

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING THE CASE OF THE INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF GUYANA

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ABSTRACT

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) started at the University of Guyana with the establishment of the Department of Extra-Mural Studies in 1976. This department was later upgraded to the Institute of Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE). Guided by the philosophy of "People improving themselves through their own resources," the Institute sought to take university level programmes to all sections/parts of the country (Tab/Map).

In so doing residents, for the first time were provided with opportunities to access various post-secondary and tertiary levels of education and training without having to leave their respective communities/localities. Further residents without formal education requirements were able to enroll for these programmes. Other aspects of openness namely flexible class/programme/course times, student/participant centered assessments and participant involvement in arriving at/formulating course objectives have since characterized the Institute's programme offerings. In addition to the distance mode, the IDCE also offers programmes and courses via the conventional mode of delivery. (Tab-List of Courses, DE & Face-to-Face) Coupled with the aforementioned, the IDCE introduced/utilized different forms of the distance modality in delivering its various programmes.

Print, audio-conferencing, and later on video-conferencing and online programming were all used to enable learner participation in these programmes and to typify the philosophy and modus operandi of the IDCE as an ODL provider. At the IDCE procedures regulating/governing the conduct of programmes/ courses offered via distance were instituted. These included conducting needs analyses, developing curriculum and course manuals/modules via the team approach, and instituting student support structures.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Face-to-Face, IDCE, video-conferencing.

BACKGROUND

Open Learning attempts to reduce/remove the barriers that affect and influence access to education and training particularly at the post secondary level. Accordingly a flexible approach is adopted in the policy and practice of open learning. This is best typified by the Mission of the Open University of the United Kingdom as being 'open to people, open to places, open to methods and open to ideas.'" The clientele of the IDCE comprises people from all walks of life. Young adults desirous of pursuing higher education and or enhancing their qualifications for employment represent one component of the Institute's clientele. Professionals whose motivation for attending IDCE is to acquire increased knowledge and or enhancing their promotional opportunities comprise another constituent of its clientele. IDCE's programmes and courses are also attended by housewives and single parents whose primary objective is to enhance/augment their vocational/skill expertise thus allowing them to create employment, among other pursuits. School dropouts also make use of and benefit from IDCE's programme/course offerings primarily in the sphere of functional and workplace literacy.

The work of IDCE can also be described as 'open to places'. The Institute continues to make available its programmes to residents domiciled in all of the administrative regions of the country. Students from the wider Caribbean have also accessed its offerings. 'Open to methods' and 'open to ideas' have also conditioned the services of the IDCE. Traditional, distance, online and blended delivery methods/modalities have all been used so as to cater for the different learning propensities of the Institute's multiple audiences. Additionally customized courses, collaboration with various stakeholders in programme development, conducting needs surveys, conducting research to construct new ideas/knowledge in instructional design and development of course materials (courseware) all testify to the Institute's openness to ideas.

PROGRAMMES

Since 1976, the IDCE has mounted over 50 programmes and courses in a multiplicity of disciplines. Approximately 35,000 adults have completed certificate and diploma programmes in academic, professional, vocational and skill enhancing pursuits primarily at the pre-university level. The major focus of these education and training programmes was to satisfy the learning needs of adults especially those whom the formal education system has failed. In addition the corporate sector (private and public) Non-Government Organizations (NGO'S) and religious organizations, among others have benefited from customized training programmes conducted by the IDCE. Programme/Course outlines are usually designed and developed by faculty and specialists in various academic fields. In recent times the Institute has incorporated open courseware materials in its curriculum.

One associate degree programme (full time-1year, part time 2 years) is offered. Generally programmes and courses are conducted over 1 year (2 semesters), and 4 months (1 semester). However, short term training on an intensive basis is also provided. Being an open learning institution, the IDCE offers some flexibility in entry qualifications, and place and pace of study. For example, students are admitted to some programmes based on their age and/ work experience (mature student category), students can also study on their own and subsequently enroll to write the requisite final examinations; students also have the option of completing some courses via distance or through the conventional mode.

In addition to the regular programme offerings, the Institute has forged alliances with overseas-based agencies so as to enhance the quality of its service. Projects and training have been designed and sponsored by these agencies to target the different categories of our clientele including staff (both faculty and administrative staff) as well as provide physical resource development. Agencies such as the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Organization of American States (OAS), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), the World Health Organisation/Pan American Health Organization (WHO/PAHO) have all been involved in the work of the Institute since 1976.

Instructional/Delivery System

The IDCE practices the dual mode delivery system. The different components used include: print (self-instructional), face-to-face tutoring/counseling, audio-visual materials, audio and video-conferencing, and internet based learning. Students completing courses in health care, social work, early childhood education and youth work also benefit from internship/attachment which provides them with 'hands-on'/practical experience which serves to support/boost the theoretical underpinnings of the courses.

Admissions

Student's Registration Process

The Institute's one year programmes begin in September/October and conclude in July/August of the following year. Enrolment for these programmes takes place during the September/October period. Courses are also conducted as per semester. The academic year comprises two semesters. Each Semester has duration of 15-20 weeks. Semester 1 begins in September and concludes in January of the following year while Semester 2 commences in February/March and ends in May/June. Students can enroll for these courses at the beginning of each semester. The IDCE also mounts courses throughout the academic year in response to requests from various stakeholder agencies. Registration for these courses occurs prior to their commencement.

Evaluation

IDCE adheres to the following three tier system of evaluation :

- **Self-Evaluation** which is practiced particularly in the modular programmes/courses (D E) Students are able to assess their knowledge/understanding of content through these exercise which are incorporated in the study material.
- ***Continuous Assessment** which is effected through assignments, practical projects, quizzes and other forms of conventional assessment (tests).
- **Programme/Course -End Evaluation** which is realized through examinations, case studies and projects, among others.

Students' final grade is based on course work as well as final assessment performances. Proportionate weight is given to both components/aspects in the calculation of students' final grade. Successful students are awarded certificates at the annual convocation ceremonies held at the different centres during the November-December period every year.

Purpose and Significance

ODL is important because it provides an alternative strategy/methodology for the providers of education to cope with large numbers of students domiciled across distances. Its philosophy and protocols/orientation determine and define the procedures adopted to evaluate it.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the ODL programmes offered at and the concomitant quality assurance procedures used by the IDCE, University of Guyana. The significance of the study resides in its attempts to assess the institution's existing quality assurance practices. It is envisaged that the IDCE's capacity as an ODL provider would be enhanced through the observations/results of this study.

Problem Statement

Increase in ODL programme offerings together with larger number of student enrolment have resulted in ODL providing agencies attracting more scrutiny and attention from various stakeholders. Graduates of the Institute's programmes/courses continue to be enrolled/admitted to degree awarding institutions both in Guyana and in other countries. Requests for information on student performance and on programme/course completed not only attest to the need for proper and efficient record keeping and other quality standards at the IDCE but also point to the desirability of having more of the Institute's programmes accredited.

Accreditation Council in Guyana uses one standard set of procedures in assessing quality of post-secondary and tertiary level institutions irrespective of mode of programme delivery.

Provisions should be made in Guyana for the development of institutional framework to evaluate quality in ODL agencies bearing in mind the peculiar quality demands and characteristics of ODL.

Research Objectives

Since there is need to evaluate the quality assurance procedures at the IDCE/UG for both the conventional and ODL programmes/courses the following research objectives were identified:

- To document the existing quality assurance practices at the IDCE, UG
- To examine stakeholders perceptions of quality assurance measures practiced at the IDCE, UG
- To analyze the factors which influence the effective application of the quality assurance strategies practiced at the IDCE, UG

Research Questions

The under mentioned were used to operational the problem statement

- What are the main quality assurance practices that are followed at the IDCE, UG
- How do stakeholders perceive of the quality assurance measures practiced at the IDCE, UG?
- What are the factors that influence the effective application of quality assurance measures at the IDCE, UG?

Beneficiaries

The main beneficiary of this study will be the IDCE. It is hoped that the results arising from the study will be incorporated into the operations of the Open and Distance Learning arm of the University of Guyana in order to improve its quality and consequentially its reputation as the leading ODL agency in the country.

Limitations of Study

Generally this study was designed to examine quality assurance procedures used at the IDCE, University of Guyana. Being the extra-mural arm of the University, IDCE adheres to and practices the tenets of open learning. Accordingly the focus/aim of this study was to analyze the quality assurance measures practiced by the IDCE through the perspectives of open learning.

The results of the study notwithstanding its peculiarity/limitation to ODL providers could also have some relevance to other post-secondary and tertiary level agencies involved in the provision of education and training. The results could be used to inform the quality assurance procedures practiced in these institutions as well as improve the quality of their service as providers of education and training particularly at the tertiary level of the education system.

