# Quality assurance measures in distance learning at University of Ghana

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**ABSTRACT**

The quest for lifelong learning and determination to acquire academic qualifications worldwide has opened up universities and polytechnics to cater for the growing number of applicants every year. In this wise, emphasis is placed on widening access to prospective learners of all categories. But should we do this at the expense of quality if we are to promote the best caliber of manpower for the next generation and after? The answer is in the negative. Effective distance education rests on several factors and stakeholders such as committed academic and administrative staff, well-resourced learning environments, well written self-contained study materials, efficient monitoring system and an effective delivery system. In the determination of University of Ghana to succeed in distance education and to get enough resources to manage established institutions, do we keep a blind eye on all this important area of providing quality education? This article looks at the quality assurance measures adopted by the University of Ghana in its distance education programme at the undergraduate level. It covers such areas as admissions, orientation, tutorial systems, course development, management, monitoring and examinations. In all these cases some level of quality assurance is maintained to increase the confidence and integrity of the programme.

**Keywords:** Quality assurance, distance education, distance learning, student assessments, managing distance education.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is evident that recent advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) have prompted changes in the modes of delivering education worldwide. The use of different forms of open and distance learning and online education is also on the rise thus making it possible to teach and learn from anywhere in the world irrespective of one's geographical location relating to the source of delivery (International Council of Nurses, 2004; Perraton, 1982).

Another positive development in distance learning is the adoption of new methods that have made tertiary education borderless as modern day students have options to access higher education beyond their national boundaries. Higher education providers can reach students anywhere in the world without having to go through the bureaucratic process of the quality provision in globalised higher education market of obtaining clearances from local authorities (Sherry,1996). The positive development is significantly important to least developed countries like Ghana who has limited funds for expansion of educational infrastructure to meet the educational needs of her rising population. In Africa, the trend is expressed in the growing attention accorded to building capacities for distance education. Most of the traditional universities within the continent are currently providing distance education.

Jung (2005) writes that "until recently they (mega universities) placed more emphasis on widening access than assuring quality, but now they recognize quality assurance as a key issue that needs to be addressed not only within individual universities but also jointly and global in context" (p.79). Many of these mega-universities have adopted e-learning or ICT mainly as supplementary modes of instruction in order to reach a wider segment of the target students some of whom live across the borders of the host institution's country. To him, "These trends challenge the existing quality assurance (QA) frameworks of DE, which have focused more on widening access than on assuring quality, and often do not address for-profit and cross border education. Especially in the

context of growing globalization in distance education, there has been an urgent need for international initiatives to review quality assurance mechanisms of DE for higher education at the international and institutional level, discuss new challenges of a changing DE environment, and build a capacity for QA to enhance the quality provision in a globalized higher education market" (p. 80).

To ensure the quality of its services, an institution as a whole must on have a set of policies and structures to direct organizational activities. On organization structures, Jung (2005) looked into a centralized QA structure, collective QA structure and a dispersed QA structure. For the centralized system, it has a total quality management to coordinate and oversee the implementation of QA activities in university–wide based on policies and guidelines formulated by QA-related boards or committees. In terms of the collective system, DE is run by boards, councils and or the committees rather than an independent quality assurance unit in administration. As a result, each body has distinctive roles in different stages or in different areas of QA activities. Finally, a dispersed quality assurance structure constitute one in which QA is a part of the responsibilities of one or more related administration offices.

One major challenge in quality assurance is the degree of elaboration in those policies and regulations and the level of integration with the general university policy framework and the national QA framework vary across the institutions. These policies and regulations are linked to complying with national standards; developing own QA policies (Tucker and Hodge, 2004).

According to Wikipedia (2010), quality assurance refers to a program for the systematic monitoring of the various aspects of a project, service, or facility to ensure that the standards of quality are being met. It is often determined by the program sponsor. It goes further to indicate that there are two key principles that characterize quality assurance. These are:

(a) Fit for purpose: the product should be suitable for the intended purpose
(b) Right first time (mistakes should be eliminated)

In essence, quality assurance includes regulation of the quality of raw materials, assemblies, products and components, services to production, and management, production and inspection processes. (Wikipedia, http//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quality Assurance, culled 18/03/10).

