

**INFLUENCE OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES ON STUDENTS RETENTION IN  
DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER  
LEARNING: A CASE OF KENYA METHODIST UNIVERSITY, KENYA.**

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## DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for any degree in any other university

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my husband Joel Kiri and my three children - Precious, Victory and Cephas for their inspiration support, encouragement and understanding in the entire research period.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the relationship between learner support services and retention of students in distance education programmes. The objectives of the study was to find out the extent to which guidance and counseling, administrative support, tutorial support and mentoring influenced students' retention in distance education programmes in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. The study would be of paramount significance to administrators and students in distance education programmes in that it would assist them in identifying support services that are most important for students' satisfaction so as to increase retention in their programmes. Relevant literature was reviewed on various learner support services that could be offered in distance education programmes. The study used descriptive research design. The target population for the study was the 360 accessible ODL students of KEMU, Meru Campus. The study used a sample size of 20%, which interpreted to 72 respondents. Stratified simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents depending on the course level. Data was collected using structured questionnaires, administered to the respondents to collect information using drop and pick method. The data obtained was analyzed and summarized using descriptive statistics. The study found that although there was high students' retention at the current course, characterized by students being determined to continue pursuing until completion of the academic degree within the set period. The study established that guidance and counseling highly influenced students retention, administrative support moderately affected the students' retention, tutorial support highly influenced the students' retention and mentoring highly influenced the students retention. The study recommends that the higher institutions of learning in Kenya should implement various policies and procedures for distance learning and guidance and counseling programs, which are run by professionals in guidance and counseling, feedback and involves all the stakeholders. The study also recommends that mentoring programmes be institutionalized. Institutions of higher learning should put in place mentoring programmes that are highly participative for learners, collaborative and that enhance team work among learners and mentors. Mentors should be trained to equip them with skills, knowledge and professionalism. The study also recommends that institutions of higher learning should ensure that there are effective face to face tutorials to supplement the instructional materials provided to distance learners. On suggestions for further study, the study found out that provision of learner support in distance learning, encouraged the students to continue pursuing ODL until completion of the academic degree course within the set period. So, another study should be conducted to establish what encourages students to continue to the next academic level. The study found out that learner support services such as guidance and counseling, administrative support, tutorial support and mentoring influence students' retention in distance education programmes. Nevertheless, there could be other factors that influence students retention in distance education programmes, so other studies should be done to determine other factors and how they influence retention in distance education programmes. The study also recommends a repetition of the study after a period of time to determine whether the same results would be obtained.

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## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ARCS	Attention Relevance Confidence and Satisfaction
COL	Common Wealth of Learning
DE	Distance Education
ICC	International Council of Correspondent Education
ICT	Information Communication Technology
KEMU	Kenya Methodist University
LSS	Learners Support Services
NACOSTI	National Council of Science and Technological Innovations
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
ODLM	Open and Distance Learning Mode
OES	Open Education Systems
OL	Open Learning
SPSS	Statistical Package of the Social Science
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
WGDEO	Working Group on Distance Education

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Education is seen as the indispensable agent that brings about change between what we are and what we want to be. We are entering into the knowledge Era and moving towards the knowledge society. This forthcoming period of change, with significant advances in communication and information technology, the opening of global economy and the demands being placed on limited resources of national governments is giving rise to new ways of thinking and acting about education and training (Venugopal 2000, Manjulika 2000). Higher education is facing a critical challenge to meet new demands for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Anyona, 2009). There is a growing crisis in the higher education which calls for new organizational structures for meeting new challenges in post-secondary education and training. Wambugu, L, and Kyalo, D (2013), advocate for the adoption of Open and Distance Education (ODE) in all the higher learning institutions in order to ensure access to higher education by all.

Distance education therefore in its organized form is one of the path breaking innovations in the field of education in this century. According to Shastree (2002), distance education symbolizes the transformation of education from the state of craft to technology enduring it with high flexibility and vastly increased productivity by transporting knowledge to the people in place of transporting people to the place of knowledge. Distance learning can provide instructionally effective and highly interactive learning experiences that are flexible equitable and responsive to individual needs (Rodgers, 1995). The flexibility is greatly facilitated by the use of technology particularly new information technologies. Technology has undergone major revolutions starting with the print media out of which correspondence system of education was born, the radio and television, pre-recorded audio and video programmes, self-learning instructional materials, application of satellite communications and finally the information and communication technology revolution (Venugopal, *ibid*). With the growth of ICT it is possible to think about the development of virtual universities and virtual classrooms.

In Kenya, a growing crisis in the higher education sector has given rise to a multiplicity for meeting the new challenges of post- secondary education and training (Juma, 2003). The role of distance education is indispensable for many students in Kenya in view of the challenges of the current higher education infrastructure which is too strained to accommodate the ever growing college aged population. The first government policy to address open higher education was the act of parliament of 1966 which established the board of adult education (Anyona, 2009). Since then, many other commissions have been set up to address issues in the Kenyan education with a number of them highlighting ODL as an alternative mode of education provision. Over the last four decades, the social demands with respect to higher education in Kenya have clearly intensified. This has been exemplified by the rise in enrolments in public and private universities, the proliferation of more private universities and the establishment of self sponsored programmes in public universities (Sifuna, 1998). Currently when open distance and flexible education is increasing worldwide, a reflection and analysis of lessons learned about how to support students' learning and which support services could institutions provide seems appropriate. Providing support for distance learners is a virtually important component of delivering distance education (Moore, 2003).

Distance education students are mostly a heterogeneous group. They may be younger ones, middle aged and older ones. Their education background, learning styles and ability also may differ significantly. As these students struggle to cope with the demands for learning at a distance, they come to realize that they need help so much so that, without anybody to intervene they might as well drop out. The value of learner support has been discussed in relation to the trend towards a more consumer- oriented approach to education where education is considered as a commodity and students as customers of services and products (Tait, 2003). In order to become a competitor in such a competitive education market place, institutions have to meet the needs and expectations of learners so that they can attract more students ( Rumble, 2000). Support services play a central role in meeting the unique and changing needs of learners (Mills, 2003). According to mills the increased interactions between support personnel and students through a well designed learner support system can produce valuable feedback from the learners about the programme which can be valuable in enhancing quality. Learner support services have

also been discussed by various authors in relation to their contribution in widening access and learning opportunities for those who were never able to participate in conventional education. Sewart,(1993) for example argues that the challenges that comes with the widening of access is that an increasing number of less experienced, less motivated and more socially and economically disadvantaged students will be participating in distance learning programmes.

Educators and practitioners suggest that learners support has a major role to play here (Ken worth; Mills 2003; Sewart 1993). Tait (2000), offered a functional characterization of Learner Support Services(LSS) that recognizes the pedagogic and motivational value of Learner support services. He identified three main functions: cognitive, affective and systemic. The three are interrelated and institutions should therefore ensure that their distance learners are well supported in all these three areas. For instance an institution without affective support, students may feel isolated and drop out.

In general, the objectives of Learner support services are first to provide all information needed by learners to encourage students to fully utilize the available facilities and third to motivate learners; forth to provide necessary counseling ; fifth to create a friendly environment among students, faculty and administration( Chander, 1998). Student support especially the guidance and counseling, tutorial support and effective information and administrative systems all provide a range of equity that impacts not only in terms of teaching but also effectiveness, that is to say reinforcing the student sense of confidence, self esteem and progress(Tait, 2003).

It is very important to retain students in any system and ensure that they eventually complete their studies successfully. Student retention has been a documented issue in higher education in the united states since late 1800s (Thelin, 2004).Formal studies on the topic began as early as 1926 (Braxton,2000).Through the last few decades academics have published influential research on student retention .However, Braxton notes that most of this research has been written about retention at these common types of institutions; relatively little has been written about open and distance education. Effective learner support services system can go a long way in assisting students to persist.LSS can help to create an environment which fosters student learning

and achievement and help students to solve problems that hamper their academic progress. One of the challenges of distance education is the issue of isolation since the learner and the tutor are separated in space and or in time. If this challenge is not addressed appropriately, it can translate to high dropout rates from distance education programmes. Therefore, there is need to ensure support is provided to increase students motivation, self esteem and progress. As such this study was aimed at investigating the extent to which different types of learners support services influence retention rates of students in distance education programmes.

The study was conducted at Kenya Methodist University, a private university in Imenti north constituency in Meru County. KEMU is one of the conventional universities that have been transformed to dual mode universities that offer programmes by conventional and distance teaching and learning methods. Open and distance learning at KEMU is an alternative mode of instruction which provides learners with an opportunity to access education and training without the benefit of classroom teaching methods. The Open and distance learning mode(ODLM) was introduced at KEMU to open access to KEMU programmes to the learners who lack the opportunity to study as regular classroom learners due to various constraints (KEMU,2002) The ODLM department in KEMU has offices to provide all support services needed by the students. The support is aimed at removing the students' isolation from the university, the course, tutor and other learners.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Despite the significance of learner support services as earlier mentioned, Learner support mechanisms are often underdeveloped or overlooked in most distance education institutions (Sheer & Locke, 2003]. Studies have shown that most distance education institutions have an inadequate understanding of how to plan and organize quality learner support services. Many researchers have acknowledged the pressing need for more research guiding us on development of quality greater systems in a distance education (Robinson, 1995).

A study done on the university of South Africa reveal that the most fundamental service in distance education is the learner support services (Manjulika, 2000).It is argued that learner

support services is likely to lower dropout rates and increase pass rate the very issues that south African Distance education institutions struggle with. Another study done on Turkish open education system reveals that open education systems have high attrition rates. About 40% of the students admitted to OES (open education system) drop out during the first two years of study. (Latchem et al 2006 ).Second, most students find the methods of OES from initial registration and course selection through the various non - traditional delivery options difficult, unusual and confusing (Murphy,1991]. Murphy continues to argue that such students might need extra support in order to navigate their way through some confusing set of educational and administrative activities. Through policies of open access, many more students, some prepared, some partially prepared are entering higher education increasing the problem of retention and low pass rate that already existed. Learner support services have therefore become critical to all institutions (Moore, 2003; Simpson, 2000).

According to Keegan 1983, distance education has been typified by high enrolments and high rates of attrition. Students retention has been established therefore as one of the challenges affecting distance education system. This has been looked at by various researchers as multivariate issue involving various interrelated factors and variables (Morgan& Tam,1999).There is also some evidence to suggest that LSS can play a significant role in assisting learners to persist (potter1998). Coldeway,(1986) argues that one of the most discussed research questions in distance education programs was why so many students who choose to enroll in distance education programs also choose not to complete their courses.

The challenges espoused in the above mentioned studies could equally apply to distance education systems throughout the world. It is for this reason that this study sought to investigate the influence of learner support services in addressing the issue of attrition and increasing retention rates in distance education programs. The study aims at finding out to what extent different types of learner support services influence retention rates of students who enroll in distance education programs.

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

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of learner support services on the retention of students in distance education programmes in institutions of higher learning.

