

EFFICACY OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: LEARNERS AND FACILITATORS PERSPECTIVES FROM THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the efficacy of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) through the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). It revealed the learners and facilitators' perceptions on ODL, adequacy of facilitation strategies and the support services offered in relation to learners' demographic factors. Sample size was 149 and SPSS software was used for statistical analysis. Pearson correlation test (at 0.001 and 0.05 levels of significance) was carried out to test the influence of demographic factors on the respondents' perception on the ODL support services that OUT provides to students. The results showed that demographic variables such as age, marital status, degree program and year of study have influence on respondents' perception on the efficacy of ODL. Also, the pedagogical and andragogical strategies used by OUT were found to be effective in transforming learners. Support services were found to be effective, with a mean of 1.79 and a standard deviation of 0.95. Therefore, nurturing and supportive learning environment must consider sex, age, degree program and marital status. It should also focus on more strengthening of support services, teaching and learning strategies.

Key Words: Perspectives, efficacy, Open and Distance Learning, andragogy, pedagogy.

Introduction

Efficacy means the ability to do what is defined as desired or to be effective in producing the intended results (Mampane, 2015). Thus, education is considered to have efficacy if it produces individuals who are not only knowledgeable but capable of solving immediate problems in their society. In Tanzania, the efficacy of education has constantly been questioned by different people. A lot of complaints concerning the effectiveness of the Tanzanian educational system have been mounted by different stakeholders, many of them blaming the education offered by different institutions in the country for failing to enable the learners to deal with our day-to-day problems, i.e. for being ineffective in producing problem solvers (MoEST, 2022). In relation to distance learning, there are even more complaints which cast doubt over the academic ability of graduates who pursue their studies through Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Scholars who raise these complaints consider graduates from Open and Distance Learning institutions as weaker in terms of knowledge and skills compared to their counterparts from the conventional institutions. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is described as the learning that takes place while the learner and the teacher are distant from each other (Freeman, 2004; Moon et al., 2005; Perraton, 2012; Ramanujan, 2002; Waghid, 2002). Essentially, ODL is seen as multidimensional and is aimed at bridging the gaps related to the time constraint, geographic constraints, economic constraints, educational needs, and the communicative distance between students and peers, students and academics, and students and coursework (UNISA, 2008). Ramanujan (2002) points out that the provision education through ODL makes use of several media to bridge the gap between students and teachers, students and materials as well as students and their peers. According to Purnell et al. (1996), the provision of education through ODL is facilitated through personal support offered by tutors through telephone, audio cassettes and video tapes that supplement the study material. Moon et al. (2005) and Mahai (2014) argue that the efficacy of ODL would improve if all the necessary conditions are met and thus distance and time are well managed.

Tanzania is among the African countries that have been administering Open and Distance Learning (ODL) since the 1970s. ODL is offered by different institutions in Tanzania but the biggest player in the field is the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) which in the academic year 2020/2021 enrolled around 46,728 (Facts Figures, 2020/2021), a number that cannot be enrolled by any other university in Tanzania within a single year. Therefore, OUT plays a great role in expanding access to education for the majority of Tanzanians and East Africans in general. OUT uses two modes of teaching and learning, namely: the blended mode and the online-learning mode. The use of these two modes is meant to give learners flexibility in their participation in higher education. ODL has become significant as a modern educational development that saves cost and time, hence enabling a big number of people to participate in learning (URT, 2014). Along with URT (2014), educators and learners consider it as an alternative way to meet the unmet demands for education, especially for those who want to pursue studies while continuing with their employment due to time and space limitations (Bryman, 2006). Komba (2009) considers ODL as an efficient alternative mode of delivering university education to the majority of Tanzanians. The aim of ODL therefore can be viewed in the lens of improving access to higher education (Bozkurt et al., 2016). Based on this, it has been argued that, for ODL to be successful, the future ODL

(especially in developing countries), it must benefit from a critical analysis of its operating environment and the focus has to shift from campus learning to home-based learning in order to reduce the knowledge gap among different groups of people (Mbukusa, 2009).

