Utilization of Ideas Discovered in Academic Conference as a Key to Good Governance in Open and Distance Education in Nigeria

Igbafe Eucharia C. (Mrs.),
Faculty of Education,
Dept. of Early Childhood Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

Open and distance education has become a veritable tool for provision of quality education and equity in educational opportunities aimed at meeting the needs of its participants. The instructors of open and distance education ensures that success is achieved through shared responsibility and close participation. Recognition of the value of open and distance education as a key growth driver for socio-economic development has increased the need for good governance. Addressing governance is critical to achieving the millennium Development Goals. It is fundamental to all poverty reduction efforts so that it can yield a powerful development dividend, enhance people's rights - the right to security, to a decent life, to basic services such as education, health and clean water, the right to vote, to organize and freely express opinions, and the right to be treated with respect, to seek redress and to due process in law (Irish Aid, 2010). Thousand of conferences are organized each day all over the world to build capacity for good governance. Millions of academic conferences are organized each year to identify emerging issues that may hinder good governance, but national organizations often fail to utilize the ideas discovered in these Academic conferences. This has continued to be counterproductive in promoting sustainable development in programmes, especially in Open and Distance education where its mode and learners are unique. After analysis of data collected through questionnaire and in-depth interview from three tertiary institutions, the result indicate that little attention is paid to these ideas discovered and it is hardly utilized. The author therefore argued that utilization of ideas discovered and how it is being implemented or utilized by the society (0keen, 1998) is a key to good governance in open and distance education.

***Key Words:** Open Learning, Distance Education, Academic Conference, Governance, Socio-Economic and Development.*

Introduction

For several decades, there has been an increasing use of conferences to bring academicians and intellectuals in a field to discourse theory, concepts, definitions, prepositions, and observations of facts organized in such a way as to describe the interrelationships among variables for the purpose of explaining and predicting the outcome of such relationships (Ndagi, 1999). Conferences are usually organized either by a scientific society or by a group of researchers with a common interest. Larger meetings may be handled on behalf of the scientific society by professional Conferences organizers (Aronowitz, 2010). Conferences are usually filled with various presentations. They tend to be short and concise, with time span of about 10 to 30minutes; they are usually followed by a discussion. The work may be bundled in written form as academic paper and published as conference proceedings. Usually a conference will include keynotes speakers (often, scholar of some standing, but sometimes individuals from outside academia) (4). Conferences may or may not always be academics.

Academic conferences are for researches to present and discuss their work together, it provides an important channel for exchange of information between researchers (web definitions, 2010). Academic conferences fall into three categories: the themed conference, small conferences organized around a particular topic; the general conference, a conference with a wider focus, with sessions

on a wide variety of topics. These conferences are often organized by regional, national, or international learned societies and held annually or on some other regular basis. The theme and sub-theme may be organized around identified challenges to find solutions or to enable sharing the success stories of other countries practices that worked. In academic conferences, position papers and research findings from scientific method of inquiry involving a systematic and intensive process of verifying knowledge that will help to achieve educational goal are presented. The findings of many research helps mankind to understanding the universe, improve practice and promote policy (Creswell, 2012).

Academic conferences are therefore for researchers whose paper presentations are to discourse the both (qualitative and quantitative) systematic and intensive process utilized in carrying out their researches (Ehiametalor & Nwadiani, 2002), directed toward discovery and development of an organized body of knowledge (Bryman, 2012) and conditions under which a phenomenon can or cannot exist or occur (Ehiametalor & Nwadiani, 2002). Academic conferences also present "activities of solving problems which leads to new knowledge using methods of inquiry which are currently accepted as adequate by scholars in the field (Hemstadters, 1970) solving these problems may result to definitive control of the events causing the problems (Johnson, 1997). It may therefore be right to postulate that academic conferences exposes participants to various ideas that can help in improving teaching-learning processes, instructional material and its proper administration.

