

## OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNERS' BEHAVIOUR CHARACTERISTICS FOR TRADITIONAL LEARNERS SUSTAINABLE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

By

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### Abstract

*Many open and distance education practitioners and stakeholders have traced learners' sustained academic performances in open and distance learning to some unique behaviour characteristics. Based on this, the paper highlighted some of the fundamental behaviour characteristics of open and distance learners that may be learned by learners in traditional school setting for sustainable academic performance particularly in Nigeria. The behaviour characteristics identified were: Clearly concentrated attention and confidence, skill for managing time, positive self-motivation and attitudinal direction, ability to identify, communicate and analyze self-needs and learner's mental readiness. These behaviour characteristics were discussed and strategies suggested for learners in the traditional school setting toward sustaining successful academic performance. In conclusion, the writer is of the opinion that achieving sustainable academic performance in Nigeria, learners from the traditional school setting can inculcate these behaviour characteristics with the assistance of school psychologist or counsellor.*

**Keywords:** Open and Distance learners, Traditional learners, Behaviour characteristics and sustainable academic performance

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### Introduction

Open and distance learning environment often consist of learners with matured behaviour and mind-set which strongly manifest in self-directed learning and academic task accomplishments thereby, resulting in brilliant and sustained academic achievement (Simpson, 2013; Shachar & Neumann, 2010 and QAA, 2015). Among the commonly used terms in describing open and distance learning environment and learners are: ability to articulate and participate in correspondence education, ability to study at home, anywhere and at any place and time, ability to undertake independent study, ability to engage in continuing education; self-instruction and participate in technology-based or mediated learning (COL, 2002 and COL, 2014).

In open and distance learning environment, learners have personal autonomy over their studies and learning, access restrictions and privileges have been removed and distance as in independence from the teacher (COL, 2014). Keegan (1996 cited in Tanglang, 2015), identifies five main elements of distance education as, the separation of teacher and learner; the influence of an educational organization; the use of technical media (usually print) to unite the teacher and learner and to carry educational content; the provision of two-way communication so that the learner may benefit from or even initiate dialogue and; the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes.

The philosophy of open and distance learning emphasises, giving learners' choices about medium or media, whether print, on-line, television or video; place of study, whether at home, in the workplace or on campus; pace of study, whether closely paced or unstructured; support mechanisms, whether tutors on demand, audio conferences or computer-assisted learning; and entry and exit points.

Educational psychologists at different levels had written a lot on how, ways and why independent and self-directed learners academically perform significantly than the opposite particularly the open and distance learners in National Open University of Nigeria based on the writers series of research and personal observations. For example, Tanglang& Aminu (2016); Tanglang& Aminu (2015), discovered a significant difference between the goal setting skills and techniques in both undergraduate and postgraduate learners in open and distance learning and traditional learning; Okopi& Aminu (2014), also discovered that learners who were exposed to face-to-face facilitation do not perform significantly better than those from open and distance learning but, realized learning behaviour of learners from open and distance learning environment significantly differ from learners from traditional setting. NUC (2016), shows a significant satisfaction difference between learners of traditional and open and distance learning environment in relation to their academic performance and achievements.

Drawing from experiences in the practice, provision and evaluation of learners in both traditional and open and distance learning settings, this particular write-up attempt to deliberate on how observable open and distance learners behaviour characteristics can be a model for academic success for the learners who are in traditional learning settings in Nigeria. In doing so, sustainable development theory and method system that were developed for many years (Washburn, 2010), and formed into certain mode or the other were examined but none of these to the knowledge of the writer specifically focused on behaviour characteristics of successful distance learners that can be annexed by traditional learners for sustainable academic performance in Nigeria.

The behaviour characteristics self-attributed by the writer for successful distance learners academic performance continue to occur to me and personally used to aid learners through the National Open University of Nigeria learners support service unit with, continue learners self-reported academic performance through the years. This particular write-up therefore, focused on how these observed behaviour characteristics can be used for developing brilliant academic performance of traditional learners in Nigeria.

Before discussing the elements of a successful open and distance learners academic behaviour characteristics, it will be of value to examine what seems similar in previous attempts. Psychology researchers have viewed learners' academic success as a state of superior functioning results in personal bests and outstanding achievements including, psychological skills such as confidence, goal setting, relaxation, visualization or mental rehearsal, concentration, motivation, arousal, attention and control (Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2007; 2011; Lau & Chan, 2012 and Natale & Ricci, 2006).

### **Open and Distance Learners' Behaviour Characteristics that can be Learn by Traditional Learners for Sustainable Academic Performance**

Open and distance learners brilliant academic performance is attributed to the following characteristics:

- Clearly Concentrated Attention and Confidence
- Skill for Managing Time
- Positive Self-motivation and attitudinal direction
- Ability to Identify, Communicate and Analyze Self-Needs
- Learner's mental readiness

#### **Clearly Concentrated Attention and Confidence Skill**

Concentrated Attention and confidence skill can lead to "flow." It is in this state that academic successes often occur. Therefore, the challenge for traditional learners and school psychologist is to develop the necessary psychological skills and strategies within learner's learning plan, which will give the opportunity to perform closest to their optimal level of performance on any given learning tasks.

