

# Factors Affecting Provision of Learners Support Service in Open and Distance Learning Programs in Tanzania

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the factors affecting the provision of learners' support services in open and distance learning programs. This study used a qualitative approach that uses words in data collection, data gathering, interpreting, organizing, and presenting data. This study was carried out at the Institute of Adult Education in Dar es Salaam campus. The area was selected for the purpose of generating reliable information for making solutions to this problem due to the presence of open and distance learning programs. The study was carried out to identify types of learners support services needed to distance learners in Open and Distance Learning programs (ODL programs) and the study suggests better strategies to be employed to improve the provision of learner's support services to learners in ODL programs. This study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data carried out through the questionnaire and interview which involved sample size of fifty-one (51) respondents including ODL coordinator, ODL learners, and lecturers. This study employed a descriptive method of data analysis. Basing on the study findings the respondents contributed by mentioned types of learners support services needed to distance learners which included academic support services which provided by the tutors basing on all teaching and learning process, administrative support service which involve the help in all office service and information, setting of centres and distribution of materials and guidance and counselling service which deals with comforting learners and make them feel cared in order to enable them to carry well their learning process. The study findings also revealed several strategies to be employed to improve the provision of learners' support services to learners in ODL programs including employ the advanced technology, having trained personnel for provision of learners support services, and being more accountable. This study recommends that the organization must know that the better provision of adult education programs lay on its shoulder. It must have a good system to monitor every Open and Distance Education program so as to make sure the education provided meets the qualifications and meet the needs of the learners. Thus, the evaluation process must be done before, in the middle, and at the end of the program so as to know the strength and weaknesses of the program and take measures to improve the provision of those programs. This would help to strengthen the provision of learners to support services and attract many learners in ODL programs.*

Keywords: ODL programs; Learners Support Services; Materials and Guidance; Institute of Adult Education

## 1. Introduction

Introduction of learners support services in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) went hand in hand with the emergence of ODL in the world. Due to nature of distance learning where the teachers and the learners are separated geographically, thus the provision of support services becomes inevitable. ODL in recent time has thus emerged as an alternative mode for education all over the world especially in developing countries (Kishole, 2009). The student support services have been very crucial in facilitating the development and strength of open and distance learning since its introduction. Learner support services are services that learner can access in order to carry out the learning process. In distance education support service is concern with range of human and non-human resource to guide and facilitate the education transaction. This resource may be library facilities, various media and software programme, community leaders or they could be various social- economic variables such as student's financial self-sufficiency and capacity to cope with their roles and responsibilities in the family and community. (Power, 2010).

In Turkish distance education, Learner support that addresses learner needs depend on the unique needs and characteristics of the learner. One important factor that contributes to success is the motivation or confidence of the learner's older learner may need more support in testing environments. Learner in distance (higher)

education system are adult and so, if they want to know learner needs in distance education system, they must know the adult learner characteristic's like experience—base, experts, independent, life-centered, solution driven skill seeking and motivation (Dillon and Blanchard, 2011).

In India, The India Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has adopted a model to provide highly integrated learner support service through the network of study centre, regional centre and the headquarters. One of the main objective of IGNOU has been to provide opportunities of higher education to large segment of population and to develop new programme for adult learners for whom formal education system was quite difficult or impossible various learners support services are offered like establishment of regional and study centre, pre-admission services, information services (information about academic programmes), post admission services (self-learning material dispatch, examination and evaluation services) and additional support services (change of medium, elective courses, change of address arrangement of personal contact programme) and other services (Jha, 2016)

In Nigeria, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) come to extend the learner support services since 2003. It started as unit but later came to become a Directorate. At the NOUN an extensive and comprehensive learner support services through the director and his support staff at the headquarters. The human resources under the director's include study Centre Directors, Student counselors and instruction-cum Tutorial facilitators. Among support services provided are academic counselling, Vocational guidance and career development services, psycho-social counselling services and like (Lee, 2013).