Consequently, academic conference helps in the generation of solutions to educational problem and research in education enables discovery of generalizations relating to the various aspects of education. These generalizations enable us to make decisions on what to do, how it should be done and what to avoid in the process… (Ehiametalor & Nwandiani, 2002). Such tested knowledge further contributes to solving the problems of what should be done in education (Ehiametalor

& Nwandiani, 2002). Such was the outcome of the World conference on education held in 1990 in Jometien, Thailand, where the movement called Education For All (EFA) was launched. In 1993, a group of nine high population countries, namely Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Pakistan gathered in New Delhi, India, under the sponsorship of UNESCO, UNICEF and United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA). These nine countries accounted for a large percentage of the population of the world, more than 70% of the World's illiterates and more than 50% of its out-of-school children. Leaders of these countries reaffirmed their commitment to pursuing the goals set in 1990 by the World conference on Education. Through this way, conferences not only expose new problems but also generate tested knowledge and new knowledge that is vital for human existence and development (Kerlinger, 1966). In fact, it sheds light to challenges limiting educational development.

It is also very essential for ensuring a meaningful, analysis of local needs and assets, capturing local knowledge, gathering and analyzing lessons learned by other countries, understanding the complex interplay of local and international factors pinning a society in poverty and generating knowledge and solutions tailored to a country's reality (UPCD, 2007). So, the research findings enables nations to adapt modify and domesticate truth and insights for local use. These have made it possible for most countries to tap the ideas and improve their expertise, build capacity to generate and adapt knowledge to development and education challenges. Universities worldwide are key agents in building strong economics and societies through knowledge and expertise derived from academic research (Morris, 2007). Most governments have recognized that a highly educated workforce and investments in research helps in generating innovative ideas for economic growth, implying that research in higher education is essential for building vibrant economics and good governance in developing countries (Morris, 2007). Recognition of the value of education in promoting literacy and reducing

poverty has led to the development of open and distance education and developing governance capacity, all helps build the foundation for prosperity.

Like conventional school, open and distance education offer skills and knowledge to develop all sectors of society and manage development effectively (UPCD, 2007). It is the training ground for future political and business leaders, policy makers and professional, and continuing professional development. It fosters the intellectual leadership and good governance skills necessary to drive development (UPCD, 2007). Through this mode, there has been an increase in socio-economic and cultural power of people who can work either part-time or full-time and still attend school. Open and distance learning has transformed the use of technology (from e-learning to m-learning and gradually to u-learning), thereby increasing the socio-economic assess of its learners. Open and distance education in many countries have recorded massive results and this has led to its diversification to many other areas, thereby creating more need for struggle to meet up with competitive environment. But, to some institutions progress is hampered by lack of good governance to coordinate the constant changes in the world.

For a society to be able to survive and prosper, it must be able to adapt to continuing changes in its environment. The global environment is changing dramatically; yet, the societal ability to adapt to societal changes is varies from one to another. In societies where there is effective government (governments that govern) within a democratic system, the government is better equipped in adapting to new situations. However, others may be less prepared. Basically, what is required by societies at present time is: effective government (good governance), meaningful public participation (democratic system) and, adherence to sustainable development principles (World Bank and UNDP, 2002). Some societies have the capability and means to assist others because of their experience, working knowledge, as well as available resources. Therefore, a proactive effort to achieve such conditions should become prime vehicle for global cooperation (World Bank and UNDP, 2002). As developed countries move towards increased trade liberalization and knowledge-based economies, developing countries must be ready with their own advocates in international trade liberalization. To develop such knowledge-based economies has made open and distance education an important channel through which nations can achieve their objectives.

The success of open and distance education has been the concern of many organization, for several decades now, especially those that perceive education as a key to achieving socio-economic development in a sustainable way. COL and its international partners (COL's partners include other Commonwealth agencies, members of the UN System (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNDP and the World Bank), national and regional distance education associations and industry), are helping in advancing Open and Distance Learning into the mainstream of education and training throughout the Commonwealth. COL is helping developing nations increase their capacity to meet growing demand for access to quality education and training; in the learning community, COL has heightened awareness to, and increased acceptance of, alternative methods of educational delivery and ICT use. COL has worked to optimize the efficient transfer of information, ideas, innovations and resources supporting Open and Distance Learning (COL, 2008). Since COL began operations in 1989, it has: helped introduce, or enhance, hundreds of teaching/training programmes in more than 40 countries; influenced the conception and development of open schools and universities; conducted training, seminars and studies on specific educational needs; established an extensive network of education and technology specialists around the world; and facilitated systemic changes in the delivery of education and influenced government policy (COL, 2008). COL is also supporting and funding conferences, seminars, and workshops, of which Nigeria as a nation has benefited a lot from COL's initiatives and good governance.

