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Editorial

The Open University of Tanzania is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Being the first public Open University in Eastern Africa it has unveiled the best educational preference to many people in the region. The best learning process transcends the efficiency and ethics of a workforce. Through research and hard work, the university has been stirring social transformation evidently in the elevation of dependable approach in solving social problems consistently with the needs of the 21st century. Although the OUT doesn't brag for its learning output, its mission and vision attract many to share the reputation of belonging to such learning institution. The importance of this occasion inspires all university stakeholders to re-evaluate the contribution of the open and distance learning to the nation. The growth in delivering and expanding access to many students in Eastern Africa has been marked with increased knowledgeable workforce in the society.

Adult learning contributes in attainment of achievers of social reform and development. For 20 years, East African nations have absorbed graduates capable of transforming society dreams to reality. Learners' response in e-learning has proved that acquisition of knowledge and skills can be done in a non-tradition classroom setting. Deviating from conventional mode of delivery, learning becomes the source of interest and excitement to both students and scholars. The uniqueness of the Open University of Tanzania is realized in its attainable goals, and taking risks while embracing internal and external challenges. The opportunity to extend access and knowledge coincides with emphasis on andragogical learning methodologies. Mobilization of educational resources and guidance in the acquisition of new knowledge empower learners' confidence and sense of belonging to the institution. Inclusion of learners' background and experience has moderated the pace of learning whereby students are in control of what and when to take courses. An online learning method has encouraged students' inclination and motivation to engage in the 21st century technology. The OUT has adhered to students' quest for new knowledge through face to face sessions, virtual and physical libraries.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has liberated many individuals from stagnation to active participant through e-learning. Learners appreciate their recognition and inclusion of their experience in the learning process. ODL acts as the remedy of many shortfalls of traditional system of education. ODL is also mentioned by Mushi in her article to create free critical and relatively independent thinkers capable of interrogating, interpreting and innovating. East African governments have welcomed the OUT move to create challengers of actions, goals, social structures, traditions and thinking. Higher quality of learning and achievable goals override society status quo. Although liberation is refined by social transformation, the OUT is still challenging its staff and students to be more conversant with emerging technologies.

Human capital has been a pillar of OUT for realization of its goals. Outsourcing innovators and those proven to excel the norm, has made the institution firm to the

present. Mbwette and Ngirwa emphasized the importance of human resource managers to increase diversity of employees. Inclusion of individual's contributions enables the institution to achieve multiple goals. Differences offer higher chance of growth but is also mentioned by Mbwette and Ngirwa to elevate chances of creating specific challenges. The institution is current in its delivering superior knowledge through qualified individuals and its initiative in sponsoring its workforce in acquisition of new knowledge and skills. The stability of the institution to its core values is affirmed in its unitary vision of all stakeholders.

Dr. John Soka
The Editor

Enhanced Efficiency and Productivity in Implementation of Face-to-Face Sessions in the Open University of Tanzania

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Abstract: *This paper focuses on efforts being made to improve the face to face sessions in the OUT Regional Centres in Tanzania. It shows students' concerns and highlights the insights for improving future practices to enhance both effectiveness and productivity of face to face sessions. Prior to 2005 face to face sessions used to be held twice per year, each time for one day duration and carried out on the same day throughout the country. A number of problems cropped up including poor attendance by both students and tutors, limited contribution from some facilitators, too short a time, too few facilitators, their inadequate participation and productivity. In 2006 a modality of utilizing tutors from both the Head Office and Part-Time-Tutors from the respective Regional Centres was adopted and together with the injection of some degree of flexibility partly improved the organization*

Staff, who leave the OUT Head Quarters to the Regional Centres have so far not been able to meet students' expectations despite the flexibility and improved organization of the face to face sessions. Students are of the opinion that funding should be improved, that there should be involvement of more tutors to cover each unit course, which they consider to be essential. However, with the introduction of the new assessment system face to face sessions have assumed new roles of assessing the readiness of students to undertake their annual examinations through students' portfolio with the new role face to face sessions are no longer discretionary.

Background

Face to face sessions are designated periods during which students meet their lecturers and Part-Time-Tutors to discuss, dialogue and interact with each other with a purpose of providing guidance on the part of tutors, sharing knowledge and experiences between staff and students and among students themselves doing practicals or field work and solving academic and social problems. Such sessions include: Science practicals, Geography field work, law projects, orientation of new and continuing students, teaching practice for both regular and licensed teachers and Special Education, as well as the general face to face sessions designated to cover all students over and above faculty specific subjects requirements. Apart from the last-mentioned face to face sessions the others receive very close supervision and guidance using specifically identified lecturers/tutors for a specific period of time. This paper focuses on the more general face to face sessions designed to be carried out in the Regional Centres with the facilitation of staff from both the Head Office and in the Regional Centres.

Face to Face sessions constitute one of the five strategies used for supporting the print, which is the main medium of delivery in the Open University of Tanzania. The report of the Committee, responsible for the establishment of the Open University of Tanzania categorically states that face to face sessions must be “*conducted regularly in a*

dispersed form at study centres with the help of “Part-Time-Tutors” (URT, 1990; p.100). The regularity referred to in the Committee’s report could be interpreted to mean as spelled out in the University’s prospectus or subjectively differently, as it was not defined. Similarly, the phrase “*dispersed form at study centres*” was not defined and so could be interpreted differently by Directors of Regional Centres.

The role of face to face sessions is described by the report as to “*compensate for the limitations of the print and electronic media*” (Ibid p. 101). The Rolling Strategic Plan 2004/5 – 2008/9 categorically states that in order to enhance teaching and learning OUT must “*ensure all scheduled face to face sessions are held in all centres*” (OUT, 2004 p.86). These statements underscore how OUT values the importance of the face to face sessions as one of the strategies of delivering the curriculum. Initially the OUT management set aside two days per year for the face to face sessions directive as reflected in the almanac of the University’s Prospectus prior to 2006.

