

Administrative Challenges of Centre Workers of University of Education, Winneba

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the administrative challenges faced by study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. A structured questionnaire was administered to 84 study centre workers, selected through census. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation, were used to analyse the data obtained. The study revealed that centre workers admitted to knowing and taking up their administrative responsibilities for the programme's success. Again, the study showed that irregular payment of tutors' claims and insufficient and unequal distribution of course materials were challenges faced by the study centre workers. Also, the centre workers employed some coping skills to run the study centres. These include: arriving on time during tutorial and examination days to put arrangements in place; delegation of authority to course representatives to execute daily routines; making available teaching and learning resources to tutors. The study recommends that the management of CODEL, UEW, should organise frequent workshops for the Centre workers to update their knowledge about their responsibilities. In addition, management should resolve the issue of irregular payment of tutors' claims and sensitize the workers on a regular basis regarding strategies they could employ to address their challenges in their administrative duties.

Keywords: administrative challenges, study centre, centre workers, centre coordinators, administrative assistants

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

The approach to inclusive and equitable quality education is the most important aspect of determining a country's future and sustainable development for its new generations. Access to high-quality education at all levels of education is the most powerful tool any country can utilize to achieve considerable social and economic progress. To make this goal a reality, there is an urgent need to debate what factors contribute to educational achievement at all levels of schooling (Pashiardis, Brauckmann, & Kafa, 2018).

In many parts of the world, there is also significant growth and an increase in the number of young people, putting pressure on higher education institutions to adapt to new and inventive ways of educating them. Adults' constant learning is becoming increasingly important in most nations as occupations change and whole career paths are replaced with new ones developed. As a result, access to education from any location, at any time, at any age, and in many methods is vital for the sake of both individual and societal well-being (Keesee, 2011).

In recent years, remote education has been used to educate students who are unable to attend traditional forms of education, hence distance education. Distance education has gained widespread acceptance and sustained expansion throughout the globe as an alternative to traditional face-to-face education (Owusu-Mensah, Anyan & Denkyi, 2015). Because of the rise in population and the rising demand for higher education, which cannot be satisfied without devising alternative techniques to accommodate time and space modifications, distance education has become indispensable (Rashid & Rashid, 2012; Perraton, 2004).

There are several reasons why the transition to distance education is intrinsically linked to altering organizational processes and procedures and building new organisational models. In other words, individuals from all areas of life enrol in distance education programmes, making it mandatory that personnel (study centre coordinators, for example, administrators of distance education offices) should carry out their duties with ease when it comes to relating to students.

Administration is very essential when it comes to the success of an institution, organisation, company, office or any business firm. The role played by administrative staff as far as the operations of institutions or organisations concerned cannot be underestimated (Dunford & Snell, 2003). Without administrative staff, the achievement of organisational goals and objectives will be a mirage. The success of the school is in the hands of the administrator, whose primary responsibility is to assist the organisation's development.

According to Amadi-Eric (2008), administration is a process of systematically arranging and coordinating the human and material resources available to any organization for the main purpose of achieving stipulated goals of that organization. Today, it is often assumed that administration is essentially the same in all businesses regardless of whether it is educational, industrial, governmental, military, or ecclesiastical. Schools, therefore, require staff with strong administrative skills to achieve and accomplish educational goals and objectives.

Distance learning administrators, according to Perraton (2004), Tait (2003), and Annan (2012), emphasise proper management and coordination of institutional activities, paying attention to student's needs and difficulties, and being capable of facilitating the resolution of issues that may impede students' learning. The workers of study centres assist the coordinators in providing highly valuable services to distance learning students by supervising both academic and administrative operations of the centres (UEW Annual Report, 2016). O'Rourke (1993), contends that study centre administrators should have the ability to anticipate and plan for distant education logistical demands, including scheduling, allocating resources, and anticipating possible challenges; and also, the ability to interact effectively with clients, students, and teaching and administrative personnel within the institution in order to discuss and resolve problems and issues of concern. The role of study centre administrators has become increasingly complex and associated with some level of administrative challenges.

