

**FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNERS' SATISFACTION WITH DISTANCE
LEARNING: A CASE OF BACHELOR OF EDUCATION (ARTS) UNIVERSITY
OF NAIROBI, KENYA**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF MASTER OF
DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

2016

DECLARATION

This research project report is my original work and has not been presented for an award of a degree in any other University

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research would not have been possible but for the intellectual guidance of my supervisor and lecturer Mr. Augustine Mwangi of the University of Nairobi. He has greatly helped channel my wild imaginations into scholarly thought, culminating to this research work. I also recognize the entire academic staff in the Department of Distance Studies, University of Nairobi led by Dr. Ann Nderitu

My family, especially my wife Jane and my parents, Mr. & Mrs. James and Sabinah Maina were an invaluable part of this research. Their financial and moral resources invested into my academics have paid off, again.

Most importantly, I thank God for his ever-present and timely help.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to James Myles, with love

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELearning- Electronic Learning

ICT- Information and Communication Technology

OdeL- Open, Distance and Elearning

SPSS- Statistical Programme for Social Sciences

UoN- University of Nairobi

ABSTRACT

Distance learning and extensive use of technology in education has been growing rapidly and is seen as the future of education as it breaks the barriers of time and place. However, it has faced various challenges world over, especially doubts regarding its effectiveness, learner satisfaction and graduation rates as seen through reported high drop out rates. In Kenya, just like the world over distance learning has been growing steadily. In the University of Nairobi for instance, distance learning has expanded a lot since its inception and has grown to involve collaborations with other institutions such as the African Virtual University (AVU). A study of literature shows that learner satisfaction in distance learning influences completion and dropout rates, success of the learners as well as re-enrolment in similar programmes. This study focuses on the factors that affect learner satisfaction while enrolled in distance learning courses such as the ones offered by University of Nairobi. The study used a descriptive survey to collect data from a sample of learners enrolled in the university. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling were employed, in which any of the learners currently enrolled in Bachelor of Education (Arts) in each level could be selected to respond to the survey. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze and present data through discussions and tables. The key findings are that learners at the University of Nairobi are satisfied with distance learning, and that this satisfaction is influenced by their personal characteristics, learning content and learner support services. Finally, the study offers recommendations on ways in which learners could be provided with an ultimate environment that would enable them to be satisfied and effectively utilize the distance learning system.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The growth of distance learning world over is undisputed, although there are no concise world figures to indicate the number of enrollments (Seamon, 2014). The potential for university growth in terms of enrollments through distance learning can be indicated through some of the mega universities in the world, all of which have attained their mega status through distance learning. A case in point is the Indira Gandhi National University (IGNOU) in India with a current enrolment of 3.5 million and Anadolu University in Turkey with a 2 million student population (Universities with the Largest Enrolments, 2016).

According to Freeman (2004), Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a combination of two approaches to education whose main focus is expanding access to education. The two approaches are a distinct philosophy that aims at both removing barriers to education and allowing learners to learn what they want at a time and a place of their choice. The second approach is the use of technology, in which case printed workbooks, audio, video, radio or the internet is used to provide access to educational content. Freeman (2004), uses words such as correspondence independent learning, home study, distributed learning or flexible learning to refer to distance learning.

Quality of distance learning has also been found to have similar or better results than the campus based learning. Allen and Seaman (2013) say that 77% of university managers participating in their research said that the outcomes of online learning, a subset of

distance learning, are the same or better, corroborating the research by Russell (1999), who found that there is no significant difference in the outcomes of online learning compared with face to face instruction. Reju and Olakulehin (2008) say that in response to criticism about the quality of distance learning, many institutions adopt measures that focus on improving the quality of various sub-components of distance learning such as course material development, learner evaluation, support services and adequate technology support. The importance of these steps towards quality improvement is to assure prospective learners, employers and policy makers that the graduates of the system are credible.

In East Africa, the Open University of Tanzania is the first fully distance learning university. It was established in 1992 and offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Virtual University of Uganda (VUU) was the first online university in the region and opened in January 2012. Kenya also started funding the starting of a virtual university dubbed Open University of Kenya (Adkins 2013). Many other existing universities in the region have set up distance and elearning platforms.

The ODEL Centre in the University of Nairobi started with the recommendations from a senate seminar in 2003. This was followed by the development of a policy document by the university which was completed and approved by senate in 2005, leading to the launch of Centre for Open and Distance Learning (CODL). The key objectives of the centre were especially to raise access to university education, enhance collaboration with experts to offer innovative programmes, reduce teaching workload on lecturers, offer market-driven courses that are relevant to national development, achieve high quality

and consistent course programmes, stimulate innovation and flexibility in the content and methods of delivery for quality higher education in Kenya. (UoN, n.d)

The institution mainly uses a hybrid or blended approach to distance learning, in which learning content is provided and accessible to learners through printed booklets and face to face sessions. This recognizes the uniqueness of Kenyan landscape in terms of internet accessibility, student computer proficiency among other factors that would make a purely distance or online system more challenging.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Measurement of satisfaction levels among consumers of any product is an important concept. According to Wang (2003), distance learning planners need to justify their activities when they devote significant amounts of organizational resources to them. These activities form the different aspects of learning and in one way or the other affect the satisfaction of learners. By measuring learner satisfaction, therefore, planners and administrators of learning systems understand the level of satisfaction the learners derive from each of the facets of learning and gives a learner's perception of the quality of service and content offered by an institution, and goes further to give insight on learner's expectations.

According to Nyerere, Gravenir & Mse (2012), in a research involving 628 distance learners, 62% of the respondents said they were dissatisfied with distance learning while 29% said they were very dissatisfied. This amounts to 91% of the respondents. On the other hand, 7% said they were satisfied and only 2% of the respondents were very satisfied. The researchers attributed these problems to poor communication especially in

rural areas which delayed responses to and from facilitators. Tutors also argued that assignments and students needs for assistance took a long time to reach them and their feedback to learners was also delayed.

Schuh (2009) argues that satisfaction is a direct test of success and that there is a positive relation between student satisfaction and retention. Assessment of satisfaction is important because of the pressure from decreasing budgets, decreasing enrolment and increased competition for funding.

Further compelling evidence has been shown by Levy (2007) in his study about dropout rates and persistence in elearning. His literature review shows that there are two main causes of non-completion which include academic locus of control and satisfaction. According to his research, there was no significant role of Academic Locus of Control in the decision to complete or drop out of the course. He however found compelling correlation that learners who were not satisfied with the courses were more likely to dropout. He further showed that learners tend to dropout earlier in their academics rather than later and so learner's prior experience in using eLearning was found to be important.

Levy's findings are also corroborated by research evidence that has shown that dropout rates for students studying online can be as much as 20-50 per cent higher than dropout among students studying on-campus (Dawson, et al., 2009).

According to research findings by a taskforce led by Professor Tait, 54% of institutions involved in the research stated that student satisfaction ratings are definitive to student success. This means that the institutions take student satisfaction as a very important

concept because it determines whether students succeed in their studies or not. This was in response to the fact that the taskforce says there are lower rates of success in open, distance and elearning programmes both objectively and perceptively. The report goes ahead to propose two poles of explanation for the lower success rates: the strengths and weaknesses of the students on one hand, as well as strengths and weaknesses of ODeL modes of study themselves (Tait 2015).

The essence of this research therefore addresses the acute need to measure learner satisfaction in institutions of learning. This is because satisfaction informs learners' decisions in their engagement in the institution as pointed out by Levy (2007), Grigoroundis and Siskos (2010) as well as Anderson (2011).

The study therefore fills in the information gap existing in the distance learning and dual mode learning literature. Much more literature on satisfaction exists in the field of marketing and consumer business through such studies by Bae, (2012), Grigoroundis and Siskos (2010) among others. The study hopes to provide the much-needed information on factors affecting learner satisfaction.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This project analyses the significance of various factors in determining satisfaction of learners enrolled in distance learning. It underscores the learners' perception about the relative importance of the various factors such as learners' personal characteristics, learning content, interactions between learners and tutors as well as learner support services, which are deemed important in distance learning courses. A test for correlation

between the factors is used to determine the extent to which each of the factors influence learner satisfaction.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The following were the objectives of the study.

1. To assess the influence of learner's personal characteristics on their satisfaction with distance learning.
2. To assess the influence of the learning content on learner satisfaction with distance learning.
3. To assess the influence of learner – tutor interaction on learner satisfaction with distance learning
4. To assess the influence of learner support services on learner satisfaction with distance learning

1.5 Research Questions

The following were the research questions for the study.