Despite all these, according to official records, Nigeria remains the only E-9 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) facing serious challenges of turning around the illiteracy rate among its youths and adults by the 2050 timeline set to achieve education for all (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The link between literacy rate and the level of economic development in any society has long been established. While societies with high literacy rate are likely to boast of developed economies, countries with poor literacy rate as found in Sub Saharan Africa are likely to be among the least developed economies. Therefore, the need to fast track economic development appears to be behind efforts made to raise the literacy rate in the country. According to experts, once illiteracy is successfully eradicated, other development challenges including poverty, disease and ignorance would be easily addressed (Udonquak, 2010). Realising that it is likely to be a difficult task to achieve 100 percent enrolment in the formal education sector and at the same time tackling the challenge of making over 70 million adult illiterates to be literate.

In the search for solution, Rufai, the minister for education in Nigeria, asserts "If we plan to get our people out of poverty, to join the global information super highway and hope to be counted among countries with developed systems in science and technology and a force to be reckoned with in the world's socio economic and political arena, we must empower our people through acquisition of literacy and numeracy" (Abubakar, 2010). Recognition of these ought to make Nigerian government to radically improve open and distance education but instead its problems are relegated to the background. There are recommendations and suggestions from various conferences in regional, national and international level but there is little or no implementation yet. Presently, there is a growing debate that Nigeria's poor progress is due to lack of good governance. Governance is a continuous and dynamic process, expanding and contracting as people, groups of people, or nations, are expanding and contracting their areas of common interests and objectives, activities, and interactions (UNDP, 2010). Governance can also be seen as both processes and arrangements that ensure orderliness, acceptable standard of allocation of resources (both human and material) and a legal framework within which national behaviours are shaped and controlled.

Good governance on its own refers to "broad reform strategy and a particular set of initiatives to strengthen the institutions of civil society with the objective of making government more accountable, more open and transparent and more democratic" (Minogue, 1997).Governance becomes good when it responds to the basic needs, wishes and aspirations of the people, when it is based on sounds efficient organizational and operational, principles, when the entire process is transparent and accountable, whose consequences are understood and predictable, leadership, competence, political will, integrity and capacity are critical to the promotion of good governance(UNDESA,2010). Bad governance occurs when accountability and transparency are lacking, appropriate organizational and operational principles are not applied, and the leaders are greedy, rapacious, corrupt, incompetent, and insensitive to the needs, wishes and aspirations of the people (UNDESA, 2010).

Good governance deals with competency, efficiency and effective application of both human and material resource to achieve organizational goals. Competency entails the capacity to formulate policies and strategies; to make timely and strategic decisions with regard to the immediate issues and the long-term policy options that are likely to emerge to implement policy decisions including the management of the delivery of services competence entails the overall analytical capacity to identify the salient issues and formulate the appropriate policies, and to manage the governance processes in response to the needs, wishes, and aspirations of the people in a world that is rapidly changing (UNDESA, 2010). Efficiency entails, continuous upgrade of the various aspects of its institutional capacity making sure that they are effective and adaptable to change and new demands. This calls for continuous training and exposure to the demands of domestic changes and

needs as well as the global challenges and opportunity (UNDESA, 2010). Effectiveness will depend partly on individual capabilities, education, training, skills and experiences and partly on their legitimacy to produce an intended result through good leadership.

Conferences has been used to search for solutions to bad governance, this was practicalized in Liberia. The country utilized conferences, seminars and workshop as a means of achieving good governance. Liberia conducted a study emerging from all the readings of the reports of the symposia, conferences and workshops conducted since the inauguration of the new government shows that Liberia has experienced bad governance for a long time (UNDP, 1999). The findings has helped them to plan a new way for good governance. Good governance is obviously a very desirable thing, in-fact, it essential for the promotion of sustainable human development, peace, security, stability and prosperity. Good governance will have to be struggled for; and very hard at that, sincerely, consistently and for a very long time (UNDESA, 2010). Borrowing from four conditions put in place for good governance in Liberia, the Nigerian context in open and distance education may be as follows:

A. There has to be a thorough understanding of governance in ODL.

B. A sound and objective comprehension of the problems and causes that led to the occurrence of bad governance,

C. Assessment should be made to determine what is realistically needed to create condition for governance to take place.

D. The establishment of a clear understanding of the kind of leadership need and the political will to bring about good governance. Appropriate and extensive information to help found the solution and make decision to the achievement of the above can be gathered from conferences.