So, the face to face sessions were until April, 2005 (when flexibility was injected in) being held nationally twice per year for one day on each occasion for specified and designated dates except for Regional Centres, which did not have directors. Such centres were overseen by directors of respective nearby Centres. In such cases face to face sessions were held a week later to allow for the overseeing director(s) to lead the sessions in such Regional Centres.

The way the face to face sessions were conducted differed considerably from one centre to another depending on the commitment and creativity of the directors of the respective Regional Centres. The OUT Head Office allocated funds to the Regional Centres for their respective directors to use for running the face to face sessions. It was up to the directors of Regional Centres to plan how to use the funds. Each Regional Centre had its own ways of carrying out the face to face sessions. Under such conditions quality assurance and control remained a matter of concern.

The Problem

As time advanced students increasingly expressed dissatisfaction with the way the face to face sessions were being implemented. The sessions were described as being not very productive, were focused largely on non-academic issues, limited time allocated to academic discussions, inadequately preparedness of some of the face to face facilitators and limited seriousness and commitment of some of the students. The dissatisfaction covers a wide range of issues such participating and financing face to face (Kihwelo, 2007).

As a result of students’ dissatisfaction with the face to face sessions Senate directed that the face to face sessions be re-organized to make them more efficient, effective and productive. To implement the directive Directors of Regional Centres were required to solicit problematic issues and difficult topics from students and to identify Part-Time Tutors in their respective regions or elsewhere, who would be deployed to address the

issues raised. Directors of Regional Centres were directed to submit to the office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) their respective face to face programmes and budgets for addressing the issues raised by students. Each Director's programme was required to show the problem areas, the identified experts/facilitators, who could lead the discussions and for how long. Directors of Regional Centres were further directed to ensure that, where they fail to identify experts from their respective regions to address their identified specific problems should indicate so to the OUT head office so that expert tutors can be identified from elsewhere and posted to them. In order to operationalize the directive further, all directors of Regional Centres spent some time on 20th February, 2005 after their two days induction course on the Rolling Strategic Plan to deliberate on the conduct of the next face to face sessions. During the meeting the following were agreed upon:

1. Directors, students, leaders of Student Organization (OUTSO) and Part-Time-Tutors to meet in their respective Regional Centres under the chairmanship of the Director of each of the respective Regional Centres to prepare a plan on how best the next face to face session scheduled for 2nd April, 2005 could be conducted more effectively, productively and efficiently to benefit participating students.
2. Future face to face sessions be carried out within a time frame of one month and not necessarily on one and the same day throughout the country as it used to be done previously provided financial resources permit.

The drive to carry out this study emanated from the author's desire to make a follow up of the case study done in Kilimanjaro Regional Centre in 2003 during which a number of weaknesses were identified and so wanted to explore more on what was happening in some of the remaining Regional Centres in terms of the organization and implementation of the face to face sessions with the purpose of identifying current practices and what can be done to improve the future organization and implementation of the face to face sessions so that participating students and the University as a whole can benefit from more such sessions in terms of effectiveness efficiency and productivity than previously.

The Objective

The overall objective of this study is to find out how the face to face sessions have so far been organized and implemented in the Regional Centres, students understandings of the meaning of the face to face sessions, problems encountered during organization and implementation for the purpose of identifying ways of improving their future implementation. More specifically, the study seeks to:

- (i) Describe the organization and implementation of face to face sessions in the Regional Centres of the Open University of Tanzania;
- (ii) describe Students' understandings (Expectations) of face to face sessions;
- (iii) identify the extent to which students' expectations are met;

- (iv) identify students' perceptions of the worth of face-to-face sessions;
- (v) identify the strengths and weaknesses of the face to face sessions as they are being organized and implemented;
- (vi) describe how students would like to have the face to face sessions re-organized and implemented to make them more efficient, productive and; the rationale behind their suggestions;
- (vii) identify problems facing the organization and implementation of the face to face sessions.
- (viii) Describe the suggested re-organization of face to face sessions for future improvements.

Method of Study

The design

This study is designed to get a cross sectional view of the organization and implementation of the face to face sessions against longitudinal perspective. In this context the researcher decided to get the 2005 cross sectional view of the organization and implementation of the face to face sessions followed by a review of the reports from Regional Centres concerning how the face to face sessions are organized and implemented over time. The longitudinal perspective provides evolvement information that shows whether or not the organization and implementation of the face to face sessions have improved over time or not and if not what else must be done.

Selection of the Regional Centres

The purpose of this study is to get a general view of the organization and implementation of the face to face sessions. A non-probability selection of Regional Centres was adopted to allow for an in-depth study, which is in line with the fact that the researcher does not at this stage intend to test for any hypothesis but rather to document and describe in detail the organization and implementation of the face to face sessions with a view to identifying what can be done for the future improvement of the implementation and practices of the face to face sessions.

As an exploratory study the researcher decided to involve every Regional Centre with a selected group of not more than 5 respondents, all numbering 125 respondents without forcing any Regional Centre to take part. In other words only Directors Regional Centres to participate willing as expressed by returned responses to the questionnaires constituted the sample. Directors of Regional Centres were requested to inform students of the study and to ask those interested in participating in the study to fill in the questionnaire, on the basis of first come first served but taking the ratio of gender into account and return the filled in questionnaires to the Regional Centre office and subsequently to the Head Office. The implication is that if the first student, who reports willing to participate in the study is a male the next one can still be a male but the third must be a female (2:1). A total of 95 students responded to the questionnaire Representing 19 Regional Centres and 40 OUTSO leaders contributed views as a

focused group the implication of these data is to ensure that for every two males there must be one female student for purposes of ensuring that women views are represented.

