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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE TO PART-TIME STUDENTS IN ACCRA, GHANA:
IMPLICATIONS FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Students at every stage of their learning need props to help them achieve their learning goals. Part-time students are no exception. Support services are essential for part-time adult students since they often have to combine their learning with work, maintenance of a home and social activities. This study looks at support services available to students at the family, work and institutional levels; likewise peer support, financial support and support from friends. Using descriptive statistics and narrative analytical methods, the study found that there was inadequate support for part-time students at the family, employment and institutional levels. Generally, part-time students are self directed learners but need a few props to enhance learning. Findings of this study also reveal implications for distance learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Adult learning is enhanced when there is a rich variety of resources to support and facilitate teaching and learning. Support services available to adult learners comprise both human and material resources (Garrison, 1989). A largely overlooked area, student support represents one of the major motivating factors for high enrolment and retention rates of students (Healy and Martin 1996). Brookfield (1986) has rightly noted that adult learners need a comfortable supportive environment to enable them to learn effectively. Likewise, Sandeen (1988) notes that student support comes in various forms according to the orientation of a student's workplace or institution of learning. He opines that the support available in an institution basically reflects the goals and purposes of that institution. One area of concern to most part-time learners is inadequate support from employers. Conrad (1993) corroborates this by asserting that apart from teacher training, there is little evidence to show that other disciplines are paying particular attention to the special needs of the adult learner. Similarly, Thompson and Devlin (1992:60) argue that, "external adult students have special needs that cannot be accommodated by simple extrapolation of administrative and academic procedures which were designed largely to serve a younger full-time audience". This paper examines the different support services available to part-time learners in Accra in relation to support from family, employers, institutions of study, friends and peers. Although respondents were adult students in face-to-face settings, the findings do have implications for distance education.

Learning Resources

According to Knox (1977), the availability, appropriateness and effectiveness of learning resources as well as learners' interest in what they learn, their age, level of education and applicability of what is learnt, to some extent, determine how effective adult learning will be. He notes that effective learning resources help adults:

- i. become more interested in the topic;
- ii. understand major aspects of the topics around which details can be organized;
- iii. relate new information to current understanding;
- iv. persist in the learning activity;
- v. register information so that it is retained as long as needed;
- vi. obtain sufficient practice and reinforcement;
- vii. minimize interference;
- viii. proceed at an optimum pace;
- ix. make the transfer of information learned to the situations to which it is likely to be applied;
- x. maintain a balance between intentional and incidental learning (Knox,1977: 441).

Student support services may range from institutional support to family support. Institutional support is one vital area of support which facilitates students' learning. Talking about administrative support, Conrad (1993) has stated that there is evidence to support the view that when students complete admissions and registration proceedings easily, it promotes recruitment and retention. Again, as part-time learners have work and other socio-economic issues as well as limited time

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to contend with, location of classes and course schedules affect enrolment. It is therefore important to keep a flexible lecture schedule, taking into consideration the part-time student's working hours (Sandeen, 1988). Healy and Martin (1996) reiterate the fact that adult learners usually need more support than young ones by virtue of their special needs as adults. This view is buttressed by Sandeen's observation that some administrators of student services have realized the essence of developing special programmes for adult part-time students to facilitate learning. This is especially so in schools where the majority of students are young and study on a full-time basis.

Socialization and Interaction

On the issue of the socialization of part-time students in institutions of higher learning, Conrad (1993) suggests that such institutions should recognize and support curricular activities that enhance the socio-cultural integration of the part-time adult learner. She goes on to say that research indicates a correlation between social and cultural support and students' retention rates as well as academic achievements. Chuma (1991), as cited in Healy and Martin (1996), has observed that part-time students in the adult learning situation need active interaction with their instructors, employers and others and support from counselors and tutors.