In Tanzania, various ODL based institutions offer a wide range of learner support services to ensure the targeted goal is reached. Among them are Open University of Tanzania and Institute of Adult Education which have offered support services since the establishment of distance learning programmes, for instance, Open University of Tanzania started to offer learner support services since 1992. In one way there are some successes in the provision of the learners support services for instance these services have aided many learners to complete their studies. On the other hand, there are emerged challenges like lack of quality learners support services that has caused some learner to drop the studies. Therefore, this study was examined the factors affecting provision of learners support services in open and distance learning programmes so as to provide theoretical help to those education organizations providing ODL programmes to be able to strengthen the provision of learners support services and ensure the provision of quality education (Nombo et al, 2020a).

Learners support services are very important in the facilitation of Open and Distance Learning everywhere in the world. They have been acting like a catalyst to speed up the growth and improvement of ODL in a number of ways. Support services are crucial from the emotional perspective providing support services to the distance learning institution is an important part of creating the feeling of belonging for student who do not have access to traditional clues. Various institutions which providing ODL programmes have been tried to provide many forms of the learning support services which can be categorized into three major groups namely administrative support, academic services and psychological support services. Learner who do not come to the campus need access to academic advisory services. Learners contact with trained academic advisory is crucial because both the learners and credit granting institution need to be confident that information given to learners is appropriate and accurate. Student also need to access outside resources that may be of educational interest to them.

Many challenges have been emerged regarding the provision of effective learner support services in various ODL institutions. These challenges have caused a huge number of the ODL learners fail to complete their course and drop out of the programme. Due to this situation the provision of education through ODL mode become more complicated and needs immediately measures to improve it so as to ensure education is provided to each one despite the circumstances he or she has. (Nombo et al, 2020b), (Bundala et al 2020b).

Despite the efforts done by various institutions providing ODL programmes, not much is known about the effectiveness of the learner support service provided to distance students who study through open and distance learning. Therefore, this study was based on examining factors affecting provision of learners support services in open and distance learning programmes as well as recommending the best way of promoting quality learner support services to ODL learners so as to improve the provision of education through ODL mode. That data obtained from this study would help the management of Institute of Adult Education through the department concerned with open and distance learning in better planning and provision of education through open secondary schools.

The information obtained from the study would help the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training to take appropriate measures in monitoring the quality of the learners support services in those institutions which provide learning through ODL in order to improve the quality of education. And lastly, the findings from the

study would enable other researchers who carry out a similar study to get a starting point and reference to improve their studies. This study investigates the factors affecting provision of learners support service in open and distance learning programmes case study of Institute of Adult Education.

## 2. Material and Methods

A study which conducted in India, in Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has revealed that the learners support services are categorized into three different models. The first two models mainly depend on the print media where the learners are sent the printed materials. They send back the assignment responses to the study center for evaluation. In the second step model, additional compulsory seminars, workshop, dissertation also included. The third category is based on the U.K Open University model where in different forms of communication and are offered to the learners who choose them as per their requirement. These included mediated of face-to-face or combination of both through a network of study centres, regional centres or communication networks (Sewart, 2010),(Bundala et al,2020b).

The study which conducted in South Africa on the provision of learner support in the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) programme at a specific university, the University of South Africa (Unisa). Extensive literature has been reviewed on the development of ODL as a mode of higher education provision, the characteristics of ODL, the rationale for ODL provision, the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in ODL, learner support in ODL and the state of ABET in the South African and Unisa contexts. The ABET department provides a range and mix of learner support services. The learner support systems available in ABET are group discussions, tutorials, workshops, my Unisa, practical work in ABET centres, telephone support, feedback on assignments, study groups etc. The ODL model entails a student-centred approach that is based on integrated systems and engaged learning. The technologies, such as telephone, multimedia CDs and DVDs, video and audio conferencing, SMSs, cell phones, e-mail and discussion forums via my Unisa have been proposed to offer new possibilities for supporting learning at Unisa. Unisa has regional centres throughout the provinces. However the ABET students are mostly in rural areas. They have to travel to cities and towns in order to access learner support services (Unisa Report, 2015)

A study that conducted in Botswana has shown that the learners support services are widely provided most of the distance learning institutions to their students. In most institutions these services are categorized into three major types namely; academic support services, counselling support and administrative support services. Academic support services involve tutorial and mentoring. Counselling support services involve counselling support service in resolving personal difficulties. And administrative support involves registration, monitoring and evaluation and preparation of study canters (Zuma, 2014),(Bundala et al ,2020a).

