REVISITING SELF-REGULATION SKILLS AND DISTANCE LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA: PLANNING IMPLICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE STUDY

By Maruff Akinwale Oladejo

ABSTRACT

Learning is more personal and the responsibility rests more squarely on the shoulders of students in distance learning systems. Also, many distance learners have several other equally important commitments such as home demands, social engagements, and religious obligations that compete with their academic work. Balancing these responsibilities with academic pursuit in such a way that one does not affect the other may become problematic for the students, especially those who are not self-regulated. This may subsequently impact student academic performance. In view of this scenario, it is expected that distance learners will have good self-regulation skills in order to perform better in their academic endeavours. This study sought to discern a causal explanation of distance learners' academic performance vis-à-vis their self-regulation skills. The study utilized a descriptive, 'ex-post facto' research design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 1,500 participants while the University of Ibadan's Distance Learning Centre was purposively selected. Data were collected through a questionnaire during the 2009 contact session. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and t-tests were employed for data analysis. Students' self-regulation skills and academic performance are positively and significantly correlated. (R^2=016;P<0.5). The study however, revealed no significant difference in students' self-regulations skills on a gender basis. The need for students to have good self-regulation skills and monitor their academic progress was recommended.

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, the primary mode of educational delivery of most African Universities has been the conventional system that is, residential or on-campus teaching. Unfortunately, due to limited financial, human, and physical resources, conventional methods of providing higher education have not been able to admit the large number of people seeking University education. The conventional system is hindered by two major constraints. One is spatial, whereby education takes place within classrooms. This constraint limits access to higher education due to inadequate physical facilities. The other constraint is temporal, in which education is confined to the earlier period of one's life, specifically from 6-25 years of age. This constraint precludes adults from attending school at a later stage in their lives.

Oladejo (2010) however remarked that in the modern era of continuing and lifelong education, there emerged a new class of learners, mostly adult workers who had previously missed out on conventional, formal education probably because they could not afford to enroll on a full-time basis due to their work schedule, family responsibilities, religious obligations, social activities, and business commitments. Many adult workers also have children to feed, clothe, and send to school (Dlamini, 1998). Working adult learners need to coordinate these different areas of their lives – family, jobs, spare time, and studies – which also influence one other. Nevertheless, education according to these working adults does not terminate at the end of formal schooling, but rather, it is a lifelong, and sometimes episodic process, which covers the entire life span of an individual.

Contemporary learners need a system that will not only help transcend the shortcomings of the formal, conventional education system but also satisfy the learners' immediate and long-term educational needs. Distance education, now globally known as Open and Distance Learning (ODL) by the International Conference on Distance Education (ICDE), provides an answer to the needs of working adult learners (Aderinoye, 2002; Ojokheta, 2000; Oladejo, 2010).

The need to overcome the seeming shortcomings of the conventional formal education system, especially in widening educational access to those who were not earlier served, paved the way for the emergence and acceptance of distance learning system in most parts of the world, including Nigeria. Aderinoye (2002) remarked that the emergence and acceptance of distance learning as a medium of

instruction marked a turning point in the provision of educational opportunities for millions of people that have been left out of the conventional system worldwide.

Distance learning, as an emerging mode of educational delivery and study, according to Perraton (2000), does not only widen educational opportunities, but also reduces inequality and cost, stimulates curriculum change, and helps to meet manpower needs. It has helped to extend the market for education to clientele who have not been previously served (Calvert, 1986), and also removed many of the traditional barriers to working adults' participation in educational programs (Ojokheta, 2000). Yet, the results achieved so far by this mode of study vis-à-vis distance learners' academic performance are not as successful and impressive as originally hoped (Brindley, 1987).

