

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate Learner's perceptions about the quality of Distance Education (DE) in an attempt to understand Learners' needs and concerns in assessing quality in DE. As Jung (2011) observes, the Quality Assurance (QA) criteria developed in various settings tend to be responsive to the perspectives of Distance Education (DE) institutions, assessors and funding bodies and often ignore learners' views on quality. While inputs from providers, assessors, and governments are valuable in managing and enhancing quality in DE as Frydenberg (2002) argues, Learners' view also need to be taken into account since the success of DE does not derive only from the products and services delivered to the learner but also from the knowledge, understanding and relationships that are co-developed by both learners and teachers during the teaching and learning processes and such success typically relies to a greater extent on learners' motivation and commitment. Moreover, in order to improve learning experience and performance of distance learners. It is essential to fully understand their perceptions of quality DE. In designing, developing and delivering distance education courses students' needs and perceptions should be central. A course failing to meet student expectations and needs may lead to low levels of student involvement (Hall, 2001). Indeed, without investigating what satisfies students in distance education courses, it is difficult to meet their needs and improve their learning. Distance education has changed from an anomaly to a standard component of most higher education institutions. The incentive for offering courses via 'the distance' has been largely pronounced as two-fold: to better serve constituents

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who would not otherwise have access to programs, and to generate additional revenue streams outside of traditional course offerings. Distance education has taken systematic teaching learning process to persons living in isolated areas where facilities for the traditional form of classroom teaching cannot be developed. There is no doubt that DE can broaden opportunities for underprivileged or marginalized people – women and girls in particular – to access education. Distance education is now internationally recognized and accepted as an alternative channel for providing broader access to education in a cost effective manner, wider and diversified curricula and a means for continuing lifelong education.

Overall, the literature suggests that there is a need to understand better the variables that affect student enjoyment of distance education courses. Such variables include faculty support, student support, teaching and learning, evaluation and assessment, infrastructure, course development and institutional credibility. The findings of this study are important since they can provide insights on the quality of programs offered by DE according to the learners' perception. Further areas that need attention can be identified and relevant action taken by the concerned institutions. Finally, this study can also provide managerial implications to educational providers in Kenya, and those providing the ODL mode of learning in general

