PROVISION OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES TO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA: A CASE STUDY OF TEMEKE REGIONAL CENTRE

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DISTANCE EDUCATION OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA

2013

CERTIFICATION

The under-signed certifies that he has read and hereby recommends for acceptance by the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) a dissertation entitled: ***Provision of Learner Support Services to Undergraduate Students of the Open University of Tanzania: A Case Study of Temeke Regional Centre,*** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Distance Education of the Open University of Tanzania.

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DECLARATION

I, **Juliana Mlay,** declare that this dissertation is my own original work and that it has never been presented and will not be presented to any other University for a similar or any other degree award.

Signature ……………………………………….

Date………………………………

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beloved parents; The Late Mr. Nicodemo Ndemanyisho Lyimo and my Mother Adeline David whose efforts, directives and encouragement resulted to high achievements of my education.

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the extent to which provision of learner support services to the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) undergraduate students influenced teaching and learning process in distance learning. Specifically, the study intended to examine the availability of learner support services for improving and facilitating distance learning; investigate quality of the available learning support services in maintaining quality distance education; and examine the managerial challenges faced by the Director of the Regional Centre in the provision of learning support services. Methodologically, qualitative approach was used and the study was conducted at Temeke Regional Centre, Dar es Salaam. Participants of the study included 45 undergraduate students, one Director of the Regional Centre (DRC), eight lecturers, two ICT Technicians, and one librarian. Data were collected through interviews, documentary review, and focus group discussion. Findings revealed that there was a great shortage and poor supply of study materials and library services to the students. In line with research findings and the drawn conclusion, researcher recommends that library services and face-to-face sessions should be arranged and provided irregularly and consistently at the regional centre according to the set-timetable focusing on the academic issues as the core function; guidance and counselling services should be established; ICT services should be provided; University examinations should be derived from the course outlines, study materials provided and content covered to ensure relevance and validity of the examinations; finally researcher recommends for a study to assess the practices, achievement and effectiveness of OUT decentralization policy of establishing regional centres in providing and downsizing services to the clients.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BED Bachelor of Education

CIPP Context, Input, Process and Product

DRC Director of Regional Centre

HQ Headquarters

IAE Institute of adult Education

ICT Information and Communication Technology

ODL Open and Distance Learning

OUT Open University of Tanzania

UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

URT United Republic of Tanzania

ZOU Zimbabwe Open University

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 THE STUDY AND ITS BACKGROUND

The study examines the role and situation of learner support services in learning through open and distance learning among the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) students. This chapter presents the background to the problem, statement of the problem, purpose and objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study and conceptual framework. It also presents limitations and delimitations of the study as well as definitions of the key terms.

1.1. Background to the Problem

Different countries across the world have been looking for alternative means of establishing and improving their educational programs because of everlasting changes (Magne, 1991). The emergence of open and distance learning institutions has been a result of governments' desire to increase access to university and tertiary education by the communities (Mmari, 1999; The Zimbabwe Open University Act 1999). Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions enable to prepare people with knowledge, skills and attitudes required for quality life improvement. As an educational strategy, ODL is fast growing system for education delivery in Tanzania that provides equal opportunity and widening access to the majority particularly in the remote areas.

According to Dodds (1991), distance education is any form of organized educational experience in which teaching and learning take place with the teacher at the distance from students for most of the time. Distance teaching and learning is not guided by

the rigid timetables and this forms the essence of independent learning. Communication between learner and instructor is mostly through printed and non-printed materials. However, the degree of independent learning in distance education is not indefinite but relative (IAE, 2006). Open and distance learning is implemental and cost effective since a large number of people can be trained within a given time while continuing with their works. Therefore, distance education is able to respond to the ever increasing demand for education faster and more effectively (OUT, 1993). On these grounds, distance education as a mode of learning is currently gaining popularity and opted by most of the countries to foster lifelong learning.

In Tanzania, open and distance learning at higher education was introduced by the Act of Parliament No. 17 of 1992 (URT, 1992) intending to extend education to a much wider society. The Open University of Tanzania being in operation since 1992, it is providing various degree and non-degree programmes through distance education. It excites entry into university programmes by people who would normally be preoccupied with work commitments, or have no access to university education results in very large enrolments in ODL universities. Recently, the University has an enrolment of about twenty thousand students who are scattered throughout the country (URT, 2010).

For easy provision of the programmes offered and for administrative purposes, the OUT has decentralized its activities to the regional centres near by the clients. This development calls for focus on the centres that give service to the students more closely. Ncube (2007) contends that there is a need to manage institutions in a

decentralized format. In keeping with the ideals and principals of accessibility, cost-effectiveness and convenience to students, it is imperative that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions set up and manage properly decentralized centres, which become the call-face for students. This is because the institutions serve students who are spread throughout the country. The regional centres therefore are the delivery points of services that students require.

Brindley et, al. (2004) argue that, learner support services in open and distance learning constitute academic, administrative and guidance and learning where students are provided support services to overcome learning difficulties and to achieve satisfactory academic standards. In the context of this study, the term learner support services meant to be services provided to the learners such as: academic services like study materials, library facilities, online teaching, interactive teaching through frequent consultations and face-to-face session and organisation of resource centres; administrative services like registration procedures, provision of guidelines for assessment of assignments, information delivery, tests and examination procedures; and guidance and counselling. In this regard, the learner support services should be provided to every learner by the institution where he or she hasenrolled.

The services provide all information learners need, encourage students to fully utilize the available facilities, motivate learners to assimilate what they learn, solve academic and related problems through counselling and create a friendly environment among students, the faculty and the administration (Chander, 1998).

Since the regional centre is the delivery points of learner support services to students, the regional centre carries out specific functions that ought to satisfy customer needs and ensure studies are carried out effectively and efficiently. The quality of service and education availed to students in an ODL institution depends on how well a regional centre is managed, since in terms of operationalization of programmes the regional centre represents the institution (Ncube, 2007). The main challenge for Open and Distance Learning providers is to ensure that a robust learner support system exists to help them make a paradigm shift from traditional learning to distance learning so as to avoid students expecting teacher-centred delivery mode in distance education (Godson, 2007).

Various issues are involved in the operation of the regional centres to ensure adequate supply of learner support services to the students. The regional centre requires specific human and financial resources to drive the processes, and these must be organized in a way that ensures quality service delivery. These services include student registration, access to library resources, tutorial services, academic advising and feedback on assignments and progress. Quality standards for the learner support services should be established as various people from different social and academic backgrounds are involved (Yorke, 2004; Scheer & Lockee, 2003; Thrope, 2002, Chute *at al.* 1999).

Regarding the roles played by the regional centre in communication at the Open University of Tanzania, Mmari (1999) observes that every quarter, the directors of regional centres meet at the Head Office to compare notes and thrash out student

problems of a policy or practical nature. Problems confronting them and students include the delivery of study materials and return of marked scripts. This fact was also echoed by Dzakiria (2005) in his study on the role of learner support in distance learning at the University-Utara Malaysia. The findings suggested that the infrequent face-to-face meetings between distance teachers and students, and students' dependency on their teachers caused frustrations and sometimes impeded the learning process.

Moreover, financial resources allocated to the regional centres often fall far below expectations. A fact alluded by Bolton (2000) that these units are often expected to deliver under scarce resources and meagre budgets. The issue of inadequate financial resource limits the availability of other resources hence affecting the supply of learner support services to the students and eventually, students are the ultimate losers.

Due to its features of openness, economy of scale and flexibility, open and distance learning has made a special and significant contribution to Chinese higher education, and more broadly to socio-economic development (Ding, 1999). This can be true of any country, but only if the regional centre, which is the point of delivery for the institution's programme is appropriately empowered to deliver in quality style.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The mission for establishment of the Open University of Tanzania was to extend education to a much wider society particularly those people in need of higher education. Since it was inaugurated in 1992, there has been a remarkable and

significant increase in enrolment of the students mainly influenced by wide spread of regional centres all over the country and establishment of new degree programs (OUT, 2010). OUT Facts and Figures show that there was remarkable upsurge in enrolment to undergraduate students from 675 students by 2000 up to 14097 students by 2010 as a total of four cohorts of 2007, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 (ibid). This increase in enrolment and expansion of the university is still a controversy as it affects also the quality part of it as well as balance between access and equity.

Even though the main thrust of regional centre is to reduce the distance between the institution and the learner in some cases, especially in the rural areas, lack of the basic learner support services in the regional centres subject students to the longer than the planned time to complete their study programmes, thus increasing wastage ratio (Moyo & Mubengegwi, 1995). Specifically, a study by Godson (2007) on learner support services provided by Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning revealed that remote students experienced delayed assignment feedback due to lack of internet services in the rural areas leading to delay in accomplishing the course work and eventually prolonged unnecessarily the duration for the students to graduate. In this case, the nature of communication network between and within the institution and students in the regional centres is still a challenging issue.

As results students miss key deadlines, tutorials, examinations and ultimately leading to prolonged programme duration and increasing dropout rate from the system resulting in a wastage of the scarce resources of both the institution and the

learners. This means that learner support services for students should be strengthened for thorough provision of education in open and distance learning mode.

The research findings by Godson (2007) reveals that lack of the basic learner support services in the regional centres subject students to the longer than the planned time to complete their study programmes and conclusion made by Moyo and Mubengegwi, (1995) that remote students experienced delayed assignment feedback due to lack of communication network lead one to ask questions: How does a regional centre support and develop learning through the mediation of course materials and learning resources for individual students? How the environment is made conducive in supporting students and enhancing self-esteem? How are the administrative processes and information management system established for effective and overall friendly? Through these questions, it was not well known as to how far the regional centres were fully decentralized and capacitated in terms of resources to support teaching and learning to the students in their localities, and how the quality of the learner support services was guaranteed to ensure quality distance education. The situation, therefore, created a need for a study to appraise the role and situation of learner support services to students of the Open University of Tanzania.

1.3. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the extent to which provision of learner support services to OUT undergraduate students influenced teaching and learning

process in distance learning. Specifically, the study intended to achieve the following objectives:

  i) To examine the availability of learner support services for improving and facilitating distance learning.

  ii) To investigate quality of the available learner support services in maintaining quality distance education.

  iii) To examine the managerial challenges faced by the Director of the Regional Centre in the provision of learner support services.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The findings are expected to enable Distance Education planners, policy makers and implementers to identify deficiencies in the provision of learner support services for improvement and for further action to improve quality of distance education. Furthermore, the study is hopefully to make a modest contribution to the existing literature on management of Open and Distance Learning in Tanzania, and other areas for further research related to Open and Distance Learning policy and practice would be illuminated.

1.5. Conceptual Framework

The study on provision of learner support services to students of the Open University of Tanzania called for an appropriate and comprehensive conceptual framework that would encompass the major parameters needed to be involved in examining the provision of learner support services.

The model adapted for the study based on various propositions drawn from different literature relating to educational programmes. This is an eclectic model which draws facts from Stufflebeam (2003) evaluation model. The model is, therefore, employed in constructing the framework which would guide the investigation on appraisal of learner support services to students of the Open University of Tanzania.

Context	Inputs	Process	Product/ Outcomes
-A well established OUT administrative structure -ODL policies	-Financial resources -Human resources -Material resources	-Providing library services - Supply of study materials -Face-to-face tutorials -Coordinating activities -Administration of tests and examinations -Providing academic advice and counselling services	-Quality of distance education -Good academic achievement

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Provision of Learner Support Services to

Source: Adapted from Stufflebeam's CIPP Model (2003)

The Context, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) evaluation model is a comprehensive framework for guiding evaluation of programmes and institutions particularly their long term effects as they seek for improvement and quality

(Stufflebeam, 2003). The model developed by Stufflebeam sees *context evaluation* as involving consideration of needs, problems, and opportunities within a defined environment. *Input evaluation* focuses on the review of the competing strategies, the work plans and budgets for implementation. *Process evaluation* monitors, documents, and assesses activities. *Product evaluation* identifies and assesses intended and unintended outcomes. Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework for the study.

Context; as the first component of the model was to assess the open and distance learning settings. In this case, programme context included educational policies and established organizational /administrative structure.

Inputs; component looked at the totality of all ingredients needed in the provision of ODL education. It included physical infrastructures like buildings; learning materials like books; human resources like teachers; and financial resources like funds to operate the programme. Resources for a programme are means to an end as they exist to facilitate and the instructional programme (Knezerich, 1975).