Administrative difficulties are scientifically defined as impediments to the school administration procedure. These difficulties that the administrative staff experienced while carrying out their duties may have a substantial impact on the achievement of school goals (Chu & Cravens, 2012).

Aja-Okorie (2010) espoused that when problems are severe or many, administrators' productivity suffers, particularly their capacity to win the respect and trust of the student population. Owusu-Mensah et al. (2015) argued in their study that the role of the administrator is critical to the overall performance of an institution or study centre; thus, when there are several challenges to overcome, it divides the administration's attention concerning students' academic achievement and, in the long run, affects administrators' output in terms of high-quality education and improvement in students' academic achievement.

The problems encountered by study centre workers in carrying out their administrative duties from the researcher's experience and perspective include; office logistics challenges, communication gaps, managerial skills challenges, office accommodation, course materials, course allocation, appointment of course tutors, timetable preparation, and venues for face-to-face tutorials.

The study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba, employ some coping skills in dealing with administrative challenges that they are confronted with. Among these coping skills include; leadership skills, administrative skills, communicative skills, human relations, logistics distribution skills, and research and evaluation skills.

The administrative staff of the study centre of the University of Education, Winneba, seemed to be faced with some administrative challenges that hinder their administrative responsibilities. It is against this background that the study sought to examine the administrative challenges faced by study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The College of Distance and e-Learning (CODEL) has the mandate of running distance and e-learning programmes for the University of Education, Winneba. The college runs programmes from the diploma to the postgraduate levels. These programmes are run across the length and breadth of the country at various study centres (42 in all). Administrative problems are many, and they interfere with administrative tasks, limit administrators' effectiveness, and often reduce students' learning experience and attainment (Sokano, 2017).

Tait (2003) argued that when administrators confront the difficulty of a lack of input from other stakeholders in education, particularly in distance education programmes, it affects administrators' performance, particularly in support services and improving students' learning experiences.

Study centres have administrative staff that ensure the effective running of the centres. However, Informal discussions between the researcher and a cross-section of the administrators revealed that they experience some level of challenges that hinder the effective discharging of their responsibilities. Besides, the researcher's personal experience as a centre coordinator at the Hohoe study centre from 2013 to 2016 regarding study centre administrative challenges, is a motivation towards the current study. Lorenzetti (2011) confirms that distance education administrators face a different set of challenges than any of the other administrators. He further explained that most universities' senior administrators are uncertain about how to handle distance education, and part of this is due to the lack of historic precedent about how distance education fits into the larger academic scheme.

Considerable scholarly research has been conducted on the administrative difficulties encountered by center workers in various distance education programs, as evidenced by the works of Johnston (2020), Schwanenberger, Dereshiwsky, and Sujo-Montes (2021), and Yazçayır, Kılınc, and Ak (2022). However, there appears to be a scarcity of empirical investigations concerning the specific administrative challenges experienced by study center workers at the University of Education, Winneba. This knowledge gap has prompted the necessity of the present study. This study could potentially contribute to the existing literature by shedding light on the specific issues, concerns, and obstacles encountered by these workers in their administrative roles.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in several aspects. Firstly, administrative problems can significantly impact the effectiveness of educational institutions, including the quality of support services and students' learning experiences. By identifying and understanding these challenges, we can work towards improving administrative processes, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience for students.

Secondly, distance education administrators, such as those at the study centres, face unique challenges that differ from traditional educational settings. There is a lack of historic precedent and established guidelines for effectively managing distance education programs within the broader academic framework. Therefore, studying the specific challenges faced by study centre workers contributes to the growing body of knowledge in the field of distance education administration, providing insights and recommendations for improving administrative practices in this context.