Table 1
Enrolment Figures at the Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan

Year of Admission	Enrolment Figures
1988/89	1,122
1989/90	625
1990/91	1,100
1991/92	732
1992/93	265
1993/94	182

Source: Admission Office, DLC, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

As depicted in Table 1, during the 1990-1991 academic session at the Distance Learning Centre of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, a total of 1100 distance learners were admitted. Unfortunately, only 587 distance learners graduated in 1997/98 (see Table 2). This graduation figure is also made up of students who were two years behind schedule in graduating as the programme is a five-year course. In essence, among the distance learners that eventually graduated are those that were unable to graduate from previous sessions. This simply means that there were actually less than 587, that is, 51.98% distance learners that graduated from the 1990/91 set.

It can therefore be inferred that either a significant proportion of distance learners dropped out of programme between the years of their admission and graduation, or many of them could not graduate within seven years. It therefore appears that the academic performance of distance learners is not as successful and impressive as originally hoped, consistent with Brindley's (1987) observation. Table 2 below shows the academic performance of distance learners at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Table 2
Analysis of the Summary of Distance Learners' Graduation Results in Selected Years at the Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan

Grade	1st Class	2nd Class Upper	2nd Class Lower	3rd Class	Pass	Failed	Total
1997	-	98	470	5	-	14	587
1998	-	62	275	1	-	17	355
1999	-	37	204	2	-	13	256
2000	-	29	155	1	-	8	193
2004	1	73	327	12	15	10	438
2005	-	-	12	-	6	8	26
2006	-	201	562	16	19	15	813
Total	1	512	1993	43	34	85	2667
% Total	.03	19.82	77.18	1.66	1.31	3.18	

Source: Records Office, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Table 2 depicts a summary of distance learners' graduation results at the Distance Learning Centre of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria for selected years from 1997 through 2006. This period reflects the Centre's first graduation class in 1997 up through the first decade of their work. Data for the seven selected years revealed that 1.31% and 1.66% of the students achieved ordinary pass and third class honours, respectively, while the majority of the students (77.18%) earned second class lower honour. Those in the second class upper honour constitute 19.82. Furthermore, since the inception of the programme over twenty-five years ago, the centre has succeeded in producing only one first class honour student.

In contrast, the summary of regular students' graduation results during the same period indicated better achievement results (see Table 3).

Table 3
Analysis of the Summary of Regular Students' Graduation Results in Selected Years at the Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan

	2000	2004	2005	2006	Total	%Share
1st Class Honour	01	03	02	02	08	0.4
2nd Class Upper	95	80	80	65	320	19.08
2nd Class Lower	356	397	287	150	1190	70.96
3rd Class	04	55	48	22	129	07.69
Pass	-	03	14	13	30	1.78
Failed	03	05	14	10	32	1.87
Total	459	543	445	262	1709	

Source: Records Office, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

For instance, a total number of eight regular full time students graduated with first class honours. Three hundred and twenty students (19.08%) had second class upper division while 1190 students (almost 71%) fell within the second class lower division. Also, 7.69%, that is, 129 students were in third class list while 30 students, which constitute 1.78%, earned a pass. This performance is comparatively better than that of the distance learners.

Barker and Wendel (2000, as cited in Bolton, 2004) remarked that students perform better if they are matured, economically independent, and self-motivated. Several factors are responsible for this dismal academic performance, among which are the roles of motivational constructs, such as student support services like guidance and counseling, library services, feedback, and information dissemination (Ergul, 2004; Chan, Yum, Fan, Jegede, & Taplin, 1999; Murphy, 1989; Ojokheta, 2000; Sewart, Keegan, & Holmberg, 1993; Suciat, 1990). Sustained investigation of motivational constructs as predictors of distance learners' academic performance is needed until a lasting solution is found to ameliorate the distance learners' unimpressive academic performance (Oladejo, 2010). In fact, Schwittman (1982, as cited in Oladejo, 2010) considered motivation a critical predictor of success in distance learning.