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING - DEFINITION AND SCOPE

The definition and scope of Open and Distance Learning and quality assurance will be addressed in this chapter. ODL has evolved into or has become an integral component of post-secondary and tertiary education throughout the world. It has provided learners with opportunities of accessing educational pursuits without having to confront or grapple with the constraints and challenges of time, place and rigid programme entry requirements in a great way.

Additionally, it has benefited from the development of various technologies which are used to facilitate conventional and virtual teacher-learner interaction hence making the process more flexible and learner friendly.

Coupled with the aforementioned, ODL has resulted in the almost exponential increases in students pursuing post-secondary and tertiary education across the world. In 2007, 150 million students were pursuing higher education globally. However because of the increasing use of digital and online modalities in ODL there were approximately 165 million students in tertiary education alone.

The development of open universities and open campuses all over the world has contributed to this increase in a major way. Open and Distance Learning has been described as the most viable technique for augmenting educational access while contemporaneously enhancing the quality of education, advocating peer-to-peer collaboration and providing the learners with a greater sense of autonomy and responsibility for their learning (Calvert, 2006).

Keegan (1990) describes ODL as learning facilitated by the use of various forms of technology designed to unite facilitator and learner who are separated by distance. It is also characterized by policies and practices that permit entry to learning with minimum barriers with respect to age, gender, or time constraints and with recognition of prior learning.

Specifically ODL refers to approaches to learning that concentrate on releasing learners from the constraints of time and place while providing flexible learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2002). It is also conceptualized as a multi-dimensional concept aimed at bridging the time, geographical, economic, social, and educational and communication distance between student and institution, student and academics, student and courseware and student and peers (UNISA, 2008). Accordingly Keegan (2002), Mutual (2002); and Homan, Macpherson and Wilkinson (2005) suggest that ODL could be used to include distance education, distance teaching, online education, web-enabled education and distributed learning. In effect ODL is characterized by increased access to learning, flexibility of learning provision, student centeredness, more emphasis on student support structures, carefully designed learning materials and enhanced course quality.

QUALITY ASSURANCE: Definition and Scope

The rapid increase in ODL has given rise to concerns about quality. Consequently strategies and mechanisms aimed at regulating and ultimately improving the level and quality of service provided by these institutions have been initiated. Carley and Waldron (1984) state that quality assurance refers to planned, deliberate actions or activities initiated and effected with the intent/aim and purpose of maintaining and improving the quality of learning for participants. Hartman (2002) defines quality assurance as a set of systematic procedures planned with the purpose of assessing programme activities by its stated objectives and outputs. Jung (2006) concurs but emphasises that the intention and purpose of quality assurance is also to maintain and improve the quality of learning rather than simply evaluating activities. Moreover Menon (2007) asserts that quality assurance is proactive rather than reactive in orientation in that it is designed to remove or restrict faults.

In addition, it could be argued that quality assurance is not only about devising procedures to be followed but is all inclusive because it affects all aspects of an institution's operations. Robinson (1993) is instructive in this instance through his assertion that quality assurance is also an attitude or ethos which determines every aspect in an institution's activity.

The main objective of quality assurance is to make sure that a product or service is fit for the market it serves. It consequently sets out to create reliable systems by anticipating problems and designing procedures to avoid or restrict errors and faults which may arise. Successful ODL needs an effective quality assurance system which must not only complement its orientation but improve standards as well. Kanwar's(2014) observation that there is need for appropriate quality assurance policies to ensure that the highest standards are attained is insightful.

An effective quality assurance system also includes systematic analyses of established principles designed to manage operational and academic chores or responsibilities in ODL agencies. It also comprises a wide variety of processes namely faculty performance and capability, student support services, teaching, learning and evaluation, and infrastructure and learning resources. The face/appearance of tertiary education has been affected by the development of ODL. New models of course management, library and learning resources which are enabled electronically together with audio, video, and text delivery formats constitute aspects of contemporary post-secondary and tertiary education and training which are not accommodated by conventional quality assurance regulatory frameworks According to (World Bank Document, 2002).

The values, standards, and criterion utilized in the assessment of quality in conventional campus-based programmes create confusion when the same is applied in ODL.

Consequently it is argued that there is need for a new framework to analyse quality assurance in ODL. This has led to a number of quality assurance agencies developing distinct quality assurance guidelines for ODL. Quality assurance agencies in the United Kingdom, South Africa, India and the USA have all embraced this development.

In sum quality in ODL implies a relationship or synergy between learning as a process and the demands, goals, standards and requirements initiated by stakeholders. It also includes quality of teaching, quality of academic and support staff, quality of student programmes, and quality of infrastructure. According to COL (1997) quality in ODL covers the physical products and pedagogical processes, product and delivery systems and philosophy. The definitions and scope of Open and Distance Learning and Quality Assurance were addressed in this Chapter. Additionally the objectives of both perspectives were discussed. The benefits learning Organizations derive from the practice of the philosophy of open learning together with those of quality assurance also comprised the contents of this chapter. The following title focused on the methodological procedures used in the study.

METHODOLOGY

This study analyses quality assurance in Open and Distance Learning with specific reference to the IDCE, University of Guyana. In actualizing the objectives of the study the under mentioned research questions were examined:

- What are the main quality assurance practices that are followed at the IDCE, UG?
- How do stakeholders perceive of the quality assurance measures practiced at the IDCE, UG?
- What are the factors which influence the effective application of quality assurance measures at the IDCE, UG?

Population and Sample

Former and present participants/students (attending classes when the study was done) of the IDCE, academic and non-academic staff of the Institute, and agencies which sponsor employees to attend IDCE classes comprised the different populations of the study. A total of 152 persons was selected/chosen from the main operating centre of the Institute namely Georgetown, Linden, and Berbice.

80 of these persons comprised the sample of former and current students of the Institute. The sample consisting of IDCE academic staff members amounted to 44 while 8 non-academic staffers were selected randomly from the centers' host population. 20 sponsoring agencies/entities also constituted another sample of the study.

Research Design

Utilizing various methods to elicit data tends to enhance the reliability and validity of the results of the study being done. Consequently self-administered questionnaires, interviews, observations and documentation were all used to gather data for this study.

This type of methodological triangulation also serves to surmount the intrinsic weaknesses namely bias, lack of reliability and limited accessibility to data source that plague single-method studies.

Two (2) Sets of questionnaires were used in this study. One set was designed for the sample comprising past and current students while the other set was formulated for the academic and regular staff of the Institute.

Additionally representatives of agencies which sponsor students to pursue IDCE classes participated in interviews where a specific interview schedule was designed and used. Documents and other records outlining the historical and contemporary operational practices of the IDCE were perused so as to acquire data pertinent to the research questions of the study. The researcher's day-to-day activities/chores performed as an employee of the institute also served as a source of data.

Instrumentation

Description of Questionnaires

The questionnaire which was completed by the student cohort contained 2 sections:

- A - Demographic Profile**
- B - Perceptions of IDCE's Service**

Section A of the Questionnaire comprised 5 questions. These questions focused on age, gender, address, occupational status and relationship with the IDCE.

Section B was made up of 11 questions. Programme advertisement, registration procedures, time-tabling/scheduling of classes, tutor performance, examination/assessment arrangements and appropriateness of infrastructural facilities typified some of the areas/themes addressed in this section. The second questionnaire designed for the staff of the IDCE was divided into 6 sections:

- A - Demographic**
- B - Institutional Support**
- C - Course Development, Instructional Design and Student Support**
- D - Teaching and Learning**
- E - Technology, Evaluation and Assessment**
- F - Determinants of Quality Assurance**

The Composition of Section A Was Similar To That Of The First Questionnaire

Section B contained 3 questions which concentrated on the relevance of organizational structure, mission statement/objectives and record-keeping to the practice and philosophy of ODL. 6 questions were included in Section C. Tutor involvement in curriculum design, accessibility to programme/course information, course development guidelines, and suitability of assessment measures to ODL represent some of the topics on which the questions were based. Student-tutor interaction, use of technology in course delivery, student feedback, and programme/course expectations formed the basis for the 6 questions included in Section D. Section E included 5 questions which were based on learning outcomes, assessment of course outline/curriculum, tutor and student involvement in use and development of learning technology. Section F consisted of 10 questions which dealt with various determinants of quality assurance. Qualifications of staff, availability of financial and physical resources, record-keeping, learning technology, and number of accredited programmes, exemplify some of the themes alluded to.