Counseling Services

Counseling serves as an essential support for part-time learners even though it is generally agreed that counseling, as a support service, is not given the due recognition and funding that it deserves (Healy and Martin 1996). Counseling has been defined by Holmberg (1995) as the "systematic exploration of self and/or environment by a client with the aid of a counselor to clarify self-understanding and/or environmental alternatives so that behaviour modifications or decisions are made on the basis of greater cognitive and affective understanding" (p. 128). For Potter (1996:575), the term "counseling is a specific activity within a framework which also includes informing, advising, assessing, enabling, advocating and feeding back". According to Potter (1996), counseling as a support service helps minimize or block situational, institutional, informational and dispositional obstacles to learning. Part-time learners may need counseling on learning opportunities, career choices, learning skills, and how to get over problems encountered earlier on during their initial education. They might also need assistance in the development of coping skills to enable them to study effectively even as they work, study and go about their family and other social duties. Again, counseling should be a continuous process not limited to only when students enter their institutions of learning (Potter, 1996; Holmberg, 1995). Haplin (1989) also maintains that student advisory service is essential for part-time students. This is because, apart from aiding in recruitment and retention purposes, it creates an avenue for regular, recurring and meaningful contact between students, lecturers and staff, thus creating integration among the different parties. Despite this, he notes in his study that student's advisory services are usually the preserve of full-time study. There is therefore the need to integrate them into part-time study. Healy and Martin (1996) further recognize that counseling helps students on two levels. The first is to assimilate and the second is to accommodate. The former involves the engagement of learners in new experiences and

challenges involved in part-time study while the latter involves helping students to develop or change their perspectives and behaviours after they have processed new experiences. This further implies that while the former may not need a professional counselor, the second function will. Some countries provide some levels of counseling services. In the United Kingdom for example, the Open University provides a system whereby tutors counsel students who appear to be in difficulty such as those who do not submit assignments on time (Holmberg, 1995). A critical example of this could be in Ghana where counseling could be given to older part-time students and perpetual latecomers. In Germany, however, counselors establish initial contact with students and thereafter expect students to contact them when necessary. This Holmberg (1995) believes is the cause of the high incidence of dropout rates in German distance education institutions. A similar trend seems to exist among part-time students in Ghana. This does not augur well for their learning. In Malaysia, the Off-Campus Centre of Universiti Sains Malaysia offers a twenty-four hour 'hot line' counseling service via a telephone recording service all year round (Dhanarajan, 1992), which appears to be a very ideal situation.

Library Support

Another main source of student support is the library. Libraries act as an important resource in teaching and learning. They supplement and support formal education by stimulating the imagination of learners (John 1990). Libraries also promote independent and self-directed learning (Woolls, 1996 and Allred, 1989). The main aim of providing library facilities is to facilitate learning. Thus, a well-stocked library, be it public or institutional with study facilities and flexible times of operations, meets the information needs of learners (Woolls 1996). It is on record that Anglophone West African countries, which expanded formal education without a corresponding expansion of library facilities, sacrificed quality education in the process (John, 1990). Advancement in technology has brought in its wake information literacy. Thus, it is no longer enough to merely know how to read and write, but also to follow new trends and become information literate. Information literacy implies one's ability to have the requisite skills to be able to meet the information age demands, acquire and use knowledge and be able to get relevant information for a given assignment. In order to be abreast of the times and satisfy students' needs, today's library is equipped with electronic information technologies and upgraded into learning resource centres to meet new demands.

Government and State Support

Governments also have a major role to play in providing support services to part-time learners in order to promote efficiency at the workplace. Government carries out this social responsibility through partnerships with stakeholders to ensure that things are properly coordinated and resources are well utilized (Hobart, 1997). Government also offers support when it encourages tripartite collaborations among workers, employers and government (Ziderman, 1996). Also, Healy and Martin (1996) submit that government must support paid study leave, child-care and offer scholarships. In the area of financial support, Lowe (1982) argues that in as much as government is expected to help, its budget also has to meet other demands so there is need to look beyond what government can provide.

