Teaching and Learning Needs as Learner Support Services offered in Open, Distance and E-Learning Programme in Selected Public Universities in Kenya

Edward Mutabari Laichena
P.O. Box 401-01020,
Kenol, Makuyu, Kenya.
E-mail: laichenabailacha92@gmail.com

Prof. Henry O. Ayot
Department of Educational Communication and Technology,
School of Education,
Kenyatta University,
P.O. Box 43844-00100, Nairobi, Kenya.

Dr. Sophia M. Ndethiu
Department of Educational Communication and Technology,
School of Education,
Kenyatta University,
P.O. Box 43844-00100, Nairobi, Kenya.

Abstract: *Open, Distance and E-Learning mode of study has been adopted by various institutions of higher learning. This has been realized through the provision of adequate learner support. As such, the objective of the study was to assess teaching and learning services that are offered in Open, Distance and E-Learning programme in selected public universities in Kenya. The research used a descriptive survey design as the study relied on attitudes, opinions and the state of the services in the universities under the study. Purposive sampling was used to select three public universities and three study regions where each of the three universities had a study centre. A sample of 327 subjects was used in the study as identified using Morgan and Krejcie (1970) statistical table. Stratified sampling technique, random sapling and purposive sampling technique were used to get a representation of study respondents. Interview schedules for the directors and questionnaires for coordinators and students were constructed to help in data collection. Questionnaires from the students and the coordinators were sorted and the directors' interview schedule was transcribed as per the objective. They were keyed in using likert scale ranging from one to five using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Descriptive statistics in form of frequency distribution tables and graphs were used to ease understanding of results. The study established that students rated majority of teaching and learning services offered as poor. The study recommends that institutions offering the programme should constantly evaluate the value of teaching and learning services offered by seeking the students' opinion so as to ensure that services offered are beneficial to majority of students.*

Keywords: *Adequate learner support, Distance education, E-learning, Learner Support Services, Open learning, Distance learning, Distance learning students' needs*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Distance education in Kenya dates back to 1953. This is when the first Department of Extra Mural Studies was founded in Makerere with a resident tutor for Kenya. However, the need for degree courses by distance teaching had been expressed earlier. In 1966, an Act of Parliament established the Board of Adult Education (Juma, 2006). The Institute of Adult Studies was established in 1973 and moved to Kikuyu. In mid-1980s, Bachelor of Education programme was started at the University of Nairobi (Republic of Kenya, 1998) with support from the British Council. The Kenyan government agreed that External Degree Programme be started at the University of Nairobi in 1983. Later, Kenyatta University College was started to provide learning opportunities to those aspiring Kenyans who could not secure university admission (Juma, 2006). That also enabled maximization of the limited educational resources and made university education available beyond the lecture halls (Jowi, 2003). As such, there was need to establish an open university to increase and develop human resource at all levels.

Other factors have led to increase in demand for university education. These include; the policy to offer free primary education and a waiver of tuition fees in day secondary schools. Also, supplementing fees for boarding secondary schools has contributed to the increasing demand. Consequently, the universities are marred with overstretched facilities and overcrowding. Further, many people who are already working are engaging in continued education making an open university an appealing option. Therefore, Open, Distance and E-Learning mode of education has been explored to increase access to higher education. As such, institutions must provide learner support services depending on the learners' needs since learners exposed to educational opportunities without proper learner support may not complete their courses despite enrollment (De Salvo, 2002).

Literature on Open, Distance and E-Learning show that this mode of learning can only succeed if learners are offered adequate learner support services (Harry, 1993). This is an indicator that learner support services are paramount. As such, learner support services offered ought to be accessible and available, easy to use, adequate, beneficial and convenient to the distance learner (Allen & Seaman, 2008). However, studies done in Kenya were mostly concerned with infrastructural development at the expense of learner support services. Chacha (2004) noted that though learner support services are important to open, distance and e-learners, the national and institutional decision-makers had ignored them. Juma (2006) also noted that most studies were concerned with the challenges of distance learning to the decision-makers and not the learners. Moreover, Anyona (2009) clearly analyzed the efforts made by providers of open and distance learning in Kenya and the challenges they experienced in Kenya's public universities. This indicates that learner support services which are referred to as the backbone of Open, Distance and E-Learning mode of study have not been emphasized in Kenya. This forms the basis of this study. Thus, the study intended to assess teaching and learning needs as learner support service offered in open, distance and e-learning programmes in selected public universities in Kenya.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