These steps indicate that enough steps are taken by the distance education institution to make sure that the institution's materials and services are of sufficiently high quality to meet the required standards. These will include in addition outside assessors (peer review), policies and requirements. In essence, a quality assurance system leads to increase in customer confidence and an institution's credibility, improve work processes and

efficiency and to enable a distance education institution to compete better and favourably with others in the field.

Distance education provision at the tertiary level in Ghana was been received with mixed reactions from the public, faculty members and students (Badu-Nyarko, 2000). This was based on the fact that distance education was perceived not to give the same content and spirit of university education as on-campus study and that for a fully fledged university student there is the need to incorporate not only lectures and tutorials but also that of seminars and inter faculty lectures. In addition to these are the inclusive of students' interactions and socialization associated with on campus study. It was also realized that the challenge dwells on the inability of faculty to cope with the large numbers and the stress they anticipate to have (Badu-Nyarko, 2000). This notwithstanding the introduction of distance education in University of Ghana has been given a major boost considering the success of such programmes in University of Cape Coast where for the past ten years it has been used to train over 20,000 teachers at the diploma and degree levels (Daily Graphic, December, 2010). The current student population stands at 33,000. At KNUST, technical courses are offered alongside graduate programmes in business studies while University of Education, Winneba with distance education students of 13,000 as at 2010 offers Diploma and Bachelor's degree in education. University of Ghana's Bachelor of Arts degree programme is currently in the fourth year with a student enrolment of 6648.

The fact still remains that the increasing demand for higher education has generated great interest in open and distance learning all over the world. In Ghana open and distance learning, no doubt, has the potential of widening access to higher education. In 2007, the University of Ghana could only admit 51% of qualified applicants and unable to do so for the rest due to limited academic and residential facilities. This trend has been the case since the 1990s and from 2000 to 2006 (Aggor et al., 1992; University of Ghana Basic Statistics, 2002-2006).

The goal of the distance education programme, therefore, is not only to widen access to all qualified Ghanaians irrespective of family, social commitments or geographical background, but also to democratize higher education. Indeed, the take off of University of Ghana distance education at the Bachelor of Arts degree level has been slow since 1997 because the advances of dual mode education have been largely ignored. Clearly, with outrageously large number of students on campus (main stream programmes), all faculty need to feel at ease with the distance education mode and the pedagogical skills that it imparts. These were clearly revealed by a faculty member in Badu-Nyarko (2000) "it could increase my workload, marking of scripts and making notes and elaborate feedback available to students by post and there is no incentive to do more for poor remuneration of

lecturers" (p.207). These issues as at now have been gradually addressed but they are factors that can affect quality at the distance.

## METHODOLOGY

This article is purely descriptive study based on personal observations and informal interviews with University of Ghana's distance programme administrators and organizers across the country. There were some selected students who were also questioned on the operations and administration of the distance education programme to ascertain the level of quality standards. Other secondary sources such as reports, manuals, newsletters and leaflets were also used.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE MEASURES ADOPTED

In order to forestall quality in the programme, specific measures are adopted to make the programme sustainable, provide confidence in the stakeholders and administrators as well as its success. These include a well structured students orientation, management committee, communication systems, tutorial support, counseling services, regular feed back to and from students and other major considerations.

### Students' orientation

Distance education students are admitted based on the required aggregate for admission into tertiary education in Ghana. This has a cutoff point equivalent to aggregates for entering tertiary institutions in Ghana. Admissions are offered by the Admissions Board of the university comprising all the heads of participating departments and the deans of participating faculties. In order for students to understand the dynamics of distance education, a three-day orientation is organized for them at the beginning of each academic year at the main campus at Legon. This is necessary in order to make the students get accustomed to the university environment for the first time and to meet and interact with some university administrators and programme administrators.