Learners support services are very important to the learner and many studies has written importance of learners basing upon different kinds of the learners support services. According to Kember and Dekkers (2013), the learner support service is important a service that needs to be provided by the institution to the learners because of the characteristics of distance Learners themselves. They are isolated and come from diverse backgrounds economic, social, education and occupational. The provision of such educational support system ensures the facilitation of communication between students, the academic staff as well as administrator's to cater for administrative needs of student. Examples of the services contained within this support system are counselling services orientation programme, course registration, news bulletin and the student association (Katete et al,2020a).

Martin (2012), argue that support services are important from the emotional perspective. Traditional students have many physical clue of their attachment to the institution. Providing support services to the distance learning population is an important part of creating the feeling of belonging for the student who do not have access to traditional clues. Some other important of the important services that should be considered include accessing library materials and facilities, delivery of course materials, traditional mail services, counselling, mentoring and others. Effective learner support services and system are very important elements and part of distance education programme. These services and systems are the human and non-human resources that learner can access in to carry out the learning process. In a distance education system analyzing the effectiveness of the teaching and learning experience is very important. (Nyangarika et al, 2020a) understanding the socio-cultural context is the key to developing appropriate support systems for distance learners. A study conducted in Turkey, shows that Turkish support services observe the socio-cultural context. Patronage systems that foster values of obedience hours and respect for authority are evident in Turkey educational system through students' respect and re loyalty toward their professors (Murphy, 2011), (Katete et al,2020b).

The need for learner support services in distance education comes from the recognition that distance learning is often mediated by networked computers with individualistic interfaces that require learners to work alone during most of the learning process. Since neither the instructor nor their peers are physically present for help and direct access to learning resources and facilities is somewhat limited, distance learners have unique needs that go far beyond the existing student support services in traditional education settings. (Lee, 2013), (Nyangarika et al, 2020b). The services provide all information based on learner needs, encourage students to fully utilize the available facilities, motivate learners to assimilate what they learn, solve academic and related problems through counselling and create a friendly environment among students, the faculty and administration. Since the regional center is the delivery point of learner support services to students the regional center carries out specific functions that aim to satisfy customer needs and ensure studies are carried out effectively and efficiently (Major, 2015).

### 3. Methods

This study used a qualitative approach which uses words in data collection, data gathering, interpreting, organizing and presenting data. The area was selected for the purpose of generating reliable information for making a solution of this problem due to the presence of open and distance learning programmes. The study was carried out to identify types of learners support services needed to distance learners in Open and Distance Learning programmes (ODL programmes) and the study suggests better strategies to be employed to improve the provision of learners support services to learners in ODL programmes. This study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were carried out through the questionnaire and interview which involved a sample size of fifty-one (51) respondents including ODL coordinator, ODL learners and lecturers. This study employed a descriptive method of data analysis. This study was carried out at the Institute of Adult Education in Dar es Salaam campus. The area was selected for the purpose of generating reliable information for making a solution of this problem due to the presence of open and distance learning programmes. This study involved the population of Institute of Adult Education by focusing on learners, lecturers and coordinators of ODL programmes. This study involved the following sample frame; learners, lecturers and coordinators of ODL programmes. The study used probability sampling procedures where the simple random method was used to obtain the sample. The study used this design because it enabled to provide more information about factors affecting the provision of learners support services to ODL programmes.

