

Abstract

This article presents findings of a study on the impact of learner support services on academic performance of distance learners in the University of Nairobi's External Degree programme. Learner support services were defined in the study as the cognitive and systemic support provided through tutoring, modern information communication technology (ICT), and administrative support that are provided to students in the study programme. Academic performance, on the other hand, was defined as the grades obtained by a learner in university examinations, consisting of coursework and semester examinations. The problem under investigation was that academic performance of External Degree students remained poor in spite of the learner support services that were provided to the learners by the institution.

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data. Selected learners in Parts II to V of the programme were targeted for the study. The distance learning programme was then studied in the light of two research questions that aimed at finding out the contribution of learner support services to academic performance of learners in coursework and semester examinations. The findings were that learner support services contributed immensely to the academic performance of learners. The poor academic performance was partly due to inadequate provision of learner support services to learners in the External Degree programme. On the basis of the findings, it was recommended that the University of Nairobi enhance the production capacity of study materials, boost library support at the regional centres and provide internet connectivity and related services at the regional centres. It was also recommended that the Government of Kenya provide a favourable ICT policy to facilitate provision of internet services to students in the regional centres within the country.

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