The majority of questions in both questionnaires were of the close-ended type. The various responses were rated using a Likert type scale. A 1 to 4 rating scale was used, with 1 being positive (satisfied) and 4 negative (complete dissatisfaction). This scaling method was used so as to capture the intensity of the respondents' answers to some of the questions. The structured interview schedule was used to acquire data from agencies which collaborate with the IDCE in the provision of ODL education and training. These agencies sponsor their employees to pursue programmes with the Institute.

This instrument comprised 7 questions which were concerned with client's satisfaction with IDCE's service, diversification of programme offerings, marketing of the Institute's programme and activities, and ways of improving IDCE's service

Administration

Instituting/administering the questionnaire electronically (that is via email, messenger chat and skype) and face-to-face completion of paper copies of the questionnaire was the strategies employed in an effort to complete the questionnaires. Respondents took approximately 10 minutes to complete each questionnaire which was self-administered. Representatives of the stakeholder agencies completed the interview schedule at the consultation meetings arranged at two of the IDCE centres

The methodology used in conducting the study was discussed in this chapter. Descriptions of the research samples, and the data gathering instruments and procedures used while administering them were alluded to. An analysis of the responses of the members of the sample constituted the focus of the following chapter

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter provides an analysis of the responses provided by members of the samples chosen to provide data for the study. An analysis of the demographic profiles of the respondents was done.

Additionally a detailed study of and interpretation of the research questions formulated to guide this research were also effected.

80 questionnaires were distributed to the students at the three locations, 60 of them were completed and returned representing a 75% response rate. 52 questionnaires were distributed to the staff at the three locations as well, 40 of them were completed and returned representing a 77% response rate.

Section A - Demographic Data

Sixty (60) students responded to question 1 on gender. Fourteen (14) of them were male while forty six (46) were female. (See Table: 1)

Table: 1
Composition of Sample by Gender (Students)

GENDER	No	%
Male	14	23
Female	46	77
TOTAL	60	100

The data showed that forty (40) members of staff provided a response to question on gender. Of this number, thirteen (13) were male and 27 were female. (See Table: 2)

Table: 2
Composition of Sample by Gender (Staff)

GENDER	No.	%
Male	13	32.5
Female	27	67.5
TOTAL	40	100

The majority of the sixty (60) persons (students) who responded to the question on age group identity came from the 20-30 age group while the over fifty group accounted for the minority. Table 3 provides more details.

Table: 3
Composition of Sample by Age Group - Students

AGE GROUP	No. IN GROUP	%
Less than 20	03	5
20 - 30	30	50
30 - 40	10	17
40 - 50	10	17
Over 50	07	11
TOTAL	60	100

Research

Question: 1

What Are the Main Quality Assurance Practices That Are Followed/Pursued At The Idce/Ug?

As an Open and Distance Learning Provider, quality assurance at the IDCE should be assessed by the following practices: curriculum design; content and organization of programmes and courses; teaching, learning and assessment; student progression and assessment; and student support and guidance. Curriculum design is a joint process involving the Institute's permanent staff (academic) and the part-time tutors who perform as tutor-facilitators for over ninety percent (90%) of the programmes and courses that are conducted throughout the Institute. After the curriculum (specifically the course outline/syllabus) is prepared, approval is then sought from the Institute's Coordinating Committee or the Institute's Board before the programme or course can commence. The Institute also utilizes with some modifications, syllabuses/course outlines of other agencies particularly examination bodies or councils (Caribbean Examination Council-CXC, for example).

Additionally Open Education Resources (OER's) from other ODL Providers from the Commonwealth and the world at large in specific subject areas are adapted and used by the IDCE. Further the contributions of the Institute are other stakeholders namely the external agencies who utilize the service are usually noted and considered during the process.

Marketing is one of the essential components of the Institute programme organization portfolio. Programmes and courses are normally advertised nationally and regionally (that is, in the different administrative regions in the country) through the print and electronic media. Consultations with stakeholders, participating in exhibitions and fairs (trade, job/ career) represent some of the other strategies used in marketing IDCE's services.

As a result the Institute's clientele becomes aware/is informed about the programmes and activities mounted by the Institute at its various centre and sub-centre throughout the country. Community or stakeholder involvement in the work of ODL Institutions is another measure used in assessing the quality of these institutions. Stakeholders comprise people, individually or collectively (in groups/agencies/organizations) who have vested interests in a particular activity or service.

Their interest could focus on the design of the service/product, its development and how it is marketed as well as strategies which are developed for its utilization. IDCE's stakeholders include students/participants, corporate agencies from the private and public sectors, government ministries,

Non-Government Organizations,(NGO's), religious, political and interest groups, among others. The views/suggestions of our stakeholders/clientele are often used to improve the quality of service that is provided.

IDCE's Advisory Committees comprising representatives of corporate, social, religious and other community based organizations, provide suggestions/advice on various aspects of the work of the IDCE including relevant programming, marketing strategies, costing of services and budgeting, setting standards, (regulatory) and monitoring and evaluation, (maintaining and improving quality).

Both pre-university and university level programmes and courses are conducted by the Institute. This is practiced so as to accommodate the different needs of the Institute's multiple audiences. Courses are organized for general audiences as well as customized/tailored to meet the needs of specific stakeholders. It should also be noted that the Institute practices/operates the dual mode system of programme deliveryBoth the conventional and distance modalities are practiced.

The IDCE employs specialists and professionals to teach and facilitate the majority of its programmes because its permanent academic staff complement is small. University degrees, professional teacherqualifications, and other relevant professional certification represent the qualifications needed to function as part-time tutors or facilitators of the Institute. The recruitment process of submitting applications and attending interviews is adhered to/followed.

Moreover professional development sessions in ODL are conducted periodically so as to enhance the competencies of these facilitators in open learning during their stint with the Institute. IDCE'S academic and administrative staff possess first as well as advanced degrees.

Added to payment for services rendered, the efforts and contributions of the part-time and permanent staff are noted or observed in another way.

The Institute's long service award scheme is used to recognize and honor those staff members who have served the Institute for 10 or more years. Generally theories of motivation state that employees are more likely to improve their performance when they are praised and recognized for the work that they do, and when they are made to feel that they belong to the organization (affiliation). Award schemes are designed and affected with the expectation that the performances of the recipients would improve thus enhancing the quality of the service provided by the institution. The teaching-learning process is also enriched/boosted by relevant recording keeping. At IDCE, attendance registers, for students in particular, are kept and are submitted by the tutor/facilitator along with a course report and payment claims, at the end of each semester. Question papers for final examinations/assessments are submitted by the tutor prior to the staging of these examinations. At the end of the programme/course, marked scripts, and marked final assignments/case studies/projects along with marked sheets are submitted by the tutor/facilitator to the heads of department/centers. Mark sheets are examined and approved by the Institute Coordinating Committee (ICC) or the Institute Board; final grades/marks are subsequently deemed official. IDCE practices the following three-tier system of assessment/evaluation:

- **Self-Evaluation** which is practiced particularly in the modular programmes/courses (D E) Students are able to assess their knowledge/understanding of content through these exercises which are incorporated in the study material.
- **Continuous Assessment** which is effected through assignments, practical projects and or quizzes and other forms of conventional assessment (tests) administered during and at the end of the programme/course
- **Programme/Course -End Evaluation** which is realized through examinations, case studies and projects, among others. Weight/credit is given to coursework. Final grade is determined by both course work and final examination performances.

These forms of assessment are used individually as per course, or course tutors may utilise a combination of them in their respective courses. Apart from in-class and post-class- counseling, other student support measures include guidance and counseling effected through face-to-face and virtual interaction, in-class and external peer group assistance/encouragement, study groups, forums, and chat-rooms.

Students' dissatisfaction with grades/marks or tutor conduct can be channeled through the review process mechanism which is in place.

Additionally tutor feedback on assignments, which in some cases are timely, serves to inform students about their performance and progression in the course.

Research Question: 2

How Do Stakeholders Perceive of the Quality Assurance Measures Practiced At The IDCE/UG?

The questions in Section B of both questionnaires were formulated to provide data needed to answer this research question. Quality Assurance points to a gamut of activities carried out by an organization to make sure those standards

are identified and attainable/achievable in a reliable manner. Various stakeholders namely faculty, students (past and present), private and public sector agencies, NGO's, and community based organizations all participate in the quality assurance process. Students and staff members of the Institute (part-time and permanent) was interviewed as part of the study sample. Firstly, the responses of the students were analyzed followed by those of the staff. The data revealed that the majority of students (past/present) were satisfied with the manner in which the Institute advertises its programmes and courses. IDCE utilizes the national print and electronic media, the electronic media in the different regions of the country. Letters, fliers, and brochures which are sent to various agencies and distributed to people from all walks of life constitute another method used in advertising the Institute's programmes/activities. Former and even current students assist in disseminating information on the programme and activities of the Institute. 75% of the respondents in Berbice, 60% in Linden and 55% in Georgetown expressed satisfaction with the way in which the IDCE advertises. (See Table: 4 for more details)

Table: 4
Advertising Programmes

Levels of Satisfaction	G/Town		Lin.		Ber.	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Satisfied	11	55	12	60	15	75
Part. Satisfied	05	25	07	35	05	25
D/satisfied	04	20	01	05	-	-
TOTAL	20	100	20	100	20	100

Registration Process

The Institute's registration process begins with the prospective student identifying the programme/course to be pursued, followed by completion of the registration form. Photographs are then submitted/presented and the required tuition and registration fees are paid. On completion of the registration process, students are issued with a student identification/registration card which they are expected to have in their possession when attending classes or when writing examinations.

