

**INFLUENCE OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES ON LEARNERS'  
RETENTION IN BACHELOR OF EDUCATION STUDENTS BY OPEN,  
DISTANCE AND ELECTRONIC LEARNING IN KISII CAMPUS,  
MOUNT KENYA UNIVERSITY**

**BY  
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**A Research Project Report Submitted to the School of Open and Distance Learning in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Award of the Degree in Master of Distance Education of the  
University of Nairobi**

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## DECLARATION

This project report is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University or examining body.

Signature.....Date.....

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L45/80655/2015

This project report has been submitted with my approval as the University Supervisor.

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this project to my father Joseph Kaudo and mother, Eucabeth Kaudo for their Support throughout my education. I would also like to dedicate this project to my late grandmother Magdalene Misori who taught me the virtue of perseverance.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the influence of learner support services on learners' retention in bachelor of education students by open, distance and electronic learning. The study targeted two hundred undergraduate students in Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University. The participants were identified through stratified random sampling. The project involved the use of research survey design that included quantitative design. Stratified random sampling was used to identify the participants. The project required the use of questionnaires as a research instrument. Before beginning the survey, a pilot study was administered on a selected group of the target population to determine the reliability of the instrument. When data was collected, it was analyzed by the use of descriptive statistical analyses. Responses from the participants revealed that provision of learner support services is a sure way of retaining learners and ensuring maximum completion rate in open, distance and electronic institutions. The study recommends that, all Open, Distance and Electronic Learning institutions should have a functional and effective learner support service departments. This study suggests that further study should be done on how learner support services can be used as a retention strategy by institutions that offer Open, Distance and Electronic Learning.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

**CODL:** Centre for Open and Distance Learning

**MKU:** Mount Kenya University

**ODEL:** Open, Distance and Electronic Learning

**ODL:** Open and Distance Learning

**SPSS:** Statistical Package for Social Sciences

**UON:** University of Nairobi

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The introduction of open, distance and electronic learning departments have attracted several students who were initially unwilling or were unable to acquire education the conventional way. Most students believe that open, and distance learning is relatively cheaper because of the reduced expenses that are incurred in transport and accommodation (Gravani & Karagiorgi, 2014). Nevertheless, they are unable to complete their studies after being enrolled in the system. In fact, some students drop as soon as they begin their classes. This brings the question into what might cause the high dropout yet most open, distance and electronic learning students made a personal decision to attend the program. Notwithstanding this challenge of retention, many institutions fail to acknowledge the importance of learner support services (Mills & Tait, 1996).

It is because of the problem as mentioned above of retention that this research was aimed at exploring how learner support services can be used to ensure one hundred percent retention rate among students who are registered for Bachelor of Education Programs under the open distance and electronic learning system. Park and Choi (2009) observe that, provision of learner support service has been useful in overcoming some of the challenges that learners are attending conventional education system face. In fact, most higher learning institutions have well-functioning and practical guidance and counseling units that attend to the students' needs on a daily basis (Jane & Ross, 2008). Some institutions even employ the services of professional counselors to attend to the needs of students. Even though it has been useful in the conventional system, its application in open, distance and electronic learning remain a

theory (Simpson O., 2013). In fact, most institutions only concentrate on course delivery but forget the fact that, open, distance and electronic learners have challenges just like the students learning under the conventional system. Because of lack of learner support services, some ODL students fail to continue with their studies (Jane & Ross, 2008). It is because of this problem of retention that this project explored how learner support can be used as a retention tool.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Open, distance and electronic learning opportunities for students have increased in popularity in the recent years. Almost every university has either started or is in the process of starting Open, Distance or Electronic campus. The increase has been facilitated by the high demand of the learner audience who is intrigued by open, distance and electronic education because they face some obstacles that make conventional training unviable. The barriers include: they live in remote places and the fact that most of the conveniently located institutions offer limited program options. They also have strict work schedules. Personal and family commitments also affect course schedules.

Although most students are attracted to open, distance and electronic education, most of them are unable to complete their studies once they enroll in the programs. Dropout rates that are associated with distance learning typically range from 20% to 50% (Mckendry et al., 2014). Russo-Gleicher (2013) reports that open, distance and electronic learning programs are characterized by greater attrition rates as compared to traditional on-campus programs. The challenge for open, distance and electronic education institutions, therefore, is not much how to recruit students. It is however on how to retain them once they have begun (Gravani & Karagiorgi, 2014).

The background above confirms that low retention rate remains a thorn in the flesh to most institutions offering open, and distance education. It is worth observing that, the problems that Open, Distant and Electronic Learners face are so unique that if not addressed, they can drop out even if they had the will and the financial ability to continue with their studies (Jane & Ross, 2008). To retain learners, ODEL institutions must come up with effective strategies. The most reliable strategy remains provision of efficient learner support services (Park & Choi, 2009). Though most institutions recognize this fact, they fail to establish a learner support system that can adequately address the problem of learner retention within the ODEL context.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The study explored the influence of learner support services on learner retention among undergraduate open, distance and electronic learning students of Mount Kenya University.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To establish the influence of Administrative Support Services on learner's retention among Bachelor of Education Students by Open, Distance and Electronic Learning of Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University.
- ii. To examine the influence of guidance and counseling services on learner's retention among Bachelor of Education Students by Open, Distance and Electronic Learning of Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University.

- iii. To determine the influence of Peer Support Services on learner's retention among Bachelor of Education Students by Open, Distance and Electronic Learning of Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University.
- iv. To investigate the influence of tutorial support services on learner's retention among Bachelor of Education Students by Open, Distance and Electronic Learning of Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University.
- v. To assess the influence of Technological Learner Support Services on learner's retention among Bachelor of Education Students by Open, Distance and Electronic Learning of Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

This study is aimed at answering the following questions:

- i. How does Administrative Support Service influence learner's retention among Bachelor of Education Students by Open, Distance and Electronic Learning of Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University?
- ii. How does Guidance and Counseling Service influence learner's retention among Bachelor of Education Students by Open, Distance and Electronic Learning of Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University?
- iii. How does Peer Support Service influence learner's retention among Bachelor of Education Students by Open, Distance and Electronic Learning of Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University?
- iv. How does Tutorial Support Service influence learner's retention among Bachelor of Education Students by Open, Distance and Electronic Learning of Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University?

- v. How does Technological Learner Support Service influence learner's retention among Bachelor of Education students by open, distance and electronic learning of Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This research is important because of the following reasons.

First, it serves to address the low retention rates that have characterized institutions that are offering open, and distance learning.

Secondly, it provides a good platform for organizations that are providing Open, Distance and Electronic learning to borrow the best practices through which they can enhance learner retention.

Thirdly, it can be used by most ODEL institutions to look into the quality and relevance of their learner support services.

Additionally, it can help ODEL institutions to overcome the weaknesses in their learner support services so as to improve learner retention.

It also provides the platform which can be used by scholars interested in studying how learner support services can make recommendations on how it can actually be used to enhance retention.

Finally, it provides an avenue through which institutions, policy and policymakers that are involved in policy formulation and implementation can improve learner retention through learner support services.



### **1.7 Delimitations of the Study**

The study based its findings purely on Mount Kenya University. This implies that most of the findings were only relevant to Mount Kenya University.

Mount Kenya University offers conventional and alternative education. Moreover, the University has several campuses that are spread in several counties within Kenya. It also has Campuses in foreign countries. This study was delimited to its Campus in Kisii County..

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

The administration was not open up to share information about their retention rate due to administrative implications of sharing such information. In some cases, the respondents failed to cooperate with the researcher even after committing to take part in the study. Moreover, the research only targeted those who were pursuing undergraduate education through open, distance and electronic learning mode and not all the students. These limitations were reduced by building positive rapport and confidence between the researcher and the respondents.

### **1.9 Assumptions of the Study**

This study assumed that while giving their responses, all the respondents were honest. Also, it assumed that the administration of Mount Kenya University was free to share relevant information about retention. Moreover, the research assumed that the target population cooperated throughout the research. Finally, the study assumed that it was easy to access the target population.

## **1.10 Definition of Significant Terms Used in the Study**

**Administrative Support Services:** this is the kind of learner support that is provided by the administration. It may include the dispatch of information and course materials.

**Guidance and Counseling Support Services:** this refers to school guidance and counseling for not only social-emotional and academic but also behavioral concerns that open, distance and electronic learner may develop throughout his studies.

**Learner Enrollment:** the process of acquiring admission to undertake a particular educational program.

**Learner Support Service:** refers to services that are aimed at helping individual students to learn from the instructional materials. This kind of support may be in the form of academic counseling, administrative or personal support to the student.

