# BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN DISTANCE EDUCATION: A CASE OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA - TANGA REGIONAL CENTRE

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DISTANCE EDUCATION OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA**

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## CERTIFICATION

The undersigned certifies that she has read and hereby recommend for acceptance by the Open University of Tanzania a dissertation entitled; ***Barriers to Effective Communication in Distance Education: A case of the Open University of Tanzania - Tanga Regional Centre"*** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Distance Education (M.Dist. Ed) of the Open University of Tanzania.

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Prof. Honoratha M. K. Mushi

(Supervisor)

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Date

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# DECLARATION

I, **David Masonga Mathias Nkingwa**, declare that this dissertation is my original work and that it has not been presented and will not be presented to any other university for a similar or any other degree award.

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Signature

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Date

# DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved mother Martina Magushani, to my dearest wife Theodosia Kalimi for their moral and material support without which I could not accomplish much of what makes this document. I extend my appreciation to my daughter Glory and my sons Mathias, Boniface, Antony, Patrick and Thomas for the encouragement they gave me when I was preparing this document. May God bless them all.

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# ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to investigate barriers to effective communication in distance education at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) - Tanga Regional Centre. Sixty nine respondents participated in the study through questionnaires, focused group discussions and semi- structured interviews. Data for the study were collected around the following focused themes: Communication barriers caused by OUT students, barriers caused by the OUT as an operating institution and barriers caused by English language as the medium of instruction. Tanga Regional Centre and Korogwe Teachers' College (KTC) which are OUT Examination centres were the areas of study. Meaning condensation technique was used to analyze the qualitative data which were obtained. Incompetence in Information Communication Technology (ICT) and English Language were among the main barriers to effective communication in provision and delivery of distance education at the OUT -Tanga Regional Centre. Furthermore, The OUT administration has not installed reliable internet services at Tanga Regional Centre and it had not digitized all her study materials. The study recommends that OUT students should study English language and ICT so as to be able to effectively interact with study materials. OUT students are advised to be serious in studying. The OUT administration is advised to digitize all of her study materials. Finally, the Government of Tanzania is urged to install electric power and internet services all over the country, allocate enough funds to enable OUT prepare and procure adequate teaching and learning resources. It is the right time for Kiswahili to be used together with English language so as to enable students who are incompetent in English language to use Kiswahili for their studies.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CD        -   Compact Disc

ICT       -   Information and Communication Technology

KTC      -   Korogwe Teachers' College

M.Dist. Ed.  -  Master in Distance Education

ODE      -   Open and Distance Education

ODL      -   Open Distance Learning

OUT      -   Open University of Tanzania

PED      -   Papers in Education & Development

TRC      -   Tanga Regional Centre

# CHAPTER ONE

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1    Background to the Problem

This chapter presents the background to the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study and specific objectives. It also presents research tasks and questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, delimitation of the study and definition of key terms. Finally, it briefly presents the summary of the chapter.

Education is essential for human resource development and for national development in general. (Nyerere, 1999)  However, in most of the developing countries, due to the limitation of resources it is almost impossible to educate all citizens through on-campus teaching (Kamal *et. al.,* 2001). Huge amount of money is needed to establish the infrastructure necessary for on-campus teaching but such money cannot be afforded by developing countries (ibid) such as Tanzania. Under these circumstances, to educate their population, developing countries are increasingly depending on Open Learning and Distance Education systems which are relatively cheap when economies of scale are attained.

Distance Education refers to a mode of learning in which student and instructors are mostly situated at different locations and learn at their own pace and time (Bates, 2005). Moore (1993) defined distance education as "the universe of teacher- learner relationships that exist when learners and instructors are separated by space and or by time. In the past, distance education was largely delivered by printed materials and audio tapes via postal services. Students usually had to study independently and

in isolation. With advances in communications systems and technologies, distance education can now take place through multiple media, such as radio broadcasts, videoconferencing and online learning platforms (Kamal *et. al.,* 2001).

In education context, communication is concerned with effective transmission of knowledge, skills, values, customs, attitudes, beliefs, habits and culture (Dimbley *et. al,* 1992). Communication may also imply exchange of thoughts, opinions or information through speech, writing or signs (Oxford Advanced Dictionary, 2000).

In a normal classroom setting, the medium of instruction can be one of the barriers that may hinder effective communication and consequently reduce the effectiveness of teaching and learning. For instance, if teachers do not give feedback in time to their students, students may be discouraged in their learning. If the medium of instruction is not clearly understood, the learners may not communicate effectively with the study materials and other sources of knowledge such as the current abundant information obtainable through internet sites.

Nasseh (1997) argued that provision and delivery of distance education needs existence of effective communication and that for successful learning and understanding of distance education all strategies of learning and teaching during instruction should not be constrained by any barrier. However, research has shown that there are many barriers that hinder smooth teaching and learning in distance education because of ineffective communication. For instance, Galusha (2001) estimated that 80% of the students enrolled in distance education faced various barriers when pursuing their studies through Open Universities. This was also

asserted by Zacharia (2008) who identified communication barrier between students and their instructors is one of the major causes of the increasing number of students drop-out from the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). This shows a certain level of failure to achieve one of the objectives of the OUT which is to provide higher education to many Tanzanians and to people around the world who can be studying while working or doing other activities (Mhehe, 2002).

Keegan (1986) believes that the separation between students and teachers imposed by the distance students and teachers in distance education removes a vital "link" of communication between these two parties. The link must be restored through overt institutional efforts so that the teaching-learning transaction may be "reintegrated" (Keegan, 1986, p. 120). Keegan hypothesized that students who did not receive adequate reintegration measures such as electronic or telephone communication, would be less likely to experience complete academic and social integration into institutional life. Consequently, such students would be more likely to drop out (Sheets, 1992).

Barriers to effective communication are likely to occur at the OUT because the distance education system has had several methodological deficiencies which need to be addressed. Moreover, face-to-face and radio programs which enhance communication have hardly been conducted due to financial constraints (PED NO. 20:1990, 89). Bhalalusesa (1999) noted that it has been difficult for OUT tutors and management to communicate with the students and vice versa due to lack of adequately developed network information technology systems within the country.

Meacham and Evans (1980) believe that distance learners should be involved in issues pertaining to learning through various means such as phone calls and e-mail addresses so as to enable them consider themselves as part and parcel of the institution. Presently, most OUT students do not have their instructors' mobile phone numbers and e-mails addresses.

Due to poor communication between students and the OUT administration some students of the OUT fail to continue undertaking their studies. Zacharia (2008) found that at Tanga Regional Director's office many students enrolled themselves for studies at the institution, however, during their first year or second year of their studies most of them decided to leave their programs and opted for admissions in convectional universities. The report added that, those who continue to study through the OUT took a long time to complete their courses.

For example, more than 50% of teacher educators working at Korogwe Teachers' College who registered themselves during the 2002/2003 academic year dropped out from OUT. Besides, only 7 out of 20 teacher educators who registered in that year have graduated while the rest have not yet completed their programmes. (Zacharia, 2008). The face-to-face sessions which were conducted twice per year between students and instructors at OUT were not considered enough in supporting OUT students to learn appropriately (Berge, 2005).

The OUT students do not have regular contacts with their instructors in terms of e-mails and mobile phones communications due to the costs involved and unstable electric supply. This phenomenon creates a barrier to effective communication and

causes some students to withdraw from studying through the OUT. Students' withdrawal from studies results into institutional failure to achieve her objectives as per the mission of the institution. (Zacharia, 2008).

Zacharia (2008) asserted that the OUT faces a number of challenges which continue to be systematically addressed within the context of the institution's vision and mission. One of the mission targets is to deliver affordable quality service to its clients. Affordable quality services according to this university charter include among other things effective communication with students. Delayed feedback, or sometimes no feedback at all, is one of the barriers facing OUT students. Ellington (1997) noted that effective feedback is the mirror of effective communication; feedback mirrors what the sender has sent in response to what was delivered to him or her. He added that feedback is the receiver sending back to the sender the message as perceived by the receiver.

Without feedback, communication becomes one way traffic. Both sender and receiver can play an active role in using feedback to make communication truly two way traffic and useful. It is a common thing to hear some OUT students complaining that they did not get feedback from their instructors after posting their work either through post office or other mechanisms. "Nipashe" one of the local Tanzanian newspapers reported that "Research reports are not corrected in time at the Open University of Tanzania" (2nd February 2009). This is one of the evidence that delaying feedback is one way communication phenomenon between OUT students and OUT instructors. This constitutes one of the barriers of communication in the institution.

Effective communication plays an important role in the learning process especially in distance learning (Bhalalusesa, 1999). It enables the sharing of information, thoughts and ideas which contribute to learning (ibid). Communication actually creates opportunities for learning to take place. Besides, it helps in clarifying information, including creating enthusiasm in learning and building positive relationships among learners (Nasseh, 1997). Since good communication is essential for successful learning, it should be given a stronger emphasis by colleges or universities. Again, Nasseh (1997) emphasized that colleges needs to establish more effective modes of communication in their distance learning programs to compensate for lack of face-to-face interaction.

The current study was intended to explore barriers which hinder effective communication in distance education specifically at the Open University of Tanzania at the university's Tanga Regional Centre. The researcher thought that it was necessary to explore this area because OUT as an institution is faced with various challenges which hinder achievement of her objectives at maximum capacity. Many OUT students are withdrawing from their programs as reported that more than 50% of the teacher educators at Korogwe Teachers' College who registered themselves during the 2002/2003 academic year dropped from OUT (Zacharia, 2008). Some of the students are not competent in using English language as the medium of instruction (ibid). These factors provide indicative evidence that there are barriers that hinder effective communication in provision and delivery of distance education at OUT. Hence, there is a need to investigate the barriers that contribute to limiting effective communication which is foundation for successful learning at all education institutions.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Distance education is an alternative to conventional education since it can reduce the amount of time, distance and obstacles for opportunities to everyone who is willing to be educated and develop him or herself academically without physically going to school. It has been mentioned earlier that all potential students cannot have education from the convectional institutions due to several reasons; the most outstanding reason being poor economic status of developing countries, including Tanzania. The poor economic status of the developing countries affects several other aspects including constraining education opportunities to majority of the population. In universities, such as the OUT, the aspects that are constrained by limited economic capacities affect communication between students, administrators, instructors and other stake holders.