Motivational variables impacting students' success identified by scholars include self-efficacy beliefs, locus of control, self esteem, goal achievement (Abdul-Raham, 1994; Lim, 2000; Oladejo, Ige, Fagunwa & Arewa, 2010; Pajares & Miller, 1994; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Sheets, 1995), goal satisfaction, self-worth, self acceptance, study habits (Sweet, 1986) self-concept, and self-regulation skills (Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1990; Lim 2000; Pajares & Kranzer, 1995; Wang & Newlin, 2002). In this study, self-regulation skills were investigated as a predictor of students' academic performance in distance learning programmes at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria because of the responsibility placed on the shoulders of the students in the distance learning system. Also, there are other equally important responsibilities that are competing for students' time. Given the personal and learning challenges faced by the distance learning students, attempts to regulate their activities so as to pave the way for effective study may appear as a challenge.

The need for distance learners to determine, control, and regulate their learning implies that effective self-regulation skills are also *sine qua non* to their academic performance. According to Miltidou (1999, as cited in Ojokheta, 2000) distance education requires students to monitor and regulate their own learning. They must control their own educational experience and pace. Some studies have established positive correlations between self-regulation and academic performance (Lynch & Dembo, 2004; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Rovai, 2003, and Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1990). In fact, Lynch and Dembo (2004) as well as Rovai (2003) argued that distance learners that persist and succeed in open and distance learning are by their nature, more independent and self-regulating. This is, however, contrary to the study conducted by Ergul (2004) who did not find a positive relationship between self-regulation skill and academic performance.

Gender differentials were also noted in self-regulation skill among distance learners. For instance, Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1988) as well as Joo, Bong & Choi (2000) reported that the self-regulation characteristic is significant for females. These Researchers argued that female distance learners used more self-regulation strategies than male distance learners. Although, several studies had been carried out on the relationships between self-regulation skills and distance learners' academic performance, it appears none had been done within the Nigerian context. This study is innovative and novel in Nigeria because, unlike other nations, distance learning is just gaining acceptance, especially in the University system. Also, there are differences in the learning environment in Nigeria as compared with that in Western world, where much of the research has been conducted. This study, therefore, serves as a bridge form the existing literature thus, extending the frontier of knowledge in developing nations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

All over the world, educational quality is judged by students' academic performance. As self-regulation is related to performance (Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1990) there is a need to explore the relationship between the self-regulation skills of the distance learners and their academic performance. Hence, this study sought to determine if there was a relationship between distance learners' academic performance and self-regulation skills. It therefore, provided a causal explanation of distance learners' academic performance vis-à-vis their self-regulations skills at the Distance Learning Centre of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The reviewed literature for the study influenced the study's design in the following areas: (a) the concept of open-distance learning, (b) the concept of academic performance, (c) self-regulation and academic performance, and (d) the history of distance learning at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

The Concept of Open-Distance Learning

Distance education, (now known globally as open-distance learning) is a discipline within education that has been associated with various definitions and terminologies. Many terms have been used to identify distance education, yet all are not synonymous with distance education. Such terms include correspondence education, open learning, independent study, non-traditional education, technology-based education, and online learning. Other terms like adult education and continuing education also bear some relationships to distance education. However, some of these terms are not necessarily related to distance, and distance education. There is a need therefore, to clarify terminology to ensure a proper conceptual base and guide to good practice of what actually constitutes open-distance learning.

The need for further clarification according to Ojokheta (2000) is contingent upon the fact that many non-traditional forms of education have been associated with distance learning. Keegan (1995) expressed this concern when he wrote in his book '*Foundations of Distance Education'* that:

> distance education' is a generic term that includes the range of teaching and learning strategies referred to as correspondence education or correspondence study or as further education level in the United Kingdom: as home study, further education, and independent study at higher educational in the United States; as external studies in Australia; and as distance teaching or teaching at a distance in the United Kingdom by the Open University. In French it is referred to as *Teleenseignement*: *Fernstudim/Fernunterricht* in German, *education a distanica* in Spanish, and *teleducacao* in Portuguese. This description lists the major terms used by distance education institutions in the English-speaking world and gives parallel terms for the major European languages. Distance education subsumes a number of existing terms but not all are synonymous. (pp. 28-29)

Early in the field of distance education, Peters (1973) defined distance education as a method of imparting knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which are rationalized by the application of division of labour and organizational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students in the same time wherever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning.

