The Views Of District Directors Of Education On Distance Education For Teachers In The Upper West Region Of Ghana

Amina, Jangu Alhassan

Senior Member of the University of Cape Coast,
Regional Resident Tutor for the Wa Regional, Ghana

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate the views of District Directors of Education towards distance education programmes in the Upper West Region of Ghana. There are some common misgivings about the attitudes of District Directors of Education towards distance education programs for teachers in the region. The attitude is a matter of concern and needs to be investigated into. The study purposefully sampled all the eleven District Directors of Education in the Region. Questionnaires are issued out, and the data gathered were analyzed qualitatively. The study revealed that, District Directors of Education have full support for distance education for teachers in the region. However, they provided some suggestions on how to improve upon the programmes for teachers to merit its acceptability. It is crucial to note that, District Directors of Education need workshops and seminar to educate them on the role, and dynamisms of distance education in the 21st century.

Keywords: Teacher Learning, Evaluation, Distance Education, Traditional Education, Assessment, Qualitative Research, Performance Assessment, Instructional Practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

University education plays a significant role in the development of any nation. If countries like Ghana want to speed up its development, then access and participation should be widened up to all those who need a university education. The realization that college Education is paramount to development has increased the demand for it against the limited infrastructural facilities at the University. It is a typical phenomenon to notice that over the last decade, distance education has become popular among working adults and youth as well (Campton, Davis, & Correia, 2010).

The 21st century has presented itself with new challenges and equally new skills and knowledge to fight these challenges. For instance, population expansion has given new challenges of denial to access and participation in education due to lack of improved and increase in already existing ones. With the new role of distance education as a tool for meeting the global needs of developing countries and developed countries as well, most developing countries have embraced distance education (Nasser & Abouchedid, 2000).

The expansion of the population across the globe makes it highly imperative for any nation to hang on to the conventional mode of Education for its people (Campton, Davis, & Correia, 2010). Even as new technologies emerge, the distinguishing line between distance education and conventional system of education is becoming thinner every day. The issue of distance in Distance Education is gradually being eradicated. Individuals are grasping this opportunity to acquire higher education.

One issue that borders on people's mind is that Distance Education limits its students from interaction and peer discussion Shelton (2011). However, to some extent we forget that there are face-to-face sessions where distance learners meet to discuss issues with their facilitators and peers as well. The times for meeting might be limited but not erased completely. Shelton (2011) suggested that, there is a strong need for a common method of assessing the quality of online education programs. It is crucial because quality indicators differ from one institution to another creating confusion among hiring professionals. The findings are significant because it has indicated that existing paradigms suggest a

strong need for a general method for assessing the quality of online education programs (Shelton, 2011).

Whiles on the surface District Directors of Education show concern for distance education their strategic thinking and attitudes towards distance education seems otherwise (Nasser et. al., 2000). They weigh down on efforts to push Distance Education beyond what pertains today. To support this notion Adams, Lee, & Cortese (2012) reported that in hiring situations, applicants with a traditional degree are found to be the overwhelming choice than the online degree holder. The reason for this perception was that online coursework creates uncertainty about its quality of preparation of students to be competent (Adams, Lee, & Cortese, 2012). In a related study by Thirunarayanan (2010) revealed that, there is still some distrust for online training, and given the chance some employers will not employ persons who obtain their degree by distance learning (Thirunarayanan, 2010). It throws a challenge to the institutions offering distance education, to educate the public that degree by distance learning is not different from level by conventional settings (Thirunarayanan, 2010). The findings are significant because, they demonstrate the perceived weigh down on efforts to make distance education a system of education. What then can be done to dismiss this perception is an issue this study has raised. In a related study, Columbaro & Monaghan (2009) also find out that, there was an overall negative perception of online degrees, and that employers continue to harbor negative attitudes about online degree credentials. The findings of the study are equally significant because it shows an entrenched stigma attached to online degrees when it comes to the hiring process within organizations and industry (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009). A Common observation from the review of the literature has indicated that all research to date has concluded that professional in the hiring business have an overall negative perception of online degrees.

It was the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) guidelines that first establish the implementation of Distance Education in Ghana through the recommendation of an Open University in Ghana (Government of Ghana, 2003). However, clear-cut policies on Distance Education are not well laid out in the ESP policy document. The public institutions that are currently offering Distance Education are all accredited by the National Board of Accreditation, the highest accrediting body in Ghana. Some District Directors of Education do not want to recognize degrees obtain by Distance Learning, awarded by these accredited institutions. While some District Directors of Education may have absolute disregard for Distance Education, some lack the needed organizational structures to support the implementation of Distance Education programmes run in their District. The technological and pedagogical approaches are things very new not just to District Directors of Education but many stakeholders of Education in the country. Maybe distance education institutions should listen to what Reimers-Hild, & King (2010) said in their report on the six questions for entrepreneurial leadership and innovation in distance education. That distance education institutions can incorporate entrepreneurial leadership and innovation into their businesses to make them a success (Reimers-Hild, & King, 2010). Leaders need the skills and knowledge to implement as well as appreciate Distance Education. They need to enforce changes in the curriculum and goals of education and shift from traditional methods of delivering education to modern methods that have the capability meet current trends in the educational system (Thirunarayanan, 2010). Better still District Directors of Education should be part of the policy formulation process instead of being fed with the end results of the outcomes of these policies (Dewey, 1938). They need to be taken through the processes of developing and preparing materials for the programmes, the mode of delivery, the supervision process, examination and certification. The understanding of these processes would put them in a better position to appreciate and support the implementation of Distance Education programmes for teachers in their districts (Reimers-Hild, & King, 2010). This study is limited to District Directors of Education for the fact that they start the process of absorbing teachers when they finish their various programmes of study either by conventional means or by Distance learning. When District Directors of Education, begin to discriminate between these two methods of education it downplays on educational policies that seek to make education the bedrock for the development of its citizenry.