**Peer Support Services:** these are learner support services that are delivered by open, distance and electronic learners to fellow learners. Peer support services are essential because they are delivered by individuals who have common life experiences with the clients.

**Learner Retention:** refers to the fact of keeping student membership and participation in a program until the end of the program. Student retention implies that they do not drop out.

**Technological Support Services:** refers to a plethora of services by which institution is offering open, and distance learning programs provide assistance to the learners on how to use technology products that are used in the learning process such as mobile phones, televisions, computers, software products or other electronic services.

**Tutorial support services:** refers to guidance and support that is offered, outside the regular teaching and learning activities of open, distance and electronic learning program. This kind of support is meant to help a student: make an informed choice of program and complete it

### **1.11 Organization of the study**

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One which is the introductory chapter comprises of the background of the study and statement of the problem. Also, it contains information on the purpose of the study; objectives of the study and research questions. It also contains the significance of the study. Also, the section provides information on limitations and delimitations of the study, assumptions of, the study, and definitions of the terms.

Chapter Two comprises of literature review on influence of administrative support on learner retention; control of guidance counseling services on learner retention. Also, it contains information on the influence of peer support services on learner retention, influence of tutorial services on learner retention and finally, influence of technological learner support services on learner retention in open, distance and electronic learning systems. Also, the section contains information on the conceptual framework, theoretical framework, and research gaps.

Chapter Three provides information on the research methodology. It contains research design; target population, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection instruments and, the validity of research instruments. Also, it contains information on data collection procedures and data analysis methods. It also contains operational definition of variables that are used in this research.

Chapter Four provides information on data presentation, analysis, and interpretation. The final chapter; chapter five provides information on a summary of findings, discussions of the study and conclusions. Also, it provides information on recommendations and outline recommendations for further research on the topic.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This section contains information on literature review, conceptual framework and the theoretical framework.

#### **2.2 Learner Retention in ODEL**

Student retention is a broad concept that incorporates issues such as, student mortality, engagement, and drop-out. It also includes attrition, persistence, progression, and withdrawal. Other factors according to Grote (2000) are completion, conclusion, successful completion, and preferred learning and success barriers. Retention in a program or course of study does not therefore simply imply staying on the program. However, it is mostly remaining active and succeeding in completing the program of study. The student retention constructs in open, distance and electronic learning insinuates getting the desired credentials at the end of the program of study despite differential pedagogy and delivery factors when compared with the conventional program (Mckendry et.al., 2015).

According to Jane and Ross (2008), not all students that register for open, distance and electronic learning program complete their studies. Students are likely to drop at any stage of their studies. Mills and Tait, (1996) suggests that problem of retention is worse in ODEL institutions because most of the students are more desperate, have varied backgrounds and have the widest possible age range. This diversification of experiences makes ODEL learners vulnerable to dropping out.

It is because of challenges of retention as explained above that the following sections present the influence of various learner support initiatives on learner retention. The sections involve a critical review of some pieces of literature that have been written with particular reference to how learner support services influence learner retention in Open, distance and electronic learning.

### **2.3 Types of Learner Support Services**

The learners' support service in open, distance and electronic education may be defined as all activities that boarders the production and the delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of students in their studies (Jane & Ross, 2008). They can be in the form of facilities, administrative assistance, and supplementary reading materials and references (Prebble et al., 2010). Also, they include human interaction, advice, and moral support.

Learner support services is classified into two broad areas: an academic support which deals with supporting students with the cognitive, intellectual and knowledge issues of particular courses and non-academic that involves helping the students in the effective and organizational aspects of their studies (Simpson, 2000). There are five types of learner support services: administrative support; guidance and counseling services, peer support services; tutorial support services and technological learner support services (Potter, 2013)

### **2.4 Influence of Administrative Support on Learner's Retention in Open, Distance and Electronic Education**

According to Farirai and Richard (2015) Administrative support services refer to the support that is given to the students about admission processes, registration, and record keeping. They also include information provision, examination supervision, and preparation and delivery of

study materials. Administrative support is an essential retention tool in ODEL because it ensures that students are encouraged to learn and develop a positive attitude towards open, distance and electronic mode of education provision (Anton, 1999).

Administrative support positively influences learner retention in ODL because it makes the learning environment favorable to the students (Gravani & Karagiorgi, 2014). An administrative support system that is structured well ensures that students have relevant information that pertains to the program. Thus, before registering for ODL program, a prospective learner is likely to be equipped with information about the course and when and where to pay the fees. Collings et al., (2014) assert that administrative support ensures that the students have information regarding when the course begins and ends. This ensures that a student does not drop out only because he was not well informed about the general course structure.

Administrative support also influences learner retention because it provides the learner with information on who to contact in case he or she faces problems throughout the study. According to Anton (1999), information such as who the tutor is, the tutors' contacts and who to contact in case there is a problem is necessary because it provides a timely solution to the problems. Thus, instead of dropping out of the course because there is none to contact, a student will reach out to the tutor or support team immediately (Potter, 2013). Moreover, an excellent administrative support system provides a platform for the administration to detect when a student has a problem.

Administrative support services such as information on when and where the course takes place, examination schedules and when and where assignments are submitted are likely to enhance retention because they make the learning process simple (Park & Choi, 2009). On

the other hand, in the absence of administrative support, most learners are likely to drop out. This is because; they would lack essential information about the program thereby making the whole system complex.

## **2.5 Influence of Guidance and Counseling Services on Learner's Retention in Open, Distance and Electronic Learning**

Guidance and Counseling is a process designed to help an open or distance learner to overcome the problems that he may face throughout the learning process (Farirai & Richard, 2015). Guidance and counseling services in open distance and electronic learning plays a major role in learner retention because it is through it that learners can solve not only the academic but also the socio-economic challenges (Jane & Ross, 2008).

Farirai and Richard (2015) contend that a continuous guidance and counseling services are necessary for ODL because learners encounter day to day challenges. According to Grote (2000), guidance and counseling services assist open and distant learners to understand their problems individually. The process also helps them to restore according to their ability without external advice. Thus, in the context of dropping out of the program because of challenges, guidance and counseling services equip them with knowledge of how to either cope with the problem or find a solution to it (Anton, 1999).

Counseling services is a good retention strategy in ODL because it includes working with the learners and with relationships which may be developmental. Such relationships provide support during crisis support. It also guides the learner on how to solve the various learning problems. Guidance and counseling services give the learner an opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of learning more satisfyingly and resourcefully (Prebble et al., 2010). Guidance and Counseling are also viewed as a special helping the relationship. Jane



and Ross (2008) assert that guidance and counseling services are an interventional strategy through which learners can share their challenges with the counselor.

## **2.6 Influence of peer support services on learner's retention in open, distance and electronic learning**

Peer support services refer to learner support services that are delivered by individuals who have common life experiences with ODL learners (Prebble et al., 2010). The kind of support can originate from those who had graduated from the system or those who are currently pursuing the same program. These people have a unique capacity to help each other based on a shared affiliation and an in-depth understanding of the experience. Peer support is an effective learner retention tool because, through it, learners offer strength, and hope to their colleagues (Park & Choi, 2009). Thus, those who might have lost hope are encouraged to continue with their studies because there are others who are either undergoing the same challenges or had successfully waded through the challenges (Salih, 2004).

Peer mentoring offers influences retention positively because it provides useful means by which both student volunteer mentors and their mentees can make the most of their university experiences (Farirai & Richard, 2015). Through peer counseling, positive responses that prompt a sense of belonging is developed. Peer Support Services also ensure enhances retention because they provide the platform for the learners to share their challenges with their peers (Grote, 2000). Consequently, they can work out ways through which they can overcome these challenges. Peer counseling services that involve sharing of personal stories of one's academic recovery journey offers to the audience who is attempting to make personal, academic journey to succeed. Peer support services offer guidance through the

experience of mutually supportive relationships with another ODL learner who is faced with learning challenges.

## **2.7 Influence of Tutorial Support Services on Learner's Retention in Open, Distance and Electronic Learning**

Tutoring is considered the backbone of support in ODL. Therefore, the tutor plays an important role in the retention of learners in ODL. Tutorial support services refer to the kind of support that learners get from their tutors in the process of learning (Mills & Tait, 1996). Tutors do not just provide intellectual support, they also provide administrative support. Also, they provide both guidance and counseling services. These roles prove that, to retain learners in ODL, there must be regular tutor-led contact sessions (Mckendry, Wright, & Stevenson, 2014).