According to Dohmen (1977), distance education is a systematically organized form of self-study in which student counseling, presentation of learning materials, and securing and supervising of students' success are carried out by a team of teachers each of whom has responsibilities. It is made possible at a distance by means of media, which can cover long distances. Holmberg (1995) describes distance education as that kind of education which covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under continuous and immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms on the same premises but, which nevertheless, benefits from the planning, guidance, and tuition of a tutorial organization.

Lane (1994, as cited in Keegan, 1995, p. 43) sees distance education as 'teaching and learning situations in which the instructor and the learner or learners are geographically separated and, therefore, rely on electronic devices and print materials for instructional delivery'.

Distance education includes distance teaching (the instructor's role in the process) and distance learning (the student's role in the process). In all these definitions, emphasis was placed on the separation of the learner and the teacher, which is fundamental because this distinguishes distance education from the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning. Holmberg as well as Moore and Kearsley (2005) also specified that there is planning involved. This implies the involvement of an educational institution and helps to distinguish it from private study at home. Moore and Kearsley's definition also implied that there was two-way communication between the instructor/institution and student(s) by electronic or other technology. This differentiates distance education from educational technology such as library

materials, do-it-yourself books, textbooks, television, and radio.

After reviewing definitions from other scholars, Keegan (1986) developed a synthesis of most of the definitions of distance education. He then came up with a list of basic characteristics essential for a definition of distance education namely:

- the quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learners throughout the length of the learning process (this distinguishes it from conventional face-to-face education);
- the influence of an educational organization both in the planning and preparation of learning materials and in the provision of student support services (this distinguishes it from private study and teach-yourself programmes);
- the use of technical media – print, audio, video or computer – to unite teacher and learner and carry the content of the course;
- the provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from, or even initiate dialogue (this distinguishes it from other use of technology in education); and
- the quasi-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups, with the possibility of occasional meeting for both didactic and socialization purposes. (Keegan, 1991 cited in Holmberg, 1995, p. 2).

Despite Keegan's (1986; 1995) synthesized definition of distance education, Ojo, Ogidan and Olakulehin (2006) still observed that no definition has been found to be exhaustive in attempting to define distance learning, rather they claimed, there are several approaches to defining the term. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2002, as cited in Ojo, Ogidan & Olakulehin, 2006), described the term open and distance learning as representing approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and group of learners.

Ojo, Ogidan & Olakulehin (2006) then concluded that open learning is an organized educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which the constraints on study are minimized in terms of access, entry, time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination of these. Thus, the concept of open and distance learning suggests an educational approach designed to reach learners in their home/offices/shops etc, provide learning resources for them to qualify without attending formal classes in person, or create opportunities for lifelong learning, no matter where or when they want to study.

For the purpose and within the context of the present study, open-distance learning refers to educational programme that is contingent on the utilization of various electronic devices and print materials as instructional delivery media due to physical and geographical separation between the learners and the tutor both in time and space.

The Concept of Academic Performance

Scholars have defined academic performance in a number of ways. For instance, it has been described as combined outcome of aptitude and interest, though the two variables are positively correlated, a high value of one necessarily means a high value of the other (Anastasia, 1976, cited in Osokoya, 1999). Academic performance is one of the most vital indicators in which policy makers and other stakeholders in education are interested. Adedeji (1998) stated that academic performance is very important because it appears to be one of the major criteria upon which the effectiveness and success of any educational institution can be judged. Corroborating Adedeji's (1998) assertion, Aremu (2001) further argued that academic performance is the fundamental criterion by which all teaching-learning activities are measured, using defined standards of excellence.

According to Aremu (2001), researchers who focus on the academic performance of students have continued to examine diverse phenomena that have been found to significantly predict scholastic performance. Aremu also contended that there have been a number of recent reviews of research that have critically examined many studies on the relationship between certain explanatory constructs and academic performance with diverse findings. Yet, the battery of variables used to predict the students' academic performance in formal face-to-face education situations, may not adequately serve as predictors of academic performance in distance learning situations (Kumar, 2002). This is due to differences in the

socio-demographic background of students in the two systems. For instance, the majority of distance learners are adults. They are also married and employed, while the reverse is the case for the traditional, face-to-face students.