According to Werner and De Simone (2006:11), "orientation is the process by which employees learn important organizational values and norms, establish working relationships, and learn how to function within their jobs". In the same vein, Armstrong (2006:471) indicated that induction of employees "is the process of receiving and welcoming employees, when they first join a company and giving them the basic information they need to settle down quickly and happily and start work". Armstrong further stated that the aims for such an activity as:

(i) To smooth the preliminary stages when everything is likely to be strange and unfamiliar to the starter;

(ii) To establish quickly a favourable attitude to the company in the mind of the new employee so that he or she is more likely to stay;
(iii) To obtain effective output from the new employee in the shortest possible time (p.471)

This is further evidenced by the fact that as new members to a community such as a university, it offers them opportunity to gain insight into new ways of doing things and to understand the community of learners better. In orientation, students are also prepared for self direction in study and management of own learning. During orientation convenient and flexible assistance as well as ensuring access to scheduling, registration, course materials and libraries are also ensured by the provider institution (International Council of Nurses, 2004). It is in these same directions that freshmen and women entering University of Ghana for the first time to pursue courses in distance education are given orientation to psychologically put them at ease and have a sense of belonging.

In line with this, the students are to note that they are pursuing the course with other students nationwide. This offers the students an opportunity to ask pertinent questions pertaining to their enrolment for further clarification. For those who for one reason or the other could not attend the Legon orientation, the management committee and the centre coordinators meet them during the lunch break for one hour during tutorial sessions at the study centres to address their problems and concerns and also to advise them on how to study and other aspects of the university's distance education programme.

Some of the major issues addressed during the orientation are:

(i) How to study as a distance student
(ii) Relevance of distance education
(iii) Overview of the distance education programme
(iv) Relevance of quality assurance in distance education
(v) Rules and regulations governing junior members of the university
(vi) University examinations
(vii) Course and subject registration formalities, deferment and withdrawal
(viii) The tutorial system
(ix) Fee schedules and payment

After the three-day orientation on learning and the challenges of studying in the university, students use the remaining time as opportunity to survey the university campus to become conversant with the university physical environment by visiting important sites of the university. They also interact with some faculty and administrative staff of the university community to understand the university system better. Modules for the first semester are then distributed to the students. This is to enable them to read the materials at least two clear

weeks before the first tutorial meeting.

## Management systems

Management systems are very critical to the success of distance learning programmes. Although the constituent parts of the distance education management system may differ from each institution, the key aspects of top level management (the board) and middle level or functional management should be in place to ensure quality. In University of Lagos for example, the University Distance Teaching Unit (UDTU) has a management board and functional units such as curriculum development, student evaluation, course writing and editing and face-to-face teaching (Agboola, 2013). With the University of Ghana's distance programme also, there is an advisory board chaired by the Pro-vice-Chancellor with Deans of participating faculties, the director of the ICDE, a representative each from University of Education, Winneba, National Council for Tertiary Education and the Director of Academic Affairs (University of Ghana).

In the Institute of Continuing and Distance Education are the Management Committee and the Distance Education Steering Committee. In these two committees are the Deputy Director in charge of distance Education and the Coordinator of the distance education programme in charge of Course Development and Student Support Services (CD/SSS). The management committee approves the annual operational plans and budget for the centre, determines the level of fees and remunerations, and liaises with the Advisory Board to provide guidance for the functioning of the Centre. It further assists in mobilizing resources for infrastructural development and functioning of the Centre. They also periodically appraise the Centre and ensure efficient and effective management of the programme. The Management Committee reports annually to the Advisory Board through the Director, ICDE.

The Coordinator (CD/SSS) among other things is to conduct periodic sector evaluation of:

(i) Instructional materials,
(ii) Programme delivery
(iii) Student support system
(iv) Assessment process and completion rates
(v) Staff performance
(vi) Impact of the programme
(vii) Develop a culture of quality assurance in the operations of the centre

The Deputy Director (DE) is responsible for administration and academic affairs including examinations.