In this study, descriptive survey design was used as the study was concerned with the attitudes and opinions of learners on services offered to them by their various universities. It is also very relevant and appropriate when dealing with educational and social issues (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). The targeted 2018 fourth year university students, 29 regional coordinators and 3 directors in the three selected public universities with major components of open, distance and e-learning programme namely, Egerton University, Kenyatta University and the University of Nairobi which are institutions that had offered the programme for almost two decades. A sample of 327 subjects was used in the study based on the Morgan & Krejcie (1970) sample size computation model.

Purposive sampling procedure was done to select three public universities that took part in the study and the three regions in which all the selected universities had study centres: Mombasa, Nakuru and Kisumu. Further, purposive sampling, stratified sampling and simple random sampling were used to arrive at the study respondents. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the students and coordinators and an open-ended interview schedule for the directors. Questionnaires are appropriate in descriptive survey where the number of respondents is high (Orodho, 2004) and very useful when collecting data from a large sample, (Wiseman, 1999). An interview schedule was used to gather information from the directors to the institutions as they are appropriate when dealing with few respondents. The interview schedule was transcribed and keyed in using the same Likert scale. Thus, data analysis was done by the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Data was presented using frequencies and percentages and summarized into tables. The researcher also adhered to legal and ethical issues in research throughout the study.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Demographic Data

The study sought to establish the demographic data of the respondents. Nearly more than half (58%) of the study respondents were female. Another 42% of them were female. This shows a good representation of the study respondents by gender. Out of 327 study sample, 253 of them responded to the study. This translated to a study response rate of 77.4%.

3.2 Teaching and Learning Needs

The study established the teaching and learning needs from students and administrative representatives perspectives.

3.2.1 Teaching and learning needs as per the students

The study was to ascertain the status of teaching and learning needs as learner support service offered in open, distance and e-learning programmes in selected public universities in Kenya. The students were asked to rate the services such as face to face interaction, availability of e-learning materials, printed materials, online library, pre-course study skills and the examination administration procedures. Their responses are as indicated in Figure 1.
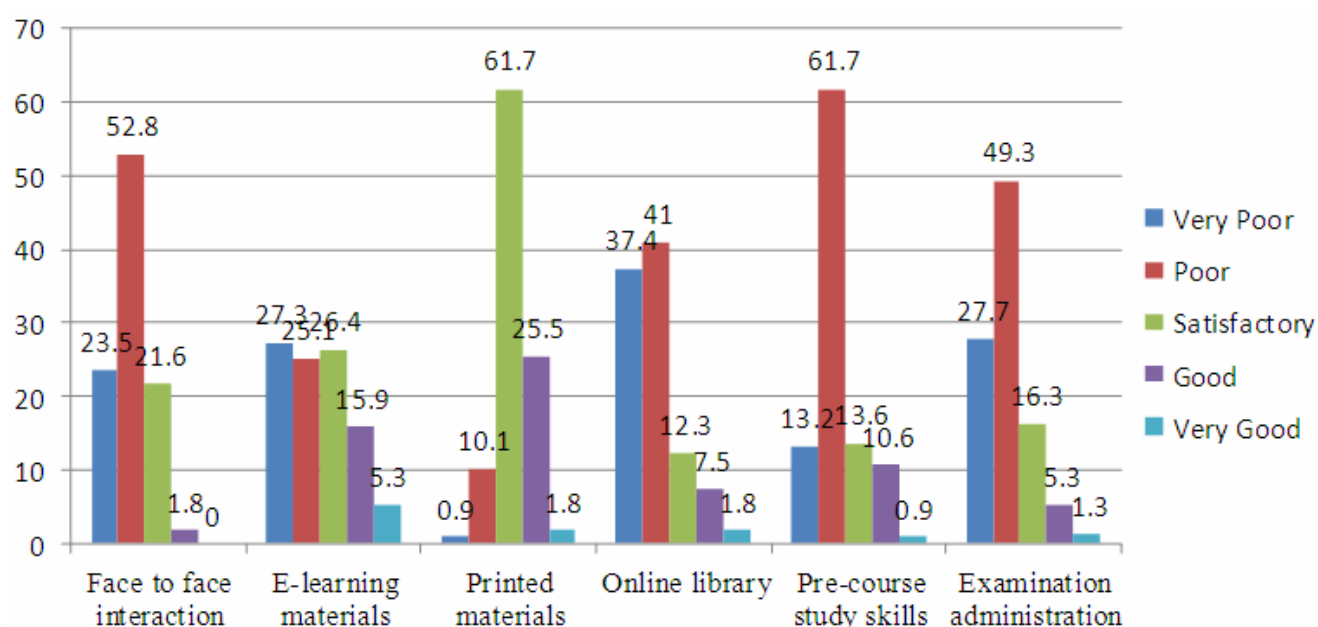