Through tutorial support services, learners with the ODL context are encouraged to articulate their learning goals and plans. According to Mills and Tait (1996), learners initially need help to develop their learning plan. They also need help on how to establish short-term goals to enable them gain the skills that are necessary to manage their goals and plans throughout their academic life. Lack of such plans makes learners vulnerable to drop out of their studies.

Jane and Ross (2008) expound on the role of tutorial support services on learner retention by arguing that tutorial support services help the learners to understand their not only their learning orientations and strengths but also areas for improvement early in their programs. The information, according to Simpson (2000) enables them to develop their plans, and assessment of their learning progress.

Tutors also advise ODL learners on the exploration and selection of learning opportunities that is relevant to their needs during the initial development of their learning plans (Mills & Tait, 1996). It provides a platform for the learners to take later greater responsibility for identifying their learning resources. Tutors also guide learners as they progress toward established goals. They also encourage them to evaluate their progress

## **2.8 Influence of Technological Support Services on Learner's Retention in Open, Distance and Electronic Learning**

Distance and open education are basically aided by the technology. Most systems rely on technology to build academic content (Salih, 2004). Technological devices such as laptops, mobile phones, interactive games, and emails play a major role in ODL. Nevertheless, some students who are enrolled in ODL are not tech-savvy. Failure to appreciate this is likely to lead to low retention because once a learner realizes that the system is discriminative, he is likely to drop out (Mckendry, Wright, & Stevenson, 2014).

Technological support is necessary because it enables learners develop the capacity to use technological devices that the systems employ to rely on information (Potter, 2013). Thus, through technological support, a learner can conveniently participate in video-conference and online discussion platforms.

Technological support is also likely to enhance retention because, through it, a learner can make the learning process both cheap and reliable. According to Mills and Tait (1996), technological support enables the learner to develop skills on how to carry out online research. Moreover, he/she learns how to deliver assignments in the online learning system. Further, technological support is also essential because, through it, learners develop an

understanding on how to seek for online support in case he has problems (Park & Choi, 2009).

Technological support as learner support service is also essential because it enables the students to learn how to engage not only fellow students but also the lecturer through online discussion platforms. The learner also learns how to use social platforms that are used in communication such emails and twitter. Students also through technological support learn how to listen to pre-recorded notes. Also, they learn how to navigate through the learning platform. All these contribute to retention because they make the learning process easier.

## **2.9 Theoretical Framework**

This section explores some of the theories that have been advanced by scholars regarding learner retention. Also, it explores how the contents of these theories can be used within the context of open, distance and electronic learning.

### **2.9.1 Tinto's theory of student retention**

Vincent Tinto proposed this theory in 1993. It presents three broad sources of student departure. These are academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals. Another source of student departure is the student's, failure to remain incorporated in both the intellectual and the social life of the institution (Tinto, 2006). Tinto's "Model of Institutional Departure" states that, for a student to persist, he requires integration into both formal (academic performance) and informal (staff interactions) academic systems. He also requires integration into and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems (Tinto, 2006).

Further, Tinto identifies the principles of effective student retention to include the following: the first principle is Institutional Commitment to Students: According to Tinto (2006), effective retention programs are committed to the students they serve. Thus, institutions should always remain focused towards initiatives that would retain the students. The second principle is educational commitment. According to Tinto (2006), effective retention programs are first committed to the education of all, and not some, of the students. Finally, effective student retention should include Social and Intellectual Community. Tinto (2006) asserts that effective retention programs must contribute towards the development of both the supportive social and educational communities where all the students are active members (Tinto, 2006).

Also, Tinto's model stipulates the principles of effective student retention programs. First, he argues that institutions should provide relevant stakeholders with resources for program development. They should provide incentives for program participation that reach out to all those who are involved in the learning process. Moreover, they should commit to a long-term process of program development. Additionally, Institutions should give policy implementers room to implement their policies. According to Tinto (2006), Institutional actions should be coordinated collaboratively to ensure a systematic, school-wide approach to student retention. Moreover, they should act to ensure that faculty and staffs possess the skills needed to assist and educate their students. Institutions should also frontload their efforts on behalf of student retention. Finally, Institutions and programs should continually assess their actions with an eye toward improvement.

The theory identifies the stages of retention as Recruitment and Admission to College where Tinto argues that there is need to set realistic expectations so that the prospective student can choose the appropriate school. The second stage is an orientation that is aimed at bridging the Gap to College. During the orientation period, institutions should provide new students with

information about the character of institutional life. They should also be provided with the information about the requirements of the system that they are joining. There is also the Pre-entry Assessment and Placement stage whereby, the identification of Student Needs is done. This phase also involves placing students in appropriate first-year courses. It also includes assessing students for counseling purposes.

Additionally, the theory identifies institutions actions to enhance retention as transition assistance, and early contact. It also includes community building, and academic involvement and support. Other measures include Monitoring and early warning, Counseling, and Guiding.

### **2.9.2 Keller's Arcs Theory of Motivation**

The theory was formulated by John Keller and is based on the idea that there are four key elements in the learning process which can encourage and sustain learners' motivation. The four elements, according to Keller, form the acronym ARCS of the model (Keller, 1987). They stand for Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction (ARCS).

The model can be perceived as a problem-solving approach to learning that instructional designers can use to develop even more engaging eLearning activities. The model suggests an instructor can obtain learner attention either by perceptual arousal or by inquiry arousal (Keller, 1987). In the context of perpetual arousal, the learners' attention is achieved through surprise or doubt. It can also be achieved through disbelief. For inquiry arousal, the learners' curiosity would be stimulated by challenging problems that they are expected to solve.

The theory is relevant in discussing ODEL because can be effectively used to design ODEL learning course design. According to Keller, a successful course design must establish

relevance to motivate learners (Keller, 2009). This can be achieved by professionals encouraging the use of language, or stories to which the learner can relate.

### **2.9.3 Goleman's Theory of Emotional Intelligence**

The theory was developed by Daniel Goleman's. He defines emotional intelligence as the ability not only to perceive and access emotions but also to generate emotions so as to assist in thinking and understanding emotions and to reflect on the emotions with the intention of promoting emotional and intellectual growth. Goleman's further identified five components of emotional intelligence (Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000). The first element is Self-awareness which refers to the ability ability not only to recognize but also understand personal moods and emotions and understand their effect on others. The Hallmarks of self-awareness are self-confidence, and realistic self-assessment. It also includes a self-deprecating sense of humor. Self-awareness is dependent on one's ability to monitor one's emotional state and to correctly identify one's emotions.

The second component is self-regulation. It is the ability to control disruptive impulses and moods. It is the capacity to suspend judgment and to think before taking any action. Self-regulation has trustworthiness and integrity as its hallmarks. Also, it includes comfort with ambiguity, and openness to change. The third component of this theory is internal motivation which is defined as a passion for working for internal reasons that go beyond both money and status (Goleman, 2006). It is the ability persistently and energetically pursues goals. Hallmarks of internal motivation as observed by Goleman (2006) include a strong drive to achieve and optimism to succeed even where it is evident that one would fail.

The fourth component is empathy. It is the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people. Also, empathy includes the capacity to treat people according to their