Similarly, Hobart (1997) argues that even though it is government's duty to support adult learners financially in order to unearth their potentials, develop and maintain competencies that can be brought to bear on their work, the private sector also needs to do its part. He has also observed that world-wide, governments play an active part in supporting education for the workforce by setting up commissions to make recommendations backed by law. He is of the view that there is need for effective co-ordination among sector ministries which have roles to play in the education of workers as well as social partners like unions and employers. Another source of government support for adult learners is the establishment of study centres for those who are unable to fit into the traditional classroom (Healy and Martin, 1996). Learning centres are available to independent learners so they can access information and other learning aids outside schools (Lowe, 1982). They are usually meant to support distance learning activities. Here learners are able to meet their tutors for face-to-face interactions, counseling, and also for discussions among fellow students. Study centres also serve as laboratories (Healy and Martin, 1996; Garrison, 1989). Part-time learners can also take advantage of the rich endowments of learning centres if available to enhance learning. This is especially so with those who live far away from locations with organized learning activities.

Work Place and Employer Support

Employer support is also essential in the promotion of part-time study. Employer support usually comes in the form of paid study leave or a few hours off duty or day releases. The convention and recommendations on paid study leave, 1974, which was adopted by the International Labour Organization defines paid educational study leave as "leave granted to a worker for educational purposes for a specific period during working hours, with adequate financial entitlements" (Schütze, 1996:303). According to him, paid study leave held sway in the 1970s. However, though 23 countries had ratified the convention, different countries define paid study leave differently in terms of jobs which qualify for it and automatic financial support. Still, in some countries, this is dealt with by unions in their collective bargaining. Healy and Martin (1996) are also of the view that employers can pay initial cost of students' education and give them paid time off to study.

Clark, Morgan-Klein et al (1997) have stated that most employers who support part-time study support particular programmes to upgrade skills and sustain loyalty. This trend, according to them is fast becoming the norm. However, part-time students still bear the brunt of having to sacrifice the greater part of their time and money to study part-time. Healy and Martin (1996) also endorse private sector participation in financing adult learning and have cited examples from the United Kingdom and the United States of America where such a system exists. However, such support is meant for job related programmes. But Ziderman (1996) has rightly observed that in their bid to satisfy medium term goals, employers might either be reluctant or lack vision in terms of taking into consideration long-term national needs and will therefore not expose their employees to "a broad skilled and technical labour base that is able to meet the needs of a rapidly changing industrial organization and technology as well as to

engineer this process of change" (p. 234). Titmus (1989) however, notes that the debate as to whether workers should be trained in specific jobs in order to perform specific functions or whether their education should be broad-based to enable them to apply it as a situation demands still goes on.

Cooperative Learning

Support systems may also be in the form of co-operatives like study circles and group learning. A study circle comprises a group of between five and 20 friends or associates who come together to study a common, planned and predetermined subject area over a long period of time and on a regular basis (Uddman, 1989; Byström, 1996; Healy and Martin, 1996). In Sweden, a study circle qualifies for grant if one out of ten national associations approve its leader and study plans (Healy and Martin, 1996; Uddman, 1989). Study circles usually meet twice a week at an average of three hours per meeting. Such meetings could take place in individual homes. Study circles originated from the Nordic countries in the second half of the nineteenth century when these countries saw the need to increase knowledge, promote radical social transformation and to establish social and cultural networks. At the time, they had inadequate study materials and did not have any teachers. What they learnt was meant to satisfy their needs. And to this end, they brought their "knowledge, experiences and perceived learning needs" to bear on the subject under discussion. The study circle presented a forum for open discussions and arguments. Here, people learned to tolerate one another, share responsibilities and accept defeat (Byström, 1996:664). Study circles are also organized at university level with about 4,000 of them in Sweden (Healy and Martin, 1996). Today, they are becoming popular in the United States of America and Canada (Byström, 1996). Meanwhile, it has gained roots in Germany, Japan and to some extent in Tanzania (Healy and Martin, 1996; Byström, 1996). Today's part-time learners need opportunities offered by study circles as they more or less often study in isolation and do not have enough time to discuss issues nor socialize due to the competing demands on their time. A study conducted by Blaxter (1994) revealed that family background and parental support in terms of financial aid, moral support and helping with child care and house work influence the participation of part-time learners in educational activities. Other ways of providing support for all categories of part-time learners include summer schools, tutorials and residential weekends (COL and IEC, 1997).

