THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES ON ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE OF DISTANCE LEARNERS: A CASE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE
LEARNING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF KENYA METHODIST
UNIVERSITY

BY

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A Research Project Report submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the
award of the Degree of Master in Distance Education, University of Nairobi.

2013
DECLARATION

I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted in any other University for the award of a degree

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L45/72758/2009

This research project report has been submitted for examination with my approval as the University supervisor.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, John Gakuu Mukunji and Peris Gathoni Gakuu, for their love for education.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This completed research project report is the result of contributions from institutions and numerous individuals, whose unwavering support made completion possible. They all deserve my thanks.

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### ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

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<tr>
<td>AVU</td>
<td>African Virtual University</td>
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<tr>
<td>KeMU</td>
<td>Kenya Methodist University</td>
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<td>ODL</td>
<td>Open and Distance Learning</td>
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<td>ODLM</td>
<td>Open Distance Learning Mode</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for Social Scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>APA</td>
<td>American Psychological Association</td>
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ABSTRACT

This study, which is descriptive survey, sought to examine the influence of learner support on academic performance. The independent variables were Orientation, Mentoring, Feedback and Library Services. The four objectives used to guide the study were: to examine the influence of orientation on performance; to assess the influence of mentoring on performance; to evaluate the influence of feedback on performance and to establish the influence of Library services on performance. Two theories of distance learning: Moore’s Theory of Transactional Distance and Keegan’s Theory of Interaction and Communication formed the basis of the study. Questionnaires were used to collect data from a sample of 60 respondents, drawn from distance undergraduate students of Kenya Methodist University. The sample was randomly selected using the Probability Proportionate to size sampling technique, and a five-point Likert scale was used in rating the students’ responses. Data coding and analysis were done using Chi-square technique and results represented in tables. The results revealed that orientation services offered in the institution helped respondents to adjust to student life. Mentoring provided helpful information on handling distance courses but fell short of addressing learners’ psycho-social challenges. Though the institution lacked proper timelines, the students received detailed comments on their assignments. Library services were readily available, except that access to specialized IT facilities was strained. Overall, students expressed satisfaction with the support offered. Conclusively, Learner support was viewed as an indispensable tool contributing to the success and quality of distance programs. The study recommended that providers of distance courses conduct needs assessments to enable them provide services closely matching prospective learner needs. There were also recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The right of access to higher education is enshrined in a number of international human rights instruments. The UN International Covenant on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 declares in Article 13, that ‘higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means, and in particular the progressive introduction of free education’. Unfortunately, with huge proportions of adult population returning to learning, there is such a rising demand for access to higher education the world over, to the extent that the existing conventional facilities of learning and research are no longer able to cope with the surge in the number of students. Such is the case in Kenya especially, following the implementation of the 8-4-4 system of education and the introduction of the parallel degree programmes GoK, (2005), “The Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2005-2007.” This situation has dictated that a large number of dual- mode institutions, both public and private open up departments offering courses at a distance. Two reasons explain this: the desire to widen access to education for off-campus learners and, for enhancing generation of revenues. The latter reason reveals why reduction of dropout rate has become an increasingly important issue. In some cases, governments have set enrollment targets for institutions to receive their funding. For example, the UK Open University like other UK universities is in part supported by a Government grant that is related to its retention rates. The relationship is complex but essentially, for every student who finishes a 60 credit point course, the University receives about £1100 from the Higher Education Funding Council for England and Wales (Gibbs & Simpson, 2003).

According to Juma (2002), Kenyan Universities are turning to e-learning as a tool to facilitate improved education. For instance, today, in the University of Nairobi the School of Open and Continuing Education offers distance programs from certificate to postgraduate levels. The use of compact disks containing course notes is intensifying. This will save the distance learners the task of filling volumes of note books with lecture notes hence allowing them to follow these lectures asynchronously. There is curriculum training for staff on how to facilitate content online and the student’s information system’s network has been integrated into the e-learning
system to enhance and allow fast uptake of e-learning. There is also an awareness campaign using brochures, flyers and open days to increase interest among students and staff.

Kenyatta University, which is the mainstay of Africa Virtual University in Kenya, has rebranded her open learning to include e-learning which is geared towards improving the delivery of educational services to students. AVU uses power of modern information technology to increase access to educational resources through Sub-Saharan Africa.

In the Catholic University of East Africa Open and Distance e-learning is used to provide grounding theory and practice of teaching and learning in Higher Education which enable academic staff at tertiary level to undertake their professional duties effectively.

Kenya Methodist University offers Education, Theology and Science in Nursing programs through the Open and Distance Learning Mode. Though enrollment in Education has been comparatively higher, many students prefer School-based programs which utilize face-to-face facilities. Strathmore University has found need to increase access and flexibility to meet the growing needs of target population. Since 2006, the University has offered a diploma in Microfinance through distance education. From the above trend, it is most likely that more universities are rethinking offering courses at a distance.

According to Keegan (1993), learners in distance education are typically older than traditional students with the average age being more than 25 years and, most of them being female. Many are married, have full-time employment and earn high income. These adults are seeking a ‘second educational chance’ to realize their potentialities. This view is supported by Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences in that, “distance education gives adults a whole new way to look at their lives, examining potentials they left behind in their childhood and now have the opportunity to develop them through courses, hobbies, or other programs of self-development.”

These learners are faced with a myriad of challenges, some of which, spring from their diverse psycho-social and socio-cultural contexts while others are related to the mode of study. Distance learners are enshrouded in the responsibilities of adulthood such that they juggle family, job, studies and other social duties. Since most, if not all distance learners have come through the traditional education system, they lack the skills of self-study and time management; hence sliding back into the rote learning they used in secondary schools. They therefore lack the experience to adapt readily to a totally andragogical system.
1.2 Statement of the Problem

Simpson (2004) argues that despite the many years of survey over student withdrawal from the course, the results have had limited value in understanding and improving retention. Simpson reports that in 2004, the Open University of UK, 35% of the enrolled students withdrew before submitting their first assignment. At the same period, Bolton University had a drop of 40.6%, the University of London 36%, while London South Bank University had 32%. In 2010, at Kwa-Zulu University, South Africa, out of the 607 students who enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering, 108 of them dropped, making 17.79% of all the students enrolled in the faculty. At the same period, the Faculty of Management which had enrolled 1633 students had 281 cases of dropouts, which made up 17.21% of all the students who had enrolled in the faculty. Among the 454 students in the Faculty of Law, 108 dropped out of the course, which comprised 23.79% of the total number enrolled in the faculty. That year alone, the three faculties lost 497 out of the enrolled 2694 students, which made a total dropout of 18.45% of the total student population enrolled in the three faculties.

In her study on the quality of ODL programs of the University of Nairobi, Kidombo (2007) observes: “Students are also mostly working adults who have little time to produce high quality work. Failure rate is high and re-sits and re-takes are higher than in the regular programmes. The customers on their part are not serious about quality expectations. Another challenge is related to the dual mode system. Policies and practices are designed for the conventional programmes, hence unsuitable for ODL.” From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that both in developing economies like Kenya and in countries which are relatively stable like the UK, low performance and student retention remain areas of much complexity to the instructors, researchers, governments and other education providers. This study therefore seeks to establish the extent to which the learner support services influence academic performance of distance learners.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of learner support services on the academic performance of undergraduate Open and Distance Learners.
1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were:

1. To examine the extent to which orientation influences academic performance of Open and distance students
2. To assess the extent to which mentoring influences the academic performance of Open and distance students
3. To evaluate the extent to which feedback influences the academic performance of Open and distance students
4. To establish the extent to which library services influence the academic performance of Open and distance students

1.5 Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does orientation influence the academic performance of Open and distance students?
2. To what extent does mentoring influence the academic performance of open and distance students?
3. To what extent does feedback influence academic performance of Open and distance students?
4. To what extent do library services influence the academic performance of Open and distance students?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study findings will give awareness to the institution studied of its areas of strength and those needing improvement in supporting distance students. To the researchers, academics and other interested professionals, the findings will provide clarification and new insights into this important area of inquiry. Findings from this study and other similar studies will
inspire government planners and decision makers to draw policies guiding the provision of quality distance program. To institutions of higher learning the findings will provide a basis for understanding factors influencing learner performance and by so doing decide what learner support services to put in place in order to contain student attrition as a way of minimizing educational wastage. The general public will learn of alternative methods, besides the conventional classroom, of obtaining the same type of education, yet being away from the providing institution. Finally, the findings of this study will contribute to the existing knowledge.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

The study was limited to the four variables of learner support namely: orientation, mentoring, feedback and library support. Data was collected only from the ODL undergraduate students in the departments of Education & Counselling, Theology and Science in Nursing of Kenya Methodist University.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Financial and time constraints were key limitations of the study. Due to the mode of study of the target population, it was difficult to contact a number of the prospective respondents. The researcher had to keep calling them requesting them to respond to the questionnaires that had been posted to their e-mail address. To some extent this may influence the generalizability of the results. Finally, this being a qualitative study, it is not unlikely that the findings could be subject to multiple interpretations.

1.9 Assumptions of the Study

The assumption of the study was that there were effective learner support services that were in place and were operational in improving learning. Since the responses were solely dependent on respondents’ willingness and honesty, the researcher assumed that respondents were willing to co-operate and that responses were genuine.
1.10 Definition of significant Terms

Orientation: This refers to the direction and exposure given to the ODL students who are novices to the Course program.