According to a study by Huss (2007), on administrators Attitudes towards Online Teacher Preparation Programs: Are Principals Logging On-or Logging Off? Principals expressed apprehension about the social aspects of teaching that may be compromised by online education programmes. It would not be surprising then if District Directors of Education assume similar positions taking into consideration the mixed outlook for Distance Education among District Directors of Education.

II. DISTANCE EDUCATION IN GHANA

Distance Education is fairly new in Ghana and is yet to be subjected to serious debate among scholars and practitioners in the field of learning and work respectively. Looking at emerging new technologies it has even become more complicated when the issue of space and distance are questionable. Today students who are on distance learning can communicate with their tutors as much as their counterparts in the conventional system of education. The line dividing traditional system of education and that of distance education is becoming thinner and thinner as new technologies emerge. For instance, with the influx of mobile phones, live chat, posting of discussions distance learners can now communicate with their institutions and colleagues any time.

The idea of Distance Education in Ghana is supported by the Ghana Government Policy on Tertiary Education. The policy provided a framework for Ghanaian universities to increase access to tertiary education through distance learning (Government of Ghana, 2003). Since then, most of the public universities in Ghana have adopted distance learning as a way of increasing and spreading their programmes to prospective learners. Ghana is battling with the reconstruction and development of its educational system. It can be seen in terms of the number of educational reforms the education system has seen since independence (Government of Ghana, 2003). It can also be seen in terms of the numerous policies targeted at reducing illiteracy rate and creating jobs for the teeming

unemployed youth (Government of Ghana, 2003). It is common knowledge that, the Ghanaian attitude to distance education is still not encouraging, most people still prefer the traditional system thinking it is the best. Even though this perception is fading and people are beginning to appreciate distance education, they still treat it as a means of acquiring education and not another way of receiving education.

CONSORTIA AS A MEANS OF INVOLVING DISTRICT DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

According to Haughey & Fenwick (1996) consortia are favorite ways to expand operations in distance education with little cost. Consortium is the highest level of collaboration where two or more institutions agree to establish on their behalf programmes and projects that would benefit their schools. This experience is drawn from the Alberta government's decentralization of distance education in 1989 (Haughey & Fenwick, 1996). However, states can identify varieties of consortia that can operate with their system of education according to their intent and interdependence (Haughey & Fenwick, 1996). If any institution wants to reap the highest benefits from distance education, then a consortium between District Directors of Education and the institution providing distance education is very necessary. Establishing this consortium cannot be an easy task, the difference in expectations creates diversity in the agendas that are brought to the table for discussion. Despite these challenges consortia are necessary evils that need to be fulfilled if any progress should be made to integrate distance education to the traditional system (Haughey et al., 1996).

Cooperation between District Directors of Education in providing distance education for teachers is an important aspect of mutual support to ensure high quality of education for teachers. There is the need for mutual understanding of the curriculum and subject content for training teachers. Studies by Asunka & Chae (2009) have underscored the understanding that not all causes can be taught online. The report gives instructors an indication that, they can help foster young students' participation in learner-centered collaborative activities. It can be done within the context of the classroom environment either by distance learning or by traditional education (Asunka & Chae, 2009). It can serve as the primary tenants between Ghana Education Service and any educational institution offering these training sessions for teachers. It is important because, the out product of distance education are absorbed by Ghana Education Service hence they should have a say in what goes on in their training. The progress and success of distance learning institutions lie in the acceptance of these teachers by Ghana Education Service. If Ghana Education Service rejects these teachers, then the system would collapse. All effects must be geared towards building a common interest, Ghana Education Service stands to benefit a lot in this because they would train their teachers at less cost. There will be no study leaves with pay, and no fresh replacements. In other words, the study by Asunka & Chae (2009) pointed out that, introducing online learning within the Ghanaian context have to contend with students' inability, unwillingness, and incapability of participating effectively in online learning activities. The reason is due to social and environmental factors and not by the program. They raised a number of recommendations that include building collaborative learning activities around group competitions to create a competitive mindset among students. If possible, make all learning activities gradable, and whenever possible you make the learning process enjoyable. In addition, instructors need to be flexible with deadlines when it comes to class assignments and projects. They need to offer alternatives to students to cater for their individual interest areas, strengths and weaknesses (Asunka & Chae, 2009).

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO QUALITY DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Just like the conventional system of education, distance education has seen many success and failures as well. According to Chaney, Chaney & Eddy (2010), the context of distance learning programmes in higher education have five enabling assumptions. They provided five basic assumptions to be considered by distance learning curriculum planners to ensure a successful application. These assumptions are based on gathered facts, findings and their personal experience of 57 years in the field of distance education. It would be unfair to buy these assumptions wholesale into the Ghanaian story of distance education. However, they can serve as guidelines as we strive to build our story. Chancy et al. (2010) indicated that one of the assumptions is that distance education is neither superior nor inferior to traditional education. A study conducted by the United States Department of Education reported that on the average, students who were pursuing online learning were better off in terms of performance than those who were exposed to the traditional education (Chancy et al., 2010).