Process; component focused on practical oriented activities of the programme. The main activities included coordination of activities, face-to-face tutorials, administration of tests, examination management, marking tests, providing library services and providing guidance and counselling services to students.

Product/Outcome; answered the questions about the success and failure of the programme. Here, the ingredients included quality of distance education and

qualitative and quantitative academic achievement. This is determined by clear goals of the programme, realistic policy and commitment in implementation (Mosha, 2006).

Lastly, feedback is a part of the model since the failure of the programme is taken as challenges for improvement, and success would ensure continuation in availability of learner support services in a circle form.

1.6 Research Questions

Consistent with the research problem, conceptual framework and purpose of the study, the following research questions were set to guide the examination of learner support services to students of the Open University of Tanzania.

i)   What learner support services are available and provided to students of OUT in improving and facilitating teaching and learning?

ii) What is the quality of the available learner support services and the extent they support effective distance learning?

iii) What are the managerial challenges facing the Director of the Regional Centre in managing learner support services and implications in the provision?

1.7 Limitations of the Study

It was anticipated that the study would be limited by several factors. First, simple random sampling was employed to select 45 students from the different faculties on the basis of their availability at the centre. It would be very difficult to have

representative number of students from each faculty. However, researcher ensured that each faculty was represented by reasonable number of respondents during data collection. Second, due to the bureaucratic nature of the organisational structure from the institution to the ministerial level, and official responsibilities of the respondents, it would take very long time to meet with different officials who have pertinent information required in the study. However, the researcher had to seek appointment to the respective respondents according to their schedules.

1.8. Delimitations of the Study

As a case study, this study was conducted in Open University of Tanzania, Temeke Regional Centre - Dar es Salaam. The study was delimited to the examination of learner support services to undergraduate students of the Open University of Tanzania within the identified area. Thus, the findings should not be generalized to all other regional centres in Tanzania, but some features to be covered in the study can be a point of reference and build a base in addressing similar issues in other centres. Moreover, the study would not deal with equity perspectives since it was not gender based. The subsequent chapter 2 presents the review of literature.

Conclusion

This chapter has explained the background to the study of the provision of learner support services by the Open University of Tanzania. Furthermore, the draw backs of open and distance learning have been examined, specifically those leading to delays in completion of courses and graduation by students. The next chapter will present the review of literature used in the study.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of literature related to the purpose and objectives of the study. The chapter covers understanding of distance education, the context of distance learning at OUT, learner support services including academic support services such study material, financial resource, physical resource, human resource, library services, tutorial services, ICT services; administrative support services, and guidance and counselling as well as empirical findings from developed countries, developing countries and Tanzania in particular. Furthermore, the chapter covers synthesis of the chapter within which knowledge gaps in literature are identified.

2.1 Understanding Open and Distance Learning

Teaching and learning in Open and Distance Learning has a point of departure with teaching and learning in a conventionally based education system. There is a physical or geographical separation between a teacher and students, a situation that necessitates the need for two-way communication (Keegan, 1990) such as correspondence tuition, written assignment and face-to-face tutorials.

Open and Distance Learning results from the technological separation of teachers and students, which free the students from the necessity of travelling to a fixed time, to meet a fixed person, in order to be trained (ibid). In this case, the physical separation of students from the teachers influences the notion of interaction between the two parties.

According to Moore (1989), this separation of lecturers from students adversely affects both teaching and learning process. However, it is within this context that the separation calls for techniques that distinguish characteristics of distance educational practice from the conventional teaching. Open and Distance Learning is distinctively and widely acknowledged for its exhaustive utilization of information and technologies for the teaching and learning process.

2.2. The Context of Open and Distance Learning at OUT

The inadequacies of the formal education system to provide skills, knowledge and attitudes and its tendency of excluding people from formal education system as well as formal sector of employment has prompted the search for an alternative. The problem has generated greater interest in the expansion of non-formal education training programmes globally. Open and Distance Learning is one of several educational strategies deliberately designed to ensure realization of the basic human right of education by complementing the conventional system.

The emergence of open and distance learning institutions has been a result of governments' desire to increase access to university and tertiary education by the communities (Mmari, 1999; ZOU Act, 1999). To achieve this in the Tanzanian context, the Open University of Tanzania was established by an Act of Parliament No. 17 of 1992 (URT, 1992) intending to extend education to a much wider society. The importance of Open and Distance Learning lies in its positive relationship between the learning process, enhanced productivity and socio-economic development.

2.3 Learner Support Services

Learner support services is conceived as a support system aimed at enhancing and improving learning and covers a wide range of skills that transpire from the initial enrolment, the teaching and learning programme of the course and continues until the results are published (Tait, 1995; Tait, 2000; McLoughlin, 2002; Moore, 2003). Various issues are involved in the operation of the regional centres to ensure adequate supply of learner support services to the students. The main institutional systems involved in learner support therefore, are teaching/tutoring and learning processes and facilities, information and administrative and advising and counselling. Everard *et al* (2004) assert that in education, resources are usually classified as human, material, and financial resources.

The regional centre, therefore, requires specific human and financial resources to drive the processes, and these must be organized in a way that ensures quality service delivery. These services include student registration, access to library resources like study materials, tutorial services, and guidance and counselling, academic advising and feedback on assignments and progress. Therefore, quality standards for the learner support services should be established as various people from different social and academic backgrounds are involved (Yorke, 2004; Scheer & Lockee, 2003; Thrope, 2002, Chute *at al.* 1999). The next sub-sections present the key components of the learner support services.

2.3.1. Academic Support Services

Under this category, students are provided support services to overcome learning difficulties and to achieve satisfactory academic standards. Therefore, the institution

should recognize the basic needs of the learners and try to fulfil them to the best of its abilities and understand the effects of the learners when the needs are not fulfilled (Somayajulu & Ramakrishna, 2010). In this context, course delivery in such institutions is a multi-channel and multi-media mix of teaching and learning materials which encompass the pertinent gadgets that are usually used to facilitate learning. They include text books, supplementary materials, teachers' guides and references, and live environment (Mosha, 2000).

Regarding the above arguments, the common theme is that teaching and learning resources play a central role in the process of improving quality of education. Thus, an effective instructional arrangement in the classroom is highly influenced by the availability of adequate teaching and learning materials. Literature shows that in the OUT, there is a great discrepancy between the demand and actual production of study materials for its courses in every faculty and institute (Genoveva, 2007). The situation affected adversely the teaching and learning process as the University if depending on borrowing some study materials from other universities.

Furthermore, physical facilities such as school buildings including classrooms, labs, library, staffrooms and teachers' houses are vital in enhancing pedagogical orientation as well as school functioning towards quality education (Mwamwenda & Mwamwenda, 1987). For that case, poor school infrastructure poses a risk of poor environment in delivering the intended objectives. School physical facilities are, therefore, means to an end as they exist to facilitate the instructional programme. Nevertheless, study materials and school physical facilities need to be coupled with

human resource. In education, human resource involves teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and students (Okumbe, 1998). Therefore, any discussion on availability and quality of human resource in relation to school academic performance must take into account the availability of qualified teachers on one hand, and students' qualification during selection and admission requirements on the other hand.

Moreover, provision of library services is among very important services for students to achieve their academic objectives. Mollell (1996) observed that more than 70% of the out students defended primarily on local public libraries for their information needs. Furthermore, McPherson (1993) asserted that public libraries whatever their merits cannot pretend to offer adequate support in terms of information requirements at all levels of higher education. This means that the open university of Tanzania should not depend solely on the library services provided by other institutions rather it should establish and improve the existing library and mini-library services at the regional levels/canters to support students for easy access through learning.

Somayajulu and Ramakrishna (2010) argue that, any university providing ODL service should develop appropriate collections in various disciplines to meet the needs of the clientele of the libraries of the University and the regional centre, provide reading, lending, reference, information and documentation facilities to all categories students, and develop a special collection of distance education books and journals at the library. On top of that, there are requirements of developing the course material for distance education using the multi-media approach has

necessitated, apart from print material, embracing technologies such as radio, television, audio and video cassettes. Currently, there is a virtual explosion in the advancements made in several areas of technology, especially those relating to computer and communication, which have a direct bearing on the distance education system. Because of their qualities such as their greater delivery capabilities, contributing to specific learning activities, promoting participatory learning, motivating students to get involved within learning activities, accommodating individual needs and extending the role of the teacher, electronic media such as radio, television, computer and internet have been embraced as part of learning materials by many ODL institutions (Lockwood & Gooley, 2001).

However, in practice, the patterns of technologies used among institutions across the world are varied, and are commonly influenced by non-pedagogical factors such as cost and access. Harry and Khan (2000) maintain that the way in which different institutions employ any particular technology are also subjected to greater variation. Okumbe (1998) assets that, due to technical and economic limitations in developing countries, it will take a long time to incorporate Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This is due to the fact that developing countries operate within a very limited budget, which can afford the heavy costs of modern support services. The Open University of Tanzania is a point in focus in this study.

Lastly, in a situation where learning resources which could support students cannot be found then face-to-face sessions (tutorial services) are vital and compulsory. Due to inadequate provision of study materials, reference books and part-time teachers as

observed by Mahai (2005) when studying the provision of institutional support services of the OUT, the situation make face-to-face sessions very necessary to complement what is missing in the individual learning. Conceptually, in the distance education system, it is generally argued that frequent faculty-learner contact is desirable on the assumption that such experiences contribute to the growth and development of the learners (Shivanna, cited *in* MuraliManohar, 2001).

2.3.2. Administrative Support Services

In keeping with the ideals and principals of accessibility, cost-effectiveness and convenience to students, it is imperative that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions set up and manage properly decentralized centres, which become the call-face for students since the institutions serve students who are spread throughout the country. The regional centres, therefore, are the delivery points of services that students require therefore the administrative aspects of support have always an important pedagogic-didactical dimension. Management of these centres determines significantly the success or failure of the ODL programmes.

The regional centre carries out specific functions that ought to satisfy customer needs and ensure studies are carried out effectively and efficiently. The quality of service and education availed to students in an ODL institution depends on how well a regional centre is managed, since in terms of operationalization of programmes the regional centre represents the institution (Ncube, 2007). The main challenge for Open and Distance Learning providers is to ensure that a robust learner support system exists to help them make a paradigm shift from traditional learning to

distance learning so as to avoid students expecting teacher-centred delivery mode in distance education (Godson, 2007). To achieve this goal, administrative support offered by the institution in terms of admission processes, registration, record keeping, information provision, examination supervision, preparation and delivery of study materials need to be enhanced. These services encourage students to learn and develop positive attitude towards distance mode of education provision (Koul, 1992).

However, in ensuring that a robust learner support system exists and be able to carry out specific functions at the regional centre, financial resource is of paramount importance. Borsetel (1992) contends that money is an absolutely crucial input for an educational programme because it provides the essential purchasing power thus ensuring the availability of other resources in place. Literature shows that most education programmes fail because of inadequate financial resources for their running, unavailability of financial resources at the time they are required, and problems associated with donors' assistance (World Bank, 1979). The common theme for the authors is that education interventions and their respective implementation need sustainable funding mechanism to guarantee achievement of the intended objectives. However, financial problem is mentioned as a main constraint in the development of study materials at the OUT (Mahai, 2005) which threatens the achievement of the learning objectives.

2.3.3 Guidance and Counselling Support Services

Guidance and counselling to open and distance learning plays an important role in solving both academic and social challenges and problems to students. This is the

process of assisting and guiding students in coping with learning environment from the distance and solving difficulties which may be attributed by several factors like social, individual and institutional factors. BACP (2001) defines that counselling takes place when a counsellor sees a client in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the client is having, distress may be experiencing or perhaps their dissatisfaction with life, or loss of a sense of direction and purpose. In academic context, guidance and counselling may entail helping and enabling students make their choices and solve both their social and academic problems which my hinder their learning.

The definition by BACP points out some important aspects such as confidentiality and privacy which should be observed by the counsellor. To be able to support students and maintain and ensure confidentiality, a good system should be established whereby well trained personnel, adequate rooms and enough support from the management should be in place. In the distance education system, it is imperative that frequent learner-tutor/counsellor contact is desirable on the assumption that such experiences enable the learner to get the chance to solve their social and academic problems in such counselling sessions. This would help to restore students' confidence in learning and develop independence in learning since students lack daily contact with lectures (OUT, 1993).