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

The objectives of the study were:

1. To establish the extent to which guidance and counseling influences retention of students in distance education programmes in institutions of higher learning.
2. To assess how administrative support offered to students in institutions of higher learning influence their retention in distance education programmes.
3. To establish the influence of tutorial support on retention of students in distance education programmes in institutions of higher learning.
4. To find out the extent to which mentoring influences retention of students in distance education programmes in institutions of higher learning.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The study aimed at providing answers to the following questions:

1. How does guidance and counseling influence students' retention rates in distance education programmes?
2. How does administrative support influence students' retention rates in distance education programmes?
3. How does tutorial support influence students' retention rates in distance education programmes?
4. How does mentoring influence students' retention in distance education programme?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The study provides considerable insight into the field of student support in distance education programmes. It will also assist administrators of distance education programmes in identifying support services that are most important for students satisfaction so as to increase retention rates and pass rate in their programmes. This study will also provide policy makers with information

necessary in the formulation of policies for open and distance learning as well as opening a window for further research for researchers. The government will get necessary information in the field of education towards attainment of vision 2030 as far as widening access in education is concerned.

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

The study was carried out in only one private university. There are many other universities both private and public which offer courses through distance learning. These may differ significantly in terms of administration and learner support systems and operations. Thus this study may not fully represent their experience in offering student support services. The study is also delimited to learner support services while there are many other factors that can influence retention rates in distance education programs.

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

Various limitations challenged the study. For instance it was very difficult to obtain some study data due to reluctance and uncooperativeness of the respondents, who felt that they were being disturbed and would even fail to explain some technical terms. The researcher and research assistant struggled to get meaning of these data and values. However the researcher explained that the data that was to be obtained was for academic purpose only. The respondents might have given inaccurate and incorrect information but the researcher first conducted meeting with the respondents to explain that the purpose of the study was purely academic. The logistics of acquiring a research permit from National Council of Science and Technological Innovations (NACOSTI) also delayed the collection of data but finally it was done. The study was further constrained by limited finances. The researcher then sought for a loan from his SACCO to obtain more fiancé which supplement the study budget. Lastly, the study was limited to the honesty and of respondent.

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

The basic assumptions of the study were:

1. The students were honest and competent in responding to the instruments of the study.

2. Policies in distance education and legal framework remain unchanged throughout the period of study.
3. The statistical data of enrolment and retention rates provided by the administration was valid and reliable.
4. The targeted population will be available at the time of the study.

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

**Administrative support-**Refers to support provided to distance education students to enable them access information effectively

**Attrition rates-** Refers to the rate at which students decrease in numbers in distance education programmes.

**Distance education-** Refers to a mode of learning where the tutor and the learner are separated in place and or in time.

**Guidance and counseling-** Refers to formal or informal advice that promote personal, social, educational and career development of students

**Higher learning-** Refers to post secondary formal education.

**Learner support services-** Refers to services meant to help learners use institutional resources effectively.

**Mentoring-** Refers to supportive, long term relationship between tutors and learners in distance education.

**Peer support-** Refers to the support students receive from fellow students or social networks in distance education.

**Retention -** Refers to the ability of students to continue with their studies without dropping out.

**Tutoring-** Refers to the process of providing instruction to distance learners.

### **1.11 Organization of the Study**

The report is organised into five chapters. Chapter one consists of the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, assumptions of the study, limitations of the study, delimitations of the study, definition of significant terms and the organisation of the study. Chapter two consists of

the review of related literature, theoretical framework and conceptual framework. The literature is reviewed under the following subtopics: overview of distance education, distance learners, learner support in distance education and learner support services. The learner support services reviewed include: guidance and counselling, administrative support, tutorial support and mentoring. Chapter three consists of the research design, target population, the sample size and the sampling technique, research instruments, instrument validity, instrument reliability, data collection techniques, data analysis techniques, operational definition of variables and ethical issues in research. There is a summary of the chapters after each chapter. Chapter four starts with an introduction followed by the analysis and interpretation of study results. The results are presented in tables for ease of understanding and interpreted in form of narrative. Chapter five provides the summary of findings discussions, conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature on distance education with emphasis on learner support sub system. The chapter begins with an overview of distance education and learner support in distance education. The chapter has also reviewed literature on different learner support services offered in distance education under the following sub topics: guidance and counseling, administrative support, tutorial support, mentoring. Finally a summary of the review is provided as well as a conceptual framework.

#### **2.2 Retention of Students Distance Education Programmes**

Distance education has become the most significant change to the process of teaching and learning of the last decade Simpson (2012). The term, open and distance learning (ODL) has been variously defined by different authors. Moore and Kearsley (2011) define it as teaching and planned learning in separate spaces that require communication through technologies and special institutional organizations. Holmberg (1990) sees distance education as the various forms of teaching and learning at all levels which are not under the immediate supervision of tutors in lecture rooms. Ndritu et al (2013), argues that to raise Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of university students from the present 3 per cent to the projected 15 per cent, the government must continue increasing the number of students joining higher education from 130,000 (2008) to 450,000 (2015).

Open and distance education represents approaches that focus on open access to education and training provision, freeing students from the constraints of time and place and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners (UNESCO, 2002). The term open distance learning reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from learners. According to Suen and Parkes (2003) distance is the most unique feature of distance education. This has a number of implications for learning and assessment of learners. The learner is isolated from resources, support and peers. The lack of contact can have a significant effect on learner's motivation. Learner support services can

therefore be very instrumental in assisting students to overcome these challenges. While distance education is probably the fastest growing area of education internationally, it suffers one fundamental weakness –the high dropout rate experienced by its students as compared with the dropout rate of students in conventional education. The importance of support in overcoming this weakness therefore cannot be under estimated. Because distance students are often placed in a unique situation in which neither the teachers nor fellow students are physically present to clarify discuss or provide feedback, effective distance education requires ‘a’ sound learner support system (Gunawardena, 1988).

Moore (2007) included transactional distance theory, but substantial research in distance education transactions was somewhat limited to the area of assessment transactions. Research in other distance education transactions, such as course context, student/teacher communication and course procedures, was needed to increase distance education's credibility and also to expand the existing ranks of reliable distance education research.

Since 2000, there has been more Meta - analysis of this literature. The Meta analysis by Bernard et al (2004) looked at different populations that had been earlier studied and also examined studies reporting drop out statistics. Bernard et al (2009) argue that it is through direct studies of DE conditions and OL that progress to advance theory and practice will be made as researchers begin to examine instructional and technological treatments between DE conditions. A fundamental shift in the culture of research practices and the quality of reporting needs to occur to enable systematic reviewers and meta analysts to come to broader and non comprehensive generalizations about the processes and conditions under which learning is best supported in DE and OL course designs. Against the background of existing research on student retention, it is commonly stated that retention in open and distance learning ODL context is poorer than in conventional higher education. Most of these comparisons are in the descriptive and do not carefully take into account that the students in open distance education are quite different from those in conventional education. The social dimension therefore should be re-considered in the structurally different context of ODL .

A wider and more differentiated approach to issues of retention in distance education is crucial from both an administrators and students point of view. This precise insight into student retention will allow appropriate institutional interventions to improve programme quality in general and students' retention in particular. Visser, (1998) assessed the effectiveness of motivational messages in distance education courses . She compared retention rates in the experimental section of the course to three other sections that did not receive motivational messages and she did a qualitative review of student responses. Improved retention of 70 to 80% offered clear support for the motivational messages. This can inform on the need for a well designed learner feedback and information delivery systems in DE programmes for better retention of students. Subsequent studies on motivational design theory by academics: visser et al (1998); Schon, Hoffman and Herczeg (2003); Keller and Suzuki (2004); Mills (2004); Kim and Keller (2008), all point out that motivational strategies with the elements of attention, relevance , confidence and satisfaction (ARCS) model are very important in the designing of motivational leaning processes.

Distance education provides various motivational opportunities in distance education programmes in which both the elements of teaching and motivation used together can improve the success of distance education learners. A meta analysis of comparative literature in distance education report presented as symposium at the annual meeting of the American educational research association on April 24<sup>th</sup> 2003, based on 73 independent findings indicated that the retention rate in DE course was significantly lower than in face to face classrooms. Such findings have been documented repeatedly over the history of distance education. This is the reason why I am interested in doing a study to find out whether an effective learners support system can help in alleviating this problem in distance education.

It is important to understand the characteristics of distance learners so as to be able to offer appropriate support services to them. According to Omondi (2008) , learner characteristics are personal attributes of a learner that may affect his or her studies. He highlights these learner characteristics as the level of motivation, commitment to study, learners to and confidence with technology. Distance learners are categorized into Manifold.

They may be younger ones, middle aged and older ones. They might be belonging to literate, semi-literate, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled categories. They may be employed, physically challenged and differently abled. (Common Wealth of Learning (COL), 2002). These learners' characteristics have also implications for the way learner support services are designed.

Most of the learners in distance education are adults employed and have dependents. A study undertaken at Wisconsin University revealed that 80.3% of students in distance education were between 25 and 45 years (Gibson & Graft,1992). Holmberg,(1995) citing studies of 3 decades affirms that 25-35 age groups seem to be largest in most distance education learning organizations. Hezel and Dirr,(1991) examined four institutions offering tele-course programmes and found out that 65% of the learners were women. This corresponds to studies done by Robinson (1991) and Gibson and Graft (1992) who report that 71.5% and 60% of the students were women. According to Robison,(1991). Most distance education learners are also working and are married. The study reveals that 83% were employed and 58.5% were married. These demographic characteristics of distance learners prove that they need support to enable them handle the multiple adult roles and responsibilities as well as learning.

Retention of students may also be influenced by the attitude of the learners towards Distance Education programmes. Gakuu (2006) defines attitude as continuously varying traits (predispositions) to display certain behavior with respect to the attitude object. It is an enduring disposition to consistently respond in a given manner to various aspects of the world including to persons, events and objects. He argues that learners' attitude towards Distance Education (DE) depends on the level of motivation, the level of familiarity with DE, experience with DE and level of familiarity with the technology applied in DE.

### **2.3 Learner Support in Distance Education Programmes**

Learner support services are defined as cognitive, effective and systemic support provided through tutoring , modern information technology (ICT),counseling and administrative support (Omondi,2008). One of the major demands of the ever changing landscape of open and distance learning is the provision of an effective learner support. Omondi (2008) argues that

although learners can be exposed to educational opportunities without learner support, it is unlikely that they will be able to complete their courses successfully.

One of the most important means of analyzing the effectiveness of the teaching- learning experiences in distance education system is through the analysis of the learner support system. “Support systems contribute to the process of a course as do the learning materials. Mbwesa (2014) looks at learner support as one of the dimensions in distance education that deals with policy and guidelines for technical, psychological social and administrative support, flexible payment and appeal.(Hodgson, 1986). Garrison & Baynton (1987) defines learner support as the resources that learners can access in order to carry out the learning processes. Distance education students are separated from the lecturer. The distance between the students and the institution is a worrying factor. The effects of such isolation on distance students can be proven through provision of student support Simpson (2002).