## Course development and production

Instructional materials are developed by faculty in the

participating departments of the university to conform to the structure and content of on-campus study. The material is made up of learning module with 36 sections of 6 units representing 36 h of lecturing for 12 weeks for a 3-credit course. Each module is designed to be self-contained with assignments and activities to be performed by the student. It also contains an introduction to each Unit and section as well as Summaries. These summaries allow the student to read it before reading the main text sometimes.

Instructional materials go through a rigorous peer review or moderation by faculty members and the head of department, editing by a core of trained faculty members from different departments and the Institute of continuing and distance education as well as proofreading processes before it is finally sent to the printers. The printers therefore provide a dummy (draft) copy for the course writer to verify if it corresponds with what has been designed. This is further subjected for moderation or subject validation before finally submitted to the printers. In writing the courses, the level and the characteristics of the distance learning student are taken into consideration. This is particularly so when the students have different psychological makeup and also of different background-workers, unemployed, secondary school leavers (Sweet, 1992).

The course writers are also taken through a week of rigorous or intensive training outside campus by qualified consultants in distance education. This is to enable them appreciate the enormous task of writing and also to have a clear mind in organizing their content. It is also to take them away from the pressures of the family and other commitments. The courses are therefore validated by the departments before delivery to the students

The Materials Development Unit is set to produce brochures, periodicals and other informational materials for both students and tutors to guide them in their participation at the distance education programme. These are provided at the beginning of the course soon after the orientation. Materials are also subjected to periodic reviews and course up-dates from the departments.

## Copyright and plagiarism

Except expressly stated, all contents produced either software or print in terms of content, copyright, patent, symbols and other intellectual and proprietary rights remain the property of University of Ghana and its affiliate departments. As a result, course writers are always reminded to acknowledge the sources of their information as they write. The editors are also mandated to scrutinize the sources in order to avoid plagiarism. To this end, each module is given a standard international number (ISSN).

## Support services

In other to ensure quality, students support services are

included in the implementation process. However most distance learning institutions in Africa are not able to offer effective support services to learners (Spronk, 2004). In Uganda for example, guidance and counseling on how to handle family and career related matters were the paramount to students' needs in their distance education programme. The support system offered at the University of Ghana include counseling, tutoring individually and in groups, the learning of study skills including examinations, peer support, feedback concerning students assessment and progress, language support, career guidance and administrative problem solving, library services in helping students to meet their information needs. This is to reduce the frustrations of the students learning at the distance. In the University of Ghana distance education programme the following quality assurance measures are provided to facilitate teaching and learning:

1. There is the provision of tutorial services at selected regional study centres across the country where students meet on weekends with their tutors and to interact with other students and staff of University of Ghana on the programme. Tutorials are held at least four sessions per course per semester. This is to supplement the learning of the students by reading the course material and interact with the lectures on difficult and abstract sections of the course. It is also to offer the students the opportunity to interact with colleagues and to discuss issues emanating from the reading materials and those they have read as additional content either from the internet or reference materials.

2. Tutors for the programme are appointed by the distance education centre in consultation with the respective departments. Tutors apply based on an internal advert in the faculties and the notice board of regional centres. These applications are then sorted out based on the performance of the applicant on his/her transcript and the selected course he/she wishes to tutor in. For the programme, a tutor must possess at least a Second Class Honours (Upper division) and above up to doctoral level or a professional qualification in the case of Law, Accounting and Marketing. The selected tutors are taken through a week's training in how to organize tutorials at the distance level, students' characteristics, adult learning, students' assessment and practicum. The practicals involve demonstration and practice on their peers. They are also regularly monitored while they perform tutorials at the various centres. This is to ensure that the right methods are applied and those found culpable are advised for a change. Tutors who persistently flout the tutorial arrangements or are found to be poor tutors are asked to leave or their contract terminated at the end of the semester, these monitoring and supervision is done at every tutorial section by the centre coordinator and his/her assistants (organizers). This therefore presupposes that the centre coordinator

and the lieutenants must be abreast of the tutorial system. As a result they are also given orientation and training as well as regular refresher courses. This is similar to that of the Open University of United Kingdom (OUUK) and Shanghi TV University (SHTVU) where tutors and lecturers (both fulltime and part-time) are given periodic training on quality matters. Each tutor is to give assignment, mark and grade the student. They offer comments on the students work based on content, structure, language and style of presentation.