Figure 1. Teaching and learning needs as per the students

Face to face interaction

As shown in Figure 1, students indicated that face to face interaction was poor across the three institutions under study. Twenty four percent (23.5%) of the students indicated that the service was very poor and 52.8% noted that it was poor while 21.6% rated face to face interaction as satisfactory and 1.8% felt that the service was good. Therefore 76.3% of the respondents felt that the service was either poor or very poor as 23.4% felt that the service was either satisfactory or good.

Availability of e-learning materials

Availability of e-learning materials service was rated very poor (27.3%) and poor (25.1%). However, 26.4% noted the service was satisfactory with another 15.9% of them indicating that

the service was good. Further, 5.3% were of the opinion that the service was very good. Therefore majority of the students (52.4%) felt that the service was either poor or very poor.

Printed materials (modules)

Students across the three universities were of the opinion that printed materials (modules) were quite satisfactory. It was established that 0.9% of the students indicated that printed materials were very poor and 10.1% felt that it was poor. However, 61.7% noted that the service was satisfactory. Further, 25.5% felt that the service was good as 1.8% noted that printed materials were very good. Therefore 89% of the students noted that the service was satisfactory, good or very good.

Online library

Online library as a learner support service was also rated poorly across the three universities as 37.4% and 41% of the students rated the service as very poor and poor respectively while 12.3% noted that the service was satisfactory. Further, 7.5% and 1.8% noted that the service was good and very good. This means that 77.4% of the students felt that the service was not satisfactory.

Pre-course study skills

Further, pre-course study skills were also rated as poor across the universities under the study. A small proportion (13.2%) of the students rated the service as very poor and 61.7% of them indicated it was poor. On the other hand, 13.6% of them pointed out that the service was satisfactory while 10.6% felt that the service was good. Only, 0.9% of the students indicated that pre-course study skills was very good. Cumulatively, 74.9% were not satisfied with pre-course study skills offered to them.

The students further noted that the examination administration procedure was very poor (27.7%) and nearly a half (49.3%) of them felt it was poor. However, 16.3% noted that the procedure was satisfactory while 5.3% and 1.3% indicated that the service was good and very good respectively. Thus the satisfaction level of 22.9% of the students is low compared to 77.1% who were not satisfied.