Mentoring: This is the continuous guidance by an expert during the course.

Feedback: This is taken to mean the type and amount of response students receive from instructors concerning their course work.

Academic performance: This is taken to mean completion of the course within the stipulated time, obtaining good grades, student satisfaction and retention in the course.

Library services: These are the learning resources in libraries that are availed to learners. Such include journals, conference papers, project reports, theses, books, self-instructional modules, cassettes, Compact disks- Read-Only-Memory (CD-ROMs); Digital Versatile Disks (DVDs) and the Internet.

Satisfaction: Feelings that services are close to learners’ expectations.

Support: The extra assistance learners get to overcome the challenges of the course

1.11 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into the following chapters: Chapter One, which is this section, gives the Background of the study, Problem statement, Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, Research Objectives, Significance, Scope, Limitations, Assumptions and Definition of Operational terms. Chapter Two focuses on the
review of Literature. Under the review of Literature are the following sub-themes: Learner support services in Distance Education, Guidance and Counselling as a learner support, Orientation in Distance Education, Mentoring in Distance Education, Feedback in Distance Education and Library Support services. In the Theoretical Framework, two theories of Distance learning have been explained: Moore’s Theory of Transactional Distance and Keegan’s Theory of Interaction and Communication, followed by a Conceptual Framework of the study. Finally come the summary and the research gaps. Research Methodology is in Chapter Three in which the Research Design, Population, Sampling and Sampling procedures, Instruments of Data collection, Validity and Reliability of Research instruments, Methods of Data Collection and Analysis, Ethical Issues have been discussed in details. Following is a table showing the operationalization of variables. The Chapter closes with a summary. Chapter Four covers Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretations which have been discussed under the following sub-themes: Introduction, Question return rate, Demographic Characteristics of the respondents, which include age, gender, marital status, year of study, and the department they are enrolled in. Influence of Orientation, Mentoring, Feedback and Library Services on Academic Performance have also been discussed. Finally, Overall Learner satisfaction on the services provided by the institution has been discussed. Chapter Five is the last chapter of the Study. In it is the summary of the Findings, Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations. It closes with Suggestions for further Research. The next is the reference section, followed by the Appendices. Appendix I is the Researcher’s letter of introduction while Appendix II comprises a questionnaire to distance learners. Questions on Section A are based on the learners’ demographic characteristics. Section B of the questionnaire are items on the learner orientation, Section C are questions on the Feedback of distance learners. Finally, Sections D, E, F and G contain items based on academic support, learning resources/Instructional Materials, Mentoring and overall learner satisfaction consecutively.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter reviews literature from past studies on learner support services for distance students. The body is divided into sections addressing specific themes, followed by a brief critique of existing work. Hereafter, a case for this study has been made hence revealing a knowledge gap. The Chapter begins with Learner Support Services in Distance Education which is discussed under Orientation, Mentoring, Feedback and Library Services. From there follow the Theoretical Framework, the Conceptual Framework and the Summary and research gaps.

2.2 Learner Support Services in Distance Education

In this study, Distance Education might precisely be defined as a “mode of education characterized by the following hallmarks: Volitional control of learning by the learner rather than the distance instructor, a non contagious communication between students and teachers, marked by limited face-to-face sessions, mediated and institution-based, which makes it distinct from self-study. The growing need for access to higher education mainly by adults has sparked concern in many dual mode institutions of higher learning, both public and private, hence taking up the task of widening access. However, with the growth and changing trends of distance education, comes the problem of student attrition. Galusha (1997) cites such challenges as lack of experience and training, perceived isolation, and inadequate learner support, all of which may lead to low performance and eventual dropping out of the program. Many researchers and practitioners have long suggested that success in attracting, serving and retaining students will hinge more on excellent learner support services than on any technology issues. Such support mechanisms include on-site facilitation, guidance and counselling, library services and appropriate administrative policies.

The effectiveness of the support offered in an ODL institution is to a larger extent dictated by the distance student’s learning needs (Gunawardena, 1998).
Tait (2003) defines learner support services as “the range of services, both for individuals and for students in groups which complement the course materials or learning resources that are uniform for all learners, and which are perceived as a major offering of institutions in open and distance learning.” Mills, (2003), categorizes learner support in two: (i) academic support and (ii) non-academic support. Academic support includes, assisting learners in managing programme workload, developing appropriate learning competencies and helping them become independent. Non-academic support on the other hand, includes assistance with any personal difficulties that learners may encounter during their student life, helping them retain interest in their studies, and get social integration into the institution and the study programme.

Moore &Anderson (2003), assert that since institutions fall into categories of ‘survivalists’ and ‘remedialists,’ any institution therefore remains the sole barrier to retention. From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that student retention in higher education, especially in distance education is a global challenge. Therefore every possible effort ought to be made to manage learner attrition, hence minimizing educational wastage.

Despite this felt need, studies show that most institutions offering distance education are yet to put in place their learner support systems in order to support the number that has already enrolled. Distance students usually come from diverse cultural, socio-economic and educational backgrounds, bringing with them different experience. To address such heterogeneity, institutions need to redress their learner support systems. It is therefore not surprising that the level of support of distance learners in an ODL institution is widely used as part of the accrediting criteria adopted by most accrediting agencies.

2.2.1 Guidance and Counselling as a learner support

Many world countries are trying to offer guidance and counselling as a way to address many learner needs in ODL programmes. Turkey for instance, has offered guidance and counselling services for over fifty years (Usun, 2003). In Nigeria, school counselors take a whole-school approach. This lessens the individual approaches and honours the traditional African view that values family and community’s role as paramount for effective decision making in schools. In the pre-colonial period, guidance and counselling was an extended family system, including clan elders.
In Kenya, Nyaga (2011), in a comparative study on the effectiveness of guidance and counselling on the development of academic, social and personal competencies among students in Kenyan public and private universities finds that, fewer student disturbances and anti-social behaviour have been reported more in public than in private universities. This, she asserts, might be attributed to the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services offered at the private universities. She finally concludes that there are significant differences in the effectiveness of guidance and counselling on development of academic, social and personal competencies between students in public and private universities.

The stance adopted in Nyaga’s study is important to the current work in that it relates guidance and counselling to the academic competencies of the students. However, it is limited in that it selects the samples for study from the population of full-time students but fails to address the distance learning students. The current study addresses guidance and counselling in distance education, which is the trend education is taking globally, and where student performance has been wanting (Kember, 1990).

Another limitation is the level of study from which the samples are drawn: that is, instead of including samples from among the first and second years of study, many of whom according to researchers, withdraw from the course “even before they submit their first assignment” (Simpson, 2004), the researcher selected samples from among the students in the third and fourth years of study who have already acquired a higher level of persistence. It is worth noting that nowadays universities are increasingly requiring students to complete their research projects within a specified period, partly for the students’ own sakes, and also to increase degree completion rates (Murray & Hughes, 2008). Lastly, studies on the influence of guidance and counselling on course choice pass rate, graduation rate and course completion in ODL programs in public and private universities are very necessary for the enhancement of the ODL programs.

Unlike the previous practice of counseling where the client was expected to abide by the conditions of the counselor, the mid- twentieth century has had a major paradigm shift in counseling as advanced by such scholars as Rogers with Client- centeredness, Perl with Gestalt therapy, Glasser brought in Reality therapy and Maslow, the Experiential approach, among others. Training of school counselors is a recent phenomenon and it was not until very late in the last century that clear standards were defined for school counseling for the overall
development of the student. Counselors help in posing questions to explore, stimulate problem-solving and give students tools and resources to use so that they can construct knowledge. The UNESCO lays much emphasis on career counseling which ushers the post-school student into the world of work. Today, the world governments are seeing the need to incorporate lifelong counseling into the education system for the enhancement of the educational, socio-economic welfare of the student. This study examines the influence of Guidance and Counselling under four variables of learner support service: Orientation, Mentoring, Feedback and Library services in the undergraduate students in the Departments of Education & Counselling, Science in Nursing and Theology of KeMU. A limitation in the current study, though, is that the findings may not be generalized for the other undergraduate students in other departments.

2.3 Orientation in Distance Education

In this study, orientation will be taken to refer to ‘the assistance given to students to help them adjust to the new situation.’ It focuses on the reinforcement of successful student behavior, effective learning strategies and awareness of academic and administrative policies, adjustment to ODL student life and needs assessment. This is mainly conducted at the beginning of the programs when the learners have already received their packages which include study materials, program guides, assignments and experiment kits. Many learners may have returned to their studies after a long gap, so they may need constructive help at this stage. As they are unfamiliar with this mode of study, they may ask for some guidance on the self-learning materials, study skills, and the process of dealing with the assignments. During orientation the distance learner should be inducted in such areas as: Reading skills which include text-mapping and critical reading, Assignment writing especially the essay type, Answering multiple-choice questions, Examination success especially preparation and writing techniques and Analyses of study problems including exploring reasons for examination failure and Strategies for success when repeating a course. Effective orientation programs can assist ODL students in acquiring, such values as: reduced victimization, resolved discipline problems, low drop out cases, improved social skills and a feeling of belonging (Simpson, 2000). It is unfortunate that, as shown in literature review, learner support services in many institutions offering distance education are wanting. Nevertheless, there are still places where these services are more comprehensive. For instance, in the Open
University of UK, guidance and counselling services alongside orientation programmes have been used in supporting learners from a non-traditional background and alleviating dropouts from ODL programmes. In KeMU, orientation services are normally provided at the beginning of the study sessions to the students who have newly enrolled in the course. Distance students will not all enroll at the same time, implying that some will hardly access formal orientation at any time during the course. During orientation the distance learner may be inducted in such areas as: Reading skills which include text-mapping and critical reading; assignment writing especially the essay type; answering multiple-choice questions; examination success, especially preparation and writing techniques and analyses of study problems including exploring reasons for examination failure and strategies for success when repeating a course.