Furthermore, the process of guidance and counselling should be a continuous process at the regional centre. Mahai (2005) contends that guidance and counselling at Open University of Tanzania was not adequately provided since there was little

support from the regional director. Such unsatisfactory service affected students in their learning from distance. Provision of guidance and counselling however, needs adequate and well trained personnel. Therefore, human resource plays an important role in ensuring all learner support services are collectively provided to enhance thorough learning from the distance (Okumbe, 1998).

2.4 Quality of Learner Support Services

Quality and relevant education plays a dual role in human life and development of societies (UNICEF, 2001). In order to achieve quality education, the entire process of education provision should be improved. It involves relevance of the study materials in terms of being up-to-date. This determines the suitability of the study materials (Genoveva, 2007). Quality of study materials as a part of learner support services in the OUT is not guaranteed as the OUT does not conduct regular review of the study materials a situation that leads to irrelevance of the study materials to the current situation (ibid).

2.5. Empirical Findings from Different Countries

2.5.1. Study Findings from Outside Africa

Research findings by Venter (2003) on the role of culture and isolation in Asia and Europe revealed that all groups of students wanted academic guidance, feedback and reassurance that they were on the right track. In the same line, Dzakiria (2005) conducted a study on the role of learner support in distance learning at the University of Utara Malaysia. It was revealed that the infrequent face-to-face meetings between distance teachers and students, and students' dependency on their

teachers caused frustrations and sometimes impeded the learning process.

A case study conducted in Brazil by Harbison and Hanushek (1992) on quality of school facilities offers specific evidence that a minimum basic quality of school facilities matters significantly for achievement of the outcomes. This is to concur that the availability of quality resources for running a programme is of paramount importance in attaining quality education. Furthermore, a study conducted by Sharma (2002) on student support system operative in the Directorate of Distance Education of Maharshi Dayanand University in Asia revealed that most of the services provided to students focused on administrative support such as creation of study centres, registration of students, distribution of study materials and academic support such as preparation of guidelines, study materials and examinations, meeting with local coordinators of the study centres, provision of library facilities and tutoring.

2.5.2. Study Findings from Africa

A study conducted by Godson (2007) in Botswana on learner support services provided by Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning revealed that remote students experienced delayed assignment feedback. Nevertheless, in establishing and sustaining effective support services, physical resource constitutes an integral and vital part of the programme. It includes audio materials, video cassettes, photocopying facilities, laboratories for experiments, guidance and counselling. This was revealed by Kinyanjui (1998) who discovered further that delivery of programmes would rely on efficiency of the local learning centres and resources

together with coordination of various support services required by students at convenient location throughout the country.

Furthermore, a study conducted in Cameroon and Nigeria by Heneveld and Craig (1995) on the availability of learning materials in primary schools in Africa revealed that text books were often not available and even when they were available, they were not used and a result was poor students' academic performance. It is, therefore, evident that provision of text books and other learning facilities have a significant positive association with students' achievement in school. In the same alignment, White (2004) after conducted a study in Ghana on school facilities, has concurred that basic school facilities matter significantly for achievement of good outcomes. Achievement of programme objectives result into programme sustainability and, therefore, quality school facilities are of capital importance.

2.5.3. Empirical Findings from Tanzania

The study by Genoveva (2007) on Suitability and Availability of Study Materials for Effective Learning: Lesson from the Open University of Tanzania revealed that although the study materials were not adequately available, most of them were outdated and were still in use. The situation claimed to be caused by OUT for not conducting regular review of its study materials to keep them up-to-date hence affected adversely the learning process for the students. Furthermore, the study revealed that there was inadequate supply of the study materials which were already developed and were lately distributed. On top of that, there was a financial constraint that led to delay in study material production as well as delay pay for lecturers.

A study by Mahai (2005) on provision of institutional support services to the students discovered that OUT students were dissatisfied with library services provided and their quality at the regional level due to inadequacy of books and other study materials and even the available materials were outdated. It was revealed further that tutorial services in OUT were inadequately provided, only twice a year with few resource persons in all courses offered. The situation subjected students orientation kind of learning where different students from different fields of study regardless the year of the programme were instructed together hence discouraging students to attend those sessions.

Another study on "The Training and Functions of Full-time and Professional Adult Education Teachers" by Kassam (1973) noted that adult education teachers were facing shortage of teaching materials, and there was lack of sufficient fund for running the programme as well as poor co-ordination. Such a situation could not allow programme sustainability. Enough funds should be made available to the regional directors, and regional centres of OUT should be made autonomous in terms of financial control, material production and supply at regional level to facilitate thorough provision of learner support services to the students.

Bhalalusesa (1998) in her study on experiences of learning at a distance at University level in Tanzania revealed that successful learning at a distance depends on the nature and quality of support obtained from the immediate social environment including the education institution that supports learning. Implied here by the author is the friendly learning environment within and outside the institution. Therefore,

education institution still has the core function of enabling and creating conducive and supportive learning environment to its clients. Another study by Mhehe (2002), on women's enrolment and participation at the OUT revealed that challenges in studying at a distance include funding shortfall and other operational concerns like OUT's course delivery, delays in giving assignments and feedback, limited access to resources as well as physical and social isolation from support services.

2.6 Synthesis of the Reviewed Literature

The reviewed literature has revealed the fundamental aspects in supporting distance learning. These form the main ingredients of the theoretical framework that guided the study. The literature specifically focused on the learner support services that contribute to effective learning for students. The literature has shown that learner support services such as study material, library services, tutorial services, ICT services, as well as the availability of financial, physical and human resources, administrative support services and guidance and counselling have greater impact in the learning process to the students. There are other study materials more than those mentioned but the research decided to study the following support services which are library, study materials tutorial coordinating test and counselling due to their significance.

Focusing on the scope of the reviewed studies, findings from outside Tanzania such as that of Harbison and Hanushek (1992) in Brazil on quality of school facilities; Heneveld and Craig (1995) on the availability of learning materials in Africa seem to be too general and ambitious focusing at the national level and not specifically at

the institutional level.

In terms of coverage, a study conducted in Tanzania by Mahai (2005) on provision of institutional support services to the students, and Genoveva(2007) on Suitability and Availability of Study Materials for Effective Learning attempted to assess the availability of learning materials in the provision of institutional support services to students but did not cover the ICT services, academic advice and counselling as parts that complement learner support services.

Finally, a study by Bhalalusesa (1998) on experiences of learning at a distance at University level in Tanzania managed to address the nature and quality of support obtained from education institution that supports learning. However, aspects of learner support services were treated mainly in general terms.

This study therefore, tries to bridge the gaps by addressing issues of availability of learner support services for improving and facilitating distance learning, quality of the available learner support services in maintaining quality distance education and managerial challenges faced by the Director of the Regional Centres in the provision of learner support services. The next chapter presents the research methodology.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a review of existing literature which is of relevance to the purpose and objective of the study. The review conducted has especially placed emphasis on the provision of adequate support services to open and distance learners. The next chapter has presented the approach and design used for the study.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research approach and design used. It describes the methods and the procedures which were employed in the process of data collection and data analysis. The chapter also focuses on the research area, target population, the sample and sampling procedures, validity and reliability of research instruments as well as ethical issues.

3.1. Research Approach and Design

Qualitative approach is a field of inquiry that cross cuts disciplines and subject matters in social science and that, the approach involves an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons governing their behaviour (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This study is largely qualitative although some elements of quantitative approach were employed to get the required information and being able to establish the magnitude of the problem and relationship among the key issues. The qualitative philosophical worldviews (the social constructivism) assert that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting and as they make sense of the world based on the their social perspectives (Creswell, 2009).

In this study therefore, the researcher entered to the respondents' personal world in their natural settings for the sake of first hand information. Information was collected mainly by interviewing the respondents who provided their opinions, feelings and aspirations in their natural settings about the availability of learner

support services for improving and facilitating distance learning, quality of the available learner support services in maintaining quality distance education, and the managerial challenges in the provision of learner support services. This qualitative approach provided to the researcher flexibility in probing through verbal explanation and seeks clarification whenever it was necessary.In this case; multiple realities were constructed by individuals who were interviewed.

Nevertheless, in order to understand the structure of this study and to be able to plan and carry it out, qualitative approach in this study called for an appropriate and compatible research design that reflects the underplaying assumptions and connects the purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, and methodology. In this case, a case study design which is associated with qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009) was adopted for the study. Wellington (2000) asserts that a case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or one single subject, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event.

A case study examines the social unit like a person, family, a social group, a social institution, or a community as well as organising social data for the purpose of viewing social reality (Best & Khan, 1993). In this study, Temeke regional centre in Dar es Salaam was studied as a case study. Availability of learner support services, quality of the available learner support services, and the managerial challenges in the provision of learner support services at the regional centre were the key aspects which were detailed investigated. Moreover, since case study design relies on multiple sources of data collection techniques, researcher used triangulation

technique whereby various methods for data collection such as observation, interviews, visits to different sites and an analysis of written documents were used which helped to offset the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strength of the other method.

3.2 Study Area

This study was conducted at Temeke regional centre of the OUT in Dar es Salaam. The selection of the study area was based on the following reasons: Firstly, there were no studies which had been done to assess the learner support services to the students in the specified area. Secondly, since Temeke centre is within Dar es Salaam city which has most of the required infrastructures, whatever would be found in that regional centre would help to open eyes on what is happening in the peripheral regional centres.

3.3. Sample and Sampling Procedures

3.3.1. Sample of the Study

Kothari (2008) defines sample as selected few items from the universe which researcher is interested in gaining information and drawing conclusion. Since the population of this study comprised OUT stakeholders, Temeke Regional Centre was selected as sample. The sample size of the study included regional director, students, lecturers, librarian and ICT technician at the centre. Students and lecturers were involved in the sample because they were directly affected by the way various courses are offered in terms of provision of learner support services. They had also the required information about the quality of learner support services provided. Also,

librarian and the ICT technician were aware of the available learning materials and their quality. Moreover, regional centre director was important informant in this study due to the important managerial roles they played in supervising the provision of learner support services to students. Also, through their daily working experience, they were aware of various managerial challenges facing the entire process of providing learner support services at the regional level. Table 1 shows the composition of the sample.

Table 1: Respondents' Sample Size Composition

Respondents	Projected Sample Size
Students	45
Regional Centre Director	1
Lecturers	8
ICT Technician	2
Librarian	1
TOTAL	52

Source: From field research, 2012

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

Sampling is a procedure used to select some elements of a population in such a way that it represents the actual characteristics of the total population (Cohen *et al*, 2000). Sarantakos (1998) adds that sampling enable the researcher to study a relatively small number of units in place of a target population and obtain relevant data that are representative of the whole target population. In this study, researcher used three sampling procedures to select respondents namely; simple random sampling, purposive sampling and stratified sampling.

3.3.2.1 Purposive sampling

In qualitative research, purposive sampling is largely dominant (Patton, 1990). It is a process of choosing key informants in the field work for in-depth study. Basing on this assumption and getting deeper understanding of the problem under investigation, purposive sampling was adopted. This is necessitated when the researcher is interested in certain specified characteristics (Nkpa, 1997). Regional centre director was purposefully selected since he was only informant in the sample who by the virtue of his managerial position had pertinent information required by the researcher on provision of learner support services and various managerial challenges facing the entire process of providing learner support services at the regional level.

3.3.2.2. Stratified random sampling

Stratified sampling is a special form of simple or systematic random sampling in which the population is divided into a number of strata and a sample is drawn from each stratum. Students were stratified based on the faculty they do belong from which three undergraduate students from each faculty were selected and involved in the study.

3.3.2.3. Simple random sampling

Simple random sampling gives each member of the population an equal chance of being included in the sample (Kothari, 2004).This technique was employed to select 45 students from the regional centre on the basis of their availability at the centre by observing the strata/groups made (see 3.5.2.3). Numbers were written on the pieces

of papers according to the number of the available students in each group/faculty. Papers were folded and every student in each group picked one piece randomly. Those with number one to three in each group/faculty were respondents. Moreover, 8 lecturers from the regional centre were randomly selected on the basis of their availability at the regional centre.

3.4 Methods of Collecting Data

In overcoming the weaknesses of the data collection instruments, and as it was guided by qualitative approach, a variety of data collection methods were employed. It included interview, documentary analysis and observation. Cohen *et al.* (2000) points out that no single method can act in isolation because it can bias or distort the whole picture of reality that the researcher is investigating. Therefore, multiple methods were used to cross-check accuracy of the data. Interviews were mostly used to establish an interactive conversation with the respondents while observation was used to see the actual practices on the ground. On the other hand, secondary data complemented the primary data by reviewing relevant documents like educational acts, policy documents, official documents and records.