Essentially, effective provision of education through ODL depends on the capacity to cater for students' needs from different locations of the country. Different learning conditions such as location, availability of support services are liable to affect the learning efficiency (Bozkurt et al., 2019). Previous studies (Daniel, 2010; Dzakiria, 2005; Krishnan, 2012; Sewart, 1993; Tait, 2000, 2003) mention the provision of support services as a core in facilitating ODL. Srivastava and Reddy (2007) hold that students' effective and successful completion of studies through ODL is dependent on a combination of factors, which include learning materials, assignments, face-to-face support, efficacy of ODL centers, peer groups, guidance from counselors and access to library services. Furthermore, another consideration in enhancing the efficiency of ODL is to improve communication through ICT (Busulwa & Bbuye, 2018; Douce, 2018; Nankanja & Bisaso, 2010). Nonetheless, ensuring these services are adequately available for the learners has been challenging in many countries, especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa.

There is research evidence indicating that the provision of education through ODL has normally been fraught with a number of challenging issues. According to Basaza et al. (2010), for instance, it is constrained by lack of adequate skills and knowledge among both the academic and support staff. Other studies such as (Bwire et al., 2015; Kishore, 2014 and Nyerere et al., 2012) have mentioned lack of supportive skills among the trainers to be hampering ODL. Bhalalusesa (2001) observe that poor infrastructure, inadequate financial resources, poor learning environment and shortage of qualified tutors restrict effective provision of ODL. Therefore, there are important questions on the way key players perceive ODL efficacy, its adequacy and strategies as well as support services offered by ODL institutions.

Efforts to improve ODL have been made through different programmes, for example ICT training for learners and facilitators, installation of different online platforms in different academic institutions. Despite all these efforts, less has been studied in relation to the way learners and facilitators perceive the efficacy of ODL mode in the context of OUT. For example, the study by Bhalalusesa (2001) paid less attention to the efficacy of ODL in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. Therefore, this paper was specifically aimed at finding out how learners perceive the efficacy of ODL, the adequacy of andragogical and Pedagogical Strategies, and learners' support services used in ODL. To bridge these gaps, this study strongly recommends improvement of ODL practices in other institutions offering distance learning in Tanzania and globally.

2.0 Methodology

This study employed a mixed research approach where qualitative and quantitative research paradigms were employed. The qualitative approach was employed to explore facilitators' perceptions on the efficacy of ODL since the approach deals with the meanings people construct as they make sense of the world and experiences in their daily life. On the other hand, the quantitative approach was employed in respect of the descriptive and inferential statistics generated from students. This was suitable to the fact that the research required a large sample and statistical information was considered important in justifying the findings of the study. A convergent parallel research design was used. The design was preferred because of its ability to approximate the prevalence of the outcomes of interest for a given population (Levin, 2006). The target population of the study comprised all facilitators and students from OUT. The Open University of Tanzania was selected by virtue of being the leading ODL institution in the country and therefore its facilitators and students were assumed to possess relevant information regarding how ODL operates through different modes of delivery.

The study involved a total of 144 students and five facilitators from OUT. The students were selected by using convenience sampling due to the fact that students of ODL do not study on campus. Thus, those who were available on campus for whatever reason were requested to fill in the questionnaire. However, the facilitators were selected using purposeful sampling. Every student who was found at the headquarters was requested to fill in the questionnaire while the facilitators were interviewed at their convenience. Only active/live students were considered for filling in the questionnaire.

OUT's headquarters was selected due to the possibility that an adequate number of students could be readily available there most of the time and could offer timely cooperation. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire (ranging from 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree) was used. The items used in the questionnaire were adopted from Claudio (2017) by the researcher and were accompanied with an interview guide for facilitators. Thematic data analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data generated from interviews while descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation test were used to analyze the quantitative data from the Likert-scale using SPSS

computer software version 22. Inferential statistics was performed to test the influence of demographic factors such as age, sex, marital status and degree programme on students' perception about the efficacy of ODL and support services provided by OUT to its students

3.0 Results and Discussion

A total of 144 questionnaires were administered to the students of OUT. The questionnaires were filled and returned at a 100% return rate. The demographic information of the respondents is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents (n=144)

| Demographic factor | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 60 | 42 |
| Female | 84 | 58 |
| Age (Years) | | |
| 19-30 | 98 | 68 |
| 31-40 | 40 | 28 |
| 41-50 | 6 | 4 |
| Degree Perused | | |
| BEd. Science | 14 | 10 |
| BA. Ed | 51 | 35 |
| BEd. Arts | 26 | 18 |
| BSc. Ed | 27 | 19 |
| PGDE | 26 | 18 |
| Years of Study | | |
| First Years | 59 | 41 |
| Second Year | 41 | 29 |
| Third Year | 44 | 31 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Single | 76 | 53 |
| Married | 68 | 47 |