2.4 Mentoring in Distance Education

Mentoring refers to the advice from a respected, experienced person provided to someone who needs educational help. The mentoring relationships are distinguished by a “richness of interdependence between two people” whereby the mentor provides model of success and performance, advice and encouragement and in return, the student provides the mentor with a validation of his/her professional abilities. Basically, mentoring services focus on individual student inventory, personal success and fulfillment, career counselling and community relations. The process of mentoring first begins with frequent meaningful communications which seem to be key to retention. This is perceived as care about the individual and it does make a difference. Being responsive is an important element at this juncture. Secondly, the learner with the mentor venture into the importance of knowledge of the program mechanics and how to work through, knowing that the mentor is able to help the learner through the bureaucracy. Thirdly, the learner and the mentor, through the quality of interaction, try to simulate face-to-face interaction in the virtual environment.

Finally, the time comes when the mentor now begins to stress academic values as a way of integrating them into the academic community as opposed to the initial focus of the content. During this stage of the program, the learner may want to discuss his/her progress, assignment grades, study visits, projects, seminars, practicals, improving study skills, learning from media, overcoming personal and technical problems with the faculty (Glazer & Stein, 2000). At Turkey’s Anadolu University, the Academic Counselling Service is one of
the most important elements of Distance Education. The main purpose of this service is to provide distance learners with chances to collaborate with other students and professors from all over Turkey. This enhances social relations and growth of the learners.

2.5 Feedback in Distance Education

Experience in higher education reveals positive correlation between instructor-student interaction and academic achievement. Emphatically, research suggests that ‘there is no single factor more critical than the feedback that open learners receive on their progress’ (Race, 1998: 124).

Feedback represents one element of learner support and what is key is the provision of individualised feedback to learners on coursework. (Lentell, 2003). The most common form of learner feedback is immediate Knowledge of Response (KR) which can be delineated as either Knowledge of Correct Response (KCR) or Knowledge of Incorrect Response (KIR). In KIR, the learner makes a response and knows only whether the response was correct or incorrect. Feedback is indeed one area students are anxious about and more so, in distance education. In Turkish distance education system feedback is used to advise the learners to exert more effort and try more strategies in cases where the current efforts have failed (Usun 2003). This helps to promote interaction, with a view of ensuring more effective learning.

Many students find the ODL environment to be cold and impersonal. That is why instructors should give personal comments to the individual learner since this goes far in giving students reassurance and confidence. This can be just a few words written on the side of an assignment, or a short note of encouragement. Personalized feedback tells students if their performance is satisfactory and, if provided early in the course, can help reduce student attrition. This activity has limitations though, because at the beginning of the course, the instructor knows relatively little about the students and their work. This type of feedback is mechanical and simple, in line with the instructor’s expectations, the rituals of class activities, and the peculiarities of the ODL platform. Appropriate feedback lies at the middle of the course where the student has produced enough material to support good evaluation. Detailed and elaborate feedback need be provided on mid-course examinations. This will prove very valuable to the students since they mostly appreciate feedback when it is timely, precise and personal. Whenever immediate feedback after an examination cannot be provided, effort should be made to score and return the test the soonest possible before the student embarks
on subsequent lessons. Feedback given at the end of the course may be valuable in providing long term guidance, but does not help the student’s grade or the quality of the work in the current course (Kasprzak, 2005).

Hattie (2007) found that positive feedback focused on an assignment has a positive effect on learners in terms of their attitudes and achievement. Providing feedback to students in distance learning classes can be more challenging than in the traditional classroom. This will involve exchanging multiple e-mails and playing phone tag with students.

While it is difficult to figure out the best way to provide individual comments to students and return their written work with meaningful feedback, quality feedback to distance students is particularly important because they have fewer opportunities to ask the course instructors for clarification on assignments or instructors’ comments on the students’ assignments.

Distance learners often feel a bit disconnected by the technology and are left wondering whether the instructor received their messages and assignments. By providing feedback, students are motivated to learn.

2.6 Library Support Services

The provision of quality library services to those who learn at a distance is undoubtedly one of the most exciting and challenging developments that have occurred in contemporary librarianship. Distance education has led to the development of specialized library and information services that can appropriately be called distance librarianship. The genesis of distance librarianship is grounded in the creation of the large-scaled spread of distance education to satisfy personal and national educational goals. Distance education has impacted not only on the discipline of education, but it has also fundamentally affected services and professions that support distance learning and distance education.

The impact and significance of distance education is fittingly described by Howard (1995), when she states that “distance education has led to a redefinition of what is common in education”. Professions, including librarianship, that are associated with distance education have also experienced a redefinition. The effect of support services on distance education has been so profound that the phrase “growth industry” is applied to the changes that have occurred in these activities. Library services for distance learners include: Services which include inter-library rule, Ask-a-librarian; Subject specialists and course reserves. Library tools include LibGuides, subject Guides, Library catalogue; Database extreme search, e-book
collections, Google scholar and Refworks. Distance learners also require technical help which includes problems report, online course help, help desk, networking and computer support. E-learning student tutorial, mybama help, UV VPN (for students outside USA).

Librarianship has grown and changed in many aspects because of the different approaches that have been taken to provide library and information services to the who learn at a distance. These changes have impacted not only on the delivery of library and information services to those who learn at a distance but also on the delivery of library services to other clients. Thus, these changes have led to the development of new professional paradigms within the field of librarianship. The redefinition of what is common in library services is rooted in the important differences that exist between traditional education and distance education.

### 2.7 Theoretical Framework

Holmberg (1995) defines theory as “a systematic ordering of ideas about the phenomenon of a field of inquiry and an overarching logical structure of reasoned suppositions which can generate intersubjectively testable hypothesis.” Although a number of theories may be used to provide theoretical framework for such a study, two theories will be considered for this study: Moore’s Theory of Transactional Distance and Keegan’s Theory of Interaction and Communication. These two theories serve as a basis for conducting research. The framework will help the researcher see clearly the variables of the study.

#### 2.7.1 Moore’s Theory of Transactional Distance

This study uses Moore’s theory of transitional distance as its theoretical framework. This theory is grounded in the concept of transaction which, according to Moore & Kearsley (1996, p.200), ‘connotes the interplay among the environment, the individuals, and the patterns of behaviour in a situation’. In this context, the transaction known as distance education is the interplay between people who are teachers and learners in environments that have the special characteristics of being separate from one another, and a consequent set of special teaching and learning behaviour. The physical distance inherent in distance education, ‘leads to communication gaps, a psychological space of potential misunderstandings between the behaviour of instructors and those of the learners. ‘This is the transitional distance.’ To overcome this transactional distance, which is pedagogical and not geographical, Moore &
Kearsley (1996) recommend instructional design and interactional procedures. Although there is some transactional distance in any educational event, Moore & Kearsley note that in distance education the separation of teacher and learner affects their behaviours. The separation actually dictates that teachers plan, present content, interact and perform the other processes of teaching in significantly different ways from the face-to-face environment. The degree of transactional distance dictates just how much and what kinds of instructor-provided dialog and structure are needed to accommodate the distance.

(ibid. p.201) define dialog as a term that “helps us focus on the interplay of words, actions, and ideas and any other interactions between teacher and learner when one gives instruction and the other responds.” The extent and nature of this dialog is determined by the educational philosophy of the individual or group responsible for the design of the course; the personalities of teacher and learner; the subject matter of the course, and the environmental factors. The environmental factors affecting dialog include the existence and size of a learning group, language, and the medium of communication. The type of distance education course inherently controls some of these factors. For instance, video tele-courses have very little or no dialog. This is because often the video telecourse is set up so that the student watches the televised video course but is not required to communicate with the instructor. Further, since no mechanism is in place for the student to give feedback to the instructor and vice versa, no dialog occurs.

In addition to dialog, a second set of variables influence transitional distance: elements of the course design. These elements include “learning objectives, content themes, information presentations, case studies, pictorial and other illustrations, exercises projects, and tests” (ibid., p.202-203). Since structure expresses the rigidity or flexibility of the course’s educational objectives, teaching strategies and evaluation methods, it describes the extent to which course components can accommodate or be responsive to each learner’s individual needs.