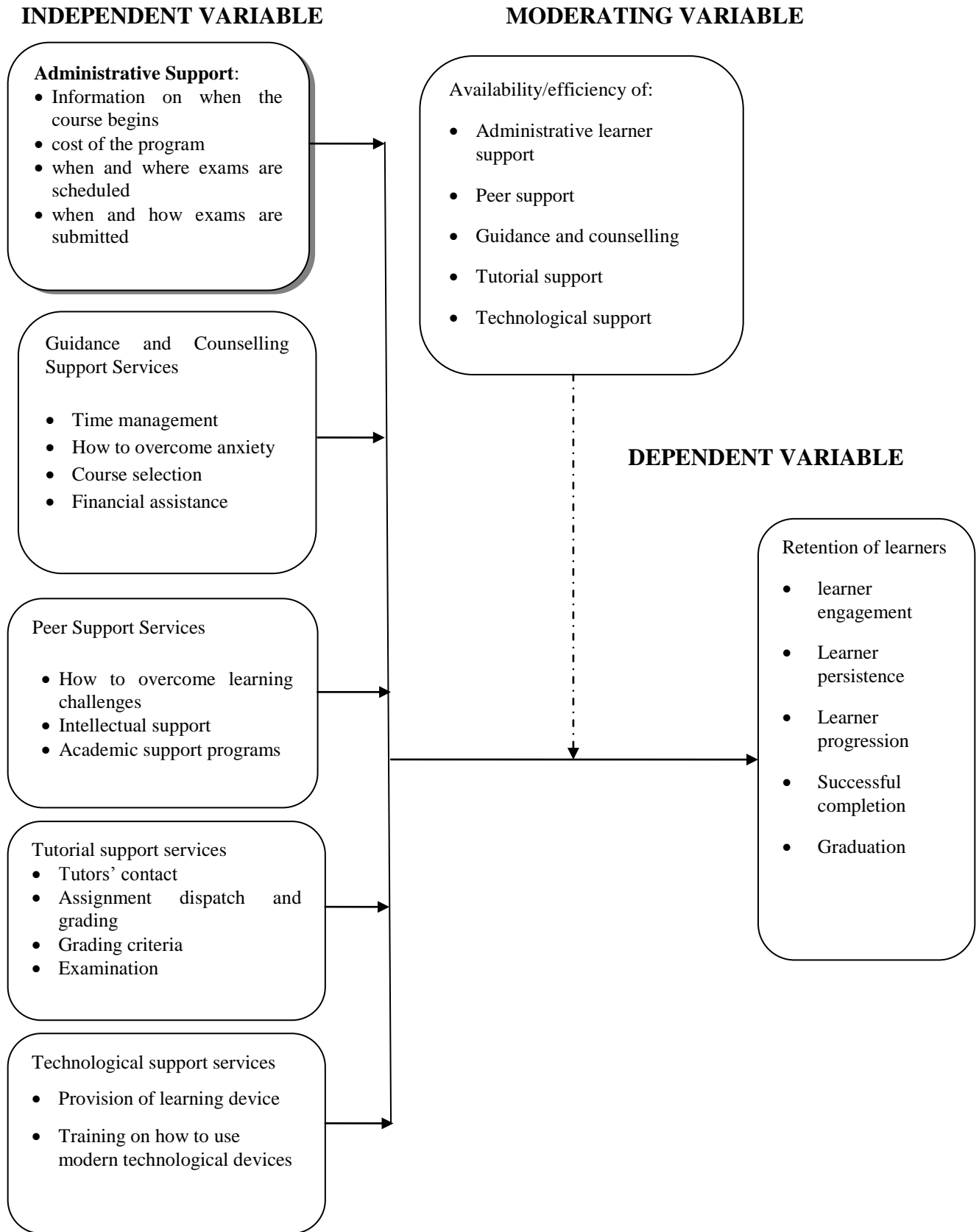
emotional reactions. Hallmarks of empathy include expertise in building and retaining talent, cross-cultural sensitivity, and service to clients and customers (Goleman, 2006). The final component is social skills. They involve the proficiency in managing relationships and building networks. It is also the ability to find common ground and build rapport with other people. Hallmarks of social skills include effectiveness in leading change, persuasiveness, and expertise building and leading teams.

Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence is relevant in learner support services because its five components provide a platform for understanding and assessing learners' behaviors, perception, attitudes, interpersonal skills, and potential. Emotional Intelligence is also an important consideration in defining the ODEL system because it provides an avenue for understanding all the learners. Thus, through this theory, the system designers and implementers can design it in such a way that it addresses individual differences.

## **2.10 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework presents a schematic diagram which shows the variables that are included in the study. In this project, the conceptual framework as explained in the figure one contains five independent variables which in this case are the different types of learner support services, one moderating variable and one dependent variable which is learner retention. This research explains how the independent variables impact on the dependent variable. The moderating variable, on the other hand, links the independent and dependent variables. According to framework, retention of learners can be determined by indicators that include: learner engagement in the learning process, learner persistence, learner progression, successful completion and eventually graduation.





**Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework**

### **2.11. Research Gap**

Since the emergence of ODEL, a lot of research has been made on areas that include: system design, course delivery and content development (Gustafson & Branch, 1997). Several researchers have also done significant research on the challenges that ODEL learners face and how to address them (Sherry, 1995). Moreover, researchers have made research on recruitment strategies and relevant learner support services. Most researchers have also observed the high dropout rate among ODEL learners (Gustafson & Branch, 1997). However, very little research has been done on how to retain these learners. This project bridges the gap by identifying how learner support services can be effectively used to address the problem of high dropout rate among learners. Finally, there are no current research articles in this area. Most of the articles were produced at the conception stage of this program. There is therefore need for more recent articles to look at the trend.

### **2.12. Summary of chapter two**

This chapter has given attention to a number of literatures that have been written about influence of learner support services. The chapter begins by identifying what learner retention is and why it is necessary in ODL systems. The chapter then analyses the various types of learner support services. They include: administrative support, guidance and counseling support, peer support, tutorial support services and finally technological learner support services. The chapter further analyses the impact of these services on retention of learners within the ODL context. Finally, the chapter examines the conceptual framework of the research.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter contains information on the research design for the study on the influence of learner support services in ODEL. Also, it provides information on the target population, sample and sampling procedure, data collection instruments and reliability and viability. Further, it contains information on data collection and data analysis procedures.

#### **3.2. Research Design**

The project used the descriptive research design. It involved observational, case study and using the survey. Case study involved the examination of previous literature and case studies that have been written regarding learner support services. Through such analysis, it was easy to get insights into the problem or helped to develop ideas or hypotheses for the quantitative research. The case studies used the uncover trends in thought and opinions about learner support services. After the survey, analysis was done to formulate facts and uncover patterns about learner support services.

#### **3.3. Target population**

The target population refers to the entire population, or group that a researcher is interested in researching and analyzing (Levy & Lemeshow, 2013). It is used to draw the sampling frame. To carry out the research, the heterogeneity and quality of information was taken into consideration. Table 3.1 gives information on the target population.

**Table 3.1: Target Population**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Target population</b>
First year	50
Second year	50
Third year	50
Fourth year	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>

### **3.4. Sample size and sampling procedure**

Sampling procedure involves the selection of some study units from a defined study population (Peters et al., 2013). Sample size is defined as the number of participants to include in a research project from the target population. As observed by Peters *et al.*, (2013), a sample of between 10% and 30% of the total population can be used to determine the sample size. However, a sample size of 10% was determined to be too small and not representative. Currently, the university has one thousand two hundred and fifty students who are actively undertaking school based degree program. Based on this population, it is a size of 25%, which translated to 200 respondents, was considered. The study therefore had a sample that was over 10% and meets the threshold of 30 for a descriptive study.

To settle on who was to take part in the study, the study first determined how many students were undertaking the program. Once the sample size was determined, it was proportionally divided among the academic years because the faculty has the ability to admit an average number of students per academic year. Once this was done the study prepared a sample frame from each academic year. The study then used simple random to select the respondents from each sample frame.

### **3.5. Research instrument**

It is a measurement device used by researchers (Mimi et al., 2015). This research involved the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire had both the open and close ended questions. The open-ended questions were used so as to allow the respondents to make additional comments. Also it was used to acquire supplementary data to those obtained from the questionnaire. The open-ended questions were used to determine respondents' level of satisfaction with the learner support services offered by the institution.

### **3.6. Validity of the Research Instrument**

Validity of the research instrument is the extent to which a research instrument does not only measure what it is supposed to measure but also performs as it is designed to perform. To make the research questionnaire valid, discussions were held with the supervisor and peer review. This ensured that the formulated questions were as valid as possible.

### **3.7. Reliability of the Research Instrument**

Reliability of the research instrument is defined as the measure of a degree by which the research tool works towards yielding consistent results after repeated results (Mimi et al., 2015). To be reliable, the research instrument must be compatible with the research objectives.

To test the reliability of this research instrument, internal consistency techniques that is based on the Cronbach Alpha method was used. This method collected data from five Open distance and electronic students from other students from other universities, who did not participate in the study data collection. The results obtained from the pre-testing of the questionnaire showed a reliability coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) of .841. The following formula was used.

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N - 1) \cdot \bar{c}}$$

Where N is equal to the number of items, c-bar is the average inter-item covariance among the items and v-bar equals the average variance.

The results from pre-testing showed that the Cronbach Alpha's coefficient was .867, which was above the 0.7 threshold recommended that was recommended by Peters et al., (2013). It was therefore evident that there was high consistency between the items of the tool; learners' retention, guidance and counseling services, administrative support services, tutorial support services and peer support services.

### **3.8. Data Collection Procedure**

After the pilot research instrument was tested and adopted, the questionnaires were administered to each member of the sampled target population so as to ensure high response rate. The supervisor drew the schedule for data collection. The method was subject to the interest and preferences of the specific respondent. Nevertheless, before carrying out the data collection process, permission was sought from the chairman of the distance studies department of Nairobi University. A copy of this consent was presented to the district education office, Kisii. Another letter was provided to the administration of Mount Kenya University-Kisii Campus. This letter was also produced to the respondents during research.