1. To what extent do personal characteristics influence learner satisfaction with distance learning?
2. To what extent does course content influence learner satisfaction with distance learning?
3. To what extent does learner – tutor interaction influence learner satisfaction with distance learning?
4. To what extent do the learner support services influence learner satisfaction with distance learning?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study was designed to shed light into the various aspects of learner satisfaction, the importance of this satisfaction as well as the effects of various factors on learner satisfaction with distance learning. This is mainly in terms of the content presented either face-to-face or through printed booklets, quality of tutoring interactions and the assessment methods used.

The study will prove valuable to the management of any institutions offering learning through distance mode. Management would also benefit from the wealth of information on the review of literature especially the dimensions of learner satisfaction that should be considered in the running of distance learning courses.

In addition to the management, this study is also invaluable to tutors of distance learners. It will provide insight into the learner's desired level of interaction so that the tutors can design their instruction in a way that will satisfy the learners.

The study is also significant to other staff involved in the design and delivery of learning material for use by distance learners. The study will point out the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the content that affect learner satisfaction, from which stakeholders can base their decisions to model the courses in a more satisfying manner.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations faced by the researcher was financial and time resources. A more in-depth, loner research tracking learner satisfaction at every stage of the course would

require much more financial resources than available to the researcher. As such, the researcher will carry out a one-time survey with current students with no follow-up later.

1.8 Delimitation of the Study

This study was delimited in scope in the sense that it only considered the perception of learners currently enrolled in distance learning courses in University of Nairobi. This means that the findings may not be generalized to inform other institutions that use different modes. Other researchers could attempt a study that covers other modes of learning and correlate them against each other.

Another delimitation was that this study focuses on the viewpoint of the learner in the courses, yet it also concerns the course tutors, designers of the elearning platform, course developers and university support staff. This study does not request their opinion on student satisfaction, but further studies could focus on those. The study is designed to be precise in its focus on learners.

1.9 Basic Assumptions of the Study

This study recognized the following basic assumptions:

1. That the respondents were honest and unbiased in giving information. The researcher assured the respondents of the privacy and anonymity of the data.
2. The research also assumed that the learners had been putting in their effort to enhance their own satisfaction. This includes creating time and effort to understand the content, sharpening their own study skills as well as attempting to initiate interaction and not just expecting the tutors to do so.

1.10 Definition of Significant Terms

Blended Learning: This refers to the combination of face-to-face and distance learning.

Participation: Refers to students' willingness, desire and actual engagement in activities offered through the elearning system. These activities include reading notes, personal research, contacting others with questions, answering questions asked by others as well as taking assignments.

Satisfaction: This is the fulfilment of a student with the services offered. It is a judgement as to whether a service meets the expectations of a consumer and produces a pleasurable response. In this study, terms such as very satisfied, dissatisfied, happy with and unhappy with a particular item are used.

ODeL: Use of open, distance and elearning methods to widen access to university education

1.11 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into chapters, the first of which is the introduction, giving the background information, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, limitations, delimitations, basic assumptions and the definition of terms.

The second chapter is the review of literature in which there is an introduction, discussion of learning models, the model adopted by the university, learner satisfaction, learner's personal characteristics, learning content, distance learning assessment, learner interaction with tutors, a summary of the literature review, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

The third chapter is the methodology adopted for this research. It contains the research design, target population, sample size and sampling procedure, research instruments, validity, reliability, data collection procedures as well as data analysis techniques.

The fourth chapter of the project is the presentation of data collected through the instruments. The chapter goes further to present the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Finally, chapter five presents a summary of the findings, discussion of the findings, conclusions, recommendations as well as suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from related research. It is an in-depth analysis of books, documents and research work carried out in areas that this research focuses on. These areas include personal characteristics of learners, learning content, assessment methods, interaction with tutors, learner support services and theoretical dimension of the research. The chapter culminates in the development of a conceptual framework that explains the relationships between the various variables as found in the literature.

2.2 Learner's Personal Characteristics

Majority of people enrolled in elearning institutions are adults. In University of Nairobi for instance, the School of Continuing and Distance Education mainly offers diploma, bachelor's degree as well as masters degree courses, all of which attract persons who have at least O Level education. These are primarily adults.

In a study to gauge student readiness for independent learning, Samarawickrema (2005) explored the various problems, differences and similarities between learners involved distance learning using print resources only. The study found that distance learners faced problems in time management, and depended on the tutors and the course structure to regulate and guide their studies. These findings implied that the course design needs to enhance personal discipline and a consistent approach to studies.

According to Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, Adults have unique characteristics which must be taken into consideration to ensure effectiveness in their education (Knowles, 1980). The theory proposes Andragogy as the term to refer to teaching and learning of adults as opposed to pedagogy, which refers to learning by children.

The gender of a learner may affect their satisfaction in a course. According to Tessema, Ready and Malone (2012), say that research has produced mixed findings on the effect of gender on satisfaction of learners. Their study also shows that many females rate their satisfaction higher than males. Chee, et al. (2005) say that females score higher grades in possibly because of their social relationships. As such, females tend to participate in club and group activities, from where they may be socialized to conform to academic ethic.

Internet self-efficacy was found to influence learner satisfaction according to Kuo et.al (2013) In their study, learners who demonstrated high internet skills were more likely to be satisfied with an online course than those who had little internet skills. They therefore concluded that institutions could provider training to help them to improve their skills. Institutions should especially improve learners' confidence in using the internet as well as trouble shooting while learning.

Knowles proposes various assumptions concerning adults and how they learn. First, adult learners have a more developed self-concept that makes them benefit more through autonomous learning experiences rather than through instructor intervention. Secondly, adults have varied experience and diverse backgrounds and learning experiences must be designed with the diversity in mind. Thirdly, the readiness to learn of adults is based on

their needs, such as the need for social connections. The fourth assumption proposed by Knowles is that adults' orientation to learning is connected to problem solving and learning content must connect directly to issues they identify with and problems they are struggling to solve. Finally, adults are motivated to learn through valid reasons (Knowles, 1980). One therefore needs to offer content and activities that can be justified, or learners will question it.

Due to the development in distance learning, learners are currently able to study while balancing their other commitments as they are not necessarily required to attend classrooms. This increases access and convenience of students (Pelet and Jean 2014). This flexibility and freedom of the learners in the control of their learning means that learners must have various characteristics that would ensure their success in learning.

Characteristics that are necessary to enable one engage in effective online learning, which is a subset of distance learning have been discussed in literature and various tools have been created to test online learning readiness (OLR). Some of the concepts that have been raised include comfort with eLearning, self-management of learning, access to technology, online skills, motivation, and ability to engage in internet discussions (Firoz, 2014). Moreover, Pillay et al (2007) developed and validated an instrument called Tertiary Students' Readiness for Online Learning (TSROL). The tool was validated through extensive testing and contains four key factors: Technical skills, Computer Self Efficacy, Learning Preferences and Attitude towards computers.

Firoz (2014) suggests that at the onset of an online course, an OLR test should be taken to ascertain the readiness of the learners. In addition, care should be taken to offer additional support and encouragement to learners who are not exactly ready for eLearning.

2.3 Learning Content and Satisfaction

A study of current literature on learning shows that learner satisfaction may be affected by the learning content. Tyler-Smith (2006) proposes that Cognitive Overload Theory offers an explanation to learner satisfaction. Many adult learners may have taken some time off their studies and therefore do not have well-developed knowledge schemas for the new content they are learning. This may overload their working memory as they have to learn many new, complex concepts. In addition, the first time distance learner is faced with multiple tasks as they start their course. These tasks include new learning content, becoming a learner as well as juggling between work, family and learning.

Blumberg (2009) suggests to instructors that they should align teaching, learning and assessment with the course objectives. He says that course objectives are a key driving force and they explain what students should master. Assessment then determines whether the learners have met the objectives. Because of this importance, they should be used to guide course planning and determination of teaching approach.

According to Kuo et.al (2013) Flexibility of a course also influences satisfaction of learners. In courses that are flexible, interaction between the learners and the content as well as with their instructors increases. Low flexibility courses lower the interactions, yet they also found that the level of these interactions is a key determiner of satisfaction.

Park and Choi (2009) discuss the importance of course relevance to the learner as an important attribute that contributes to learner satisfaction and ultimately, the possibility to dropout of a course. According to the findings, designers of online learning need to enhance a course and make it relevant to learners. Course content should be modelled according to learners' problems and expectation. This is echoed by Zarghami & Hausafus, (2002) who found learner satisfaction to be influenced by meaningfulness of the course, usefulness and applicability on the learners' professional setting. They also found that if the course materials were helpful in understanding the course content, learners became more satisfied. They therefore went on to conclude that students can be involved in deciding the course content strategies for instruction and assessment.

Importance of course content as a factor that influences learners has also been discussed through the Adult Learning Theory. Knowles (1980) theorizes that adult learners should be involved in selection and planning of learning content. He also says that adults bring a variety of experiences which impact the learning process.