### 4. Results

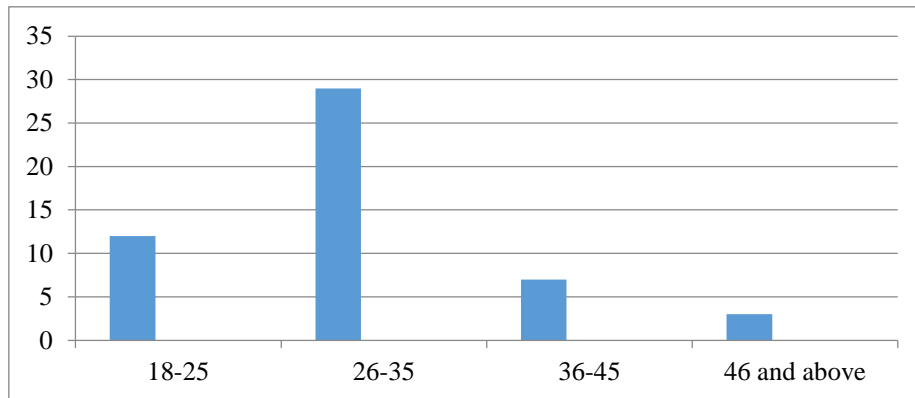
The study findings show that the factors affecting the provision of learners support services in open and distance learning programmes. The findings analysis made on the basis of the specific objectives including: to identify types of learners support services needed to distance learners, to examine the hindrance in the provision of learners support services to distance learners in ODL programmes and to suggest better strategies to be employed to improve the provision of learners support services to learners in ODL programmes. The results are presented through subsections as explained below;

**Table 4.1 Actual number of Respondents (N=51)**

Name of Respondents	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	F	M		
ODL learners	21(53%)	19(47%)	40	78%
Lecturers	3(50%)	3(50%)	6	12%
ODL coordinators	2(40%)	3(60%)	5	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>26(51%)</b>	<b>25(49%)</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100%</b>

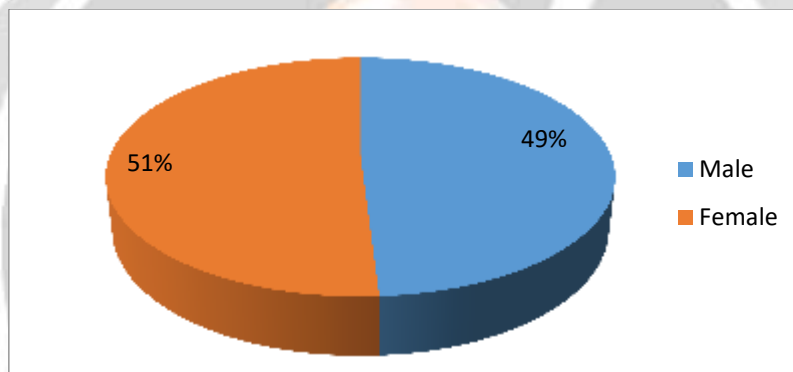
**Source: Field data (2020)**

As indicated from Table 4.1, the study involved a total number of 41 respondents from different categories among which 26 were female and 25 were male. Findings indicated that many respondents were ODL learners who were 78% of the sampled population. Adult education facilitators were 12% of the sampled population and ODL coordinators were 10% of the sampled population. This study involved different ages ranging from 19 years through 50 years as shown in (Figure 4.1).



**Figure 4.1 Age Description of Respondents**  
 Source: Field data (2020)

In the (Figure 4.1), 12 respondents had 18- 25 years, 29 respondents had 26-35 years and respondents who had 46 years and above were 3. Finding shows that respondents aged between 26-45 years were mainly participated in adult education than other ages. The study collected information from both, female and male respondents as indicated in the (Figure 4.2).



**Figure 4.2 Distribution of Respondents by Gender**  
 Source: Field Data (2020)

As data shown in (Figure 4.2, 25 respondents who participated in this study equal to 49% were males while 26 respondents who participated in this study equal to 51% were female. Data shows that female had participated more in this study than male. Respondents who involved in this study had different levels of education ranging from primary education through degree/masters.

These education levels are shown in (Table 4.2). As shown in the (Table 4.2), 30 respondents equal to 78% of the sampled population had advanced or college education and 11 respondents equal to 22% had university education (degree or masters). From the data, it shows that the large number of 78% of the respondents were acquired advanced or college level of education. This means that there was little number of the respondents who had the higher level of education which was about 22%. The findings were made on the bases of the specific objectives including to identify types of learners support services needed to distance learners, to examine the hindrance in provision of learners of support services to distance learners in ODL programmes and to suggest better strategies to be employed to improve the provision of learners support services to learners in ODL programmes. The responses presented through subsections as explained below;

**Table 4.2 Distribution of Respondents by Educational Level**

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Primary level	0	0
Secondary level	0	0
Advanced/college level	40	78%
Degree/masters level	11	22%