The findings in Table 1 indicate that the study involved more females than males, which implies that most of the students who opt for ODL as a means of knowledge acquisition are female. It is then obvious that ODL offers flexibility for females to participate in higher education without being barred by the time constraint due to multiple obligations at home and at work. This is consistent with Moon et al. (2005) who posits that distance and time become manageable when learners opt for ODL mode of knowledge acquisition. Similarly, URT (2014) mentions ODL as a significant and modern educational development that saves costs and time, thus enabling a big number of people to participate in learning. Again, the table indicates that most of the participants (98%) were aged between 19 and 30 years. This is an active and productive age group that is likely to have a significant contribution to the nation. In regard to degree programme, most of the students were taking "Bachelor of Arts with Education" and the majority of were in their first year of study.

The study also sought to examine learners' perception towards the efficacy of ODL in OUT. The five-point scale was clustered into three and descriptive statistics (including frequencies, mean and standard deviation) were established and presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Learners Perception towards efficacy of Open and Distance Learning

| | Agree | | Not Sure | | Disagree | | Mean | SD |
|---|-------|----|----------|---|----------|---|------|-------|
| | N | % | n | % | n | % | | |
| Open and distance learning is highly valued by the learning community | 143 | 99 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1.01 | 0.167 |
| Open and distance learning goes with the change of science and technology | 137 | 95 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1.07 | 0.327 |
| Open and distance learning is preferred by many scholars by lifelong learners | 135 | 94 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1.07 | 0.306 |
| Open and distance learning is a cost effective mode of learning | 134 | 93 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1.09 | 0.353 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|-----|----|----|---|----|---|-------------|-------------|
| Open and distance learners gain high respect from the learners | 133 | 92 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 1.10 | 0.387 |
| Open and distance learning is regarded by Tanzanian society as the weakest education system in the country | 132 | 92 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 1.12 | 0.436 |
| Open and distance learning is considered as education for the in- service and people with low performance in their secondary education | 124 | 87 | 8 | 6 | 11 | 8 | 1.21 | 0.567 |
| Open and distance learning is an effective and efficient mode of learning | 121 | 84 | 10 | 7 | 13 | 9 | 1.25 | 0.609 |
| The learning courses studied at open and distance learning reflect national needs | 129 | 90 | 5 | 4 | 10 | 7 | 1.17 | 0.533 |
| Open and distance learning encourage self-learning to students | 132 | 92 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 1.12 | 0.418 |
| Learners in open and distance learning are involved in decision making regarding to their learning processes | 132 | 92 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 1.14 | 0.482 |
| Gender is highly considered in promoting participation in open and distance learning | 131 | 91 | 4 | 3 | 9 | 6 | 1.15 | 0.506 |
| Current and relevant courses in relation to world market are offered in open and distance learning programs | 136 | 94 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 1.10 | 0.415 |
| Total | | | | | | | 1.16 | 0.50 |

From the findings above, it can be observed that both the individual and average means for all items (1.16) fall under the ‘agree’ category. Thus, both of them indicate that the participants from the Open University of Tanzania had a positive perception on the efficacy of ODL in relation to their general life. In the same line, the individual standard deviations (SD) ranged from 0.16 to 0.61 with a mean value of 0.5, which shows little dispersion of the data around the mean value. This implies that the respondents had nearly similar answers to the questions over their perception of the efficacy of ODL.

The findings are consistent with Hung et al. (2010) who studied learners’ readiness for online learning by evaluating both scale development and their perception. At the same time, the findings coincide with Rumble (2000) and Daniel (2017) whose studies also found that ODL is cost-effective. However, the findings are inconsistent with Simonson et al., (2019) whose study showed that distance learners feel isolated and stressed due to lack of organizational support, something that eventually leads to non-completion of their course programmes. Likewise, they are against Zikmund et al. (2010) who revealed programme costs, lack of equipment and infrastructure, instructional concerns and poor technical assistance as perils for ODL. Also, they are opposed to Parker (2003) whose findings indicated that financial constraints constitute the most problematic peril facing ODL. Moreover, they are against the findings by Pityana (2004) who is suspicious of the quality of graduates produced through the ODL route. As well, they are in discord with Belanger & Jordan (1999), Biao (2012), and Kalleberg et al. (2006) who showed that school directors have negative perception towards the possibility of distance education meeting the training needs of teachers.