Although, successful governance is influenced by several factors which include socio-economic and political commitment; quality of leadership, character and form of government enlightenment and engaged civil society and government's administrative capacity (Adesida, 2001). Knowledge has now emerged as the crucial link for development. In an era of dwindling resources,… there is need to strategically utilize knowledge as a tool for development (CHEA, undated). On this basis academic conferences generate new knowledge and the utilization these ideas discovered will enhance decision-making process. This is because these ideas, when arranged ensure orderliness, acceptable standard of allocation of resource (human and material), management of a country's economic and social resources for development (Minoque, 1997, Cheema Maquire, 2004). Since good governance promotes sustainability, efficiency, effectiveness, participation in decision-making, the paper therefore argue that the utilization of ideas discovered in academic conferences to improve open and distance education in Nigeria, is key to good governance.

Rationale for the Study

The success of open and distance education depends on good governance. Good governance will involve a comprehensive coordination of well-designed delivery strategies to increase response to changes and programme implementation. This in turn is linked to how individuals in the organization are able to harness information available in decision-making process. Academic conference provides varieties of relevant information to enable rational decision-making process. This information is produced through utilizing quantitative and qualitative data collection process. Institutions, learners and communities must recognize the importance of academic conferences and utilize the ideas discovered as key to good governance. Open and distance education are confronted with lots of issues and challenges. These have hindered its development. Improving access, delivery and quality is critical to eliminate its perception as a second alternative. Furthermore, building its esteem is essential to increase management results to unsupportive environment. Academic conferences can be used to generate new knowledge and ideas to improve governance.

Problem of the Study

There are millions of academic conferences organized each year all over the world (Aronowitz, 2010), in these conferences, marketable ideas, creative innovations that ought to promote good governance and sustainable economic development stops at the laboratory doors of the researchers, consequently the recommendations and report findings dies without proper implementation (Okeen, 1998). Good governance is a product of knowledge, information, education, training, culture, traditions, experiences, natural endowments, motivations and commitment to goals (UNDESA, 2010). Academic conferences leads to the production of educative information, it trains participants directly or indirectly on how to adapt the acquired knowledge, skills and attitude to fit the socio-cultural environment bearing in mind the traditions and experiences of the people that may limit the success of its implementation. The utilization of these ideas enables placing the right people at the right position, which increases their motivation and commitment to the achievement of the set goals. When these are achieved, administrative governance which is concerned with the implementation of the decision, the institutional framework, knowledge, skills and experience of the personnel involved and the resources needed to ensure efficient and effective implementation of public policies, the supply of public services and the manner in which they are delivered becomes easily achievable (UNDESA, 2010). But these ideas are not always utilized; the implication is too slow pace of progress in open and distance learning, making sustainable development in socio-economic life of the people difficult to achieve.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to find out if the ideas discovered in academic conference are utilized in the institutions as a key to good governance. The objectives of the study therefore include the following:

- To determine the impact of academic conferences to good governance.
- To increase application of ideas discovered in these academic conference so as to improve Open and distance learning.
- To explore the reason for poor implementation of ideas discovered in academic conferences.
- To determine the inhibiting factors towards the implementation of these ideas.

Methodology

This was a Descriptive study carried out in Benin City between the month of September and November 2010. The study population was 180, made up of lecturers and administrative staffs selected from three universities in south-south, Nigeria. Letters A, B and C represents the three Universities. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 160 participants from the population. The Descriptive survey research design used to obtain data for the study, is a useful means for fact finding and as an acknowledged means of obtaining social facts and opinions and will help collection of accurate information on a short period of time (Borg & Gall, 1996). The main instrument for data collection was through the use of in-depth interview and a 10 items questionnaire. The in-depth interview was used to match their responses and check the reliability of the responses provides in the questionnaire. Out of the 160 questionnaires, participants completed only 120. Data was analyzed using simple frequency distribution.

Findings

Letters A, B and C represents the three Universities.