Self-Regulation Skills and Academic Performance

Self-regulation skill is a fairly new construct of motivation. It has been found to be another very important student motivational characteristic (Ergul, 2004). This is due to the fact that in distance learning systems, learning is more personal and responsibility is more on the shoulders of the students when compared with the traditional face-to-face formal education system. Ergul therefore argued that for distance learners to be able to achieve, they need to control their learning and also regulate themselves.

In academic context, self-regulation refers to the processes that involve the activation and maintenance of cognition, behaviours and affects which are systematically oriented towards the attainment of goals (Schunk, 1989; Schunk, 1990; Zimmerman, 1994). According to Butler and Winne (1995), self-regulation is a learning style for students comprised of strong abilities like setting goals for developing knowledge and choosing balancing strategies against unwanted situations. Self-regulation has been studied in traditional classrooms in order to understand how students use their cognition, meta-cognition, and motivation so as to experience successful learning.

Cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies provide the building blocks for constructing knowledge within a learning environment. According to Kovach (2000), self-regulated learners set academic goals, select appropriate learning strategies to achieve these goals, and continually monitor goal progress. They are aware of their knowledge, their beliefs, motivation, and qualities of their cognitive processes. Self-regulated learners do not only need to posses cognition (knowledge to build upon), and meta-cognition (the knowledge and monitoring of learning strategies), but they must also be motivated to use their meta-cognitive strategies to build upon their understandings of instructional material (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

Zimmerman (1994) identified four attributes of self-regulated learning: (a) self-motivation, (b) self-monitoring, (c) manipulation of social and physical environment, and (d) self-confidence. Self-motivation refers to motivation that is derived from the students' self-efficacious perceptions and their use of self-regulatory learning processes such as setting goals. Self-monitoring refers to the students' awareness and self-checking during a learning process. Manipulation of the social and the physical environments refers to the students' ability to seek help from people who they know are capable, and also organize and restructure their skills in order to optimize learning.

A review of the literature on self-regulation uncovered numerous theoretical and empirical studies (Garcia, 1995; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). Garcia (1995) proposed that students use their self-efficacy to fuel their motivational strategies. Pintrich and De Groot (1990) found out that increased levels of self-efficacy stimulate self-regulated learning. Meece (1994) suggested that self-regulated learners possess motivational attributes in their goal orientation that affect their learning experiences. For example, some students are intrinsically motivated to engage in academic activities, while others are extrinsically motivated to maintain their engagement.

Yet, few studies have explicitly linked the components of self-regulated learning to academic performance (Schunk, 1984; Pajares & Kranzler, 1995; Pajares & Miller, 1994; Pajares & Miller, 1995). Schunk (1984) conducted an experiment on 4th grade children and posited that students who adopt learning goal exhibit higher self-regulation skills and engage in activities they believe enhance learning. Research conducted by Blocher (1997) has shown that self-regulated students have a strong desire to learn. Yet, Ergul's (2004) finding established no significant relationship between self-regulation and academic performance in distance learning. He argued that his subjects probably did not develop strategies that supported their learning, thus their academic performance was not sufficient.

Furthermore, on gender differentials in self-regulation skills, studies of (Joo, Bong & Choi, 2000; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; and Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1988) established gender differentials in self-regulation as they reported that self-regulation characteristics were significant for females, but not for males. This contradicts the finding of Ergul (2004) who reported that males are more self-regulated than the females.

The evidence presented in the above studies point towards the importance of self-regulation as a predictor of academic performance especially in distance learning system.

Distance Learning at the University of Ibadan: Historical Perspective

Established in 1988, through the Department of Adult Education, The Centre for External Studies (CES) initially focus on training teachers, particularly the practicing ones who needed to upgrade qualifications, as well as guidance/counseling training and development of adult educators. This focus has however, been recently expanded to include two Arts Degrees (one in theatre and one in French), as well as an agricultural programme. There are approximately 7,350 students currently enrolled in programmes of the Centre.