Descriptive statistics results were complemented with inferential statistics in order to bring meaningful interpretation of the data. This relationship between demographic factors and learners’ perception on the efficacy of ODL was determined using Pearson’s correlation test and the results are as summarized in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Pearson’s Correlation Matrix of Learners’ Perception on Efficacy of ODL and Demographics

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------|-------------------|--|------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------|----------|
| 1 | Sex | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 1 | | | | |
| 2 | Degree program | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.110 0.191 | 1 | | | |
| 3 | Year of Study | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.080 0.342 | .225** 0.007 | 1 | | |
| 4 | Age of respondent | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.218** 0.009 | .328** 0.000 | 0.080 0.341 | 1 | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|---|
| 5 | Marital Status | Pearson Correlation | 0.179* | .379** | 0.200* | .507** | 1 | |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.032 | 0.000 | 0.016 | 0.000 | | |
| 6 | Learners Perception towards efficacy of ODL | Pearson Correlation | 0.109 | 0.100 | 0.177* | 0.120 | 0.039 | 1 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.194 | 0.235 | 0.034 | 0.150 | 0.646 | |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results from Pearson’s Correlation Matrix above show that the years of study, age of the respondent and marital status have a significant influence on the learners’ perception of the efficacy of ODL. Unlike these variables, sex and degree programme have less correlation with learners’ perception. The learners’ year of study was found to have a significant positive association with the learners’ perception. Pearson Correlation values were recorded at $r = 0.177$ and $p = 0.034$. Also, marital status and age were found to have a strong correlation with learners’ perception on the efficacy of ODL (P values = 0.007, 0.000 and 0.000 respectively).

The findings corroborate Hung et al. (2010) who show that college students’ perception on readiness and the efficacy of online learning have a significant association with their grade (year of study). This might be a result of improved self-directed learning among advanced students, who also demonstrate higher competence in using the ODL system compared to the freshers. This is also in line with Edom (2012) who shows that students’ gender, age and knowledge can influence the use of e-learning resources in secondary school libraries. Sex was not found in any significant relationship with learners’ perception, something that is in line with studies such as (Lindberg et al., 2010; Muhammad, 2017; Owan, 2020; Owan et al., 2019) which have also shown that it has an insignificant influence on students’ performance. The implication of these findings is that the designing of ODL program has to put into consideration different factors, including age, sex, marital status, degree program and the year of study in order for them to be effective.

On the other hand, the adequacy of andragogical and pedagogical strategies used in facilitating ODL were analyzed. During the analysis, the five-point scale was clustered into three corresponding frequencies, mean and standard deviations as presented in Table 4

Table 4: Prevalence and Practice of Andragogical and Pedagogical Strategies used by OUT (N=144)
Results on the teaching and learning strategies used by OUT indicated that the strategies are effective. This is

| | Agree | | Not Sure | | Disagree | | Mean | SD |
|--|-------|----|----------|---|----------|----|-------------|-------------|
| | N | % | n | % | n | % | | |
| The open university of Tanzania employs varieties of teaching and learning strategies to the learners | 121 | 84 | 4 | 3 | 19 | 13 | 1.29 | 0.688 |
| The facilitation methods used by the open university yield important skills to the learners | 114 | 79 | 8 | 6 | 22 | 15 | 1.36 | 0.735 |
| Regular consultation between students and facilitators is always done at the open university of Tanzania | 111 | 77 | 7 | 5 | 26 | 18 | 1.41 | 0.779 |
| Learner centered approaches are often applied in distance learning institutions | 108 | 75 | 12 | 8 | 24 | 17 | 1.42 | 0.762 |
| The learning strategies designed by open university of Tanzania are more current and up to date | 117 | 81 | 4 | 3 | 23 | 16 | 1.35 | 0.742 |
| Assessment mode applied at the open university of Tanzania is done reasonably | 116 | 81 | 6 | 4 | 22 | 15 | 1.35 | 0.732 |
| The facilitation processes used at the open and distance learning always lead to better understanding of course programs | 118 | 82 | 6 | 4 | 20 | 14 | 1.32 | 0.706 |
| Online learning processes are practiced by open and distance learning | 111 | 78 | 7 | 5 | 25 | 18 | 1.40 | 0.770 |
| Provision of learning materials is done at Open and distance learning institutions in Tanzania | 110 | 76 | 8 | 6 | 26 | 18 | 1.42 | 0.780 |
| The existing facilitation methods for learning adopted in open and distance learning are effective | 110 | 76 | 9 | 6 | 25 | 17 | 1.41 | 0.770 |
| Total | | | | | | | 1.37 | 0.75 |