Garrison observes that in distance education support is concerned with range of human and non-human resources to guide and facilitate educational transaction. According to common wealth of learning (COL, 1999), learner support is an important element of any distance education programme. The working group on distance education (WGDEOL, 2002) argues that distance learners who study without the provision of learner support from their institutions are unlikely to be successful. Support systems developed in recognition of students needs help distance learners to become competent and self-confident in learning, social interactions and self-evaluation (Rae, 1998). Prudeaux ,(1989) observes that effectiveness of the student support systems has not been evaluated. According to (Keegan, 1983), most early distance education systems were concerned with access and availability of learning opportunities than with the individual experience of the learner. Consequently, distance education has been typified by high enrollment and high attrition rates.

Tait, (2003) asserts that the students support especially students guidance and counseling, tutorial support and effective information and administrative systems all provide a range of activity that impacts not only in terms of teaching but also effectiveness, that is to say reinforcing the

students' sense of confidence, self esteem and progress. According to Tait, the avoidance of an avoidable drop out has always been a goal of distance education systems which are often compared with conventional colleges and universities in spite of fact that their students are normally older have families and are in employment.

He continues to point out that the provision of student support at open universities of United Kingdom in particular solved the drop out problem and this contributed greatly to the status of distance education worldwide. Successful distance education programmes do not underestimate the amount of time, effort and expense required to attract and retain students Rovial & Downey (2010).

## **2.4 Learner Support Services in Distance Education**

Learner support services are those services that are designed to help the individual students learn from the teaching materials, may be academic administrative or personal (Tait, 2003). According to Tait, learner support services enable the education system to widen its students participation, recruitment and the retention of students. Robinson, (1981) had identified three main areas in which student experience problems as open and distance learners. These are: study and learning difficulties, interacting at a distance and personal problems. Learners support services include; orientation and information provision, admissions and other registry services, advising and counseling, instructional support (tutoring/teaching) and student advocacy (Brindley, 1986). Guidance and counseling, administrative support, tutorial support, peer support, mentoring are some of the most important services that can be offered to distance education learners to help them persist. This study therefore aims at finding out how these services influence student retention in distance education programmes.

### **2.4.1 Guidance and Counseling and Retention of Students**

Hudson (1993) defines counseling as that advice and encouragement that people need in addition to subject – specific support to help them be successful learners. Counseling students is seen as a formal role in some open and distance learning systems carried out by counselors or tutor counselors. The essence of counseling is to facilitate the person being counseled to come to their

decision about what is best for them. Students may need counseling before, during and after a course (Thorpe, 1993) and therefore the counseling function need to be designed to accommodate this.

Tutors play various counseling tasks for the learners in ODL. These include: - answering non course related queries, giving students guidance about choice of course, supporting students during the course, advising students on post-course choices and advising about ODL systems (Robinson 1989, Thorpe, 1979). Daniel (1979), comments that in remote learning systems, other than the Open University, counseling is more often a case of quietly conscious help in problems since there are few systems where this function is institutionalized. Students should be informed of the self-motivation and commitment needed to be successful in the programme.

Nortledge,( 1975), sees the two functions of the counselor as a caring supporter and efficient manager. This kind of organization of counseling support services necessitates a complex administrative system to underpin it as well as management and staff development programmes for the part-time staff. It is important that all learner support personnel including administrators and clerical staff who might be in a position in which they provide guidance or advice to learners have some awareness since guidance and counseling is a highly skilled process. Thomas, (1974) identifies characteristics of a good counselor as someone who is enthusiastic, sympathetic, flexible and approachable, knows the system and can liaise with others, contacts the students where necessary and is competent academically and can facilitate group activities.

According to (Simpson, 1992), Counseling is a cyclic process of five phases which includes; clarifying – ensuring the learner’s needs are clear; checking restating the need in the counselor’s own words; conceptualizing –restating the need in the counselor’s words; challenging – pointing out contradictions and other ways of seeing an issue; consequent action; agreeing to what the counselor and learner each might do as a result of their discussion.

#### **2.4.2 Administrative Support and Retention of Students**

Communication between teachers, and learners and learners and their institution is a necessary component in distance education. Communication serves two purposes; distribution of information and interaction between teachers and learners. Provision of information to learner in open and distance learning (ODL) requires much more effort than would be in case of face to face students. Administrative support includes functions such as enrolment; admission and registration; record keeping; information provision and delivery of study materials. Faculty participation depends on appropriate administrative support as an important factor (Betts,1998).Molefi continues to argue that since distance learners are studying at a distance, the institution relies far more heavily on the effectiveness of the administrative systems and its record systems for support.

According to the Common Wealth of learning (COL) and Asian Development Bank (ADB),(1999), administrative system should provide four types of support to its learners: Timely dispatchment of complete course materials; Information of various kinds e.g. amount of fees to be paid and when, commencement of the course, who the tutor is, who to contact for certain kinds of information, where and when examinations are scheduled; accurate and complete record keeping and dispatchment of the right examination to the right location at the right time.

Study centres are components of the administrative structure in distance education. They are basically set up to provide support services to distance learners. They act as regional resource centres for distance learners. They provide tutorials, guidance and counseling services, teaching and learning facilities such as library, organized lectures, discussion groups, and also organize workshops (Mbuva, 2007). For instance in the university of Nairobi, the study centres are known as extra mural centres and are located in all the major towns in Kenya. They are usually for organizing and coordinating the activities of the external degree programmes as well as running short courses on face to face basis (Odumbe and Kamau, 1995).A study centre is specifically set up by the parent university to provide support services to distance education learners. Keegan (1986) sees study centres as associated with independent learning and he asserts that independence has been identified as one of the major areas in distance education. Local centres appear to carry one or more of these functions: academic, advisory and administration.

### **2.4.3 Tutorial Support and Retention of Students**

Kaye and Rumble, (1981) are of a feeling that a key figure in most support systems is the tutor. In a distance education environment, there are various types of interactions. Among them, the interactions that play a major role in quality assurance in distance education programmes are student-teacher interactions. Distance education programmes should be developed to promote and facilitate healthy interactions between the learner and the instructor. A tutor is a person who has close contact with a student in a particular course, engaging in a detailed dialogue through the medium of written assignments and face to face or telephone discussions or response sheet (Mbuva, 2007).Tutors deal with administrative issues as well as counseling learners. Tutors are the most crucial form of learner support. Without tutorial support, the best materials in the world may prove disappointing (Rowntree , 1997).Tutorial support can be organized as completely face to face events or in combination with communication at a distance e.g. teleconferencing, telephone tutoring, online tutoring or by post and fax.

Face-to-face sessions are critical as they create a platform that allows interaction between students, and between students and tutors/lecturers, for mutual benefit. Telephone tutoring according to Robinson,(1981) is cheaper than travel in terms of costs for students; convenient; efficient and fast way to get help for a student and it's a substitute where there are too few students to form face to face tutorial groups in one area. Online tutoring can be done through one to one emails, asynchronous conferencing or synchronous conferencing (chat).Many ODL institutions offer face to face tutorial sessions. These sessions are mostly for motivation, induction and briefing, reviewing an assignment, preparing assignments, reviewing a section of the learning materials, exploring common difficulties, remedial work, skill development, preparing for exams and consolidation.

Tutors need training in the skill of face to face tutorials since they differ significantly with conventional face to face teaching. An ODL course is taught by the materials; the tutors role is to facilitate the student's learning of the materials. Kaye and Rumble (1972) argue that in distance learning system, most if not all the learning takes place through instructional materials so that the tutors function changes to dealing with problems arising from the study of the written materials

and to acting as intermediary between the student and course writers. The tutor, through guidance and direction can assist the students to achieve their goals and develop control of the education process (Garison, 1989).

#### **2.4.4 Mentoring and Retention of Students**

Historically, mentoring has been considered as the way in which the old assist the young to achieve their goals and become the next generation of wise people (Rapuleng, 2002). Mentors are therefore advisers, educators, counselors who pass on their experience on to less experienced people. Dilley & Roman (1998) argue that mentoring has become an important method of supporting learning in distance education. Effective mentoring reduces professional isolation, provides support and feedback with regard to performance and gives confidence to mentees.

A study undertaken in three different universities; the Korean National University; the open University of UK and the open Polytechnic of New Zealand shows that apparent retention gains of up to 20% with a return on investment of up to 295 may be possible after the linking of students in the form of mentoring and peer support (Bolgle,2010). However, the report suggests that there is still much mileage to be made out of mentoring and study dating.

According to (Portner,1998), in order for mentoring to be effective a mentor has to function by relating, assessing, coaching and guiding. He continues to argue that the relationship between the mentor and mentee is built on mutual trust, respect and professionalism. Without a firm basis of everyday trust, mentoring is likely to become frustrating and difficult for both the mentor and mentee.

In distance education mentoring can be important for two particular reasons – increasing retention and increasing engagement for disadvantaged groups (brown, 2001).

A study undertaken on the effectiveness of mentoring in distance education programme, at the Lesotho College of Education affirm that mentoring can increase enrolment and reduce dropout rates in distance education programmes (Manjulika, 2000)

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

A theory provides people with an explanation to make sense of complex practices and phenomena (Garrison, 1990) and can provide a perspective that reduces complexity while suggesting generalizability. There are a number of theories proposed by different theorists that have a bearing on the provision of learner support services in distance education programmes and therefore provide a framework for this study.

**Transactional distance theory** –According to Moore (1991), the first attempt in English to define distance education and to articulate a theory appeared in 1972 and in 1980 was named as the theory of transactional distance. The concept of transactional distance encompasses the distance that he says exist in all educational relationships. It was introduced at the world conference of the international council of correspondent Education (ICCE) (Moore, 2007). Moore explains that distance is not determined by geography but the relationship between dialogue and structure. The degree of transactional distance depends on: dialogue structure and learner autonomy. Saba and Shearer (1994) carried on a study on transactional distance and concluded that as learner control and dialogue increases the transactional distance decreases. This theory is applicable to this study in that the learner support services are geared towards decreasing transactional distance between learners and their tutors and counselors, learners and their institution, learners and other learners as well as learners and the course materials. Once the distance is reduced no doubt the students can persist and consequently retention of students in distance education programmes will greatly improve. The use of integrated communications systems, well designed instructional materials, properly designed guidance and counseling systems can permit a greater variety of transactions to occur thus improving dialogue to minimize transactional distance.

### **Independence and Learner control theory**

Altmann & Arambasch, (1982) and Rotter (1989) argue that student who perceives that their academic success is as a result of their own personal accomplishments have an internal locus of control and are more likely to persist in their education. Those with an external locus control feel that their success or lack of it is due largely to events outside their control are likely to become

dropouts. Factors that influence dropout rate have been of concern to distance educators as they search for criteria to predict successful course completion. Baynton (1992) developed a mode to examine the concept of control as it is defined by independence competence and support. This theory is applicable to my study in that learners support services may be one of the criteria to predict successful course completion in distance education programmes. Effective mentoring, guidance and counseling, tutorial support and learner – learner(s) interaction can help motivate learners and thereby elevating their internal locus of control. This can translate to persistence and eventually retention of students in the distance education programmes.