3.2.2 Teaching and learning needs as per the administrators

The administrators that included coordinators of regional centres and directors were also expected to give ratings on the services they offer to their Open, Distance and E-Learning Students. Their responses were represented as shown in Figure 2.
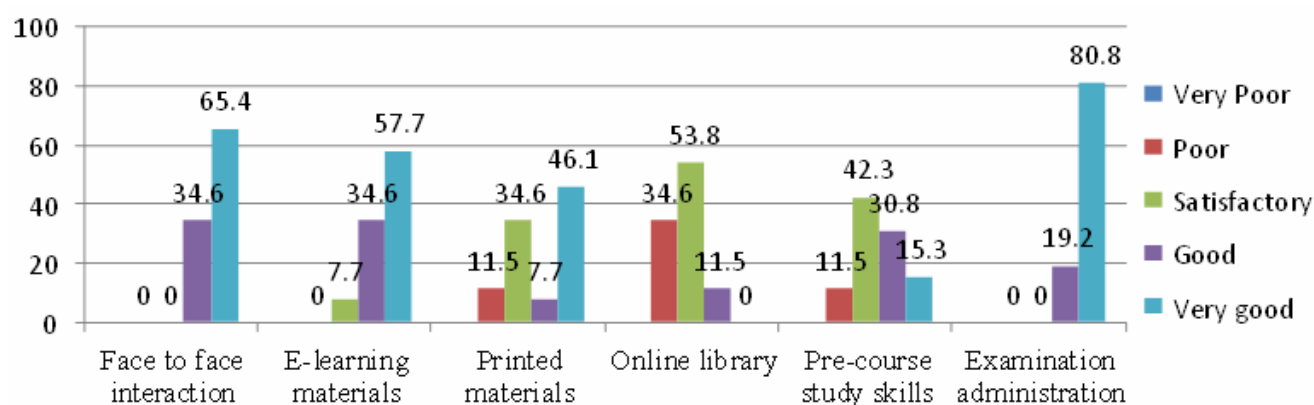
Figure 2: *Teaching and learning needs as per the administrators*

As shown in Figure 2, nearly two thirds (65.4%) of the administrators indicated that face to face interaction was very good while 34.6% of them indicated it is good. Further, availability of e-learning materials was also rated highly whereby 7.7% noted that the service was satisfactory and 34.6% and 57.7% of them felt that it was good and very good respectively. Additionally, examination administration procedures were noted to be good or very good at 19.2% and 80.8% respectively. Therefore in the three services offered, there was no single administrator who felt that the service was poor.

Nevertheless, 11.5% of the administrators indicated that printed modules were poor as 34.6% noted that it was satisfactory while 7.7% and 46.1% felt that it was good and very good respectively. Further, online library service was noted as poor by 34.6% while 53.8% indicated it was satisfactory. Another 11.5% of them indicated that online library service was good. Further still, pre-course study skills were rated poor as pointed out by 11.5% of the respondents and 42.3% of them felt it was satisfactory. Another 30.8% of them indicated it was good and 15.3% felt it was very good.

4.0 DISCUSSION

Teaching and learning services in Open, Distance and E-Learning programmes are very important to the students. Poor face to face interaction scenario was also witnessed in a study conducted in Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) that indicated that 75% of the students felt that face to face interaction was inadequate (Wilson, 1993). However, the institution embarked on improving its face to face interaction service and by 2012. In another study conducted by Chadamoyo and Ngwarai (2012), students at Zimbabwe Open University were satisfied with the face to face interactions; universities under study ought to borrow a leaf from ZOU.

Availability of e-learning materials as a learner support service is important bearing in mind that in established institutions such as KNOU, only 65% of distance learners indicated that e-learning

materials offered were very good while 31.5% noted that they were somewhat good with only 3.5% of the students noting that the materials were either bad or very bad (Reddy & Manjulika, 2000). This is in contrast to the Kenya's situation and therefore institutions ought to make e-learning materials available to its students.

From the study, students rated the printed materials (modules) as generally good. This is an indicator that the service offered was quite helpful to the students. This agrees with SAIDE (1999) that there was a high positive correlation in satisfaction of distance learners who used modules bearing in mind that printed materials or modules are simplified and interactive and therefore in the absence of the tutor, they play an important role in a student's academic progress.

Online library service was rated poorly across the three universities under the study. This has been attested to by a study by Anyona (2009) that Kenyatta University and the University of Nairobi had acute shortage of recent journals and publications in their libraries. Further Mahai (2005) noted that in the Open University of Tanzania students were dissatisfied with online library services. It should be noted that online libraries ought to provide online learning resources and services to Open, Distance and E-Learning students just like those students who are on campus (Bagwandeen, 1999) to assist them to go through the programme.

Accordingly, studies have shown that pre-course study skills are necessary since learners do not have all the skills necessary to exploit the resources available. It is no wonder that Reddy & Manjulika (2000) noted that students hardly follow instructions whereby, 78% watched television programmes before going through the programmes materials. This could be through the assumption that learners were already aware of what distance learning is all about but this may not necessarily be true.