Values in the table below are in Percentage.

|		A Total 100		B Total 100		C Total 100	
	Questionnaire	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
1	Conference Attendance; National	87.5	12.5	95.0	5.0	35	65
2	Conference Attendance International.	25.0	75.0	42.5	57.5	30	70
3	Discovering ideas	97.5	2.5	100	0	94	6
4	Utilization of ideas	17.5	82.5	32.5	67.5	47.5	52.5
5	Application to governance	7.5	92.5	22.5	77.5	21.0	79
6	Consulting with others to implement ideas discovered	2.7	97.3	2.0	98.0	28.0	72.0
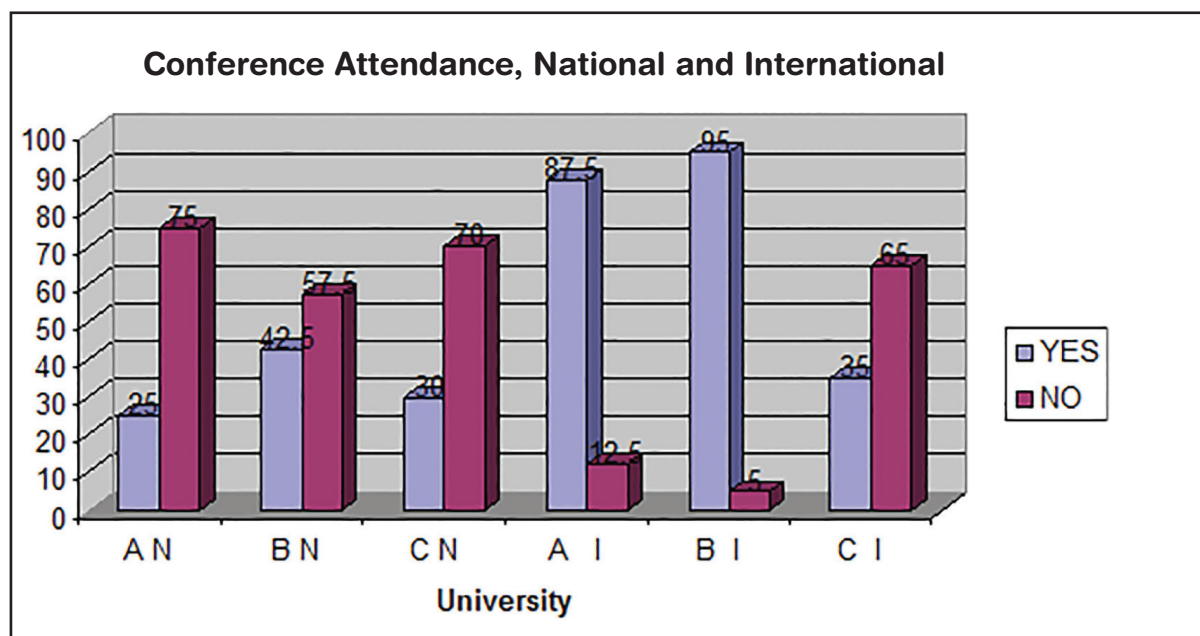
Figure 1