Nyerere, Gravenir & Mse (2012) found that universities found the production of high quality material expensive as it included curriculum designers' fees, course writing and authoring as well as final production and design of electronic material. As a result of these costs, many of the universities have resulted to using material designed and produced for on-campus students. These materials according to Nyerere may not communicate effectively to learners who are far from their tutors. The nature of the course material used in distance learning may therefore affect learner satisfaction with the

system in such cases as when the material is not effective in arousing learner's ability to self-teach themselves.

The University of Nairobi distance learning material are normally prepared under very specific guidelines outlined through writers' workshops. The booklets, locally referred to as learning modules are designed and written by teams of tutors. Specific areas and presentation requirements especially emphasize on presence of a list of learning objectives, conversational tone in the content, discussion questions, summary of the lecture, learning activities and list of suggestions for further reading.

2.4 Learner-Tutor Interaction

Through research, Sun et al (2006) hypothesized and proved that tutors' timeliness in response as well as their attitude towards technology affects learner satisfaction. Moore (2007) proposed the concept of transactional distance, in which he says that distance in elearning is not geographical, rather it is an instructional construct. This means that though learners may be separated from the instructors by geographical barriers, transactional distance can be reduced through effective communication between learners and their tutors. Moore in essence suggests that some courses that are highly structured to offer learners guidance to self-study have huge transactional distances and generally lead to lower satisfaction levels among learners. While Moore goes further to examine transactional distance between learners and between learners and the content, this study focuses more on transactional distance between the learner and the tutor. McConnell (2006) found that relation between a sense of community and grades is not significant.

Research has indicated that tutors have various roles in distance learning including management, social and intellectual communication (Swan, 2003). Swan also found interaction between tutors and learners to be more significant than interaction among peer learners. In addition, Wu and Hiltz (2004) found that tutors are crucial in organizing well-structured discussion and are a strong predictor of learning effectiveness and ultimately satisfaction. The findings show that although all types of interaction are important in developing a deep approach to learning, learner-tutor interaction is the one that transforms all other interactions into a community of inquiry.

Teacher-learner interactions are also conceived as beneficial in setting an appropriate educational tone and a climate that is conducive to construction of knowledge. Tutors in this case give feedback to learners on articulation of individual knowledge. The tutors also emphasize on collaboration in small groups and use of diverse communication tools (Rossi et.al, 2013)

As observed by Sun et al (2006), because not every instructor has interest, time and enthusiasm for online learning, institutions should be careful in selecting who should teach online. Online instructors should not be relegated just to the position of designing course material; they should interact and guide learners along the line of study of any course.

These findings underscore the fact that elearners should be provided with interactive space, not just with the content, but they should also interact with the tutors. Various channels could therefore be opened to allow for communication. Such channels like

telephone calls, short messages, online chats and forums should be factored in when assigning online tutors to classes (Farmer & Maria, 2012).

2.5 Learner support services

According to Gakuu and Omondi (2011) there are various learner support services offered by distance learning institutions. These services include academic support, emotional support/ counseling, administrative support. Distance learners are most of the time separated from the institution and work independently and at their own pace. They however need to still be connected to the system and to adhere to the guidelines, regulations and timelines laid down by the institution.

Academic support is offered by the lecturers, tutors or facilitators in the course. Their role in supporting the learners are many but are mainly tied to course work. First among these roles is clarifying course instructions. It is the work of the tutors to explain to the learners any ambiguous instructions that may occur in the course material. Secondly, the facilitators explore the course content application in the learner's specific circumstances. This may include exploration of cases not necessarily presented in the print or electronic resources (Somayajulu, 2008). Finally, the course facilitators play a large part in assessment and giving of feedback to the learners. Such information as course grades and comments on assignments assist the learners in understanding their areas of weakness and places they need to put more effort.

Learners may also need personal and emotional support as they go through a distance learning course. This is mainly because the learners' personal life is likely to affect the progress and outcome of the course (Tait, 2003). The first area counselors may be

required in is in helping learners to manage their time appropriately. This involves understanding the learner's lifestyle, their jobs and time available for studies. The counselors can then assist learners in determining the best time allocation and schedules to assist them to complete their studies and assignments in time. The other area involves setting of academic goals. Some learners may need help in setting realistic goals for their distance learning courses. This help can be offered by institution appointed counselors. Another area is taking action to help learners who may be in distress. For instance, the support service provider may arrange for transport for a disabled learner or help in waiving a rule that would bar a learner from achieving particular objectives as may be appropriate. (Gakuu and Omondi, 2011)

Administrative support for learners is another critical component of distance learner support systems. This involves for instance supporting learners information about finances. Learners need to be informed on course fees, availability of fee waivers or scholarships as well as penalties that may accrue due to late payments (Somayajulu, 2008). The learners also require support staff who will keep them informed about course tutorial venues and dates. Such communication could also include details about tutors and how to contact them. Finally, administrative support also keeps records for the learners. These records include course grades, assignment submitted; fees paid other essential records that facilitate smooth running of the course. (Tait, 2003)

According to Gakuu and Omondi (2011), Learner support services providers need to have various characteristics for them to be effective. Such qualities include warmth, genuineness, empathy, organizational skills, explicatory skills and listening skills. Such

qualities enable the support providers to be respectful and understanding when dealing with a distance learner.

2.6 Distance Learning as Adopted by University of Nairobi

In the University of Nairobi, once students are enrolled, they meet in designated learning centers where lecturers introduce the learning content. Key concepts of the course are discussed, course outline and reference material are revealed to the learners. The learners are also presented with printed booklets which are organized in lectures; each being complete with objectives, content, learning activities, questions and reference material for further reading. This same content is also available online. This means that the learning content can be accessed offline through the booklets as well as online through an online learning portal. (UoN).

Essentially this also means that both synchronous and asynchronous learning are employed. Synchronous learning mainly occurs when learners attend an introductory session in a face-to-face classroom and a concluding session during which examinations are administered. Synchronous learning can also occur online when several learners and tutors are available for chats or discussions at the same time. Presence of a face to face session and distance component means that the university uses a blended mode (UoN).

Learning and interaction among learners and tutors are also possible through mobile devices, through which learners can send and receive messages through SMS, Email and chat forums. This m-learning has been hailed as an important aspect in enhancing access to education (Gikundi, 2012). According to Pelet and Jean (2014), use of ICT and

eLearning has revolutionised education in that learning is no longer confined to the classroom; it takes place in any place and at any time through technology.

2.7 Learner Satisfaction with Distance Learning

Information on learner satisfaction is useful to institutions as it helps them to know their strengths and challenges (Noel-Levits, 2011). Many higher education institutions consider student satisfaction as one of the major elements in determining the quality of online programs in today's markets (Yukselturk & Yildirim, 2008). With information on satisfaction, institutional administrators, course designers and tutors identify areas that need improvement (Reinhart & Sneider, 2001).

In businesses, satisfaction is one of the most important metrics measured to support marketing. This is because it gives insight into the effectiveness of business operations or products. This is the reason many firms spend a great amount of money in marketing research, out of which the customer satisfaction is the number one expenditure (Bae, 2012). Bae also shows that customer satisfaction affects the profit margins of corporations.

Satisfaction is also seen as important by Grigoroundis and Siskos (2010) who says that many corporations reinforce customer orientation by choosing customer satisfaction as the main performance indicator. In addition, they consider satisfaction as the most reliable source of feedback because it provides direct, meaningful and objective information on consumers' preferences and expectations.

Borrowing from these trends among diverse organizations, Universities need to measure and evaluate satisfaction of their learners. This is because they too are market and customer driven. They exist in competitive environments and learners have expectations which need to be met.

Chyung, Winiiecki, & Fenner (1999) found out that the main factor influencing student's dropping out of Boise State University between 1989 and 1996 was satisfaction. The specific reasons included dissatisfaction with learning environment, course structure, incompetence in using the distance learning software, feeling overwhelmed by advanced information among others.

According to Reichheld (2006), one of the key indicators of satisfaction is the Net Promoter Score (NPS). This basically is the question whether a consumer would promote or recommend a product. In our case, if there are high numbers of current students who say that they would recommend distance learning, then there is a positive NPS, which means that these students are satisfied. On the other hand, dissatisfied learners are not likely to recommend similar courses and therefore there would be negative scores. The NPS indicates that the learners have positive words concerning the course, which indicates that satisfied learners are an asset to the institution as they can potentially market and bring in more students.

According to Anderson (2011), adult learner satisfaction with academic advising affects retention and completion. It also affects student success and, depending on satisfaction levels, learners can take various actions such as lodging complaints with the university, decide to take other courses in the university or not, advise others on whether to enrol in

the institution and sometimes even drop out of a course. These are conceptualised as either exit, where customers decide to disengage with the institution or voice, where the customer decides to contact the firm or lodge a complaint (Dowding & John, 2012).