Furthermore, while existing literature acknowledges the general administrative challenges in distance education, there is a need for context-specific research to understand the unique challenges faced by study centre workers at UEW. By conducting this study, we aim to fill this research gap and provide empirical evidence regarding the specific challenges experienced by administrators at these study centres.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Fayol (1916) Administrative Theory of Management. This is a classical approach to management that emphasizes the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative processes within an organization. The theory was developed by Henri Fayol, a French management theorist, and focuses on five key functions of management: planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling. In the context of this research, administrative challenges of center workers at the University of Education, Winneba, I believe that Fayol's theory offers a valuable lens through which to analyse these challenges and develop strategies for improvement. By employing the key functions of management as a framework, I identified the underlying causes of the challenges faced by center workers and propose practical solutions to enhance their performance and effectiveness. Furthermore, Fayol's theory provides a well-established foundation that has been widely studied and applied in various organisational contexts. Its relevance and applicability have been demonstrated in numerous empirical studies and real-world scenarios. By leveraging this established theoretical framework, I drew upon the existing body of knowledge and build upon previous research to contribute to the understanding of administrative challenges in the specific context of center workers at the University of Education, Winneba. Again, By employing a theoretical framework that is well-grounded in management principles, I gathered relevant and insightful data that directly address the research questions. Similarly, when analysing the results, Fayol's theory provided a framework for interpreting and understanding the data in a meaningful way. It allowed me to connect the findings to the broader concepts and principles of management, enabling me to derive practical implications and recommendations for improving efficiency and effectiveness in the centre.

1.5. Purpose of the Study

The study sought to find out the administrative challenges faced by study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba.

1.6. Research Objectives

1. Views expressed by study centre workers regarding their administrative responsibilities
2. Problems encountered by study centre workers in carrying out administrative duties
3. Coping skills employed by study centre workers in dealing with administrative problems

1.7. Research Objectives

1. What are the views expressed by study centre workers regarding their administrative responsibilities?
2. What problems do study centre workers encounter in carrying out administrative duties?
3. What coping skills are employed by study centre workers in dealing with administrative problems?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. A cross-sectional study is a form of observational study or descriptive research in which information about a population or a representative subset at a single point in time is analysed (Simkus, 2021). The design is considered useful in generating data that would facilitate decision-making on the administrative challenges faced by study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba.

2.2. Population

The population for the study comprised all study centre (CODEL – College for Distance and e-Learning) workers of the University of Education, Winneba, at all the study centres nationwide. There are presently, forty-two (42) Study Centres across the country, with at least, one, located in each of the 16 regions of Ghana. Each of the forty-two centres has two centre workers (administrators), comprising the study centre coordinator and the administrative assistant. The total population of the administrators in the forty-two centres adds up to eighty-four (84).

2.3. Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for the study comprised 84 study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba. Census was used in selecting the participants for the study. Census is where a researcher selects all the members of the population as the sample (Borg & Gall, 2007). The basis for using census was that the number was manageable in size.

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

The study relied on the use of a structured questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire was administered to study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba. The questionnaire consisted of five (5) sections: Section 'A' looked at participants' demographic data whiles section 'B' asked participants to provide personal descriptions or definitions of administration. Section 'C' centered on views of study centre workers relating to administrative responsibilities, whiles section 'D' looked at administrative challenges faced by study centre workers. Section 'E' focused on coping skills/strategies employed by study centre workers in dealing with administrative problems. The questionnaires were to be filled out by the study

centre administrators, who, in this study are as well described as study centre workers. The researcher carefully selected the participants to respond to the questionnaires.

2.5. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was given out to experts in educational administration and management to check for both the face and content validity of the questions. To establish the reliability of the instrument, 20 questionnaires were pilot-tested among Administrators at the College of Distance Education at the University of Cape Coast. A Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of .812 was obtained.

2.6. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (Mean and standard deviation) were used to analyse the data. The items on the questionnaire were coded and fed into the Statistical Product for Service Solutions (SPSS) version 26.0. Data were screened for errors and missing responses. Outliers and normality were also checked before conducting the analysis. Upon satisfying the assumptions of normality and the absence of any outliers, the analysis was carried out.