From what has been seen in this review of the literature, it is obvious that part-time learners can benefit from support services if they are readily available. Again, Healy and Martin (1996:587) have rightly observed that "the more integrated the support systems, both horizontally and vertically, the higher the likelihood of success". One cannot also help but agree with the view expressed by Clark et al (1997:1) to the effect that: "if part-time higher education is to take root across the system, it will require a combination of a clear policy of support on the part of government; a change in the system of student finance and sustained institutional commitment". The invaluable role part-time study plays in national development requires the necessary structures to be put in place to make the system more effective.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data were collected from adult part-time students in four institutions in Accra. These were Accra Workers' College where students were pursuing "academic" courses leading to the award of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science (Administration) degrees from University of Ghana; SAS Accountancy Centre, Centre for Business Studies, and the Certified Chartered Accountants Students Society in Ghana whose students were pursuing professional courses. In all, a population of 612, comprising 419 from Accra Workers' College, 103 from SAS Accountancy Centre, 40 from the Centre for Business Studies and 50 from the Chartered Accountants Students Society in Ghana was surveyed. A total of 240 questionnaires were sent to respondents and 161 (representing a response rate of 67%) were returned. Four uncompleted questionnaires were rejected. The survey research design using the questionnaire was adopted to solicit responses from the students. The survey dealt with support services available to students. All the students were studying part-time at the centres selected.

FINDINGS

The study provided tentative results that relate to support services available to the students and the challenges inherent in the provision of these services. These are summarized in the following details.

Support Services Available to Students

Part-time learning is enhanced when there are a rich variety of resources to support and facilitate teaching and learning. These support services comprise both human and material resources (Garrison, 1989). The support services available to the students are presented in Table 1. Table 1 suggests that the majority of students (62.7%) got encouragement from their families. This was made up of 66.3% of students taking professional courses and 59.3% pursuing degree courses. However, contributing to pay fees was the least mentioned followed by the provision of child care.

Table 1. Family Support Services Available to Students

Issues	Professional		Academic		Both	
	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %
Contribute to the payment of my fees	16.3	83.8	18.5	81.5	17.4	82.6
Prompt me to study	32.5	67.5	32.1	67.9	32.3	67.7
Share house duties with me	32.5	67.5	27.2	72.8	29.8	70.2
Encourage me to learn	66.3	33.8	59.3	40.7	62.7	37.3
Provide child care	22.5	77.5	23.5	76.5	23.0	77.0

Table 2. Workplace and Employer Support Services Available to Students

Issues	Professional		Academic		Both	
	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %
My boss allows me to leave early	33.8	66.3	55.6	44.4	44.7	55.3
My employers have granted me paid study leave	7.5	92.5	14.8	85.2	11.2	88.8
Colleagues cover up for me	-	-	40.7	59.3	27.3	72.7

Table 3. Institutional Support Services

Services	Professional		Academic		Both	
	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %
The school allows me to pay fees by installment	38.8	61.3	2.5	97.5	20.5	79.5
The school helps me get relevant reading materials	31.3	68.8	17.3	82.7	24.2	75.8
The school allows me to use premises for my private study	17.5	82.5	45.7	54.3	31.7	68.3
My lecturers and school authorities encourage me to learn	52.5	47.5	50.6	49.4	51.6	48.4
My lecturers make time for me outside normal teaching hours	8.8	91.3	6.2	93.8	7.5	92.5

Employer Support Services

Employer support is essential in the promotion of part-time study. This usually comes in the form of day releases, paid study leave and some hours off duty. The study revealed that employer support available to part-time students vary as in Table 2. Data from Table 2 show that 88.8% of part-time learners were not granted paid study leave. This comprised 92.5% of students taking professional courses and 85.2% offering academic courses. Data from this table indicate that some part-time students (55.3%) were not allowed to leave their offices early by their bosses. The majority of these students (66.3%) were enrolled in professional courses. At the workplace colleagues sometimes cover up for their friends who leave their offices to study. This is so because it is against the labour law to absent oneself or leave the premises of the employment early without permission.