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This study focuses on elearning in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. As such, the population consists of adult learners. The theoretical framework adopted for the study is Adult Learning Theory proposed by Knowles, et.al (1998). Knowles theory is based on six principles that apply to adult learners.

The first principle indicates that adults should to be involved the planning their education. This means that the content, delivery method and the evaluation of learners should be consultative to ensure that the learners are well involved and the results achieved.

The second principle is that adults bring on a variety of experiences, which provide the basis for the learning activities. For adult learners to be satisfied with their education, their experiences need to be incorporated into the learning activities

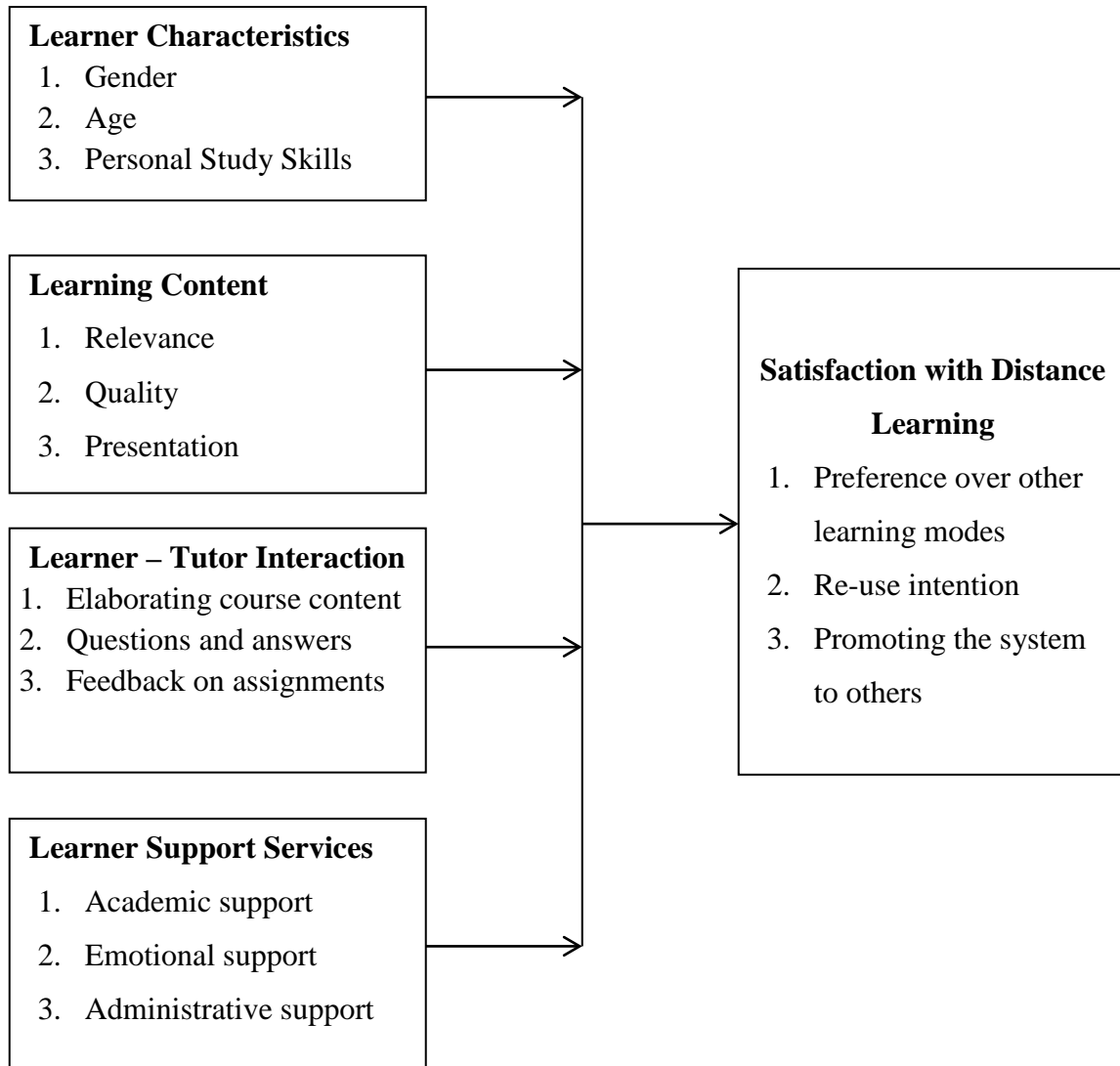
The third principle is that Adults are most interested in learning content that is highly relevant and has direct impact on their lives. This means that learner satisfaction is influenced by the content being learnt.

Finally, adults prefer problem-cantered methods rather than content-oriented methods of learning. This means that the method of learning and content delivery is important to the learners.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

The following figure shows the conceptual framework adopted for the study.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework



This study recognizes the critical factors influencing learner satisfaction proposed by Sun et al (2006) as well as Wang (2003). Sun et al (2003) Postulated that six dimensions affect learner satisfaction, and they include the Learner, Instructor, course, technology,

design as well as the environmental dimensions. On the other hand, Wang (2006) postulated that learner satisfaction is influenced by four factors that include the learner interface, content, community and personalization.

In this study, the factors have been synthesized and modified to suit the study, coming down to four specific variables that will affect learner satisfaction. First, this study indicates that learner's personal characteristics, which include study skills and computer efficacy, contribute to learner satisfaction. This means that learners who possess these skills are more likely to be satisfied with eLearning than those who lack in them.

Secondly, the study focuses on learning content as a factor that will influence learner satisfaction. This includes the content's level of difficulty, organization and learner's expectations. Both Sun et al (2006) and Wang (2003) take this to be important.

Thirdly, the study takes interaction between learners and tutors as a significant factor towards learner satisfaction. Wang (2003) focuses on learning community while Sun et al (2006) takes it as the instructor dimension.

Finally, the study finds out the effect of technology on learner satisfaction. Such aspects of technology as ease of access of the technology, ease of navigation of the software used, availability and cost of internet are considered.

2.10 Summary of Literature Review

This literature review has brought to light various elearning models, especially synchronous and asynchronous models both of which are currently in use, with special emphasis on the mixed model. It has also expounded on learner satisfaction and shown that learners can be satisfied with elearning depending on their expectations, level of difficulty and the outcome of the course. These items have been categorised under learners' satisfaction with their own study skills, content, technology and their interaction with tutors. It has also proved that learners may take actions such as lodging complaints, dropping out or advising others depending on their level of satisfaction. Various variables such as personal characteristics, content, learner support services and interaction with tutors have been proved to be critical in determining satisfaction. Institutions must therefore ensure learner satisfaction with all four variables.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology by highlighting information on the research design adopted. It also focuses on the target population, the sampling procedures, the sample size used and the rationale behind it. Further still, it discusses the research instruments, data collection procedures and the techniques used to analyse the data.

3.2 Research Design

This study used a descriptive survey design. Descriptive research helps to show the characteristics of a population (Jackson, 2009). Mainly the aim is to provide a better understanding of a topic especially when baseline information is not available. Descriptive research is also preferable when resources and time are limited and is often used to identify gaps which can lead to further research (Shields and Rangarjan, 2013). It can also be used when the researcher does not have any control over the variables and can only report, through description, a situation as it is at present (Tejinder & Shantanu, 2015)

This research focused on one case, Bachelor of Education (Arts), School of Continuing and Distance Education, University of Nairobi. According to Yin (2009), a case is especially important when a phenomenon and its boundaries are not evident. This means

that the researcher finds it important to study the context of a case as well as other related conditions that influence the case.

3.3 Target Population

The case in point is a university school, which runs nine (9) graduate degree programmes, five (5) bachelor's degree and nine (9) diploma courses. During the current academic year, 3,440 students are enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Arts) degree programme in the school through distance learning. These are target of the research.

3.4 Sample size and Sampling Procedure

To determine a good sample size, Israel (1992) discusses three criteria which include the desired level of precision, desired confidence level as well as the degree variability. The level of precision is the range in which the true value is estimated to be in percentage. It is generally agreed that a range of ± 10 is acceptable.

The confidence level is a concept of Central Limit Theorem derived from the normal distribution curve of the entire population. The sample in this study was selected at 90% confidence level. The degree of variability on the other hand is the distribution of the attributes being measured. A homogeneous population means that the attribute is possessed by all members while a more heterogeneous population means varying possibilities of possession of the attribute by the whole population. In this case, the highest variability possible is 0.5 and is used in the calculation of the sample size.

Z = Confidence Level

P= Percentage picking a choice

C= Confidence interval

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 * p * (1-p)}{C^2}$$

Using this formula, a sample of size 99 learners was used in this research.