3. Results

3.1. Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 displays the distribution of respondents' demographic data. Table 1 shows that there were equal numbers of administrators and coordinators, thus 42 (50%) from each group. More than half of the respondents (n = 52; 61.9%) were males. Majority of the respondents (n = 32; 38.1%) were between the ages of 41 and 50 years. The study was dominated by respondents with Master's degree (n = 56; 66.7%). Also, most of respondents had a working experience of 15-20 years (n = 26; 31%), followed by 11-14 (n = 23; 27.4%) with above 20 years (n = 1; 1.2%) being the minority group.

Table 1.

Distribution of respondents based on demographic Characteristics (N=84)

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Position		
Administrator	42	50.0
Coordinator	42	50.0
Sex		
Male	52	61.9
Female	32	38.1
Age		
18-30	6	7.1
31-40	25	29.8
41-50	32	38.1
51-60	21	25.0
Professional Qualification		
Degree	28	33.3
Masters	56	66.7
Working Experience		
1-4	19	22.6
5-10	15	17.9
11-14	23	27.4
15-20	26	31.0
Above 20	1	1.2

Source: field data, 2022

3.2. Research Question 1

What are the views expressed by study centre workers regarding their administrative responsibilities?

The purpose of this research question was to identify the administrative responsibilities of study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba. Respondents, therefore, answered questions to various statements relating to administrative responsibilities as it exists in their various study centres. The responses followed a four-point Likert scale type of measurement as 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree. For analysis and discussions, the average mean score for all the responses is 2.5. Hence mean value of 2.5 and above suggest an agreement that the statement is an administrative responsibility they perform. In contrast, mean scores below 2.5 suggest disagreement. The same interpretation was given to research question 2 and 3. Table 2 presents the details of the responses.

Table 2 shows that respondents accept the outlined responsibilities as their administrative responsibilities ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 0.7$). These findings imply that study centre workers at the various CODEL centres agree that their administrative responsibilities include assisting in the physical and academic development of their centre, assisting the coordinator in providing highly valuable services to students by supervising academic and administrative operations of the centre, conveying students' demand and concerns to the study centre coordinator as well as keeping and managing property and students record at the study centre.

Table 2.

Views expressed by study centre workers regarding their administrative responsibilities

Statement	M	SD
I primarily assist in the physical and academic development of the centre	3.8	.62
I assist the coordinator in providing highly valuable services to students by supervising academic operations of the centre	3.7	.70
I assist the coordinator in providing highly valuable services to students by supervising administrative operations of the centre	3.7	.70
I convey students demand and concerns to the study centre coordinator	3.7	.72
I convey the CODEL requirements to prospective students	3.7	.72
I plan and make study centre requisition on behalf of the coordinator to CODEL	3.6	.83
I keep and manage property and students record at the study centre	3.8	.62
Mean of Means	3.7	0.7

Source: field data, 2022

3.3. Research Question 2

What problems are encountered by study centre workers in carrying out administrative duties?

This research question aimed at finding out the challenges study centre workers face while discharging their administrative duties. Result is presented in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, study centre workers encounter some problems when carrying out their administrative duties. Problems that respondents agreed to are irregular payment of tutor's claim ($M = 3.0$, $SD = .94$) and insufficient and unequal distribution of course materials ($M = 2.8$, $SD = .84$). To the respondents, there is no communication gap between their centre and the CODEL office centre ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 1.0$) and there is also a sufficient supply of office equipment to work with at the centre ($M = 2.5$, $SD = .94$). Respondents also indicated they are challenged with timetable preparation, venues for face-face tutorials, training and office accommodation.

Table 3.

Problems encountered by study centre workers in carrying out administrative duties

Statement	M	SD
There is communication gap between the center and CODEL office	2.3	1.0
*There is sufficient supply of office equipment to work with at the centre	2.5	.94
There is no training for me before assumption of duty at the study center	2.1	1.0
There is insufficient office accommodation for me to effectively discharge my duties	2.3	1.1
There is insufficient and unequal distribution of course materials	2.8	.85
There are inadequate competent hands at the centre of handles courses	1.6	1.1
There is irregular payment of tutor's claim	3.0	.94
There is a challenge of time table preparation	1.8	.90
There is a challenge of venues for face-face tutorials	1.6	.89
Mean of Means	2.2	1.0

Source: field data, 2022

3.4. Research Question 3

What coping skills are employed by study centre workers in dealing with administrative problems?