Institutional Support Services

Institutional support is a very important area, which if available, facilitates students' learning. The type of institutional support available to students are shown in Table 3. Table 3 shows that most part-time students (92.5%), made up of 91.3% and 93.8% of students enrolled in professional and academic courses respectively, indicated a non-existence of lecturer support in helping students after classes. This was followed by 79.5% of students who were not allowed to pay their fees by installment. In fact, this mostly affected those enrolled in degree courses (97.5%). A little over three-quarters (75.8%) of part-time students were not assisted by their school Authorities to get relevant reading materials. This was significant especially for students offering academic courses (82.7%). Again, most part-time students (68.3%) were not allowed to use the school premises for their study. Besides, the students from the study received very little relief in terms of paying their fees. However, a little over half of part-time students (51.6%), made up of 52.5% and 50.6% of students enrolled in professional and academic courses respectively, were encouraged to learn by their lecturers and college authorities.

Counseling Before Course Commencement

Counseling is essential in an individual's life especially when taking major decisions like embarking on a course.

Table 4. Counseling Before Beginning of Course

Type of Student	Yes (%)	No (%)
Academics	27.2	72.8
Professionals	46.3	53.7
Mean	36.75	63.25

According to table 4, 36.8% of students had some counseling before their courses. It is interesting to note that close to half, that is, 46.3% of students enrolled in professional courses had access to counseling services before they decided to embark on their respective careers as against only 27.2% of students offering academic courses as in Table 4.

Counseling Received Since Course Started

Counseling services at the institutional level helps to minimize situational, institutional, informational and dispositional problems (Potter, 1996). Ideally, counseling should be a continuous process not limited to only when students entered their institutions of learning (Potter, 1996; Holmberg, 1995). But was that the situation on the ground? The answer is revealed in Table 4.

Table 4. Counseling Received Since Course Started

Type of counseling	Professional		Academic		Both	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
None	49	61.3	64	79.0	113	70.2
To set goals	3	3.8	1	1.2	4	2.5
Time management	-	-	1	1.2	1	0.6
Study skills	3	3.8	-	-	3	1.9
Exam writing strategies	2	2.5	-	-	2	1.2
Benefits of the course	4	5.0	3	3.7	7	4.3
Encouragement						
Total	80	100	81	100	161	100

From Table 4, it is obvious that most part-time students (70.2%) did not receive any counseling during their stay in school. Also, 61.3% of students offering professional courses; and 79.0% pursuing academic courses had had no counseling since their courses commenced. Of the 29.8% left, 19.3% were encouraged to learn. A breakdown shows 23.8% of them in the professions and 14.8% enrolled in degree courses. Time management was the least cited.

Funding of Part-time Study

Financial support is essential in part-time study. The type of funding support available to students is explained in Table 5.

Table 5. Funding of Part-time Study

Type of funding	Professional		Academic		Both	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Salary	74	92	55	67.9	129	80.1
SSNIT loan	-	-	22	27.2	22	13.7
Scholarship	1	1.3	1	1.2	2	1.2
Paid study leave	-	-	3	3.7	3	1.9
Others	5	6.4	-	-	5	3.1
Total	80	100	81	100	161	100

Data in Table 5 indicate that the majority (80.1%) of part-time students comprising (92.0%) of students enrolled in

professional courses and 67.9% of those offering academic courses depended on their salaries as a source of funding. A few (1.2%) were on scholarship. This signifies that most part-time students paid from their incomes whether they received high salaries or not.

Peer/Student Support Services

Peer support in the form of discussion groups benefits part-time learners in that it facilitates individual learning. Table 6 has the results of various forms of peer support that were available to part-time learners.

Table 6. Peer/Student Support Services

Services	Professional		Academic		Both	
	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %
Discussions	47.5	52.5	53.1	46.9	50.3	49.7
Exchange of study materials	53.8	46.3	60.5	39.5	57.1	42.9
Encouragement	58.8	41.3	55.6	44.4	57.1	42.9
They help me understand lectures that I miss or do not understand	40.0	60.0	44.4	55.6	42.2	57.8
They give me their notes to copy when I miss lectures	70.0	30.0	77.8	22.2	73.9	26.1

In Table 6, the majority of students (70.0%) offering professional courses and 77.8% of those enrolled in academic courses claimed they received lecture notes from their fellow students when they missed lectures. The least support these students got from their fellow students was helping them understand lectures they either missed or did not understand.