The academic staff of the Institute offer advice to/counsel those persons who in some instances are undecided about the programme/course they want to do. According to the data shows in Table: 5, 80% of the sample indicated their satisfaction with the registration process used at the Institute. (See Table: 5)

**Table: 5
Registration Process**

Levels Satisfaction	G/Town		Lin.		Ber.	
	NO	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Satisfied	16	80	16	80	16	80
Part.Satisfied	0	20	04	20	04	20
D/satisfied	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	20	100	20	100	20	100

Organisation of Classes

The Institute conducts one year courses of thirty week duration. These courses are conducted from September to June/July of the following year. One semester courses of fifteen to twenty weeks are offered twice per year, September to February and March to June/July.

The majority of the Institute's face-to-face classes are held in the late afternoons/early evenings primarily to accommodate the students who are working and the part-time tutors, the majority of whom are working full-time in other agencies/organizations.

Classes for courses are held twice weekly. The duration of each class session is two hours.

The print mode of the Institute's DE courses run for/lasts for six months or for one year, some of them have a face-to-face component which is conducted twice monthly for two hours per session. The online courses are conducted synchronously as well as asynchronously.

However examinations are administered in the traditional way. The sample members were impressed with the organization of the Institute's classes. The majority of the samples were satisfied with the manner in which the IDCE organized its classes.

75% of the sample members from the Berbice area expressed satisfaction with the time-tabling and scheduling of classes while 55% of the interviewees from the Linden and Georgetown cohorts expressed similar sentiments. (Table: 6 provides more details)

**Table: 6
Organisation of Classes**

Levels of Satisfact	Geog.		Linden		Berbice	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Satisfied	11	55	11	55	15	75
Part. Satisfied	05	25	06	30	04	20
D/satisfied	04	20	01	05	01	05
TOTAL	20	100	20	100	20	100

Level of Tuition Fees

The IDCE'S fee structure is based on cost recovery principles rather than one of profit maximizations. Students are also given the option of completing payments in two installments, the last of which takes place no later than the midway stage of the course. The members of the sample also expressed their views on the Institute's level of tuition fees. The majority of the interviewees expressed satisfaction with the tuition fees charged by the IDCE. (Details are found in Table: 7)

**Table: 7
Level of Tuition Fees**

Levels Satisfaction	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Satisfied	16	80	11	55	15	75
Part. Satisfied	04	20	07	35	02	10
D/Satisfied	-	-	02	10	03	15
TOTAL	20	100	20	100	20	100

Physical Environment

The sample was divided in their opinion relating to the physical environment where face-to-face interactive sessions are held.

The data showed that a small majority of the students from Berbice and Georgetown expressed satisfaction with the level of the physical facilities provided while more students from Linden were partially dissatisfied (Table 8 provides details).

Use of Technology in Course Delivery

The data showed that the sample was again divided in their opinion. In Berbice and Linden a small majority was satisfied with the use of technology in course delivery.

**Table: 8
Physical Environment**

Level of Satisfaction	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Satisfied	09	45	05	25	11	55
Partially Satisfied	04	20	08	40	07	35
D/Satisfied	07	35	03	15	02	10
F/Disatisfied	-	-	04	20	-	-
TOTAL	20	100	20	100	20	100

However in Georgetown 60% of the students who were interviewed indicated that they were partially dissatisfied with this development. (See Table 9 for more details/particulars)

**Table: 9
Use of Technology**

Levels of Satisfaction	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Satisfied.	05	25	07	35	10	50
Partially Satisfied	12	60	05	25	06	30
D/Satisfied	03	15	05	25	02	10
F/Disatisfied	-	-	03	15	02	10
TOTAL	20	100	20	100	20	100

Tutor Performance

The majority of the sample expressed satisfaction with the performance of the Institute's Tutors (See Table: 10).

**Table: 10
Performance of Tutors**

Levels of Satisfaction	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Satisfied	07	35	16	80	17	85
Partially Satisfied	11	55	04	20	03	15
Dissatisfied	03	15	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	20	100	20	100	20	100

Assessment Procedures

Most of the sample members were satisfied with the assessment procedures practiced by the IDCE.

Data provided showed that at two of the Centres -Linden and Georgetown, 70% of the interviewees expressed satisfaction with the said procedures. (Table: 11 provides more details)

Table: 11
Assessment Procedures

Levels of Satisfact.	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Satisfied	05	25	14	70	14	70
Partially Satisfied	10	50	06	30	04	20
Dissatisfied	03	15	-	-	-	-
No Response.	02	10	-	-	02	10
TOTAL	20	100	20	100	20	100

Students' Appeal Process

The data revealed that a number of students were unaware of the procedure adopted by the IDCE regarding the handling of students' queries of examination and coursework marks and grades.

It was observed that at the Georgetown and Berbice locations 45% of the sample were unaware of this practice. (See Table: 12 for more details)

Table: 12
Students Appeals/Queries

Levels of Satisfaction	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Satisfied	06	30	07	35	02	10
Partially Satisfied	04	20	07	35	06	30
Dissatisfied	01	05	03	15	03	15
No Knowledge	09	45	03	15	09	45
TOTAL	20	100	20	100	20	100

STAFF

Mission of the IDCE

The Mission of the IDCE is as follows: 'The Institute of Distance and Continuing Education is conscious of the national goal of providing equality of access to education and recognizes the natural right of all Guyanese to education.' (IDCE Silver Jubilee Reflections, 2002) The data revealed that a majority of the IDCE staff were either unaware of the mission of the Institute or opined/felt that the the mision was not consistent with the practice of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). (See Table: 13 for more details).

Table: 13
Mission and ODL Practice/Philosophy

Levels of Observation	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Observed	01	05	01	10	05	50
Insufficiently Observed	08	40	03	30	01	10
Not Observed	11	55	02	20	03	30
Not Aware	-	-	04	40	-	-
No Answer	-	-	-	-	01	10
TOTAL	20	100	10	100	10	100

Verification of Students' Profile

Verification of students' profile is a key component of institutional support for effective quality assurance in ODL. It was discerned from the data that the majority of the sample felt that this practice was being followed at the IDCE. However it was also revealed that staff members were unaware of this practice. (See Table: 14 for more details).

Table: 14
Verification of Students Profile

Levels of Observation	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Observed	11	55	05	50	04	40
Insufficiently Observed	06	30	02	20	02	20
Not Observed	02	10	03	30	03	30
Not Aware	-	-	-	-	-	-
No Answer	01	05	-	-	01	10
TOTAL	20	100	10	100	10	100

Course Development

The data showed that most of the staff members from the centers of Berbice and Linden felt that the Institute observed the practice of using minimum standards to guide the process of course development, and design and delivery of instruction. On the contrary the majority of the staff from Georgetown felt that this practice was not followed, according to the data represented in Table: 15

Table: 15
Minimum Standards for Course Development

Levels of Observation	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Observed	03	15	05	50	06	60
Insufficiently Observed	03	15	01	10	02	20
Not Observed	12	60	03	30	02	20
Not Aware	02	10	01	10	-	-
TOTAL	20	100	10	100	10	100

Course Review

Reviewing learning materials, course outlines, and learning outcomes is consistent with good quality assurance practices in ODL.

The data revealed that this practice is insufficiently observed at the IDCE.

In Georgetown 65% of the sample opined that this is not done while 40% at both Linden and Berbice stated that this is insufficiently observed. (Table: 16 is instructive)

Table: 16
Review of Course Materials

Levels of Observation	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Observed	01	05	-	-	04	40
Insufficiently Observed	06	30	02	20	04	40
Not Observed	13	65	03	30	02	20
Not Aware	-	-	04	40	-	-
No Answer	-	-	01	10	-	-
TOTAL	20	100	10	100	10	100

Assessment and Learning Objectives

The procedure of using assessments to measure learning objectives is consistent with the philosophy of ODL and is also in keeping with good quality assurance praxis in ODL. The data in Table: 17 show that over 50% of the sample indicated that this was not fully observed at the IDCE. In fact, 55% of the Georgetown cohort stated that this was insufficiently adhered to.