### **Motivational Design Theory**

This theory asserts that instructional materials should be configured with strategies which increase the attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction of the students for an instructional design which ensures the continuity of learning motivation ( Keller, 1983, Keller & Kopp, 1987). High attrition rates can be directly attributed to low motivation (Kuan-Chung & Syh-Jong, 2010). Therefore, it is vital that instructional designers understand principles of motivational design (Hodges, 2004).

According to motivational design theory, in order to create an effective efficient and attractive instructional design, the elements of motivation have to be understood well. Keller (Ibid) has developed a model of motivation which defines four primary components of motivation: Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction (ARCS). The concern of this study is on the concept of motivation.

Learner support services play a crucial role in motivating students. Studies have shown that there are very significant motivational difficulties for the distance education students. The ratio of dropout in the programmes is itself a sign of the problems originating from motivation. In this study the ARCS model forms the basic concept of a motivational intervention in form of effective learner support services which are provided before and during the course and aim at maintaining or adjusting learners' motivation. The aim of this study is to enhance the motivation

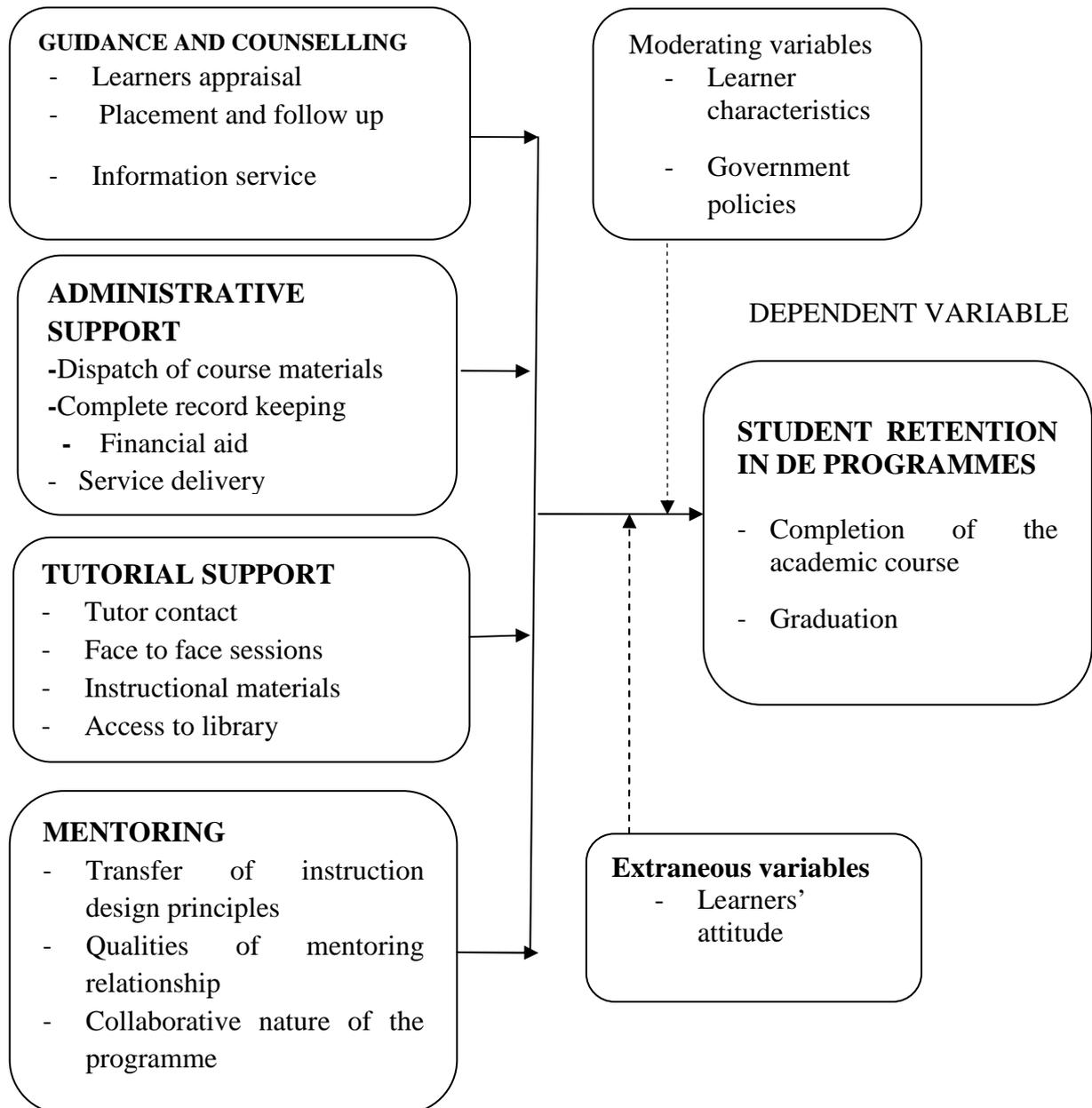
of distance education students through improving student support in an attempt to decrease the drop out ratio.

## **2.6 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework shows relationship between the independent and the dependant variables .The different type of learners support services offered in distance education programmes are the independent variables. These include: guidance and counseling, administrative support, tutorial support, peer support, mentoring. If these support services are effectively offered then they have an effect on the student retention rates in distance education programmes. Therefore students retention rates in distance education programme is the dependent variable

## INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**



The conceptual framework shows the relationship between the dependent variables and independent variables. The dependent variable is retention of learners in distance education programmes in institutions of higher learning. This variable is influenced by independent variables which include: guidance and counseling, whose indicators are: putting in place proper and effective learners' appraisal schemes, placement and follow-up mechanisms, information service systems, and consultancy; administrative support pegged on ensuring continuous and effective dispatch of course materials, complete record keeping (registrar services), providing adequate financial aid and effective service delivery; tutorial support characterized by supportive tutor contact, up to date Instructional materials, unlimited access to the library and Timely feedback and mentoring based on implementing an effective transfer of instructional design principles, ensuring high quality of the mentoring relationship and ensuring collaborative nature of the ODL program. These have a high influence on student retention in Distance Education programmes. These are the ones reviewed in this study. Nevertheless, there are other variables that influence student retention but have not been assessed in this study such as learner characteristics and government policies. These are referred to as moderating variables in the conceptual framework. Extraneous variables are variables that influence the dependent variable but are immeasurable. For instance in this framework learner's attitude influences student retention in distance education programmes but it is difficult to measure attitude.

## **2.7 Summary**

From this chapter it is evident that the different types of learner support services i.e. guidance and counseling, administrative support, tutorial support, peer support, and mentoring have a contributory effect on the rate of retention of students in distance education programme. These variables have been discussed and their contributions in distance education as viewed by different scholars highlighted. The literature review has also reviewed distance education programmes and the characteristics of distance learners with a view of bringing out the need for an effective learner support system in distance education.

The literature reviewed clearly indicates that the problem of attrition is a common phenomenon not only in Kenya but all over the world. Institutions of higher learning with a distance education

faculty should therefore put in place mechanisms that can increase persistence among their students. Though there are numerous studies revealing low retention rates in distance education programmes, not much research has been done on measures that can be put in place to curb the problem. This study therefore aims at investigating the extent to which different learner support services influence retention rates of students in distance education programmes. Nevertheless, there is still need for further research on other factors that can influence retention rates of students in distance education programmes. There is also need to carry out such research on other institutions of higher learning with an aim of gathering more information on measures that can be used to improve retention of students.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with the description of the method used in carrying out the research. The chapter outlines the research design, target population the sampling techniques and sample size sampling procedures and research instrument. The validity and reliability of the research instrument and data collection procedures are also highlighted. The chapter ends with the data analysis procedures.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

According to Orodho (2004), a research design is a programme used to guide the researcher in collecting analyzing and interpreting observed facts. Research design is the arrangement of condition for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to research purpose with economy in procedure. The design for this research was survey. The researcher applied this technique for a number of reasons; firstly, large amount of data can be collected with relative ease from a number of people. Lodipo, Spaulding & Voegtle (2010) affirm that data collected from such a population is more reliable and up to date. Secondly, descriptive survey allows the researcher to examine many variables and to use multivariate statistics to analyze the data. Finally according to Chandler (1978) geographical boundaries do not limit surveys. According to Borg and Gall (1989) surveys research can successfully be used to explore relationship between variables. It is simple in design and commonly used in scientific discipline in the field of education to evaluate study relationship effects of treatment and comparison between groups which are being studied.

#### **3.3 Target Population**

Borg and Gall (1989) defines target population as the number of real hypothetical set of people, event or objects to which a researcher wishes to generalize his findings. The target populations of this study consisted of the entire students of Kenya Methodist University (KEMU). This study target population was 360 accessible ODL students of KEMU, Meru Campus. The target Population is captured in Table3. 1.

**Table 3.1: Classification of Target Population**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Total</b>
Undergraduate Degree	306
Master's Degree	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>

Source: KEMU University (2015) *Students Registration*. MERU

### **3.4 Sampling techniques and Sample Size**

Sampling is an important aspect of research .A sample is defined as a portion of population .While sampling refers to the selection of subjects of cases from some population of interest (Somers, 2003). The sample size took into account the heterogeneity and quality of information desired. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) a sample of between 10% and 30 units can be used to determine the sample size. In this study if 10% was used it would be too small a sample and not representative. The same was echoed by Kombo and Tromp (2006), who contended that a sample population of 30 was suitable for descriptive survey. So the study used a sample size of 20%, which interpreted to 72 respondents. The study therefore had a sample well above 10% and meets the threshold of 30 for a descriptive study. The study used stratified sampling technique based on the course level.

The study first determined how many students were from each course level and then it proportionately determined how many students were needed from each course level as sample size for that stratum. Once this was done the study prepared a sample frame from each course level containing all the students in that course level. The study then used simple random to select the respondents from each sample frame.

### **3.5 Research Instrument**

The study used questionnaires developed by the researcher. There was a questionnaire for students. The questionnaire had seven sections. Section A comprised the respondents profile or demographic trends while Section B collected data on the dependent variable. Section C to F collected data on the independent variables. The questions were both closed and open ended

questions. An analysis of document on enrolment and completion of students at Kenya Methodist University distance education faculty was also done with a view of collecting relevant information on retention rates of students in the programme.

### **3.6 Validity of the Instrument**

Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure (Borg and Gall,1989).It was done to test the tool for accuracy and meaningfulness using content validity test. This measured the degree to which data collected using a particular tool would represent the specific domain of indicators. The assessment of content validity was carried by two professional experts; ODL expert and the project supervisor. The supervisor assessed the tools to establish what concept the instruments were trying to measure. The ODL expert determined whether the sets of items accurately measured the influence of learner support on retention of students in distance education programmes. The Experts were requested to comment on the representativeness and suitability of questions and give suggestions on the structure of the tools. This helped to improve the content validity of the data that was collected.

### **3.7 Instrument Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of measurements in a study (Bryman and Bell, 2003). It was conducted to measure the degree to which research instruments yield consistent results (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Cooper and Schindler, 2008). The data was tested for reliability to establish issues such as data sources, methods of data collection, time of collection, presence of any biasness and the level of accuracy.