2.7.2 Keegan’s Theory of Interaction and Communication

This theory suggests that student’s retention is enhanced when academic support is available, which integrates the student into the academic community even though the student is at a distance. Keegan hypothesizes that the separation of the teaching and learning act is responsible for a weak integration on the student into the scholarly life of the institution. This
aspect of isolation has been integral in many researches in open and distance learning. For example, an individual learner tracking study initiated by Athabasca University led to conclusions that a relationship existed between learner motivation and involvement with the University. It was also found that many learners had difficulty developing the routine and self-control necessary for completing courses, being that the delivery system does not allow for flexibility to suit the tremendous heterogeneity of the learner population. Lack of integration may contribute to students dropping out of the learning experience. Further, the separation of the teaching and learning act is responsible for a weakness in interpersonal communication, leading to a lack of quality in the learning achieved. A study by Glazer & Stein (2000) states that analysis of the student and faculty narratives indicate that frequent meaningful communication seems to be the key to retention.
2.8 Conceptual Framework

**Independent variables**

**Orientation**
- Awareness of Course requirements
- Teaching and learning strategies
- Adjustment to student life

**Mentoring**
- Quality of advice given
- Personal fulfillment
- Learners’ social relations

**Feedback**
- Promptness of feedback
- Clear marking criteria
- Teachers’ comments on students’ assignments

**Library Services**
- Quality self-instructional materials
- Delivery of library Services
- Access to specialized IT facilities

**Moderating variables**
- Hours of study
- Previous experience in ODL programmes
- Institutional policies and regulations

**Dependent variables**
- Academic performance
  - Learner satisfaction
  - Student retention
- Health
- Study environment
- Financial wellbeing

**Intervening variables**

*FIGURE1: Conceptual Frame work*
Figure 1 shows the Conceptual Framework of the Study. In the words of Mwanje (2001), “this section will spell in more detail the nature of the argument, or of the analytical or explanatory task involved in the project.” Based on theory and philosophies used by researchers in this area of study, a relationship has been depicted between learners support services and academic performance for distance students. This study which sought to establish the influence of learner support services on academic performance was examined through four independent variables: Orientation, Mentoring, and Feedback and Library services. Orientation has been discussed under student’s awareness of course requirements, teaching and learning strategies and, adjustment to student life. The second variable, mentoring, has been viewed through the quality of advice given to distance learners, learners’ personal fulfillment and social relations. Feedback, the third variable has been discussed under promptness of feedback, clear marking criteria and teachers’ comments on student’s assignments and the fourth variable, library services is examined through the quality of self-instructional materials, delivery of library services and student’s access to specialized IT facilities.

Dependent variables are the anticipated outcomes or the causal effects of the independent variables and extraneous variables on the learner’s interaction with the course. In this study, the dependent variable, which is the learner’s academic performance, has been discussed under learner satisfaction and student retention.

Moderating variables and intervening variables are special types of extraneous variables. These are independent variables that have not been controlled by the researcher. In this study moderating variables include the learner’s number of hours of study, previous experience in ODL programmes and institutional policies and regulations. Intervening variables include learner’s health, study environment and financial wellbeing.
2.9 Summary and Research Gaps

This study provides findings from literature on learner support services in enhancing academic performance for students in ODL programmes, globally, within the region, and in Kenya, a case of Kenya Methodist University. Broadly, two strategies of learner support have been considered: Guidance and counseling as a learner support, has been viewed through orientation of learners at the onset of the course and mentoring during the course; while administrative support has been discussed under feedback from the faculty and provision of accessible library services and IT facilities. In this study, orientation at the starting of the course referred to the learner acquiring awareness of the course requirements, the teaching and learning strategies during instruction, and learner’s adjustment. Mentoring during the course was viewed through the quality of advice provided from the departments, the learners’ personal fulfillment, and social relations with the broader student community. Feedback on the learners’ progress was viewed through promptness, clarity of the marking criteria, and the quality of the teachers’ comments on the learners’ assignment. Library services were viewed through the quality of the instructional materials, efficient delivery of library services and access to specialized IT services. The intervening variables in the study are hours of study, previous experience in ODL programmes and institutional policies. Moderating variables are learner’s health, study environment and financial wellbeing. The study briefly critiques an existing work—a comparative study on the effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling on Kenya public and private universities, a case of Chuka University Nyaga (2011), which concludes that there are differences on the effectiveness of guidance and counseling between the public and private universities in that there has been fewer cases of student unrest in the latter. Although the current study points some gaps in Nyaga’s, study, they however share a common assumption that guidance and counselling services influence academic performance.

Findings from this study also show that, supporting students in the ODL programmes enhances their academic performance. They also show that institutions offering distance programmes, as is the case of KeMU, are making effort in providing the necessary support to their distance learners, notwithstanding the few areas cited as needing improvement. The chapter provides a theoretical framework based on Moore’s Theory of Transactional Distance and Keegan’s Theory of Interaction and Communication. A conceptual framework
linking interventions and performance has been developed with independent, dependent, intervening and moderating variables explained
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter includes the Research design, Target Population, Sample size and Sampling procedure, Research Instruments, Validity and Reliability of the Research instruments, Data collection procedures, Data analysis and Ethical issues.

3.2 Research Design

The study is a descriptive survey. This involves collecting information from a group of people in order to describe some aspects or characteristics (such as abilities, opinions, attitudes, beliefs and/or knowledge) of the population of which that group is a part (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). This study sought to investigate the influence of learner support services on the academic performance of ODL undergraduate students in the Departments of Education & Counselling, Theology and Science in Nursing at Kenya Methodist University. Learner support services were studied under Orientation, Mentoring, Feedback and Library Services. Data was collected through questionnaires which contained closed-ended and open-ended items to determine learners’ satisfaction of Learner Support Services provided by the institution. A Likert scale was used in rating learners’ responses. The survey would permit the researcher to describe heterogeneous populations accurately and economically. As much as possible, effort was made to try and minimize ambiguity in the questions sent to the respondents.

3.3 Target Population

The target population was two thousand and eighty six open and distance undergraduate students from three departments namely, Education & Counselling, Theology and Nursing of KeMU. The sub-populations in the three departments were 1050, 700 and 336 respectively. Students were classified according to their ages, gender, marital status, years of study and the departments they had enrolled in.
3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

Mwanje (2001) defines sampling as the process involving the selection of a finite number of elements from a population of interest, for the purpose of inquiry. The study used probability sampling. Having ensured that the population characteristics were well defined, a sample was randomly selected from the three departments, which served as three strata. Mugenda & Mugenda (2003), recommend that a well selected 10% of the target population would serve as a sample for a descriptive study, which in this case would be 209 respondents. But since interviewing a sample of 209 respondents would pose difficulties within the constraints of finance and time, together with the challenges in data collection procedures, a desired sample size of 60 respondents was selected randomly using the probability proportionate to size sampling where the number of elements selected from each department was proportional to the relative size of the sub-population in each department (Mugenda, 2003 p.48) and Ngechu (2006). To select a proportionate sample, the researcher constructed sub-population frames, then selected from each sub-population the required sample.

To get the proportionate to size sample, the researcher multiplied each group size by the sample size and divided it by the total population size.

**Hence:**

Department of Education & Counselling = \(60 \times \frac{1050}{2086} = 30.20\)

Department of Theology = \(60 \times \frac{700}{2086} = 20.13\)

Department of Science in Nursing = \(60 \times \frac{336}{2086} = 9.66\)

The results of proportionate sample sizes are shown in Table 3.1
Table 3.1 Proportionate sample sizes in the three departments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Population. N</th>
<th>Actual sample size</th>
<th>Desire Proportionate to size samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edu &amp; Coun</td>
<td>10.50</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science in Nursing</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2086</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 is a summary of the population, actual sample size and the desired proportionate sample of each of the Departments of Education & Counselling, Theology and Science in Nursing at Kenya Methodist University.

3.5 Data collection instruments

Questionnaires containing open-ended and closed-ended items were used to generate quantitative and qualitative data were sent to respondents’ e-mail addresses. The researcher’s decision to use questionnaires was because they could be mailed to many people at the same time. They were however challenging since the researcher was expected to formulate clear unambiguous questions and order and organize them to make taking data easy and accurate. The items in the questionnaires were organized in seven sub-sections according to the purpose of the study. Section A contained five questions on respondents’ background information (age gender, marital status, year of study and department). Section B contained questions on orientation, while Sections C and D had questions on Mentoring and Feedback consecutively. Section E asked questions on library services while Section E had questions on overall learner support. Students responses were rated on the Likert scale.
3.6 Validity of the research Instruments

Validity is the extent to which a test measures what it claims to measure. This study utilized Content- validity because it is important in educational testing. Content-related evidence, according to Fraenkel & Wallen (2000), revolves around the adequacy of sampling of content. The instrument used in the current study was tested for adequacy of content, appropriateness of language, adequacy of work space, size of font type and clarity of printing. To ascertain the appropriateness of the content-related evidence of the measure used in the study, the instrument was critically examined by experts in the field of distance learning.

3.7 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure or the extent to which a measure does not contain random error (Singleton, 1998). In this study, reliability was assessed through internal consistency procedure using Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient. With this approach, the researcher examined the relationships among all the items simultaneously from a single test administered by the researcher to all the subjects. This meant that the consistency or stability of data would be determined from scores obtained. The basic issue here was to establish the extent to which the items responded to were homogenous — that is the extent to which the same concepts had been measured. With identical content and no time interval, agreement on scores obtained by independent respondents was used to determine how items correlated among themselves (Mugenda, 2003). The resulting was a coefficient of 85%, indicating an acceptable level of agreement.

3.8 Data Collecting Procedures

After the approval of the survey instrument by the Department of Distance Studies, the researched/ visited KeMU. After introduction, a letter to allow research activities in the institution was granted on request. Since the prospective respondents were usually off-campus students, the questionnaire containing
open-ended and close-ended items were administered electronically. With the consent of the relevant authorities, the ODLM department assisted the researcher access the target students contact.