### **3.9. Data Analysis Methods**

Data analysis methods refer to the process by which sense and meaning are made of the collected data in qualitative research. It can also be defined as the process by which the emergent knowledge is applied to the response from the clients. Data analysis, therefore, involves breaking down the collected data into constituent parts so as to obtain answers to the

research questions. In this research project, the dependent variable was learner retention. The independent variable was the learners support services within the context of ODEL. Data analysis methods in this research included the use of descriptive statistics: frequency distribution, and percentages to analyze the response from close-ended questions such as those that relate to demographic and personal information. On the other hand, the interpretation of open-ended questions involved qualitatively analyzing the responses through the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

### **3.10. Operational definition of variables**

The operational definition of variables is contained in 1.0 one which provides information on the objectives of the study and their specifying variables, indicators, measurements, scale and data collection methods and analysis.

**Table 3.2 Operational Definition of Variables**

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Measurement</b>	<b>Measurement scale</b>	<b>Data collection method</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
To establish the influence of administrative support services on learner retention	Independent: administrative support services Dependent: learner retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of administrative supportive services</li> <li>• Efficiency of administrative support services</li> </ul>	Usage of administrative support services such as provision of information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cost of the course</li> <li>• fees</li> <li>• who to contact</li> <li>• when and how to submit assignment</li> <li>• and who to contact by Mount Kenya University</li> </ul>	Ordinal	Questionnaire	Quantitative Qualitative
To examine the influence of guidance and counseling services on learner retention	Independent: Guidance and counseling services Dependent: learner retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of guidance and counseling services</li> <li>• Efficiency of guidance and counseling services</li> </ul>	Application of guidance and counseling services such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provision of information on how to apply for a course</li> <li>• time management</li> <li>• how to revise for exams</li> <li>• how to overcome stress/anxiety</li> <li>• study skills by Mount Kenya University-Kisii Campus</li> </ul>	Ordinal	Questionnaire	Quantitative Qualitative



Objectives	Variables	Indicators	Measurement	Measurement scale	Data collection method	Analysis
To determine the influence of peer support services on learner retention	Independent: peer support services Dependent: learner retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of peer supportive services</li> <li>• Efficiency of peer support services</li> </ul>	Presence of peer support services such: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• online group discussion</li> <li>• existence of social networks</li> <li>• Existence of focus group discussions in Mount Kenya University-Kisii</li> </ul>	Ordinal	Questionnaire	Quantitative Qualitative
To investigate the influence of tutorial support services on learner retention	Independent: tutorial support services Dependent: learner retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of tutorial supportive services</li> <li>• Efficiency of tutorial support services</li> </ul>	Usage of tutorial support services such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provision of information on tutor contact</li> <li>• assignment dispatch and grading,</li> <li>• examination by Mount Kenya University-Kisii Campus</li> </ul>	Ordinal	Questionnaire	Quantitative Qualitative
To assess the influence of technological learner support services on learner retention	Independent: technological support services Dependent: learner retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of technological support services</li> <li>• Efficiency of technological support services</li> </ul>	Provision of technological support services such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to submit assignments online</li> <li>• how to send and receive mails</li> <li>• how to surf through the internet</li> <li>• How to access online libraries by mount Kenya University- Kisii Campus.</li> </ul>	Ordinal	Questionnaire	Quantitative Qualitative

### **3.11 Ethical considerations**

The research subscribed to various ethical issues that include the following: seeking of informed consent from the respondent by ensuring that the respondents knowingly and voluntarily accepts to take part in the study; and ensuring that respondents were not be harmed throughout the exercise. It was achieved by creating good rapport with my clients. The respondents were given a favorable and safe environment while giving their response. It was achieved by giving them room to work in an environment where they felt safe. Another ethical consideration was confidentiality. The respondents' identity and information was not disclosed to any person. Moreover, the information that was acquired was only meant for the purpose of the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, an analysis and discussions of the results that were obtained from the field have been presented. The presentation of the result has been done by use of table and graphs to facilitate understanding. The interpretation on the hand has been done by in form of a narrative based on the research objectives. The results that have been presented here originate from data that were collected from the field. The analysis has been quantitatively done by use of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0. The study contains results on not only respondents' demographics, and response rate but also descriptive statistic.

#### **4.2 Response Rate**

The data collection tool that was used in this research was a questionnaire was administered on two hundred respondents. Out of this, 178 respondents responded while 15 did not return their questionnaires. This translated to 89% response rate of the sample population. According to Yin (2013), this was an excellent response rate because a 50% response rate can adequately give researcher information on what he is researching on. Thus, 89% was a good response rate. Despite the fact that this was a good response rate, it is regrettable that 22 respondents which translate to 11% of the total sampled population did not respond. Their failure to respond can however be attributed to the fact that they were out of reach by the time the questionnaires were being collected. It is however worth observing that all those who responded to answered all the questions in the questionnaire. The response rate is as presented in the Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Analysis by Response Rate**

Category	Frequency	Percent
<i>Undergraduate</i>		
Sample population	200	100
Response	178	89
No response	22	11

### **4.3 Respondents' Demographics**

Various aspects of the demographics were considered. This includes age, gender, employment status, marriage status and academic year. All these were aimed at having a comprehensive understanding of the audience.

#### **4.3.1. Respondents' Gender**

The respondents were requested to state their Gender and the results obtained from the questionnaires were recorded in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Analysis by Respondents' Gender**

GENDER	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Male	78	43.82
Female	100	56.18
Total	178	100

From the results in Table 4.2, it is evident that a majority of the respondents were females (56.18%) while males constituted the lowest percentage of the respondents (43.82%). The gap between the two genders is wide. This signifies the fact that there is gender parity in

distance and electronic learning. Most of those who go for distance education are females while males constitute a lower percentage.

### 4.3.2 Respondents Age

The respondents were asked to indicate their age brackets. The results are as indicated in the Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Analysis by Respondents' Age**

Age Bracket (years)	Frequency	Percentage
18-30	47	26.40
31-40	65	36.52
41-50	55	30.90
51-60	9	5.06
61 and above	2	1.12
Total	178	100

The result in Table 4.3 clearly demonstrates that those who are between 31 and forty formed the highest percentage of the respondents at 36.52%. They were closely followed by those who ranged between 41 and 50 years who constituted 30.90% of the respondents. Those who indicated that they were between 18 to 30 years were 26.40% while those who were between 51 to 60 years constituted 5.06%. The final categories of respondents were those who were above the age of 60 who were 1.12%.

### 4.3.3. Respondents' Year of Study

The respondents were requested to indicate in the questionnaire their academic year and the results are as shown in the Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Analysis by Respondents' Year of Study**

Academic year	Degree	Percentage
First	50	28.09
Second	80	44.94
Third	32	17.98
Fourth	16	8.99
Total	178	100

The results in Table 4.4 showed that most of the respondents were second year students who formed 44.94% of the respondents. The first year students who constituted 28.09% followed by the third year students who constituted 17.98% and finally the fourth year students who constituted 8.99%. Forth year and third year students constituted the lowest percentage because most of them had gone for industrial attachments and were therefore not actively involved in learning.

#### 4.3.4. Respondents' Marital Status

The respondents were requested to indicate their marital status. The results are as indicated in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Respondents' Marital Status**

Marital status	Frequency	percentage
Married	90	50.56
Single	34	19.10
Divorced	19	10.67
Widowed	35	19.66

From Table 4.5, it is evident that most of those who responded to the questionnaire were married at 50.56%. The divorced and the widowed followed closely at 19.10% and 19.66% respectively. The single respondents were the least at 10.67%. It can therefore be concluded that majority of those who go for distance learning programs are either married or were at one point married.

#### **4.3.5: Respondents' Employment status**

The respondents were asked to indicate their employment status and Table 4.6 presents the response.

**Table 4.6: Respondents' Employment Status**

Employment status	Frequency	Percentage
Informal employment	76	42.70
Formal employment	91	51.12
Unemployed	28	15.73

From the Table 4.6, it can be deduced that majority of those who go for distance learning are employed. Those who are in the formal sector constitute 51.12% of the total respondents while those who are in informal employment were 42.70%. Those who are unemployed on the other hand were the least at 15.12%.

#### **4.3.6 Number of Dependents**

Respondents were requested to indicate the number of dependents that they have. The results are as shown in the Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7: Number of Dependents**

Number of dependents	Interval	Percentage
0	0	0
1-5	111	62.36
6 to 10	60	33.71
11 and above	7	3.93

From the above table, it can be observed that none of those who responded to the questionnaire does not have dependents. It can also be observed that those who responded had dependents that range between one and five at 62.36%. Those who had dependents of between 6 and 10 were 33.71% while those who had more than ten dependents were 3.93%.