The test for reliability established the extent to which results were consistent over time. The researcher improved the instrument by reviewing or deleting inconsistent items from the instrument. The study tested the research tools (questionnaire) for reliability, using the internal consistency techniques based on the Cronbach Alpha method. It collected data from five (5) ODL 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 results showed that the Cronbach Alpha's coefficient was .867,

which was above the 0.7 threshold recommended by Nunnally (1978). So the internal consistency of .867 is an indication of high consistency between the items of the tool; students' retention, guidance and counseling, administrative support, tutorial support, mentoring.

### **3.8 Data Processing**

After collecting the questionnaires from the respondents, they were checked for completeness and only the ones completely and properly filled were considered for analysis. The checking was done to ensure the data is accurate, consistent with the facts gathered, uniformly completed and well arranged to facilitate coding and tabulation. A manual screening of the received questionnaires was done to check for completeness and excluded incomplete ones before further analysis.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

During data analysis, the results were classified, measured, analyzed and interpreted to determine the influence of learner support services on retention of students in distance education programmes. The analysis was based on the study objectives using both descriptive and content analysis techniques. Descriptive analysis which is the first step in analysis provided a convenient way to produce the most useful statistics. This analysis was achieved using descriptive statistics which is the assessment of central tendency of convergence and dispersion. The data was then represented in form of tables (Aneshensel, 2004). Descriptive Statistics was used to summarize the data. This included percentages and frequency tables to present the data collected for ease of understanding and analysis. Quantitative Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0 was applied for effective analysis.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

In most research, ethical standards are focused on maintaining the confidentiality of participants. In an educational institution, the Board of Postgraduate Studies usually has to be made aware of the research so that they can help to ensure that the anonymity, respect and consent of the participants are safeguarded. In the current study, permission to contact the participants was sought from, and subsequently granted by, the UON Distance Studies Department. This is in line with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics (2007) which specifies that researchers have to avoid undertaking secret or classified research, be competent and accountable, respect human

participants, and be responsible when doing their research. According to Carlin (2003), an ethical research design focuses on ensuring individuals' anonymity, maintaining confidentiality, gaining access to settings for research purposes and informed consent, protecting individuals from harm caused by participating in and presenting the research, and examining the relation between the researcher and the respondent. The identified sample population was notified about the aims, methods and anticipated benefits of the research; their right to abstain from participating in the research and the confidential nature of their responses and their right to privacy and autonomy.

### 3.10 Operationalization of Variables

Table 3.2: Operationalization of Variables

OBJECTIVES	VARIABLES	INDICATORS	MEASURE MENT OF INDICATOR	DATA COLLECTION METHODS	SCALE	LEVEL OF ANALYSIS
1.To establish the extent to which guidance and counseling influences intentions of students in distance education Programmes in institution of higher learning	<b><u>Independent</u></b> guidance and counseling <b><u>Dependent</u></b> Retention of students	- Placement and follow up - Learners appraisal - Information service - consultancy	Level of agreement placement of learners	Questionnaire	Ordinal	Descriptive
2.To assess how administrative support offered to students in institutions of higher learning influence retention of students	<b><u>Independent</u></b> Administrative support <b><u>Dependent</u></b> Retention of students	- course programme - dispatch of course materials - complete record keeping - financial aid	Complete record Level of agreement or disagreement with the responses	Questionnaire document analysis	Ordinal	Descriptive

in distance education Programmes						
3.To establish the influence of tutorial support on retention of students in distance education Programmes in institutions of higher learning	<b><u>Independent</u></b> Tutorial support <b><u>Dependent</u></b> Students retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- academic support</li> <li>- tutor contact</li> <li>- face to face sessions</li> <li>- instructional materials</li> </ul>	Level of agreement or disagreement with the given responses	Questionnaire document analysis	Ordinal	Descriptive
4. To find out the extent to which mentoring influence retention of students in institutions of higher learning	<b><u>Independent</u></b> Mentoring <b><u>Dependent</u></b> Retention of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- transfer of instruction design principle</li> <li>- qualities instruction quality design</li> <li>- of mentoring relationship</li> <li>- collaborative nature of the programme</li> </ul>	Level of agreement or disagreement with the responses	Questionnaire	Ordinal	Descriptive

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis and discussions of the results obtained from the analysis of the study results. These results were represented using tables for ease of understanding and were interpreted in form of narrative based on the research objectives. These results are from data analyzed using quantitative analysis analyzed by use of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0. The study contains results on respondents' demographics, response rate and descriptive statistic.

#### 4.2 Response Rate

The questionnaire (used as the data collection tool) was administered to 72 respondents and 53 responded. This translated to a response rate of 73.61% of the sample population. This was a very good based on the assertion by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) that; a 50% response rate is adequate, 59% good and above, and above 69% is very good.

**Table 4.1: Analysis by Response Rate**

Category	Frequency	Percent
Sample Population	72	100.00
Response	53	73.61
No Response	19	26.39

According to (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003), a 50% response rate is adequate, 60% good and above 69% rated very high. Based on this assertion the response rate for this study can be said to be very good at 69.14%, which was high above 69%. Although the results were interpreted to indicate a very good response rate, a failure of 26.39% to respond might have been explained by some of the respondents being out of reach by the time the study was being conducted. All those who responded answered all the questions in the questionnaire quite well without leaving any questions unanswered. The answers were given by the right source and were accurate.

### 4.3 Respondents' Demographics

#### 4.3.1. Gender

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

**Table 4.2: Analysis by Gender**

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	27	50.94
Female	26	49.06
Total	53	100.00

From the results, a majority of 50.94% were male as 49.06 were female. The gap between the two was very small. The male, who were the majority made up 50.94% as the female took up the remaining 49.06%. If the male lost 0.88% to the female, the male would have been the same as the female. This was showed that there was gender diversity in the distance learning.

#### 4.3.2 Respondents Age

Further, the respondents were requested to indicate their age bracket and the results were recorded in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Analysis by Respondents Age**

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percent
Below 20 years	0	0
21 to 30 years	28	52.83
31 to 40 years	20	37.74
41 to 50 years	4	7.55
Over 50 years	1	1.89
Total	53	100.00

The results showed that majority of the respondents, who formed 52.83%, were between 21 and 30 years. They were followed by those who indicated that they were between 31 and 40 years, who formed 37.74%. Those who showed that they were between 41 and 50 years formed 7.55% as 1.89%% showed that they were over 50 years. None of the respondents was below 20 years which is a clear indication that distance learners are mostly young adults between ages 21 to 40 years.

#### **4.3.3. Highest Level of Education**

The respondents were requested to indicate their highest level of education and the results recorded in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Analysis by Highest level of education**

<b>Highest level of education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Undergraduate Degree	42	67.92
Masters Degree	11	20.75
Total	53	100.00

The results showed that most of the respondents were undergraduates who formed 67.92% while 20.75 had a Masters degree. This indicates that most distance learners are undergraduates.

#### **4.3.4. Period have been in Employment**

The respondents were requested to indicate the period they had been in employment and the results were recorded in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Analysis by Period have been in employment**

<b>Period have been in employment</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Below one year	6	11.32
1 - 5 years	22	41.50
6 - 10 years	14	26.42
11 - 15 years	8	15.09
16 - 20 years	3	5.67
Total	53	100.00

The results showed that majority of the respondents had been in employment for 1-5 years who formed 41.50%. 26.42% had been in employment for 6-10 years. This indicates that most distance learners are employed and have been in employment for between 1-10 years.

#### **4.3.5 Highest Qualification that the Respondents have Attained through ODL**

The respondents were requested to indicate the highest qualification they attained through ODL and the results were recorded in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6: Analysis by Highest Qualification that the respondents have attained through ODL**

<b>Highest Qualification that you have attained through ODL</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Interrupted from distance Learning (dropped from the course)	2	3.92
Currently undertaking first course	9	17.65
Undergraduate Degree	36	67.92
Masters	6	7.84
Total	53	100.00

The results showed that majority of the respondents had attained undergraduate degree which formed 67.92%. 7.84%, 17.65% and 3.92% had attained Masters Degree, were currently undertaking first course and had dropped from the course respectively. This indicates that very

few of the respondents had interrupted their course and most of them had done their first degree through distance learning.

#### 4.4 Student Retention in Distance Education Programmes

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 = 0: Disagree= 1: Neutral = 2: Agree =3: Strongly Agree = 4 to measure the Dependent Variable (DV) and the independent variables (IVs). The study further obtained a mean for each indicator for each variable (both DV and IVs) and another mean the respective variable. The ordinal data was moderated to obtain the mean statistics; 0 – 0.8 for Strongly Disagree; above 0.8 – 1.6 for Disagree; above 1.6 – 2.4 for Neutral; above 2.4 – 3.2 for Agree; and above 3.2 – 4.0 for Strongly Agree. The interpretation was first based on the Likert scale and then checked against the mean for clarity. The study sought to establish the status of students’ retention. The results were recorded in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7: Analysis by student retention**

Indicator	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean
The learners support provided in distance learning encourages me to persist until I graduate	0.00	7.70	15.40	51.90	25.00	2.94
I intend to stay until completion of the academic degree owing to the learners support provided in distance learning	2.00	2.00	11.80	54.90	29.40	3.08
The learner support services provided motivates me to complete the course within the set period	3.80	15.10	13.20	49.10	18.90	2.64
<b>STUDENTS RETENTION</b>	1.93	8.27	13.47	51.97	24.43	2.89

The results showed that most of the respondents, who formed 51.90% (who were the majority), indicated that that they agreed with the statement that “The learners support provided in distance learning encourages me to persist until I graduate”. The mean obtained from that statement that

was 2.94, an indication that learners support provided in distance learning encouraged the students to continue pursuing ODL.

The results further showed that a majority 54.90% indicated that they agreed with the statement “I intend to stay until completion of the academic degree owing to the learners support provided in distance learning”. The mean obtained in these results was 3.08, which indicated the respondents agreed with the assertion that the institutions provided learners support in distance learning which motivated the students to stay until completion of the academic degree. Other results showed most of the respondents, who formed 49.10% of the total response, indicated that the learner support services provided motivated the ODL students to complete the course within the set period. This was supported by the mean of 2.64 (an indication of agreeing with statement “The learner support services provided motivates me to complete the course within the set period”). Overall, the results showed that students retention status was high with an overall mean of 2.86 (which meant agree) and a majority of 51.92 indicating that they agreed that this was the case.