There is a low attendance of national conference by the three universities 25% Ua, 42.5% UB, AND 30% UC respectively compared with high attendance of international conferences 87.5% UA, 95% UB and 35%UC. This is clearly shown by universities A and B. (25%N, 87.5% I); University A (42.5%% N, 95.1% I); University B. The figure showed generally that majority of the respondents prefers to attend international conference than national conferences.
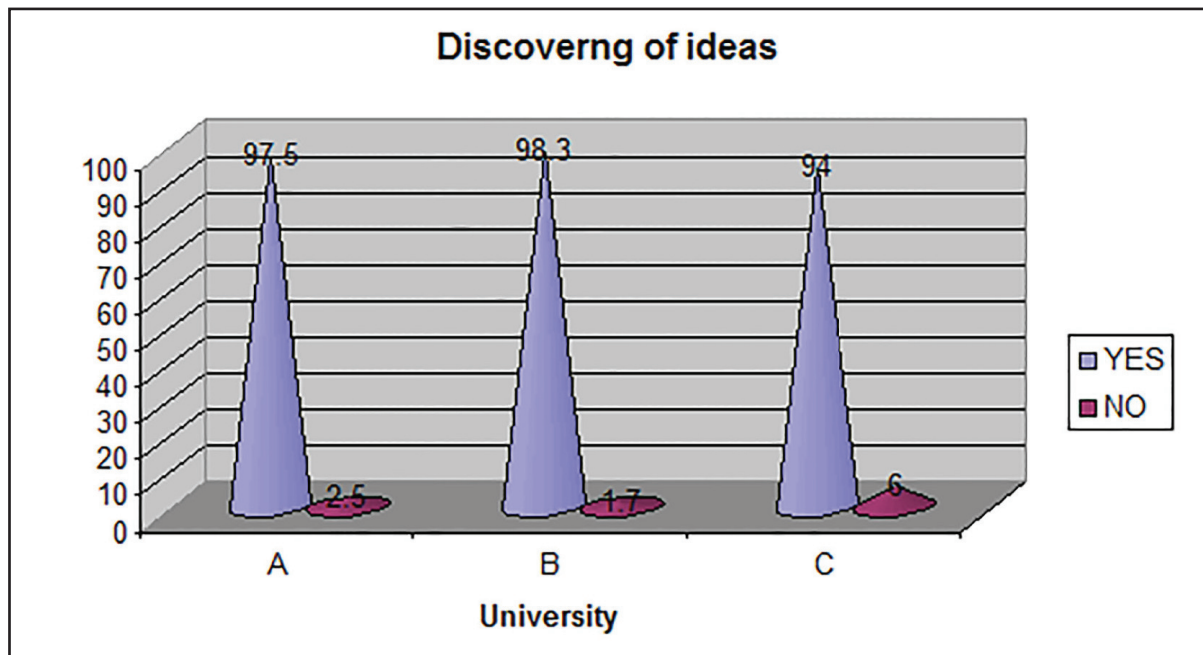
Figure 2

Figure 2 above clearly showed that there is high discovering of ideas by the respondents in all the three universities A, B, C. Majority of them discovered ideas in academic conferences UA (97.5%); UB (98.3%); UC (94%) respectively.
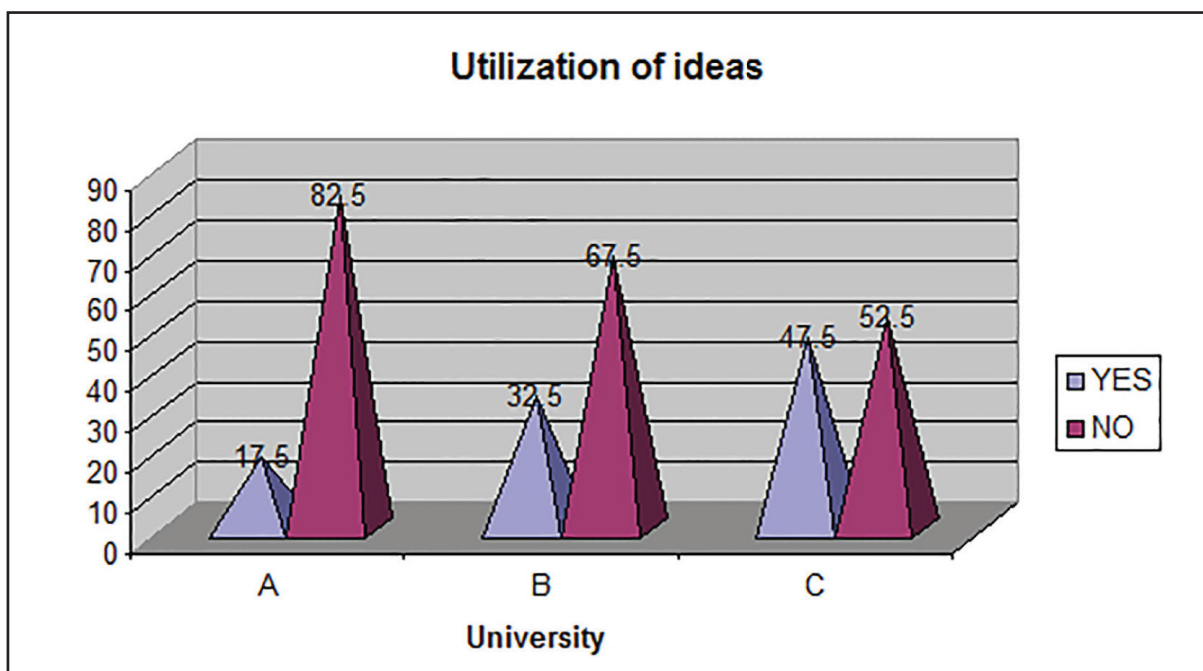