3. Tutors are reappointed based on satisfactory performance from an evaluation report from students and the centre co-coordinators. They are judged on the following lines: helping students with difficulties, availability at post, that is, punctuality, enthusiasm of the tutors, clarity of expression, effective supervision and guidance, adherence to lecture schedules, encouragement of students participation, fair grading of continuous assessment, challenging students academically, interaction with students after tutorials, relationship with course organizers, temperament and comments on students response to questions or contributions in class. These are done on a 5-point scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

4. Study centres are equipped reading rooms for students to study when they visit the study centres on weekends. The libraries are yet to be fully stocked with referenced materials but with enough modules so that a student who forgets his/her module can go there and read before the next tutorial section. During university recess where on-campus student go on vacation, distance students have the opportunity to make use of the main university library while during full university section they benefit on weekends. Those in areas where university libraries are located also utilize the facilities when they so desire. This according to Asamoah-Gyadu (2005), this helps in meeting the information needs of the students.

5. Each tutorial session lasts for two hours per course and students take five courses per day for two days. Also every course has four sessions of two hours per semester.

6. To maintain the parity as on campus, selected lecturers monitor the tutorials at the study centres. These include the Director of the Institute, his deputy, the coordinator of the programme and the Heads of Units and the centre coordinators.

7. Study centres at Accra, Kumasi and Tamale are equipped with computer laboratories. Plans are far advanced to use students' platform, computer conferencing, video-conferencing and other electronically-based learning facilities at the centres to facilitate student learning. The Accra study centre has a video conferencing room as well.

8. The programme offers counseling services to students through the Centre coordinators and organizers and other trained staff. In addition, the students also benefit from counseling services from the Counseling and Placement

Centre of University of Ghana.

## Students' assessment

In order to ensure quality in a distance learning programme, assessment processes and methods must not differ from that of the regular stream. In Open University of United Kingdom for example, their assessment framework complies with the National Quality Assurance Agency's Code of Practice for Assessment of students (Jung, 2005). In a similar way, students of the University of Ghana distance education programme carry the same credit load per semester as on campus students and can graduate in four years with two-year grace period for courses they could not pass. The grading system is also the same. Lecturers on campus who teach the same courses offered by the distance students set examination questions, mark and award grades equivalent to those on campus.

During the semester, students are to attend at least two of the four tutorials and write quizzes and all assignments which constitute 30% of the final grading before being deemed to have fully participated in the course for examinations which is 70%. But for the nature of the course and the fact that students copy directly from the module or friends as well as late submission of assignments, this element of continuous assessment is suspended. It is hoped that monthly quizzes at the end of every two Units of the module will be used from August 2011 for 30% marks.

Unique to the University of Ghana's distance education programme, distance students are invited for a two week revision at the main University of Ghana campus at Legon prior to the examinations when off-campus students are on recess. This period offer the students the opportunity to interact with course writers or lecturers on campus to explain the most difficult concepts in the course and what they expect the students to do during the examinations. It is also a period in which students meet colleagues from other study centres to share ideas and also to fraternize. Many of the students have confided that it has given them the opportunity to see the university and also to familiarize themselves with the university environment and the dynamism of university work and atmosphere. It has also boosted their morale and confidence as university students particularly the seminars.

All examination particulars including courses and examiners are submitted to the Academic Board for approval. The departments are responsible for the setting of examination questions. The questions are set by the same examiners who teach the same course at the main campus. The questions are discussed and moderated at the departmental level before they are sent to the Director of Academic Affairs for onward printing. The examinations are conducted under the university examination officer who arranges for venues and the design of the examination time-table. The University Examination Superintending Committee monitors the progress of the examination throughout the period. Every distance education student is requested to register for the examinations electronically and must show proof of identity through the university issued identity card before being admitted into the examination hall. This is to avoid impersonation and cheating.