#### **4.5 Guidance and Counseling and Student Retention**

Guidance and counseling was the main variable in assessing the first objective. Objective one was to establish the extent to which guidance and counseling influences retention of students in distance education programmes. In institutions of higher learning. As with earlier results, the data collected on a 5-point Likert Scale (0: Strongly Disagree; 1: Disagree; 2: Neutral; 3: agree; 4: Strongly Agree) and the means interpretation were as below; 0 – 0.8 for Strongly Disagree; above 0.8 – 1.6 for Disagree; above 1.6 – 2.4 for Neutral; above 2.4 – 3.2 for Agree; and above 3.2 – 4.0 for Strongly Agree. The results obtained were recorded in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8: Guidance and counseling**

Indicator	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean
Guidance and counselling coordinates the accumulation and interpretation of information concerning learners	0.00	5.70	20.80	50.90	22.60	2.91
The institution helps identify learners with special needs and abilities and recommends appropriate actions	0.00	24.00	24.00	36.00	16.00	2.44
Through guidance and counselling learners are assisted in selecting and making use of available opportunities within the institution and market	1.90	17.00	13.20	43.40	24.50	2.72
Placement assists learners to make appropriate choices of courses of study, transitions of next level of education, choice of subjects and potential for future employment	0.00	13.20	17.00	39.60	30.20	2.87
Follow-up helps with the development of a systematic plan for maintaining contacts with former learners	3.80	15.10	20.80	30.20	30.20	2.68
During Follow-up the learning institution evaluates and updates the institution's programme of courses, course content and guidance and counselling plans.	5.70	15.10	15.10	35.80	28.30	2.66
Counsellors seek, collect, and disseminate information which will assist learners to make better choices and plan their educational lives	3.80	19.20	17.30	40.40	19.20	2.52
There are consultations with guardians, tutors, in order to enhance the relevance, effectiveness and quality of learning	5.70	22.60	18.90	37.70	15.10	2.34
<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>2.64</b>

The results showed that most of the respondents, who formed 50.90%, indicated that Guidance and counseling coordinates the accumulation and interpretation of information concerning learners which led to students' retention as the mean of 2.91 indicated that the such Learners' Appraisal (coordination of the accumulation and interpretation of information concerning learners) highly influenced students' retention. Most of the respondents agreed with the assertion that the institution helps identify learners with special needs and abilities and recommends

appropriate actions. According to the results obtained from the respondents, 36% who were the majority agreed with this assertion. This was supported by a mean of 2.44 which indicated that institutions' identification of learners' needs and abilities and subsequent recommendations for appropriate action influenced students' retention. Further, 43.40% of the respondents agreed that through guidance and counseling learners are assisted in selecting and making use of available opportunities within the institution and market. The results of the assertion yielded a mean of 2.72 which is a clear indication that guidance and counseling has an influence in student's retention. The results also showed that 39.60% of the respondents agree with the assertion that placement assist learners to make appropriate choices of courses of study, choice of subjects and potential for future employments which leads to students' retention. The mean of the results was 2.87. On guidance and counseling still, 30.20% of the respondents agreed that follow up helps with the development of systematic plan for maintaining contacts with former learners. 24.50 strongly agree with the assertion. The results therefore suggest that this aspect of guidance and counseling lead to students' retention. The assertion yielded a mean of 2.68.

Further 35.80% of the respondents (which is the majority) agreed that during follow up the learning institution evaluates and updates the institutions programme of course, course content and guidance and counseling plans; 28.30% strongly agreed while 15.10% disagreed. Finally respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement with the assertion that there are consultations with guidance tutors in order to enhance the relevance, effectiveness and quality of learning. 37.70% of the respondents agreed 15.10% strongly agreed while 22.60 disagreed. This shows that majority of the respondents agree that there are consultations which lead to students retention. Generally, guidance and counseling highly influences students retention in distance education programmes.

#### **4.6 Administrative Support and Student Retention**

Administrative Support was the main variable in assessing objective 2; to assess how administrative support offered to students in institutions of higher learning influence their retention in distance education programmes. The study data collected on a 5-point Likert Scale (0: Strongly Disagree; 1: Disagree; 2: Neutral; 3: agree; 4: Strongly Agree) and the means

interpretation were as below; 0 – 0.8 for Strongly Disagree; above 0.8 – 1.6 for Disagree; above 1.6 – 2.4 for Neutral; above 2.4 – 3.2 for Agree; and above 3.2 – 4.0 for strongly agree. The results obtained were recorded in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9: Analysis by Administrative Support**

Indicator	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean
The administrative support ensures that the material to learners urgently	1.90	22.60	17.00	49.10	9.40	2.42
The institution ensures that all the learners access their material as appropriate	3.80	13.50	19.20	46.20	17.30	2.60
The learners' records are always up to date and reflect the current status of information	11.30	3.80	28.30	39.60	17.00	2.47
There are opportunities for financial aid to deserving learners	17.00	22.60	30.20	24.50	5.70	1.79
The learning institution makes arrangement for learners to obtain desired financial help	15.10	30.20	28.30	26.40	0.00	1.66
The administration ensure that the learning services are effectively delivered	0.00	5.80	17.30	65.40	11.50	2.83
Learners' time is not wasted regardless of the prevailing circumstances	3.80	17.30	19.20	44.20	15.40	2.50
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT</b>	<b>7.56</b>	<b>16.54</b>	<b>22.79</b>	<b>42.20</b>	<b>10.90</b>	<b>2.32</b>

From the results, most of the respondents, who formed 49.10%, showed that the administrative support ensured that the materials are delivered to learners urgently. The results show that the mean was 2.42, which simply meant that the function of the administrative support ensuring that the materials are delivered to learners urgently highly influenced students' retention. The results showed most of the respondents, who made up 46.20%, indicated that that institution ensured that all the learners access their material as appropriate. The mean was 2.60, which indicated that

ensuring that all the learners access their material as appropriate highly influenced the students' retention. The study found that most of the respondents, who made up 39.60% of the respondents, agreed that learners' records were always up to date and reflect the current status of information. The mean obtained was 2.47, an indication that record keeping highly influenced the students' retention.

It was found that most of the respondents, who made up 30.20%, indicated that they were neutral on the statement "There are opportunities for financial aid to deserving learners" and the mean was 1.79. This was indication that that the available opportunities for financial aid to deserving learners moderately influenced the students' retention. The results showed that most of the respondents, who made up 30.20% of total response, indicated that they disagreed the statement "learning institution makes arrangement for learners to obtain desired financial help." The mean obtained was 1.66, an indication that failure to make arrangement for learners to obtain desired financial help lowly influenced the students' retention.

It was shown that a majority of 65.40% of the total response indicated that they agreed that administration ensured that the learning services are effectively delivered, with a mean of 2.83, which indicated that assurance by the over effective learning services delivery highly influenced the students' retention. From the results, most of the respondents, who made up 44.20%, indicated that they agreed that learners' time was not wasted regardless of the prevailing circumstances and the obtained was 2.50, an indication that the saving of learners' time by institute highly influenced the students' retention. Overall, 42.20% of the respondents showed that administrative support affected the retention of students. The mean obtained was 2.32, which mean that administrative support moderately affected the students' retention.

#### **4.7 Analysis by Tutorial Support and Students Retention**

Tutorial Support was the main variable in assessing objective three; to establish the influence of tutorial support on retention of students in distance education programmes in institutions of higher learning. As with earlier results, the data collected on a 5-point Likert Scale (0: Strongly Disagree; 1: Disagree; 2: Neutral; 3: agree; 4: Strongly Agree) and the means interpretation were

as below; 0 – 0.8 for Strongly Disagree; above 0.8 – 1.6 for Disagree; above 1.6 – 2.4 for Neutral; above 2.4 – 3.2 for Agree; and above 3.2 – 4.0 for Strongly Agree. The results obtained were recorded in Table 4.10.

**Table 4.10: Analysis by tutorial support**

Indicator	Strongly Disagree		Neutral	Strongly Agree		Mean
	%	%		%	%	
The tutors are accessible and ready to help as and when required by the learners	3.80	9.40	20.80	49.10	17.00	2.66
The institutions allows the learners to contact the tutor using electronic systems such as mobile, email and related systems	0.00	3.80	3.80	50.90	41.50	3.30
The tutors always assist when contacted by the learners	3.80	9.40	18.90	43.40	24.50	2.75
The tutors provide effective face to face tutorial sessions to the learners at certain times	5.70	5.70	18.90	47.20	22.60	2.75
The Instructional materials are submitted the learners at the appropriate time	1.90	15.10	11.30	50.90	20.80	3.13
The learners have access to the library without any restrictions.	3.80	9.60	13.50	59.60	13.50	2.69
The library contains up to date learning materials	3.80	0.00	3.80	43.40	49.10	3.34
The library material is very helpful to the learner	0.00	3.80	15.10	37.70	43.40	3.21
The learners always obtain feedback after every enquiry or session	0.00	0.00	11.30	45.30	43.40	3.32
The feedback system is very effective	7.50	20.80	28.30	28.30	15.10	2.23
There are regular feedback from the course instructor	5.70	24.50	32.10	28.30	9.40	2.11
<b>TUTORIAL SUPPORT</b>	<b>7.50</b>	<b>13.20</b>	<b>24.50</b>	<b>49.10</b>	<b>5.70</b>	<b>2.32</b>

The results in Table 4.9 about Tutorial Support shows that most of the respondents, who formed 66.1% of the total respondents indicated that the tutors were accessible and ready to help them and when required by the learners. A majority of 92.4% indicated that the institutions allowed the learners to contact the tutor using electronic systems such as mobile, email and related systems. 67.5% of the total respondents indicated that when tutors are contacted, they always assist the learner. The results also showed that 69.85% of the total respondents agree that tutors provide effective face to face tutorial sessions to the learners at certain times. A majority 71.7% of the total respondents indicated that the instructional; materials for learners are submitted at the appropriate time. The results further indicated that most of the respondents, who formed 73.1% of the total respondents, have access to the library without any restriction. The respondents were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with assertions on timely feedback. The results showed that 88.74 % of the respondents agreed that they obtain feedback after every session, 37.74% agree that feedback systems are very effective while 28.30% agree that there is regular feedback from the course instructor. From these findings it is quite clear that tutorial support highly influences student retention in distance education programmes.