Academically successful open and distance learners display a diversity of these features or traits in order to find success in any online academic courses. These unique characteristics are possessed by online

learners. Simonson, Smaldino, Albright & Zvack (2009) and Tanglang& Aminu (2016), recognised accurate concentrated attention and confidence, prior knowledge that transmits into learning styles as indicators of academically successful open and distance learners. Concentrated attention based on positive confidence can be linked to accurate time management, self-motivation and effective communication of ideas and needs in learners. Acknowledging these attributes by the writer, during enrolments into the University's programme of study, open and distance learners of the National Open University of Nigeria were consciously informed of these attributes and how the attributes can be develop into behaviour for learners academic success. The ways and methods in using the attributes may be jointly identified and demonstrated by either the school psychologist or counsellor or individual but should be tactically internalized by everyone.

### **Skill for Managing Time**

In the same line, time management as one of the attributes of concentrated attention and confidence should be identify on the basis that traditional learners are sometimes busy just like most open and distance learners, it is vital for them therefore to possess skill for managing time. The ability to manage time is the major factor of motivating traditional learner so as to succeed academically. To have sustained academic performance, learner need to realise that they need not to receive persistent reminders about learning activities and tasks such as constant reading, practice, rehearsals, demonstrations and others related acts and actions which are vital to learner's academic performance, rules and regulations regarding learner type of study, programme or course and trends that are constantly changing and evolving, schedules, or deadlines that must be met should be adequately plan and prepared for.

All these must be done in a respectable amount of time prior to the due date and in a way that endorses knowledge and learning continuation. In achieving this, goals should set as well as utilize some sort of time management system schedule or time -table in order to keep track of everything before the assessment and evaluation. Time management strategy assists learners to avoid procrastination. Organising a plan provide a guide to be followed so that learners do not waste valuable time deciding what to do next. This promotes motivation and allows one to be more successful all academic engagements and activities.

Garcis (2010) pointed out that academically successful open and distance learners never give up on their work. Likewise, would be successful traditional learner should never give up. This ability to remain accountable for completing course work in a timely manner is a behaviour attribute that must be sustained by all categories of learner. In particular, traditional learners like their open and distance, must acquire and demonstrate behaviour of time consciousness and management in order to have brilliant academic success.

### **Positive Self-motivation and Attitudinal Direction**

In order to sustain successful academic performance traditional school setting learners must develop positive self-motivating strategy. For instance, open and distance learners are not forced to attend classes; therefore they find it extremely necessary to stay on top of their work because there is no one to keep them on task except by themselves (Wilkinson, 2010). This suggests therefore, that Open and distance learning is for those who have the ability to be self-motivated. This ability is worth adopting by traditional education setting learners for sustained positive academic performance. Attitude toward engaging in purposive learning activities is another area critical to positive self-motivation. Positive academic attitude will influence positive learning and learning task accomplishments (Aminu, 2006 and 2017).

### **Ability to Identify, Communicate and Analyse Self-Needs**

Another notable characteristic of open and distance learners that can be learn by traditional school setting to sustain positive academic performance is self-created avenue to self-identify self-needs, avenue to communicate self-needs, avenue to analyse self-needs and also solve self-needs are critical element toward attaining self-academic positive performance. The role of school psychologist or counsellor in traditional school settings become critical here in assisting learners and traditional school setting manager to provide

necessary structure that will enable learners to freely and willingly identify, communicate, analyse and resolve their needs; personal-psycho-social and academic needs (Aminu, 2006 and 2017).

Visser, Visser, Amirault & Simonson (2012) and Aminu & Tanglang (2016) asserted that open and distance learners are easily identified with a profile of identifying, communicating, analysing and resolving their needs at the commencement of any chosen academic programme that is possibly similar or diverse from that of others and such profiles often heterogeneous, this was fully agreed to by the writer. This profile makes open and distance learners level of motivation not to be misdirected. In addition, the strategy of creating avenue for learners improve mind to generate thought patterns, influence emotions, stimulate or diminish arousal and create images of a desired action towards positive academic outcome (Visser, Visser, Amirault & Simonson, 2012). Also observed was that when learners are allowed to communicate their needs and motivation directed toward those needs, it reduced or totally eliminate anxiety. And finally communication of needs based on motivation assist learners irrespective of school setting, reduce tension and stress that may have cause a decline in academic performance over a long period of time.

### **Learner's Mental Readiness**

When learners develop anxiety and arousal anxiety which is a state of being uneasy, apprehensive, or worried about what may happen before, during and after a given learning task, the best way to manage this from the writer's experience is to allow learner opportunity to communicate such and immediately accomplish with appropriate motivational strategy. For example, anxiety like what has happen to one family, study, career, personality, worry, concern, negative thoughts and feelings can be effectively managed through effective communication and motivation after effort is made to differentiate whether it is trait or state anxiety, sources of stress, and recognize the link between optimum arousal levels and performance. School psychologist or counsellor can assisted learner to learn strategy for managing personal anxiety. Psychological strategies such as concentration/attention skills, mental rehearsal/visualization, relaxation and goal setting are among the best suggested ways and methods for resolving learner personal anxiety therefore, school psychologist or counsellor's effort is to make learner inculcate the behaviour (McIntosh & Avey, 2007; Odoemelam, 2006; Odonohue & Ferguson, 2006 and Lipsitt, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, when learners' efforts are directed and coordinated by utilizing a disciplined concentration routine, they will begin to experience sustained concentration and confidence that can lead to 'sustained academic performance'. It is in this state that lifetime successful academic performance often occurs. There are very strong indications that identification of behaviour characteristics of successful distance learners and their effective application of the characteristics can be used in sustaining academic performance of learners in traditional school settings. With this, it is hoped that school psychologist or counsellor can assist learners in traditional school settings to learn and counsel upon.

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