Table: 17
Assessment and Learning Objectives in ODL

Levels of Observation	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Observed	01	05	-	-	04	40
Insufficiently Observed	06	30	02	20	04	40
Not Observed	13	65	03	30	02	20
Not Aware	-	-	04	40	-	-
No Answer	-	-	01	10	-	-
TOTAL	20	100	10	100	10	100

Provision of Programme Information for Students

Perusing Table 18, it was seen that the provision of relevant programme/course information to the student prior to registration was not fully observed at the IDCE.

Table: 18
Providing Programme Information

Levels of Observation	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Fully Observed	04	20	02	20	05	50
Insufficiently Observed	12	60	-	-	04	40
Not Observed	04	20	08	80	-	-
Not Aware	-	-	-	-	01	10
Not Stated	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	20	100	10	100	10	100

Interaction between Students and Tutors

Table: 19 showed that the sample was divided in their opinion of student-student and teacher-student interaction being encouraged at the IDCE. In Georgetown 45% and in Linden 50% of the sample stated that this was insufficiently encouraged/observed. (See Table: 19)

**Table 19
Interaction (Student and Tutors)**

Levels of Obs.	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Fully Observed	02	10	02	20	08	80
Insufficiently Observed	09	45	05	50	02	20
Not Observed	09	45	01	10	-	-
Not Aware	-	-	01	10	-	-
Not Stated	-	-	01	10	-	-
TOTAL	20	100	10	100	10	100

Feedback on Students' Assignments/Assessment

Providing feedback on students' assignment in a timely manner is indicative of students' support system/activities in ODL and tertiary education.

The data in Table 20 suggests that this procedure was not fully observed. 60% of the interviewees from Georgetown and 50% from Berbice indicated that this was insufficiently observed at their respective centres.

**Table:20
Providing Feedback on Students' Assignments**

Levels of Observation	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Fully Observed	03	15	-	-	05	50
Insufficiently Observed	12	60	03	30	05	50
Not Observed	05	25	07	70	-	-
Not Aware	-	-	-	-	-	-
Not Stated	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	20	100	20	100	20	100

Students' Handbook

The data revealed that the respondents were unaware of the existence of any documentation on the requirements students need to fulfill for successful programme completion. 45% of the Georgetown staff opined that they were not aware of this and 50% of their counterparts from Linden expressed similar sentiments. (See Table: 21 for additional details)

Table: 21
Documentation on Students' Requirements for Programme Completion

Levels of Obs.	G/Town		Linden		Berbice	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Fully Observed	06	30	02	20	05	50
Insufficiently Observed	05	25	03	30	05	50
Not Observed	09	45	05	50	-	-
Not Aware	-	-	-	-	-	-
Not Stated	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	20	100	10	100	10	100

SPONSORING AGENCIES (STAKEHOLDERS)

Representatives from 20 agencies which collaborate with the IDCE in effecting its programme offerings were interviewed. Collaboration is effected through agency's sponsor of employees to attend programmes, granting students' time off to attend classes, hosting students on attachment/internship and funding customized courses for their employees.

Table: 22
Satisfaction with Level and Type of Programme

Levels of Satisfaction	NO.	%
Satisfied	16	80
Dissatisfied	02	10
Very Dissatisfied	02	10
TOTAL	20	100

60% of the agencies expressed dissatisfaction with the marketing strategies of the Institute. (See Table: 23).

Table: 23
Marketing IDCE Programmes

Levels of Satisfaction	No	%
Satisfied	06	30
Dissatisfied	12	60
Very Dissatisfied	02	10
TOTAL	20	100

80% of the sponsoring agencies stated that the IDCE is providing a useful service (providing education and training) for the NGO'S and corporate sectors. (Table 24 provides more details)

Table: 24
Usefulness of IDC's Service

Responses	No	%
Yes	16	80
No	04	20
TOTAL	20	100

OTHER COMMENTS

<p>Programme Offerings</p>	<p>IDCE should cater for current social, academic and economic needs of communities</p> <p>IDCE should try to satisfy industrial and job market needs</p> <p>Courses in agriculture, health and safety, environmental studies, administrative professional studies, and science and technology should be offered.</p> <p>IDCE should use more of the electronic media in advertising its programmes (including face book and other social media forums)</p> <p>IDCE staff should visit organisations to promote IDCE’S service</p>
<p>Marketing IDCE Programmes and Courses</p>	<p>IDCE should use more promotional videos to sell itself</p> <p>Banners and fliers promoting IDCE’s service should be placed in prominent locations in the communities being served</p> <p>Consultations with various stakeholders should be held more often IDCE should encourage their alumni to assist in is marketing drive</p> <p>Attending IDCE’s courses serves to improve the knowledge and skill base of organisations</p> <p>Employees can study and work at the same time. Knowledge and skills learnt can be applied almost immediately in the workplace</p> <p>The flexibility of IDCE’s operations means that agencies can have their specific training needs attended to. Courses can be structured to meet the needs of specific organisations and groups.</p>
<p>Benefits of IDCE Programmes/Courses for NGO’s and corporate sectors</p>	<p>IDCE should use more community based resources in effecting its service</p> <p>IDCE should strive to have more of its courses recognized by work agencies and other training institutions. More of IDCE certificates should be accepted for employment in work agencies in the private and public sectors.</p> <p>There is need for the IDCE to use more technology in delivering its courses (more online courses)</p> <p>IDCE should improve its physical locations (both buildings and facilities)</p> <p>IDCE should continue to offer opportunities for persons who need a second chance to obtain education and training More of IDCE courses should have a practical aspect. Attachments to various agencies relevant to courses being done should be encouraged and practiced</p>
<p>Image as an ODL Provider</p>	<p>IDCE should continue to offer opportunities for persons who need a second chance to obtain education and training More of IDCE courses should have a practical aspect. Attachments to various agencies relevant to courses being done should be encouraged and practiced</p>

Research Question: 3

What Are the Factors That Influence The Effective Application of Quality Assurance Measures/Strategies at The IDCE/UG?

Qualifications of Teaching Staff

60% of the sample indicated that qualifications of teaching staff influence the application of quality assurance strategies at the IDCE. See Table 25 for additional information.

**Table: 25
Qualifications of Teaching Staff**

NO.	%
24	60
12	30
04	10
TOTAL 40	100

Staff Complement (Availability)

Approximately 50% of the respondents stated that the availability of both academic and support staff determines the practice of quality assurance at the IDCE. The data also revealed that 30% disagreed with this view. (See Table: 26)

**Table: 26
Staff Complement**

NO.	%
20	50
12	30
08	20
TOTAL 40	100

Availability of Physical Resources

60% of the sample cohort agreed that quality assurance at the Institute is affected by the availability of physical resources.

It was also discerned from the data that 30% of the interviewees disagreed with this view. (Table: 27 provides more details)

**Table: 27
Physical Resources**

N0.	%
24	60
12	30
04	10
TOTAL 40	100

Availability of Financial Resources

The members of the sample were somewhat divided in their views on the influence of financial resources on quality assurance at the IDCE. An average of 40% of the respondents agreed that effective quality assurance is determined by the amount of financial resources available to the IDCE. 30% of them however disagreed with this opinion. (See Table: 29)

**Table: 29
Financial Resources**

N0.	%
16	40
12	30
12	30
TOTAL 40	100

Communication Skills

Table: 30 shows that the majority of the sample agreed that good/effective communication skills is a determinant of quality assurance.

However an average of 20% of them stated that they were unaware of the influence of communication skills on quality assurance practices at the IDCE.

**Table: 30
Communication Skills**

N0.	%
28	70
04	10
08	20
TOTAL 40	100

Accredited Programmes

Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents agreed that quality assurance at the IDCE is determined by the level and number of accredited programmes which are offered. The other members of the sample either disagreed or indicated their unawareness of this. (See Table: 31)

Table: 31
Accredited Programmes/Courses

NO.	%
24	60
08	20
08	20
TOTAL 40	100

Record-Keeping

Members of the sample also expressed an opinion on the influence of record-keeping on the practice of quality assurance at the IDCE.

An average of 68% agreed with the statement that quality assurance is determined by record-keeping whereas 28% of them disagreed. (See Table 32 for more details)

Table: 32
Record-Keeping

NO.	%
28	68
10	28
02	04
TOTAL 40	100

Teaching/Learning Technology

The members of the sample also commented on the influence of teaching/learning technology on IDCE'S quality assurance practices.