The Population

The target population constitutes students studying with the Open University of Tanzania irrespective of the year of study but gender inclusive. The realized respondents captured a range of years from 1 to 8 years of study as well as by both males and females.

As it can be seen in Table 1 out of the 95 respondents 63 of them or 66 percent were men while 32 of them or 34 per cent were women. This percentage reflects reasonably well the proportionate participation of both sexes since at national level women

Table 1
Number of Respondents by Gender

Gender	N	%
Male	63	66
Female	32	34
Total	95	100

admission as the percentage of total admissions was 25.1 in 2005 (OUT, 2009, p.17) academic year. So, women in the sample are to some extent over represented by a small margin.

Table 2
Respondents by Programme of Study

Programme of Study	Frequency	Relative frequency
Bed	26	28
B.A Ed.	26	28
BSc. Gen (HE)	9	10
B.B.A.	2	2
BSc. Ed.	7	7
BA Political Science	1	1
BCO Gen.	4	4
BCM Ed.	1	1
LLB	7	7
Dip CYP	5	5
Master Dist Ed.	1	1
B.A Gen	2	2
BA Special	1	1
BA Tourism	1	1
OFC	2	2
Total	95	100

Respondents are pursuing different programmes all amounting to 15 the majority of whom constitute those pursuing Bachelor of Arts with Education, Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Science General, Law and Bachelor of Science with Education. The remaining programmes are rather thinly represented as shown in table 2. In terms of years of study table 3 shows that the majority (72%) of respondents have studying experiences with the Open University of Tanzania of between 2 and 8 years and have had sessions of face to face experiences. The first year students constitute 28 per cent of the group and did not therefore have wide experience of face to face sessions except for the orientation of the new and continuing students.

Selecting respondents was done by the Directors of Regional Centres after the announcing the intention to carry out the study and inviting those interested to participate. Questionnaires were distributed to students on the basis of those who had

Table 3
Respondents by Year of Study

Year of study	Frequency	Relative Frequency
1 st	27	28
2 nd	17	18
3 rd	18	19
4 th	7	7
5 th	15	16
6 th	8	9
7 th	0	0
8 th	3	3
Total	95	100

expressed interest to participate in the study to ensure that only interested ones were given the questionnaire, instructed to respond the questionnaire and to return them to the Regional Centre.

Sources of Information

Information was obtained from a questionnaire to which 95 students responded. The questionnaire included items, which solicited information to address the concerns reflected in the objectives of the study. The questionnaire generated quantitative information from respondents responses, which are expressed in frequencies and percentages; Secondary information was obtained from reviews of published and unpublished documentary information, mostly quarterly implementation reports from Directors of Regional Centres and the face to face sessions reports; Views of the focused Group constitute the discussions of Students government leaders.

Data Management, Analysis and Interpretation

Given the fact that this study is basically exploratory most of the questionnaire questions are of general nature but informative. The quantitative data from the

questionnaire questions were tallied and presented in terms of frequencies and percentages using a calculator and were disaggregated by gender, programme and year of study as shown in tables 1, 2 and 3. The qualitative data and information were subjected to content analysis whereby large quantities of the information/data were reduced to provide insights and knowledge representing facts and practical guide to action. The data have been presented in prose, direct quotations and tables.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

No study is of any value if the results are not valid and reliable. As Elliott (1990) clearly and rightly points out *“the validity of knowledge claim lies not so much on the extent to which they reflect a set of neutral facts but rather on the pragmatic test of ability to realize societal values better”*. Stating it in a different way, the knowledge claims mirror social construction of reality of the phenomenon. The data and information collected are not only be correctly observed but also accurately recorded and properly interpreted. Respondents to the questionnaire questions did so voluntarily and were not forced to participate in the study and so their responses reflect their own perspectives. Using the principle of triangulation their information and data were checked against other views collected qualitatively through documentary reports or discussions with focused groups to establish their credibility consistency and authenticity.

It should be noted that in qualitative approaches to research the equivalence of the internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity are the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability respectively (Bhola, 1990). That implies that one approach must not be judged against the criteria of another approach but rather by its equivalence.

Findings

The findings concerning the organization and implementation of face to face sessions are reported in Figure 1.

The Organisation and Implementation of Face to Face Sessions

The response to the question seeking information on the organization of the face to face sessions show that Directors of Regional Centres mobilize students and Part-Time-Tutors for the next face-to-face sessions at the Regional Centre level just a couple of weeks before the day when the actual activity takes place much, as the university yearly almanac is in place and are aware of it. The programme for the day is organized by the Director of the Regional Centre sometimes with or without an effective involvement of OUTSO leaders or the students themselves. Prior to 2005 the day for face to face session normally started with the meeting of students, tutors/lecturers and Director of the respective Regional Centre in a designated hall generally hired for the occasion. The Director of the Regional Centre introduce Part-Time-Tutors, lecturers and OUTSO Government leaders to students after which the Director proceeded with administrative announcements. OUTSO leaders held their meetings thereafter, largely because it was

the only time students could gather together in a relatively large numbers and so OUTSO leaders took advantage of it to hold their meetings. By so doing they thus effectively reduced the time for academic dialogue, discussions and interaction. With the introduction of planned time table from the Head Office OUTSO meetings have not been featuring prominently in the same sessions any more. They gathered together again to start interacting with tutors and among themselves as illustrated on table 4

The findings show five versions of practices in conducting the face to face sessions in the Regional Centres. The first four options pertain to the period prior to 2005 and the fifth option depicts the situation after 2006. The first option concerns sessions held in one day. This option has two versions; one concerns students assembling in one hall, start off with routine and administrative chores of both the Directors followed by OUTSO leaders of Regional Centre and then followed up by students breaking into groups to discuss some issues with their unit course tutors from the Regional Centre

