

## **Abstract**

This article presents findings of a study on the relationship between learner characteristics and academic performance of distance learners of the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Learner characteristics were defined as the personal circumstances of the learner that may affect his/her studies such as age, gender, marital status, size of family, educational background and income status. On the other hand, academic performance was defined as grades obtained by a learner in University examinations, consisting of coursework and semester examinations. The problem under investigation was that academic performance remained poor in spite of the study courseware and learner support services provided to the learners by the university. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data. The study targeted learners in parts II to V of the Bachelor of Education (Arts) distance study programme. The programme was then studied on the basis of the research question that aimed at finding out the relationship between learner characteristics and learner's academic performance in coursework and Semester examinations. The findings were that learner characteristics consisting of age, family size, entry academic qualification and supplementary income have a significant relationship with academic performance of learners in the course. Recommendations were made to review the External Degree curriculum, provide education support funds and enhance the provision of guidance and counselling to students.

***Key Words: Learner Characteristics, Learner Support Services, Academic Performance, Distance Education, Open Learning***