Studies concerning barriers to effective communication in distance education in Tanzania have not been done especially at OUT. Zacharia (2008) studied factors that cause OUT students' dropout from their studies but did not highlight barriers to effective communication. Several studies have been conducted outside Tanzania with regards to distance education.

Isman *et.al.,* (2004) studied student's perceptions and challenges of distance education in Turkey, Biswas and Mythil (2000) provided an analytical study of the students' attrition and completion rate in distance education programs in India. However, all those studies do not address the major issue raised in this study. The issue is the exploration of barriers to effective communication in distance learning at the OUT - Tanga Regional Centre.

The constraints mentioned above coupled with unclear instructional language have complicated processes, infrastructure and facilities which are critical in generating conducive environment for developing learners who are competent in the instructional language and putting in place an infrastructure that enables effective communication for teaching and learning. It is against this background and a general survey of existing literature which implicates that there are barriers to effective communication at the OUT. Existing methodological deficiencies and limited technological tools such as radio, TV connectivity may be barriers to effective communication at the institution.

Since there have not been any studies that have focused in uncovering the actual barriers to effective communication at OUT, the researcher deemed it necessary to conduct such a study.

## 1.3    General Objective

The overall aim of this study was to assess barriers to effective communication in distance education particularly at the Open University of Tanzania - Tanga Regional Centre.

### 1.3.1 Specific Objectives

This study had the following specific objectives:

1. To examine students personal factors which cause barriers to effective communication in distance education at OUT - Tanga Regional Centre.

2. To investigate whether OUT administration culture causes barriers to effective communication in distance education at OUT - Tanga Regional Centre.

3. To examine if English language as a medium of instruction in OUT was a barrier to effective communication in studying at the OUT- Tanga Regional Centre.

## 1.4    Research Questions

The study aimed at answering the main research question which is: How do barriers of communication hinder distance learning for distance learners in Tanga Regional Centre? In the light of this main question the following three sub questions will be answered by the study:

1. What are students' personal factors that cause barriers to effective communication in distance education at OUT - Tanga Regional Centre?

2. What barriers are caused by OUT administration that hinder effective communication in distance education specifically at OUT? -  Tanga Regional Centre?

3. How does English language as a medium of instruction at OUT contribute as a barrier to effective communication at OUT - Tanga Regional Centre?

## 1.5   Significance of the Study

Like other social science studies, this was expected to contribute knowledge to support higher education practitioners to establish workable plans for the improvement of distance education in Tanzania. These plans include ensuring that academic progress reports to individual students are sent on time, promoting Kiswahili to become a medium of instruction in higher learning institutions and the need to have more face-to-face sessions between OUT students and their instructors. Since this study investigated barriers that hinder effective communication in distance

education, it will contribute to the body of knowledge especially on issues related to barriers that hinder effective communication in distance education particularly in Tanzania.

## 1.6     Limitation of the Study

Since this study was descriptive and it involved qualitative approach in collection of its data, Maykutt and Morehouse (1994) argues that qualitative research reveal the informants' understanding, expectations and perspectives relating to the study. The major means of collecting data was mainly on what the study participants said. Thus, one of the respondents' responses might have been affected by participant's expectations and perspectives hence some biases could occur. However, to overcome this limitation, the researcher employed more than one technique in collecting data. For example, observing and listening attentively to what the respondents say as well as examining properly the correctness of the English language the respondents use.

Moreover, the study obtained limited representative sample due to high costs both fiscal and time. Beside, the representative sample used was limited in scope to enable the generalization of the findings from the study. The findings of this study may consequently not be generalized to all Open Universities Centers in Tanzania, since different geographical location may have their own peculiar characteristics in terms of geographical location, the socio-economic status of the people and the primacy that community append to education.

## 1.7 The Scope of the Study

Basically, this research concentrated only on barriers to effective communication that reduce effectiveness in studying through distance education particularly to students

of OUT in Tanga region. Although, the study was confined in Tanga Region the findings from some regions of Tanzania were mentioned. The mentioned regions outside Tanga are under the administrative supervision of the headquarters from Dar es Salaam. In brief this part pointed out again that the aspects of the study included: The barriers to effective communication in distance education particularly at the Open University of Tanzania - Tanga Regional Centre.

## 1.8    Organization of the Study Report

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction of the study which consist of the background and statement of the problem, objectives and research questions, limitations of the study, the scope of the study and definitions of key terms used in this study. Chapter two focuses on literature review which relates to this study. Chapter three presents the research methodology which shows how data were collected and analyzed. Chapter four is about data presentation and discussion; this is the section which presents and discusses data which were gathered from respondents. Chapter five is the last section which presents conclusion and the recommendations made by the researcher.

## 1.9  Definition of Key Terms

**Barrier**: is anything that prevents someone to achieve something. A barrier in this study is an obstacle or something which prevents people from communicating effectively.

**Communication**: communication is basically an act of sending messages or receiving messages from the sender or receiver respectively. To communicate is to

impart or exchange thoughts, opinions or information through speech, writing or signs.

**Distance education**: is the form of education which is offered through some forms of communication media and technology such as broadcasting, telecasting, printed materials, seminars, contact programs or a combination of any two or more of such means.

**Effective communication**: is a process through which the sender conveys a message that the receiver readily receives and understands. It is a two-way process instead of one-way process.

**Face-to-face session**: is a meeting whereby students, instructors, or facilitators meet together at the same time and place for the aim of exchanging educational information. During face to face sessions students discuss on how to solve some of the prevailing barriers or challenges related in provision and delivery of distance education.

## 1.10   Summary

This part has given the introduction of the study that gives rationale for the study. The next chapter will review literature related to the barriers to effective communication in distance education in Open University of Tanzania.

## CHAPTER TWO

## 2.0  LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1  Introduction

The review of the literature provides the background and context for the research problem; it also helps in discovering important variables relevant to the topic under study (Mutai, 2000). This chapter critically reviews several sources, dealing with barriers that hinder effective communication in distance education and to the OUT in particular. In the first place the researcher provides the history of distance education and its associated problems in learning. He also introduces the concept of communication and barriers to effective communication in distance education. The researcher briefly differentiates communication from effective communication. A brief discussion on the rationale for distance education followed by a discussion on the theories of distance education is provided. Finally, this chapter provides different experiences concerning how different barriers can negatively affect effective communication in distance education.

### 2.2  History of Distance Education

Distance education which is now commonly referred to as Open Distance Education (ODE) refers to an independent study which takes place even if the teacher and the learner are separated physically during the learning process (Rumble, 1992). This type of independent study is known as Correspondence Studies (CS) which is enhanced by several other means such as telephone, satellite and microwave networks to transmit voice video and data (Carrs, 2000). Similarly, Moore (1993) defined distance education as the universe of teacher- learner relationships that exist

when learners and instructors are separated by space and or by time. That means that, successful teaching can take place even if a teacher and the learner are physically separated during the learning process.

Distance education begun before the 19th century when missionaries exploited its capabilities to spread Christianity by using biblical correspondences through postal systems (Potashnik and Capper, 1998). Europe and United States of America (USA) have been using distance education so as to educate many adults and disabled people who wanted to learn but were unable to attend conventional schools.

The targeted people for correspondence studies were women who were not allowed to register themselves in formal schools and colleges (Carrs, 2000). Men who had jobs during normal schools were also encouraged to register for correspondence studies (ibid). The invention of radio during the 1920's and the advancement of television during the 1940's promoted new forms of communication such as radio and television broadcast which were employed in distance education (Potashnik and Capper, 1998).

From these inventions many instructors managed to broadcast educational programs to many learners. Likewise, the improvement of telephone systems during the 1980's increased the ability of educators of distance education to modify their provision of education to many distance learners through teleconferencing systems (Mhehe, 2002). Distance education had been modified and highly improved whereby nowadays there is an increased use of worldwide websites through which educators and learners teach and learn respectively through online educational programs.

Despite the strength found from these conceptual literatures about the history of distance education, however, they do not directly address the question: How do barriers of communication hinder effective learning for distance learners in Tanga region? And therefore, this is a gap which needs to be filled by this study.

## 2.3    Rationale for Distance Education

As stated earlier, in most of the developing countries, due to the limitation of resources it is impossible to educate all of their citizens through on-campus teaching (Kamal et. al., 2001). Huge amount of money is needed to establish the infrastructure necessary for on-campus teaching which is out of the reach of the developing countries (Ibid). In this circumstance, to educate their entire populations the developing countries are obliged to depend on open learning and distance education systems.

This is one of the underlying reasons that distance education was introduced. Rumble (1992) asserted that the reason why distance education was established was to alleviate capacity constraints in on-campus teaching which requires institutional infrastructures such as buildings, roads and other essential services. Distance learning on the other hand is mostly conducted off-site; the system reduces the demand on institutional infrastructure particularly in terms of funds.

Similarly, Holmberg (1989) argued that distance education is less selective in that it can be beneficial to different groups of people including people with disabilities, handicapped, the sick, aged and children who happen to be deprived of formal education. Besides, Potashnik and Capper (1998) noted that distance education

which is delivered through radio, prints and face-to-face sessions can be used to teach better methods of health, agriculture and basic school subjects. Furthermore, distance education is considered to be more economical. These scholars contend that distance education through radio, prints and face-to-face sessions bring far more effective, immediate and relevant educational resources to millions who would otherwise miss the education. Besides, it also helps to share the worlds' education resources through the use of different media and technology.