Table 4
Respondents' perceptions of the organization and implementation of the face to face sessions

Type of organization	Way conducted
1. One day, at the OUT Regional Centre in a single hall for all students.	(i) Generally described as not well structured to emphasize the academic aspects; (ii) dominated by administrative announcements, invited guest speakers' speeches; (iii) OUTSO leaders given roles to play; (iv) A few facilitators meet with a few groups of students and discuss some presented topics; (v) OUTSO meetings conducted; (vi) Routine work for the rest of day.
2. One day with students grouped into 3 to 4 units course programme level with between 3 and 5 part-time tutors.	(i) Initial gathering in a hall, where Administrative and logistical issues/take place. (ii) Tutors (mostly from Education) are allocated to groups in different rooms, where students are invited to ask questions and get responses from the tutors; (iii) Some facilitators give lectures, which are later discussed and any question raised are answered during the day.
3. 1 to 2 days in the districts. Roles distributed between the directors of respective Regional Centres and other facilitators	Students are informed to remain in their respective districts in designated meeting places and lecturers follow them there.
4. DRCs and Part-Time	(i) Difficult topics from students are sent to DRCs,

Tutors follow students in their respective districts.	who arrange for Part-Timers to meet at the district level;
5 Three days devoted to certificate and undergraduate students and one to two days for postgraduate students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (ii) The Director of Regional Centre or Part-Time-tutors travel to the districts and deliver lectures on a course units already identified, which are then discussed including questions and answers. (i) DVC-Academic discuss guidelines with Deans/Directors of Faculties/Institutes/Department and DVC(RS) to make the essential preparations; (ii) DVC-Academic requires DRCs to cooperate with students and submit difficult topics to Deans through DVC (RS); (iii) DVC-Academic in cooperation with Deans and Directors prepare teams of academics to serve two adjacent Regional Centres each.

concerned. The second option pertains to the session held in one day with an increased number of tutors participating and allowing for more groups of unit courses for discussions. These had an initial meeting in one hall, where administrative and logistical issues were discussed and carried out and then followed up by the students breaking into groups to discuss difficult topics on the basis of questions and answers or some of the facilitators giving lectures and answer questions raised by the participating students thereafter.

The third type of organization, which emerged from the data is where the Director of a Regional Centre together with Part-Time-Tutors prepared responses to students' prior questions and then travelled to districts to present them to the students in designated places and then discuss them further with the students. In this case the face to face sessions took one or two days. The limiting factors with this type of option were the finances because facilitators could not stay in the districts longer than the financial resources could permit to sustain them.

The fourth option was that DRCs and Part-Timer-Tutors followed students in their own districts. The facilitators prepared lectures on difficult subjects previously submitted by students, and deliver them at a district level in a designated place. The third and fourth options described above were not common because the main limitation was the amount of funds allocated to the Regional Centre and therefore to stay at the district level.

The fifth type of organization actually originated from the Head Office and directed from the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic (DVC – Ac) with effect from 2006. Deans of Faculties under the coordination of the DVC academic with the cooperation of DVC (Regional Services) as a team worked out a modality of

organizing and implementing the face to face sessions in the Regional Centres. Members from each of the faculties and directorates including Deans and Directors

Table 5
Face to face session schedule

Days	Days of the Week					Fr	St	S
	Fr	St	S	M T	W T*			
Programmes	Non-degree and Undergraduates		and Post Graduate Traveling Time			Non-degree and undergraduates		
Regional Centres			Tanga			Kilimanjaro		
			Manyara			Arusha		

The alphabetical letters stand for days of the week. Fr = Friday, St = Saturday, S = Sunday, M = Monday, T = Tuesday, W = Wednesday and T* = Thursday.

visited a Regional Centre, where they spent at least three days imparting mostly study skills and discussing issues of general nature but not necessarily focused on an academic content of particular course topics or units. An extra one or two days were devoted to post-graduate students within the same region. The attention was given to post-graduate students during the week days before the next weekend, which was devoted to non-degree and undergraduate students as illustrated in table 5 as an example.

The procedure was that at least one member from each faculty/directorate formed part of a team of tutors to provide face to face services to two adjacent Regional Centres. A typical team had one staff from each of the following faculties/Institutes/Directorate: Law, Science, Technology and Environmental Studies, Arts and Social Sciences, Business Management, Educational Technology, Faculty of Education; Institute of Continuing Education and Directorate of Post Graduate Studies. Each member of the team was expected to have prepared lectures, talking notes to deliver to the students of the respective Regional/Coordination Centres – including problematic issues submitted to each of the faculties through the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Regional Services) from the Regional Centres; general faculty messages, study skills to be imparted to students and the ability to respond directly to questions from students in the respective Regional Centres. Below is an example of a summary of what transpired in the Regional Centres during face to face sessions, as presented by Kihwelo (2007) and synthesized by the researcher.

In a nutshell the majority (94%) of responses want and value the face to face sessions but they have got to be more meaningfully re-organized and conducted more

effectively and efficiently. In support of this statement Gwalema (2006 p.3) is of the opinion that *“there is need for greater cooperation between Deans of Faculties and Directors of regional Centres during the preparation of the face to face sessions”*. In the case of Mwanza, Mara and Kagera Regional Centre poor attendance was attributed to *“coincidence with the standard seven examinations. A substantial number of OUT students are Primary School teachers who could not attend the face to face sessions due to their involvement in invigilation of examination”* In Iringa, Mbeya, Ruvuma and Rukwa criticism was levelled against *“ changes in the almanac for creating a lot of inconvenience”*. In the case of Dar es Salaam Amaa (2006 p.5) observed *“The students attendance in the face to face sessions was poor and students were coming one at a time depending on their convenience. Instructors had to wait there for students the whole day and the briefing exercise had to be re-done for each individual case. After the students had realized that there were no lectures as expected they did not even see the need of the exercise hence the poor attendance.*

Suggested re-organization of the face to face sessions

Respondents were asked to propose ways by which the face to face sessions could be re-organized and conducted more effectively and productively. The findings are presented in annex 6.