3.4.1. Interview

An interview constitutes a set of questions administered through verbal communication in a face-to-face relationship between a researcher and the respondents (Kothari, 2004). This method allows flexibility as there is opportunity to restructure questions. Interviews were administered to the individuals for the purpose of finding out what was in their minds and what they were thinking or how

they were feeling about learner support services in the learning process. Best and Khan (2006) point out that one of the advantages of an interview is to allow the participant to describe what is meaningful or important to him or her using his or her own words rather than being restricted to pre-determined categories. It is flexible, adaptable and information can be obtained in detail. This study employed semi-structured interview in gathering information from all categories of respondents. General questions relevant to the study objectives and questions were developed to guide the data collection from the students, lecturers, ICT technicians, librarians, and regional centre director. The general questions prepared beforehand provided framework for more specific questions which were raised from both the researcher and the interviewees in a more communicative way during data collection.

Researcher had to take notes during the interview, and then elaborated upon the notes, and analyzed the information at the end of each day of interview. The major advantage of the semi-structured interview was the ability it provided to the researcher to probe and ask follow-up questions thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the interviewee's experience, feelings and perspectives concerning the topic under discussion (Cohen, et al. 2000).It also allowed both interviewer and interviewees to raise and pursue issues that were not had been included in a pre-devised schedule, but they were pertinent to the study.

3.4.2. Documentary Review

Documentary review refers to studying existing documents to obtain relevant data. Documents can provide more insights into the phenomena under study by cross-

validating and augmenting evidence obtained from other sources (Yin, 1994). Another advantage of documentary analysis is that information is permanent and can be checked by any other people. Moreover, it is asserted that documentary review provides a vast amount of information and it is cost effective. In this study, official documents from regional directors' offices were reviewed. They included summary of the registered students in each programme, inventory book for the available teaching and learning resources, and policy document for establishment of regional centres of the Open University of Tanzania. This method helped to complement data which would be left out from other data collection methods like interview and observation.

3.4.3 Observation

Yin (1994) asserts that direct observation, in a case study, occurs when a researcher physically visits a site to collect data. In this study non-participant observation was used and it helped the researcher in acquiring dependable information without influence from the respondents. An observational checklist (appendix VI) was used to guide the researcher to observe available teaching and learning facilities such as study materials, computers, internet services, and other support services like study centres, teaching staff, library service. The data obtained through observation by the researcher were used to complement the gathered data through interview and documentary analysis.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

Validity is the extent to which the findings of the study make sense, are credible or represent an authentic portrait of the study is looking at (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

It is the establishment of the causal relationships whereby the outcomes of the study are linked to each other. Moreover, reliability refers to the consistency with which repeated measures produce the same results across time and across observers (Patton, 2002). In order to achieve validity and reliability of the instruments, the researcher decided to use triangulation technique for data collection. Interview was the main method used for data collection, and then supplemented by documentary review and observation to capture information which could not be possible to be collected by one method and offset the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strength of the other.

This ensured the information collected to be valid by counterchecking any contradictory information. Moreover, the used instruments contained clear hints which guided collection of the required information and researcher's supervisor was consulted at every stage of constructing instruments for reviewing and approval. For the case of documentary analysis, only authentic and relevant documents were consulted by using a documentary guide.

This was the checklist of the key issues which were reviewed and derived from the official documents such as higher education act, admission register, inventory book for the available resources, and policy document for establishment of regional centres. This review based on the actual events or factual information of what was going on as far as the learner support services were concerned. The research instruments were also refined in the field after encountering the subjective and objective reality.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis is a systematic process which involves working with data, organizing and breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what was learned and deciding what to tell others (Bogdan & Bulklen, 1992).

Data in this study was mainly qualitative. In analysing qualitative data, content analysis was employed. This is a technique in which the researcher organizes information collected into categories and revises them until a final perspective emerges. It is a technique used to analyse communication in a systemic objective and qualitative manner in order to measure variables (Mwiria, 1995). In this study, data were coded and categorized according to the research questions.The researcher had to take notes during interviews, and then elaborated upon the notes at the end of each day of interview. Then, the information collected through interviews was subjected to line-by-line coding by using the words of the participants to form categories.

Then, various categories and themes related to the research objectives and questions such as types of learner support services, quality of the available learner support services, and the managerial challenges in the provision of learner support services were identified. Once the researcher had analyzed all the interview data and identified the major themes, she then focused more closely on the specific and related themes from the documentary review and observation data, and then submerged the related minor categories to the major themes to enrich and develop

more plausible concepts and themes. In interpreting the findings of the study, some of the respondents' views and opinion were presented as quotations in terms of actual statements. Nevertheless, there were few numerical data which are presented in tabular form in terms of numbers. This data was used to support the discussion by relating and establishing relationship among the themes which led to intensive, detailed, interrelated and focused interpretation and discussion of the findings.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

An 'ethic' is a moral principle guiding conducts which are held by a group or even a professional (Wellington, 2000). This study considered legal rights, confidentiality, privacy and consent of respondents to safeguard their human rights as insisted by Tuckman (1994). In this regard, a research clearance was sought from the Open University of Tanzania and presented to the regional and district authorities for further permission before visiting the study area.

During data collection, the researcher provided a brief explanation to the respondents about the aim of the study. Data were collected under the respondent's consent, and at the right time and place. Moreover, the information obtained was solely used to inform this study.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the research approach and design used to collect data as well as analysis of the data collected. In addition, it has focused on the target population in the research area, the sampling procedure and the sample taken for the

study. The next chapter has presented the analysis and discussion of the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents, analyzes and discusses the research findings on provision of learner support services to undergraduate students of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). The findings were obtained through interviews, documentary review and observation and presented in three sections following the research questions in chapter one that guided the study. The sections include availability of learner support services for open and distance learning improvement, quality of learner support services and managerial challenges in the provision of learner support services.

4.1. Availability of Learner Support Services for ODL Improvement

The first research question sought to examine the availability of learner support services for improving and facilitating open and distance learning. This question was based on the assumption that full supply of learner support services was significant towards appropriate and sustainable academic achievements in open and distance learning. From this point of view, academic support services such as printed materials, ICT facilities and other non-printed media, library services and face-to-face sessions; administrative support services; and guidance and counselling were considered of paramount importance to be studied in examining their role in improving and facilitating open and distance learning. The required information was obtained through interviews with open and distance learners and regional centre officials as well as observation.

4.1.1. Academic Support Services

Study Materials; in the process of teaching and learning through open and distance learning, adequate availability of study resources was thought to be of paramount importance. The first research question therefore, examined further the availability and supply of study resources at the regional centre. The required information was obtained through interviews with DRC, lecturers and students. DRC confirmed during interview that all necessary materials were adequately provided to students. Responding to one of the interview questions, DRC had these to comment:

> Study materials are adequately prepared for each course. These include books, handouts and course outlines. To ensure everyone gets accordingly, we provide such materials depending on the number of courses registered by each student.

Regarding the above quotation, it is true that provision of such materials depending on the courses registered by each student is a good mechanism to ensure every student gets the required number of study materials as per programme requirements. Verifying the information given by the DRC, researcher conducted interviews with students. It was however, noted otherwise that there was great shortage of study resources supplied contrary to what was reported by the DRC. Students were complaining that they paid tuition fees covering all institutional services including study materials but, they did not get them as required. Two different students had different views as follows:

> I am a fourth year student. We got study materials in the first two years of the study but currently, study materials are not provided

at the centre. Books and handouts should be provided as we pay tuition fee but they are not provided at all. Conclusively we can say, our poor academic achievements particularly in the examinations are caused by our institution.

My friend, we normally do exams without reading a book or any other material. We just consult our colleagues for help but we end-up failing our exams as we read irrelevant materials.

By implication, it can be argued that DRC's information was highly contradicting with the information from the students. It would be creation of good image to the public by the DRC but in actual fact, since students were the ones affected at the grass root level, their views could be correct. This was also evidenced through high rate of examination supplementary in different courses as revealed by students who commented that it was largely caused by lack of study materials.

In the same line of argument, another distance learner mentioned during interview that, out of four courses she was doing in the academic year 2010/2011, none of the four was supplied with study materials by the regional centre. She was noted:

I am a fourth year student, pursuing Bachelor of Education in Arts. In this year (2011/11), I registered four courses, Human Rights Education (OED 311), Distance Education (OED 227), Project Appraisal in Education (OED 228) and Human Resources Management in Education (OED 307). Surprisingly, no one of these courses is supplied with learning resources.

Asked on the alternative way of getting the study materials, 42 out of 45 interviewed students confirmed that they had to make copies from their colleagues, reading different sources and sometimes waiting for face-to-face sessions which were also, not guaranteed. The situation adversely affected students as it resulted to massive failure, postponement of studies and even drop-outs. Furthermore, it was double cost-full to the students who had already paid for such materials through tuition fees.

In the course of finding rich information to supported the ones obtained through interview, it was revealed during observation that some of the study materials particularly, for BED students were available at the regional centre but in a single copy for lecturers' use only . Since the centre had no library services, all the copies were gathered in a store where accessibility was even more difficult. Regarding the difficult environment of getting study materials, students declared to perform badly in their university examinations and even others dropped out. One student had the following note:

> Really, as students of OUT, we study in a very hard time. Learning environment is very difficult as we don't get any support from the University. In this study centre, we were 28 students but now we are only 6. This is because of difficulties in the provision of study materials and other support services. Some of them discontinued from studies and others are just at home.

Generally, study materials to the students at the regional centre were a critical problem which needs quick measures.

Library Services, proper use of study materials at the centre level is influence much by availability of library services at the centre. It was the interest of the researcher to find out the availability of library services in fostering learning in the distance mode. During interviews with adult students and DRC, it was confirmed that there was no library services at the regional centre. One of the OUT learners asserted:

> We don't have a library at the regional centre. We normally use the OUT main library at the HQ which is also small to the extent that you cannot get even a sit. It can accommodate only 20-25 students at a time compared to the number of OUT students in three regional centres in Dar es Salaam. However, learning materials are not adequately supplied at the HQ in spite of being far from our localities.

The above quotation was to be cross-checked through interview with the DRC who acknowledged that there were no library services at the regional centre. DRC confirmed that there was a small store where they used to keep study materials distributed to students at the beginning of the academic. Researcher observed absence of library services and study materials at the regional centre similarly as declared by the students and DRC. Even the books store mentioned by the DRC was empty. By implication, the situation at the regional centre was not promising as students had to travel to the HQ where the service was not adequately provided. The situation would adversely affect learners' academic achievement.

When asked about measures taken to solve the problem, DRC argued that their target by the time being was to establish their own buildings, where a place for

library will be available. This means that availability of study materials and provision of library services was not the priority at the regional centre. Students had to get alternative service through searching different search engines via internet which was also unreliable, expressive and not friendly to the majority computer illiterates. However, these alternative ways, whatever their merit, could not pretend to offer adequate support in terms of information requirements at all levels of higher education as supported by McPherson (1993). All the barriers affected students in their learning process as majority of the interviewed students claimed to have poor academic achievement in their university examinations.

Since the academic achievement of the students affects the quality of education provided, library service therefore, is of paramount importance in supporting the learning process. This means that OUT should not depend solely on the students' initiatives rather, should provide mini-library services at the regional centres in the course of decentralizing power and services to the local levels as its agenda in focus.

ICT Facilities; the researcher was interested in finding out the availability of computers and the related services like internet service at the regional centre as they play a key role for learning in ODL mode. When asked about the availability of computer laboratory, Director of Regional Centre confirmed that there were no computer services for students at the regional centre. The few computers at the region centre were only for official use in record keeping and daily official operations at the centre. The researcher observed only two installed computers which were in use. Actually, this in-adequate number of computers affected not only

the administrative duties but more adversely in rendering teaching and learning services to students. This was strongly affirmed by students through interviews that absence of computer services at the regional centre impaired their learning as they had to travel a long distance to the OUT-HQ were also computer facilities were inadequate as it services three regions of Temeke, Ilala and Kinondoni in Dar es Salaam. One of the students had this to comment:

> My friend, open and distance learning is a problem as it is rated the second best. OUT have thousands of students across the country but unfortunately, no supply of important facilities like computer services compared to other universities under conventional learning system. Imagine, one has to travel from his working place to the HQ to access information through internet which is not even guaranteed. Under such situation in this globalized world, distance learning cannot be achieved.