Figure 3

Figure 3 above shows poor utilization of ideas discovered during academic conferences by respondents in the three universities, especially universities A and B. 17.5%, University A; 33.5% university B and 47.5 % University C.
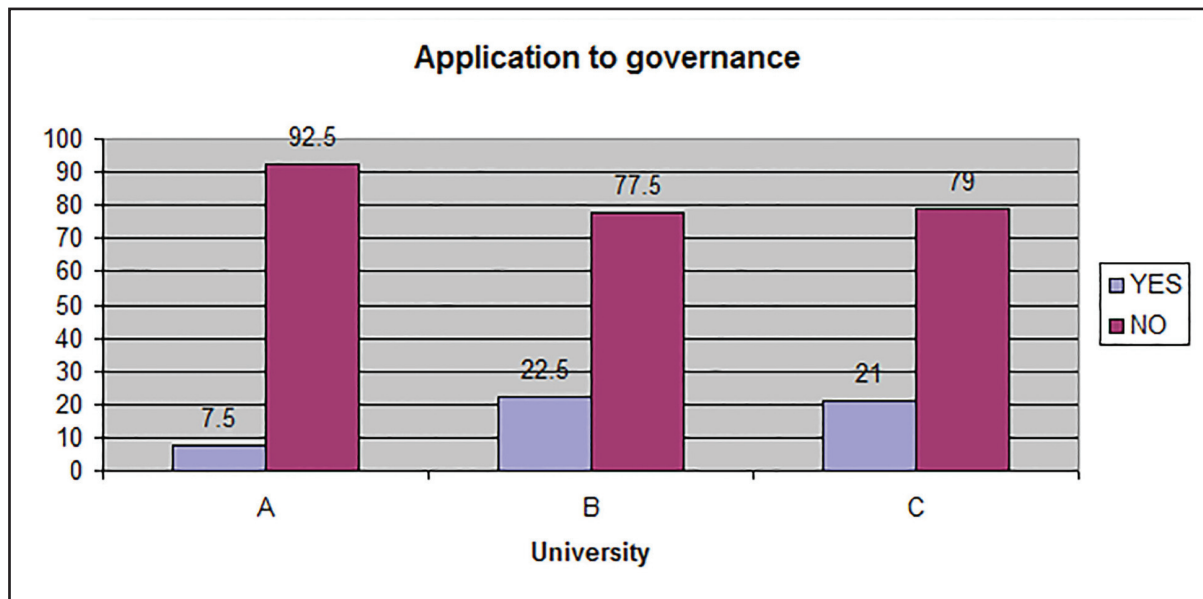
Figure 4