- (i) 39 per cent of the responses want each unit course offered to have an appropriate expert/lecturer to address the issues identified by students or give a lecture/series of lectures on difficult topics pertaining to the unit course.
- (ii) 23 per cent of the responses want the number of face to face sessions to be increased to between 4 and 12 sessions per year; implying that there should be at least one day of face to face session after every three months or one face to face session every month;
- (iii) 13 per cent of the responses are of the view that students must remain central in identifying difficult topics for discussion and must present them to their respective Deans/Directors early enough to allow for tutors to make adequate prior preparations to enhance interactions during the ensuing discussions.
- (iv) 9 per cent of the respondents want students to be availed summaries of the tutor/facilitator preparations of difficult topics/issues, which they can take home for future reference to enhance their understanding;
- (v) 8 per cent of the responses cover suggestions such as carrying out the face to face sessions early during the year and not near the examinations or Timed Tests; students to be encouraged to make paper presentations; the face to face sessions, and timetables to be prepared on the basis of difficult topics in unit courses identified by students to ensure all of them are addressed, avoid subject collisions as well as to save time by addressing critical and felt needs and issues.
- (vi) The remaining 8 per cent constitute irrelevant and non-response to the item.

To these proposals are added those from focused groups: mainly the views of OUTSO leaders concerning what they consider could be done to improve the conduct and implementation of the face to face sessions. The OUTSO Leaders, who met during the

USRC meeting, which took place in November, 2008 at Singida Regional Centre observed that the face to face sessions were inefficiently conducted. This focused group of 40 participants deliberated how the issue of face to face sessions implementation could be improved and recommended three main scenarios: firstly, the face to face sessions to be held zonally implying the deployment of all the tutors in all the Regional Centres constituting the zone could increase and broadening the subject coverage. Secondly the focused group proposed the use of resource people in the locality, which serves the same purpose of broadening coverage, reduce the cost of the face to face sessions as well as to enhance contacts between students with tutors within easy reach of the Zone/Region instead of having to contact staff at the Head Office by distance while it could be done through face to face. Thirdly, the issues and problems raised by Regional Centres within the Zone should be considered; a measure to ensure that each Regional Centre's concerns are attended to and not to be submerged within the zonal perspective.

The Rationale for the Proposed Suggestions.

Respondents were requested to give reasons for their proposals for improving the implementation of the face to face sessions. Response options are presented in annex 7:

The proposal for increasing the number of facilitators (13% of the responses) is based on the respondents' views that it will:

- Ensure that every student, who turns up for the face-to-face sessions will have an opportunity to interact with his/her unit course facilitator;
- most if not all students' concerns will be addressed to their satisfaction and;
- since the all the assumption is that students concerns will be addressed frustrations among students will decrease; participation will be enhanced and there will be greater understanding and subsequently improved students' performance.

In July 2009 Senate removed all assignments, reduced Timed Tests from two to one (30% of the total marks), remained with annual examination (70% of the marks) and instituted students progress portfolio for every subject which carry no marks but serves as a ticket for doing annual examinations. This decision constitute an improved measure of ensuring that students are fully involved in reading the study materials than the two assignments as they must satisfy at least two tutors that they are well versed with the study materials as they must have the summaries of all study materials read, difficult areas encountered, references of materials read and be able to respond to tutors questions regarding the study materials. The student progress portfolio effectively undermine any possibility of cheating through assess.

The face to face sessions which were previously used to be for discussions of difficult topics, lectures an students interactions will now be used for the assessment of students readiness to undertake their annual examinations. The session will take 6 days once per year instead of 3 days twice per year as it was the practice previously. The issue now is how will students solve the problem of difficult topics. It should be noted that the OUT

has been strengthening the Regional Centres they posting more study materials and there of the different faculties. It is expected therefore that any student finding difficulties in the course of reading study materials can visit the appropriate staff in his/her faculty for assistance. Alternatively students can raise their difficult topics in their study centres where other students and or tutors can provide some assistance.

Problems Raised During Face to Face Sessions

Many of the problems raised during the face to face sessions pertain to the Institution are in Table 6. Nearly two thirds (64.7%) of the reported problems relate to failure on the part of the University to release results of assignments, timed-tests and annual examinations results in time and shortage of study materials. The next set of problems (30.7%) are also institutionally based as they relate to inadequate time for the face to face sessions, collisions in the examinations time table, ineffective communication between head office and the students in the Regional Centres especially on, unexplained changes in the prospectus, too few tutors attending the face to face sessions, inaccuracies in recording students marks and, over-crowded examination rooms implying inadequate funding for hiring spacious examination halls . Some of the problems raised are quite challenging and do not have immediate solutions. For, example, increasing the number of tutors is a process that can be quite time consuming as it involves negotiations between the University, mother ministry, Central establishment and Treasury and even then the budget ceilings may not permit a substantial increase of both academic and administrative staff.

