

NOTE:

This case study has been used to inform Chapter 3 of the book,
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The case study has not been subjected to an editorial process.
The views and opinions expressed therein are those of the author.

GHANA DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Introduction

For the past ten years or so, the universities in Ghana have had the unpleasant duty of turning away a large number of qualified applicants every year as a result of their inability to admit not even half of these applicants. This situation has been attributed to limited and deteriorating facilities.

Coupled with this limited facilities is the rising cost of providing quality education at the secondary and tertiary levels. The government of Ghana is finding it increasingly difficult to fund tertiary education all alone.

As a result of the above reasons and many others the government of Ghana has adopted distance education as a viable complement to the conventional face-to-face education. This step is inspired by the vision that all Ghanaians should have access to all forms of education and training regardless of where they live.

A brief history of Distance Education in Ghana

The idea of distance education (DE) is not new in Ghana. It was more vibrant two or three decades ago than it is now. It used to be known as correspondence education, an avenue through which a number of workers and professionals upgraded themselves. The economy of Ghana started deteriorating after independence thus making it difficult for student-workers to afford the cost of upgrading themselves by this means of education. The income levels of workers were so low that they could not simply afford to pay their fees.

However, after some time the idea of using DE for manpower development resurfaced strongly and this led to the introduction of a number of DE initiatives including the Modular Teacher Training Programme (MTTP), which was introduced in 1982. This programme was meant to upgrade untrained teachers academically and professionally through some form of DE. Through this programme 7,537 untrained teachers received professional training and obtained Teachers' Certificate A. However this programme was abandoned because of certain difficulties it faced.

Recent initiatives in Distance Education in Ghana

Despite the difficulties encountered in the earlier attempts with DE in Ghana, there was still a strong conviction on the part of the Government of Ghana that DE is a viable complement to conventional education especially at the tertiary level. This conviction was partly due to the fact that universities were not able to admit even half of qualified applicants due to limited facilities.

Consequently, between 1991 and 1994, the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education (MOE) sponsored a number of surveys to assess the DE needs of Ghana. Two important international organisations which were involved in these surveys are the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the United National Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Upon the recommendations from these surveys the universities agreed to start DE programmes. The four universities, University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast, University of Science and Technology and University of Education, Winneba started preparations for this new model of educational delivery. University of Ghana opted to offer four courses through its DE programme. These are Sociology, English, Religious and Political Science at the Bachelor degree level. For University of Cape Coast the courses selected were Bachelor of Education in Primary Education and Post graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). At the University of Science and Technology two programmes were proposed for the programme. These were BSc (Building Technology) and BSc (Biological Sciences). However, funding of the DE programme was a problem for the universities.

Of these four universities only UEW was able to take off in 1996 as a result of assistance from the then British Overseas Development Administration (ODA) now Department for International Development (DFID). UEW took off by admitting a first batch of 196 students to pursue Post-Diploma Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree in four subject areas namely: English Education, Life Skills Education, Mathematics Education and Science Education. UCEW therefore became the pioneer in university level DE in Ghana. UCC and UG have just taken off in this 2001/2002 academic year with diploma programmes in Basic Education and Youth in Development Work respectively.

Mission of Ghana Distance Education Programme

The mission of Ghana's distance education programme is to make quality education at all levels more accessible and relevant to meet the learning needs of Ghanaians so as to enhance their performance and improve the quality of their lives.

Pioneering Ghana's Distance Education at the Institute for Educational Development and Extension (IEDE) of the University of Education, Winneba (UEW)

The mission of the Institute for Educational Development and Extension (IEDE) is to provide leadership in the development, provision and maintenance of effective extension services in education to prepare teachers, educational professionals and people from other professions and industries for service to the nation. It seeks to provide greater access to higher education in a much more efficient manner with the application of better equipment and human resources at the Institute and various Study Centres located in the ten Regions of the country.

The Distance Education programme is in line with the University's mission to equip teachers with the requisite academic proficiency and professional competency for teaching at the pre-tertiary level.

About 15,000 Certificate 'A' teachers leave the classroom each year for further studies, creating vacancies that are difficult to fill. This situation affects teaching and learning. This mass departure of teachers from the classroom for upgrading is in response to the Ministry of Education's directive that the minimum qualification for teaching in Ghanaian basic schools by the year 2005 should be a Diploma instead of a Certificate.

Up till 2002/2003 academic year, there existed a government policy which enabled over 3000 teachers to pursue higher education each year. Quotas have now been allocated to various courses resulting in a drastic reduction in the number of teachers who can pursue university education each year.