## 2.4  Theories of Distance Education

Holmberg (1995:4 ) defined theory as " a systematic ordering of ideas about the phenomenon of a field of inquiry and an over- arching logical structure of reasoned suppositions which can generate testable hypotheses'' In other words, a theory is a systematically organized body of knowledge applicable in relatively wide variety of circumstances.  A theory is a system of assumptions, accepted principles and rules of procedure divided to analyze, predict or explain the nature or behavior of a set of phenomenon.  That means a theory can be correct and applicable in some situations or places but not in some situations or places. That is why; According to Polansky (1986) there is nothing as practical as a good theory to guide action. However, Polansky emphasized that theory and research work together to develop schools of thought (multiple theories). Overtime, social work has recognized that no single theory, whether narrow (psychodynamic) or grand (general systems theory) can guide practice. Mcharazo (2000) pointed out that the theories of distance education normally explain the relationship and communication between a distance learner, instructor and the institution which provides distance education.

### 2.4.1   The Theory of Industrialization

Peter (1988) saw the theory of industrialization as the theory of large scale production of instructional materials which are supplied to many clients; the use of technical media, the division of labour which is used in the development of instructional materials and the regulations and rules to direct production, delivery and to ensure co-operation of people who are involved in the production processes. That means, this theory explains how a student of distance education is supposed to have good relationship with his or her instructors (Mcharazo, 2000).

The founders of the theory of industrialization are from western countries. For instance Otto Peters is a Germany while Charles Wedemeyer is from America. Industrialization theory depicts more about the environment of western countries than that of Africa particularly Tanzania. The theory of industrialization insists that both the learners and the institution providing distance education can be in touch so as to ensure that there is effective communication. Studying through distance mode is related to as a conveyor belt in an industry. Conveyor belts depend on each other or work in a collaborative way. Likewise, student of distance education should have good relationship with their instructors and their institution. There must be effective communication between them and their instructors and their institution. This will enable them to communicate effectively with their instructors and with study materials.

### 2.4.2 The Equivalency Theory

This theory suggests that electronically linking instructor and students at various locations creates a virtual classroom. The theoretical analyses of virtual education

however have not yet been addressed by literature: Is virtual education (interactive, live televised instruction) a subset of distance education or to be regarded as a separate field of education endeavor? (Keegan, 1995).

This approach to distance education advocates designing a collection of equipment learning experiences for distant and students at conventional institutions, even though they may be different for each student, the equivalence theory is based on the following definition of distance education. Formal, institutionally-based educational activities where the learner and teacher are separated from one another, and where two-way interactive telecommunication systems are used to synchronously and asynchronously connect them for the sharing of video, voice and data-based instruction (Simonson, 1999). The equivalency theory is generally supported by Keegan (1995) who  highlighted that, Equivalency theory is based on core values such as the rapport between teacher and learners and personalized learning and the use of modern interactive telecommunications systems. The researcher had the opinion that this theory can help the OUT students to study individually using internet and also through communicating with their instructors. They must have good relationship with their instructors and the OUT administration in general.

## 2.5    Communication

Communication has been derived from the Latin word "communis", meaning to share thoughts, opinions or information (Mshiu and Nyangwine, 2001). Communication requires a sender, a message, a channel, and an intended recipient, although the receiver need not be present or aware of the sender's intent to

communicate at the time of communication; thus, communication can occur across vast distances in time and space. Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) (2007) defined communication as an expression of ideas, which may be verbal, non-verbal or vocal that is perceived, heard or read by another person. That means communication is transmission of meaning from one person to another through symbols which can be oral, non verbal, writings or any other semiotics.

Also, Kadeghe (2001) considered communication not only as the exchange of news and messages but also collective activity embracing transmission and sharing of ideas. According to Kadeghe (2001) there are three major types of communications; oral, non-verbal, written communication and other artifacts. Since not all communications are effective communication, a good strategy for communicating more effectively is to make a message concise and complete.

## 2.6     Effective Communication

Effective communication   means a type of communication which is not altered or interrupted by any barrier (Koul, 1992). This implies that an effective communication is a type of communication that has no any barrier. Galusha (2001) viewed effective communication as the passing of the right message or information to the right person, in the right way, at the right time, and with the right effect, impact and outcome. In education setting, effective communication according to Galusha (2001) means the transmission of knowledge, skills, values, customs, attitudes and beliefs to the right destination, with the right way and time with the right use for the right effect. In this study communication is confined to the way the

students of the OUT communicate with their instructors, fellow students, OUT administration and interact with their study materials.

Effective communication plays an important role in the learning process. It enables the sharing of information, thoughts and ideas which contribute to learning. (Ellington, 1997). Effective communication is essential for successful learning. As there is limited face –to – face interaction in distance learning courses, hence, effective communication is given a strong emphasis by schools providing ODE courses. Many colleges provide learning programs to compensate for limited face-to-face sessions.

In ODE, the course content can be effectively communicated to students through audio tapes, video tapes, web materials or printed texts. The student will be informed about the course content and course directives. Most importantly, the information should be effectively communicated to the students as they need to know exactly what is expected of them. Galusha (2001) asserted that for information to be effective it should pass through the right channel, right time and reach the right recipient. Many distance learning course developers make use of the internet to provide up –to-date information to enhance learning. Besides course materials, course developers usually link to other websites including online journals and books to create in depth learning. With the internet, course developers are able to provide, through online sources great supplies of current data course materials.

Henke and Rusum (2000) added that as physical separation can create a sense of isolation, many institutions which have open learning courses build effective

communication channels to decrease the isolation feeling that their learners may experience. In distance learning, therefore, for learning to take place smoothly, Hekce and Rusum identified four types of effective communication to be built; electronic mail, websites forums, chat rooms and internet conferencing. Effective communication channels allow students to ask questions flexibly, about the course, assignments and sources of relevant information.

During the course, students may not fully understand some topics and need to seek clarifications with the course instructor. Sometimes, even though the course instructor has explained the assignments in the course content, students may still have questions about them. Thus, careful handling of students' timed tests and annual examination should be adhered so as to ensure that students' academic performances are kept well lest they are misplaced. This call was also made by Mushi (1999) who insisted on careful handling of students' timed tests and annual examinations and giving them feedback. This is due to the fact that communication can be complete if the sender and the receiver can interact through various ways.

## 2.7    Barriers to Effective Communication

Communication barrier is anything that obstructs, breaks or interferes with communication (Mshiu *et. al.,* 2007). Effective communication is the key factor in the success of any organization; there are certain barriers that organizations may encounter. People often feel that effective communication is as easy and simple as it sounds. What makes effective communication complex, difficult and frustrating are the barriers that come on its way. Galusha (2001) reported that there are many

barriers hindering effective communication in distance education in developing countries in teaching and learning processes. Eisigner (2000), in his study on challenges facing Open Distance Learning (ODL) found that 80% of the enrolled students in developing countries are faced with various barriers that hinder effective communication when pursuing their studies as a result most of them withdraw themselves from their programmes.

Limited use of media is one of the barriers that hinder effective communication in many open and distance learning especially in developing countries (Kamal and Sultana, 2000). Kamal and Sultana added that for better delivery of the courses, ODL system have to use both synchronous and asynchronous media. The synchronous media include face-to-face interaction, video and audio conferences while asynchronous media include tape recorded materials, e-mail and print media. Online media can be used for both synchronous (such as live interactive tutorials) and asynchronous (such as chat rooms) delivery. Onyango (2011) reported that OUT's Vice - Chancellor Professor Tolly Mbwette said when addressing the prospective graduates during annual convocation meeting of the Open University of Tanzania that his university will establish a radio station in a place to be identified later within three to four months' time, and later would be followed by a television which will be established in two years to come. However, he said in an exclusive interview after his meeting that, television is more expensive and would require long term planning.

Study materials are key factors for learners of distance education especially for those who are in remote areas where there is no access of internet or resources centers. If study materials are not readily available, the learners are most likely to be

discouraged and they decide to withdraw from the program of distance learning. (Thompson, 1997). Currently, OUT -Tanga Regional Centre has only one computer lab with only 10 thin client computers that need to accommodate a vast number of students from 8-9 districts. Therefore, the available computers are not enough to accommodate all students at OUT - Tanga Regional Centre.

Radio program on distance education is also one of the media which could provide education to the learners since radio is cheap and easy to operate and it can send knowledge to many students in remote areas. Capper and Postashnik (1998) indicated that radio has been used widely to improve educational quality since the early 1970's particularly in some parts of Africa, Asia and Latin-American. Msuya and Maro (2002) conducted a study on the provision of information service to distance learners in Dar - es - Salaam and Mwanza; their study found that OUT has problems in addressing the information requirements of her staff and students. Msuya and Maro further emphasized that OUT main library does not have adequate resources while OUT information units at regional centers and Tanzania library services (TLS) are poorly stocked.

Msuya and Maro (2002) asserted that accessibility to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is very crucial in ODL system for better delivery of the courses, better coordination among student, student and instructor and student and study material (content). ICT is useful in extracting more knowledge and facilitate fast flow of information (Kamal and Sultana, 2000). Use of ICT is very limited in the OUT as some students even do not access to electricity; some cannot

use a computer (Mhehe, 2002). Therefore, this hinders efforts of students in accessing important study materials as well as communicating with their instructors on issues pertaining to learning.

Thompson (1997) noted that lack of proper coordination in management is also another source of barriers to effective communication in ODE. Thompson added that proper coordination is necessary for smooth functioning of ODE system and hence easier communication. According to Zacharia (2008) one of the reasons to why some students drop from studies was poor coordination and communication between OUT administrators and students on issues of coursework submission. Some students were considered as having incomplete in their coursework while they did not have any incomplete coursework (ibid).

Chickering and Gamson (1987) identified seven principles for good practice in teaching. One of those principles is that good practice gives prompt feedback. Chickering and Gamson (1987) summed up the importance of providing feedback to students by claiming that knowing what someone know and do not know focuses someone's learning. Black and William (1998) found that positive feedback focused on an assignment has a positive effect on learners in terms of their attitude and achievement. However, feedback should not always be positive to make student happy but it should convey really the ability and achievement of the learner either negative or positive. Providing quality feedback to distance learning students is particularly, important because students have fewer opportunities to ask instructors on face-to-face basis for clarification on assignments or comments about their

assignments (Chichering and Gamson, 1987). ODL students often feel a bit disconnected and isolated when they do not get feedback in time. By providing quality feedback it helps distance learning students become motivated to learn. Students feel more connected to the class, get a better sense of what content they have mastered and what areas they are weak. Feedback allows them to focus their efforts on areas where they are the weakest.