Secondly, the study further proved that, hybrid courses were far more advantageous than single approach systems, therefore; none of the two is better than the other except when they are combined. The implication here is that distance education on its own and traditional education on its own would yield no better results than the other. But when the two modes are combining then one can expect the best of learning from students. In Ghana, most of the distance education programmes are on the face to face mode, with very little on class activities. They also pointed out that successful distance learning programmes are not the ones driven by technology but rather distance learning programmes are driven by their methods of teaching and learning strategies adopted by students (Chancy et al., 2010).

The third assumption includes the principles of marketing management, where there is interplay between and among the product mindset, the sales mindset, and the customer mindset. The interplay helps to determine the success of the distance education programme an institution is offering.

The fourth was analyzed to mean designing distance education programmes to meet the needs of student, faculty members, departments, professionals, and administrators. Their last assumption was that, for a distance education programme to succeed the culture of support must exist at all levels of the institution. Every person must be rolled along to build greater inner strength to fight external forces such as

competition from sister institutions offering the same programme. The University is a complex institution and is not easily influenced by change. Norms and culture changes take long processes, and by the time they arrived at decisions, new demanding challenges already exist again which override the old one that is being implemented. However, if there are meaningful collaborations among stakeholders in the institution, most of these challenges would be eradicated before they show up (Chaney et al., 2010).

Much as the members of the institution are prepared to collaborate to advance distance education, and their decision goes against their will. It is quite complicated, conflicting and could be investigated into by psychologist. Dorman et al. (2009) as cited by Chaney et al. (2010) after a systematic review of literature listed the following features as indicators of quality distance education programmes. That there should be mixed interactions between the institution and students, whereby the school includes all service providers on the distance education set up. There should also be quick feedback from the school to students in real good time. Lack of prompt feedback renders student lonely in a distance education programme. It makes them feel isolated, and this affects their success. Support services are also crucial to a successful distance education programme. A Student in a distance education programme be it online, or face to face mode are removed from the mother institution. All efforts must, therefore, be made to close that gap, and another way is to ensure that your support services to the student are adequate, useful, and timely. Information and guidance on how to use resources or available services like when classes are opened and would close, when to subunit assignments, when to use the online library, when to contact your facilitator or tutor, and how to access financial aid. The provision of this info to students goes a long way to enhance their success in the distance education programme. Programme evaluation is another feature. It enables the institution offering the distance education programme, to measure their success and failures. It is only upon these findings that they can improve upon their challenge or find solutions to their weaknesses (Chaney et al., 2010).

PERCEPTIONS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION DEGREES VIA CONVENTIONAL DEGREE PROGRAMME

A study conducted by Udegbe (2012) on attitudes of prospective human resource personal towards distance learning degrees, revealed a less favorable attitude to degrees obtain via distance learning. Raj & Al-Alawneh (2010) also reported the same trend as well as Adams (2008). In both instances, they said that acceptability of online degrees is on the decrease. They suggested that, educational providers per distance learning should note that face-to-face contact with instructors and mentors are an important key to quality education (Raj, & Al-Alawneh, 2010; Adams, 2008). In summary, the findings revealed three basic issues that informed employers' objections or acceptability of online courses and degrees. They are face-to-face classroom experience, the reputation of the institution for rigor and mentored learning experiences. These issues were noted as the stumbling blocks for online degrees, limiting their

acceptability as traditional degrees. These findings are crucial to the extent that, they provide new ideas and approaches to distance education to make it acceptable as another form of education. In addition, they suggest that face-to-face contact with instructors and mentors are valuable to what many people would consider as quality education (Adams, 2008).

It is difficult to draw a distinction between how distance education is expanding and how people still perceive negatively about distance education programmes. In many parts of the world distance, education and online academic curriculum are growing day in and day out. Populations have grown tremendously, and many educational institutions are screwed to their limits in terms of offering admissions to fresh students. They resort to creating cut off points for new applicants, rendering many potential students education less. Ghana is no exception to these new developments across the globe. In effect, Ghana has experienced a rapid growth in distance learning programs, with many educational institutions offering distance education. The number of applicants to distance education programmes keep rising every academic year. (University of Cape Coast, 2013) Take the Centre for Continuing Education University of Cape Coast for instance, the number of distance learners have increased from 720 in 2002 to 7800 by 2013 an estimation of 12 years of its operation (University of Cape Coast, 2013). This same trend applies to all other distance learning educational institutions in the country.

Where people tend to use the issue of accreditation to judge distance education programmes does not apply in Ghana. It is because all the institutions are offering distance education programmes in Ghana currently are accredited educational institutions. The proliferation of an accredited or substandard distance learning institutions has not found their way in Ghanaian education sector yet. So far, all the institutions offering distance education programme are fully approved.

According to Udegbe (2012) there are mixed reports about the quality of degrees obtained by distance and traditional system of education. Her report shows that previous research studies have not found any significant difference in the performance of students from both programmes. Other research findings also indicate that, online degrees and courses were of little quantity. They could not adequately prepare leaders to tackle state specific issues (Richardson, MeLeod, & Dikkers, 2011 cited by Udegbe, 2012). It has also been observed that only a few distance education programmes are fully accredited internationally (Adams & De Fleur, 2006). Students of distance learning are quick to claim that, they are satisfied with the experience they gain by pursuing online courses, whiles employer's belief more in products of the traditional system of education. These entrenched positions could be attributed to the difficulty of change. It is difficult to accept new knowledge that challenges the issues that have stood the test of time and have become a part of the people (Udegbe, 2012).