#### **4.3.7 Highest Qualification Attained Through Distance, Open and Electronic Learning**

The respondents were requested to state the highest qualification that they have had through distance, open and electronic learning and the following was the response. The response is presented in the Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8: Analysis by Highest Qualification**

Highest level	Frequency	Percentage
Dropped from course	5	2.81
Currently undertaking first course	81	45.51
Certificate (completed)	41	23.03
Diploma (completed)	34	19.10
Undergraduate degree (completed)	14	7.87
Masters	3	1.69
PhD	0	0



From table 4.8, it was observed that, those who are currently undertaking their first course constituted the highest percentage at 45.51%. On the other hand, those who have completed a certificate course and those who have completed a diploma course followed closely by 23.03% and 19.10% respectively. Those who have completed a degree course through ODEL system were 7.87%. 2.81% reported to have at one point dropped from a program while none of the respondents had successfully completed a PhD course.

#### 4.4: Learner Retention

The study sought to evaluate the respondents' view of institution's initiative to retain students through the following statements as presented in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9: Analysis by Learner Retention**

Indicator	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean
The learner support services provided encourages me to persist with the program to retention	9.55	8.43	10.11	22.47	49.44	3.94
I intend to graduate within the stipulated duration my degree takes	1.69	3.37	2.25	28.65	64.04	4.50
<b>LEARNER RETENTION</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>12.12</b>	<b>15.95</b>	<b>50.83</b>	<b>17.79</b>	<b>4.22</b>

From the table 4.9, it is evident that most of the learners at 49.44% strongly agree that the learner support services that are provided encourage them to continue with the program to completion. 22.47% on the other hand agree that the learner support services that are provides encourages them to continue with the program to completion. A look at those who agree and those who strongly agree implies that majority of the learners at 71.92 agree with the learner

support services that are provided by the institution. A smaller percentage at 9.55 and 8.43% strongly disagree or disagree respectively. 10.11% on the other neither agree nor disagree. A look at the percentage of those who neither agree nor disagree, strongly disagree and disagree implies that the institution's learner support services are not relevant to all the learners.

From Table 4.9, it is also evident that most of the learners at 64.04% strongly agree that they intend to graduate within the stipulated periods of their program. A further 28.65% agree that they intend to complete their programs within the stipulated periods. A look at the total percentage of those who strongly agree and those who agree point to the fact that majority of the respondents intend to graduate within the stipulated periods. A smaller percentage neither agrees nor disagree (2.25%) while 3.37% disagree. Those who strongly disagree are 1.69%. this latter category imply that there are learners who have different challenges that the institution must address in order to graduate within the stipulated time.

#### **4.5: Administrative Learner Support**

The study sought to assess the study objective using data collected on a 5-point Likert Scale and the results accompanied the corresponding objectives. The study used in the scale; strongly

Disagree = 1: Disagree= 2: Neutral = 3: Agree =4: Strongly Agree = 5 to measure the Dependent Variable (DV) and the independent variables (IVs). The interpretation was first based on the Likert scale. The study sought to establish the status of the institution's learner support services.

The results were recorded as in table 4.10.

**Table 4.10: Analysis by Administrative Support**

Indicator	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean
Learning materials are timely issued to all the learners	0.00	7.30	5.62	48.88	38.20	4.18
Administration provides learners with information on when the course begins	2.25	8.99	2.25	53.93	32.58	4.6
The institution provides information on the cost of the program	1.69	7.30	5.62	56.74	28.65	4.03
Institution provides information on when and how to submit the assignment	0.00	1.69	5.06	73.03	20.22	4.12
Learners records are always up to date	1.12	2.81	1.69	65.73	28.65	4.18
Institution provides bursaries to deserving learners	38.20	33.71	21.35	3.37	3.37	2.0
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT</b>	<b>2.61</b>	<b>16.49</b>	<b>18.39</b>	<b>39.25</b>	<b>23.26</b>	<b>3.85</b>

From Table 4.10, most learners agreed that the institution issues learning materials to all the learners. 48.88% agreed to this while another 38.20% strongly agreed. A small percentage (5.62%) were neutral while 7.30% disagreed. There is no respondent who strongly disagreed with the statement. This points to the fact that issuance of learning materials is important in learner retention.

Most of the respondents: 53.93 and 32.58% also agreed or strongly agreed respectively that the institution provides information on when the course begins. With regards to the cost of the program, 56.74% and 28.65% agreed and strongly agreed respectively that they are furnished with information on the cost of the program. This is a very high percentage as compared those who either took a neutral position or disagreed with the statement.

Most of the respondents at 73.03% and 20.22% also agreed and agreed strongly that they are furnished with information on how and when to submit assignments. Majority of the respondents also agreed that their records are up to date. With regards to bursary, 71.91% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that the institution provides them with bursary.

In conclusion, administrative support is very essential in learner retention. Services such as issuing learning materials to all the learners and providing information on the cost of learning are necessary in retention. Provision of information on when and how to submit assignments are effective ways of retaining learners.

Though majority of the respondents disagree with the statement that the institution provides scholarships to financially disadvantaged students, bursaries are essential because through them, the institution can retain students who are likely to drop out of college due to financial challenges.

#### **4.6: Guidance and Counseling Service**

Guidance and counseling services was one of variables in this study. Learners were expected to answer specific questions with regards to provision of guidance and counseling services within the institution. The responses are presented in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11: Analysis by Guidance and Counseling**

Indicator	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean
The institution identifies and helps learners with learning challenges	4.55	15.17	13.03	48.65	23.60	3.87
Learners are assisted on issues of time management	3.93	11.24	14.16	44.27	26.40	3.78
Learners are guided and counseled on study skills	1.69	24.71	6.18	17.42	50	3.91
Institution equips learners with information on how to overcome exam anxiety	1.12	9.55	11.80	51.12	26.40	3.92
The institution helps learners on course selection	0.00	3.94	16.85	56.74	22.47	3.98
The institution helps learners on how to overcome financial crisis	3.93	11.91	28.09	38.09	17.98	3.54
<b>GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING</b>	<b>2.61</b>	<b>16.49</b>	<b>18.39</b>	<b>39.25</b>	<b>23.26</b>	<b>3.83</b>

From the data in Table 4.11, most of the respondents at 72.25% agreed that the institution not only identifies but also helps learners with learning challenges. A good percentage at 70.67% agreed that the institution assists learners with the issues of time management while 77.52% were in support of the services that the institution provides to them to overcome exam anxiety. 79.21% also agreed that the institution helps them on course selection. With regards to statement on how to overcome financial crisis, 56.07% supported the institutions initiatives on how to overcome financial crisis.

An analysis of the responses proves that majority of the participants supported the guidance and counseling services that are provided by the institution. Through such services, it is

evident that most of them are motivated to carry on with their studies despite the challenges that they may have throughout their academic life.

#### 4.7: Peer Support Services

The influence of peer support services on retention was one of the objectives of this study. To examine this, respondents were expected to respond to a few statements on peer support services within the institution. The results are presented in Table. 4.12.

**Table 4.12: Analysis by Peer Support Service**

Indicator	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean
Institution has a platform for peer engagement	6.18	12.92	12.47	43.71	24.72	3.68
Learners receive peer support on how to overcome learning challenges	6.85	15.17	7.98	43.71	26.29	3.67
Learners receive intellectual support	6.74	6.85	16.40	48.09	21.91	3.72
There is effective peer mentorship program	6.85	10.79	18.09	46.85	17.42	3.57
Peer opinions and suggestions are thoroughly considered by the administration	1.69	9.55	11.24	43.26	34.26	3.99
<b>PEER SUPPORT SERVICES</b>	<b>2.61</b>	<b>16.49</b>	<b>18.39</b>	<b>39.25</b>	<b>23.26</b>	<b>3.53</b>

From the data in Table 4.12, majority of the learners at 68.43 agree that the institution has a platform for peer engagement. With regards reception of peer support services on how to overcome learning challenges, 70% of the learners approved the peer support that they

receive. A same percentage also agreed that they receive intellectual support services. 64.27% of the respondents also approved the institutions peer mentorship program. On the other hand, 77.52% agreed that peer opinions and suggestions are always considered by the administration.

From the responses that respondents gave on peer support services, it is evident that it is a very important factor in learner retention. By approving the peer platform that the institution has put in place, the institution is sure of retaining most of the learners. Because there is a number that are either neutral or do not agree to the fact, the university should work out ways on how its peer mentorship program accommodates.