Further, examination administration procedure was rated poorly possibly as a result of planning where students may not have been informed on the dates or venues of examinations well in advance or even the changes in the scheduled examination timetable. Possibly, institutions under the study need to borrow from UNISA which has been noted to be very efficient in the administration of examinations. Zimbabwe Open University has followed suit by having examination timetables which are prepared well in advance and are accessible to the students SMS broadcast systems and voice telephone calls (Chadamoyo & Dumbu, 2012).

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Most of teaching and learning services offered to Open, Distance and E-Learning learners were not good enough to support the students As such there is need to improve teaching and learning services to students under Open, Distance and E-Learning programme to make them better. Therefore, directors in collaboration with coordinators of various institutions offering Open, Distance and E-learning programmes should constantly evaluate the value of teaching and

learning services offered by seeking the students' opinion so as to ensure that services offered are beneficial to majority of students. Further, institutions should strive to offer few but essential learner support services that are of high quality and satisfactory to their students instead of many services that do not meet the students' expectations.

Since the study aimed at assessing teaching and learning services offered to Open, Distance and E-Learning students in public Universities, a similar study should be conducted in the private universities as they were not involved in this study.

REFERENCES

Allen, I. E. & Seaman, J. (2008). *Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States,* 2008. Needham MA: Sloan Consortium.

Anyona, J.K. (2009). *The status and challenges of open and distance learning in kenya's public Universities: A thesis submitted in fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Doctoral of Philosophy in Education of Kenyatta University* (Unpublished thesis, Kenyatta University).

Bagwandeen. D. R. (1999). *Assuring quality through study materials in distance education in South Africa.* A paper presented at the 1st National NADEOSA Conference, 11-13 August 1999.

Chacha, C. (2004). *Reforming Higher Education in Kenya: Challenges, Lessons and Opportunities.* A paper presented at the State University of New York Workshop with Parliamentary Committee on Education, Science and Technology, Naivasha Kenya, August, 2004.

Chadamoyo, P. & Dumbu, E. (2012). Developing a framework for benchmarking quality attributes for learner support services in Open and Distance Learning: Students' perceptions at the Zimbabwe Open University. *International Journal of Research in management, 6*(2), 2249-5908.

Chadamoyo, P. & Ngwarai, R. (2012). M-Learning in the face of unstable information technological support: Assessing the viability and effectiveness of m-learning in distance education. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education, 3*(1), 2223-4934.

Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (1997). *Research methods in education (4th Edition).* London: Croom Helm Limited.

De Salvo, A. (2002). *The rise and fall of the university correspondence college, pioneer of distance learning*. Cambridge: National Extension College.

Harry, K. (1993). *Distance Education: New Perspectives.* New York: Routledge.

Jowi, J. (2003). *Governing higher education in the stakeholder society: Rethinking the role of the state in Kenya's higher education.* A paper presented at the CHEPS Summer School, June 29 – July 4 2003, University of Maribor, Slovenia.

Juma, N. (2006). *The establishment of a higher education open and distance learning knowledge base for decision makers in Kenya*: A Paper Presented to UNESCO in Nairobi, Kenya, August 2006.

Kombo, D. & Tromp, D. (2006). *Proposal and thesis writing; An introduction.* Nairobi: Pauline Publication.

Mahai, L. (2005). *Provision of institutional support services to students. A case study of Mwanza and Kagera Regional centres of the Open University of Tanzania* (Unpublished M. A dissertation of the University of Dar es Salaam).

Morgan, D.W. & Krejcie, R.V. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement* , *30*, 607-610.

Orodho, A. (2004). *Elements of education and social science research methods.* Nairobi: Masola Publishers: Oxford Press.

Reddy, V.V. & Manjulika, S. (Eds). (2000). *Towards virtualization, open and distance learning.* New Delhi: Kogan Page.

Republic of Kenya. (1998). *Presidential working party on education and manpower training for the next decade and beyond.* Nairobi: Government Printer.

SAIDE. (1999). *Learner support in distance learning: A South African program perspective.* Johannesburg: SAIDE.

Wilson, C. D. (1993). *Study Centres: Key to success of field dependent learners in Africa.* Distance Education for the Twenty-first Century, Selected Papers from the 16th World Conference of the International Council for Distance Education.