The traditional system of education which is the classroom type of education has been practice for long in this country. Distance education is a new phenomenon that has emerged over time to deal with new challenges associated with the traditional system of education. Some of which are an

increase in population, rising cost of education, and social restructure. Population has expanded to the extent that with the traditional system of education prospective applicants cannot access and participate in higher education due to lack of infrastructure and other logistics that makes schooling possible. The cost of education has also risen, so workers prefer to work whiles school to be able to pay for the cost of getting educated.

That aside, the social structure where the country is moving from the extended family system to nuclear family system makes it impossible for people to leave their children behind, while they attend school under the traditional systems. Currently whatever discrimination is flaring between degree per distance education and conventional education is a matter of time. Until then, it is rewarding research finds out the challenges, the loopholes, and the way forward which will help to strength a better future for the two kinds of education. Other scholars also commented on the ability of distance education to train students to acquire practical skills. Institutions that offer distance education are aware of the importance of practice knowledge and skills. To achieve this, text materials for courses are self-leaning materials which direct students to perform activities, do exercise and assignments and practical work that they report back during face to face interactions. During face to face sessions, facilitators are physically present to take students through practical activities in the cause of teaching, and project work for those writing essays are not left out.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ACCEPTANCE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

With the influx of information technology, educational institutions have capitalized on its advantage of reaching out to many people to institute distance education as one way of solving access problems. Educational institutions have not been able to absorb all their qualified applicants; this has been a major challenge having to set up cut off points among other strategies to select a few from the lot. Now that people can stay at home, work, and learn at the same time, they are beginning to appreciate distance learning more than ever.

Choosing to adopt distance education comes with its challenges. According to A1,- Fadhli (2009) to enhance distance learning systems the institutions need to address the following issues. Computer self-competency, when students can use the computer, has knowledge about its software, the internet, and then there is a high possibility of their students' success in the distance education programme. Technological factors, the more inclined a distance education programme is to information technology, the more successful it will be. Reliable technical services such as the internet, availability of audio and video plug-in, network security, asynchronous, and synchronous networks all build up confidence for people to accept a distance education programme. Others are the social presence and instructor characteristics. All these are interconnected to make a distance education programme satisfactory and acceptable to both its consumers, and the consumers' consumers (A1- Fadhli, 2009).

The need for more qualified teachers in our classrooms cannot be ruled out. The agitations of some teachers complaining about their District Directors of Education not prepared to employ them after they graduate from Distance Education programmes cannot be undermined. The motivation to prepare both undergraduate and graduate teachers is increasing as educational institutions strive to overcome constraints in terms of limited infrastructure and other logistics. If District Directors of Education accept new teachers who had their degree by Distance learning then the doors for greater opportunities for teachers to upgrade themselves whiles at the post would be established. On the other hand, if District Directors of Education are not in support of Distance Education for teachers it is going to create friction between the District Directors of Education and teachers and students are the ones who will suffer. It is in the interest of this concern that this paper examines the views and concerns of District Directors of Education towards Distance Education programmes for teachers in the selected Region. Their primary concerns would inform policy formulation because as things stand now distance education has come to stay the only way is to streamline its activities to much up with the policy guidelines concerning teacher education in this country.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is based on Roger's (1995) diffusion of innovation model. The model suggests that for any change and decision-making process to succeed five stages are involved; they are knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. This framework is relevant to this study because it would help us to understanding the level at which our District Directors of Education are and what can be done to push them ahead on this model. If they are still at the knowledge stage then they need to be educated on the importance of Distance Education. I used the theoretical framework because it is based upon theories that have already been tested. Moreover, the theoretical framework is broader in scope and involves broader generalizations that reflect the relationship between cases (Creswell, 2013; Clarkson, 1996).

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to assess District Directors of Education views towards Distance Education for teachers in their districts. By determining their views, we would gather information on their perception of the performance of teachers who have completed Distance Education programmes and are teaching. We would also gather information on how ready they are to support Distance Education programmes for teachers in their districts.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following seven (7) research questions were set to guide the study.
- ✓ What is the Level of Concern for Distance Education Programmes by District Directors of Education?
- ✓ What is the Level of Credibility of Distance Education Programmes as Compared to Traditional Education Programmes?

- ✓ Who are District Directors of Education Most likely to hire? Distance Education or Traditional Education Teachers.
- ✓ Are there any major issues confronting District Directors of Education with regards to teachers enrolled in Distance Education Programmes?
- ✓ What Changes about Distance Education would make District Directors of Education accept Distance Education for teachers?
- ✓ Do District Directors of Education have any knowledge about the course content of the distance education programme for teachers?
- ✓ Should Distance Education for Teachers Continue?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is a common observation that, some District Directors of Education refuse to accept student teachers who had their degrees per distance learning in the Upper West Region of Ghana. This study will help to address the challenges facing distance learners in securing jobs after completion of their studies. It is going to help distance education providers to make informed decisions about the future of their products as far as the job market is concerned.

LIMITATIONS/DELIMITATION

A major limitation of the study was my inability to interview the District Directors of Education on face to face basis due to work constraints; the study adopted the correspondence method by delivering the questionnaires to participants by mail. This process also affected the completion of survey rate, since out of the twenty-two (22) questionnaires sent out four (4) were returned uncompleted. The study was delimited to the Upper West Region for the reason that it is one of the few regions that have complaints about securing jobs for some student of distance learning after completing their studies. The study is also delimited to the District Directors of Education because they are directly involved in the recruitment of teachers for their community schools.

III. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research design was adopted to ascertain District Directors of Education level of perception for distance education programme for teachers in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Data was collected at a point in time and analyzed using frequencies and qualitative analyses. The region is made up of eleven districts, and all were involved in the study. It was to ensure that we have an accurate reflection of the views of all the District Directors of Education in the region. The target population consisted of the District Directors of Education. All the District Directors of Education in the region were purposefully sampled to be involved in the study. It was to ensure adequate information for the study, to present a real mirror of events in the region as far as recruiting teachers of distance learning background was concerned.

A questionnaire is used as the primary tool for data collection. We constructed eight (8) open-ended questions that

were adequate to provide data to answer the seven research questions stated in the report. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part obtained background information that include gender and work experience. The second part of the questionnaire contained eight (8) open-ended items that were personally constructed using the research questions as guidelines. We ensured that each construct gathered information to address each research question. The responses were data written.

Data was collected mainly through correspondence. The questionnaires were sent out to the members and retrieved after seven (7) weeks. We gave enough time to ensure that members were able to attend to the questionnaires out of their busy schedules. Just as any human activity, some surveys were brought uncompleted with the excuse that they had no time to complete them. The following are the statistics for the completion of the questionnaires. Out of the twenty-two (22) questionnaires sent out we had a retrieval rate of 100%. However, statistics for the completion of the questionnaires are as follows: 82% that constitute eighteen (18) questionnaires were retrieved duly completed. The remaining 18% that represent two (2) of the surveys were returned uncompleted. With these statistics, we went ahead to analyze the data. Qualitative analysis of basic descriptive statistics such as frequency counts were used to analyze the data collected. The findings are presented according to the seven (7) research questions that were given to guide this study. Responses gathered were analyzed for commonalities, tallied and analyzed as a conventional viewpoint. Single unique responses are analyzed individually. The overall judgment was on the perceived value of distance education over conventional education for training of teachers. The results obtained from these analyses are presented in the next section.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are presented in accordance with the seven (7) research questions that guided the study. But first with the analysis of the bio data, which include gender and length of service as a District Director of Education.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	12	67	67	67
	Female	6	33	33	100.0
	Total	18	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: The Gender of Participants

The analysis on Table 1 indicates that out of the total number of eighteen (18) members who took part in the study, a total of 12 (67%) were males while 6 (33%) were females. This is an indication that both sexes were represented in the study and therefore it was not a gender biased study

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than One Year	2	11	11	11
	Two to Three Years	2	11	11	22
	Four to Five Years	5	28	28	50

Six to Ten Years	5	28	28	78
11 and Above Years	4	22	22	100.0
Total	18	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Length of Service as District Directors of Education

Table 2 indicates how long they had served as District Directors of Education in their districts from the range of less than one year to eleven years and above. To identify a two-way perception about the results, two to three years, four to five years, six to ten years, and eleven (11) and above years were merged to mean experienced District Directors of Education. On the other hand the less than 1 year was taken to mean inexperienced. The results displayed on Table 2 indicate that, only two District Directors of Education representing 11% can be considered as inexperienced. The other 16 District Directors of Education representing 89% can be considered as experience District Directors of Education as far as this study is concern. Thus there is enough reason to continue with the analysis.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	18	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3: Awareness of Teachers' Participation in Distance Education

District Directors of Education were asked a question if they are aware teachers were participating in distance education programmes. The results on Table 3 indicates that, all 18 participants were informed receiving a 100% score on that issue. This question was relevant because it gave me the indication that they would provide accurate and reliable information.

WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF CONCERN OF DISTRICT DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION ON DEGREES PER DISTANCE LEARNING FOR TEACHERS?

When District Directors of Education were asked the question, If a teacher came to you for employment and you know his/her degree was obtained wholly per distance learning how would you describe your level of concern? The following responses were gathered; Eight (8) of them said they have respect for distance education, and will show the same level of interest as the one who has gone through the traditional school system. They also stated that, as far as distance education certificate holders have a recognized certificate they will employ them. This viewpoint goes contrary to what Columbaro, & Monaghan (2009) said that, there was an overall negative perception of online degrees. Thus, employers continue to harbor negative attitudes about online degree credentials, and the quality of training and work experiences for teachers who completed their training in distance education mode. Three (3) said they will be worried because some are not competent and confident, and more so they will have reservations depending on the particular programme the teacher pursued. This viewpoint goes to agree with what Thirunarayanan (2010) said that, there is still some distrust for distance learning training for teachers, and given the chance some employers will not use any person who

obtains their degree by distance learning. In other words, Thirunarayanan (2010) suggesting that, the Universities offering distance education has a responsibility to educate the general public on degrees by distance learning. This suggestion was made based on the fact that some of these perceptions are a stereotype and without proof. Another District Director of Education said his concern was that, the Diploma in Basic Education (DBE) qualification for enrollment should be reviewed. It also goes to confirm what McClary (2013) said that educational institutions should have a keen interest in what type of distance learning programmes they implement, together with whatever standards they will want to implement. Institutions will master distance learning, or in some cases, distance learning trends and demands will teach the school (McClary, 2013). Essentially, educational institutions should be proactive in providing leadership that serves as a proverbial lighthouse in which their departments, colleges, and schools can adopt. However, four (4) agreed with Columbaro, & Monaghan (2009) when they raised their concern over distance education programmes, and their unwillingness to hire them. Three (3) left the item vacant, they could not present any response to the question.