Source: Field Data (2020)

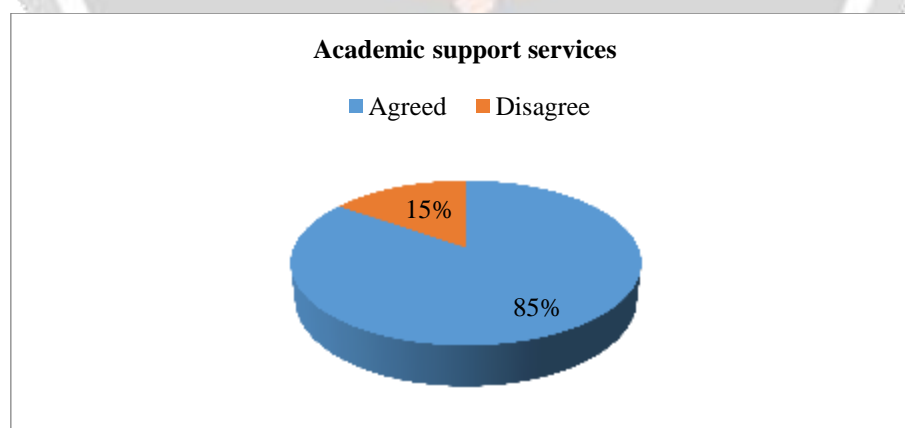
The study findings show that the types of learners support services needed to distance learners. The responses obtained through questionnaire from 46 respondents who were 40 ODL learners and 6 facilitators, showed that the types of learners' support services provided to ODL learners. (Table 4.3), as shows the types of learners' support services provided to ODL learners.

**Table 4.3 Types of learners' support services provided to ODL learners**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Academic support services	39	85%
Administrative support services	43	93%
Guidance and counselling services	41	89%

Source: Field Data (2019)

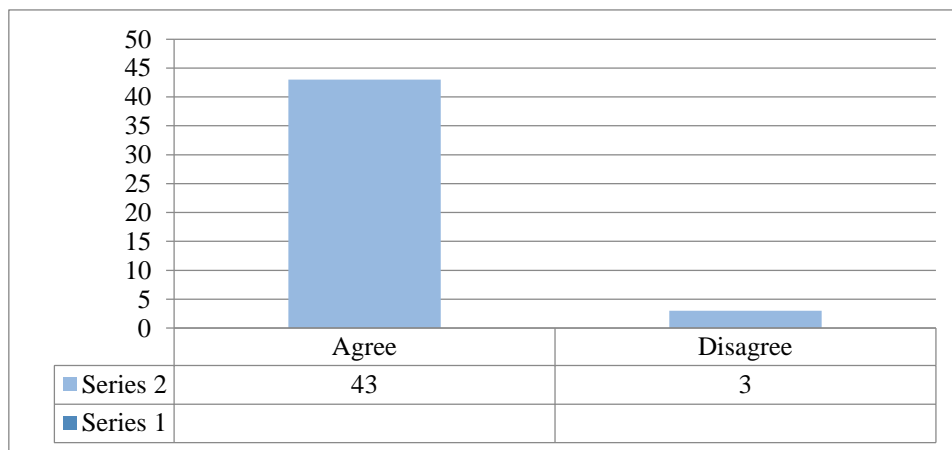
About 39 respondents among 46 who were equal to 85% of the sampled population mentioned that one of the learners support services provided to ODL learners is the academic support services. This is the service which includes all the tutorial assistance which aimed to impart skills and knowledge to the distance learners.