The main thrust of delivery in the Centre's programmes is through printed materials. There is also a regular student newsletter. After registration, students take materials home to study and then return to the University for a six-week residential session. During this session, they write a final examination (which currently constitutes the only formal assessment within programmes). The Centre established six study centres to support students (where they are able to register, collect materials, and organize teaching practicals in the form of physical tutorial facilitation, but three of these centres have now been closed.

The Centre also used to run tutorials, but has had to discontinue these because of administrative problems (particularly due to lack of financing). The Centre is expected to be financially self-sufficient, which means that – in most cases – the cost to students of studying in this way is the same as face-to-face education. Course materials are written by University lecturers. Writing course materials is generally initiated through writing workshops, at which training is provided. Lecturers are accommodated in hotels for an intensive writing period during which they write as much of the course materials as possible. Lecturers are paid for this work as well as for time they spend conducting the face-to-face sessions. They also receive royalties on the sale of the course materials (although the copyright resides with the Centre). Editing of materials is undertaken by the Centre's staff, who has been sent to courses in the United States. Each course guide consists of approximately 15 lectures, meaning that there are approximately six guides for each full-year course. At the initial stage, guides cost about ₦100 to produce, and are sold to students for between ₦150-200. Materials are made available to all students on campus at the University bookshop. The Centre is interested in exploring use of multimedia resources – particularly audio cassettes –but finances currently make this impossible.

The University administration has recently become more interested in the work of the Centre, as it has demonstrated an ability to maintain educational standards and success rates, albeit not at the same level as the face-to-face programmes. The University is particularly interested in the Centre's ability to generate income, to provide education to working people, and to absorb students who cannot currently be accommodated in the traditional face-to-face programmes. A Committee has been established to review the structures and operations of the Centre, with a view to expanding its operations (for example, in areas such Accounting and Business Administration).

Summary of the Reviewed Literature

The review of literature in the present study dealt with some of the supposition by scholars and researchers of students' self-regulation skills and their academic performance in open-distance learning programmes. The literature reviewed framed the two major constructs underlying this study, that is, self-regulation skills and academic performance.

Several studies have established diverse findings on the prediction of academic performance by self-regulation skills. For instance, while a positive correlation was reported between self-regulation skills and academic performance by Pintrich and De Groot (1990) as well as Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons (1990), Ergul (2004) established contrary findings. He reported insignificant correlation between self-regulation skills and academic performance.

Researchers such as Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1988) and Joo, Bong & Choi, (2000) reported gender differentials with respect to self-regulation. Namely, females reported greater self-regulation characteristics at a statistically significant level. The researchers argued that female distance learners

reported more use of self-regulation strategies than males. The evidence presented in the above studies point towards the importance of self-regulation as a predictor of academic performance not only in traditional face-to-face classrooms, but also in distance learning systems.

As part of the current interest of the University of Ibadan's DLC, more faculties now offer courses to students. Courses like Agricultural Economics and Extension, Agronomy, Animal Science, Forestry/Forest Resources Management, Agric-Extension and Rural Sociology, Fisheries and Wildlife Management are now available in the faculty of Agriculture, while the faculty of Engineering now offers Agricultural Engineering, Civil Engineering, Petroleum Engineering, Electronics and Computer Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Food Technology, Industrial and Production Engineering, and Wood Production Engineering.

Furthermore, the faculty of Science offers Physics, Chemistry, Industrial Chemistry, Geological Sciences, Geography and Regional Planning, Geography, Statistics, Botany, Botany and Micro-Biology, Zoology, Mathematics, Micro-Biology, Archaeology, Computer Science, Anthropology, etc. Other available courses are Biochemistry, Human Nutrition, Physiology, Micro-Biology, Virology, Anatomy, Veterinary Medicine, and Pharmacy.