The results for this item raised a number of issues that are worth discussing. The question focused on the views of District Directors of Education on degrees per distance learning in general. Out of the eighteen (18) participants thirteen (13) constituting 72% indicated that they will accept applicants who completed their programmes by distance learning. Four (4) 22% are sure they will have reservations when asked to employ applicants with distance education background. One participant could not share any thoughts on the issue. Overall, we can comfortably say that they have less concern when it comes to employing teachers who completed their training in distance education mode.

WHAT DISTRICT DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION THINK CONCERNING THE CREDIBILITY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION?

The next item seeks to find out whether District Directors of Education think distance education and traditional education have the same level of reliability. The relevance of this question was to find out if there are contrasting views in relation to the first item discussed above. The following responses were gathered; Ten (10) of the participants said yes, with reasons that distance education programmes have the same ratings and level with traditional education. They added that the same syllabus was used for both programmes, and the same Universities are offering both programmes. They also added that both programmes are pursuing courses in the interest of pupils. This revelation goes contrary to what Adam et al. (2012) reported that, in both hiring situations the applicant with a traditional degree was found to be the overwhelming choice. They rejected the online degree holder because of credibility issues. In this case, District Directors of Education show an overwhelming support for distance education teachers with Twelve (12) of them saying yes they will accept distance education teachers. Three (3) participants answered no to the question. The reasons were that, with traditional education students have full time for their studies

with some innovations coming in from time to time. However, with distance education the classes come in only at weekends and the teachers go about their official duties and private businesses during the weekdays. Thus, distance education is not as intensive as traditional education. In addition, some of the students are enrolled in the distance education programme with weak and failed grades. Moreover, the subject content is not well covered under distance education. However, these participants shared the concern that distance education coursework creates uncertainty about the quality of preparation that is enough to reject distance education products (Adams, et al., 2012). Three other participants have interesting views to share. one (1) thinks that, distance education is more credible because you achieve greater heights in the hard way. Unlike with traditional education, you go through the regular system without any hindrance or obstructions.

Again, this view goes contrary to what Thirunarayanan (2010) said that, people find it difficult to accept distance education as a credible educational system. One (1) of the participants stated that, it is a yes and no situation. Yes because the certificates are the same, and no because products of both programmes do not have the same level of confidence and competence. However, he did not mention which category had the most confidence, the distance education teacher or traditional school teacher. The other one (1) participant was not quite sure but demonstrated that distance education students have divided attention, they work under pressure, do not have time to teach well or learn well. From all indications, there is a positive attitude towards teachers who completed their training in distance education mode. Perhaps, what needs to be done is what Raj & Al-Alawneh (2010) suggested, that we need to strengthen face-to-face contact with instructors and mentors as a key to academic rigor and quality education. It will eliminate the perception that traditional classroom experience offers something more than distance education institutions (Raj & Al-Alawneh, 2010).

WHO ARE YOU MOST LIKELY TO HIRE? DISTANCE EDUCATION OR TRADITIONAL EDUCATION CERTIFICATE HOLDER

District Directors of Education were asked the question, given two candidates to hire for a job. Both performed creditably and had comparable transcripts. Who are you most likely to engage? Four categories of responses were gathered. The first group consisting of six members indicated that they will subject the applicants to a rigorous interview to determine their suitability, and who should be given the job. In other words, they have no problem with what mode of training they received; either by distance education or by traditional education. The second category consisting of four members, who suggested they will hire the teacher who completed their training in traditional education model. They further explained that, teachers who completed their training in traditional education method have ample time to study in-depth of their course materials. The third category, consisting of four members stated they will prefer the person with distance education. Their reasons have been that, teachers who completed their training by distance learning method have

worked harder; they combined working with studies, family responsibilities and other social demands. In addition, teachers who completed their training by distance learning mode have work experience because they are mostly workers. The last category in this set, consist of four members who believe that any of them is worth hiring. We can merge the views of the first category, third category, and the last category to mean an acceptance of teachers who completed their training in distance education mode. It is because they all have a favor for hiring teachers who completed their training in distance education mode. In that case, we have fourteen (14) members accepting teachers who completed their training in distance learning model. The remaining four (4) members who reject teachers who completed their training in distance education model.

ARE THERE ANY MAJOR ISSUES CONFRONTING DISTRICT DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION WITH REGARDS TO TEACHERS ENROLLED IN DISTANCE EDUCATION?

We gathered information on the major issues facing District Directors of Education with regards to teachers enrolled in distance education. The results we see here are multiple responses. Two (2) members said that teachers leave the classroom for distance education programmes which are affecting performance at the primary education level. In addition, they give excuses about going to write quizzes and exams, Six (6) District Directors of Education stated that some teachers take undue advantage of the programme to absent themselves from classes. Six (6) said teachers who are obtaining their training by distance education mode pay ineffective attention to children in the classroom. Two (2) members said they concentrate on assignment brought from the distance education programme. Therefore, they are more concern about their studies than their job which maybe supports what others said regarding their ineffective attention to children in the class. Three (3) others believe that, teachers on distance learning do not prepare adequately before they enter the classroom. They spend much time on their studies than on making lesson notes. Other single responses include the following:

- ✓ Students take advantage of their studies to ask for leave to do other businesses.
- ✓ Some teachers ask for financial assistance, which means they are financially constrain and this does not put them on the right frame for teaching in the classroom.
- ✓ Teachers leave school while children are not vacated. For example, 27 teachers in one of the districts left school 1st May to 12th August 2012 pursuing distance learning at the detriment of the children. This lead to poor performance at the BECE.
- ✓ Those who leave every Saturday have no time to prepare TLMs or proper lesson notes.
- ✓ Use of teaching time by teachers for distance education programme.
- ✓ Teachers on distance learning programmes no longer have time for children remedial teaching or counseling. They are immersed with their own learning.
- ✓ Syllabuses are not covered.