Student Support Services — Friends

Support from friends can go a long way to boost the morale of part-time students. The type of support students received from friends is displayed in Table 7.

Table 7. Student Support Services — Friends

Issues	Professional		Academic		Both	
	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %
Encouragement	67.5	32.5	72.8	27.2	70.2	29.8
Financial support	11.3	88.8	12.3	87.7	11.8	88.2
Study materials	53.8	46.3	44.4	55.6	49.1	50.9
No interruptions during studies	26.3	73.8	28.4	71.6	27.3	72.7

The majority (70.2%) of part-time students constituting 67.5% offering professional courses as against 72.8% pursuing degree courses were encouraged by their friends to study. However, very few had friends who could support them financially.

DISCUSSIONS

Support for part-time study at the family level was mainly in the form of encouragement. Encouragement alone is insufficient. When learners are not helped with household chores and child support they will be too tired to learn. Blaxter confirms this with her observation that helping with child care and housework among others influences the participation of part-time learners in educational activities. The same can be said for distance learners who also have to grapple with work,

study and family commitments. At the employment level, employers were reluctant to grant paid study leave and allow their employees to leave the workplace early for school — particularly students pursuing professional courses. Also, colleagues felt reluctant to cover up for friends who left the office to study most probably because they felt they could be found out and sanctioned. These could impact positively on productivity in the workplace but affect human resource development. Bosses who allowed their employees to leave their offices early as was the case of some part-time students taking academic courses could cause some beneficiaries to sometimes cover up their (bosses) wrong-doings which would affect organizational behaviour. Also, disallowing workers to use their annual leave to study may affect productivity at work. In some instances victimization occurs when the boss feels that by pursuing further studies they may be at par with them or overtake them in the organization. This invariably affects distance learners who need such times to write the end of semester examinations. Many establishments support full-time study. Yet part-time students who contribute towards organizational development even while in college or tertiary institutions are not supported. It is recommended that organizations take another look at the situation and give part-time students the necessary support. For example:

1. Employers can collaborate with the private sector to support part-time study
2. Employees should be given more hours off in lieu of study leave.
 - Employers should be educated on part-time study to enable them (employers) to encourage their staff to study part-time.
 - Generally, institutional support was very low as regards access to lecturers, textbooks and payment of fees. The majority of part-time students could not get in touch with lecturers after classes for discussions. This was especially true for students taking academic courses. The problem could be that lecturers had to teach other classes or that they were too tired when classes ended. For distance learning tutors must at least spend a few hours with few students on-line or after tutorials.

However, part-time students' inability to meet their lecturers after lectures can be likened to the situation of distance learners who only meet their tutors for face-to-face interactions at specified periods. So in the absence of tutorials or students' inability to meet their lecturers for discussions after lectures, distance learning programmes must make room for enough assignments or activities. In addition, the learning situation must be interactive during face-to-face meetings. Also, some of the institutions could not help most part-time students obtain relevant textbooks. This confirms the observation made by Onumah (1997) to the effect that inadequate textbooks was a major institutional problem. This could impact negatively on learning. So for part-time learners learning through distance education to be effective, the following are recommended.

- Institutions can contact authors, or publishers to supply textbooks directly to students to reduce cost. Also students could be asked to buy directly from publishers after initial contact by the institutions in order to supplement course materials.
- Tutors should also give students current references since lack of appropriate up-to-date textbooks does not enrich the learning experience. Besides, it does not help students

update their information base.