78% of the sample agreed that the teaching/learning technology used by the IDCE to deliver courses is a determinant of its quality assurance practices. (See Table: 33 for more information)

**Table: 33
Teaching/Learning Technology**

NO.	%
32	78
08	22
TOTAL 40	100

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this study was to analyse quality assurance practices in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) with special reference to the Institute of Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE), University of Guyana. In an attempt to effect this, three (3) research questions were formulated and samples comprising eighty (80) students (former and current), fifty two (52) staff members and representatives from twenty (20) stakeholder agencies were identified. This section includes a summary of the main results of the study and the conclusions drawn from them

**Research Question: 1
What Are the Main Quality Assurance Practices
That Are Followed By the IDCE, UG?**

COL (1997) implies that quality in ODL covers/includes the following features namely the physical products and pedagogical processes, production and delivery systems and the institutional culture or philosophy.

Quality of products includes course materials, number of graduates, examination success rate and the number of graduates progressing to advanced education and training. Quality of process covers teaching and learning, student counseling and other facets of student support and the management of student information.

Quality of products and the delivery system comprises course production, print and technology driven delivery of course materials and the dissemination/diffusion of information and learning resources to the students. Quality of philosophy embraces the vision, mission and policy statements and the corporate culture and reputation of the institution.

Analyzing the quality assurance measures followed by the IDCE, it was noted that curriculum design at the IDCE was demand driven.

Programmes and courses were developed in response to the expressed needs of the Institute’s clientele, individual adults as well as groups and organizations.

Curriculum design was characterized by total involvement/participation of all the relevant internal stakeholders namely the Institute’s permanent academic staff

and the tutors who have the responsibility of delivering the curriculum. Moreover the contributions provided by the other stakeholders, particularly the external agencies, community groups and individuals, captured at the stakeholder consultations which are held from time to time serve to enhance the curriculum design procedure. Moore's (2002) is instructive in this instance. He contends that effective course design depends on resources inside and outside of the institution hence the attention and contributions of the many constituents are captured. Johnson (1969) further argues that effective curriculum design is a critical/crucial component in the formation and delivery of quality courses.

The quality of the Institute's products (courses) is determined by its curriculum design procedures. In sum, curriculum design at the IDCE is not only an attempt to accommodate the learning needs of its clientele/customers but is also a reflection of their projected learning outcomes intended to be achieved primarily through instruction. ODL Providers need to institute competitive strategies in order to ensure that not only is efficient service provided but it is done so at an affordable cost since high tuition cost is one of the deterrents which is experienced by students trying to access education and training. Providing relevant information in an effective way on one's service/product is intended to garner the support of the relevant audiences. In so doing the quality of the relationship providers/suppliers have or develop with their customers or consumers is determined.

Accordingly the IDCE relies on advertisement of its programme and activities in the print and electronic media together with the distribution of fliers, brochures, letters and other forms of promotional materials to its stakeholders and the wider public/audiences. A significant number of the respondents however, felt that the IDCE should do more advertisement at different times during the year. Testimonials and recommendations for alumnus/graduates also serve to popularise and promote the work of the Institute. Further encouraging and establishing sustainable relationships with stakeholders in advancing the work of the Institute is another component of the Institute's marketing strategy. The work of advisory committees, student councils and student groupings (as per courses), and collaborating with professional organisations in mounting courses exemplify the IDCE efforts in this regard.

According to COL Knowledge Series (2012), sustainable relationships with stakeholders serve to differentiate the Institution's brand in the marketplace and tend to foster loyalty and trust among stakeholders.

Quality assurance includes procedures which an organization uses to make sure that standards are specified and attained consistently for a product or service. Over the years the IDCE has been consistent in its policy of recruiting trained and qualified staff in the various subject/content areas to serve as tutors/facilitators.

The majority of the teaching staff tends not to be familiar with the practice of open learning at the beginning of their stint with the IDCE. In attempting to remedy/correct this deficiency the Institute has conducted training sessions to make staff more aware of emerging technologies and other aspects of professional development peculiar to Open and Distance Learning from time to time. This is in keeping with one of the objectives of quality assurance, that is, of designing measures to correct deficiencies that may arise and which may threaten the reliability of the system concerned. Furthermore, the Institute's full-time academic staff at all the centres all possess bachelors and advanced university qualifications.

A system of effective record-keeping also enhances the quality of service provided by ODL Institutions. Record-keeping tends to assist institutions monitor and evaluate student as well as tutor performances, among other uses. Students benefit from a reliable record-keeping system because it serves as the mechanism through which feedback on their assignments and other forms of assessment, queries and appeals of marks / grades are facilitated. Record - keeping also enables tutors/facilitators keep track of their lesson plans and progression. In spite of its predominantly manual state and the consequential/limitations, IDCE'S system of record-keeping not only enriches the teaching learning process but also adds to the quality of the service it provides as an ODL providing agency. However the introduction of a technology driven data management/record-keeping system at the IDCE will decrease/remove the deficiencies that affect the largely manual based system which is in use.

The Institute's system of assessment/evaluation provides some degree of flexibility in its operations. The assessment of student performance is facilitated by three forms depending on the types of programmes/courses and the way in which they are delivered.

Therefore self-evaluation, continuous assessment and evaluation at the end of the course provide variety to the IDCE's system of assessment and facilitate consistency in student performance. Students are therefore assessed overtime rather than on one or isolated occasions. The types of student assessment practiced by the IDCE is consistent with the objectives of open and distance learning, that is, being flexible rather than rigid in its conduct and operations. Open and Distance Learning is known for its emphasis on student support. Being separated physically from the facilitator and fellow students necessitates the use of mechanisms/strategies to support the learners throughout the programme. Consequently the IDCE's use of internet based forums and chat-rooms, studygroups and counseling/guidance facilitated in the traditional ways as well as electronically, among others, is critical as well as consistent with the objectives of ODL. Moreover effective student support measures enrich the quality of service provided by the Institute.

Research Question: 2

How do Stakeholders Perceive of the Quality Assurance Measures Practiced At The IDCE/UG?

Generally the members of the sample expressed satisfaction with the quality assurance measures practiced by the IDCE/UG. The main objective of using marketing strategies in Open and Distance Learning is to increase student intake. Advertisement in ODL is concerned with the provision of information about the programmes and activities being offered with the objective of persuading prospective students/audiences to register for these programmes.

The use of the print and electronic media together with personal or direct methods of providing information about the IDCE's course offerings found favour with the majority of the stakeholders who were sampled. Notwithstanding this some stakeholder agencies felt that more visits to organization by IDCE personnel should be done and this would go a far way in promoting its services as an ODL provider. In effect, the manner in which courses are marketed is/serves as a determinant of the size of its student intake as well as its image as an efficient and reliable provider of ODL programmes and courses.

IDCE's registration procedures also help to define the manner in which it organises its programme and activities. Its registration system was designed to be applicant/student friendly. Participants found it simple and easy to follow. Additionally support in the form of guidance/counseling was provided for those applicants experiencing difficulties in choosing/identifying course(s) to pursue. However some members of the sample suggested that student handbooks providing all pertinent information on the Institute's registration policy and practice should be made available to present as well as potential students. It was also noted that the print based nature of the IDCE's registration system makes the retrieval of relevant information time consuming hence the desirability for the introduction of modern technology in the Institute's registration system

Coupled with the aforementioned enrolment for some classes occurs/takes place twice yearly and actual class sessions are held in the evenings to accommodate members of the working population who work during the day. Flexibility in the Institute's enrolment policy and scheduling of classes to satisfy the needs of students who work on a full-time basis reflect the openness of its operations. A significant proportion of the sample members expressed satisfaction with the organization of the IDCE's programme offerings.

The physical environment of the Institute comprises classrooms and the buildings that house the administrative and office staff of the Institute at all of its locations. However the sample was asked to comment on the comfort level/readiness of the classroom facilities. Unfortunately the Institute does not own the buildings where classes are kept but rather utilise the classrooms of secondary schools which are controlled by the Country's Ministry of Education.

The seating accommodation (furniture) and lighting, in particular, are in most cases unsuitable for adults. The Institute therefore needs to provide adequate and comfortable classrooms, laboratories and libraries equipped with modern facilities which will enhance the teaching-learning process

The sample members were also asked to state/disclose how satisfied they were with the use of technology in the delivery of courses. It was discerned from the data that a significant proportion of the sample felt that more tutors could incorporate the use of technology in the delivery of their lessons in the classrooms. The use of multi-media facilities, in particular, was highlighted by the respondents of the study.

Tutor performance is a key indicator of the quality of service provided by ODL institutions. Tutor performance has implications for the teaching-learning process, the quality of students the Institution produces, and enrolment and retention of students. In sum the reputation of the Institution as an ODL Provider is affected by tutor performance. However the majority of the sample expressed satisfaction with the performance of tutors employed by the IDCE.