To get the learners to respond to the questionnaires, the researcher used purposive sampling, in which learners at different levels, those who have been enrolled for 1-2 semesters, 3-4, and above 4 semesters were selected. At each of these categories, random sampling was applied and any of the learners had a chance of participating in the research. The researcher requested the assistance of the class leaders in accessing the learners at their level.

3.5 Research Instruments

The instruments chosen for this study were questionnaires. Questionnaires have multiple advantages in their administration and also give the respondents opportunities to express themselves and make own suggestions (Gay, 1992). Because the questionnaires were self-administered, they guaranteed the confidentiality of the respondents.

The questionnaires were necessary for collection of background information about the respondents' gender, age, course enrolled in and reason for choosing distance learning. The second section of the questionnaire collected data on students' perception of the learning content in terms of its perceived quality, and organization. The third part sought to understand learners' perception of their interaction with tutors. The fourth part asked respondents about their perception of learner support services provided by the university while the last part gave the learners' perception of their satisfaction.

3.6 Validity of the Instruments

Validity refers to the degree in which the instruments actually measure the concept being studied (Orodho, 2008). As such the content of the instruments should be analyzed to ensure that the questions are not biased and will actually lead to responses that answer to the problem stated and the research objectives. Content validity for this research is ascertained by the researcher with the assistance of the supervisor and distance learning specialists from the University of Nairobi in a proposal defence seminar.

3.7 Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability of the instruments measures the degree to which an instrument yields consistent results (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). According to Gay (1992) a reliable instrument should eliminate all random errors that would give different measurements if the instrument was administered again.

This study used the split-half method to measure and enhance the reliability of the quantitative data in the instruments. A pilot study was conducted through which the reliability of the instruments was tested. A few changes to the instruments were made as was deemed necessary. During the pilot study, results of the responses were correlated using the odd-even strategy. The correlation was computed using SPSS. The Spearman-Brown prophecy was used to predict the correlation of the full test. The Spearman-Brown prophecy formula is simplified as below, where r is the correlation using the split-half and p is the predicted reliability.

$$p = \frac{2r}{1+r}$$

The reliability coefficient found through the procedure was 0.88, which was accepted, as it was well above the predetermined acceptance threshold of 0.75.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected after seeking permission from the National Council for Science and Technology (NACOSTI) and University of Nairobi. The questionnaires were then administered to the respondents at a time when they were in a face-to-face session . This made it easier for the respondents because they did not need to post or email their responses, something that could reduce the number of responses. It was also more convenient for the researcher because each of the respondents could fill out the questionnaires in one sitting and hand it in to the researcher.

3.9 Data Analysis

The questionnaires were sorted, checked for completeness of the data and counted to calculate the response rate.

Quantitative data was then be analysed through statistical methods which involved calculation of mean, variation, standard deviation and normal distribution tables as appropriate for each data segment. These calculations and correlations were mainly done through statistical software known as SPSS (version 16). The data was then presented in tables with the researcher's descriptions and analysis.

Qualitative data, which essentially arose from the open ended questions, was analyzed by being summarized and sorted into categories to enable the researcher find common

themes and response patterns. The data was then presented in tables drawn out of the categories.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

To ensure that research ethics were adhered to, the researcher sought necessary permissions, contacted the respondents and outlined the ethical issues to them before they answered the questions. Respondents were also informed about data confidentiality with which this research was carried out. This helped to create a conducive environment and mutual understanding about the research. This improved the quality of the responses by encouraging the respondents to make truthful remarks.

The other way was through application for various permits as required by law. One of these was a request to NACOSTI, which is the government agency that regulates research in Kenya. The other was a request to the University of Nairobi administration, seeking approval to engage in the research. Both institutions scrutinized the research documents to ensure that the research was ethical.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the findings as analysed using the procedure outlined in the research methodology. The results are derived from the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire administered on learners in the University of Nairobi, School of Continuing and Distance Studies. The key information sought through the instrument was the various factors that influence the learners' satisfaction with a distance learning course. The research questions were: To what extent do personal characteristics influence learner satisfaction with distance learning? To what extent does course content influence learner satisfaction with distance learning? To what extent does learner – tutor interaction affect learner satisfaction with distance learning? And to what extent do the learner support services affect learner satisfaction with distance learning?

Quantitative data in the instrument has mainly been analysed using SPSS software through which various tables have been designed to present counts, averages, frequencies, percentages and correlations. These tables will help the reader perceive the contribution of various factors on learner's satisfaction with distance learning. On the other hand, qualitative data has been presented through summaries and categorization of the themes as indicated by the respondents.

4.2 Questionnaire return rate

For the purposes of the research, a total of ninety (90) questionnaires were administered to learners undertaking Bachelor of Education (Arts) in the University of Nairobi through distance learning. A total of seventy seven (77) responses were returned, representing 85.5% response rate. According to Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 60% gives an adequate representation of the target population and is therefore adequate for analysis.

4.3 Demographic characteristics of respondents

The demographic characteristics of learners sought through the questionnaires were on learners' age, gender and length of enrolment in the course. This information was necessary as it gives a profile of the respondents, and any decisions to be made based on the report is only valid if it considers learners with a related profile.

The gender composition of the respondents was important for the research in order to provide a clear picture of the results and to help in making any inferences concerning satisfaction among males and females. This data is presented in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Gender composition of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Female	39	50.6
	Male	38	49.4
Total		77	100.0

Table 4.1 shows that all the respondents indicated their gender, and that 50.6% of the respondents were females, and 49.4% of them were males.

This research also sought to know the age brackets of the respondents. This was for the purpose of correlation, to see whether age is a factor that determines learner satisfaction.

The results are presented in Table 4.2

Table 4.2: Age brackets of respondents

	Frequency	Per cent
Below 25	18	23.4
25-30	21	27.3
30-40	36	46.8
40-50	2	2.6
Total	77	100.0

The table shows that 18 respondents, which is 23.4% were below 25 years, 21 respondents who comprise 27.3% were 25-30 years, 36 respondents, who comprise 46.8% were between 30 and 40 years while only 2 respondents who comprise 2.6% were between 40 and 50 years. None of the respondents was above 50 years of age. The results show that majority of the respondents were between 17 and 40 years of age. T

The research also sought data on the length of enrolment of the respondents at the time of the survey. The data shows the distribution of the respondents and the length of their experience as distance learners. This information is presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Length of Enrolment in the Course

Time Enrolled	Frequency	Percent
1-2 semesters	22	28.6
3-4 semesters	32	41.6
more than 4 Semesters	23	29.9
Total	77	100.0

Out of the 77 respondents, 28.6% had been enrolled in the course for between one and two semesters. These are learners in their first year of study in the course. Another 41.6% of the respondents had been enrolled in the course for three to four semesters, meaning they were in their second year. The remainder, 29.8% had ben enrolled for more than four semesters. Length of enrolment of learners was an important facet of the research because there is a likelihood that their perception of the course and feelings may be different. Learners who have recently been enrolled have had limited interaction with the course content, tutors and even the learner support services, while those who have been enrolled for a long time have higher experience in the system.

4.4 Personal Characteristics of the respondents

This research inquired about learner characteristics in order to measure their effect on satisfaction. Two characteristics were measured and they included preference for private study and sticking to a personal time table. The first item concerned learning preferences

because most of the studies in distance learning are done privately. The other question was concerned with personal time management through timetables. The results are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Personal characteristics of respondents

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
I like to study in private	Freq	4	25	6	35	7	77
	%	5.2	32.5	7.8	45.5	9.1	100
I stick to personal Timetable	Freq	1	16	13	32	15	77
	%	1.3	20.8	16.9	41.6	19.5	100

One of the personal characteristics that the survey measured about the respondents was their perception of their own preference for studying alone. Of the respondents, 5.2% strongly disagreed with the statement that they liked to study alone in private. Another 32.5% disagreed with the statement and 7.8% were undecided as to whether they prefer to study alone in private or not. The remaining 45.5% agreed that they like to study alone and 9.1% strongly agreed with the statement. This shows that almost half of the respondents do not prefer to study privately while the other half prefers to study privately.

The other personal characteristic measured in the survey is ability to stick to personal timetable. The respondent stated the extent to which they agreed with the statement that they create and stick to personal timetables. One respondent, who represents 1.3% of all

the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, 16 respondents who represent 20.8% of the respondents disagreed and 13, which is 16.9% of the respondents were undecided. The other 32, which is 41.6% agreed with the statement and 15, which is 19.5% strongly agreed with the statement. This shows that there are more learners who appraise of their ability to create and stick to personal timetables than those who do not. These timetables are tools they use to manage their time. The learners therefore have varied ability to manage their time.