## Monitoring and evaluation of the programme

Monitoring ensures that challenges to the programme are corrected as the programme goes on, to ensure quality end products and retention of students. As a new programme it is necessary that regular monitoring is provided. As a result, weekly monitoring of the programme is conducted by the Distance Education Steering Committee of the Institute and selected faculty members of the participating departments to the study centres. The Directors of Quality Assurance and Academic Affairs, the chairman of the Distance Education Advisory Board occasionally visit the Accra Tutorial centre to interact with students, tutors and programme administrators. Students are more often than not frank in informing the centre coordinators and organizers about how the programme is being administered and the difficulties they face. Reports are periodically received at the end of every semester from the centre coordinators. These are collated, summarized and sent as progress report to the Vice-chancellor.

The challenge in the monitoring process is the high cost of travelling and the distances to cover. But since it is not done by one person, value is being received. This monitoring has made tutors perform creditably and also to make the administrators at the regional tutorial centres active and operational. It also helps in fishing out problems and addressing them as and when they unfold.

Evaluation of programmes ensures that all the loopholes and challenges are overcome for the success of the enterprise. It is also a means of ensuring the survival of the organization. To be a responsive organization, efforts must be made to address the concerns of all stakeholders and publics they serve (Kotler, 2008). Various approaches are adopted by institutions in the world to evaluate their distance programmes. The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) for instance embarks on planned routine monitoring in every semester. In addition to that confidential reports are submitted by sectional heads to the management board annually for review. The China Central Radio and Television University (CCRTVU) also takes feedback from students and tutors as part of their evaluation programmes, while the Korenn National Open University (KNOU) depend on students assessment of tutors and their support services rendered to them to assess the

quality of their programme (Jung, 2005). To this end, the programme is evaluated at the end of every year by the stakeholders- management committee, departmental coordinators, centre organizers, heads of departments and the Academic Affairs Directorate of the university. Each provides its own observations for the year and various reports from the study centres are fully debated and discussed. At the end of deliberations the Management Committee of the Institute is mandated to implement the decisions taken.

## Learning environments

In order to ensure that learning takes place in a more convenient and adaptive environments, tutorials are held at the university's study centres across the country. Where such facilities are not established by the university, a tertiary institution in the region is used. Such is the case in Sunyani in the Brong Ahafo region where the facilities of the Faculty of Renewable Natural Resources of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology are used. The study centres are equipped with adaptive resource-rich learning environment that includes a small library with all the modules for those who may forget a module or lost their materials in transit, a computer laboratory in five of the six centres, and academic counseling services offered by the Centre coordinators and their organizers. The programme also offers the students a flexibility of time table spanning for sixteen weeks with each course having four to five tutorial meetings per semester for first year students and three tutorials per semester for Levels 300 and 400 courses. All quantitative courses are given an additional tutorial period over the others. The programme is therefore made adaptive to students needs.

## Challenges to quality assurance

The programme is limited to the required openness it needed based on the fact that examinations are restricted to University of Ghana main campus at Legon-Accra as people from all over the country have to converge at Legon campus to write the end of semester examinations. This sometimes brings untold hardships on the students and the large number of students per course in some courses during the revision period makes organization difficult. Other students may not get study leave to attend due to the nature of their work and family responsibilities especially the women (Arthur, 2010).

There are also many restrictions on the programme. The flexibility where students can enter at any semester and defer at any period of time is not provided. There are no laid down rules and regulations on distance learning in the University Students' Handbook as at 2012. Students' registration and closure are done for all students not taking cognizance of the dispersed nature of distance education students. This must be discontinued as courses on offer at the main campus may not be at the distance and this must be communicated to the students. This calls for sensitization of university administrators on the philosophy of distance education and how it is operated in dual mode universities.