Table 6
Students concerns raised during 2007 face to face session

Issue/ Problem Raised	Frequency	Relative Frequency
Assignments not composed in time and results are delayed	25	18.7
Timed-Tests results are late/or lost	16	12.0
Annual examination results are released late	17	12.7
Shortage/lack of study materials	29	21.6
Collisions in the examination time tables	6	4.5
Inadequate time for face to face sessions	7	5.2
In adequate head office students communication	4	3.0
Unexplained changes in prospectus, the clusterization.	6	4.5
Too few face to face tutors attending the sessions resulting in unresolved issues	4	3.0
Inaccuracies of academic records	3	2.2
Need to extend time for submitting assignments due to late start	3	2.2
Need for more personal computer in the Regional Centres	2	1.4

Lack of clarity on the number of units to be studied	2	1.4
Over crowded examination halls	1	0.8
Referencing	1	0.8
Teaching practice results not recorded	1	0.8
Procedures for changing programmes	1	0.8
Deadlines for the submission of assignments between the University almanac and of Deans do not match	2	1.5
Practicals are too congested	1	0.8
Specificities of licensed teachers to be made clearer.	3	2.2
TOTAL	134	100.0

Summary of the Findings

The study aimed at finding out how face to face sessions are organized and implemented in the Regional Centres of the Open University of Tanzania; students’ understandings/expectations of face to face sessions; students and Part-Time Tutors participation in the face to face sessions; the strengths, the weaknesses; the worth of the face to face sessions; students’ suggestions on the re-organization of the face to face sessions to make them more effective, productive, efficient, problems, which students encounter as well as the rationale for the student’s suggestions for improvement.

a) Organization and implementation of the face to face sessions

The organization and implementation of the face to face sessions is perceived to be a function of the creativity, commitment and interpretation of the purpose of the face to face sessions by the Directors of Regional Centres and staff at both the head office and the Regional Centres. The major changes undertaken since 2005 comprise an injection of Flexibility in the implementation of the face to face sessions from one and the same day the nation to any number of day within a designated period of a month twice per year subsequently to an increase in the number of days to three for certificate, diploma and undergraduate students twice per year. For post graduate students the number of days increased from not formally recognized or specified apart from being lumped together in the one day modality twice per year along with the other programmes to two designated days twice per year. In terms of implementation, emphasis has been on using own lecturers and tutors from the Head Office and the Regional Centres rather than depending solely on Part-Time-Tutors from the regions and other institutions. The Organization is such that two adjacent Regional Centres symbiotically benefit from each other in the utilization of their respective Human and other Resources. But under the new assessment strategy the face to face sessions have assumed the role of assessing how well students have read and are ready to undertake annual examinations.

b) Students’ understanding/expectations of face to face sessions.

The results of the study show that students have two main expectations:-

- (i) Provision of solutions to what students perceive to be problematic or

difficult issues and topics and;

- (ii) Delivery of lectures aimed at enabling students to have deep understanding of the subject matter in a more friendly and interactive manner including a handout of the summary points of the lectures to students.

The majority of the respondents reported that expectations in the context of their perspectives and understanding were not met at all, or met at a very low level. The main reason is that tutors provide what they believe students need in order for them to learn well in an open and distance learning mode and; the learning skills while student's perception is different and more focused on the content of their unit courses by way of solving difficult topics through worked out solutions and providing easily understood lectures.

(c) Strengths of the face to face sessions

Students view the face to face sessions as important forums for their interaction and dialogue with lecturers and tutors and;

That they constitute opportunities for students and tutors to establish working relationships; including getting to know and understand each other and;

Given the new role they identify students who have sufficiently made use of the study materials from those who need to read more in order to be ready for their examinations.

(d) The major weaknesses of the face to face sessions

- (i) Failure of lecturers and tutors to address student's expectations largely because of the conflicting conceptualization of purpose of face to face session
- (ii) inadequate attendance by both students and tutors not only prior to 2005 but also after that year though for different reasons,
- (iii) despite well scheduled sessions and articulated procedures students' issues to be addressed are not always given the priority they deserve;
- (iv) despite the increased number of days for face to face sessions and flexibility in their implementation not-with- standing students perceive time on task to be limited because what tutors deliver is different from the students' expectations, which are solving problems and providing lectures on the subject matter,
- (v) limited active student involvement and participation due to failure of students to change their attitudes and mindset because of previous practices and experiences, which are perceived not to address students concerns and;
- (vi) while financial resources have more than doubled as a result of sending lecturers from the Head Office to the Regional Centres to meet students concerns still financial support appears to be limited because most of it is used as per diems and travel costs, which have rocketed high rather than for paying more lecturers and tutors for increased content coverage.

(e) The worth of face to face sessions

An over whelming majority of respondents (87 per cent) perceive face to face sessions positively as providing good learning opportunities. However, the way the face to face session are conducted and implemented need to be improved in terms of re-organization and implementation from time to time.

Discussions

The actual academic engagement and interaction time between Part-Time-Tutors and students prior to 2005 was just about three hours per day since the sessions had to cater for many things; distribution of study materials to eligible students, administrative issues, announcements, OUTSO issues and the need to adjourn early in the afternoon to allow for students to leave their respective Regional Centres to catch buses to their respective home district towns and subsequently to their respective homes. Given the large number of course units and the few experts of course units available, who used to turn up for the face to face sessions one could imagine the large number of students, who missed subject specialists to interact with them. Such students had to wait until they collected study materials or simply left their centres for their respective homes rather frustrated because of not getting their course units experts to share with them ideas and views.

Two approaches seem to be in use in conducting student/tutor discussions. The course units with the largest number of students are given priority; followed by course units with small numbers of students or vice versa. The idea is quite rational because students can benefit from each of the course units which overlap. Take Education with Economics and Geography or Education with History and English; Education with Mathematics and Physics etc. By starting with Education it gives an opportunity to education students to participate in the other unit courses like Geography, History, Economics, physics, Maths, etc. For example, there are participants, whose difficult topics fall in either the OED100, 200 or 300 series etc; such that if the facilitator's expertise is in the 100 series students, who have attended the session will have their concerns in the 100 series responded to well by the requisite tutors but on the other subsequent series say 200 or 300 will not have their respective needs met because the expert in the OED 100 series may not necessarily demonstrate the equivalent expertise in the 200 or 300 series. Even within the OED 100 series an expert in OED 101 unit course, which is History of Education is not necessarily an expert in the OED 105 (Philosophy of Teaching and General Methods) but both unit courses are within the OED 100 series.