- The lack of financial relief for part-time students offering academic courses implies that those who were unable to pay fully would have to lose the opportunity of enrolling into tertiary institutions. Students offering professional courses, however, were given some respite. At least more than a third paid their fees by installment so that as workers combining work with study, they could plan to support their families.
- Taking into consideration the fact that part-time students were mostly full-time workers, who earned relatively low incomes, especially those pursuing academic courses, providers of distance education should charge fees taking salary levels into consideration. However, the fees charged should be such that the programme would be able to sustain itself
- It should also be possible for students to pay fees by installment.

Another area of concern was the difficulty students, especially those pursuing professional courses, faced when they wanted to have their private studies on their school premises.

- Since distance learners will be widely scattered, there is the need for providers to collaborate with government and other appropriate institutions to provide support for learners. For example, it is important for providers to identify facilities which can provide support at the local level. The Institute of Continuing and Distance Education offices in the regions, Teacher Training Colleges and other tertiary education institutions throughout the country can provide classrooms for distance learners for their face-to-face interactions and also for individuals to study on their own or in groups during the week-ends.
- Providers can also collaborate with the postal service where possible to hand deliver course materials to identified institutions where students could go for them and also submit assignments. In addition, providers could coordinate with the State Transport Corporation and the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) to convey course materials from regional centres to district and community centres. Lecturers and school authorities were however interested in the students' well being as exemplified by the encouragement given to many students to learn. It is significant that over half of students received encouragement from their lecturers and school authorities to learn. Encouraging students to learn points to the fact that lecturers have students' success at heart. Counseling as a support service helps minimize or block situational, institutional and dispositional obstacles to learning (Potter 1996). Counseling was however not popular among part-time students particularly those enrolled in academic courses. This could create problems for part-time learners as they would not know where to turn to for solutions to their problems before and during the course. This is also inconsistent with the views of Potter (1996) and Holmberg (1995) who advocate counseling before and during the course to prepare students for their courses and solve problems as they arise as the course progresses. And even after completing their courses, students can be counseled on how to plan for further studies (Croft, 1991). Recognizing the fact that part-time students were seldom counseled before and during their courses, the establishment of counseling services in distance learning

institutions becomes paramount as it will help give counseling services to students when the need arises. Further, counseling services could be extended to distance students at their first face-to-face meeting before their courses begin and also as their courses progress. Pre-entry counseling could cater for students' information needs on entry qualifications, cost of programmes, duration of programmes and qualifications to be obtained after completion. In the course of the academic year, counseling could be used to solve students' problems related to learning. Students can also be counseled after they have completed their courses.

The study found that students enjoyed a lot of peer support. Most students who missed lectures managed to get notes from fellow students to copy. This could be seen as help to the absentee student but it could also encourage absenteeism. Students who were absent from class may also miss explanations from lecturers and instructions on a given assignment. As a result, it could lead to lower learning making many of them to become surface learners in the process. Besides, the donor's time to learn from his/her notes would be limited and this could affect learning output. This implies that libraries should not only be stocked with print materials but also with machine-readable records, data-base searching tools and relevant CD-ROMs. The library as a resource centre will thus, among other things, improve students' learning by helping faculty review research results and choose the best instructional methods and the most effective materials with which to teach (Woolls, 1996). In as much as library services might not be able to meet all needs of part-time students, attempts should be made to make them meet their basic needs. The results indicate that part-time students had friends who meant well but probably due to financial constraints these friends faced there was little support in that area.

Conclusion

Support services, particularly at the institutional level presented a lot of limitations. These include inadequate reading materials for research and inadequate counseling. Others were the inability of students to have discussions with lecturers after classes, students' inability to pay fees by installment, and their inability to have their private studies on the school premises. All these impacted negatively on students' learning. Current economic situations and requirements in the country's universities, however, do not favour workers entering full-time study. It is therefore hoped that government and policy makers would establish policies and programmes that will help promote part-time study through distance learning in Ghana. Part-time study through the distance has a bright future but there is need to bridge the gap between learners' needs and their goals through the provision of appropriate and adequate support services especially at institutional and governmental levels. In all these, students studying at a distance tend to be more vulnerable and need the necessary props to reduce attrition rate. This study by no means ever exhausts the subject of support services for part-time students. Further research could be done on areas like library needs of part-time learners.

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