Data collection involved both primary and secondary data. Primary data was gathered from the field while secondary data was obtained from the review of literature. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures were used. Collected data were summarized in tables.

### 3.9. Data Analysis

After data collection, the instruments were cleaned and data coded for entry into the computer. Data was analyzed using SPSS. Salient findings were analyzed on the basis of each variable and results extrapolated in a descriptive manner. The findings have been presented in form of figures and tables Chapter Four has summarized the results.

Table 3.1 is a summary of the population, actual sample size and the desired proportionate sample of each of the Departments of Education & Counselling, Theology and Science in Nursing at Kenya Methodist University.

### 3.10 Ethical Issues

In research, it remains the fundamental responsibility of every researcher to ensure protection for the participants in a study from physical and/or psychological harm.

In this study, the researcher sought consent to interview the human subjects from the office of the Dean, Research and Development. The researcher, in a letter of introduction, explained to the participants the essence of this study, thereby requesting them to voluntarily respond to the questionnaire. Though working electronically with the respondents required much patience on the side of the researcher, the participants finally responded at will.
Table 3.2 Operationalization of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To establish how orientation influences the academic performance of ODL undergraduate students | Orientation      | Awareness of course requirements  
|                                                                              |                  | Teaching and learning strategies  
|                                                                              |                  | Adjustment to student life.       | Percentage frequencies | Ordinal nominal | Descriptive                  | Open and closed-ended questions |
| To examine the influence of mentoring on the academic performance of ODL undergraduate students | Mentoring        | Quality advice  
|                                                                              |                  | Personal fulfillment  
|                                                                              |                  | Social relations               | Percentage frequencies | Ordinal nominal | Descriptive                  | Open and closed-ended questions |
| To assess the influence of teachers’ feedback on the academic performance of ODL undergraduate students | Feed back        | Promptness of feedback  
|                                                                              |                  | Clear marking criteria  
|                                                                              |                  | Teachers’ comments on assignments | Percentage frequencies | Ordinal nominal | Descriptive                  | Open and closed-ended questions |
| To examine the influence of library services on the academic performance of ODL undergraduate students | Library services | Quality of instructional material  
|                                                                              |                  | Delivery of library services  
|                                                                              |                  | Access to specialized IT facilities | Percentage frequencies | Ordinal nominal | Descriptive                  | Open and closed-ended questions |
3.11 Summary
Chapter Three is the Methodology section of the Research Report. It covers the Research Design, which is descriptive survey. The target population is the ODL undergraduate students at KenyaMethodistUniversity. Questionnaires with structured and unstructured questions have been used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on a sample of sixty (60) respondents. Data was collected using questionnaires which contained structured and unstructured questions. Validity and Reliability of the instrument were ascertained by professionals of distance studies. Ethical Issues have been considered to ensure the participants’ safety from any form of harm. The data collected was finally analyzed using statistical packages. Results were reported in APA tables.
4.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation of data. The data was collected from responses on the study which sought to realize the following four objectives: To examine the extent to which orientation influences academic performance of Open and distance students; to assess the extent to which mentoring influences the academic performance of Open and distance students; to evaluate the extent to which feedback influences the academic performance of Open and distance students and to establish the extent to which library services influence the academic performance of Open and distance students.

4.2 Questionnaire return rate

Out of the 60 questionnaires sent to the participants, all 60 were responded to in time for analysis. Interviewing a larger sample would have been unmanageable considering time and financial constraints.

Return rate = 60/60x100% = 100%

4.3 Demographic characteristics

Students’ demographics revealed to the researcher the distribution of responses in relation to the variables under study across the target population. Tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 provided distribution by Age, Gender, Marital status, Year of study and the Department.

4.3.1 Age of the respondents

Age is a significant demographic characteristic in distance education. Respondents’ distribution by age was placed in four categories as shown in Table 4.1.
Table 4.1. Respondents distribution by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 and above</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 shows respondents’ distribution by age. Those below 29 years formed (30%) of the population; those between ages 30-34 made 18%; those aged 35 to 39 made up 26.7% while 205 comprised of the students aged 40 to 44. Only 5% of the student population were aged 45 and above. This indicated that the greatest student population comprised of younger people, while those at 45 and above made only 5.0% of the student population.

4.3.2 Gender of the respondents

Since gender was considered an important variable in the study, respondents’ genders were considered in this study as indicated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Distribution by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 shows that gender composition was represented by males (25%) and females (75%). A gender imbalance was noted in that female participants were three times as many as their male counterparts.
4.3.3 Marital Status

Respondents fell into three categories of marital status: the single, the married and the widowed as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Distribution by Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 represents distribution of respondents by marital status. It shows that the married category had the highest number of respondents with 66.7% against 26.7% for the single and only 6.7% for the widowed. It is a clear indication that the greatest proportion of the respondents was comprised of married adults.

4.3.4 Year of Study of the respondents

Responses were collected from students in four years of study and recorded in Table 4.4 in frequencies and percentages.

Table 4.4 Distribution by Year of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of study</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 shows that the highest percentage of the participants was Year 1 respondents who scored 45%. It indicates that enrollments in Year1 respondents from the three departments
were higher than in the other three years which recorded 23.3%, 16.7% and 15.0% for the respondents in Year3, Year4 and Year2 respectively.

4.3.5 Respondents’ Departments

Responses from the students in the three departments were compiled and shown on Table 4.5 in frequencies and percentages.

Table 4.5 Distribution by Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Counselling</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science in Nursing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5 shows that the department of Education and Counselling had the highest percentage of respondents with 35%. The department of Science in Nursing followed closely with 33.3%. Enrolment was lowest in the department of Theology which had 31.7%. It is clear from the table that there was higher enrolment in the department of Education and Counselling than in the other two departments.

4.4 INFLUENCE OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Influence of learner support services was examined based on the four variables: Orientation, Mentoring, Feedback and Library Services. Table 4.6 shows students’ responses on the influence of orientation on performance.
4.4.1 Influence of Orientation on academic performance

Respondents were asked whether they agreed that orientation influenced performance. Table 4.6 shows their responses.

Table 4.6  Responses on the influence of orientation on academic performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation influences academic performance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results in Table 4.6 show that (46.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed that orientation programmes influenced performance. 23% agreed, 15% were undecided. While 10% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 5% strongly disagreed that orientation influenced performance. This implied that much needed to be done to improve orientation programs in order to make them useful.

The study also sought to assess the extent to which Orientation influenced academic performance. The items for which responses were: Student orientation matching their expectations, orientation enabling respondents adjust to student life, workload being appropriate to the respondents’ degree, staff being good at explaining things and staff making the course interesting. Table 4.7 shows the responses per item interviewed.
## Learner satisfaction with orientation

### Table 4.7 Student satisfaction with orientation (by Department and Year of study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department &amp; Counselling</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student orientation</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>matches my expectations</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation enabled me</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to adjust to student life</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The workload for my</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>degree is appropriate</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation gave me</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>awareness of course</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requirement</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff has made the</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>course interesting</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.52</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 4.7, disaggregated by department and year of study, the mean score of the students’ responses to the research item on the influence of orientation on performance were compiled in SPSS. Rated on the degree to which orientation enabled students adjust to student life, respondents from department of Education and Counselling rated it at 2.31, that of Theology, 3.05, and Nursing 3.27 respectively. Students in the first, second, third and fourth years rated the item at 3.38, 2.37, 2.84 and 1.40 respectively. Asked whether orientation enabled them to adjust to student life, respondents from the department of Education and Counselling rated it
3.37, those in Theology, 3.44 and Nursing at 3.55 respectively. Students in the first, second, third and fourth years of study rated the item at 4.11, 4.37, 3.69 and 3.40 respectively.

Responding to the question whether the workload for their degree was appropriate, respondents from the department of Education and Counselling rated it 4.31, those in Theology, 3.72 and Nursing at 3.94 respectively. Students in the first, second, third and fourth years of study rated the item at 4.11, 4.37, 3.69 and 3.40 respectively.

In response to whether orientation gave them awareness of course requirements, respondents from the department of Education and Counselling rated it at 3.81, those in Theology at 4.16 and those in Nursing at 4.27 respectively. Students in the first, second, third and fourth years of study rated the item at 4.38, 3.62, 4.07 and 3.40 respectively. The final item that response was sought for was whether the staff made the courses interesting. Respondents from the department of Education and Counselling rated it 3.81, those in Theology, 3.16 and Nursing 4.27 respectively. Students in the first, second, third and fourth years of study rated the item 3.80, 3.37, 2.78 and 3.00 respectively.

From Table 4.7, the average rating of these respondents on the five items measured on the Likert scale was 3.52 for all the items for the students in the department of Education and counselling, 3.51 for those in the department of Theology, and 3.66 for those in the department of Science in Nursing. Students in the first year had an average rating of all the items at 3.93, 3.27 for the second, 3.21 for the third year students and 3.08 for the fourth students.

Finally, it is clear from Table 4. That the first year students were satisfied with the services offered by the institution By rating them at 3.93, while the fourth year rated them at 3.08 as they felt that they would have wanted the services reviewed.

4.4.2 Influence of mentoring on Academic performance

The study sought to establish the extent to which mentoring influenced academic performance. Responses were recorded in Table 4.8 in frequencies and percentages.
Table 4.8 Learner satisfaction with Mentoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentoring influences academic performance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8 shows that while 36.7% of the respondents strongly believed that mentoring influenced performance, 41.7% agreed, 3% disagreed while 5% strongly disagreed, 13.3% were undecided.