4.5 Findings on Learning Content

As seen in the existing literature, learning content can affect learner satisfaction this is especially in terms of the relevance of the content to the learner's career path, the quality of the material produced, editing, presentation and examinations. The findings are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Opinion on Learning Content

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Content is relevant	Freq	0	23	9	31	14	77
	%	0	29.9	11.7	40.3	18.2	100
Content is high quality	Freq	2	14	2	46	13	77
	%	2.6	18.2	2.6	59.7	16.9	100
Content is well edited	Freq	0	15	8	42	12	77
	%	0	19.5	10.4	54.4	15.6	100
Content is well organized	Freq	0	23	9	31	14	77
	%	0	29.9	11.7	40.3	18.2	100
Exams are tied to course objectives	Freq	2	3	3	48	21	77
	%	2.6	3.9	3.9	62.3	27.3	100
Exams well administered	Freq	2	17	14	32	12	77
	%	2.6	22.1	18.2	41.6	15.6	100

As can be seen in table 4.5, 29.9% of the respondents disagreed with the notion that the content is relevant to them while 11.7% were undecided. The others either agreed (40.3%) or strongly agreed (23%) The question was aimed at giving a learner's point of view of the relevance of course content to their careers. The findings show that There was a significant percentage of the learners who have negative feelings towards the relevance

of the content to their careers. However, this was surpassed by the percentage of those who have positive perceptions.

The research also sought data on students' perception of content quality through the statement that the content is of high quality. The results show that 2.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 18.2% disagreed while 2.6% were undecided. Majority of the respondents, 59.6% agreed with the statement while 16.9% strongly agrees with the statement. This means that the general perception among the learners is mixed, but most of them perceive the content to be of high quality.

The respondents were also asked to rate the level of course content editing. The rationale behind this question is that well edited content may be easier to read through and as such affect the learner satisfaction. As seen from the table, 15 respondents, who represent 19.5%, did not agree that the content is well edited. 8 respondents, representing 10.4% were undecided while 42, which is 54.5% agreed that the content is well edited and 12, representing 15.6% strongly agreed with the statement. Again, the perceptions of the learners are mixed but more learners indicate that the content is well edited. Learners who feel that the content is not well edited may be put off by the various conceptual or grammatical mistakes thus reducing their level of engagement with the content.

Another question required the respondents to rate how easy it was to follow through the content. This refers to how well the content is organized. The results indicate that none of the respondents strongly disagreed, but 29.9% of the respondents disagreed, 11.7% were

undecided while 40.3% agreed and 18.2% strongly agreed with the statement that the content is well organized.

The research also required the respondents to rate their feelings about examinations. One of the questions wanted to check the extent to which learners feel that the exams are closely tied to the objectives of the course. The data shows that 2 respondents (2.6%) strongly disagree with the proposition that exams are closely tied to objectives, 3 respondents (3.9%) disagree with the proposition, another 3 respondents are undecided. On the other hand 48 of the respondents (62.3%) agree with it while 21 respondents (27.3%) strongly agree with the statement.

In addition to the above question, respondents were asked to rate their feelings on exam administration and marking. The responses show a wide array of learners' feelings. 2 respondents who represent 2.6% strongly disagree, 17 respondents who represent 22.1% disagree while 14 respondents who represent 18.2% were undecided. Majority, which is 32 respondents who represent 41.6% agree with the statement and 12 respondents who represent 15.6% strongly agree with the statement.

4.6 Findings on Interaction with Lecturers

This research sought data about interactions between learners and their lecturers. The key questions to measure this interaction was in: elaborating course content, asking questions, answering questions, giving feedback on assignments as well as timeliness of the feedback. The results are presented in table 4.6

Table 4.6: Learner-tutor interactions

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Lecturer explains content	Freq	1	1	4	56	15	77
	%	1.3	1.3	5.2	72.7	19.5	100
Lecturer answers questions	Freq	2	4	5	48	18	77
	%	2.6	5.2	6.5	62.3	23.4	100
Lecturer gives feedback after assignment	Freq	6	10	14	33	14	77
	%	7.8	13.0	18.2	42.9	18.2	100
Feedback is timely	Freq	7	26	8	29	6	76
	%	9.1	34.2	10.5	38.2	7.9	100

4.6.1 Lecturer Elaborating Course Content

This part of the questionnaire required the respondents to rate their feelings on whether lecturers elaborate the course content. From the table, one student (1.3%) strongly disagrees, another one respondent (1.3%) disagrees while the others, who are the majority either agree (72.7%) or strongly agree (19.5%) with the statement that lecturers elaborate on the course content. Cumulatively, this is 92.2% of all the respondents. On the other hand, only a minority (1.3%) strongly disagree and another 1.3% who disagree with the statement.

This part sought information on how lecturers ask and answer questions from the learners. The table shows that 2.6% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement that lecturers ask and answer their questions. Another 5.2% disagree with the proposition while 18.2% were undecided. On the other hand, 42.9% agree with the statement and 18.2% strongly agree with the statement.

Another question that dealt with learner-tutor interactions required the respondents to state the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement that lecturers give feedback at the end of each assignment or exam. The results are as shown in table 4.16 below, and show that 7.8% of the respondents strongly disagree, 13.0% just disagree, 18.2% were undecided, 42.9% agree and 18.2% strongly agree with the statement.

Learners' feelings about the timeliness of the lecturer-learner interaction are captured in table 4.17 below, and shows that 9.1% strongly disagree, 33.8% disagree, 10.4% were undecided, 37.7%, which is the majority agree while 7.8% strongly agree that the interaction is timely

4.7 Findings on Learner Support services

This part of the questionnaire required the respondents to rate their feelings towards learner support services. The section had three questions dealing with academic support, social support/counselling, and administrative support. From the outset, the respondents appear more satisfied with academic and administrative support more than counselling as can be seen from Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Learner Support Services

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Easy to get academic support	Freq	1	14	3	47	12	77
	%	1.3	18.2	3.9	61.0	15.6	100
Easy to get counseling	Freq	5	20	14	23	15	77
	%	6.5	26.0	18.2	29.9	19.5	100
Easy to get administrative support	Freq	3	13	4	41	15	76
	%	3.9	17.1	5.3	53.9	19.7	100

The first statement required them to rate their agreement with the statement that they could get academic support. Of the respondents, 1.3% strongly disagree, 18.2% disagree, 3.9% were undecided, 61% agree while 15.6% strongly agree with the statement that “I can easily get academic support.”

The question on social support/ counselling asked the respondents the extent of their agreement with the statement: “I can find counselling if I am stressed.” Some of the respondent’s, 6.5% strongly disagree, 26.0% disagree, 18.2% were undecided, 29.9% agree and 19.5% strongly agree.

The respondents were here asked about accessibility of administrative support, especially information about their courses such as dates, venues and assignments. About 3.9% of the respondents strongly disagreed that the information was accessible, 16.9% disagree, 5.2% were undecided, 53.3% agree and 19.5% strongly agree.

4.8 Findings on Learner Satisfaction

Learner satisfaction was the dependent variable in this research. As seen in the literature, the variable can be measured using various parameters, and this research checked the learner's preference for distance leaning, re-use intentions, meeting the expectations of the learners, encouraging others to enroll in similar programmes as well as whether the learners regret using distance learning. Each of the items was measured through a 5-point likert-scale question, in which learners rated their level of agreement with a question. The findings are presented in Table 4.8

Table 4.8: Learner’s level of satisfaction

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
I am satisfied with the course	Freq	0	3	4	49	20	76
	%	0	3.9	5.3	64.5	26.3	100
I prefer distance learning	Freq	2	7	3	41	24	77
	%	2.6	9.1	3.9	53.2	31.2	100
I would re-use distance learning	Freq	4	7	2	40	24	77
	%	5.2	9.1	2.6	51.9	31.2	100
Distance learning met my expectations	Freq	0	6	12	43	16	77
	%	0	7.8	15.6	55.8	20.8	100
I can encourage others to use distance learning	Freq	3	1	4	45	24	77
	%	3.9	1.3	5.2	58.4	31.2	100
I often regret using distance learning	Freq	22	16	5	18	14	75
	%	29.3	21.3	6.7	24.0	18.7	100

The first part asked the learners to rate their general feeling about their satisfaction with distance learning. This question was very direct and required the learners to evaluate their overall feeling about distance learning at the university. They expressed their feelings as shown in the table. Among the respondents, 3.9% disagreed, 5.2% were undecided,

63.6% agree while 26.0% strongly agree with the statement that they were very satisfied with distance learning.

The researcher also required the respondents to state their level of preference for distance learning as compared to classroom-based learning. Table 4.8 shows that 2.6% strongly disagreed, 9.1% disagreed, 3.9% were undecided, 53.2% agreed and 31.2% strongly agreed that they preferred distance learning.