Motivational design theory points out that instructional process are required to be configured with the strategies which increase attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction of the students for an instructional design which ensures the continuity of learning motivation (Sali, 2008). Holmberg (1986) noted that distance teaching will provide motivation to students, promote effective learning if offered in a situation where there is good communication and study relevance to the individual learner and his or her needs.

Kamal and Sultana (2000) in their study on barriers that hinder ODL in Bangladesh asserted that in most developing countries ODE lack many of the support systems that traditional schools have to help to keep them motivated. ODE offers few (or no) in-class sessions, which means that an individual may never interact with, or even speak to instructor or fellow classmates. This lack of social interaction can make it difficult for some types of learners to stay motivated (Sali, 2008). Sali (2008), Kamal and Sultana (2000) and Holmberg (1986) have a similar perspective that effective communication plays a greater role in facilitating distance and open learning among students and instructors.

Therefore, the roles of student and instructors should be in the consciousness of communicators to develop effective distance education processes and resolve interaction difficulties (Isman, 1999). Instructors and students need to be responsible collaborative planners, communicators and evaluators in their distance education roles. Together they can break down communicational barriers and overcome limitations in the technology and its implementation. Substantial benefits will result from taking personal responsibility, improving the process, and solving problems to create rich interactive learning.

Much has been done on issues of Open and Distance Learning in Tanzania like a study by Bhalalusesa (1999) who highlighted what retains students in distance learning program. Further, Mahenge (2002) studied challenges of the OUT. Additionally, Mhehe (2002) examined women enrolment and participation at the OUT. Despite the highlighted studies, not much has been done on barriers that hinder effective communication at OUT. It is on this ground that the current researcher decided to conduct this study to find out barriers that hinder effective communication in distance education particularly at the Open University of Tanzania - Tanga Regional Centre.

## 2.8    Knowledge Gap

As various literatures have exhibited, very little detailed work has been done on the barriers to effective communication in distance education. Available literature about distance learning such as; Adewale & Inegodion, (2008); Ngoma & Cosmas (2004); Onyango (2002); Sali (2008); Siddique (2004); and Zacharia (2008) have not

addressed directly the raised general research question. Therefore, what is not yet known is: What are the barriers to effective communication which hinder effective learning for distance learners in Tanga Region? This study is conducted to fill up this knowledge gap.

The next chapter deals with the methods which were used to investigate and collect data.

## CHAPTER THREE

## 3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This is a methodological chapter; it spells out the procedures used to collect data pertinent to the barriers that hinder effective communication in distance education specifically at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). The chapter describes the research approach and design, geographical area of study, sample and sampling techniques. It also includes issues of data collection techniques, ethical considerations, reliability and validity as well as data analysis procedures.

### 3.2 Research Approach

Hayes (2004) considers research approach as creative process of translating a research idea into a set of decisions about how the research will proceed in practice. This study employed qualitative approaches with some aspect of quantitative approach. Qualitative research takes an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter therefore enables the researcher to explore things in their natural settings (Auerback and Silverstein, 2003).

### 3.3 Research Design

Basically, qualitative researches provide opportunity for use of case study design, which the researcher used to collect data from selected respondents. Case study design was chosen due to its ability to use multiple sources of data and variety of methods (Kothari, 2004). A case study design was adopted in this study, since it gives the room to employ a variety of techniques and helped to find out in-depth

information about barriers to effective communication in distance education in Open University of Tanzania. The study provided understanding on barriers to effective communication in Open University of Tanzania, by examining a small number of units extracted from a large number of variables and conditions. Creswell (2009) asserts that case study is a triangulation research strategy that enables the researcher to use qualitative and quantitative methods to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within a single study. The approach provides possibilities for taping experiences on the ground or natural setting rather than approaching the research with predetermined variables or assumptions.

## 3.4 Area of the Study

The study was conducted at OUT's Tanga Regional Centre. The OUT Tanga Regional Centre has two sub centres' that are used to accommodate OUT students from all districts in Tanga Region. These are Tanga city centre and Korogwe town centre situated in Tanga city and at Korogwe Teachers' College (KTC) respectively. This study was undertaken in these two centers. Tanga is located on the shores of the Indian Ocean north east Tanzania. Tanga has a land area of 474 square kilometers and had a population of 242,640 inhabitants in 2002 (population and housing census, 2002). Tanga sub-centre is located at Tanga city. In the same line Korogwe centre is located at Korogwe district. Korogwe is one of the eight districts of Tanga region in Tanzania. It is bordered to the north by Lushoto district, to the east by Muheza district, to the south by Handeni district and to the west Kilimanjaro Region. KTC is located two kilometers from the main road that run from Dar-es-Salaam through Arusha to Nairobi, Kenya.

Tanga Region Centre was selected in this study following lamentations from many OUT students and other stake holders who had the assumptions that there were challenges which face ODL institutions, Tanga Regional Centre being one of the centers that have a large number of students have withdrawn from OUT programmes. This assumption was reported by Zacharia (2008) who asserted that there was a large segment of OUT students at the Tanga Regional Centre who took a long time to complete their courses while most of them drop their courses. Therefore, the researcher found it necessary to conduct a study which may contribute to improve the operations of all OUT regional centers and retention of their students in their courses.

## 3.5    Population and Sample

Van (1990) defines population as all members, individuals, group or elements involved in the study. The population of this constituted continuing OUT students, OUT students who dropped from their studies as OUT, OUT graduates in Tanga region, the director of OUT at the Tanga Regional Centre and OUT Tanga regional centre academic and non academic staff. The researcher's intention was to draw insights about the barriers that hinder effective communication in distance education particularly at Tanga Region Centre. The composition of the sample is presented in Table 3.1.

## 3.6 Sampling Techniques

Enon (1998) defines a sample as the proportion of the population that participates in a study. A sample is a small group drawn from the population in which a researcher is interested in gaining and drawing conclusions about the universe (Kothari, 1992).

**Table 3.1: Categories and Number of Study Respondents (n=69)**

| Centre | Continuing Students | | Drop-out students | | Graduates | | OUT Tanga DRC | | Academic Staff in Tanga | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M & F |
| Tanga | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | - | 1 | 2 | 2 | 35 |
| Korogwe | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | - | - | 2 | 2 | 34 |
| **Total** | **10** | **10** | **10** | **10** | **10** | **10** | **-** | **1** | **4** | **4** | **69** |

**Source: Field Data, (2012)**

The study employed purposive sampling which entails deliberate selection of cases on the basis of specific qualities (ibid). The goal of employing purposive sampling technique was to select individuals who were likely to be information rich in respect of the researcher's purposes (Gall *et. al.,* 2005).

## 3.7    Data Collection and Research Instruments

Data collection is a process of gathering information aimed at proving or refuting some facts (Kothari, 1992). Basically, descriptive research in most cases applies the use of different research tools such as questionnaires, observation, interviews, and documentary reviews and focused group discussions. This study used questionnaires, semi structured interview, documentary reviews and focused group discussions to collect data which ensured the gathering of a wide range of information related to the study.

### 3.7.1  Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents (Gall et. al.,

2005). Kothari (1992) argues that close-ended questionnaire items are those items with definite concrete and pre-determined questions. Close-ended questionnaires are used to restrict respondents to predetermined responses. This study used both open and close ended questionnaires so as to enable respondents to give their views freely.

In this study questionnaires were administered to OUT continuing students and to the OUT Tanga Regional Director. The aim of using questionnaires to that category of respondents as emphasized by Denscombe (1998) is that questionnaires are economical since they can supply a considerable amount of research information at a relatively low cost in terms of material, money and time. Questionnaires were used not only for the aim of enabling respondents who were far to have a chance of giving their views but also to guide them on the specific assumption related to the study.

### 3.7.2   Interview Technique

Interview means trying to understand what people think through their verbal expressions (Bernard, 1988). Semi structured interview was used in this study particularly in the collection of rich qualitative data due to their flexibility, being focused and time-effective (Patton, 2002 in Mtahabwa, 2007). Students and the academic staff of OUT were interviewed through semi-structured interview.

This type of interview enables the respondent to express him/herself at length (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). Semi-structured interview were conducted so as to allow deeper exploration of opinions, feelings and ideas about the barriers that hinder effective communication at OUT. This was done so as to acquire greater detailed and necessary information. The main function of the interview within the research

agenda was to reveal informant's understandings, expectations and perspectives relating to the barriers to effective communication in distance education particularly at the OUT. (Kothari, 1992). Another reason as to why the researcher chose this technique was to diagnose informant's perceptions and experience towards communication at the OUT. Some guiding interview questions for students and OUT academic staff were set for semi-structured interviews; few questions were prepared purposely because more questions would have been generated from participants' explanations during the process.

### 3.7.3 Focused Group Discussion

Focused group discussion is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept or idea (Dane, 1990). Koul (1992) asserted that the respondents in the focused group discussion should be knowledgeable in the topic of which they are discussing. Respondents who participated in this study were knowledgeable since they were among the stakeholders at OUT. Focused group discussion was mainly used to collect information from drop out students of OUT, OUT graduates, OUT academic staff as well as continuing students at OUT. The group was mainly composed of eight participants whereby each named category was represented by two members. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/focus group-cite note-0 (12/6/2012).

In the first place the researcher informed the participants about the importance of undertaking the research study. He also uncovered to participants rationale of the truth when discussing different issues about barriers that hinder effective

communication at OUT. The researcher formulated few guiding questions concerning OUT in general and barriers that hinder effective communication at OUT. These guiding questions helped the researcher not to discuss issues that were beyond the scope of the study.

Focused group discussions enable the respondents to be free in expressing their inner feelings and therefore provide relevant information. Therefore, this method was deliberately chosen for the aim of ensuring that viable information was obtained which could not have easily obtained through methods such as questionnaires. This is because through focused groups there is exchange of ideas, knowledge and experiences towards the topic from the group members.