The study also sought to establish learner satisfaction with the availability of the items comprising mentoring service which include good advice in handling course work, addressing respondents’ learning and personal needs, providing useful information and getting opportunities for social interaction. Responses were recorded by department and year of study in Table 4.9.
Table 4.9 Student satisfaction with Mentoring (by Department and Year of Study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Counselling</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good advice is available for handling course workload</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is sufficient support to meet my personal needs</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When needed the information offered has been helpful</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have plenty of opportunities to interact with other students</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 4.9, disaggregated by department and year of study, the mean scores of the students’ responses to the research item on the influence of Mentoring provided good advice for handling course workload, respondents from the department of Education and counselling rated it at 4.00, Theology at 6.60 and Nursing at 3.38 respectively. Students in the First, Second, Third and Fourth years of study rated the item at 3.47, 4.28, 3.62 and 3.80 respectively. Asked whether mentoring provided welfare and support to meet learners’ personal needs, respondents from the Departments of Education and Counselling rated it at
3.87, Theology, at 2.80 and Nursing at 2.61 respectively. Students in the First, Second, Third and Fourth years of study rated the item at 2.89, 3.00, 3.00 and 4.80 and 3.80 respectively.

Responding to the question whether the information and advice offered had been helpful, respondents from the departments of Education and counselling rated it at 4.06, Theology at 3.50 and Nursing at 3.38 respectively. Students in the First, Second, Third and Fourth years of study rated the item at 3.36, 3.71, 3.75 and 4.80 respectively.

The final item for which response was sought was whether the respondents had the respondent as had plenty of opportunities to interact socially with other students had made the course interesting. Respondents from the department of Education and counselling rated it at 4.25, Theology at 2.60 and Nursing at 2.61 respectively. Students in the First, Second, Third and Fourth years of study rated the item at 3.36, 3.42, 2.25 and 4.40 respectively. From Table 4.9, Third year students showed that they would have wanted the learner support services improved.

4.4.3 Influence of Feedback on Academic performance

The study also examines instructors’ feedback to the students. Students’ responses to these items: whether feedback on assignment was prompt; whether marking criteria were clear to the students; whether comments on marked assignments were detailed and whether feedback helped clarify things they did not understand. Students were classified according to department and year of study. Responses were compiled and recorded in table 4.10.
Table 4.10 Feedback on academic performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback influences performance frequency</th>
<th>percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results in table 4.10 show that 46.7% of the respondent strongly agreed that they received prompt feedback on their work while 23.3% agreed. 10% disagreed while 5% strongly disagreed. 15% were undecided.
Table 4.11 satisfaction with Feedback (by Department and Year of study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback on my assignments has been prompt</th>
<th>Education &amp; Counselling</th>
<th>Theology</th>
<th>Nursing</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The criteria used for marking have been clear in advance</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have received detailed comments on my assignment</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback on my work has helped to clarify things I did not understand</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disaggregated by department and year of study the mean scores of the students’ responses to the research item on the influence of feedback on performance were compiled in SPSS tables. Rated on the degree to which feedback had been prompt, respondents from the departments of education and counseling rated it at 4.00, theology, at 3.00 and nursing at 3.08 respectively. Students in the first, second, third and fourth year of study rated the item at 3.52, 3.00, 2.57 and 4.16 respectively.

Asked whether marking criteria was clear, responses from the department of education and counseling rated at 4.00, theology at 2.60 and nursing, 2.41 respectively. Students in the first, second, third and fourth years of study rated the item at 3.29, 2.00, 2.28 and 3.83 respectively.
Responding the question whether the received detailed comments on their work, responses from the departments of education and counseling rated at 3.91, theology at 3.30 and nursing at 3.08 respectively. Students in the first, second, third and fourth year rated the item at 3.47, 3.00, 2.85 and 4.33 respectively.

In the response to whether feedback had helped them clarify things they did not clearly understand, responses from the departments of education and counseling rated at 3.75, theology at 3.50 and nursing at 2.91 respectively. Students in the first second third and fourth years rated the item at 3.47, 2.75, 3.14 and 3.83 respectively. From table 4.11, the average rating of these respondents on the four items measured on the Likert scale was 3.91 for all the items for the students of education and counseling, 3.10 for those in the department of theology and 2.87 in the department of nursing. Students in the first year had an average rating of all the items at 3.44, 2.68 for the second year students 2.71 for third year student and 4.04 for the fourth year students. It is clear from table 4.11 that the fourth year students were satisfied with the services while the second year students felt they would have wanted the services reviewed.

**4.4.4 Influence of Library Services on academic performance**

The study also sought to establish the influence of library services on students’ academic performance. The respondents were asked to state whether self-instructional modules were interactive and the information provided helpful. Their access to specialized IT services was also examined. Responses were compiled and reported in Table 4.12.
Table 4.12 Influence of Library on academic performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library services influences performance (%)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.12 shows that 26.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that library services influenced academic performance, while 23.3% agreed. 10.0% disagreed while 5.0% strongly disagreed. 15% were undecided.
Table 4.13 Learner Satisfaction with Library Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The printed materials and online documentation on my course give me the information needed</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been able to specialized equipment such as IT facilities or rooms when I needed to</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of the self-instructional course materials is satisfactory</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disaggregated by year of study and department, the concern on Library services was traced from Science in Nursing students who rated the library services at 3.38 and those in their Fourth year at 3.00. Higher ratings were noted from the Education & Counselling students. Students in the First, Second, Third and Fourth years of study rated the item at 3.46, 4.04, 2.25 and 3.42 respectively. Less concern was traced from the department of Education and Counselling with a score of 3.56 and those in the Department of Theology with 3.53.
4.5 Overall Learner Satisfaction with learner support services

The study finally sought to establish the overall learner satisfaction with the support services offered by the institution.

Table 4.14 Overall Learner Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Support Services are satisfactory</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 60 100.0

This was based on a roll-up questions that assessed satisfaction levels on the basis of experience with the institution and the degree program pursued. The data showed that most of the respondents were generally satisfied with the services with average rating of 80%. Students at KeMU were in agreement that their degree would support them in their prospective career, further study or other individual goals as evidenced by the high score of 93%, but there was discomfort among the students with the statement that they should have sought more advice before enrolling in an external program of study with a score of 63%.

Table 4.14 shows that 51.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that library services influenced academic performance, while 28.3% agreed. 13.3 % disagreed while 5.0% strongly disagreed. 1.7 % was undecided.
4.6 Institution’s Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement

To identify key strengths and opportunities for improvement, respondents were asked to describe in an open-ended mode the areas they like about their respective departments and the areas they would wish to see improvements. Table 4.15 shows their responses.

Table 4.15 Institution’s Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring of institution’s strengths</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving detailed comments on students’ work</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff competence in ODL programs</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate assignment time</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff availability</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopting current technology in Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely communication</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.15 shows that giving detailed comments on students’ marked work scored 65%, Staff availability 58%, and adequate time for assignments were scored some 45% of the institution’s strengths. Staff competence in ODL programs scored 36% while adopting current technology in teaching and learning and timely communication scored 12% and 18% respectively.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the last one of the Research project report. It covers the Summary of Findings, Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations, and closes with Suggestions for further research. The study sets a stage where adult learners have been enrolling in higher education, but due to many social roles enshrouding them, have found distance education the best option. Institutions of higher learning face the challenge of providing comprehensive learner support services to distance learners. This may result in one or more of these; failure in exams, hence re-sits and re-takes, low scores, low graduation rates and at times, dropping out of the programme. The basic presumption of the study is that learner support services have some influence on learners’ academic achievements. The main concern of this study is to answer the question, “To what extent?” The research questions and objectives were based on four variables: orientation, mentoring, feedback and library services. Questionnaires with structured and unstructured items were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from 60 respondents from the departments of Education and Counselling, Theology and Science in Nursing. Their demographic characteristics, which include age, gender, marital status, year of study and the department they are enrolled in were analyzed in Chapter Four.

5.2 Summary of findings

Based on the learners’ demographic characteristics, the results revealed that most of the students enrolled in the three departments were below 29 years of age, forming 30% of the student population. Only 5% were 45 and above. Together with age, gender was a significant variable. Female students made up 75% of the student population while male students made up the remaining 25%. Distribution by marital status shows that 66.6% of the respondents were married, 6.7% were widowed while 26.7% were single. Respondents were at four levels of study. Students in the first year of study comprised 45% of the population, those in their second year made up 15%. Third year students and those in the Fourth year made up 23.3% and 16.7% respectively. Finally, distributed by departments, those in the department of
Education & Counselling made up 35%, while those enrolled in Theology and Science in Nursing made up 31.7% and 33.3% respectively.

The first objective of the study was to examine the extent to which orientation influenced academic performance of Open and distance students. Respondents were presented with a range of five statements and asked to rate their level of agreement with each. They sought to establish the role of orientation in enabling the respondents to adjust to student life. This was broadly intended to determine how well the institution was deemed to have articulated its orientation program as well as the extent to which the students were deemed to identify with these guidelines. The results indicated clearly that the institution had competent staff in orienting the students as depicted by a high score of 70%. While 15% of the respondents were neutral, 15% of them expressed dissatisfaction, hence need for the institution to create orientation programs that matched students’ expectations. On average, most of the respondents expressed satisfaction on the orientation services offered by the institution.