- Most at times distance education programme begin when schools are still in session, this prompts teachers to leave classroom to attend their lessons at their study centres.
- Continuous assessment is affected.
- Students who failed in WASSCE have found their way into distance education programmes; this is creating a big problem when it comes to inputting such people in the government payroll.
- Teachers instead of teaching during instructional hours concentrate on reading their course materials during contact hours.
- Teachers move at will to learning centres without seeking permission from school authorities. This is affecting cordial relationship in the schools were we have teachers training by distance learning method.

One (1) did not see any challenges posed by teachers who are on distance education. There was no response to the question. Despite these challenges they still suggested that, distance education is useful for teachers and should be maintained or accepted by all.

WHAT CHANGES ABOUT DISTANCE EDUCATION WOULD MAKE DISTRICT DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION ACCEPT DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS?

What changes in distance education programmes would make you take distance education in totality if you are thinking otherwise now? The question was relevant because it provides suggestions on how to improve on distance education programmes given the challenges they listed above. The following multiple responses were gathered: Two (2) members suggested that the programmes should be organized when pupils are on holidays. Another two (2) members suggested that student teachers on distance education programmes should usually complete their assessment records before distance education programme starts. In addition, four (4) members also suggested that the programme should be organized outside the typical school calendar, an additional voice to the first suggestion. These ideas call for a significant policy change in the institutions offering distance education because their programmes runs on weekends, with just a few weeks for a break before the next semester. For two (2) other members, there was no need for any changes. What prevails was enough and acceptable. The rest are single responses presented below:

- Student teachers who absent themselves from school should be withdrawn from the distance education programme.
- Intensity on methodologies.
- Students need to build confidence in themselves.
- Face to face sessions are few for students, and should be increased.
- The programme does not encourage students to be religious because most of their activities are on weekends.
- Distance education administrative programmes should be decentralized to regional levels.
- The products should be made to do national service after completing their courses.
- Those in education should be absorbed after their training.

- There should be a thorough scrutiny of students or applicants before they are enrolled into the programme.
- More study centre should be opened to avoid long distance travelling using school hours to travel by teachers.
- They should be regular to school.
- Build confidence to match qualification.
- Proper permission should be asked before they leave school.
- Government should bear some of the tuition fees.
- Classes to be sandwich during holidays.
- Tutorials should be included on the programme.

DO DISTRICT DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION HAVE ANY KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE COURSE CONTENT OF THE DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME FOR TEACHERS?

The researcher wanted to verify if the members of the study had any ideas about the course content of the distance education programmes they are referring to. This question is also relevant because, without the knowledge of the course content, it will be difficult to make any informed decision about the integrity of the distance education programmes. What we can do, is to make references to the performance of individuals and not the programme in general. The question was, do you have any knowledge about the course content of the distance education programme for teachers? These are the responses that are categorized according to commonalities. Three (3) members stated they know nothing about the course content of distance education programmes. As leaders of educational institutions, they have not done much to seek for this information from institutions offering distance education. It may sound strange, but a reality on the ground. Two (2) stated they knew something about the course content but not much. They appealed to the institutions to feed them with their syllabus for a familiarization exercise. Twelve (12) members stated they know the course content of distance education programmes. It was possible because some are products of distance education. Others facilitated distance education programmes, and one (1) stated he is aware because distance education programs share the same syllabus with their mother institutions that run on traditional education model. The impression is that, they are aware of the course content of distance education programmes.

SHOULD DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS CONTINUE?

Unlike the other questions where there were varying results, all members agreed that distance education should continue. However, they stated different reasons for their decision and provided additional suggestions to improve upon distance education programmes. Four (4) members were of the view that it should continue because not all teachers can be granted study leave with pay to stay on campus. Three (3) members were of the view that Ghana Education Service will benefit because teachers stay on their job while learning. Ghana Education Service will not have to sponsor them for their education. Others think that, it is also cost effective for

the learner, but should be organized outside school time, maybe during holidays. They went on to suggest that, the background of candidates should be investigated before admissions are given to them. They also wanted teacher absenteeism to be addressed to improve children performance. The latter is the task of District Directors of Education, and perhaps not distance education institutions. Research has shown that supervision on the part of school authorities improves teacher performance because they know they are been watched Ankomah (2002). Other suggestions include the following; distance education programmes should be reviewed primarily on how it is administered. More programmes should be added to the already existing ones, and teachers must be encouraged to participate more in distance education programmes. Applicants must pass in electives and core subjects to gain admission into the programme. They also added that, distance education is good because it helps many people to upgrade themselves so it should continue. It also complements the regular programme, and helping to increase and update teachers professionally. One member advised that, even as it helps teachers to upgrade themselves they have a responsibility to study the methodology and practice it. Students should not think they can go through the course anyhow and pass their examinations they must study hard to be successful in a distance education programme. It was probably a caution, coming from an experienced member since some of the members indicated they are products of distance education programmes.