#### 4.8: Technological Support

Technology is an important factor in the provision of distance education. Its integration in learning is therefore necessary in learner retention. This study therefore aimed at determining the influence of technology on learner retention. Table 4.13 shows the response.

**Table 4.13: Analysis by Technological Support**

Indicator	Strongly					Mean
	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
	%	%	%	%	%	
Learners are provided with learning gadgets	39.89	48.09	12.02	0.00	0.00	1.03
Learners are taught on how to use technological devices	1.69	2.25	11.24	46.63	38.20	4.17
Technological support	20.79	15.17	21.63	23.15	19.1	2.6

From Table 4.13, it is evident that the university does not provide technological learning gadgets to learners. 87.98% responded that the university does not provide them with learning gadgets. In relation to sensitization on how to use technological gadgets, 84.83% responded that indeed they are provided with such education. It points to the fact that though the university does not provide learners with gadgets, it appreciates the importance of the gadgets in acquisition of knowledge. It is because of this that learners are given the technological support.



**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND**  
**RECOMMENDATION**

**5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the summary of the research findings, conclusions and recommendations are given. The chapter also highlights the research gaps the researcher felt should be filled by further research as well the limitations of the study. The conclusions and recommendation are actually based on the study objective.

**5.2 Summary of Findings**

This study was aimed at determining the influence of learner support services on learner retention among undergraduate programs in open, distance and electronic learning in Mount Kenya University. This study found out that there was high student retention in this university. From this study, it was realized that the university effectively provides learner support services to all its learners. Consequently, most learners were encouraged to continue with their studies to completion.

**5.2.1 Administrative Learner Support and retention**

The study found that administrative support really influence retention of learners in ODEL systems. Aspects of administrative learner support services such as timely issuance of learning materials to learners reduces the stress that they may have if that was not done. On the other hand, provision of information on when the course begins is essential in retention because it enables the learners to appropriately plan for their studies. This eliminates the possibility of a learner dropping out because of clashes in his schedules. On the other hand,

when the institution provides full information on the cost of the program, learners are likely to budget appropriately on how to meet the financial demand. Moreover, provision of information on how and when to submit assignments is necessary because enables the learners to not only do the tasks in time but also submit them in time. This avoids challenges that arise from tasks that are not submitted. With regards to financial assistance, institutions should always work out ways on how learners who are yearning for education but are financially incapacitated can be assisted. This will eliminate the possibility of the dropping out of school.

### **5.2.2 Guidance and Counseling Services and Retention**

There are several challenges that learners face that if not addressed, are likely to result into drop outs. To ensure that there is full completion rate, this study found out that ODEL institutions must come up with measures that would enable learners to not only understand the challenges that they have but also on how to overcome them. This research found out that, ODEL system is highly involving in terms of time. Therefore, the institution taught learners on time management. It also teaches learners on study skills. It also trains learners on how overcome exam anxiety. Additionally, learners are taught on how to overcome financial crisis. Through this, the university has been able to retain its students.

### **5.2.3 Peer Support Services and Retention**

This study found that, the institution has a peer engagement platform that has really influenced platform. Through the peer engagement platform, the institution has made it easy for learners to overcome their learning challenges. The institution has also made it easy for the learners to receive intellectual peer support. This has really influenced retention. The institution also has an effective mentorship program. The research also found out that peer

opinions and suggestions are thoroughly considered by the administration. Through this, the administration is able to retain the learners. Overall, peer support services highly influences learner retention because through it, learners are able to share ways through which they can overcome learning challenges.

#### **5.2.4. Technological Support Service and retention**

This research found that the institution does not provide learners with learning gadgets such as laptops and ipads. Despite this, the institution provides education to the learners on how to use these gadgets. Consequently, learners have been able to overcome technology related challenges and this has improved learner retention.

### **5.3 Discussion of the Study**

This study was aimed at determining the influence of learner support services on learner retention in open, distance and electronic learning. The findings of this study are in conformity to views of various scholars on how learner support services are important in retaining the learners. This section provides comparative analysis of findings of this study and the views of other scholars.

#### **5.3.1 Administrative Learner Support and learner retention**

This study observes that, administrative support services are very essential in retaining learners. According to this study, administrative support services enable the learners to understand the general administrative requirements such as the fee requirements, who to support during crisis, when and how to submit assignments alongside other administrative issues. Consequently, the learners are able to learn without any stress. This finding confirms the observations of Grote (2000) who held that, administrative support services in Open

Systems are very essential because through them, the administration is able to eliminate the fear and anxiety that learners develop throughout their learning process. The findings also support the views that are held by Jane *et al* (2008) who held that, the role of administrative support is so crucial that learning institutions should have functional administrative support personnel to assist the learners to overcome their learning challenges.

### **5.3.2 Guidance and Counseling Services and Retention**

This study revealed that, just like any other learner, open, distance and electronic learners have learning challenges that they must overcome. The ability of the institution to help the learners to overcome these challenges will determine retention. Personal and social issues were revealed to be among the issues that a learner must overcome in order to learner effectively. This view supports what Farirai and Richard (2015) observed in their article that counselling services motivates learners. The findings also supports the assertions that are held by Keller (2009) that for learners to effectively learn, there must be a clear strategy on how the institution will help them to overcome the personal challenges that they might have.

### **5.3.3 Peer support services and learner retention**

The study revealed that most of the challenges that open, distance and electronic learners face are common. A platform on how they can share their challenges is therefore a sure way on how they can overcome them. The study found out that, an effective peer support system enables the learners to share their challenges throughout their learning period. Moreover, it enables them to reap from the experiences of the alumni. These findings confirm the views of Latifah (2008) that held the view that, to manage retention, learners must benefit much from successful stories of the alumni community. The findings also corroborate the views of

Mckendry *et al* (2014) that students voices are necessary when it comes to helping their colleagues in overcoming learning challenges.

#### **5.3.4 Technological support services and learner retention**

According to this study, the use of technology is something that Open, Distance and Electronic learning institutions cannot avoid. The study also observed that, institutions must provide technological support service to enable the learners to overcome the challenges that they are likely to meet in their application of technology in the learning process. According to this study, it was evident that, despite the importance of technology, most learners are unable to utilize it fully in education. In an environment where technology supports the learning process, learners are likely to drop out if they are unable to employ it. This view is also held by Park and Choi (2009) who observes that among the factors that enhance learner retention is effective use of technology. This is because; technology makes the learning process easy, comfortable and enjoyable.

#### **5.4 Conclusion of the Study**

This study found that, learner support service is an integral part of Open Distance and Electronic learning. The study found out that, through effective learner support structures, Mount Kenya University has been able to not only attract a good number of students but also retain. Thus, because of learner support services, most learners have been able to complete their studies within the stipulated period.

Through administrative support services, the institution has been able to provide learners with all the administrative information that they need. This has enhanced retention. On the other hand, efficiency of guidance and counseling services that are provided by the institution has made it easy for the learners to overcome their learning challenges. This has positively

impacted on learner retention. Similarly, the availability of peer engagement platform has made it possible for learners to not only share their challenges but also share ways of overcoming the challenges. This has also impacted on retention. Finally, though the university does not provide learners with technological devices, training the learners on how they are applied in education has enhanced retention because through that, learners have been able to appreciate their relevance.

### **5.5 Recommendations of the study**

This study recommends the following based on its findings

- i. ODEL institutions should develop efficient learner support systems to enhance learner retention.
- ii. Learner support services should be a continuous process in ODEL institutions. There should be a fully operational department that provides learner support services. This department should have experts.
- iii. ODEL institutions should develop ways through which they can provide learners with technological devices such as laptops. These devices are very essential in ODEL and providing them will enhance retention.

### **5.6 Suggestions for Further Study**

This research suggests the following for further research

- i. An assessment of how learner support services are administered in purely digital learning systems
- ii. A study on how alumni members can be used to provide peer support services
- iii. A repetition of the same study in other branches of Mount Kenya University and even other universities to compare the results.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Letter of Introduction**

Miyuga Primary school,

P.O Box, 75-40310

Mawego.

MOBILE: +254715890333

7<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

Dear Sir/Madam

#### **TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**RE: Request for Participation in Research Study on Influence Of Learner Support Services on Learners' Retention in Bachelor Of Education Students by Open, Distance and Electronic Learning In Kisii Campus, Mount Kenya University**

I am Kaudo Isdore Ouma, currently pursuing a Master of Distance Education degree at the University of Nairobi. With a lot of humility, I am requesting you to assist me by filling in the questionnaire below as correctly and as honestly as possible. The findings of the research will be used purely for this research. Moreover, they will be handled with the confidentiality that it deserves. Thanks a lot in advance for your willingness to participate in this research.