So, the problem is very complicated and no institution can claim to manage and send facilitators to all the 26 Regional/Coordination Centres in all the unit courses. That is being unrealistic and impractical without the use of Information communication technologies (ICT) whereby one lecturer can reach thousands of participants. The use of E-learning and teaching can reduce the magnitude of the problem but the difficult we have is that not all students leave alone tutors and lecturers have own computers or laptops. For remote areas some students may not have access to the internet cafes due to long distances involved, lack of power or frequent power cuts.

(i) *The Scenarios of Implementing Face to Face Sessions.*

The decentralized implementation of the face to face sessions at the Regional Centre level without firm guidelines on how it should be conducted with clear

outputs, which could be evaluated led to many students complains. An immediate solution was perceived to allow for flexibility in the implementation of the face to face sessions. The one month framework within which the face to face sessions were allowed to take place had the advantage that:

Any DRC could draw expertise from the other Regional/Coordination Centres including the Head Office. It also had some limitations: firstly, there was the question of financial resources, which were not sufficiently available to enable a large number of tutors to be deployed. Secondly, limited information on what expertise exists in the respective regions with which the Regional/Coordination Centres are located, a problem, which is compounded by failure of students to send to their respective Regional Centres clear difficult topics and issues rather than the course unit say OED 103 for discussion and elaboration. Instead they submitted things like OED 104, OLW 101 or OHI 333 which make it difficult for the facilitators to know what topic in OED 104 is difficult or is it the whole unit course? The one month framework did not succeed. It posed a lot of problems and was not given a second trial and was replaced by yet another modality whereby staff from the Head Office were sent to the Regional Centres. Even then the reports from the Regional Centres show that there were a lot of problems also, such as failure to budget for seminar halls, exclusion of Part-Time-Tutors from the Regional Centres including the Directors of the Regional Centres. The subsequent sessions involved the DRCs and some of the tutors but their numbers were limited by the availability of funds to sustain them. Thus, the inadequacy of tutors continues to be a problem compounded by inadequate funding, which further depressed any possibility to resolve the problems.

- (ii) The Students' understanding of face to face session *vis-a-vis* what lecturers and Part-Time-Tutors perceive to be vital skills essential for open and distance learning are not in consonance. This study results show that students' persistence of negative views that face to face sessions have not been able to fully address students' concerns because their perspectives are at variance with those of facilitators; who believe and are convinced that students are being given the right knowledge and skills in order to acquire the necessary "fishing lines" and know how to fish for themselves rather than to be given the fish. So, the respondents' recommendation that the number of face to face sessions be increased to twelve per year reflects their conviction that face to face sessions are more effective ways of imparting knowledge and skills than self-study through the open and distance mode. The value students attach to the face to face sessions partly explains why students perceive the implementation of the face to face session to have failed to achieve what they consider to be the main purpose of face to face sessions.

Among the active and partially active students, who do not participate in the face to face sessions could be the result of the following reasons:

-Failure of the sessions to meet, what students believe to be the purpose of face to face sessions (listen to lectures and resolve difficult topics); Amaa's observations support this perspective "students did not really see the importance of general information provided to them regarding examination regulations, how to answer questions in assignments, tests and examinations etc. (Amaa, 2006). There are several reports which show clearly that students think differently from tutors concerning the way face to face sessions were being conducted. Amaa (ibid) said: "The brief opening remarks were followed by an atmosphere of dissatisfactions on the part of students, who could not really understand the purpose of the face to face sessions and were anxiously waiting for the timetable for the planned activities. In addition, there was a misconception of the whole exercise on the part of students as they were waiting for formal lectures and these were not forthcoming (2006 p.3). In the case of Mtwara and Lindi students had similar thinking as reported by Chale (200) " *Students expected the face to face session to be subject specific rather than be told general faculty matter*" Referring specifically to Kagera Regional Centre and with reference to clusterization of course units as part of the general information from the faculty it was reported "*Students are not comfortable with the clusterization issue ... the clusterization idea was not a consensus of all the students but an opinion of a few leaders not their own*". It is very clear from the above statement that students do not value such information however important and useful it might be to them.

-Persistent negative attitudes towards face to face sessions, which are reinforced every year by the inclusion of activities, which were initially responsible for creating the negative attitudes towards them.

-Limited number of facilitators participating in the face to face sessions as a result of

- their limited availability and the available ones being
- Susceptible to further reduction through natural and unnatural deaths or drawn away by the effect of greener pastures elsewhere or hedonic reasons as well as the fact that it takes a long period to train replacements.

-Inefficient communication with students and Part-Time-Tutors, whenever there is a sudden change of decision to the effect that information does not reach all concerned in time; and even when it does the time remaining is too short for employed students to process both permission and funds afresh and still meet the deadline. It should however be noted that participation in the face to face sessions has not been low all the time but rather fluctuating from one session to the next and for different reasons as observed by the Director of Rukwa Regional Centres below.

"The number of participating students increased from 24 last face to face to 97 meaning that they have been allowance (sic) of time for students to collect themselves from their districts to come to the Centre headquarters. Also, there was no interference in terms of collision with some other government business as happened last time. This means that the DVC (Academic) have (sic) taken into consideration the importance of including in his time table national events that in one way or another involves students" (DRC Rukwa, 2007).

One other reason accounting for limited students participation as expressed by the same Director of Rukwa Regional Center is inadequate and inefficient communication

between Regional Centre, the Head Office and Districts within the regions as expressed in the following manner.