**Figure 4.3 Sample population supported academic support services**  
(Source: Field Data 2020)

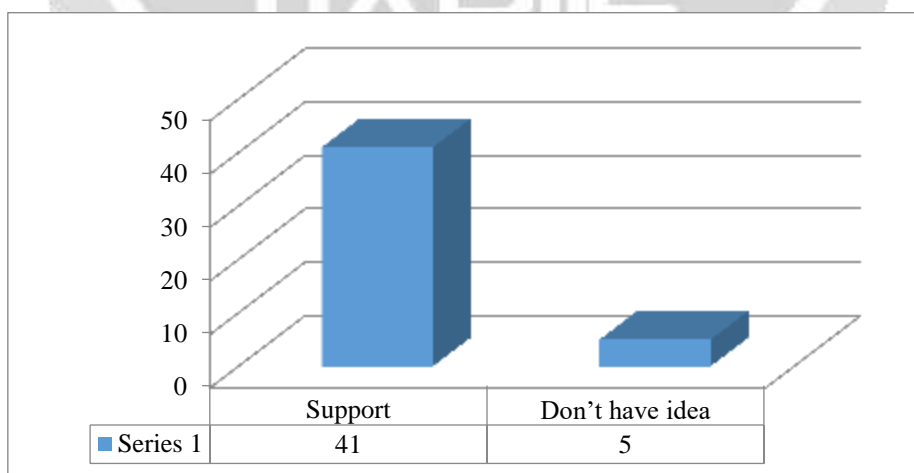
. The academic support services are mainly provided by the tutors who are responsible to conduct orientation to the distance learners on the nature and types of subjects offered by the institution, preparation of self-study materials, provision of assistance to learners when they couldn't understand the study materials and also to monitor and evaluate all the learning progress of distance learners. *One of the respondent said that; "Academic support services is of importance because it is the support services which enable ODL learners to get what they were seek from the institution and make them acquiring experience and attitude which changes their behaviour in technical range."*

In (Figure 4.4) shows that 43 respondents among 46 who were equal to 93% of the sampled population mentioned that another type of learners support services provided to ODL learners is the administrative support services. This is the crucial support services provided by administration of the institution providing open and distance learning programmes. The administrative support services including advertisement of the course offered by the institution, accreditation process of the institution, enrolment and admission of the distance learners, creation of profile of distance learners for restoration of their information and printing and distribution of study materials and preparation for the study centres. Also the administration of the institution providing open and distance learning programmes has to prepare for the place where face to face session would be held. The administration manages the provision of education and ensures quality is attained in the provision of education through open and distance learning. It is also a crucial service because it determines the existence of the institution.



**Figure 4.4 Sample population supported administrative support services (Source: Field Data 2020)**

In (Figure 4.5) shows that 41 respondents among 46 who were equal to 89% of the sampled population agreed that the last service provided to ODL learners is the guidance and counselling services. This is the support service which helped ODL learners to feel they are cared and can complete their study successful. The guidance services is provided mostly before the starting of the learning process whereby distance learners were guided on how to study in distance learning environment and also how to make decisions about the type of subjects they wanted to learn for their future benefits as shown in (Figure 4.5).



**Figure 4.6 Sample population supported guidance and counselling support services (Source: Field Data 2020)**

The counselling services provided to ODL learners after registration and admission. The counselling services provided to ODL learners to help them cope with environment of distance education and to give them comfort

so as to prevent mid-course drop out. From the data obtained respondents agreed to have awareness on the hindrance in provision of learners of support services to distance learners in ODL programmes including insufficient Infrastructure, poor technology used in providing learners support services, insufficient funds on organization and remoteness of learners. The study findings also revealed several strategies to be employed to improve the provision of learners support services to learners in ODL programmes including employ the advanced technology, having trained personnel for provision of learners support services and being more accountable.

## 5. Conclusion

This study found that various kind of learners support services provided to ODL learners could be grouped into three major types which were academic support services, administrative support services and guidance and counselling services. The study indicated that there is hindrance in provision of learners of support services to distance learners in ODL programmes including insufficient Infrastructure, poor technology used in providing learners support services, insufficient funds on organization and remoteness of learners. However, the findings showed that various strategies to be employed to improve the provision of learners support services to learners in ODL programmes including employ the advanced technology, having trained personnel for provision of learners support services and being more accountable. The institute must know that the better provision of adult education programs lay on it shoulder. It must have good system of monitor every Open and Distance Education programs so as to make sure the education provided meet the qualifications and meet the needs of the learners. Also the evaluation process must be done before, at the middle and at the end of the program so as to know the strength and weakness of the program and take measures to improve the provision of those programs. This would help to strengthen the provision of learners support services and attract many learners in ODL programmes.

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