The above quotation asserts that computer services were not provided at the regional centre in spite of the fact that it is only a quick and convenient way of learning particularly for distance learners in the contemporary society. When students were asked about alternative way of getting internet services, they mentioned that they had to go to the private internet service providers where it was also too expensive for them to afford hence failure to get all the required materials as per their needs something hindered their learning.

The regional centre had to offer computer services to the students to comply with the notion of decentralization of administrative and teaching and learning services to the

grassroots level. Such services would have helped students in terms of promoting on-line learning, quality feedback and speed up feedback between students and lecturers at the regional centre. Regarding the existed situation at the centre, there is a need to move from hard study materials to soft copies in fostering learning from the distance.

Study Centres; study centres for students in ODL mode are important and necessary assisting students in tutorials, guidance and counselling, practical and for individual and peer learning and discussions. Basing on this assumption, researcher intended to find out the available study centres under the regional centre coordination. To get the required information DRC and OUT students were interviewed. The DRC declared to have no single study centre under his area of jurisdiction. This was contrary to what OUT policy states. OUT (1994) states that study centres were to be opened within institutions in order to assist students in tutorials, guidance and counselling, projects, demonstrations, practical and interaction. They would also be opened in places nearby students working areas, mostly in primary school premises.

Verifying the information, all 45 interviewed students strongly emphasized that they had never been in study centres organized by the regional office. Some of the students had the following remarks.

i)   Study centres are not there. We normally find our own places for discussion and get assistance from teachers whom we pay privately.

ii)   There is no enough space at the regional centre. We

usually conduct discussions under the trees and sometimes

in the primary school settings when primary school

students are off.

The above quotations show that students were in high need of study centres although such service was neither provided nor officially recognized at the regional level. Researcher observed students in group discussions at Wailles study centre within Wailles primary school buildings and others at Mgulani study centre within Mgulani primary school classes. Although these centres were not formal, they were very useful as students had a chance of sharing learning experiences, discussing difficult topics and shared study materials which eventually helped in their academic achievement. OUT could support these initiatives by students by formalizing the service and providing the related support services. OUT (1995) points out that study centres help in avoiding academic loneliness that might result from physical isolation from both the institution and other students who are expected to share learning experiences with fellow students. In general one could say that study centres should be established nearly to students within the regional centre to ensure full support in their learning and fostering their academic achievement.

Face-to-Face Sessions; in ensuring full support in learning from the distance, students need face-to-face sessions where lecturers and students discuss together difficult topics and even administrative matters. It was the researcher's interest to identify the availability of such service and the way it was done at the regional

centre.

DRC and students were interviewed to get the required information. Both DRC and students concurred during interviews that face-to-face sessions were not provided at the regional centre rather, at the HQ. This implies that, OUT was not doing the best in the provision of learner support services to the student in their local areas. Basically, regional centres were established aiming at reaching clients in the local areas hence failure to provide face-to-face sessions to students at the regional centre signifies poor coordination of the regional centres in the provision of learner support services which will eventually affect students academically.

DRC confirmed during interview that face-to-face sessions were conducted twice a year at the HQ whereby each session was done for six days. Three days for academic discussions and the other three days for students' progress portfolio assessment and administrative logistics. DRC emphasized that academic discussions were conducted by respective lecturers in their areas of specialization and assessment of students' progress portfolio was one by panel of different lecturers by evaluating students cumulative activities assigned and grading them. This was a part of their lesson assessment. In this case, students were not allowed to do their University examinations if they did not submit the required report and assessed accordingly during face-to-face sessions.

Ideally, if it was so done, it was a good conduct in correcting the area of weakness, sharing experiences, learning new experiences and knowing the academic progress.

To solidify the information obtained from DRC, researcher interviewed students in search of their views on procedures of face-to-face sessions. Contrary to the DRC, all 45 interviewed students argued that despite being provided at the HQ, face-to-face sessions were hardly conducted and poorly organized. Consider the following remarks from different students:

i) Face-to-face sessions are there but only once a year. Actually, face-to-face is not for teaching or discussion of academic matters; rather, it is for logistics and announcements like OUT costs to be covered, examination regulations etc.

ii) There is very poor organization of face-to-face sessions. Most of the time, we are not aware of what is going to be taught or discussed in the face-to-face sessions hence being out of focus.

iii) There is very poor system of communication. Dates for face-to-face sessions are not in the University Almanac, and announcements are placed on the notice board at the HQ where it is far from our regional centres. Therefore, we always miss face-to-face sessions just because of lack of information at the right time.

iv) Face-to-face sessions are conducted once a year and un-announced.

Regarding the above quotations, one can argue that a poor channel of communication from the HQ to the students at the grass root level was a problem. Information floor could be handled by the DRC and disseminated to study centres if were there. Otherwise, information through media was another alternative to reach majority at the local level. Furthermore, by centralizing the service at the HQ where

face-to-face sessions were occasionally conducted could affect students' academic progress since not every student could manage to attend. However, lack of fixed timetable for face-to-face and using such forum for merely administrative announcements instead of teaching and discussing various academic matters was being out of focus, of which could demoralize students and affect their academic achievement.

4.1.2 Administrative Support Services

As a sub-section under the first research question which sought to examine the availability of learner support services for improving and facilitating open and distance learning, this part focuses on information delivery, examination procedures and supervision, study material supply and organization of academic events. These were deemed important towards appropriate and sustainable academic achievements in open and distance learning. The required information was obtained through interviews with DRC, open and distance learners and regional centre officials.

Information Delivery; it was discovered during interviews with students that communication system in the entire OUT organization was neither adequate nor effective, a situation that caused delays in various academic activities such as feedback of their assignment and examinations, receiving important information about examination schedules, provision of study materials, and face-to-face sessions arrangements. On the other hand, DRC declared that there were available systems of communication like OUT-website, letters, phones, media and through notes boards which could be used by students to access information. However, DRC

acknowledged that there were several communication breakdowns in their daily operations.

Due to the isolation nature of students, they could not be easily contacted and for them to contact the OUT offices since the available communication mechanisms were not reliable and accessible to every student. Even for the available OUT-website, communication to the regional centre and HQ was still problematic since the regional communication networks were not established hence delays of information. All these could delay and adversely affect academic progress of students and even administrative functions at the regional centre since things could not be done at a right time. To ensure adequate administrative support to the ODL students, a well connected communication network should be established within the institution and more importantly to the clients at all levels.

Supply of Study Materials; **e**nough and timely supply of study materials was considered to be of paramount importance. This sub-section as part of the first research question therefore, examined further the supply of study materials at the regional centre. The required information was obtained through interviews with DRC, lecturers and students. DRC confirmed during interview that all necessary materials were timely provided to students. It was commented by the DRC that study materials were prepared for each course, including books, handouts and course outlines and then delivered to the students depending on the number of courses registered by each student. However, it was revealed during interviews with students that study materials were timely provided by limited and inadequately supplied.

Students confirmed that only few materials like handouts were provided on time and the rest were completely not supplied so, they had to depend mainly on their own sources. It was revealed elsewhere in this study that there was critical shortage of study materials at Temeke regional centre a situation which could also reflect the same image in material supply.

The same findings were reported by Mahai (2005) that study materials were scarcely and untimed provided to OUT students of Mwanza and Kagera Regions Centres. It may be argued that, supply of study materials in any academic institution depend largely on production and availability of the respective materials which are to be ensured by the institutional administration. Poor supply of study materials at the regional centre as revealed in this study is the outcome of poor administrative support to the ODL students which may eventually affect adversely the entire learning process among students.

The findings of this study also confirm to the reviewed literature that in most ODL institutions there is a great discrepancy between the demand and actual production and supply of study materials for its courses in every faculty and institute (Genoveva, 2007). The situation affects adversely the teaching and learning process as the University. Therefore, face-to-face sessions were very necessary to complement what was missing in the individual learning in the institution due to inadequate provision of study materials, lack of ICT services, inadequate reference books and lack of part-time lecturers. However, this necessity was not deemed important by the institution since there was lack of decentralization system of face-

to-face sessions at the regional centre. The situation could not support learners in learning trough ODL hence affecting their academic achievement. Therefore, the findings confirm the literature that the merit of combination and use of different alternative ways of supporting ODL students can offer adequate support in terms of information requirements in learning.

Since ODL students at OUT contributed for their study materials, adequate materials such as books, journals, papers, handouts and e-materials should made adequately available and timely supplied to the students to facilitate teaching and learning in ODL. However, material supply should be coupled by material production to ensure balance and adequacy. Brindley et, al. (2004) argue that the administrative aspects of support have always an important pedagogic-didactical dimension.

Examination Procedures and Supervision; procedures for and supervision of tests and examinations was deemed as an important administrative support to the ODL students since it consumes time and may affect duration/length of the programme. It was revealed during interviews with the DRC and students that since Temeke Regional Centre is within Dar es Salaam city and closely to the HQ, it was possible for proper examination procedures to take place thoroughly and for them to get involved at a right time in spite of communication barriers which existed as mentioned elsewhere in this study. Students complained for lack of effective communication between tutors who marked the assignments and students. One student was noted during interview:

I have never met lecturers who used to mark my assignments and

tests. They just comment on the assignment but to me it is not useful enough since they don't give detailed information for further improvement. Sometimes I don't understand their comments.

The above comments by student suggests that, there is a need for lecturers to meet with their students during consultation hours for academic advice and providing adequate clarification and constructive comments about their assignments so that they may improve their learning. By so doing, students will be in a position to discuss the academic difficulties by their lectures hence to be in a good position to improve academically. It is argued by Koul, (1992) that provision of administrative support services such as appropriate examination supervision encourage students to learn and develop positive attitude towards distance mode of education provision.

4.1.3. Guidance and Counselling

Since learner support services include academic, administrative and guidance and counselling services, it was therefore imperative to find out how guidance and counselling services were offered and the extent it supported ODL learners to achieve their learning objectives. To get the required information, interviews were to be conducted by students and OUT officials at the regional centre. It was revealed by both the students and OUT officials that guidance and counselling services were not adequately provided at the regional centre due to various factors. One of those factors was lack of enough strategic infrastructures like offices and rooms for conducting such a service as it was revealed elsewhere that there were only three

rooms at the centre, one for the DRC, the other one for the personal secretary and the other one for lecturers.

This was termed as a critical barrier since some of students' problems could be confidential in handling as a matter of principal in guidance and counselling. For this reason, and as supported by students during interviews, no student was read to ask for guidance and counselling services in such an environment since they felt lack of confidentiality and privacy. BACP (2001) argues that counselling takes place when a counsellor sees a client in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the client is having, distress may be experiencing or perhaps their dissatisfaction with life, or loss of a sense or direction and purpose. Furthermore, it was revealed during interviews with students that, some of the lecturers and other supporting staff were not friendly to the extent that students afraid to consult them. Students claimed to be mistreated by some of the lectures. One student was noted as follows:

> Some of our lecturers are not friendly. We are mistreated and threatened when we go for an academic advice. We face a lot of problems as you can be insulted without a good reason. How can you tell or ask such a person to give advice on your personal or social problems.

The above quotation may show little support students were getting from their lecturers. However, it may be argued that guidance and counselling needs special and skilled people to serve the purpose of assisting students to solve social issues and problems and not only academic issues. Thorpe (1993) and OUT (1993) argue

that guidance and counselling help to restore students confidence in learning, develop independence in learning since students lack daily contact with lectures.

Researcher was further necessitated to find out the existence of a special unit for guidance and counselling and their respective skilled personnel at the regional centre. It was declared by the DRC that, although it was in their plan to have a unit of guidance and counselling at the regional centre, they had yet introduced such a service and they had no skilled personnel for such a service. However, DRC added that it was a responsibility of every lecturer to assist students according to their area of specialization. Arguably, the concluding remarks by the DRC show that academic advice was conceived as guidance and counselling in itself. Thorpe (1993) argues that counselling is far different from both teaching and advising. For this case, good lecturer is not necessarily to be a good guider and/or counsellor.