The greatest advantage of the Distance Education (DE) programme is that teachers will remain in the classroom and will continue to offer their services while upgrading themselves. Also, the DE programme will make higher education accessible to all teachers without any restrictions. Several pronouncements by government officials indicate the support that government is prepared to give to Distance Education.

Currently, the annual enrolment into DE is about 2,000. It is expected that this will increase to 10,000 in five (5) years, thus further increasing access to, especially, women. Generally, women seem to prefer Distance Education (which allows them to combine family commitment with higher education) to residential programmes. This is borne out by the fact that while women form only 31% of residential students, they form 54% in the Distance Education programme. Thus Distance Education will address the issue of gender equity.

The Institute for Educational Development and Extension (IEDE), which is responsible for the delivery of DE in UEW, was established in the second year of the University's existence. Since its establishment, DE, as a second mode of delivery of University courses (UEW runs a dual-mode programme), has been a prominent part of UEW programmes. It focuses on teacher education, with the same academic and professional components as the on-campus programmes.

The academic component comprises specific subjects taught in primary/secondary schools and colleges (such as mathematics and social studies). The professional component, on the other hand, consists of the theory of education, school management and pedagogy. The DE programme therefore has been in line with the University's mission to equip teachers with the requisite academic proficiency and professional competency for teaching at the pre-tertiary level.

Related Works in Africa

The University of Cape Coast (UCC) like UEW, also offers a three-year diploma in Basic Education. The programme aims at upgrading the academic and professional competence of basic school teachers. Thus, the two Universities target the same population.

There are however, differences in terms of overall (DE) programmes and student support services offered by the two Universities. In addition to the three-year diploma in basic education, UEW offers two year Post-Diploma B.Ed programmes in Vocational and Technical Education, Mathematics, Science, English and Life Skills.

Apart from the UCC programme there are DE programmes in two other West African Countries namely, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, which also aim at improving the academic and professional skills of basic school teachers but differ from the UEW programme in terms of the level at which training is offered. Whereas UEW offers Distance Education for teachers who have already had initial teacher training, Freetown Teachers College (FTC) in Sierra Leone trains basic school teachers who have not had any professional training. The National Teachers Institute (NTI) Kaduna, Nigeria, however, offers both initial and further training for basic school teachers. It runs three different programmes. These are:

- Teachers Certificate Grade II (TCII) (for untrained teachers)
- Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) (for trained teachers)
- Pivotal Teachers Training Programme (PTTP) (for trained teachers)

Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Kenya in East Africa have also effectively utilised DE to significantly improve their human resource base, especially in teacher training.

Not long after independence, Tanzania resolved to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by virtually doubling the number of children at school, which meant that more teachers had to be trained. To solve this problem, a Distance Teacher Training Programme (DTT) was launched. The programme aimed at training 40,000 primary school teachers. Within five years, 37,998 primary school teachers were trained. This made a substantial impact on Tanzanian primary education (Mahlck and Temu, 1989).

Similarly, after achieving independence, Zimbabwe was faced with a shortage of teachers to meet the post-independence demand for primary schools. In order to solve this problem a distance education project – the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) was launched in 1981. ZINTEC set out to train 8,000 teachers in 4 years. Out of the original 7,353 students who were enrolled into the programme, 5887 (ie 80%) qualified as teachers (Chivore, 1993).

In 1986 the University of Nairobi launched a B.Ed by DE programme. The aim of this programme was to upgrade the academic and professional competencies of experienced non-graduate secondary school teachers. This was in response to the rapid expansion of secondary education which had outrun the supply of graduate teachers. This programme also made a substantial impact on teacher supply in Kenya. Makau (1993) reports that the programme achieved 66% success.

Many Distance Education institutions currently use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to supplement the print mode. Examples

of such institutions are the University of South Africa (UNISA), Open University of UK and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) of India. To enhance the student support system, UEW intends to supplement print with ICT. This variation in medium, it is hoped, will enhance opportunities for learning.

Gender relations in UEW

Distance Education, it must be emphasised, is particularly suited to women who, as a result of family commitments, may be unable to leave their homes to take advantage of conventional residential courses.

Four batches of students have been admitted to the UEW Distance Education programme, and for each batch, steps were taken to encourage women to register. Below are the statistics that illustrate high enrolment figures for women:

Course/Batch	Year	Total	Women		Men	
			Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
BEd. Batch 1	1998	196	110	56	86	44
BEd. Batch 2	2000	102	63	62	39	38
DBE Batch 1	2001	1095	511	47	584	53
DBE Batch 2	2002	2363	1349	57	1013	43
Total		3756	2033	54%	1722	46%