reflected by the total mean value of 1.37, which falls in the agree range, and the standard deviation value of less than 1 (0.75), which indicate resemblance between the andragogical and pedagogical strategies in terms of their

effectiveness. Therefore, the strategies agree with the vision and mission of OUT and its strategic plans and the current mission of “ using ICT as a strategic tool in facilitating provision of quality open and distance education, research, and public services” (Mnyanyi et al., 2010). The same andragogical and pedagogical strategies have been reported to be used in other contexts too (Mampane,2015). The findings are against Bhalalusesa (2001) and Mbukusa (2009) who report on a shortage of qualified ODL tutors to enhance effective teaching and learning OUT. In the author’s view, the argument by Bhalalusesa (2001) and Mbukusa (2009) can no longer hold at the present since there has been a long lapse of time since the years of publication and OUT has made significant improvement in its andragogical and pedagogical practices.

Evidence from individual item scrutiny showed a significant improvement in OUT’s pedagogical and andragogical practices. For example, it was revealed that OUT uses up-to-date methods which are learner-centred, allows regular consultation with students, provides wider opportunities for effective online learning, and serves learning materials to students. Regarding this, one of the facilitators was quoted in an interview saying, “*unlike in the past, currently, there is a significant improvement of the pedagogical and andragogical methods used.* (Facilitator 1, June 2022).

Lastly, the study aimed to measure learners’ support services in ODL. Eleven (11) items were used for this purpose. The respondents were asked to answer five-rated items, and the rating ranged from 1 to 5 (1 – strongly Agree, 2 – Agree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Disagree, and 5 – Strongly Disagree). Then, researcher clustered the items and determined the descriptive statistic. Frequencies, mean and standard deviation were established as presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Prevalence of learner’s support services provided in ODL

The findings on the prevalence of learners’ support services in Table 5 above indicate that there is a relatively low

| | Agree | | Not Sure | | Disagree | | Mean | SD |
|---|-------|----|----------|---|----------|----|-------------|-------------|
| | N | % | n | % | n | % | | |
| The open university of Tanzania does provide enough learning materials to its learners | 88 | 61 | 9 | 6 | 47 | 33 | 1.72 | 0.929 |
| Internet services, study rooms, stationeries and consultation services are adequately provided by the open university of Tanzania | 81 | 56 | 13 | 9 | 50 | 35 | 1.78 | 0.932 |
| The open university centers are located in few areas mainly at urban areas | 81 | 56 | 12 | 8 | 51 | 36 | 1.79 | 0.938 |
| Guidance and counseling services are provided to open and distance learners | 79 | 55 | 10 | 7 | 55 | 38 | 1.83 | 0.953 |
| Research and consultation services are given to open and distance learners | 83 | 58 | 8 | 6 | 53 | 37 | 1.79 | 0.953 |
| Qualified facilitators are highly available and accessible in open and distance learning | 83 | 58 | 8 | 6 | 53 | 37 | 1.79 | 0.953 |
| Students-facilitators ratio in open and distance learning is fair distributed | 80 | 56 | 8 | 5 | 56 | 39 | 1.83 | 0.961 |
| Open and distance learning offer interactions among students which serve as a tool for learning | 78 | 54 | 11 | 8 | 55 | 38 | 1.84 | 0.951 |
| Library facilities are readily available in open and distance learning | 82 | 57 | 10 | 7 | 52 | 36 | 1.79 | 0.945 |
| Technical and technological support are available for open and distance learners | 87 | 60 | 6 | 4 | 51 | 35 | 1.75 | 0.950 |
| Open and distance learners have self-learning tools such as computers and e-mail | 88 | 61 | 6 | 4 | 50 | 35 | 1.74 | 0.946 |
| Total | | | | | | | 1.79 | 0.95 |

existence and provision of these services since the mean values of individual items range from 1.72 to 1.83 with an average mean value of 1.79, which lies in the “not sure” category. Further, there is a low spread of results as the standard deviations were averaged to 0.95. The results are consistent with Musingafi et al. (2015) who showed that support services for learners were under-resourced, hence causing poor facilitation of learning in the ODL system. In an interview on the adequacy of the facilitation methods used, one female facilitator revealed that:

“...the concept of support services is very subjective; learners do not get satisfied with what is considered by an institution as support. They continue demanding for more privilege once one is provided. What is assumed an adequate supportive mechanism for one learner is not taken

as support by another learner. Therefore, no matter how hard OUT tries to support students' learning, they do not get satisfied."(OUT facilitator 3, June 2022).

The findings correlate with previous studies by Daniel (2010), Dzakiria(2005), Krishnan (2012), Sewart (1993), and Tait (2000, 2003) who have established that support services are central in facilitating open and distance learning. Based on this, the spectrum of the concept of support services needs to be communicated to learners in order to define its boundaries and therefore reduce learners' confusion.

For more critical results and interpretation, Pearson's correlation test was again performed to determine the relationship between support services and demographic variables such as age, sex, degree program, marital status and year of study.

Table below 6 indicates the Correlation Matrix of the stated variables.

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | |
|---|----------------------------------|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| 1 | Sex | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | Degree program | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.110 | 1 | | | | |
| 3 | Year of Study | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.080 | .225** | 1 | | | |
| 4 | Age of respondent | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | .218** | .328** | 0.080 | 1 | | |
| 5 | Marital Status | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | .179* | .379** | .200* | .507** | 1 | |
| 6 | Learners support services in ODL | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.126 | 0.158 | .343** | .190* | .322** | 1 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the analysis it was established that the year of study, age of respondent and marital status were found to be significantly related with learner's support services in ODL. Pearson's Correlation values for the year of study were recorded to be $r = 0.343$, $p = 0.000$, for respondents' age ($r = 0.190$, $p = 0.023$) and for marital status $r = 0.322$, $p = 0.000$. The year of study, age of the respondent and marital status can be used to explain the level of experience of the participants. They show that the respondents were more experienced with the support services provided in ODL. This implies that some support services are prevalent in the ODL system, for instance library facilities, qualified facilitators, technical support services as well as research and consultation services. This is in disagreement with Hara (2000) who argues that distance learners experience confusion, anxiety and frustration due to lack of prompt or clear feedback from their lecturers. It however agrees with Purnell et al. (1996) whose findings indicated that students appreciate the personal support offered by tutors by telephone and are also impressed by the audio cassettes and video tapes that supplement their study materials. These observations are considered to be true due to the reason that the aforementioned studies were carried out in different contexts presumed to have variations in the provision of support services. On the other hand, previous studies tended to look at support services in general but the current study has delved deeper into demographic issues. In regard to that, the limited exposure and staff training in distance education in many of the Sub-Saharan countries needs to be overhauled in order to make ODL more effective and avoid what Tait (2014) describes as "living in a fool's paradise.

4. Conclusion

This study assessed facilitators and learners' perception on the efficacy of ODL in Tanzania. ODL learning is an alternative path through which so many people in the world get access to higher education. Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that both students and facilitators (mean=1.5) of the Open University of Tanzania positively perceive (mean=1.5) ODL as efficient. The findings have revealed that ODL is technologically

delivered, is cost-effective, provides flexibility for in-service learners and has relevant programs. Further, some variables such as age, year of study, marital status and sex were found to have a significant influence on learning when Pearson's correlation test was carried out to find out the correlation between learners' perceptions and the support services provided by OUT. Also, it was found that OUT employs effective andragogical and pedagogical strategies to make learners achieve the desired outcomes. However, it was found that students perceive ODL support services to be less effective (mean value= 1.79). This was found to be based on variations in learners' perceptions on the adequacy of students support services such as the open education repository (OER), consultation services, guidance and counseling services and technical support. It is recommended that support services should be improved so as to enhance effective learning in OUT. This will significantly enhance participation in ODL.

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Declaration of interest statement

Authors have no conflict of interest.

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