This research question looked at how study centre workers manage the administrative problems they encounter in their line of work. It aimed at finding out the challenges study centre workers face while discharging their administrative duties. Result is shown in Table 4.

The result from Table 4 indicates that the major strategy used by study centre workers in dealing with their administrative problems is by arriving on time during tutorial and examination days in order to put arrangements in place before the start of the session ($M = 3.7$, $SD = .80$). Respondents also noted that they make available teaching and learning resources to tutors before the start of every tutorial session ($M = 3.6$, $SD = .80$), assign supervisees to qualified and appropriate tutors for project/dissertation supervision ($M = 3.5$, $SD = .81$), set up a schedule for the collection of modules and other materials for students that orderliness ($M = 3.3$, $SD = .88$) and make constructive use of suggestions and criticisms from students and tutors through action taking and prompt feedback ($M = 3.2$, $SD = .72$). Nonetheless, respondents indicated that they do not make use of suggestion box with the intention of solving both general and delicate problems that beset members of the study centre ($M = 2.3$, $SD = .82$).

Table 4.

Coping skills employed by study centre workers in dealing with administrative problems

Statement	M	SD
I delegate authority to course representatives in order to execute my daily routines effectively and efficiently at the centre	2.9	.94
I occasionally communicate with course representatives regarding pending problems among students and to deal with student absenteeism	3.2	.86
I make constructive use of suggestions and criticisms from students and tutors through action taking and prompt feedback	3.2	.72
I convene regular meetings with my tutors and administrative assistants in order to find solutions to problems before they get out of hand	3.0	.77
I make use of suggestion box with the intention of solving both general and delicate problems that beset members of the study centre	2.3	.82
I arrive on time during tutorial and examination days in order to put arrangements in place before the start of tutorials/examination	3.7	.80
I make available teaching and learning resources to tutors before the start of every tutorial session	3.6	.80
I set up schedule for the collection of modules and other materials for students that orderliness	3.3	.88
I assign supervisees to qualified and appropriate tutors for project/dissertation supervision	3.5	.81
Mean of Means	3.2	0.82

Source: field data, 2022

4. Discussions

The discussion is presented in line with the research questions. It covers findings relating to the views expressed by study centre workers regarding their administrative responsibilities, problems encountered by study centre workers in carrying out administrative duties and coping skills employed by study centre workers in dealing with administrative problems.

4.1. Views Expressed by Study Centre Workers Regarding Their Administrative Responsibilities

This study revealed that study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba, expressed positive views and to a large extent, admitted to taking up their administrative responsibilities and seeing the assumption of their duty to contribute positively to the success of the programme. Notably, the study centre worker (administrative assistant) admitted to assisting in the physical and academic development of the centre, assisting the coordinator in providing highly valuable services to students by supervising academic and administrative operations of the centre, conveying students' demands and concerns to the study centre coordinator as well as keeping and managing property and students' records at the study centre. It could be inferred that study centre workers aid the organization's development and are ultimately responsible for the programme's success. The findings align well with Dunford & Snell (2003) who expressed that the role played by administrative staff as far as the operations of institutions or organisations are concerned, cannot be underestimated because they are entirely responsible for the institution's performance and have a major duty to promoting the growth of their institution.

The findings further agree with Perraton (2008), Tait (2003), and Annan (2012) who reported that workers of study centres assist the coordinators in providing highly valuable services to distance learning students by supervising both academic and administrative operations of the centres. Similarly, the findings align well with O'Rourke (1993) who noted that study centre administrators have the ability to anticipate and plan for distant education logistical demands, including scheduling, allocating resources, and anticipating possible challenges; and also, the ability to interact effectively with clients, students, and teaching and administrative personnel within the institution in order to discuss and resolve problems and issues of concern.