The second objective was to assess the extent to which mentoring influenced performance. The indicators to measure the adequacy of mentoring for students were: Obtaining helpful information, good advice on handling courses, opportunities to interact socially, and welfare to meet learner needs. Respondents were in agreement that mentoring services addressed students individual needs as evidenced by the high score of 78.4%. While 13.3% of the respondents could neither agree nor disagree, a low percentage of 8.3 expressed discomfort in the institution’s provision of services to meet their individual needs. Results showed satisfaction with mentoring services.

The third objective of this study was to evaluate the extent to which feedback influenced academic performance. From the review of Literature, experience in higher education reveals positive correlation between instructor-student interaction and academic achievement. Respondents were asked to determine whether the feedback they received from the faculty was prompt. Whereas 70% the respondents agreed that they received detailed comments on their work, A small percentage of the respondents felt that the institution lacked proper timelines and clarity in marking of students' work indicated by the lowest scores of 15%. The other 15% were undecided. On average, responses indicated students’ satisfaction with the feedback they received from the faculty.
The fourth and last objective of the study was to establish the extent to which library services influenced academic performance. Respondents were asked whether library services were accessible and whether the learning materials were interactive. Except for the IT facilities which were found to be scarce, majority of the respondents agreed that the quality of learning resources was satisfactory.

On average, the level of overall learner satisfaction was rated at 80%, which was relatively high. The issue of the degrees being studied supporting the graduates in their prospective career scored an overwhelming 93%. Nonetheless, a comparatively lower score of 63.55% indicated that the respondents should have sought more advice before enrolling in an external program of study. Disaggregated by department and year of study, the concern on the general learner satisfaction can be traced from the Department of Education & Counselling and among the Second year students.

5.3 Discussions of Findings

Although it is difficult to distinctively separate study results from discussions, effort has been made to restrict discussions only to the highlights of the report findings, thus avoiding much repetition. The significance of the results was assessed in the light of the objectives and the state of the debate in the field as discussed in the literature review. The study sought to examine the influence of Learner Support services on the academic performance of ODL students at Kenya Methodist University. Student satisfaction with Learner Support Services was measured using four variables: Orientation, Mentoring, Feedback and Library Services. To begin with, five demographic characteristics of the respondents’ were considered for the study. These were age, gender, marital status, year of study and the department in which the respondents were enrolled. In the respondents’ distribution by age, study findings indicated that 95% of the respondents were below 45 years, with those below 29 years comprising 30% of the sub-population as compared to those at 45 and above, who made only 5.0% of the total respondents. It could be argued that these young adults seem to prefer distance education to the conventional class room because of commitments at work and raising young families.
Considering respondents’ genders, three as many times female as male had enrolled in the programme. The gender imbalance could imply that more female than male students were being attracted to distance education. Regarding respondents’ marital status, 66.6% of them were married with only 26.7% of them single. The rest were widowed. Findings show that the greatest percentage of the respondents is comprised of married adults. The findings fit in the review of literature where Keegan (1993) describes distance learners as ‘typically older than traditional students with the average age being more than 25 years and, most of them being female. Many are married, have full-time employment and earn high income.’

Respondents were also distributed among the four years of study. Findings showed that the greatest percentage of the respondents (45%) were in their first year, while the rest (55%) were distributed among the second, third and fourth years of study. This might be taken to indicate a rising enrolment rate in the distance programmes. Further, respondents were disaggregated by the department they had enrolled in. The department of Education & Counselling had an enrolment of 35% against 33.3% and 31.7% for the departments of Science in Nursing and Theology respectively. Despite the results showing a higher enrolment in Education & Counselling, intake rates in the three departments were at a close range. It can be derived from the results that more teachers are enrolling in distance programmes than other professionals. Responses were sought on the influence of learner support services on academic performance as viewed through the four variables of the study: orientation, mentoring, feedback and library services. The first item of study was student orientation. Based on the results of analyzed data, 70% the respondents agreed that orientation influenced performance, 15% of the respondents disagreed while the other 15% were undecided. Findings on students’ satisfaction with orientation services revealed that the way the institution had articulated its orientation programmes was rated highly by the respondents. On average, results indicated a satisfactory level of student orientation. However, programmes matching students’ expectations were rated low, indicating the need for the departments to revisit the services. While it is common practice in ODL programs to try and have students fit into pre-determined course objectives following a presumption that certain characteristics are common to all distance learners; it is undisputable that there exists a high level of heterogeneity among them. It is therefore the role of orientation services to prepare learners for the responsibilities and expectations of participating in distance courses in less threatening environments. In an attempt to provide programs
matching students’ expectations, it can be suggested that needs assessment be carried out. According to Carey & Dick, (1991), identifying learners’ needs through needs assessment reveals their backgrounds and this gives the instructors and the instructional message designers a base for planning instruction or learning and the methods to apply. Although orientation is normally conducted at the beginning of the course, orientating students each time they are taking up new courses would possibly minimize the uncertainties that distance students face. Distance students will need to be made aware of the course demands early enough and be warned of procrastination.

The next item of study was student mentoring. Mentoring relationships are distinguished by a ‘richness of interdependence between two people’ whereby the mentor provides model of success and performance, advice and encouragement and in return, the student provides the mentor with a validation of his /her professional abilities (Glazer & Stein, 2000). As indicated by the high score of 78.4%, mentoring services have been adequately availed to students at KeMU. Only a comparatively lower score of 8.3% depicts some gap. It may be deduced that there has been some level of incongruence in the services offered and the students’ personal needs. Moore’s Theory of Transactional Distance explains that there exist gaps in psychological potentials, hence misunderstanding between behaviours of instructors and learners. It is therefore hoped that the departments will continue upholding those services.

Feedback was the item that followed mentoring. From the review of literature, experience in higher education reveals positive correlation between instructor-student interaction and academic achievement. Emphatically, research suggests that ‘there is no single factor more critical than the feedback that open learners receive on their progress’ (Race, 1998:124).

From the study findings, 70% of the respondents agreed that the departments gave prompt feedback. However, clarity in marking students’ work and proper timelines were lacking. It might be necessary therefore that the departments review programme schedules and clarify timelines and define clear criteria used when marking students’ assignments.

Although there are many factors responsible for students’ strained performance, Keegan’s Theory of Interaction and Communication stresses that lack of interaction and communication between department and the learner is responsible for weak interpersonal communication. Students expressed dissatisfaction with the institution’s effectiveness in communicating changes made in the course program. Misinformation, delayed
communication or total lack of communication have been known to result to such issues as students missing tutorials, getting late for exams or sometimes late submission of assignments. Where possible, students may need to access the year’s calendar of events so they can plan the course activities well ahead of time. In case of changes, effective communication to the affected students needs to be ensured to minimize inconveniences on the side of the students.

In distance learning, the role of self-instructional materials cannot be overemphasized. This is basically because these are the media through which the distance instructor communicates to her distance students. In this study, learner satisfaction with library services was measured based on three aspects: how informative the printed materials and online documentation were; the quality of self-instructional materials and ready accessibility to IT specialized equipment. The results indicated that only 50% of the respondents expressed satisfaction. There was however, a portion of the respondents who expressed dissatisfaction in accessing IT facilities. The quality of printed materials, in terms of readability and content complexity is crucial in instructional message delivery. One of the hallmarks of distance learning is the separation of the learner from the teacher. That explains why a high level of interactivity characterizes a well designed instructional message. Further, access to library services and specialized IT facilities form essential learning resources for the off-campus students. On the whole, instructor through learning resources aids in alleviating the perceived isolation of the distance learner. It could perhaps be argued that dissatisfaction with accessing IT equipment was as a result of inadequate facilities for the prospective users. From the students’ point of view, we can say that except for the few areas cited in the summary as requiring interventions, findings might be taken as evidence of satisfactory support services offered to ODL students at Kenya Methodist University. It is particularly worth noting that basically all students believed that the degrees they were studying for were bound to support them in their prospective careers, further studies or other individual goals. While staff were commended for giving detailed comments on students marked assignments(65%), adequate assignment time (45%) and staff availability(58%) were cited as some areas of the institution’s strengths, staff competence in ODL programmes (36%), adoption of current technology in teaching and learning and timely communication were cited as areas needing improvement. The indicators of performance were learner satisfaction, and student retention. It was not possible to access students’ grades to determine if performance was satisfactory since it would be

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considered unethical. There is a gap in the study in that it did not identify cases of attrition due to lack of support services.

Although ideally orientation of students is that crucial, it is barely successful for distance students since they normally do not start all together. This will lead to a conclusion that since distance students enroll into the program at different times it is therefore likely that some respondents in the current study may never have been oriented into the course.

5.4 Conclusions

With the understanding that no study is completely free from flaws, the researcher wishes to qualify conclusions that what the study has yielded as findings are not necessarily facts. Rather, they are respondents’ views of the questions of the study. The study results show that the respondents were satisfied with the learner support services provided by the institution. From the foregoing discussions, any claims that this might suggest that learner support services delivered at KeMU are comprehensive and enhance academic achievement need to be qualified by the fact that adult learners are goal-driven and are apt to responding to approaches which suggest immediacy in facilitating problem-solving.