The assessment procedures employed/practiced by an ODL provider could be used to assess its quality assurance status. Overall the stakeholders who were interviewed as part of the study sample were satisfied with the assessment methods carried out/practiced at the IDCE.

STAFF

Mission and the Practice of ODL

The mission of an ODL Institution should be consistent with the principles and practice of Open and Distance Learning. Implicit in the mission of the IDCE is the basic guiding principle of ODL, that is, reducing and/removing the barriers that hinder access to education (promoting equality of access to education). Additionally, slogans such as " IDCE goes the distance with you", and "Bringing quality education to the Nation " used in the Institution's promotional campaigns reinforce its commitment to the philosophy of Open Learning.

Further the mission and policy statements of ODL institutions also determine the quality of its programme offerings. The scope, type and level of courses offered is configured by the institution's philosophical underpinnings or is a reification of its mission or quality of its philosophy.

In spite of this the data revealed that the majority of the IDCE staff was not acquainted/familiar with its mission. The minority who indicated some knowledge of the Institute's mission failed to recognise its conformity to the practice of ODL because of their lack of knowledge of the principles of open learning.

Course Development

Course development is one of the critical elements/processes of ODL. It comprises the phases of needs assessment, designing learning materials, course implementation and evaluation (Seels and Glasgow, 1998). Coupled with this it involves the participation of teams comprising specialists rather than one individual namely the course tutor/facilitator, in its design. This collaborative approach described by Daniel (2009) as an industrial model of division of labour for course development, contributes to the production of high quality courses. (IRRODL, 2010). Course development in ODL is a continuous process. It does not cease after the teaching sessions come to an end but feedback from students and other stakeholders fuels/facilitates its review and constant evaluation. Course development in ODL takes a longer time than when it is done in conventional education.

Minimum standards adhered to at the IDCE in developing and reviewing courses include subject/content specialist initiating and leading the process, minimum consultations with other staff occur, course is subsequently assessed by Institute Board and approved. In some instances piloting of course is done before it is finally approved. Courses are reviewed annually so as to make content current and to ensure that assignments are kept congruent with content.

The review process however, does not include the contributions of all the stakeholders on every occasion. The majority of the staff polled were unaware of course development at IDCE being guided by minimum standards. They also opined that the course review process was insufficiently observed at the Institute.

Assessment and Learning Objectives

Assessment is an organised way of making inferences about the learning and development of students. It includes both the formative and summative aspects/forms.

These forms usually highlight the relationship between assessment and learning objectives as well as indicating whether the learning objectives were attained. Dwyer (1991) is informative in this instance when he suggests that objectives should be tied to assessment in order to achieve the expected results or outcomes.

In keeping with the provision of student support service in ODL students should be informed/advised prior to the commencement of the course about the nature and function of the types of assessment to be completed during the course and their contribution to summative assessments. The staff members of the IDCE who were interviewed indicated that the practice of using assessments to measure learning objectives was insufficiently observed at the IDCE.

Student Support

Student Support could be conceptualized as comprising timely, accurate, and accessible information disseminated by an institution to its students about all facets/phases of the learning transaction, from registration to graduation. Good quality assurance practice in ODL ensures that students are provided with the requisite support designed to help them cope with the demands of their course of study successfully.

One school of thought divides student support into two groups, administrative/non-academic, and academic. Activities which facilitate the making of enquiries, admission requirements, the registration process, course delivery mode(s), and the non-academic aspects of assessments represent examples of administrative support.

The academic support category includes providing information on specific course requirements, providing feedback on student assessment, counseling, mentoring, providing/forming study groups, among others. Such information should be made available to the students on or before the registration process or during the first week of class. Generally the staff members who were interviewed as part of the study sample indicated lack of awareness of these student support services or opined that they were insufficiently practiced or observed by the IDCE.

Research Question: 3

What Are The Factors That Influence The Effective Application of Quality Assurance Measures at the IDCE, UG?

The application of quality assurance measures in an effective way is dependent on/conditioned by a number of factors. Staff complement/availability, qualifications of teaching and administrative staff, level of salaries for staff, availability of physical, learning and financial resources, and accreditation of institution and/programmes represent some of the determinants of the quality assurance process mentioned by the study sample.

Qualifications of Academic/Teaching Staff and Support Staff

Qualifications tend to determine capability /performance. As a consequence the recruitment of academic and support staff in ODL should be based on sound criteria which are consistent with the standards of the institution.

Qualifications/or fitness for purpose should not only be limited to certification but also to appropriate work ethic and attitude. Qualified and competent staff not only enriches the quality of the learning process/transaction but also assist in producing capable, skilled and efficient learners or practitioners.

In addition the exceptional performance of these graduates over time in the world of work serves as a boost to the reputation of ODL institutions.

In effect the quality assurance process in ODL is enhanced by skilled and competent staff capable of participating in a learning environment which demands commitment to task and the maintenance of standards. The majority of the study sample agreed that qualifications of staff determine the effective application of quality assurance procedures at the IDCE, UG.

Availability of Physical and Learning Resources

The availability of physical and learning resources is critical to the provision of open and distance learning. ODL institutions depend on physical and learning resources to effect their mandate of providing education and training opportunities for learners. Buildings to accommodate face-to-face facilitation, technological equipment and accessories to aid/supplement the course delivery process, together with print and virtual materials and resources to support and direct learner and facilitator activities exemplify these resources. It should be noted that in ODL, the use of learner resources tends to be emphasized more than in conventional education programming. It is sometimes argued that the quality assurance process in ODL institutions is more often than not driven/propelled by the standard/quality of the learning resources being used (Avabrath, 2013). Additionally the utilisation of these resources not only support the teaching-learning process or procedures and enables the realisation of learning objectives but also serves to supplement/add quality to the entire education and training experience provided by ODL agencies. Effective quality assurance includes both the physical learner resources as well as the total learning experience of the learners. In excess of ninety percent (90%) of the sample cohort interviewed supported the positive influence/determination of physical and learning resources on the effective application of quality assurance measures at the IDCE, UG.

Availability of Financial Resources

Financial resources could be conceptualized as the enabling factor in the provision of ODL. The non-availability of these resources tends to result in the non-provision of education and training pursuits. On the contrary the existence of adequate quantities of these resources aids the conduct of programmes and courses, irrespective of philosophy, context or delivery modality. The effectiveness of the service provided by ODL institutions is determined in a significant way by the availability of adequate finances. The cost of providing all the resources whether physical/material, learning or human (wages and salaries of staff) is absorbed/taken care of by the existing/available finances of the institution. Hence the attainment of course objectives in ODL is made possible when ample financial resources, among other factors, are available. Moreover the overall quality of the service experience in ODL is enriched by the availability of adequate financing. As a consequence the effective application of quality assurance measures in ODL is boosted by the provision of ample financial resources. The majority of the study sample was of the opinion that the availability of adequate financial resources is indeed a determinant of the effective application of quality assurance at the IDCE, UG.

Accreditation of Institution/Programme

Accreditation refers to a process of self study and external peer review which is used to examine and assess the basic features of an institution or its programme for quality standards and to see if the institution is realising its mission and specified objectives. The process is usually effected by a national body which is either government controlled or privately administered. Accreditation is of two types, institutional and programme. At the institutional level the entire institution is assessed namely its programmes and staff and other support service units. These units include governance/administrative practices and structure, teaching staff, learning resources, physical facilities and financial structures and resources, among others.

Accreditation of programme addresses the quality of the institution's programme by focusing namely on the curriculum, educational objectives, student support services, quality of facilities, quality of teaching units/divisions and administrative structures. In ODL, accreditation influences the standards or societal acceptability of an institution's graduates. Institutions which are subjected to the accreditation process on a regular basis and are given a 'clean bill of health' enjoy the confidence and support of stakeholders. The certificates issued by these institutions are accepted by work agencies for employment and other tertiary level institutions of learning for matriculation purposes. Certificates issued by the IDCE are accepted for employable and matriculation purposes because of it being a unit of the University of Guyana. Notwithstanding these members of the sample felt that the IDCE needs to participate in the accreditation process so that more of its programmes will gain acceptance nationally as well as in other countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

IDCE should use external assessors in its curriculum development process. Peer-based review of curriculum and course approval should be encouraged/introduced.

- IDCE should initiate/encourage more collaboration with stakeholders in developing curriculum so as to make use of /benefit from technical expertise needed to produce quality courses on a consistent basis.
- More stringent staff induction programmes/exercises should be practiced so as to orient staff to the challenges/demands of working in an ODL environment.
- IDCE should practice more credit transfers between its programmes thus adding more flexibility to its operations.