4.2. Problems Encountered by Study Centre Workers in Carrying out Administrative Duties

The findings suggest that study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba face some challenges when carrying out their administrative duties. In particular, the study revealed that irregular payment of tutor's claims and insufficient and unequal distribution of course materials had the highest rate of occurrence. The findings are in consonance with Pajibo, Asare & Dzikunu (2019) study, which concluded that insufficient supply of course materials were affecting administrators' performance. Distance education study centres are scattered and should not experience insufficient and unequal distribution of materials, if so, it can disrupt their smooth functioning (Sokano, 2017).

On the contrary, respondents disagreed with the notion that there is a communication gap between the center and the CODEL office. This result contradicts the findings of Sokano (2017), whose research found that there is inadequate communication between administrators, coordinators, and the mother institution, which poses significant challenges in terms of role definition, vision, and feedback.

Similarly, the study centre workers disagreed with the constructs; there is insufficient office accommodation for them to effectively discharge their duties, there are inadequate competent hands at the centre of handling courses, there is a challenge of timetable preparation, there is a challenge of venues for face-face tutorials. This was a positive result for the University of Education's CODEL programme.

4.3. Coping Skills Employed by Study Centre Workers in Dealing with Administrative Problems

It could be inferred from the results that study centre workers on University of Education's CODEL programme employed some coping strategies in managing the administrative challenges they encounter. The respondents admitted to dealing with their administrative problems by arriving on time during tutorial and examination days in order to put arrangements in place before the start of tutorials. This could give them ample time to manage situations before they could interfere with administrative tasks, limit administrators' effectiveness, and reduce students' learning experience and attainment (Sokano, 2017).

The findings further revealed that the study centre workers employed other strategies including delegation of authority to course representatives in order to execute their daily routines effectively and efficiently at the centre; occasionally communicate with course representatives regarding pending problems among students and to deal with student absenteeism; making constructive use of suggestions and criticisms from students and tutors through action taking and prompt feedback; convening regular meetings with tutors and administrative assistants in order to find solutions to problems before they get out of hand; making available teaching and learning resources to tutors before the start of every tutorial session; setting up a schedule for the collection of modules and other materials for students that orderliness; and, assigning supervisees to qualified and appropriate tutors for project/dissertation supervision. These strategies help in managing administrative challenges they encounter for the smooth running of the centers' business.

4.4. Key Findings of the Study

The following were the main findings of the study:

1. It emerged from the study that majority of the study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba, expressed positive views and to a large extent, admitted to knowing and taking up their administrative responsibilities for the programme's success.
2. The study revealed some challenges such as; payment of tutor's claim, and insufficient and unequal distribution of course materials. These challenges were militating against the performance of study centre workers of the University of Education, Winneba.
3. The study also showed that study centre workers on University of Education's CODEL programme, employed some coping strategies in managing the administrative challenges they encounter. These strategies were: arriving on time during tutorial and examination days in order to put arrangements in place before the start of tutorials; delegation of authority to course representatives in order to execute daily routines effectively and efficiently at the centre; making available teaching and learning resources to tutors; setting up schedule for the collection of modules and other materials for students.

4.5. Recommendations

1. To ensure that study centre workers keep knowing the responsibilities, the study recommends that management of CODEL, UEW, organises frequent workshops to update the knowledge of the centre workers on their responsibilities.
2. The researcher recommends management of CODEL, UEW, to resolve the issue of irregular payment of tutors' claims. Tutors' claims should be paid promptly on monthly basis, upon submission of the claim forms.
3. Again, CODEL management should provide sufficient course materials and also ensure they are equally distributed. This will motivate students to attend tutorial sessions regularly and also get committed to their studies.
4. The study also recommends that CODEL management should sensitize study centre workers on regular basis about the strategies they could employ to address the challenges they face in their administrative duties.

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