V. CONCLUSION

The results raised a number of issues that are worth discussing. The information gathered indicates that, District Directors of Education have support for distance education programmes for teachers in the region. However, they are still skeptical about the quality of distance education programmes in the districts. It will be helpful if distance education institutions organize in-service training for stakeholders of education in the municipality. The in-service training, workshops and seminar will educate them on the role of distance education for teachers in the 21st century. It is very clear that educational institutions cannot operate without distance education. It will mean falling out of the competition with other educational institutions in the country. The most crucial movement now in the education of the 21st century is distance learning. No matter what leaders in educational institutions think about it, distance education has come to stay. If we consider the influx of distance learning platforms in the country and the world at large, we will understand that the traditional education system can no longer sustain the teeming youth seeking admission into non-existent schools. The present research reveals there is ignorance to the concept distance education. The data gathered shows that, some district directors of education and their immediate subordinates are not acquainted with distance education curriculum. That is a crucial issue that distance learning institutions must take up. Notwithstanding the efforts put in place to make the research a credible one, there is no intention of making generalizations out of the results. The reason is that,

other districts have their cultures, standards, and features they may employ to evaluate their acceptability or non-acceptability of distance learning programmes. An understanding of district directors of education attitude regarding distance learning programmes for teachers in the region is necessary for a successful implementation of distance education. It is necessary for distance learning institutions to focus on collaborating with district directors of education for a viable educational programme for teachers in the region.

REFERENCES

[1] Adams, J. (2008). Understanding the Factors Limiting the Acceptability of Online Courses and Degrees. *International Journal on E-Learning, 7*(4), 573-587. Chesapeake, VA: AACE. Retrieved January 15, 2014 from http://www.editlib.org/p/24314.

[2] Adams, J., & Defleur, M. (2006). The acceptability of online degrees earned as a credential for obtaining employment. *Communication Education, 55,* 32-45.

[3] Adams, J., Lee, S., & Cortese, J. (2012). The Acceptability of Online Degrees: Principals and Hiring Practices in Secondary Schools. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, *12*(4). Retrieved January, 2014 from http://www.citejournal.org/vol12/iss4/general/article1.cfm

[4] Al-Fadhli, S. (2009). Factors Influencing the Acceptance of Distance Learning: A Case Study of Arab Open University in Kuwait *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 12* (3)*,* Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/fall123/alfadhli123.html

[5] Ankomah, Y. A. (2002). The Success Story of Private Schools in Ghana: The Case of Three Schools in Cape Coast. *Journal of Educational Management,* 4, 1-14.

[6] Asunka, S., & Chae, H. S. (2009). Strategies for Teaching Online Courses within the Sub-Saharan African Context: An Instructor's Recommendations. *Merlot Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 5*(2), 372-379.

[7] Chaney, D., Chaney, E., & Eddy, J. (2010).The Context of Distance Learning Programs in Higher Education: Five Enabling Assumptions. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 13* (4), Retrieved   from http://www.uncg.edu/oao/PDF/5%20Assumptons%20OJDLA.pdf

[8] Clarkson, P. (1996). Researching the 'therapeutic relationship' in psychoanalysis, counselling psychology and psychotherapy—a qualitative inquiry. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 9*(2), 143–163.

[9] Columbaro, N. L., & Monaghan, C. H. (2009). Employer Perceptions of Online Degrees: A Literature Review. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, (12)*1. Retrieved January 9, 2014 from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring121/columbaro121.html

[10] Compton, L., Davis, N. & Correia, A. (2010). Pre-Service Teachers' Preconceptions, Misconceptions, and Concerns

about Virtual Schooling. *Distance Education, 31*(1), 37-54. doi: 10.1080/01587911003725006

[11] Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

[12] Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

[13] Government of Ghana. (2003). Education Strategic Plan 2003 to 2015 Policies, Targets and Strategies. *Ministry of Education*. Ghana: Accra.

[14] Haughey, M., & Fenwick, T. (1996). Issues in Forming School District Consortia to Provide Distance Education: Lessons from Alberta. *The Journal Distance Education, 11* (1), 51-81.

[15] Huss, J. A. (2007). Administrator Attitudes Toward Online Teacher Preparation Programs: Are Principals Logging On—or Logging Off? *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, *7*(3). Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ987301

[16] McClary, J. (2013). Factors in High Quality Distance Learning Courses. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 16* (2), Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer162/mcclary162.html

[17] Nasser, R., & Abouchedid, K. (2000). Attitudes and Concerns towards Distance Education: The Case of Lebanon. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 3*(4) Retrieved from

[18] Raj, S., & Al-Alawneh, M. (2010). A Perspective on Online Degrees Vs. Face-to-Face in the Academic Field. Retrieved January 15, 2014, from http://linc.mit.edu/linc2010/proceedings/session16Raj.pdf

[19] Reimers-Hild, C., & King, J. W. (2010). Six Questions for Entrepreneurial Leadership and Innovation in Distance Education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, (12)*4. Retrieved January, 2014, from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter124/reimers-hild124.html

[20] Rogers, E.M. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations (4th ed)*. The Free Press. New York.

[21] Shelton, K. (2011). A Review of Paradigms for Evaluating the Quality of Online Education Programs. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, (4)*1. Retrieved January, 2013 from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring141/shelton141.html

[22] Thirunarayanan, M. O. (2010).Will you hire the Services of Professionals who completed their Professional Preparation Completely Online? *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning.* Retrieved January, 2014 from http://www.itdl.org/Journal/Sep_10/article02.htm

[23] Udegbe, I. B. (March, 2012). Attitudes of Prospective Human Resource Personnel towards Distance Learning Degrees. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 15* (1), Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring151/udegbe.html

[24] University of Cape Coast. (2013). Vice Chancellor 45th Annual Report: On the occasion of the 45th congregation of the University of Cape Coast.