The Re-use intention of a consumer is a clear indication of their level of satisfaction. As such, this research sought the respondents' possibility of re-using distance learning. Those who would re-use the system are satisfied while those who would not re-use the system are dissatisfied. Table 4.8 shows that given a chance, 5.2% would not use distance learning as they strongly disagree, 9.1% disagree and 2.6% were undecided. The vast majority however would re-use the system as seen through 51.9% who agreed and 31.2% who strongly agreed with the statement.

Learners' expectations are a major factor that determines their level of satisfaction. The survey required the learners to give a rating of their agreement with the statement that distance learning has met their expectations. Table 4.24 shows that 7.8% of the learners disagree with the statement, 15.6% were undecided, 55.8% agree while 20.8% strongly agree with it.

Another question that measured the level of learner satisfaction asked the respondents to rate their agreement with the statement that they could encourage their friends and relatives to enroll in a distance learning course. This report shows that 3.9% of the

respondents strongly disagree with the statement, 1.3% disagree with it and 5.2% were undecided. The other 89.6% were positive about it and 58.4% agree while 31.2% strongly agree with the statement.

The respondents were also asked to rate the level of their agreement with the statement that “I often wish that I had not enrolled in a distance learning course.” Learners who are dissatisfied with a programme may often wish they had not enrolled in it. As seen in table 4.8, 28.6% of the respondents strongly disagree with this statement. 20.8% disagree with it while 6.5% were undecided. On the other extreme, 23.4% agree while 18.2% strongly agree with the statement. There was also 2.6% of the respondents who did not respond to this question.

4.9 Spearman’s Correlation between the factors

The researcher ran a series of tests for correlation using the Spearman’s Correlation. Spearman’s correlation tests the correlation between variables which are monotonically related to each other. The correlation measures the strength of the relationship and calculates the statistical significance.

The correlation is denoted by r_s and the relationship is stronger the closer it is to ± 1 and is either positive or negative. For this particular test, spearman’s correlation was chosen instead of Pearson’s correlation because it is non-parametric and it is less sensitive to outliers. The test also does not require normal distribution of the results, which is a requirement for Pearson’s correlation. Also, the relationship does not need to be linear, it can be linear, quadratic or otherwise.

Depending on the results, Spearman's correlation coefficient can be verbally described as a very weak relationship (between 0.00 and .19), a weak relationship (between .20 and .39), moderate (between .40 and .59), strong (between .60 and .79) or very strong (between .80 and 1.00)

Table 4.9: Correlation between the variables

	Learning Content	Tutor Interaction	Learner Support	Personal characteristics
Correlation Coefficient	.468	.182	.313	.259
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.114	.006	.023
N	77	77	77	77

The test for correlation between learners' personal characteristics and their satisfaction shows that there is a weak relationship between the two variables that is significant at the 0.05 level ($r_s=.259$, $n=77$, $p<.005$)

The correlation between the respondents' perception of learning content and their satisfaction indicates that there is indeed a moderate relationship between learning content and learner satisfaction. There is a positive relationship between the variables at the 0.01 level. ($r_s=.468$, $n=77$, $p<.001$)

The test for correlation between learner satisfaction and the learner-tutor satisfaction shows that there is a weak positive relationship between the two variables. However, this

relationship was not statistically significant as p is greater than 0.01. ($r_s=.182$, $n=77$, $p>.01$)

The correlation test between learner support services and learner satisfaction indicates a weak positive relationship between the two variables. This correlation of .313 is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. ($r_s=.313$, $n=77$, $p<.001$)

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a summary of the findings, discussions on the findings as well as conclusions and recommendations derived from the findings of the study. These are based on the influence of personal characteristics, learning content, learner-lecturer interactions and learner support services on satisfaction of learners enrolled in Bachelor of Education (Arts) through distance learning at the University of Nairobi. This chapter is also in line with the research objectives and questions as outlined in chapter one of the study.

5.2 Summary of the Study

This study concludes that generally, learners in the University of Nairobi taking Bachelor of education (Arts) by distance learning are satisfied with the process and structure of the distance learning programme. Majority of the learners stated that they would still prefer to take a course through distance learning. They also stated that distance learning has been meeting their expectations and that most of them do not regret having enrolled for a degree course through distance learning. All these pointed to the fact that distance learning has been working for them and they are satisfied.

On the first objective, the respondents showed that they had varied character traits in terms of gender, age, level of study, preference for private studies and time management. All these personal traits were shown to have a positive correlation to the level of

satisfaction of the respondents. It is therefore statistically proven that personal characteristics affect learner satisfaction.

On the second objective of the study, respondents showed that learners were mainly positive about the course content and the exam administration offered at the course. The respondents stated that the content is highly relevant, is of high quality, is well edited and well organized for ease of studies. The positive perception of the content were correlated with the satisfaction and proven to have a positive influence on satisfaction.

On the third objective, this study reveals that the respondents were quite positive about the relationship between themselves and the tutors. This was proved through the high index given to lecturers' explanation of course content, questions, feedback after exams and promptness of the lecturers' replies. However, the correlation did not show a statistically significance to help draw conclusions. Further investigations would be required in which case a larger sample of learners could be involved to ascertain the positive relationship depicted by the correlation.

On the final objective, the respondents were also showing positive feelings towards the learner support systems adopted by the university. They were especially positive about academic support and administrative support, and to some extent counselling support. This was also correlated with their satisfaction and a positive correlation coefficient was established.

5.3 Discussion of Findings

This study sought information on learners' personal characteristics, their feelings on learning content, interactions between themselves and their tutors and the learner support services provided by the university. This information was then correlated with the learners' perception of their satisfaction with distance learning as offered in the university. The results clearly show that majority of the learners agreed with statements that measure their satisfaction with the factors. The correlation also shows the existence of a positive relationship between all the factors measured and learner satisfaction. This means personal characteristics, learning content, learner-tutor interactions and learner support services all influence learner satisfaction.

5.3.1 Learners' Personal Characteristics

The distribution of learners' responses on their personal characteristics showed that about 38% of the respondents do not like to study alone in private, while 8% were undecided. This leaves about 51% stated that they like to study alone in private. This corresponds to Samarawickrema (2005) who found that many distance learners had difficulties managing their time. This had a little significance on their overall satisfaction with distance learning. On the other hand, 60% of the learners agreed to sticking to a personal timetable while the rest either disagreed or were undecided. This was not a statistically significant determining factor as to whether the learners would feel satisfied with distance learning. Because of the possible influence, then personal characteristics deserve a deeper study to ascertain this influence, and develop tools to test for learners' readiness for distance learning as suggested by Firoz (2014). Institutions can further develop support

mechanisms that can enable learners who lack proficiency in desired characteristics to develop them.

5.3.2 Course Content

According to the findings of this study, majority of the learners are satisfied with the aspects of learning content that were measured during the survey. This means that majority of the learners view the learning content as relevant for their career paths as seen in Park and Choi (2009), that the content is high quality, well edited and well organized (Zarghami and Hausafus, 2002). This could be attributed to the rigorous process employed by the University of Nairobi in developing content for distance and online learning. In addition, more than 90% of the respondents expressed their satisfaction with the exams as they are prepared in accordance with the learning objectives. This corroborates Blumberg (2009), who discusses aligning content with course objectives. On the other hand, about 44% of the respondents either had negative feelings about exam administration and marking or were undecided. The remaining 56% were very positive about the examination administration and marking. The percentage on learners who have a negative feeling on administration of exams is quite high and further investigations would be required to ascertain the exact dissatisfaction and improve on it.

5.3.3 Interactions with lecturers

This research found that majority of the respondents have very positive feelings about the lecturers elaborating the course content. This was indicated by 92% of the respondents. Only about 8% had negative or neutral feelings about this type of interaction. The most

varying responses were on timeliness of feedback where 43% had negative feelings, 11% were undecided and 46% had positive feelings about it. Further the question had 9% of the respondents stating that they strongly disagreed with the statement that lecturers' feedback was timely.

Tests for correlation between interactions with lecturers found a very weak positive correlation coefficient (.182) which was not statistically significant and therefore more tests would be required to make inferences on this relationship. In Sun et al (2006), there was adequate evidence that was statistically significant to conclude that there is a correlation between the two variables. Also as observed by Swan (2003), institutions should be careful in selecting tutors because tutors do not have the same attitudes and proficiency for distance learning.