Generally, critical shortage of buildings for administrative and learning purposes, lack of computer services for students, great shortage of study resources, lack of library services, lack of decentralization system of face-to-face sessions at the regional centre, poor and untimed supply of study materials and lack of guidance and counselling were the critical issues revealed in the first research question on the availability of learner support services for improving and facilitating open and distance learning.

4.2. Quality of Learner Support Services

The second research objective and its respective research question sought to investigate the quality of the available learner support services at the regional centre

in maintaining quality of distance education. It was assumed that quality of the available learner support services would affect either positively or negatively the academic achievement of the students. To capture the required information DRC, librarian, lecturers and students were interviewed.

4.2.1 Quality of Study Materials

It was the interest of the researcher to assess the quality of the study material in place in spite of great shortage. The researcher assessed the relevance of the study materials, set-up and printing quality of materials, quality of library services and quality of face-to-face sessions.

Relevance of the Study Materials; DRC revealed during interview that all the study materials were prepared as per course objectives and requirements as indicated in the course outlines. When the researcher wanted to know the authority body for preparing the materials, it was noted from the DRC that every lecturer had to prepare study materials for his/her respective course and then edited and published by the OUT for the internal and external use. DRC had these remarks:

> Our study materials are of high quality. We review them from
>
> time to time to accommodate new experiences. Actually, they are
>
> very relevant that is why, our study materials are highly needed
>
> by external universities and colleges.

Researcher had to observe the available study materials at the regional centre by comparing with learning objectives in course outlines to assess the relevance of the

materials. The reviewed courses were OED 213 – Educational Planning and Administration, OED 303 – Introduction to Education Research and OED 103 – General Psychology. By evidence, materials were relevant enough as they were containing the intended learning experiences in the course outlines. The content was well organized from the simplest to complex knowledge with further readings at the end to enable students search for more materials. This was seen by the research as a good practice in improving quality of education to students. However, only few study materials were evidenced by the research hence these findings cannot be generalized.

Students concurred the same that the few available study materials were relevant in terms of content but raised another issue within. During interviews, 39 out of 45 students asserted that even the few relevant materials available were not much helpful to them since some lecturers were not assessing/testing students on the basis of the content written in those study materials in a respective course. Students had these clams:

i. Study materials provided are of less importance since university examinations deviate from contents in the provide materials.

ii. Relevance of study materials should be extended to the tests and examinations. If tests do not reflect the study materials, the issue of relevance is the illusive.

iii. My friend most of the students are subjected to supplementary and massive failure due to irrelevant examinations. This has been our cry for a long time. A good example is the course OED 103 – General Psychology whereby the

tutor/lecturer gives examinations out of the course outline and the study materials available. Now, what is relevance of study materials for?

Regarding the number of complaint from the students it is irrelevant to assess students in the areas they were not prepared for. Validity of the examination entails to examine students in the covered content.

Set-up and Printing Quality of Study Materials; due to the shortage of manuals and study materials at the regional centre as revealed elsewhere, original copies were to be photocopied to cater the demands of the students. By so doing, quality of the materials was not the same. It was observed by the researcher that photocopied materials were in loose bind and mixed page numbers something which affected the order and arrangement of the content. Moreover, some pages were missing as the manuals had no covers to protect the materials. Researcher observed a manual for OED 227 – Distance Education whereby papers were arranged up-side down and some parts were dirty with black ink to the extent that they were not readable. Consider this script as a part of the study material for OED 227.

This organization of pages in a manual and its readability affects not only the order of the content but also lack of continuity hence poor understanding of the content. As parts of the manuals were not reader friendly as shown in the above evidence, it becomes even more difficult in interpreting the message written on it. This eventually leads to poor understanding of the content hence little or no help for academic achievement. It is the duty of OUT therefore, to ensure quality of prepared

materials. Ironically, the OCD 227, a course on distance education, is supposed to be the model for all others instructional materials.
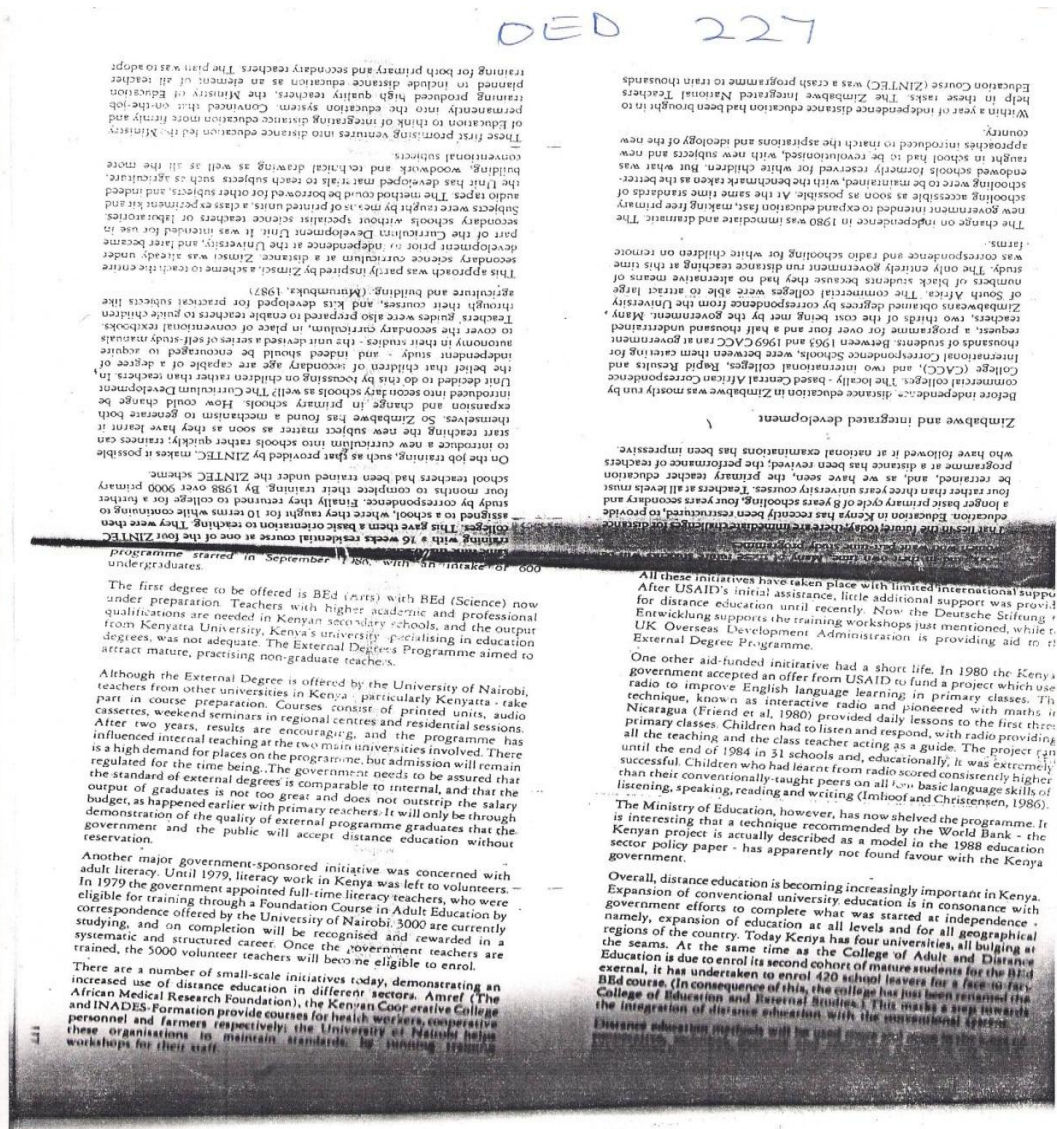
Figure 2: Part of OED 227 Study Materials

Students supported the findings during interviews by showing different manuals for OED 305- (Principles of Guidance and Counselling) which were very poor in terms of quality of printing as one could not read thoroughly. Also, as it was photocopied,

the text on the papers was skewed on one side leading to some words being out of the normal margin. Consider a part of the manual as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Part of OED 305 Study Materials

Figure 3 shows clearly that such a text could not convey any message as was reproduced incomplete. Moreover, the quality of the printing was poor to the extent that one could not read easily. Since the words on the text are faintly reproduced, it

is hardy to read and understand the text.

4.2.2. Quality of Library Services

Provision of library services was considered to be important for improving quality of distance education and students' academic success.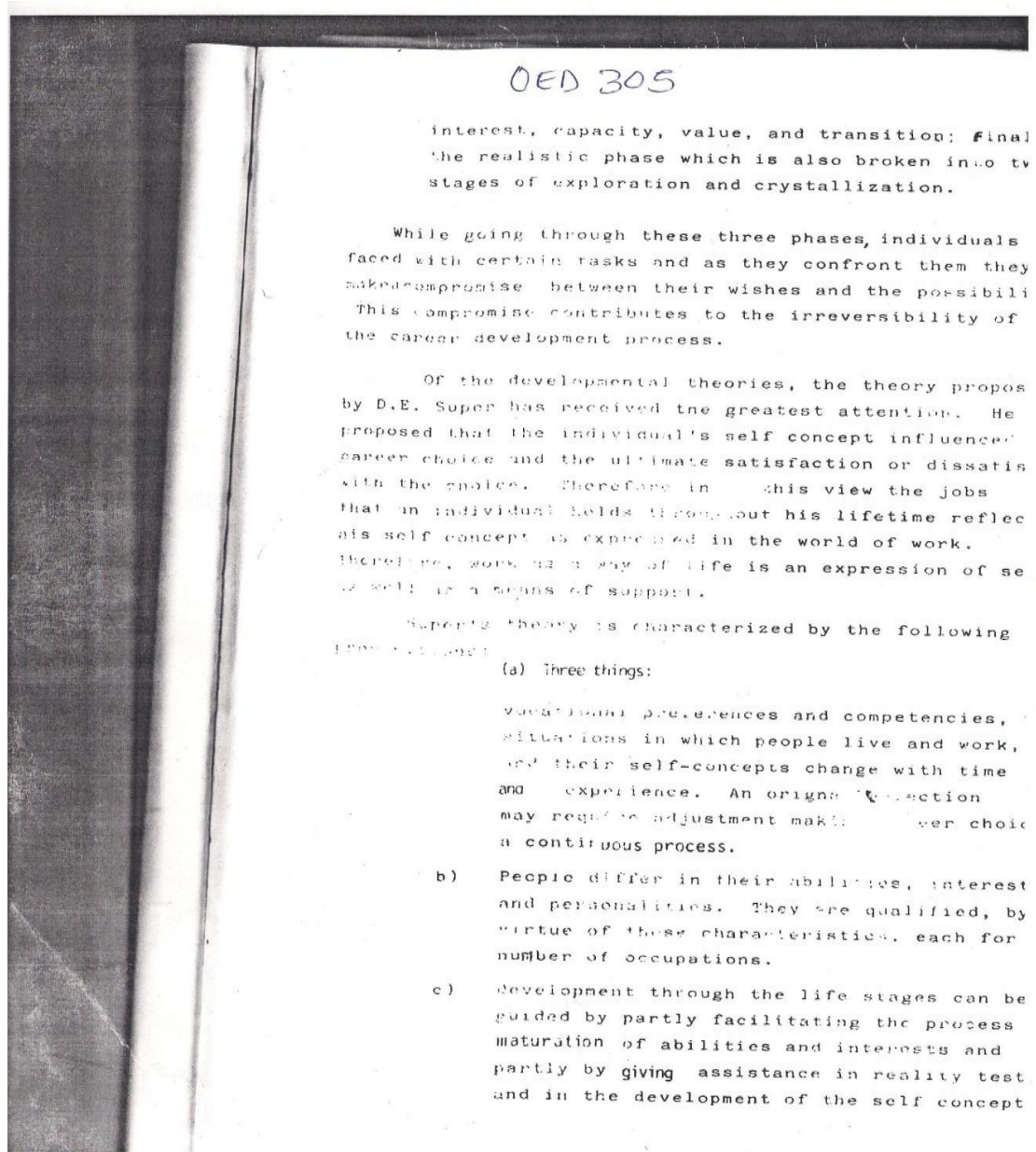 These include reliability of the service, accessibility of adequate and different materials and organization of the service to accommodate a reasonable number of library users. In examining the quality of library services, students and librarian in-charge at the HQ were interviewed. Since the service was not easily accessible, students from three regional centres in Dar es Salaam were scrambling to access the few materials available at the HQ. This was confirmed by all interviewed students that library service at OUT was not reliable and conveniently accessible to them. Difficulties in accessing the library services would affect students' interest in studying since in spite of being far, most of them were working in various places hence difficult for them to leave their working places.