As a result of the persistent insistence by some stakeholders, the Centre has changed the term "Pre-Degree" programme to a new nomenclature called "Bridge-Link" because these stakeholders had an erroneous impression that Pre-Degree is a promise or commitment by the Centre to admit students automatically into full degree programmes of the parent University or as a "short cut" to a Nigerian University.

Hypotheses

On the basis of literature reviewed, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- There is no correlation between self-regulation skills and distance learners' academic performance.
- Self-regulations skills will not significantly contribute to Distance learners' academic performance.
- Gender has significant difference in the self-regulation skills of distance learners.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for the study is descriptive, of the *"ex-post facto"* in nature.

Population and Sample

The target population for the study consisted of all undergraduate distance learners at the Distance Learning Centre of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. This was approximately 7,350 during the 2009 academic session. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the Distance Learning Centre of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, one of the Nigerian Universities approved by the National Universities Commission to operate a distance learning programme. One thousand and five hundred (1500) participants were however selected through simple random sampling technique during year 2009 contact session. This was 20.41% of the total population.

Instrumentation

A self-designed instrument titled Students' Self-Regulation Skills in Distance Learning Scale (SSRSDLS) was used for data collection. This instrument was developed to collect information on students' self-regulation skills. It consisted of 20 items drawn on a modified four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) and carried the weights of 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. A pilot study was conducted on 300 part-time students who share almost the same characteristics with the participants of the study. For instance, these part-time students are mostly adult working class like the distance learners. They are also married. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability was computed for the instrument. The alpha value obtained was 0.86, which

makes the instrument considered reliable. The Researchers used another self-designed distance learners' bio-data master sheet (DLBMS) to collect students' records on results (Grade Point Average) from the Institution's records officers.

Method of Data Analysis

Regression analysis was used to determine the contribution of the self regulation skills (x_1) in predicting distance learners' academic performance (x_2). The criterion variable was therefore regressed on the explanatory variable. Also, a *t*-test was performed to determine if there was a significant difference in self-regulation skills of distance learners on gender basis.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the analysis of the collected data, testing the posed research hypotheses in the study.

Hypothesis 1: There is no correlation between self-regulation skills and distance learners' academic performance.

Table 4
Pearson Correlation Between Self Regulation Skills and Academic Performance

N		GPA (Academic Performance)	Sig (1-tailed)
1500	Self-Regulation Skills	.055	.016

$p<0.05$

Table 4 above shows the correlation between self-regulation skills and academic performance. There exists a significant relationship between the two constructs (r=.016; $P<0.05$).

Hypothesis 2: Self–regulation skills will not contribute to Distance learners' academic performance.

Table 5
The Contribution of Self Regulations Skill to the Prediction of Students' Academic Performance

Factor	B	Std. Error	R^2	T	Sig.
(Constant)	2.921	.515		5.668	.000
Self Regulations Skills	-1.38E-02	.006	.062	-2.148	.032

$p<0.05$

The Table above reveals that the beta (β) weights of the paths (path coefficients) give the estimates of the strengths of the correlation. It was revealed that self-regulation skills of distance learners at the Distance Learning Centre of the University of Ibadan contributed significantly to the prediction of students' academic performance ($R^2=.062$; $p<.05$).

Hypothesis 3: There is significant gender difference in the self-regulation skills of distance learners.

Table 6
Comparison of Self-Regulation Skills of Male/Female Distance Learners

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	*t* value	Sig
Female	847	2.91	1.55	1498	.339	.734
Male	653	2.95	1.64			

$p > 0.05$

Table 6 above represents information on hypothesis 3, as measured by a *t*-test to determine whether the difference between male and female academic performance in the sample is statistically significant. The result shows a mean of 2.91 from female distance learners compared with a mean of 2.95 from male counterparts. This finding indicates that gender has no significant effect on distance learners' academic performance ($t = .339$, df =1498, $p > 0.05$). Hypothesis 3 is therefore rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings revealed that students' self-regulation skills and academic performance are positively and significantly correlated ($R^2 = 0.16$; $p < 0.5$). Reason for this finding may be due to the fact that most of the subjects in this study are employed and self sponsored, and thus, focused on programme success. They had probably formed necessary self-regulatory strategies that could assist and enable them to perform well in the programme. This finding is consistent with the results of earlier studies like Pintrich and De Groot (1990) and Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons (1988) who reported positive correlations between self-regulation skills and academic performance. The finding of this study however, contradicted Ergul's (2004) finding that established no significant relationship between self-regulation skills and academic performance. Ergul argued that his subjects probably did not develop strategies that supported their learning, thus, their academic performance was not sufficient.