## 3.8    Validation of Instruments

Validity refers to the quality that a procedure or an instrument used in the research is accurate, correct, true, right and meaningful (Enon, 1998). The validity of this study was achieved since the researcher sought expert's opinions before data collection which helped to refine instruments in relation to the nature of the study in terms of relevance, coverage and consistence. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that triangulation maximizes the validity of research findings therefore the researcher triangulated interview, questionnaire and focused group discussion.

A researcher is considered reliable if we get the same result repeatedly (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In achieving reliability to the study, a pilot study was conducted at Korogwe T.C. to test whether the proposed information could be reliable for use in the study.

## 3.9    Data Analysis Approach

Data analysis is a process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming and modeling data with the goal of highlighting useful information, suggesting conclusions, and supporting decision making (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Athanas (2004) defines data analysis as a systematic process involving working with data, organizing and breaking them into manageable units. What makes a study qualitative is that it usually relies on inductive reasoning processes to interpret and structure the meanings that can be derived from data (Mutai, 2000).

The qualitative data analysis was employed in this study whereby meaning condensation technique was mainly applied. Five steps were involved in the analysis of the collected qualitative information. The initial qualitative analysis involved noting patterns and consistencies in the "subjective" data, then observing similarities and differences between individual narratives. Meaningful data were collected, recorded, read through so as to get a sense of the whole especially data which resulted from focused group discussion. Thereafter, the researcher determined the meanings as articulated by the informants so as to identify dominant themes. The next task of the researcher was to integrate meanings from texts considering the purpose of the study and finally major themes were tied together to form meaningful descriptive statements.

## 3.10    Summary

The major sampling technique which was used in collecting data based mainly on non probability sampling which bases on collecting perceptions which leads to

verbal or qualitative expressions. A non-probability sampling technique is the purposeful sampling whose subjects are selected according to individuals who are well informed on the topic (Patton, 1990). The following chapter is on data presentation, analysis and discussion.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## 4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1     Introduction

This chapter presents research findings and discussion of the barriers that hinder effective communication in distance education particularly at the OUT Tanga Regional Centre. The presentation and discussion were mainly based on several factors which were students' factors, English language as a medium of instruction in OUT and students' work environment.

### 4.2     Students' Factors

The purpose of the first research task was to examine students factor which cause barriers to effective communication in distance education at OUT. The researcher employed focused group discussion to obtain information from the OUT continuing students, graduates, drop out students and OUT regional administration. Students' factors were found to be one of the major sources of barriers to effective communication in distance learning at OUT-Tanga Regional Centre. The researcher found that 48 (80%) out of 69 respondents were of the opinion that students contribute a lot in breaking communication at OUT through various ways such as laziness and not being committed or serious to study. Furthermore, It was also found that 50 (84%) out of 60 respondents do not have stable financial base as a result they do not have access of OUT administration and their instructors. To have access to the OUT administration and their instructors, students need either to call their instructors by phone, us postal services or e-mail services which were not affordable to them.

They could also travel to the OUT headquarters to present their problems whenever there was a need to do so. All these possibilities needed finances if they were to be executed. Therefore, financial limitations contributed as barriers on the side of the students. They failed to pay tuition fees in time due to competing commitments to other activities such as finding money to earn their daily bread. One student of the OUT who is a tutor at KTC said,

> I have totally failed to adhere to my time table just because I do not have enough money that I can earn a living and at the same time pay my tuition fee and other expenses including communicating with the OUT administration.

Basically, according to respondents, financial crises on the side of students exacerbated the state of some students' into less being commitment to their studies. This is because they fail to afford the cost of communicating through phones or e-mail addresses due to financial crises. Students have limited time to concentrate in their studies as a result they failed to communicate effectively with their instructors in time. And that is why most of them drop or take a long time to graduate as shown below in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Graduating Rates of OUT Students from KTC from 2000-2012**

| Registered Students | | | | Drop out Students | | | | Graduated Students | | | | Continuing Students | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M | F | T | % | M | F | T | % | M | F | T | % | M | F | T | % |
| 22 | 13 | 35 | 100 | 13 | 7 | 20 | 57 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 26 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 17 |

**Source: Field Data, (2012)**

Learners in higher learning institutions are supposed to incur some costs in their studies like buying stationeries, study materials, paying tuition fees and paying transport and communication costs (Biswas and Mythil, 2000). Therefore, before

seeking for admission an individual who expects to undertake his or her studies in Open Distance Learning mode should budget all the requirements for the programme, set a plan of action on how to complete his or her course as well as to be commitment in studying effectively so that he or she can successfully complete his or her programme.

Eighteen (90%) out of 20 OUT students who dropped out of the system claimed that they failed to adhere to OUT timetable because they had too heavy workload to fulfill according to their employment schedule. In addition to that they were supposed to take care of their families. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to fulfill OUT requirement in time. One teacher who teaches at Kilole Secondary School in Korogwe district at one time said that, job commitment is a great barrier that hinders communication in his studies. He added that his teaching load is intolerable since he is the only Physics teacher at that school. He was also the second master of that school. Therefore, this shows that OUT students do not have commitment to their studies that is why they cannot even adhere to the timetable of their studies.

Koul (1992) noted that distance learners face difficulties in balancing the combination of work and education. Most of the Open and distance education students are adults and have jobs and families to serve. Job responsibility is already intimidating, therefore, the task of balancing all of the above responsibilities is truly challenging for most of OUT students who are employees (ibid). Steinberg (1990) cited in Koul (1992) argues, employment undermine a student's commitment to

study; he added that students who work while attending school are likely to lose their commitment to school. His theory emphasized that students are more likely to lose their commitment to study. They can also be more susceptible to lose their interest in school while working. They may have to work in the evening time of which they are also supposed to do their homework, prepare and or eat supper and sleep. Steinberg also elaborated on how ODE students receive money out of work that can make school seem less desirable.

These explanations correspond to earlier findings of Wedemeyer (1971), in his theory of autonomous who argued that in studying distance education: a student is free to prepare a tentative schedule which he/she can follow in studying through distance mode. OUT students must have authority and power in implementing their study timetable so that they can have effective communication.

ODE students need to set goals to achieve self regulated learning. Biswas and Mythil (2000) Argues that a student needs to have a strategic action plan (planning, monitoring, and evaluating personal progress against a standard), and motivation to learn. Self-regulated learning, according to Biswas and Mythil, implies emphasis on autonomy and control by the individual who monitors, directs and regulate actions toward goals of information acquisition, expanding expertise, and self-improvement.

That is to say ODE students need to be self-regulated learners and do away with other issues that hinder them from pursuing their studies due to barriers such as family chores and job commitments.

Furthermore, the researcher found that sixteen (82%) out of 20 continuing students were not competent in using computer to search for different materials through internet (information and communication technology- ICT). One student said, '' I am very poor in surfing materials from the internet; this is one of the barriers which obstruct my completion of studies at the OUT (5/6/2012)''.

Research conducted by Marais (2000) suggests that the use of computers, internet and related technologies give adequate support to students of open and distance education and can indeed facilitate the transformation of the learning environment into a learner-centered one.

Learning using internet and related technologies are more effective learning experiences, since the learner is participating in learning process and receives individual attention. Though the instructor and the learner are at different locations, this participation in learning is by itself a positive learning experience which enables learners to access up-to-date content relevant to their field of study.

This finding is only partly in line with the results from previous theory of equivalency which insist students to use modern and powerful interactive telecommunication systems in order to be successful in their studies.

## 4.3   English Language as a Medium of Instruction at OUT

Another factor which was found by the researcher as a barrier to effective communication was caused by incompetence in speaking and writing English language among the students of OUT. According to the findings obtained using

focused group discussions, seven (87%) out of eight of the respondents said that English language as a medium of instruction hindered effective communication at the OUT. All 20 (100%) out of 20 graduates who were interviewed revealed that a learner learns better if he or she is using the language which he or she knows best. (field notes, 5/6/2012) that means, since many of Tanzanians know Kiswahili better than English it would be appropriate for Kiswahili to be used as the medium of instruction in all levels of schooling from kindergarten to university.

Mshiu and Nyangwine (2001) asserted that language proficiency is the most significant aspect of communication because what makes communication to breakdown is when the language used is not known to the receiver. It is obvious that a student who is incompetent in speaking and writing English language will not only fail to communicate with the OUT administration and instructors but also will perform poorly in assignments, timed tests and annual examination because he/she cannot communicate or interact with the study materials.

Marais (2000) conducted a study in South Africa to identify whether there is a difference in performance between secondary students who receive tuition in their mother tongue and those who receive tuition in language other than their mother tongue. Marais found that students who receive secondary tuition in languages other than their mother tongue are at a disadvantage. In reaction to this and similar reports, many prospective students and parents from the Afrikaans speaking community in South Africa are dissatisfied with the shift in teaching medium from Afrikaans to English. They believe that having to change from Afrikaans-medium primary and

secondary education to English-medium tertiary education may negatively impact the students' academic performance.

Fifty three (89%) out of 60 respondents (continuing, drop-outs and graduate students) at different circumstances claimed that it is better if Kiswahili becomes the medium of instruction at OUT since students could be confident of having effective communication among themselves as well as with their instructors. One respondent said,

> I wish Kiswahili could be the medium of instruction at all levels in our country because a person learns best using a language that he or she knows best, what we are doing is first learning English, then starting understanding the material

However, the major challenge that might be encountered if Kiswahili becomes a medium of instruction at OUT is the shortage of Kiswahili study materials. There are not enough documents prepared in Kiswahili. Therefore, we need to invest more time and resources in this area. Mshiu and Nyangwine (2001) identified countries that are currently using their national languages as medium of instruction from primary level to university level, these countries including among others, Sweden, USSR and Germany. That means if Kiswahili will be used as a medium of instruction at the OUT it is obvious that many Tanzanians who are not competent in English language will study and get high education through the Open University of Tanzania. Here, I don't mean that English language will not be taught or studied in Tanzania but it will remain as an international language. Besides, Kiswahili will not only be promoted but also will enable many people to use it in different fields like commerce, politics and social affairs just to name few aspects.