On the other hand, 44 out of 45 interviewed students revealed that they were not satisfied with the library service provided at the HQ because in spite of being far, there were few reference books and even the few materials in place were outdated. They commented further that the space was not enough to accommodate all the students in need of the service. Different students had different views as follows:

   i.   OUT library services are of low quality. In spite of being centralized at the HQ, there are few books which are also outdated. We cannot get the same knowledge as those in the conservational education system.

ii.   The library has a very small space with few resources. We are scrambling in order to get the services.

iii.   We cannot borrow books for our own studying at home because there are few copies available.

Researcher wanted to establish a number of students who were regularly getting library services at OUT-HQ and those who did not or were getting the service elsewhere. It was revealed that only 4 out of 45 interviewed students were getting the library services at the HQ and the remained 41 students were either getting such service from the public and/or private libraries or not at all. As a solution to the problems and challenges aroused, students suggested that OUT should establish its own mini-libraries at each regional centre and supply adequate learning resources for improving learning process.

When OUT-librarian in-charge was asked to explain about the situation, librarian concurred with students that there were not adequate study materials and even the library was not enough in terms of space to accommodate large number of students. Librarian was further noted that although there were out dated materials published as far back as 1950's but still there were current materials. But due to the large number of students, some could not read books at all and others depended solely on the public and private libraries which could not provide the adequate and required information for them. Molten (1996) observed that more than 70% of OUT students depended primarily on local public libraries for their information needs. By implication, since students were not satisfied with the provided library service it

would affect them academically hence failure to accomplish their learning objectives.

4.2.3 Quality of Study Centres

As revealed elsewhere, study centres were not organized at the regional centre level hence not officially in operation. However, the few informal centres organized by individual students were assessed in finding out their quality in supporting students in open and distance learning. Interviews with OUT-students together with observation by the researcher were used to get the data. It was observed by the researcher that OUT students were using classrooms in the primary school premises. The environment was not conducive since it was a temporal place used after normal school hours. For this case, OUT-students had to wait until the normal schooling hours. However, desks in those classes were designed for primary school children not for adults like OUT students. Moreover, students were learning in absence of study materials and for few hours. Students themselves declared during interviews that they experienced a lot of difficulties in those centres. One had these comments:

> My friend, we are like refugees. We use this class during school days
>
> from 5pm to 6.30pm. During the weekends and holidays, we have to
>
> gather and study under the tree since the primary school classes get
>
> closed. This learning environment disappoints us a lot.

Regarding the above quotation, it can be concluded that, poor academic achievement of OUT students in their university examinations was attributed by several factors including poor learning environment.

4.2.4 Quality of Face-to-Face Sessions

In improving and maintaining quality of distance education, quality of face-to-face sessions is necessary. This is determined by the frequencies offered, accessibility to the students and its organization in terms of academic issues for discussion. Although face-to-face service was provided as was revealed elsewhere in this study, but was hardly accessible at the HQ since the regional centre could not manage to do so. The service being far from students could cause a lot of inconveniences in terms of logistics. To improve quality of such service, OUT should provide it at the regional centre as its objective for administrative decentralization.

Moreover, students were interviewed about the quality of the service in terms of frequency and organization of the sessions. All 45 interviewed students revealed that although the service was provided at the HQ, a place far from their areas, it was irregularly and inconsistently provided without outreaching information. Consider this statement by one student:

> Face-to-face session can be conducted at any time in the academic year and hardly once. Surprisingly, we are not informed at a right time. Now! Why having such a service if clients are ignored?

The arguments by the student shows clearly that quality of face-to-face sessions was poor due to either poor organization system or else unmanageable number of students at the HQ since it had to serve students from three regional centres in Dar es Salaam.

Focusing on the way face-to-face sessions were conducted, students revealed during interviews that most of the times, face-to-face sessions were used for administrative purposes by giving directives to students and announcements and not for academic issues like discussion of difficult topics and tutorials as was expected by the students. In solidifying the information, students confirmed that even some of the panel members in those sessions were not professionals in addressing academic issues as their core activity, rather administrators who used to give announcements and were arrogant as they annoyed students. One student noted to be dissatisfied with the service because of mistreatment:

> We are treated as kids. We face a lot of problems during face-to-face sessions and other academic consultations. Lecturers are not friendly to us as they insult us for a mere common mistake. This situation discourages us a lot.

The quotation above shows that quality of face-to-face session was hardly to be achieved under such a situation. Since OUT students are adults, they need to be fairly treated and supported to solve their academic problems and challenges. Lecturers need to be supportive and friendly to restore students' confidence and trust over them which in turn help students to be encouraged to learn successful.

Conclusively, findings show that study materials were of low quality in terms of set-up and printing quality which affected the order, arrangement and continuity of the content. Moreover, OUT library services were of low quality since there were few books which were also outdated. Nevertheless, face-to-face sessions which could

help to correct the above shortfalls were poor organized due to irregularities and inconsistencies. All these affected negatively the academic achievement of the students. These findings confirm the reviewed literature that quality of study materials as a part of learner support services in the OUT is not guaranteed as the OUT does not conduct regular review of the study materials a situation that leads to irrelevance of the study materials to the current situation.

4.3. Managerial Challenges in the Provision of Learner Support Services

The third research question sought to examine the managerial challenges in the provision of learner support services at the regional centre. Establishment of the OUT-regional centres aimed at decentralizing management of all academic and administrative issues closer to the clients. This includes provision of learner support services to the OUT-students. It was therefore, the aim of this study to examine the challenges faced by the Director of Regional Centre (DRC) in supervising the process. The key respondent was the DRC and the information was obtained through interview.

4.3.1. Shortage of Institutional Strategic Infrastructures

Asking on the major constraints and challenges facing the DRC, it was revealed by the DRC during interview that the great challenge was shortage of permanent and enough buildings like offices for administrative purposes, library, conference rooms, computer labs and lecturers' offices. Through observation, it was noted that the centre had only three offices, one for DRC, one for personal secretaries and the other one for all lecturers whereby other activities like consultations and counselling were

conducted within. The centre had twelve lecturers, three personal secretaries, two system administrators and the DRC. All these workers had to share few offices in place hence difficult in rendering the required services.

Researcher observed only one office for lecturers with inadequate facilities compared to the 12 available lecturers at the centre while on the other side within the office was slotted and installed computers for business purpose as confirmed by the DRC. This was real poor working environment compared to the nature of work, number of staffs and clients to be served. It was claimed by students that it was even difficult for them to go at the centre for academic advice and counselling due to the lack of privacy as lecturers had no place for attending individual student's problems. Service provision under such a situation is not promising since it would affect the quality of the service. One would think of how one can conduct counselling service to the students or consultancy service to the clients in a room of more that twelve lecturers doing different activities at the same time. For such services to be well conducted in harmonious situation, OUT should find adequate offices for administrative and academic purposes.

Nevertheless, in spite of great shortage of the instructional strategic infrastructures, it was further revealed by the DRC that even the few available offices were rented. As these premises were rented, some of the support services such as library facilities and ICT services including computer and internet were not provided. This would affect teaching and learning in ODL since students in ODL depend much on library and ICT services. Moreover, even to solicit support from donors to install those

services was not possible since they will require having permanent settlement. Learner support service would be hardly provided under such environment since even the additional staff at the centre would not be accommodated.

According to the DRC, the centre was supposed to have several offices, one for DRC, one for deputy DRC, two for personal secretaries, one for system administrators, a hall for conferences, a library room and at least six rooms for lecturers for consultations, counselling and other academic functions. Regarding the existing situation versus the demands of the institution, learning in such environment was not conducive and ultimately, students were the ultimate loser.

Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda (1987) emphasize that physical facilities such as school buildings including classrooms, labs, offices, library and staffrooms are vital in enhancing pedagogical orientation as well as school functioning towards quality education. Mrema (1991) contends that learning can be secretly impacted if it is not supported by favourable and adequate physical resources such as offices, classrooms, furniture and teaching and learning materials.

4.3.2. Inadequate Funds

DRC confirmed during interview that financial constraint was another challenge hindered smooth provision of learner support services to the students at the regional centre. DRC argued that although services at OUT were decentralized to the regional centres, there were no enough financial resources allocated to the regional centres for their daily operations. DRC commented the following:

Apart from daily administrative issues, we have to attend a large number of students and supplying learning materials, conducting tests and making. All these need money which is insufficiently provide. As a result, students are the ultimate looser since financial constrains affects service provision which in turn affect teaching and learning in ODL.

Regarding the above quotation, one may argue that the system cannot claim to be fully decentralized since the regional centre was not autonomous in mobilizing its resources and making decisions especially on the matters related to finance which in turn would affect the provision of learner support services to the students. Although the students paid fees, all financial transactions were controlled at the HQ. It can be argued that this financial redtapism could affect negatively the provision of learner support services at the centre level. Borsetel (1992) contends that money is an absolutely crucial input for an educational programme because it provides the essential purchasing power at the school level thus ensuring sustainability of the programme.

4.3.3. Poor Communication System

It was discovered during this study that communication system in the entire OUT organization was not effective hence a great challenge for DRC in supporting teaching and learning. DRC declared that although there were systems of communication like OUT-website, letters, phones, media and through notes boards, still there were several communication breakdowns in their daily operations. Due to the isolation nature of students, they could not be easily contacted and for them to

contact the OUT offices since the available communication mechanisms were not reliable and accessible to every student. The situation caused delays in various activities giving an example of feedback to students on their assignment and examinations, provision of study materials, preparations for face-to-face sessions etc.

Even for the available OUT-website, communication to the regional centre and HQ was still problematic since the regional communication networks were not established hence delays of information. According to DRC, this delay adversely affected academic progress of students and even administrative functions at the regional centre since things could not be done at a right time. OUT- HQ should be well connected through internet services with its all regional centres for quick service provision.

Moreover, financial constraint hindered smooth provision of learner support services to the students at the regional centre. The situation could affect negatively the provision of learner support services at the centre level because of red-tapism and centralization of financial issues. Borsetel (1992) contends that money is an absolutely crucial input for an educational programme because it provides the essential purchasing power at the school level thus ensuring sustainability of the programme. To address the managerial challenges at the regional centre there should be full decentralization of management in all academic and administrative issues.

Regarding the situation of provision of learner support services to Open University of Tanzania students as revealed and discussed in this chapter, the

researcher has provided recommendations for improvement. The next chapter presents the summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the findings and discussion as well as recommendations for action and further studies.

4.4.4 Conclusion

Chapter four has analysed and discussed the research findings of the study which included provision of learned support services to undergraduate students of the Open University of Tanzania. The chapter has also analysed and discussed the availability and quality of support services provided. The next chapter has presented the summary of the main findings conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study intended to investigate the extent to which provision of learner support services to OUT undergraduate students influenced teaching and learning process in open and distance learning. Within the conceptual framework of the study, it was expected that quality of distance education and good academic achievement in open and distance learning would be influenced by several factors. The study, therefore, focused on ODL policies, all required inputs and provision learner support services like library services, study materials, face-to-face tutorials, academic advice and counselling services which in turn would influence quality provision of distance education at OUT. In this chapter, researcher summarizes the study and its main findings, gives conclusions basing on the findings and discussion done in chapter four and recommends for further improvement.

5.1. Summary of the Methodology

This study was qualitatively conducted and adopted a case study design since it is associated with qualitative approach in reflecting and connecting the purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, and methodology. The sample size of the study included one regional director, 45 students, eight lecturers, one librarian and two ICT technicians at the centre where by purposive, simple random and stratified sampling procedures were used to select respondents. Moreover, multiple methods interviews, observations and documentary review were used to collect and cross-check accuracy of the data. The use of multiple methods aimed at ensuring validity and reliability of the instruments. Lastly, content analysis was employed to analyse

data since it is a technique used to analyse communication in a systemic objective and qualitative manner in order to measure variables. In this case, data were coded and categorized according to the research questions, and then findings were interpreted and discussed.

5.2. Summary of the Main Findings

It was revealed that there was a great shortage and poor supply of study materials at the centre and to the students in spite of tuition fees paid by students which covered the costs for study materials. The situation was coupled by lack of library services at the regional centre, a situation that forced students in all three regional centres in Dar es Salaam to depend solely on a small library at the HQ. Moreover, face-to-face sessions were centralized at the HQ, and hardly conducted once a year with no fixed timetable. However, such forum was used for administrative announcements instead of teaching and discussing various academic matters.