The university needs to put the right administrative and academic structures in place to ensure the smooth operations of the programme. Currently, there is little or no coordination between the Academic Departments offering the distance education courses and the Unit coordinators and staff in the students support services and course and materials development. Distance education needs regular contact and consultation with participating departments and enough staff to operate successfully. In terms of formatting and imputers, only two permanently employed staff working on over 150 modules produced.

Distance education support staff employed must be given enough orientation and training to understand the dynamics of the programme to appreciate it. There should also be constant reviews of the programme periodically at least every semester to know areas that need to be strengthened or improved.

There is an existing problem of rapid growth in the number of students enrolled in the programme in the first three years from 907 in 2007; 2477 in 2008 to 4566 in 2009 and 6618 in 2010 (ICDE, Progress Report, 2011) with limited staff base and the use of the same lecturers teaching on campus to write courses, set examination questions, mark and grade them. No doubt, course writing materials in subsequent years keep on delaying as well as examination results. Sometimes students get their learning materials a month to the examinations. These do not match the growth and interest in the programme hence quality of University of Ghana distance education programme is compromised allowing some potential students to drop out. The lecturers are already overburdened with academic work and the same lecturers tasked with the distance education programme cannot put up their best. Motivation must be good for them to commit their time and energy to the programme. There is no sanction for those who delay in developing the modules.

Cost of internet services is another obstacle to distance learning on the Ghanaian scene since the majority of the students cannot afford home internet services and therefore have to rely on private internet cafes with expensive rates for their distance learning courses. In some areas, there are no electricity facilities to provide learning. Even with on-campus students have to queue to get access to a computer in the computer laboratories for their academic work with every student having access for one hour a day. This calls for an urgent discussion for students to own their own laptops.

Every student has a folder in which the admission letter

and other correspondences are kept. This was done for the first two cohorts until the university took over in 2009/2010 academic year. As a result of this, the centre finds it difficult to keep students correspondence and also to interact actively with the university registry in keeping these records. Also, the volume of work in the registry will not let the main university staff have interest in the records of the distance students.

In line with the electronic course registration, students find it difficult to do so and have to call several times from their destinations to get things done. This results in the inability of some students getting through before the deadline. In fact, the tying up of registration facilities with on-campus students in terms of deadlines for registration does not auger well for distance students as they start their programme later than on-campus students. Admission letters often get delayed due to the fact that all admissions are done centrally with on-campus students first followed by City Campus before distance education students. This same procedure is maintained for issuing of admission letters culminating in the delay the commencement of the academic calendar for distance students.

## CONCLUSION

The success of any programme hinges on the quality of its products or beneficiaries. In tertiary education, it is the quality of the students produced and how they go through the university education that becomes paramount. In distance education, parity of esteem is essential. As a result of this, the university has put in place series of mechanisms to ensure that students graduating from the distance education programme are given the same academic exposure and controls as it exists for on-campus study. One major criticism of distance education has been quality of its products in terms of numbers and compromise. This taken care of through careful scrutiny of examination scripts by awarding marks in relation to what the student deserve by the marking scheme without compromise. Lecturers are not forced to release their results within a short time but ample time is given to avoid rush and mistakes. In specific cases where the number of students is large, residential marking at weekend are offered faculty to have a peaceful and conducive atmosphere to mark the examination scripts. All these are to ensure quality and reliability.

As Jung (2005) stated: "A quality culture can be defined as an institutional culture that promotes the introduction of an internal QA system, values the capacity building for implementing QA arrangements, stresses the link between the internal QA system and accountability to the public at the national and international levels, and focuses on learning rather than teaching" (p. 90). Distance education students are given the opportunity to

have weekly seminars on important topics of their choice although the student leaders help to select the topics and engage both lecturers and the practitioners from selected fields of endeavour to lead the seminars. This has given the students enough knowledge in the world of work and global issues in a diverse form. In order to ensure participation, it is conducted during the lunch break and those who do not have any lessons immediate after the break benefits. It is the desire of management of the DE that students attend at least two of such seminars per semester. This measure is to establish interaction and critical thinking among the students through questions, contributions, discussions and public speaking.

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