## 4.4    The OUT Administration Factors

In order to get in – depth explanation from the respondents, the researcher administered semi-structured interview. As Kothari (1992) insisted that semi-structured interview enables respondent to unfold their knowledge and express their opinions about the subject matter. The current study explored OUTS' continuing student, graduate and drop-out students about what communication barriers result from OUT administration and hinder effective communication between the OUT students and the OUT administration. Delaying feedback or no feedback at all was one of the causes of communication barrier resulting from OUT administrative systems.

Seventeen (87%) out of 20 continuing OUT students who were interviewed said that they were not getting enough feedback from time tests in relation to what and how they were supposed to answer the questions. This study found that on rare occasions the OUT administration was not providing academic progress reports to her students on time as a result students fail to know their academic progress so that they can register themselves for supplementary examination in time or not. Consequently, due to poor communication some students failed to know whether they have completed their units or not. It was also reported through Nipashe newspaper that; poor attendance during graduation ceremony in OUT was contributed by lack of feedback to students on whether they completed their units of study or not (5/6/2012). Similarly, one respondent who was interviewed said,

> Up to this moment I do not know whether I am going to be one of
> the graduates of this year or not this is because there are two
> months remaining before the date of the graduation ceremony and
> I have not been informed if I am one of those who will graduate
> or not.

This shows how feedback is not communicated in time among students at OUT. Feedback enables evaluation of the effectiveness of the content learned. If the audience does not understand what the content means, one can tell by the feedback and then refine the content accordingly (Van, 1990). Black and William (1998) found that feedback has more effect on achievement than other factors. Black and William spent four years studying and reviewing research into feedback which is closely linked to formative assessment. They conclude in agreement that communicating feedback to distance students has a huge effect on the quality learning.

Similarly, Owolabi and Onuka (2000) argued that feedback by instructors is usually made up of two distinct stages. In the first stage, instructors show students that a mistake has been made, and in the second stage, they help the students to correct it on top of that, Black and William (1998) noted that one way of increasing the effectiveness of feedback and the likelihood that the information provided is understood is to conceptualize feedback more as a dialogue rather than as information transmission. Feedback as dialogue means that the student not only receives initial feedback information but also has the opportunity to engage the instructor in discussion about the feedback (ibid).

Provision of feedback to ODE students is crucial for maintaining an open communication climate. The university administration and instructors must create an environment that encourages feedback. For example after assigning students some tasks instructors must ask them whether they have received and understood it or not. At the same time instructors must allow his or her students to express their views.

According to Carrs (2000) the most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement is feedback. Carrs added that the simplest prescription for improving education must be "dollops of feedback" which provide information as to how and why the student understands and misunderstands, and what directions the student must take to improve. The most fundamental component of teaching, assigning students to acquire information, assessing and evaluating understanding of the information needs the existence of effective communication between the students and their instructors. Nicol and Macfarlane (2006) noted that the fewer the cognitive resources needed for a task and the more the feedback is directed at the task demands and not the person then the more powerful the feedback (Holmberg, 1989). However, providing feedback to students is not enough as the only way and manner in which individuals interpret information, therefore it is important to develop positive and valuable concepts of providing information concerning improvements of OUTS' students academic performance through pointing out where the student did not do well and how to improve academically.

Data obtained through focused group discussion revealed that many OUT students were lamenting that some of their course units were not recorded by the OUT examination officers appropriately. Respondents claimed that sometimes they were told that they have not completed some of the course units while in reality they completed all the required units. One respondent said,

> I completed all course units, but when I asked for my academic progress report I was told that I had not completed them. This was not right because I was sure that I completed them, so I decided to carry all the said missing assignments and timed tests to the dean of faculty who found that I was right. Therefore, he communicated with the examination officer and told me to see the examination officer so as to record the units which were not recorded.

From this lamentation of a student, it proves that there are some barriers in studying though distance mode. It is paramount importance to improve the way of communicating so as to have effective communication which can promote communication at the OUT, a situation which can motivate many people especially Tanzanians to study through the OUT and thus ignorance will be reduced at a large scale.

Fasasi (2004) found a similar problem in Nigerian secondary schools where many school managers failed to keep students records appropriately. The reason for this problem in Nigeria, according to Fasasi, could have been that, school managers are operating within a complex environment which could be posing a lot challenges to their successful administration. Students' scores and other information are the basic records to be kept appropriately. They serve as a bank in which information is deposited and kept with the hope of retrieving and utilizing in the future (Fasasi 2004). Proper keeping of school records could enhance planning process, serve as historical record, provide knowledge on students' academic performance and facilitate schools' financial administration. It also provides a basis for advisory and counseling services. University records also enables us know the yearly academic performance of students. University administrators and instructors will be able to determine the academic progress of the students and take necessary precautionary measures towards improving their academic performance (Zindi and Aucon, 1995).

Communication facilitates as one of the aspects on factors associated with the administration was also investigated. The results showed that, there was little direct

telephone contact between the academic staff with their students. Out of thirty continuing and graduate students of OUT who were interviewed if they have mobile phone of any member of the academic staff such as the dean of faculty or instructor, only two continuing students (7% were found to have the numbers of the mobile phones of their deans of their faculties. The rest, twenty eight students (93%) out of 30 students had neither numbers of their deans nor their instructors. This is actually contrary to the findings of Sweet (1986) and Kember (1989) who both indicated that direct telephone contacts between the academic staff and the students had positive influence on students' commitment and persistence to learning. Kember (1989) noted that high proportion of students who make use of the telephone to communicate with their tutors have been doing better than those who did not. Therefore, effective use of mobile phone, voicemail and e-mail by university staff is essential. This is because tutors can modify the voicemail message to address common corners of student that arise during the semester (Sweet, 1986).

In the same line, students need to have their prospectus at hand from the beginning of the course. During focused group discussion and interviews, majority of the respondents (continuing, drop-outs and graduate OUT students) claimed that they were not supplied with university prospectus. One respondent said:

> The OUT administration never provide us with prospectus, therefore, this is a barrier to effective communication because we are blind, we do not know what courses we are supposed to take, their units, when to undertake timed test and even examinations (05/06/2012).

Prospectus is a document that communicates to prospective and enrolled students to attract them to apply for admissions (Koul, 1992). It usually contains information

about the institution and the available courses, including advice on how to apply and the benefits of accepting a place at the institution. Many universities have individual prospectuses for each course or group of course that they offer. Most universities have both online and paper versions of prospectus. However, the trend at OUT indicates that the institution provides prospectus after the individual has acquired an admission. This is different from other universities in the world whereby prospectus needs to be provided before admission so that it can attract students. Failure of provision of prospectus to students especially to the registered one is a barrier which needs to be modified so as to enable OUT students to be up to date not only to what is going on but also to get full information of their courses, this is because a prospectus is viewed as a part of a curriculum.

Moreover, it was found that the channels of communication used by the OUT Tanga Regional centre between students and administration through the post office are not effective. Using post office services resulted to the delay of information hence hindered effective communication at OUT. Eighteen (90%) out of 20 continuing students said that internet services at OUT - Tanga Regional Centre are not reliable.

In addition, five graduate students who were supposed to graduate in 2008 graduated in 2009 just because of delay of their assignments which they submitted using post office services. Although, OUT launched internet services to most of her regional services, internet services provided at OUT - Tanga Regional Centre is not reliable. This is because there are electricity cuts. Consequently, OUT students fail to communicate effectively with study materials form internet sites or communicate

with their instructors. Therefore, sometimes they decide either to travel to the OUT headquarters or rely on postal services which are expensive.

Orienting instructors and students on course redesign for electronic learning delivery at the context of OUT is inevitable. The World Bank (2001) conducted a study in Nigeria and a reported similar finding is that; distance education has faced numerous challenges in implementation during its three decade history. First and foremost challenge was poor communication between college and her students due to the use of traditional postal services in delivering information.

As literature suggests, many instructors of ODE attempt to communicate so much information at one time that any student on the receiving end would become overloaded (Sali, 2008). Sali emphasized that routine communications with our students should be brief and focused. Not everything must be accomplished in one discussion. If too much information is offered at once, students may become overwhelmed and incapable of processing any of it. Thompson (1997) maintained that being proactive is very important in communicating with students of the ODE; we must strive to move towards a proactive style as educators. In addition colleges and instructors need to take advantage of spontaneous moment to communicate with students; it also helps to schedule communication time, for example, dedicating some office hours for appointments with students. In relation to this point respondent through a focused group discussion said that their marked time tests were not clearly showing the mistakes they made. Besides, they do not have a schedule communication time with their instructors. Eighteen (90%) out of 20 respondents

said; "After all we do not have the phone numbers of our instructors and we do not know even their names! How do you expect us to communicate with them? "

Open and distance learning covers education approaches that reach learners in their environment. These approaches are expected to be compatible with adult and independent learning designed to reduce the isolation of these learners (Trindale, et. al., 2000). Besides providing access to learning materials like study guides, prospectus, text books and Compact Discs (CDs) or other portable or mass media, distance learning requires that some kind of support mechanisms can be made available to students to help them overcome their learning difficulties, get supplementary information, valuate their own progress and exchange ideas with instructors, administrators and fellow students (Holmberg 2000; Keegan 1993). Unlike classroom-based teaching, open and distance learning systems aim to provide education to many learners and, at the same time be flexible enough to cater for the various needs of the learners. Any exclusively distance learning institution requires doing everything possible to ensure that all learning materials reach the learners in time and that all the relevant information is accessible to the learners (Trindale *et. al.,* 2000). That is to say, new innovations like the internet and mobile technologies provide a great opportunity for mass delivery of open and distance education information especially in Africa where governments and institutions struggling to equip their people with much needed skills for development.

The findings of this study through the questionnaires asked to respondent revealed that sixty eight (98%) out of 69 of the respondents were not having reliable internet

services in Tanga region due to the fact that there is often electricity cuts and also the fact that many of the respondents live in rural areas where there is no reliable electricity and internet. Therefore, in order for Tanzania government to provide good education to her people it has to ensure that she allocated enough funds to the OUT so as to enable it to increase face to face sessions, prepare enough study materials such as text books, CDs, study guides, prospectus, to have radio programs and innovative internet and mobile technologies.