Furthermore, the hypothesis three which states that gender has significant difference in the self-regulation skills of distance learners is rejected. This is because finding indicated that there is no significant gender difference in the self-regulation skills of distance learners at the Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan, though male learners are more self-regulated than the females. This is in contrast to the findings of some earlier studies such as Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons (1988) as well as Joo, Bong & Choi, (2000) which reported gender differentials between male and female distance learners. These studies established that self-regulation characteristics are significant for females. The Researchers argued that female distance learners had reported more frequently than males, the use of self-regulation strategies. Age may have influenced the degree to which both male and female respondents in this study reported self-regulatory skills as most of the students in this study were more mature than the typical face-to-face college student in Nigeria. Findings from this study are in agreement with the study of Ajadi, (2001) as he reported no significant difference in self-regulation skills among students based on gender.

CONCLUSION

The selected students' motivational characteristic, that is, self-regulation skills did not only relate with, but also significantly determine the academic performance of distance learners at the Distance Learning Centre of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. It therefore, becomes highly imperative for the concerned students to be wary of the importance of being self-regulated for them to succeed in the programme.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Findings from the present study indicate the need for further study. For instance, further studies can include other demographic variables like age, employment status, disability status and marital status. Also, one area of study concerning self-regulation that has not yet been completely examined in Nigeria is that of its effects on students' performance and satisfaction with online courses, as well as course completion. This can be left for other studies.

PLANNING IMPLICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE STUDY

The following are planning implications that self-regulation skill has for effective study towards improved students' academic performance:

- Students should endeavour to have a specific period of time to go through their course materials and always find time to search for information concerning their programme on the internet. This is because teaching-learning responsibilities lie more on the shoulders of the students. These practices can also lead to effective study habits.
- Students need to monitor their progress in goal achievement in distance learning programmes. The University authority should put in place effective feedback mechanisms on the academic progress of the students.
- Students should always create balancing strategies in case of unforeseen situations in their academic pursuit as well as setting goals towards knowledge development in distance learning programme.
- Students should reduce their social, business, and religious activities in favour of their academic work, especially during contact periods. They need to always carry out personal assessment and evaluation of the study objectives vis-à-vis course materials so as to be able to get effective feedback on their academic pursuits.

APPENDIX
DISTANCE LEARNERS' SELF-REGULATION SKILLS SCALE (DLSRSI)

Instruction: Kindly read through the following statements and rate accordingly. You are to tick (√) your responses.

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
1	I always ask myself questions so as to make sure I understand the distance learning study materials I have been reading.				
2	I usually work on practice exercises and answer questions at the end of each chapter even though I do not have to do so.				
3	I work hard to receive good grades even though I do not like certain lesson of distance learning programme				
4	I have specific period of time to go through my distance learning course study materials even when the time may not be convenient.				

5	I do not usually set my goals towards knowledge development in my distance learning studies.				
6	I always endeavour to select appropriate learning strategies so as to achieve my academic goals				
7	I usually monitor my progress in goal achievement in distance learning programme.				
8	I always set balancing strategies in case of unwanted situation in my academic pursuit.				
9	I usually set goals towards knowledge development in distance learning programme.				
10	I always find time to search for information concerning my programme on the internet.				
11	I usually strive to get relevant course materials to read in the programme.				
12	I do not engage in other activities that will further promote my understanding of the study materials.				
13	I usually reduce my social activities to the advantage of my academic works during contact periods.				
14	I usually carry out personal assessment and evaluation of the study objectives.				
15	I maintain such systematic cognitions and behaviours necessary for me to attain my goals.				

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