On administrative part, it was revealed that some of the administrative support services were hindered by poor communication system in the entire OUT organization a situation that caused delays in various academic activities such as feedback of their assignment and examinations, receiving important information about examination schedules, provision of study materials, and face-to-face session arrangements.

It was further revealed that provision of guidance and counselling service to OUT students was not established and therefore hardly provided due to lack of expertise and lack of adequate rooms for privacy. Although it was a responsibility of every

lecturer to assist students according to their area of specialization yet, it was revealed that some of the lecturers were not friendly and cooperative enough in assisting their student even in the academic matters.

Study materials were relevant enough as were containing the intended learning experiences as per course outlines. The content was well organized from the simplest to complex. Nevertheless, university examinations were not relevant as were not assessing/testing students on the basis of the content in those study materials in the respective course.

The findings revealed further that quality of study materials in terms of set-up and printing was very poor since the available materials were photocopied, kept in loose bind with mixed page numbers and other pages were missing. Moreover, among 45 interviewed students, 44 students revealed that they were not satisfied with the quality of library service provided at the HQ because in spite of being far, there were few reference books and even the few materials in place were out dated did not accommodate all the students in need of the service.

On top of that, it was revealed that quality of face-to-face service was poor as was hardly accessible at the HQ and the regional centre did not manage to do so. The service was provided at the HQ where it was far and irregularly and inconsistently provided without outreaching information. The great challenge to the DRC was confirmed to be shortage of permanent and enough buildings like offices for administrative purposes, library, conference rooms, computer labs and lecturers'

offices and even the few available offices were rented. Moreover, it was confirmed that although the services at OUT were decentralized to the regional centres, there were no enough financial resources allocated to the regional centres for their daily operations.

Lastly, it was found that there were poor systems of communication whereby regional office and students experienced several communication breakdowns from the HQ and vice versa in their daily operations. The situation caused delays in various activities giving an example of feedback to students on their assignment and examinations, provision of study materials, preparations for face-to-face sessions etc.

5.3. Concluding discussion

A great shortage and poor supply of study materials found at the centre which was coupled by lack of library services would result into poor academic achievements such as high rate of supplementary in the examinations, massive failure, postponement of studies and drop-outs.

Furthermore, centralization of face-to-face sessions at the HQ made it difficult for students to access the service. However, since the service was mostly used for administrative announcements instead of teaching and discussing various academic matters, it demoralized and affected students' academic progress. Poor communication system in the entire system of OUT caused delays in various administrative and academic activities such as feedback of students' assignment and

examinations, receiving important information about examination schedules, provision of study materials, and face-to-face session arrangements. This would develop negative attitude towards open and distance mode of education provision among students.

Lack of well established and provision of guidance and counselling service to OUT students would adversely affect students 'progress and confidence in learning since students were lacking daily contact with lecturers. The situation would eventually result to dropouts, poor academic achievement and even prolonged period of programme completion.

Although the study materials were relevant enough as were containing the intended learning experiences as per course outlines but the university examinations were not valid as were not assessing/testing students on the basis of the content in those study materials in the respective course. The situation affected students' performance.

Quality of library service was very poor since it was not available at the centre and even at the HQ where it was found, the library was small with few reference books which were out dated. Moreover, quality of the study materials was also poor since were photocopied, kept in loose bind with mixed page numbers and other pages were missing hence to be not helpful to students.

The managerial challenges faced by DRC such as shortage of permanent and enough premises for administrative and academic purposes, poor financial resources for

official daily operations and poor systems of communication from the HQ to the regional and individual students all together led poor quality service provision to students in their academic matters, poor provision of study materials at the centre and delays in various academic activities hence students being the ultimate losers.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Recommendations for Action and Policy Implications.

Given the status of learner support services at OUT, the following recommendations are made:

Firstly, study materials at the regional centre should be adequately available and timely supplied to the students. Nevertheless, in ensuring easy access, library service should be provided at the regional centre and supplied with the adequate and up-to-date materials ODL students for improving learning process.

Secondly, face-to-face sessions should be decentralized, arranged and provided at the regional centre, closer to the people, irregularly and consistently according to the set-timetable focusing on the academic issues as the core function. In ensuring quality of face-to-face sessions, it is however recommended that the process should be professionally conducted by lecturers and other professionals and not the supporting staff.

Thirdly, ICT services should be established at the regional centre and facilitated with equipment like computers and internet devices to help students learning though internet where a bulk information concerning various areas of specialization are found. This would reduce students' dependence on their lecturers.

Fourthly, a good system of guidance and counselling should be established to serve the Open University of Tanzania students in their academic and social challenges so as to restore students' confidence in learning and develop independence in learning since students lack daily contact with lecturers.

Fifthly, OUT should ensure quality of study materials in terms printing, set-up, readability, and organization of the study materials for easy and friendly use to the students. Moreover, university examinations should be derived from the course outlines and the study materials used to assess the content covered and ensure relevance and validity of the examinations.

Sixthly, OUT should build permanent and enough premises for administrative and academic purposes at the regional level to ensure thorough provision of the service to the ODL students. Moreover, adequate financial resources should be allocated to the regional centres for their daily operations for smooth provision of learner support services to the students at the regional centre and other administrative functions.

Lastly, proper and effective communication channels should be established and/or improved for better communication from the HQ to the individual students to ensure smooth two way communication as a means for facilitating teaching and learning and avoiding delays.

5.4.2. Recommendations for Further Research

This study was confined to only one regional centre in Dar es Salaam. The same study can be conducted to other regional centres particularly in the up-country

centres for comparative analysis in provision of learner support services in the country in course of identifying similarities and differences.

Moreover, another study can be conducted in assessing the practices and achievement of OUT decentralization policy like establishment of regional centres in providing and downsizing services to the clients.

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APPENDECES

Appendix i: Interview Schedule for the Regional Centre Directors

Centre's Name ……………...Sex: Male ………………Female …………………….

Professional Background ……………..……………………………………………

Duration in the Current Post…………………………………………………….

1. What are your managerial functions as Regional Director?

2. What kind of support services are provided to the students in the regional centre?

3. What are your roles in providing learner support services to OUT students?

4. Are there established study centres in the region? If Yes! How are they managed to ensure proper provision of learner support services to the students?

5. How many undergraduate students are registered at your Regional centre?

6. What is the availability and qualification of lecturers at the regional centre?

7. Are the lecturers adequate in proportional to the number of students in the regional centre? If No! How the situation does affect learning process for students?

8. How many permanent and part-time staff are at your regional centre? In case of part time lecturers, how does the situation affect learning process?

9. How are the lecturers controlled in their daily activities in the provision of learner support services?

10. Are there consultations, guidance and counselling service for individual students in case of the need of each learner?

11. Is the academic advising service available for students? How is it handled?

12. Are study materials adequately available in the centre? If No! How it affects teaching and learning process?

13. How study materials are distributed to the OUT students?

14. Are there library services in the Regional centre? If yes! Are they equipped with all required resources?

15. Is there ICT service such as on line study service for students? If Yes! Is it accessible to all students conveniently?

16. What is the quality of learner support services provided to the students in terms of suitability and relevance?

17. How face-to-face sessions are conducted?

18. What are the possible results of having inadequate learner support services to the students of OUT?

19. What are technological challenges facing the regional centres in the provision of learner support services to the students?

20. What are managerial challenges do you face in your day to day activities of providing and managing learner support services?

21. How do you address those challenges to ensure thorough provision of learner support services?

22. What are your opinions/comments as far as provision of learner support services is concerned?

Thank you for your Cooperation

Appendix ii: Interview Schedule for the Librarian

Centre's Name ……………...Sex: Male ………………Female ……………………

Professional Background ……………...………………………………………………

Duration in the Current Post…………………………………………………………….

1. What are your functions as an OUT librarian?

2. What learner support services does your library provide to the students?

3. How do you ensure that the services are adequately provided?

4. Are the available study materials in the library adequately in proportional to the number of users? If not what measures are taken to solve the problem?

5. What is the quality of the available study materials in terms of their relevance and being up-to-date?

6. Are the available study materials in the library fully utilized by the students? If no! Why?

7. What mechanisms are in place to enable students to borrow books for individual learning?

8. What difficulties and challenges do you encounter in the provision of learner support services to students?

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix iii: Interview Schedule for the ICT Technician

Centre's Name ……………...Sex: Male ………………Female ……………………

Professional Background ………………..……………………………………………

Duration in the Current Post……………………………………………………….

1. What are your functions as ICT technician in facilitating learning of the students?

2. What is the ICT package established and provided to the students in facilitating learning?

3. Are the students aware of ICT technology to support them in learning?

4. How do you support individual students in using ICT-internet services?

5. Is the ICT service sufficient to accommodate the number of students at the centre?

Appendix iv: Interview Schedule for Lecturers

Centre's Name ……………...Sex: Male ………………Female …………………….

Professional Background ……………..…………………………………………

1. What is your experience in distance learning?

2. What are your functions as an OUT tutor? Are they prescribed by OUT?

3. What subject are you instructing at OUT?

4. How frequent do you have consultation with students? (Daily, weekly, monthly, yearly).

5. Is the academic advising service available for students? How is it handled?

6. Students require support services other than tutoring, what kind of support services doyou provide to students?

7. Are there consultations, guidance and counselling service for individual students in case of the need of each learner?

8. How do you ensure that students obtain quality academic support services?

9. Do you participate in face-to-face sessions? What are your roles in the face-to-face session?

10. Do you have study materials at the time you need them and adequately?

11. What is the quality of study materials in terms of suitability and relevancein your centre?

12. How often do you give assignments? (a week, a month, a year).

13. Do the students get feedback of assessments and progress on time? If Not! Why?

14. What problems do you encounter in assisting students to learn? Any suggestions?

15. In general, what can you say about you students in term of their academic performance?

16. The Open University of Tanzania is operating on Regional Centres, what are your views on Coordination and Organization of Regional Centres?

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix vi: Interview Schedule for the Students

Centre's Name ……………...Sex: Male ………………Female …………………….

Professional Background ………………..……………………………………………

1. What programme are you taking at OUT?

2. What is the year of study?

3. What problems and challenges have you met in your open and distance learning as far as learner support services are concerned?

4. The Open University of Tanzania is providing the following support services in order to assist students. Library services, Academic advising, face-to-face session, and study materials, study centres: Are these support services available at the Regional Centre?

Support Services	Available	Not Available	Adequate	Not Adequate
Study Materials				
Distribution of study material				
Study centres				
Face-to-face sessions				
Academic advising				
Library service				

5. What do you say about study materials? Are they clearly understood? If not, who assist you in learning?

6. Is the content in the study materials relevant to your needs? If not, what would you need to be changed or included?

7. How many times are you provided with face-to-face sessions? Is the time

specified for face-to-face session adequate? If not what do you suggest?

8. How is the face-to-face sessions conducted? Are you satisfied with the conduct of face-to-face sessions? If not, what would you want to be changed?

9. What would you say about the relevance of face-to-face session in your studies? Any suggestion for improvement?

10. Are the study materials sufficient and available for your units? If not, what do you do to solve these problems?

11. Are these study materials available and adequate in the following places?

Place	Available	Not Available	Adequate	Not Adequate
Regional Centres				
Library				

12. Apart from being provided with study materials, is there any other media, which is used?

Other Media	Provided	Not Provided
Tapes and tape records		
Video tapes		
Computer assisted learning		

13. The Open University of Tanzania prepares and distributes study materials for students, how do you obtain yours? Do you get any problems in getting study materials? If yes, can you tell me the problems? How do you solve them?

14. Are there library services in your region? Where are they? Are there librarians? Are there adequate reference books?

15. Are there consultations, guidance and counselling service for individual students in case of the need of each learner?

16. Which support services do you think are mostly needed by students? Why? Any suggestion?

17. Do you think there is effective organization and management of support services?

18. What changes would you suggest to be made in provision of support services?

19. What are your general views on quality, organization and coordination of support services provided at the Regional Centre?

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix vi: Observation Checklist

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Item	Available	Unavailable	Adequate	Inadequate
-Study Materials e.g. Reference Books				
-Tables				
-Chairs				
Number of teaching staff				
Study Centres				
Computer + Internet				