Fifty four (90%) out of 60 respondents who were interviewed showed their dissatisfaction with face-to-face sessions that are undertaken by the OUT. One continuing student said; "during the face-to-face session it is only administration logistics which are done. Sometime some of the assignments are not issued during the face-to-face session especially at the begging of an academic year." He continued saying; " the face-to-face takes only one day which is actually not enough to enable a distance learner to get required assistance from his/her instructors."

According to this respondent, it is high time for the OUT to ensure that the academic matters are fully discussed during the face-to-face sessions which could take three or more days. Study materials and all important issues should be given or presented during face-to-face sessions rather than waiting for the Director of Regional Centre (DRC) to follow them from the OUT headquarter. According to respondents' views during focused group discussion it was found that the government does not provide enough funds to the OUT in order to conduct face-to-face sessions as required. One respondent said,

> we do not have enough time to discuss with our instructors…
> instructors undertake face-to-face sessions in a rush, claiming
> that, they should complete their work on the same day and move
> to another centre because of the limited number of days paid
> (05/06/2012).

The opinion highlighted above indicates that many OUT students cannot study smoothly if they are not having long contact with their instructors as far as the study materials given to them are in a foreign language which hinder them from communicating effectively. That is, interacting well with study materials. However, if their instructors are facilitated with accommodation even for few days by the OUT at regional centers, effective communication could be reached and learners could interact with their tutors and with study materials well.

To support this idea, Rajamanthri (2004) who conducted a study on the students' expectations of face-to-face sessions at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) and the overall findings of his study clearly indicate that the participants of distance learning mode have very few contacts with their instructors compared to the demands. Keegan (1986) asserted that many distance learners may find it difficult to handle the self-learning materials with their various access devices, activities and assignments. These would require knowledge of study skills which can be provided through human support.

In fact, ODE students would like to know many things regarding the scope of their courses, their performance in assignment responses, examination patterns, as well as the modes of assessment and evaluation. Precisely to meet such needs of the distance learners, study centers are established and face-to-face contact sessions are arranged

at these study centers, and the contacts need to be enough to cater for the needs and requirements of both the students and the course.

However, to some students face-to-face sessions were found to be unnecessary to them and even in some cases harmful as they feel that their own study schedule is interfered with. Generally, effective communication in open and distance education plays an important role in the learning processes. It enables the sharing of information, thoughts and ideas which contribute to learning. Effective communication actually generates opportunities for learning to take place. As Nasseh (1997) emphasized that college need to establish more effective modes of communication in their distance learning programs to compensate for the smaller number of face-to-face interaction between students and instructors.

This is largely in accordance with theory of industrialization, such as Peter (1983) who states that people in industry who are involved in production should be co-operate so that they can obtain high production. Likewise OUT Administration should co-operate with their students by giving them important information and material so that they can get quality output.

## 4.5    Summary

Students' factors were found to be one of the sources of barriers that hindered effective communication in distance learning at OUT Tanga regional centre. The researcher found that forty eight (80%) out of 60 of the respondents were of the opinion that students contributed a lot in breaking effective communication in OUT. It was also found that fifty (84%) out of 60 OUT students do not have stable

financial basis as a result they fail to communicate with their instructors and the OUT administrators.

The study further revealed that OUT students were not serious in their studies and that many students do not adhere to the timetable of their studies. Eighteen (90%) out of 20 students who dropped out of studies failed to adhere to the timetable because they already had other commitments such as jobs and family matters. Likewise, English language was found to be a barrier that hindered effective communication in distance education particularly at the OUT - Tanga Regional Centre. According to the findings obtained using focused group discussion, seven (87%) out of 8 respondents said that English language as a medium of instruction hindered effective communication at the OUT. All graduate students who were interviewed revealed that a learner learns better if he or she is using the language which he or she knows better.

Furthermore, the study explored factors that are caused by OUT administration. Respondents revealed that forty-six (77%) out of 60 OUT students were not satisfied with the feedback from their tutors in relation to marked timed tests, term papers and annual examinations. This study found that the OUT administration does not provide some of the academic progress reports to students on time as a result some students do not get their academic progress prior to their next term papers or timed tests. That means, they do most of their next timed test, term papers or annual examinations before seeing their former academic papers which could show them what and how they were supposed to answer the timed test or term paper. Besides, the study found

that, there was little direct telephone contact between the academic staff and the administration with their students.

Apart from telephone contacts, the library of the OUT- Tanga Regional Centre had no reliable internet services for her students. There are very few computers compared to the number of students at the regional centre. Moreover, it was found that the channels of communication used by the OUT - Tanga Regional Centre between students and administration through the post office are not effective. Using post office resulted to the delay of information. Hence hinder effective communication at OUT.

The findings of the study revealed that face-to-face sessions is considered to be the most useful way though they are not enough to cater for students' demands and course requirements. Fifty four (90%) out of 69 respondents (academic staff, continuing, dropped and graduates students) who were interviewed showed their dissatisfaction with the face-to-face sessions that were undertaken by the OUT. They claimed that the face-to-face sessions were not enough.

According to respondents' views, it was found that the government does not provide enough funds to the OUT to conduct face-to-face sessions as required. However, to say the truth, The OUT Administration is doing a commendable job to ensure that many OUT students are excelling well academically. The researcher congratulates the OUT leadership, academicians and all the OUT staffs from the regional level up to the headquarters in Dar-es Salaam for the best job they are doing.

Generally, effective communication in Open and Distance Education (ODE) is a very fundamental component since it enables the sharing of information, thoughts and ideas which contribute to effective learning. The following last chapter is about conclusion and recommendations of the research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## 5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1    Introduction

In the previous chapter data were presented, analyzed and findings discussed in relation to barriers to effective communication in distance education in Open University of Tanzania. This chapter summarizes, concludes and outlines the recommendations of study based on the research findings. Finally, it suggests areas for further research.

### 5.2    Summary of the Study

This study aimed at assessing barriers to effective communication in distance education at Open University. The study was guided by the following research questions: What are the students' personal factors that cause barriers to effective communication in distance education at OUT -Tanga region centre? What barriers are caused by OUT administration that hinders effective communication in distance education? And, what barriers are caused by English language as the medium of instruction in the OUT that hinder effective communication between OUT students, instructors and study materials?

Review of related literature revealed important issues related to the barriers to effective communication in distance education. The review focused on the concept of distance education, rationale for distance education, theories of distance education, and communication.   Different studies have shown the contribution of distance

learning, but the barriers to effective communication in distance education in OUT - Tanga Regional Centre has not yet been established.

To attain the purpose of the study, the case study design was employed. Within this design the focus was mainly on qualitative inquiry. Respondents from whom data was generated were of various categories: 20 continuing students, 20 drop-out students, 20 graduates, 01 OUT - Tanga Regional Centre director and 8 academic staff in Tanga region. Data was sought through document search, interviews, and observations. Relevant data was analyzed manually basing on the focused themes.

## 5.2    The Main Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are summarized following the objective and related research questions.

### 5.2.1   OUT Students Factors

Findings from this study showed that students' factors contribute a lot in effective communication at the OUT -Tanga Regional Centre. It was shown that most of the OUT students are not serious and committed in studying due to poor communication from OUT administrators and instructors as a result most of these students fail to pay college fees and do Timed Tests, Annual Examination and research work in the right time.  Besides, the study revealed that students lack sufficient funds to communicate with administrators and instructors. Consequently, this has contributed to the breakdown of effective communication.

In order for OUT students to overcome communication barriers that are caused by work and other family matters and succeed in their OUT programs, they must be

committed to their studies, they must also have action plans on how to study and complete their courses. They should actually be serious in studying and doing follow ups of their academic programs. The study showed that more than 48 OUT students (80%) out of 60 OUT students in Tanga Regional Centre were not communicating effectively with their deans of faculties as well as the examination officers in order to be aware of their academic progress due to the fact that they have a lot of job commitments, family matters and being incompetence in using ICT and a computer in general.

### 5.2.2 English Language as a Medium of Instruction

Findings revealed that English language as medium of instruction hindered effective communication at the OUT in Tanga Regional Centre. All 20 (100%) graduate students who were interviewed revealed that a learner learns better if he or she uses the language which he or she knows better.

English language as the medium of instruction is actually not well understood and fluently spoken by many OUT students. The findings indicated that more than seventy five percent (75%) of OUT students in Tanga Regional Centre were incompetent in communicating effectively in English language. Therefore it is obvious that English language contribute a great barrier to effective communication in the OUT -Tanga Regional Centre, the situation which hinder OUT students to communicate effectively with study materials which are written in English language.

### 5.2.3 The OUT Administration Factors

The findings revealed that OUT administration is one of the sources of barriers that hinder effective communication between students, instructors and administrators.

The research revealed that face-to-face sessions conducted by OUT are very few per year to cater for students' demands. This is mainly because during the face-to-face sessions academic matters are not fully discussed or addressed. There is not enough constructive feedback from the instructors to their students on how the questions of Timed Tests Examinations were supposed to be answered. This is very important learning of new skills, especially for beginners.

## 5.3    Conclusions

In light of the research findings, the following conclusions are made:

1.  The OUT students are not serious and self committed in studying. Though the study has shown that most of the OUT students are faced with family and or too much work load obligations yet it is appropriate to advise them to be serious and self committed in studying. Since most OUT students are not competent in English language, they fail to interact effectively with their study materials. It is the right time to advise them to learn how to use English language effectively since competence in the language plays an important role for the learners to effectively interact with study materials. Most of study materials are developed using English language. The study has revealed that most of OUT students are not competent in using ICT and thus they fail to surf study materials from the internet sites and communicate with their instructors. The study has shown that several of the barriers to effective communication at OUT are to a large extent created by OUT students themselves.