#### **4.8 Mentoring and Student Retention**

Mentoring was the main variable in assessing the fourth objective; to find out the extent to which mentoring influences retention of students in distance education programmes in institutions of higher learning. The data collected on a 5-point Likert Scale (0: Strongly Disagree; 1: Disagree; 2: Neutral; 3: agree; 4: Strongly Agree) and the means interpretation were as below; 0 – 0.8 for Strongly Disagree; above 0.8 – 1.6 for Disagree; above 1.6 – 2.4 for Neutral; above 2.4 – 3.2 for Agree; and above 3.2 – 4.0 for Strongly Agree. The results obtained were recorded in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11: Analysis by Mentoring**

Indicator	Strongly					Mean
	Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	
Learning improves as a result of participation in the Distance Education Mentoring Program.	1.90	9.40	9.40	62.30	17.00	2.83
Understanding of course contents improve as a result of participation in Mentoring Program	1.90	7.50	7.50	64.20	18.90	2.91
Learners are able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired from the Distance Education Mentoring Program	0.00	7.50	9.40	56.60	26.40	3.02
Mentors devotes time to establish good rapport with learners	5.80	13.50	15.40	55.80	9.60	2.50
Mentors always provide learners with career support	3.80	15.40	19.20	50.00	11.50	2.50
Mentors exhibit strong interpersonal skills within a professional framework	2.00	13.70	25.50	41.20	17.60	2.59
Mentors have an open door policy encouraging learners to freely offer suggestions.	1.90	11.50	21.20	40.40	25.00	2.75
Learners' opinions and suggestions for improvement in distance education are always encouraged and welcomed.	7.50	11.30	17.00	41.50	22.60	2.60
Opinions and suggestions offered are thoughtfully considered	5.70	18.90	30.20	35.80	9.40	2.25
Mentoring encourage working as a team to solve problems.	1.90	5.70	7.50	60.40	24.50	3.00
When problems occur, mentors are more interested in better understanding processes	3.80	18.90	13.20	50.90	13.20	2.51
<b>MENTORING</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>12.12</b>	<b>15.95</b>	<b>50.83</b>	<b>17.79</b>	<b>2.68</b>

The results in Table 4.11 about mentoring indicate that 79.3% of the total respondents agree that learning improves as a result of participation in the distance education mentoring programme. The results on the table also show that 83.10% of the respondents agree to assertion that understanding of course contents improve as a result of participating in mentoring programmes. A majority of 83% of the respondents agreed that learners are to able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired from the ODL mentoring programme. The results suggested that majority

of learners are able to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in mentoring programmes which lead to better retention of student. The respondents were asked to respond to assertion on quality of the mentoring relationship in ODL. The results as indicated on Table 4.10 shows that 65.40% of the respondents agree that mentors devote time to establish good rapport with learners. 58.8% agree that mentors exhibit strong interpersonal skills within a professional framework and 64.10% agree that mentors have an open door policy encouraging learners to freely offer suggestions. These results therefore suggest that the quality of a mentoring relationship highly influenced retention of students. The study also sought to find out the view of the respondents towards the collaborative nature of the mentoring programmes. The results on Table 4.10 indicates that 45.2% of the respondents agree that opinions and suggestions offered are thoughtfully considered, 84.90% of the respondents agreed that mentoring encourage working as a team to solve problems while 64.1% agreed that when problems occur mentors are more interested in better understanding process. The results pointed out that collaboration of the learners with the mentors has an influence on students' retention. This is because majority of the students agreed with the statements on collaboration. This formed 68.62% of the respondents. In conclusion, from these findings it is very clear that mentoring highly influences student retention in distance education programmes.

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

**5.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the summary of findings, conclusions as well as the recommendations based on the findings. It further highlights the research gaps the researcher felt should be filled by further research as well the limitations of the study. The conclusions and recommendation were based on the study objective.

**5.2 Summary of Findings**

The general objective of the study was to determine the influence of learner support services on ODL students' retention. The study found that there was high students' retention. The study also found that the institution provided learners support in distance learning, which encouraged the students to continue pursuing ODL. Further, institute provided learners' support in distance learning which motivated the students to stay until completion of the academic degree. Due to the intervention of the institution in ensuring learner support services are provided, the learners were motivated to complete the course within the set period.

**5.2.1 Guidance and Counseling and Retention of Students**

The study found out that guidance and counseling highly influenced students' retention. It was specifically found that Learners' Appraisal (coordination of the accumulation and interpretation of information concerning learners) highly influenced students' retention and through guidance and counseling learners are assisted in selecting and making use of available opportunities within the institution and market. The study also found that placement highly assisted learners to make appropriate choices of courses of study, transitions of next level of education, choice of subjects and potential for future employment, which highly influenced students' retention. Further, follow-up highly influenced students' retention too. It was also found that the process of counselors seeking, collecting, and disseminating information which would assist learners to make better choices and plan their educational lives highly influenced students' retention and

consultations with guardians, tutors, in order to enhance the relevance, effectiveness and quality of learning moderately influenced students' retention too.

### **5.2.2 Administrative Support and Student Retention**

The study found that timely dispatch of course materials highly influenced students retention; the administrative support ensured that the material to learners and it also ensured that all the learners accessed their material as appropriate. Complete record keeping (registrar services) was to have highly influenced the students' retention. The learners' records were always up to date and reflected the current status of information. However, the available financial aid was found to be inadequate to ensure students' retention. There were moderate opportunities for financial aid to deserving learners and the learning institution did not make arrangement for learners to obtain desired financial help which lowly influenced the students' retention. Service delivery was found to have highly influenced the students' retention. The administration ensured that the learning services are effectively delivered and learners' time was not wasted regardless of the prevailing circumstances Overall, administrative support moderately affected the students' retention.

### **5.2.3 Tutorial Support and Retention of Students**

The study found that tutorial support highly influenced the students' retention. Among the indicators of tutorial support, the study found that tutor contact have highly influenced the students' retention. The tutors were accessible and ready to help as and when required by the learners, the institutions allowed the learners to contact the tutor using electronic systems such as mobile, email and related systems, tutors always assisted when contacted by the learners and the tutors provide effective face to face tutorial sessions to the learners at certain times. The study found that instructional materials highly influenced the students' retention. The instructional materials were submitted to the learners securely, the institution ensured that all the learners always accessed their material as appropriate, and the instructional materials were submitted the learners at the appropriate time. The further found that Access to the library highly influenced the students' retention. The learners had access to the library without any restrictions, the library contained up to date learning materials, and the library materials were very helpful to the learner. There was sufficient library material which very highly helped the learners and this very highly

influenced the students' retention. The study found that the Timely feedback highly influenced the students' retention. The learners always obtained feedback after every enquiry or session, the feedback system is moderately effective and there were regular feedback from the course instructor.

#### **5.2.4 Mentoring and Retention of Students**

The study showed that mentoring highly influenced the students' retention. This is where transfer of instructional design principles was found to highly influence the students' retention. The learning improved as a result of participation in the distance education mentoring program, understanding of course contents improve as a result of participation in mentoring program and learners were able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired from the distance education mentoring program. The study also found that the quality of the mentoring relationship highly influenced the students' retention. The mentors devoted time to establish good rapport with learners, mentors always provided learners with career support, mentors exhibited strong interpersonal skills within a professional frame work and mentors had an open door policy encouraging learners to freely offer suggestions.

The study found that the collaborative nature of the program highly influenced the students' retention. The learners' opinions and suggestions for improvement in distance education were always encouraged and welcomed, opinions and suggestions offered were thoughtfully considered and mentoring encouraged working as a team to solve problems. Lastly, on collaborative nature of the program, the study found that when problems occurred, mentors were more interested in better understanding processes.

#### **5.3 Discussions of the Study**

The study aimed at finding out the influence of learner support services in distance education programmes. The findings of the study are a proof that learner support services indeed influence student's retention in distance education programmes. This is quite similar to studies done earlier by other researchers. The discussions provide a comparative analysis of the study in relation to other studies done by other researchers as reviewed in the literature review.

### **5.3.1 Learner Support and Student Retention in Distance Education Programmes**

It is clear from the result analysis that adoption of effective learner support systems has a high influence on students' retention in distance education programmes in institutions of higher learning. This is because most of the respondents agreed with the statements provided in the questionnaire given to them to find out the extent to which various learners support services influence students' retention. Majority of the respondents who formed 54.90% felt that provision of learners support services encourage students to persist and complete their studies within the stipulated time. The study sought the views of respondents on the various support services; in guidance and counseling, administrative support, tutorial support and mentoring and the results as earlier analyzed clearly indicate that all these services have a high influence on students' retention in distance education programmes. There is a general consensus that these services help to improve retention of students in ODL. This is similar to studies done by Taiti (2003), Rovial and Downey (2010), Mbwesa (2014) who agree that provision of effective learner support services increases motivation of learners, make them more confident in the use of technology hence they are able to persist and avoid dropping out.

### **5.3.2 Guidance and Counseling and Retention of Students**

The study found that guidance and counseling highly influences students' retention and the main factors enhancing this were; proper and effective learners' appraisal schemes, placement and follow-up mechanisms, information service systems, and consultancy. Hudson's (1993) study found that counseling students is seen as a formal role in some ODL systems carried out by counselors or tutor counselors (Daniel, 1979; Robinson, 1989; Thorpe, 1993). Nortledge (1975) found that It is important that all learner support personnel including administrators and clerical staff provide guidance or advice to learners have some awareness since guidance and counseling is a highly skilled process which would ensure students' retention as was found in this study (Thomas, 1974). Simpson (1992) found that guidance and counseling; ensures the learner's needs are clear; conceptualizing, pointing out contradictions and other ways of seeing an issue, consequent action; and agreeing to what the counselor and learner each might do as a result of their discussion. This would eventually lead to students' retention as found in the present study.

### **5.3.3 Administrative Support and Student Retention**

The study found that the administrative support ensured that the materials are delivered to learners urgently, ensured that all the learners access their material as appropriate, records are always up to date and reflect the current status of information, learning services are effectively delivered, and time was not wasted regardless of the prevailing circumstances. These factors influence retention of students as shown in the findings. Tait, (2003) asserts that the students support especially effective information and administrative systems provide a range of activity that impacts not only in terms of teaching but also effectiveness, that is to say reinforcing the students' sense of confidence, self esteem and progress.

### **5.3.4 Tutorial Support and Retention of Students**

The study found that tutorial support generally influenced students' retention in distance education programmes. In particular, the study found that tutors availability and readiness to help learners, tutor contact, effective face to face tutorials and timely feedback after enquiry or sessions, access to the library and timely provision of instructional materials have a high influence in retention of students. This concurs with findings from other studies. Mbuva, (2007), for instance argues that distance education programmes should be developed to promote and facilitate healthy interactions between the learner and the instructor. Face-to-face sessions are critical as they create a platform that allows interaction between students, and between students and tutors/lecturers, for mutual benefit. According to Robinson,(1981), these sessions are mostly for motivation, induction and briefing, reviewing an assignment, preparing assignments, reviewing a section of the learning materials, exploring common difficulties, remedial work, skill development, preparing for exams and consolidation. Kaye and Rumble (1972) argue that in distance learning system, most if not all the learning takes place through instructional materials so that the tutors function changes to dealing with problems arising from the study of the written materials and to acting as intermediary between the student and course writers.

### **5.3.5 Mentoring and Retention of Students**

According to Bolgle (2010), apparent retention gains of up to 20% with a return on investment of up to 295 may be possible after the linking of students in the form of mentoring and peer

support. According to (Portner,1998), in order for mentoring to be effective a mentor has to function by relating, assessing, coaching and guiding. He continues to argue that the relationship between the mentor and mentee is built on mutual trust, respect and professionalism. This is also in line with the current study since the study found out that that learning improved as a result of participation in the distance education mentoring program. The study indicated that understanding of course contents also improves as a result of participation in mentoring program. The factors that were considered in this study were; transfer of instructional design principles, qualities of a mentoring relationship and collaborative nature of the mentoring programme. It was found that all these highly influenced students' retention in distance education programmes. This is similar to Bolgle's (2010) study which indicates that there are retention gains from mentoring programmes in distance education.