5.3.4 Learner Support Services

This research found that majority of the respondents had positive feelings about learner support services as about 66% were positive about getting academic support and 74% were positive about getting administrative support. On the question about counselling, about 50% were positive while 18% were undecided and the remaining 32% had negative feelings. Overall, learners are satisfied by the support services offered in the university with some room for improvement. The research also found statistically significant positive correlation between learners' feelings about the support services and their overall sense of satisfaction as stated by Tait, (2003)

5.3.5 Satisfaction

Respondents in this research showed that they are, to a large extent satisfied with distance learning as offered through the School of Continuing and distance Studies, University of Nairobi. Majority of these respondents indicated their satisfaction by stating that they would still enrol through distance learning. They also showed that they would prefer distance learning as opposed to regular classroom-based learning. Further still, many of the respondents indicated that their expectations were met through the programme. In addition, majority of the respondents stated that they would encourage friends and relatives to enrol through distance learning. This corresponds to Reichheld (2006), who says that people who are satisfied with a product promote it to others. Finally, most of the respondents do not show regret and extreme dissatisfaction about having enrolled through distance and not classroom-based course programmes. This proves the high level of satisfaction of the learners.

5.4 Conclusions

The objective of this study was to examine that factors that influence learners satisfaction with distance learning. This has been achieved through a survey of learners taking Bachelor of Education (Arts) University of Nairobi. The factors under study included Learners' personal characteristics, learning content, learner-tutor interaction as well as learner support services.

The researcher came to a conclusion that learners are generally satisfied with distance learning. This was as a result of the analysis of their responses to the questions. In short, learners appear to be more satisfied with the learning content, followed by their

interaction with the tutors, then the learner support services and least by their own personal characteristics.

A series of tests for correlation showed that all four factors have a positive correlation to satisfaction. This means that learner satisfaction is influenced by their personal characteristics, learning content and learner support services. Learner –tutor interaction was also shown to have a positive influence on satisfaction, but the results were not statistically significant, and more research would be required to verify the relationship.

5.5 Recommendations on the Research Findings

As resulted from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. A small number of learners indicated their dissatisfaction with the learning content, especially in terms of content quality and editing. The department should look into ways of improving on this content.
2. The department should look into improving the interactions between the learners and their lecturers especially by improving the speed and timeliness of feedback between the lecturers and the learners. This could be done through interactive webpages, social media or phone calls.
3. Information on available counselling services should be passed on to the learners so that they benefit from the services. In addition, these services can be made more accessible through ways in which learners can suggest.
4. The department should consider enriching the distance learning provision with more online learning content provision, intensified use of the elearning portal as

well as mobile learning through mobile devices such as phones, tablets and laptops.

5.6 Recommendation for Further Research

Further research in this field can be done in the following areas:

1. Research on learner satisfaction, incorporating other variables such as marital status, employment and financial status, as these factors may also influence satisfaction
2. To investigate the quality of distance learning at the universities because satisfaction is not the only factor that influences learners' decision.
3. Learner satisfaction in other courses and departments because levels of satisfaction could be different for each course or department.
4. Researchers could also find out about learner satisfaction in other universities and the factors that influence satisfaction in those institutions.

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APPENDIX I: INTRODUCTORY LETTER

BONIFACE
P.O BOX 33-10204
KIRIA-INI

APRIL 2016

TO THE RESPONDENT
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

Dear Respondent,

RE: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I am a Master of Distance Education student at the University of Nairobi. As part of the course, I am carrying out a research on student satisfaction while enrolled in a distance course.

The survey seeks to know the effect of various factors on your satisfaction with the course content offered, the technology used, the lecturer assistance as well as your own characteristics. This could help the university improve the services offered to ensure that you are satisfied.

You are hereby informed that the data collected will be used with utmost discretion and your name or personal details will not be shared publicly or privately. Please honestly answer the questions as accurately as possible without any fear or intimidation.

The questions mainly require you to tick the appropriate boxes and a space to give your narrative as to why you are satisfied or dissatisfied with any component.

Yours faithfully,

Boniface Irungu

APPENDIX II: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNERS

Section A: Demographic and personal characteristics of respondents

Please tick as appropriate

1. What is your gender? Female [] Male []

2. What is your age?

Below 25 [] 25-30 [] 30-40 [] 40-50 [] Above 50 []

4. How long have you been enrolled in the course:

One – Two Semesters [] Three- Four Semesters [] More than Four Semesters []

5. Why did you enrol in the course through distance learning not the regular mode?

6. Please rate the effect of the following to your satisfaction in the course.

a) I like to study alone in private

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

b) I create my personal time table and stick to it at all times

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

7. Explain any other personal strengths or weaknesses that may make you either satisfied or unsatisfied with the distance learning course

Section B: Learning Content

8. How would you rate your satisfaction with the learning content in terms of its:

a) The course is relevant and informative for my career

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

b) Course material is high quality

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

c) Course content is well edited

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

d) The content is well organized and easy to follow through step by step

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

e) Exams are closely tied to learning objectives and course content

- Strongly Agree []
- Agree []
- Undecided []
- Disagree []
- Strongly Disagree []

f) Exams are well administered and marked

- Strongly Agree []
- Agree []
- Undecided []
- Disagree []
- Strongly Disagree []

Explain _____

9. Please describe any other issues that make the course content either very satisfying or very dissatisfying.

Section C: Interaction with Tutors

10. Have you been interacting with your lecturers either through Email, SMS, Chat or phone calls? **Yes** [] **No** []

11. How do you rate your interactions with lecturers in terms of

a) The lecturer explains the content of the course

- Strongly Agree []
- Agree []
- Undecided []
- Disagree []
- Strongly Disagree []

b) The lecturer asks questions during the study period

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

c) The lecturer answers learners' questions appropriately

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

d) The lecturer gives feedback at the end of each assignment/exam

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

e) Lecturer interactions and feedback are timely

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

12. Explain any other cause of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with your lecturers

Section D: Learner Support Services

13. How important are the following items of learner support services in affecting your satisfaction?

a) I know where to get academic support if I have a question about course content

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

b) Lecturers can explain to me the concepts learnt and how they apply in my specific area

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

c) If I am stressed, I can call or visit a UoN centre and find counselling

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

d) I can find an advisor/counsellor to help me in managing my time, organising my studies and

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

e) Information about course dates, assignment deadlines and venues is easily accessible

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

f) I know where to find information about course administration.

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

13. Explain any other cause of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with support services

Section E: Satisfaction

a) How satisfied are you with distance learning?

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

b) Distance learning is better than campus-based learning according to my experience

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

c) Given a chance to re-enrol, I would still choose distance learning over campus-based learning

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

d) Distance learning has met my original expectations fully

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

e) I can encourage my friends/ relatives to enrol in University of Nairobi distance learning courses

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

f) I often wish I had not enrolled in a distance learning course

Strongly Agree []

Agree []

Undecided []

Disagree []

Strongly Disagree []

Thank you very much for your time and responses.

APPENDIX III: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION



NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

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

9th Floor, Utalii House
Uhuru Highway
P.O. Box 30623-00100
NAIROBI-KENYA

Ref. No.

Date:

NACOSTI/P/15/99977/8271

14th July, 2016

Boniface Irungu Maina
University of Nairobi
P.O. Box 30197-00100
NAIROBI.

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on "*Factors affecting learners' satisfaction with Distance Learning: A case of Bachelor of Education (Arts) University of Nairobi, Kenya,*" I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Nairobi County** for a period ending **3rd November, 2016**.

You are advised to report to **the Vice Chancellor, University of Nairobi, the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Nairobi 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen K. Kibiru', written over a horizontal line.

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

Copy to:

The Vice Chancellor
University of Nairobi

The County Commissioner
Nairobi County.

The County Director of Education
Nairobi County.

APPENDIX IV: RESEARCH PERMIT

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:
MR. BONIFACE IRUNGU MAINA
of **UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, 0-10204**
Kiria-ini, has been permitted to conduct
research in *Nairobi County*

Permit No : **NACOSTI/P/15/99977/8271**
Date Of Issue : **14th July, 2016**
Fee Received : **Ksh 1,000**

on the topic: **FACTORS AFFECTING
LEARNERS' SATISFACTION WITH
DISTANCE LEARNING: A CASE OF
BACHELOR OF EDUCATION (ARTS)
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, KENYA**

for the period ending:
3rd November, 2016

.....
**Applicant's
Signature**



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

CONDITIONS

1. You must report to the County Commissioner and the County Education Officer of the area before embarking on your research. Failure to do that may lead to the cancellation of your permit
2. Government Officers will not be interviewed without prior appointment.
3. No questionnaire will be used unless it has been approved.
4. Excavation, filming and collection of biological specimens are subject to further permission from the relevant Government Ministries.
5. You are required to submit at least two(2) hard copies and one(1) soft copy of your final report.
6. The Government of Kenya reserves the right to modify the conditions of this permit including its cancellation without notice



REPUBLIC OF KENYA



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

**RESEARCH CLEARANCE
PERMIT**

Serial No. A **10129**

CONDITIONS: see back page