2.  (a) The study has also shown that OUT administration needs to modify her ways of recording and disseminating students' academic reports. This is because the

OUT has not installed reliable internet sites at Tanga Regional Centre since there are frequent electricity cuts. Besides, not all study materials have been digitized. Furthermore, the study revealed that OUT students' academic records were sometimes misplaced or lost. 2(b) OUT should digitize all her teaching and learning resources so that her students and other stake holders can surf study materials from internet sites. 2(c) The OUT administration has not thoroughly improved communication with her students as there are some occasions when students fail to get study materials and important information from OUT at the right time. For instance, changes of examination time table and sometimes missing of some examination papers was lamented by respondents. Given the findings, it is correct to advice the OUT administration to improve her communication systems so as to make it effective.

Generally, the OUT is doing her level best in informing her students about their academic progress through Students Academic Registration Information System (SARIS). Students see their examination results through internet. Also they register themselves for the courses and examinations through internet. Some study materials and other OUT documents are digitized in the internet. All these are good progress the OUT has done which we appreciate.

However, it has not installed reliable internet services up to the district levels where majority of her students reside. The OUT has not used the Teachers' Resource Centres which are found in most district headquarters which could be convenient as OUT District Centres.

3. Furthermore, the study has revealed that most of the OUT students are not competent in using English language which is the medium of instruction. The findings showed that more than seventy five percent (75%) of OUT students in Tanga Regional Centre were incompetent in English language. Given this fact, this is a barrier which needs to be addressed since language is a key factor to effective communication. Therefore, all OUT students with this shortfall are strongly advised to study English language effectively so as to be competent in using it.

## 5.4    Recommendations

Findings from this study suggest that proactive efforts are needed to improve and eradicate barriers that hinder effective communication in education particularly at OUT-Tanga Region Center. The researcher recommends the following:

1. As long as English language as a medium of instruction in higher learning institution is not well understood by many Tanzanians, the OUT's students will continue to perform poorly in their examinations and some will most likely drop from studies. The researcher advises policy makers and educationist to consider the adoption of Kiswahili language as a medium of instructions in Higher learning institutions. The use of Kiswahili language will enable many Tanzanians who are not competent in English language to study at the OUT.

2. Policy makers and academicians are advised to investigate and finally advise the government of Tanzania through the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) to find out solutions to enhance effective communication

during teaching and learning process. For instance, Kiswahili language could be used as a medium of instruction in Higher learning institutions such as OUT. English language can remain an international language which will continue to be taught in schools and colleges since it is used in international matters.

3. The OUT needs to have more sessions of face-to-face, at least about three sessions per academic year. OUT Staff should be facilitated to attend and teach OUT students according to their respectful subjects or areas of specialization during the face-to-face sessions. This will increase effective communication between the OUT students and their instructors.

4. The OUT is advised to digitize all of her study materials so that her students will have a lot of information related to their programmes. For, it is believed that information is power; therefore, annual prospectus and study materials for each course will enable students to get various current information. This will remove the prevailing barriers to effective communication at OUT.

5. The government through the Ministry of Education and Vocation Training (MoEVT) is kindly urged to assist OUT students with some funds to accommodate them in various requirements including communication costs with their OUT instructors and also subsidizing  their university fees.

6. The OUT should emphasize high performance in the ICT course to all her students which will enable them to communicate effectively with their instructors and administrators. It will also enable them to access study materials from internet sites.

7. The OUT is advised to cooperate with the Teachers' Resource Centre which is available in every district. OUT students can use them as centers for learning. The OUT is advised to equip them with teaching and learning materials.

8. Since this study was constrained to only barriers that hinder effective communication in distance education particularly at OUT Tanga Regional Center, whereas the OUT has twenty seven Regional Centers, it is suggested that similar studies should be conducted in other Regional Centers at national and international level.

9. This study also revealed that delay of feedback and sometimes misplacement or loss of academic progress report was a factor creating a barrier to effective communication between the learners and the OUT administration. This situation affects OUT students because they fail to know their academic progress in time. Therefore, further investigation is needed to find out best ways of providing feedback for academic progress to OUT students. This is because getting feedback at the right time promotes effective communication.

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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix I: Questionnaires to OUT Director Tanga Regional Center and the Academic staff**

Dear respondent,

I am doing a study on the Barriers that hinder effective communication in distance learning: the case study of the open university of Tanzania. I humbly request you to fill in this questionnaire. The information will be for research purposes and will be kept confidential.

Personal information

1. Gender: male…………………….. Female…………………..

2. Respondent's status; put a tick n a right box

| Director | |
|---|---|
| Academic staff | |

Questionnaires

1.1 Which are the major barriers that hinder effective communication in the OUT that have been complained by students? Please list down three barriers.

A…………………………………………………………………………………

B…………………………………………………………………………………

C…………………………………………………………………………………

1.2 What are the major students' factors that hinder them to communicate effectively with the OUT? Please list down three factors.

A…………………………………………………………………………………

B…………………………………………………………………………………

C…………………………………………………………………………………

1.3 Is there any complain from either students or instructors about English language as a medium of instruction? Tick in the right column and explain briefly below.

(a) Yes (………)                     (b) No (………)

**Appendix II: Questionnaires to OUT Graduates**

Dear respondent,

I am doing a study on the Barriers that hinder effective communication in distance learning: the case study of Open University of Tanzania. I humbly request you to fill in this questionnaire. The information collected will be for research purposes and will be kept confidential.

Personal information

Gender: male……………….. Female…………………

Questionnaires:

2.1    Which among the following are the major sources for the existence of barriers to effective communication in distance education? (Tick not more than three sources).
    A.  Delay of academic feedback from the OUT to students.
    B.  Abrupt changes of examination and timed tests time table.
    C.  Lack of prospectus and other related OUT materials including phone numbers of OUT instructors.
    D.  Delay of completing OUT courses.
    E.  Dropout of OUT students from their programs.

2.2    With reference to the major sources you have selected in question number 2 above (appendix 2.1). Tick not more than three factors from the list given below (A to L) which you think are barriers to effective communication in distance education.
    A.   Few OUT staff.

B.   Lack of release from duties by the employers.

C.   Lack of ICT knowledge to OUT students.

D.   Lack of ICT knowledge to OUT tutors.

E.   Financial constraints of OUT students.

F.   Financial constraints of OUT institute.

G.   Incompetence in English language as a medium of instruction in OUT.

H.   Job commitment.

I.   Family chores.

J.   Unavailability of internet services.

K.   Insufficiency of study materials

L.   Lack of communication skills to many OUT students.

2.3   Which five recommendations would you advise the OUT administration to do in order to remove the barriers to effective communication in distance?

A.   …………………………………………………………………………

B.   …………………………………………………………………………

C.   …………………………………………………………………………

D.   …………………………………………………………………………

E.   …………………………………………………………………………

**Appendix III: Questionnaires to Continuing Students**

Dear respondent,

I am doing a study on the Barriers that hinder effective communication n distance learning: The case study of the Open University of Tanzania. I humbly request you to fill in this questionnaire. The information collected will be for research purposes and will be kept confidential.

Personal information.

Gender: male……………….. Female…………………..

Questionnaires:

1.1     Give only one brief recommendation which will solve the major barriers to effective communication in provision and delivery of distance education at the Open University of Tanzania.

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

1.2     Are you released from duties by your employer in order to study OUT studies?  Please tick which is appropriate

A.    YES   (      )                          B.  NO       (      )

1.3     Suggest two major ways from the list given which could solve the barriers to effective communication in distance education in the OUT.

A.    OUT students should be fully committed in communicating wit their OUT tutors.

B.    The government should allocate enough funds to the OUT so as to enable it to procure teaching and learning resources.

C.    the OUT tutors should not delay academic feedback/academic progress report to the OUT students

D.    provision of OUT prospectus and phone numbers of instructors to OUT students

(            ) & (            )

**Appendix IV: Introductory Letter to Respondents**

Dear sir/madam,

I hope you are fine. I am fine. My name is David M.M. Nkingwa, a tutor at Korogwe Teachers' College. I am studying a Master course in Distance Education through the Open University of Tanzania. The title of my research is: Barriers to Effective Communication in Distance Education: A case of the Open University of Tanzania - Tanga Regional Centre.

This research is part of my master dissertation. I would therefore be very grateful if you could help me to collect data by filling in the questionnaires form that you can find in attachment which is a word document. This needs you only few minutes. Please send it back to me by May, 15th through the following fax no. 0272640999, Email or through postal address as shown below.

My mobile phone is +255782499191 or 0714-772595

My e-mail contact is nkingwa3@gmail.com

It is me,

David M. Nkingwa

P.O BOX 533 Korogwe

April, 2013

**Appendix V: Semi-Structured Interview Guide Questions (Continuing, Dropped and Graduates Students)**

In order for the researcher to seek information from students on the way they communicate with the OUT administrators and instructors, the following interview schedule was be used. Status of a respondent (Please tick in the right box)

Continuing student (    )   Drop-out students (    )      Graduate (    )

Sex…….male………female……….respondent's age………

Years of studying at the OUT…………

The year dropped from studies (for the drop-out students)………

Questions

1.  Why do you think some of the students dropped from OUT studies?
2.  Which are the major barriers that hinder effective communication in distance education?
3.  What are your views about the way students communicate with their instructors and administrators at the OUT?
4.  What challenges do you face in using language as a medium of instruction at the OUT?
5.  Do you think OUT contribute to the poor communication with her students at the OUT?
6.  What are the factors which are contributed by the students in communicating with the OUT?

**Appendix VI: Guidelines for Focused Group Discussion**

1.  It is said by many Tanzanians including scholars that English language as a medium of instruction in higher learning institutions is a barrier for students to communicate with study materials effectively and thus reduce their understanding of what they learn. What are your opinions? What can be done to address this situation?

2.  The OUT Administration as the provider of high education to her distance learners has some barriers which hinder effective communication with her students. Give your opinions and suggestions on how to improve effective communication in the OUT in Tanzania.

3.  "The delivery of Open and Distance Education needs a students to be fully self committed and self regulated" How far is this contention correct?

4.  What can the Government of Tanzania do in order to assist the OUT to fulfill her objectives of providing education not only to many Tanzanians but also to other people in other countries who will like to study through distance mode?

**Thank you all in advance**