“this first face to face sessions in 2007 has had notable improvements in terms of students and staff participation compared with the previous one. The number control have been higher than the above list (i.e. 97) if the means of communication between the regional condition Head Quarter and district could be in good condition ... Only 4 students out of 95 from Mpanda and 6 students out of more than 40 students from Namanyere managed to attend” (DRC Rukwa 2007:3).

In overall terms, ineffective and inefficient communication concerning any changes in the university almanac is one of the main reasons for poor participation in the face to face sessions. The poor attendance of the 2nd face to face session in 2006 was due to a sudden decision to combine the face to face session it with the orientation activities, which took place sometime later and, which seemed to over-shadow the face to face component. Secondly, students, who had been granted permission to attend the sessions before the change of date had to seek another permission due to the extended time beyond what had been requested and granted, which could be either granted again or rejected.

Conclusions

The OUT management has tried its best to improve both the organization and the delivery of the face to face sessions with less than satisfactory results and progress though improving every year and shifting of focus. The purpose of OUT's recent desire for a central planning monitoring and control of the face to face activities is a response to student's complains so as to enhance productivity and the quality of the outputs and outcomes. The previously one day face to face session twice per year has improved to 3 days face to face sessions twice per year for certificates, diploma and undergraduate programmes while post graduate programmes have improved from their being part of the one day twice per year modality described above to 2 days dedicated specifically to them twice per year. Thus is an appreciable improvement. Previously the conduct of the face to face sessions was largely done by Directors of Regional Centres with the collaboration of Part-Time-Tutors from the respective regions held on one and the same day throught the nation but the situation has improved tremendously whereby a team comprising Deans of faculties and Directors of Directorates and Institutes plan together with some degree of flexibility during implementation. The Deputy Vice Chancellor Regional Services coordinates DRC's contributions of difficult topics and issues to be discussed for solutions and ensures that inputs from the Regional/Coordination Centres reach the respective Deans/Directors and the DVC (Academic) who coordinates the planning, monitoring and the implementation.

The results of this study show that the face to face sessions are well planned and organized but logistics and implementation are perceived to be unsatisfactory due to

what we call conflicting conceptualization of what constitutes the purpose of the face to face sessions and ineffective communication among and between stakeholders. While students, focus on delivery of lectures and solving difficult problems and issues as the central function of face to face sessions; tutors and lecturers focus on what they believe students need: the broad study skills, information sharing concerning the developments within their respective Faculties, Directorates and Institutes, the curriculum, citations, skills on writing of papers, research skills and how to do assignments as well as responding to Timed-Tests and Examinations. These perspectives are in reality complementary to each other and students should get both but what is at stake is the weight and timing accorded to the two perspectives. Tutors and students need to strike a balance between the two perspectives and allocate proportionate time especially because time for the face to face sessions is already increased and the fact that the new role of face to face sessions has to be taken on board.

Most of the problems raised by students are levelled against the University, which are mostly concerned with delays in releasing results of Assignments, Timed-Tests and Examinations, inadequate study materials and improper scheduling or sudden changes of activities in the almanac to the extent that information does not reach all concerned in good time to accommodate the changes. The University is already talking these issues. Already the sessions are being evaluated after their implementation and the shortcomings rectified in the next face to face Sessions.

It is very clear from the findings that students value the face to face sessions very much (93%) and perceive them as instrumental to their success in their studies. So, they need to be well implemented so that students reap their perceived benefits. The recent changes in the roles of the face to face sessions from being a modality of instruction to the role of assessment is worth noting as a critical step in the evolvement of the university. However, its role has changed from being essentially a strategy for imparting knowledge skills and clarifying difficult topics for better understanding to one primarily for the assessment of students readiness to do the annual examinations in their relevant course units but exclusively. As such, the face to face sessions have evolved from being done on one and the same twice per year three days twice per year to six days once per year; and from focusing on discussions of difficult issues through interaction between tutors and students to largely but not exclusive tutors assessing students readiness to sit for their respective course units. It is also an evolvement from being free to attend the sessions to being compelled to attend them.

Recommendation for policy

Face to face Sessions are strategies for the acquisition of academic knowledge and skills which constitute a core function of the university. It is recommended that.

The idea of organizing face to face sessions on a zonal basis proposed by student leaders because it had the potential to enable students to benefit from an increased number of staff comprising the – 3 to 4 directors of Regional Centres, the academic

staff already posted to the regions and from all the regions comprising the zones plus the ones from the Headquarters and Part-Time-Staff from the regions does no longer have the chance to be experimented because of the new role accorded to the face to face sessions of assessing student portfolios, which is best implemented on a Regional Centre basis or better still on a smaller scale .

The centralization of the Planning Committee under the chairmanship of the Deputy Vice Chancellor – (Academic) should continue to be strengthened given the new role of assessing student Progress portfolio's readiness to sit for examinations but also they can discuss with students especially difficult topics and issues encountered during their readings sections which the subject expert can elaborate her/ his interview with the students over summary of the contents of the study material and references.

The ICT knowledge and skills, which have started here at the university for all academic and administrative staff as well as students is crucial for the future improved delivery of knowledge and skills and as such, should be continuously pursued as well as enhanced and, extended to students in all Regional Centres by ensuring provisions are made available to them. To this end the issue of RC's acquisition of own premises and facilities is crucial and of paramount importance.

Recommendations for research.

Students believe that face to face sessions are more effective means of imparting knowledge. There is need to do an impact exploratory research on programme completion in OUT focusing on the role of the face to face sessions broadly defined.

The results of this study show some shortfalls in the logistics, the preparations and understandings of the purpose of face to face sessions. The process of how the new roles are going to be implemented are worth being monitored through Action research. It is recommended that a qualitative in-depth study be carried out to unearth what transpires during the process of face to face interactions in the context of the new initiatives.

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