Sincerely yours,

Kaudo Isdore Ouma

## Appendix B: Questionnaire

### SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Kindly indicate your gender by putting a tick (✓) in the appropriate box

Male  female

2. I am.....years old (Fill in the space by indicating your age)

3. kindly indicate your academic year by putting a tick (✓) on the appropriate box

1<sup>st</sup>.  2<sup>nd</sup>.  3<sup>rd</sup>.  4<sup>th</sup>.

4. I was admitted in the year.....(indicate the year when you were admitted into the program)

5. Indicate your marital status by putting a tick (✓) in the appropriate box

Married  single  divorced  widowed

6. Employment status (please indicate by putting a tick (✓) on the appropriate box)

Informal employment  formal employment  unemployed

7. I have.....dependents (kindly indicate in figures the number of dependents you have).

8. What is the highest Qualification that you have attained through distance, open and electronic learning? Indicate by ticking (✓) the appropriate box.

<b>Open, Distance and Electronic learning experience</b>	<b>Please tick only one box</b>
Interrupted from distance Learning (dropped from the course)	
Currently Undertaking first Course	
Certificate	
Diploma	
Undergraduate Degree	
Masters	
PhD	

9. Any other information, please specify.....

**SECTION B: Learner Retention**

10. This section evaluates your view of institution’s initiative to retain students. Kindly indicate in your opinion the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements by ticking (√) in the space corresponding to the correct answer.

1. **Scale: Strongly Disagree =1; Disagree nor Disagree = 2; Neither = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5**

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
a. Completion :  The learner support provided encourages me to persist with the program to completion					
b. Graduation: I intend to graduate within the stipulated duration my degree takes					

**SECTION C: Administrative Learner Support Services**

This section of the study evaluates the main indicators of administrative learner support services. Please indicate in your opinion the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements on administrative learner support service. Kindly Tick (√) in the space corresponding to the correct answer.

**Scale: Strongly Disagree =1; Disagree = 2; Neither Agree nor Disagree 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5**

<b>Administrative learner support statements</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
i. Learning materials are timely issued to all the learners					
ii. Administration provides learners information on when course begins					
iii. The institution provides information on the cost of the program					
iv. Institution provides information on when and how to submit assignments					
v. Learners records are always up to date					
vi. Institution provides bursaries to deserving learners					

**SECTION D: Guidance and Counseling Services**

This section of the study evaluates the main indicators of Guidance and counseling support services. Please indicate in the table below your opinion of the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements on Guidance and counseling services.

Kindly Tick (√) in the space corresponding to the correct answer.

**Scale: Strongly Disagree =1; Disagree = 2; Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5**

<b>Guidance and counseling services statements</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
i. The institution identifies and helps learners with learning challenges					
ii. Through guidance and counseling, learners are assisted on issues of time management					
iii. The institution guides and counsels learners on study skills					
iv. The institution equips learners with information on how to overcome exam anxiety					
v. The institution helps learners on course selection					
vi. The institution helps learners on how to overcome financial crisis					

**SECTION C: Peer Support Services**

This section of the study evaluates the main indicators of Peer Support services. Please indicate in the table below your opinion on the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements on Peer Support services. Kindly Tick (√) in the space corresponding to the correct answer.

**Scale: Strongly Disagree =1; Disagree = 2; neither agree nor Disagree= 3; Agree = 4; strongly Agree = 5**

<b>Peer Support services statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
i. Institution has a platform for peer engagement					
ii. Learners receive peer support on how to overcome learning challenges					
iii. Learners receive intellectual peer support					
iv. There is effective peer mentorship program					
v. Peer opinions and suggestions are thoroughly considered by the administration					

**SECTION D: Tutorial Support Services**

This section of the study evaluates the main indicators of Tutorial Support services. Please indicate in the table below your opinion of your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements on Tutorial Support services. Kindly Tick (√) in the space corresponding to the correct answer.

**Scale: Strongly Disagree =1; Disagree = 2; neither agree nor disagree = 3; Agree = 4; strongly Agree = 5**

<b>Tutorial support services statements</b>	1	2	3	4	5
i. Learners are provided by Tutor’s contact details such as Email address, and mobile phone number					
ii. Tutors are easily accessible					
iii. Tutors provide learners with information on assignment dispatch and grading					
iv. Tutors provide learners with information on grading criteria					
v. Tutors provide occasional face to face tutorial sessions					
vi. Tutors provide relevant information regarding exams e.g. dates, venue and time					

**SECTION E: Technological learner support services**

This section of the study evaluates the main indicators of Technological learner support services. Please indicate in your opinion the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements on Technological learner support services. Kindly Tick (√) in the space corresponding to the correct answer.

**Scale: Strongly Disagree =1; Disagree = 2; neither agree nor disagree= 3; Agree = 4; strongly Agree = 5**

<b>Technological learner support services statements</b>	1	2	3	4	5
i. Learners are provided with learning gadgets e.g. laptops, Ipads,					
ii. Learners are taught on how to use technological devices					

**Thanks a lot for your time and cooperation**



**Appendix C: NACOSTI Letter**



**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,  
TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION**

Telephone: +254-20-2213471,  
2241349, 3310571, 2219420  
Fax: +254-20-318245, 318249  
Email: dg@nacosti.go.ke  
Website: www.nacosti.go.ke  
When replying please quote

NACOSTI, Upper Kabete  
Off Waiyaki Way  
P.O. Box 30623-00100  
NAIROBI-KENYA

Ref. No. **NACOSTI/P/18/94171/22443**

Date: **15<sup>th</sup> May, 2018**

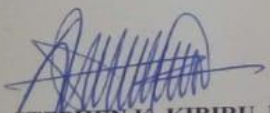
Isdore Ouma Kaudo  
University of Nairobi  
P.O. Box 30197-00100  
**NAIROBI**

**RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION**

Following your application for authority to carry out research on *“Influence of learner support services on learners retention among undergraduate programs in open, distance and electronic learning students: A case of Mount Kenya University-Kenya,”* I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Kisii County** for the period ending **14<sup>th</sup> May, 2019**.

You are advised to report to **the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Kisii County** before embarking on the research project.

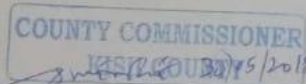
Kindly note that, as an applicant who has been licensed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 to conduct research in Kenya, you shall deposit a **copy** of the final research report to the Commission within **one year** of completion. The soft copy of the same should be submitted through the Online Research Information System.

  
**DR. STEPHEN K. KIBIRU, PhD.**  
**FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO**

Copy to:

The County Commissioner  
Kisii County.

The County Director of Education  
Kisii County.



AUTHORIZED

## Appendix D: NACOSTI Certificate


**THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:**

**MR. ISDORE OUMA KAUDO**  
**of UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, 0-40310**  
**KENDU BAY, has been permitted to**  
**conduct research in Kisii County**

**on the topic: INFLUENCE OF LEARNER**  
**SUPPORT SERVICES ON LEARNERS**  
**RETENTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE**  
**PROGRAMS IN OPEN, DISTANCE AND**  
**ELECTRONIC LEARNING STUDENTS: A**  
**CASE OF MOUNT KENYA**  
**UNIVERSITY-KENYA.**

**for the period ending:**  
**14th May,2019**

**Permit No : NACOSTI/P/18/94171/22443**  
**Date Of Issue : 15th May,2018**  
**Fee Received :Ksh 1000**





*K. Igone*  
**Applicant's Signature**

*[Signature]*  
**Director General**  
**National Commission for Science,**  
**Technology & Innovation**

**CONDITIONS**

1. The License is valid for the proposed research, research site specified period.
2. Both the Licence and any rights thereunder are non-transferable.
3. Upon request of the Commission, the Licensee shall submit a progress report.
4. The Licensee shall report to the County Director of Education and County Governor in the area of research before commencement of the research.
5. Excavation, filming and collection of specimens are subject to further permissions from relevant Government agencies.
6. This Licence does not give authority to transfer research materials.
7. The Licensee shall submit two (2) hard copies and upload a soft copy of their final report.
8. The Commission reserves the right to modify the conditions of this Licence including its cancellation without prior notice.

  
**REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

  
**National Commission for Science,**  
**Technology and Innovation**

**RESEARCH CLEARANCE**  
**PERMIT**

**Serial No.A 18509**  
**CONDITIONS: see back page**