There is need for more articulation of the expectations of students for successful completion of programmes. This should be done prior to enrolment wherever possible or not later than the commencement of the programme.

- The IDCE should initiate studies designed to trace the career path of its graduates as much as possible. This adds to/enhances its quality assurance practices.
- There is need for a more formal and rigorous system of student assessment of the performance of tutors/facilitators.
- IDCE should regularize the use of competency based assessment in its system of evaluation. Procedures such as portfolios, demonstrations and challenge examinations exemplify some of the components of this approach which would serve to recognize prior learning and experience.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHOR



Dr. GLASGOW has and B. Soc. Sc (Sociology)-University of Guyana, 1982. His diploma in Education (Administration)-University of Guyana, 1992 and v M. Soc. Sc from University of Guyana, 2003. He is Director (Ag), IDCE from the January 2006-June 2009, Deputy Director (Ag), IDCE September 2005-December 2005 and Resident Tutor, IDCE-Linden November 1992-August 2005. Other responsibilities of Dr Glasgow were Part time Graduate Teacher, CWSS, and New Silvercity Secondary, Linden, part time tutor, IDCE-Linden, and Cyril Potter College of Education, Linden Centre. His major research studies are completed death with Forging Community Developing through Open and Distance Learning, 2008. Motivational Determinants of students pursuing ODL Programmes, 2007 Case Studies of Graduates of Supported Distance Education Programme, 2006, Determinants of Literacy Levels-The Case of Linden, 2004. Case Studies of Women in Non-Traditional Training, 2003. Technology and its use in Adult and Continuing in Guyana, 2003 and Factors affecting Failures and Successes of Students pursuing IDCE Programmes, 2002. His main publications areas followed Glasgow, Francis (2002). The Learners' Voice. In P. Persaud (ed) Gender and ICTs: Listen to the Learners. University of Guyana and the International Extension College, UK. Amsterdam, Gene and Glasgow, Francis (2000). Literacy and Non Formal Education in the Caribbean...Guyana. EFA in the aribbean...2000. Case Studies No. 2. UNESCO, Kingston, Jamaica. His writing project proposals, ACP sponsored works and he attended many national and international conferences, seminars and workshops suc as Social Determinants of Literacy Levels-Facilitators Conference, National Literacy Fast Track Initiative, (MOE) NCERD, 2009. The IDCE AND Community Development, Belle Vue Sub-Centre (IDCE), 2009. Studies Skills and the Adult Learner. Training Programme for Recruits, Civil Aviation Department, Georgetown, 2009. The Management of Stres-Seminar for Administrative Professionals, Linden, 2007. Motivating the Adult Learner. Forum on Adult Learning, Linden, IDCE, 2007, The Scope and Challenges of Tourism-Stakeholders' Seminar, Lethem Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Lethem, Rupununi, 2007.

The 'Do's and Don'ts' of Teaching Adults. Forum on Adult Education, Linden IDCE, 2006. He teaches on Principles of Business, Business Management, Office Administration, Introduction to Sociology and Supervisory Management

He is a resident tutor-duties included: Coordinated all Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programmes and activities of the centre. These programmes and activities took the form of: evening classes, seminars, workshops, public lectures, conferences, etc.). Recruited staff (part-time) to teach programmes/courses and prepared and submitted monthly reports to Director on programmes and activities conducted at the centre. And also, he pursued public service activities. Conducted needs analyses/surveys so as to ascertain continuing education needs of the Institute's clientele. Liaised with community based organizations and agencies in the conduct of community education programmes. Taught Open and Distance Learning Programmes/Courses and conducted research pertinent of Open and Distance Learning. He is attended Institute Staff and Board Meetings and participated in other University sponsored activities.

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QUESTIONNAIRE 1 - STUDENTS

This Questionnaire is being used to gather data for a research study on Quality Assurance at the IDCE. We shall be grateful for your responses to the under mentioned questions. Please be assured that the answers provided will only be used for the purposes of this study.

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH

Partially Satisfied Dissatisfied Completely Satisfied Dissatisfied

- a) IDCE'S way of advertising its Prog./ Courses
Comments
- b) IDCE's registration process
Comments.....
- c) IDCE's time-tabling/scheduling of classes
Comments
- d) IDCE's level of tuition fees
Comments.....
- e) Physical facilities (c/room, furniture, etc) Provided by IDCE
Comments.....
- e) The use of technology to deliver lessons at IDCE
Comments.....
- f) Performance of IDCE's tutors
Comments.....
- g) IDCE's examination/assessment procedures
Comments.....
- h) Release of prog/course results
Comments.....
- I) System governing appeal/queries about Prog/course results
Comments.....
- j) The provision of course related information (regulations re: attendance, failure,, GPA, etc) prior to course start-up)
Comments.....

QUESTIONNAIRE 2 - Staff

University of Guyana

Institute of Distance and Continuing Education

This Questionnaire is being used to gather data for a research study on Quality Assurance at the IDCE. We shall be grateful for your responses to the under mentioned questions. Please be assured that the answers provided will only be used for the purposes of this study.

Section A

Demographic Data

1. Gender M F
2. Age Group 20 - 30; 30 - 40; 40 - 50; Over 50
3. Address G/Town Linden Berbice Anna Regina

4. Occupation (kindly state)

5. Association with IDCE Full-Time (Permanent staff); Part-Time;
Student/Participant;

Other (Kindly state)

Section B

Institutional Support

6. To what extent are the following observed at/practiced by the IDCE

	Not	Insufficiently/Partially	Fully Observed
A) Admin. Structure facilitates effective decision-making related to ODL			
B) Mission statement/Objectives are consistent with ODL philosophy/practice			
C) Suitable guidelines are in place to verify that students enrolled in ODL prog./courses and receiving certificates are indeed those completing coursework			

Course Development, Instructional Design and Student Support

D) Guidelines regarding minimum standards are used for course development, design & delivery of instruction

E) Instructional materials, course outlines and learning outcomes are reviewed periodically to ensure they meet programme standards

F) Courses are designed so that students develop requisite skills/knowledge to satisfy learning objectives

G) Assessments measure learning objectives and are conducive to an ODL environment

H) Tutors should be involved in the development of Prog. curriculum

I) Learning objectives describe outcomes which are measurable

- J) Students receive or have access to prog. /course information (adm. Requirements, tuition, fees books and supplies, technical requirements) prior to admission and registration**

Teaching and Learning

- K) Student-student interaction and tutor-student interaction are important and are facilitated through a variety of ways**
L) Feedback of student assignment is constructive and timely
M) Technology is used to achieve learning outcomes in delivering course content
N) Students learn appropriate methods for effective research
O) Expectations for student attendance, assignment completion, grade policy and tutors response are clearly outlined in Prog. Syllabus.
P) Programme addresses the needs of students with disabilities via alternative instructional strategies

Technology, Evaluation and Assessment

- Q) Expected learning outcomes at the prog./course levels are reviewed periodically to ensure clarity utility and appropriateness**

R) Prog./course retention is assessed
S) Prog./course evaluations are done regularly
T) Prog./course evaluations collect student feedback on quality of content and effectiveness of instruction
U) Tutors, staff and students are supported in the development and use of new technologies and skills

Determinants of Quality Assurance

7.Do you agree/disagree that quality assurance in ODL is determined by the following:

Agree Disagree Do not know

- A) Qualifications of teaching staff**
B) Shortage of staff
C) Availability of physical resources (classrooms, offices, teaching supplies, etc)
D) Availability of financial resources

- E) Level of salaries for staff (permanent/part-time)
- F) Communication skills of staff
- G) Level and number of accredited programmes/courses
- H) Record-keeping
- I) Type of teaching/learning technology used
- Other(s) (Kindly state)

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - AGENCIES

**University of Guyana
Institute of Distance and Continuing Education**

This Questionnaire is being used to gather data for a research study on Quality Assurance at the IDCE. We shall be grateful for your agency's responses to the under mentioned questions. Please be assured that the answers provided will only be used for the purposes of this study.

**1. How satisfied are you with the type of prog./courses offered by the IDCE?
a) Not satisfied b) satisfied c) dissatisfied**

**2. How satisfied are you with the level of prog./courses offered by the IDCE?
a) Not satisfied b) satisfied c) dissatisfied**

3. Do you think IDCE should diversify/change its programme offerings?

a) yes a) no

Give reasons for your answer

4. Are you satisfied with the way in which IDCE markets its programme?

a) yes b) no

If your answer is no, what changes would you recommend?

.....

5. Do you think IDCE is providing a useful service for the NGO's and corporate sectors?

a) yes b) no

Comments

.....

6. What should IDCE do to improve its overall image as an Open and Distance Learner Provider in Guyana?

.....

7. Do you have any other comments?

.....