Figure 4 showed that there is very poor application of ideas discovered during academic conferences to governance by the entire respondents.7.5% UA, 22.5% UB, and 21% UC.
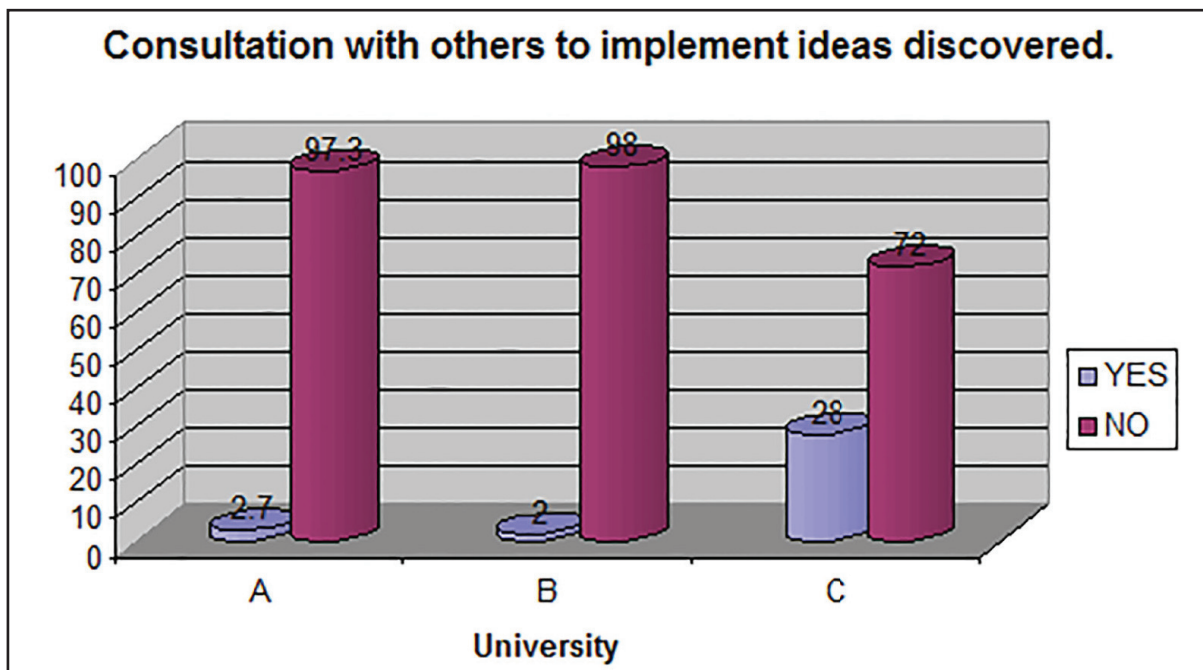

Figure 5

Figure 5 showed poor consultation with others to increase implantation of ideas discovered during academic conferences for UA (2.7%), 2% UB, 28% UC respectively.

Discussion

The findings from the study as shown in figure I, 2, 3, 4, and 5 revealed that the respondents in the three universities attended both national and international academic conferences, a high percentage of new ideas and knowledge are discovered but little attention is paid to implementation of these ideas. It is also evident that consultation with others to promote the implementation of the ideas is very low in three universities. This could be the reason behind poor application of ideas to promote good governance in open and distance education in Nigeria. These seems to agree with Okeen, (1998), assertion, who argued that a major weakness of the conferences by academics is that they end up with mere presentation of papers for which the academics would pat themselves at the back for a 'wonderful' paper, full stop. There are no follow through to know what has become of the ideas discovered and how it is being implemented or utilized by the society. The respondents also agreed that ideas are discovered in academic conferences, although it was poorly utilized, which make it insignificant. This is in line with the views of Minoque, 1997, Cheema Maquire, 2004, these ideas, when arranged ensure orderliness, acceptable standard of allocation of resource (human and material), management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Moreover, It is also possible that the motive for conference attendance could play an important role in its implementation (For instance, if the motive is to cause a change in the social and educational life of the people) implementation can be achieved, but if the motive is for publication of papers for professional upgrading and growth, then implementation will be very low. This in turn will underscore the benefits of academic conferences which are to enhance universities objectives which is teaching, research and community outreach.

Recommendation

The researcher therefore, intends to explore extensively the reasons behind poor utilization of ideas discovered in academic conference as a key to good governance across several universities in the countries and among conferences participants from others countries. Furthermore, an additional research is needed to explore delegate's intentions towards academic conferences, purposes and objectives, attitudes of delegates towards non- utilizations of ideas and recommendations by significant others. This will help in refocusing the objectives of conferences, on how the ideas and new knowledge discovered can be implemented to help develop the socio-economic life of the institutions and the people who were used as guinea pig for the research.

Conclusion

The study discovered that many academicians from these institutions attend conferences, discover new ideas but hardly implement it to achieve good governance. The promotion of socio-economic and sustainable development cannot be achieved without good governance. Good governance is a product of good leadership and good decision-making process. Conferences generate new ideas through its extensive exposure to information based on research findings and position papers; this is expected to aid decision making process, leadership style and governance. Good governance encourages member commitment to the decision and improvement of the quality of atmospheres; such creates conducive atmosphere, which ensures sustainable socio-economic development of the people and institutions. The author therefore argued that utilization of ideas discovered and how it is being implemented or utilized by the society (0keen, 1998) is a key to good governance in open and distance education.

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