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

The study concludes that guidance and counseling , which is ensured by putting in place proper and effective learners' appraisal schemes, placement and follow-up mechanisms, information service systems, and consultancy; administrative support pegged on ensuring continuous and effective dispatch of course materials, complete record keeping (registrar services), providing adequate financial aid and effective service delivery; tutorial support characterized by supportive tutor contact, up to date Instructional materials, unlimited access to the library and Timely feedback and mentoring based on implementing an effective transfer of instructional design principles, ensuring high quality of the mentoring relationship and ensuring collaborative nature of the ODL program have a high influence on student retention in Distance Education programmes. Therefore, learner support services influence student retention in Distance Education Programmes in institutions of higher learning.

#### **5.5 Recommendations of the Study**

Based on the findings of this study, came up with the following recommendations:

1. The higher institutions of learning in Kenya should implement various policies and procedures within their structures to set up successful ODL guidance and counseling program, these programs should be headed and run by professionals in guidance and

counseling. The policies implemented should ensure that the team managing ODL guidance and counseling report back to the institute on the state of affairs regularly and all other stakeholders.

2. Secondly, the study recommends mentoring programmes are institutionalized. Institutions of higher learning should put in place mentoring programmes that are highly participative for learners, collaborative and that enhance team work among learners and mentors. Mentors should be trained to equip with skills, knowledge and professionalism.
3. The study also recommends that institutions of higher learning should ensure that there are effective face to face tutorials to supplement the instructional materials provided to distance learners.

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

The study suggests the following topics for further study:

1. An assessment of -how support services influence ODL students' retention of in other Counties.
2. Another study to establish what encourages students to continue to the next academic level.
3. Studies to determine other factors and how they influence students' retention in distance education programmes.
4. A repetition of the study after a period of time to determine whether the same results would be obtained.

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**APPENDICES**  
**APPENDIX 1**  
**LETTER TO THE RESPONDENTS**

**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**  
**DEPARTMENT OF DISTANCE STUDIES**  
**P.O BOX 92**  
**KIKUYU**

Dear Sir /Madam

I am a post graduate student in the university of Nairobi and am carrying out a research on the influence of learner support services on retention rates of students in distance education programmes. You have been randomly selected to participate in this study.

The attached questionnaire is part of this research study. Kindly respond to the questions honestly. I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that the information you provide will not be used anywhere else beyond this study and will be treated with outmost confidentiality. For this reason, you are requested not to write your name on the questionnaire.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

Doreen G Kiraithe

**APPENDIX II**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS**

**INFLUENCE OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES ON RETENTION OF STUDENTS  
IN DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER  
LEARNING**

Any information provided in this Questionnaire will be used for purposes of research only and will not be divulged or availed to unauthorized persons  
Tick the correct answer in the boxes provided against the questions where provided.  
You need not write your name on the questionnaire.  
Please answer the questions as accurately as possible.

**SECTION A: RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHICS**

1. **Please Indicate your gender by** ticking (√) in the appropriate box

Male  Female

2. Please indicate your age on the table below. Tick (√) in the appropriate box

<b>Age Bracket</b>	<b>Please Tick only one box</b>
Less than 20 Years	
21 to 30 Years	
31 - 40 Years	
41 - 50 Years	
Over 50 Years	

3. May you indicate your Marital status by ticking (√) in the appropriate box

Marital Status	Please Tick only one box
Single	
Married	

4. Please indicate your highest level of education by ticking (√) the appropriate box

Undergraduate Degree  PhD Degree   
 Masters Degree

Any other please specify \_\_\_\_\_

5. For how long have you been in employment? Indicate by ticking (√) the appropriate box.

Employment Status	Please Tick only one box
Not at All	
Below one year	
1 - 5 Years	
6 -10 Years	
11 - 15 Years	
16 – 20 Years	
Over 20 Years	

6. What is the highest Qualification that you have attained through distance learning? Indicate by ticking (√) the appropriate box.

distance learning Qualification	Please Tick only one box
Interrupted from distance Learning (dropped from the course)	
Currently Undertaking first Course	
Undergraduate Degree	
Master	
PhD Degree	

**SECTION B: STUDENTS RETENTION**

7. In this section the study evaluates the status of students’ retention. Please 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.

**Scale: Strongly Disagree =0; Disagree = 1; Neither = 2; Agree = 3; Strongly Agree = 4**

Statements	0	1	2	3	4
<b>a. Graduation</b>					
I. The learners support provided in distance learning encourages me to persist until I graduate					
<b>b. Completion within the stipulated duration</b>					
I. I intend to stay until completion of the academic degree owing to the learners support provided in distance learning					
II. The learner support services provided motivates me to complete the course within the set period					

**SECTION C: GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING**

8. In this section the study evaluates the main indicators of guidance and counseling as shown in grid below. Please indicate in your opinion the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements on guidance and counseling indicator. Please Tick(√) in the space corresponding to the correct answer.

**Scale: Strongly Disagree =0; Disagree = 1; Neither = 2; Agree = 3; Strongly Agree = 4**

<b>Guidance and Counseling Statements</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>a. Learners' Appraisal</b>					
I. Guidance and counseling coordinates the accumulation and interpretation of information concerning learners					
II. The institution helps identify learners with special needs and abilities and recommends appropriate actions					
<b>b. Placement and Follow-up</b>					
I. Through guidance and counseling learners are assisted in selecting and making use of available opportunities within the institution and market					
II. Placement assists learners to make appropriate choices of courses of study, transitions of next level of education, choice of subjects and potential for future employment					
III. Follow-up helps with the development of a systematic plan for maintaining contacts with former learners					
IV. During Follow-up the learning institution evaluates and updates the institution's programme of courses, course content and guidance and counseling plans.					
<b>c. Information Service</b>					
I. Counselors seek, collect, and disseminate information which will assist learners to make better choices and plan their educational lives					
<b>d. Consultancy</b>					
I. There are consultations with guardians, tutors, in order to enhance the relevance, effectiveness and quality of learning					

**SECTION D: ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT**

9. This section is about administrative support. In your opinion indicate the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements. Please put a tick (√) on the space corresponding to the correct answer in each question below.

**Scale: Strongly Disagree =0; Disagree = 1; Neither = 2; Agree = 3; Strongly Agree = 4**

<b>Administrative support Statement</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>a. Dispatch of course materials</b>					
I. The administrative support ensures that the material to learners urgently					
II. The institution ensures that all the learners access their material as appropriate					
<b>b. Complete record keeping (Registrar Services)</b>					
I. The learners' records are always up to date and reflect the current status of information					
<b>c. Financial aid</b>					
I. There are opportunities for financial aid to deserving learners					
II. The learning institution makes arrangement for learners to obtain desired financial help					
<b>d. Service delivery</b>					
I. The administration ensure that the learning services are effectively delivered					
II. Learners' time is not wasted regardless of the prevailing circumstances					

**SECTION E: TUTORIAL SUPPORT**

10. This section is about tutorial support for distance learning. In your opinion indicate the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements. Please put a tick (√) on the space corresponding to the correct answer in each question below.

**Scale: Strongly Disagree =0; Disagree = 1; Neither = 2; Agree = 3; Strongly Agree = 4**

<b>Tutorial support Statement</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>a. Tutor contact</b>					
I. The tutors are accessible and ready to help as and when required by the learners					
II. The institutions allows the learners to contact the tutor using electronic systems such as mobile, email and related systems					
III. The tutors always assist when contacted by the learners					
IV. The tutors provide effective face to face tutorial sessions to the learners at certain times					
<b>b. Instructional materials</b>					
I. Instructional materials are submitted to the learners securely					
II. The institution ensures that all the learners access their material as appropriate					
III. The Instructional materials are submitted the learners at the appropriate time					
<b>c. Access to the library</b>					
I. The learners have access to the library without any restrictions.					
II. The library contains up to date learning materials					

III. The library material is very helpful to the learner					
<b>d. Timely feedback</b>					
I. The learners always obtain feedback after every enquiry or session					
II. The feedback system is very effective					
III. There are regular feedback from the course instructor					

## SECTION G: MENTORING

11. This section is about mentoring in distance learning. In your opinion indicate the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about mentoring. Please put a tick (√) on the space corresponding to the correct answer in each question below.

**Scale: Strongly Disagree =0; Disagree = 1; Neither = 2; Agree = 3; Strongly Agree = 4**

Mentoring Statement	0	1	2	3	4
<b>a. Transfer of Instructional Design Principles</b>					
I. Learning improves as a result of participation in the Distance Education Mentoring Program.					
II. Understanding of course contents improve as a result of participation in Mentoring Program					
III. Learners are able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired from the Distance Education Mentoring Program					
<b>b. Qualities of the mentoring relationship</b>					
I. Mentors devotes time to establish good rapport with learners					
II. Mentors always provide learners with career support					

III. Mentors exhibit strong interpersonal skills within a professional framework					
IV. Mentors have an open door policy encouraging learners to freely offer suggestions.					
<b>c. Collaborative nature of the program</b>					
I. Learners' opinions and suggestions for improvement in distance education are always encouraged and welcomed.					
II. Opinions and suggestions offered are thoughtfully considered					
III. Mentoring encourage working as a team to solve problems.					
IV. When problems occur, mentors are more interested in better understanding processes					

**Thank you for your cooperation**

**APPENDIX III**  
**RESEARCH PERMIT**



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

Telephone: +254-20-2213471,  
2241349, 310571, 2219420  
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Email: secretary@nacosti.go.ke  
Website: www.nacosti.go.ke  
When replying please quote

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Uhuru Highway  
P.O. Box 30623-00100  
NAIROBI-KENYA

Ref: No. **NACOSTI/P/15/20706/8535**

Date:  
**30<sup>th</sup> November, 2015**

Doreen Gatakaa Kiraithe  
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 students retention in distance education programmes in institution of higher learning: A case of Kenya Methodist University,”* I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Meru County** for a period ending **25<sup>th</sup> November, 2016.**

You are advised to report to **the Vice Chancellor, Kenya Methodist University, the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Meru County** before embarking on the research project.

On completion of the research, you are expected to submit **two hard copies and one soft copy in pdf** of the research report/thesis to our office.

  
**SAID HUSSEIN**  
**FOR: DIRECTOR GENERAL/CEO**

Copy to:

The Vice Chancellor  
Kenya Methodist University.

The County Commissioner  
Meru County.

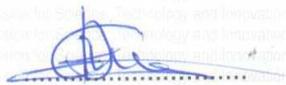


*National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation is ISO 9001: 2008 Certified*

**THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:  
MS. DOREEN GATAKAA KIRAITHE  
of UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, 0-60200  
MERU, has been permitted to conduct  
research in Meru County**

**on the topic: INFLUENCE OF LEARNER  
SUPPORT SERVICES ON STUDENTS  
RETENTION IN DISTANCE EDUCATION  
PROGRAMMES IN INSTITUTION OF  
HIGHER LEARNING: A CASE OF KENYA  
METHODIST UNIVERSITY.**

**for the period ending:  
25th November, 2016**



**Applicant's  
Signature**

**Permit No : NACOSTI/P/15/20706/8535  
Date Of Issue : 30th November, 2015  
Fee Received : Ksh 1,000**



**Director General  
National Commission for Science,  
Technology & Innovation**