According to the results of students’ responses on their satisfaction on the orientation services offered by the institution, it can be concluded that, despite being offered only at the beginning of the course and falling short of meeting many of the students’ expectations, comprehensive services which helped them adjust to student life were available to the students and most of them were able to access them. This is a clear response to the study’s first objective: To examine the influence of orientation on academic performance. Responses therefore support that orientation influences academic performance for distance students.

The second objective sought to establish the extent to which mentoring influenced academic performance. Respondents expressed satisfaction with mentoring services offered by the institution, notwithstanding the view that the services were found lacking in addressing
learners’ personal needs. From the responses given, the study concluded that mentoring influenced academic performance of the distance students.

The third objective was to assess the extent to which feedback influenced academic performance for distance students. Asked whether they received feedback from the departments, a large portion of respondents agreed that they received prompt feedback from the departments. In spite of the remark that the departments lacked clear marking criteria for the students’ work, respondents however agreed that their assignments had detailed comments. This might imply that the students were satisfied with the feedback services offered by the institution. A conclusion can then be reached that feedback influences academic performance for distance students.

The fourth and final objective of the study was to establish the influence of library services to academic performance among distance students. The respondents were asked whether library services were readily accessible and students’ self-instructional materials interactive. They were also asked to state if specialized IT equipment were available. They were in agreement that although IT facilities were scarce, the other learning resources were accessible. They also agreed that self-instructional materials were interactive. Students therefore expressed satisfaction with the library services provided by the institution. It can therefore conclude that library services influence academic performance.

This study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in distance studies by bringing on board the broader perspective of the need for ‘connectedness for the distance student. This happens when the distance student gets connected to the faculty by understanding the laid down policies, student life and the wider community of learners through orientation; study materials, by getting involved through interactivity used in instruction and related tasks such as assignments, projects, group presentations. In mentoring, the learner finds a role-model from whom they can receive advice, encouragement and behaviour moderation, constantly receiving feedback about their progress. To be brief, this study advocates that all practitioners of distance learning devise approaches that deliver the distance learner from that feeling of perceived isolation. Finally what this study has covered is far from being exhaustive and there are still many gaps that require more such studies to fill.
5.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

(i) The departments need to review orientation services so as to match students’ expectations.

(ii) Departments offering distance programmes should try to follow up the enrolled students so as to identify at-risk students early enough so as to provide the necessary interventions.

(iii) Staff needs more competence in handling ODL programmes.

(iv) Departments offering ODL programmes need to expand mentoring services to address individual learner needs.

(v) The institution needs to increase specialized IT facilities to enhance access.

(vi) Departments need to improve on being timely in communicating important information to the learners.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

A study of this magnitude would be inadequate to exhaustively address the gaps in Learner Support Service for ODL students. Therefore, the researcher recommends that similar studies be carried out to try and fill the existing as well as emerging gaps in this mode of study. Such studies may address such areas as “The influence of gender on enrolment in ODL programmes”.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Introduction Letter

Dear Respondent,

I am a 2008 KeMU alumna pursuing a Masters programme in Distance Education (MDE) at the University of Nairobi. I am undertaking a study which seeks to establish “The influence of learner support services on the academic performance of ODLM students at Kenya Methodist University.” I humbly request you to take some of your time to respond to this questionnaire with as much integrity as you can. All the information provided on the study will be treated with a high level of confidentiality. This is sorely an academic paper with no other purpose but to enhance learner support in Open and distance programmes in our private and public universities.

For your cooperation,

Thank you.

Gakuu Watiri Jacinta
APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE TO DISTANCE LEARNERS

You are kindly requested to fill in this questionnaire to the best of your knowledge. Your identity will be treated with utmost confidentiality. The information you give is only required for research purpose. Please tick the correct answer.

SECTION A

Background Information of the respondents

1. Sex of the respondent
   - Male
   - Female

2. The age of the respondent
   - Below 29
   - 30 - 34
   - 35 - 39
   - 40 - 44
   - 45 - 49
   - 50 and above

3. The marital status of the respondent
   - Single
   - Married
   - Separated
   - Divorced
   - Widowed
4. In which year of study is the respondent?
   - Year 1
   - Year 2
   - Year 3
   - Year 4

5. In which department is the respondent?
   - Education & Counselling
   - Theology
   - Science in Nursing

SECTION B

Questions on Orientation

6. Student Orientation matches my expectations.
   - 5=Strongly agree
   - 4= Agree
   - 3= Undecided
   - 2= Disagree
   - 1= Strongly disagree
   - 0= Not applicable
7. Orientation gave me awareness course requirements

5 = Strongly agree
4 = Agree
3 = Undecided
2 = Disagree
1 = Strongly disagree
0 = Not applicable

8. The workload for my degree is appropriate.

5 = Strongly agree
4 = Agree
3 = Undecided
2 = Disagree
1 = Strongly disagree
0 = Not applicable

9. The staff is good at explaining things.

5 = Strongly agree
4 = Agree
3 = Undecided
2 = Disagree
1 = Strongly disagree
0 = Not applicable
10. The staff has made the course interesting

5= Strongly agree
4= Agree
3= Undecided
2= Disagree
1= Strongly disagree
0= Not applicable

SECTION C

Questions on Feedback

11. Is Information about what is required to pass courses/modules and obtain a particular class of degree clear?---------------------------------------------------------------
-----------------------------------------------
-----------------------------------------------

If no, what additional information would you require in order to succeed in your study?------
-----------------------------------------------
-----------------------------------------------
-----------------------------------------------

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12. Feedback on my assignment has been prompt.

   5= Strongly agree
   4= Agree
   3= Undecided
   2= Disagree
   1= Strongly disagree
   0= Not applicable

13. The criteria used for marking have been clear in advance

   5= Strongly agree
   4= Agree
   3= Undecided
   2= Disagree
   1= Strongly disagree
   0= Not applicable

14. I have received detailed comments on my work

   5= Strongly agree
   4= Agree
   3= Undecided
   2= Disagree
   1= Strongly disagree
   0= Not applicable
15. Feedback on my work has helped me to clarify things I did not understand.

5 = Strongly agree  
4 = Agree  
3 = Undecided  
2 = Disagree  
1 = Strongly disagree  
0 = Not applicable

SECTION D

Questions on Academic support

16. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies

5 = Strongly agree  
4 = Agree  
3 = Undecided  
2 = Disagree  
1 = Strongly disagree  
0 = Not applicable

17. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to

5 = Strongly agree  
4 = Agree  
3 = Undecided  
2 = Disagree  
1 = Strongly disagree  
0 = Not applicable
18. Good advice was available from my department when I had questions about my studies.

   5= Strongly agree
   4= Agree
   3= Undecided
   2 =Disagree
   1= Strongly disagree
   0=Not applicable

19. The support and supervision I receive from academic staff enable me to study.

   5= Strongly agree
   4= Agree
   3= Undecided
   2 =Disagree
   1= Strongly disagree
   0=Not applicable

20. Any changes in the degree or teaching have been communicated effectively.

   5= Strongly agree
   4= Agree
   3= Undecided
   2 =Disagree
   1= Strongly disagree
   0=Not applicable
21. The study programme is well-organized and running smoothly.

  5= Strongly agree
  4= Agree
  3= Undecided
  2= Disagree
  1= Strongly disagree
  0= Not applicable

22. The printed materials and online documentation on my courses/modules give me the information I need.

  5= Strongly agree
  4= Agree
  3= Undecided
  2= Disagree
  1= Strongly disagree
  0= Not applicable
23. I have been able to access specialized equipment, such as IT facilities or rooms when I needed to.

5 = Strongly agree  
4 = Agree  
3 = Undecided  
2 = Disagree  
1 = Strongly disagree  
0 = Not applicable

24. The quality of the self-instructional course materials is satisfactory.

5 = Strongly agree  
4 = Agree  
3 = Undecided  
2 = Disagree  
1 = Strongly disagree  
0 = Not applicable
SECTION F

Questions on Mentoring

25. Good advice is available for handling course workload

5= Strongly agree  
4= Agree  
3= Undecided  
2 =Disagree  
1= Strongly disagree  
0=Not applicable

26. Are there times you have found yourself uncomfortable with your academic counselor/tutor?

If yes, what would you have preferred?

27. There is sufficient provision of welfare and learner support services to meet my needs.

5= Strongly agree  
4= Agree  
3= Undecided  
2 =Disagree  
1= Strongly disagree  
0=Not applicable
28. When needed, the information and advice offered by welfare and learner support services has been helpful.

5= Strongly agree
4= Agree
3 = Undecided
2 = Disagree
1= Strongly disagree
0= Not applicable

29. I have had plenty of opportunities to interact socially with other students

5= Strongly agree
4= Agree
3= Undecided
2 = Disagree
1= Strongly disagree
0= Not applicable
SECTION G

Questions on Overall learner satisfaction

30. My degree will support me in my prospective career, further study or other individual goals

5= Strongly agree
4= Agree
3= Undecided
2= Disagree
1= Strongly disagree
0= Not applicable

31. Do you feel there are other emerging issues that are likely to influence your performance and may need to be addressed in the learner support system?

32. I am very satisfied with my choice of enrolling in a degree program in this University

5 Strongly agree
4= Agree
3= Undecided
2= Disagree
1= Strongly disagree
0= Not applicable
33. I should have sought more advice before I enrolled in an external program of study.

5= Strongly agree
4= Agree
3= Undecided
2= Disagree
1= Strongly disagree
0= Not applicable

34.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative:</td>
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