

Curriculum resources and academic performance of distance learning students in selected Kenyan public universities.

Rebecca Wambua, Africa Nazarene University, Kenya

Christopher Gakuu, University of Nairobi, Kenya

Harriet Kidombo, University of Nairobi, Kenya

Speranza Ndege, Kenyatta University

Email:rebeccawambua2015@gmail.com

Abstract

Distance learning is a mode of study which involves the separation of the lecturer from the student in space, time or both. The mode of study is increasingly being adopted globally due to development in technology, its flexibility and the benefits which accrue to individuals and the society as a result of investment in education. Academic performance of distance learning students has been of interest to scholars. Findings in developed countries have been consistent, however in Kenya, they have been inconsistent. This study sought to establish the extent to which curriculum resources influence academic performance of distance learning students in selected Kenyan public universities. The study is based on pragmatism due to its focus on objectivity and use of scientific methods. Mixed methods of research were used. The sample consisted of 847 Bachelor of Education (Arts) distance learning students, 149 lecturers teaching distance learning students and 2 administrators in charge of distance learning programmes. The research instruments consisted of questionnaires, interview guides, document analysis and the instrument for measuring academic performance. The findings indicated that curriculum resources, significantly and positively influence academic performance of distance learning students. The study recommends that effort should be geared towards enhancing accessibility and the use of online curriculum resources by distance learning students.

Key words: Distance learning, curriculum resources, academic performance

Introduction

Distance learning is a global phenomenon which involves the separation of the lecturer from the learner in space, time or both. The learner is taught as an individual with occasional face to face or virtual meetings with lecturers. The mode of study involves intensive planning of curriculum resources. Curriculum resources are any objects or devices which help lecturers make lessons clear to learners (Isola, 2010). Some of the curriculum resources include instructional materials, e-books and e-journals.

Researchers have been interested in studying variables contributing to academic performance. Bandura (2001) explained that environmental factors and personal factors contribute to the learner's behavior. Among the

environmental factors which a learner interacts with in universities are curriculum resources. A number of studies have revealed that there is a significant relationship between curriculum resources and academic performance of students (Adetoro & Adekinle, 2013; Jagero, 2013; Musau & Migosi, 2013). However, these studies focused on schools and therefore the results cannot be replicated in universities.

Over the years, the debate as to whether distance learning students perform as well as conventional students has been ongoing. In developed countries, research has consistently revealed that there is no significant difference in performance between distance learning students and conventional students (Russell, 2002; Gallagher, Dobrosielski-Vergona, Wingard & Williams, 2005; Crowley et al, 1999; Duffy et al.2002). In Kenya, however, the results have been inconsistent. A study by Mboroki (2007) indicated that there is parity in performance between distance learning students and conventional students while Mutonga (2011) found out that conventional students performed better than distance learning students. Another study by Wambugu (2012) revealed that conventional students performed significantly higher than distance learning students. This inconsistency in study results has resulted to skepticism in Kenya, regarding the quality of education attained by students through the distance learning mode of study (Wambugu, 2012). The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which curriculum resources influence the academic performance of distance learning students in selected Kenyan public universities. The objective of the study was to establish the extent to which curriculum resources influence academic performance of distance learning students in selected Kenyan public universities.

Methodology

The philosophical foundation of this study is based on an overlap of three schools of thought; constructivism, social cognitive and system's theories. The three theories emphasize the need to structure institutional factors so well that the expected learning outcomes are achieved. The research paradigm of this study is pragmatism due to its emphasis on the need for objectivity and use of scientific methods in research. This study adopted ex post facto design (Orodho 2005). In this study the independent variables were library resources and instructional materials. The dependent variable was the cumulative mean score of Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year distance learning students. The study was conducted in the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University. The study further adopted a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques (mixed –method research techniques) which supplement each other. (Kothari, 2004). The sample consisted of 847 Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year distance learning students, 149 lecturers who teach Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year distance learning students and 2 administrators in charge of distance learning programmes from the selected Kenyan public universities. The sample size from the selected Kenyan public universities consisted of 475 Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year distance learning students, 125 lecturers teaching Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year distance learning students and 2 administrators in charge of distance learning programmes. In this study, questionnaires, interviews guides, document analysis and the document for measuring academic performance were used.

Results

The response rate was above 50% from all the categories of respondents which was considered significant for the study

Response rate.

Item	Category of respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Filled Questionnaires and returned- Questionnaires Not Returned	Lecturers	73	58.4%
	Lecturers	52	41.6%
	Total	125	100
Filled Questionnaires and returned Questionnaires Not Returned	Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year	305	64.2%
	Distance Learning Students		
Questionnaires Not Returned	Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year	170	35.8%
	Distance Learning Students		
	Total	475	100
Interviews Conducted	Administrators	2	100%

The descriptive statistics on curriculum resources are presented as follows; library resources and instructional materials.

Curriculum Resources

Curriculum Resources	Category of Respondents	Satisfaction- Percentage	Satisfaction- Mean out of 5
Library Resources	Students	74%	3.7
	Lecturers	74%	3.7
Instructional Materials	Students	80%	4.0
	Lecturers	78%	3.9
Overall rating of Curriculum Resources	Students	78%	3.9
	Lecturers	76%	3.8
Composite mean for lecturers and students		77%	3.85

The findings show that the level of satisfaction of both students and lecturers in relation to library resources was similar, 74% of both students and lecturers were satisfied with access, availability and use of reference books and e-journals. The mean was 3.7. The administrators explained that the library resources were satisfactory. The student information handbook explained that Kenyatta University had over 400,000 volumes of books and bound periodicals and it subscribes to over 20 electronic databases. The student information handbook from the

University of Nairobi explains that the university has access to over 40,000 peer reviewed full text electronic journals and it has subscribed to over 50,000 e-books from Elibrary and Taylor and Francis. The administrators explained that the students were satisfied with the library resources as evidenced in the student information handbooks.

In regards to the instructional materials, the study results revealed that 80% of the students were satisfied with availability of instructional materials, their relevance and their usage. The mean was 4.0. Among the lecturers, 78% of them were satisfied with availability of instructional materials, their relevance and their usage. The mean was 3.9. The findings were consistent with those of the administrators who explained that the students were satisfied with the instructional materials because there were stringent measures in place to ensure that instructional materials were available, relevant and easy to use. These findings indicate that instructional materials were developed, available and used according to the set standards.

The overall rating of curriculum resources shows that 78% of students were satisfied, with a mean of 3.9 while 76% of the lecturers were satisfied with a mean of 3.8. The satisfaction rate is quite high indicating that generally the selected Kenyan public universities were doing well in terms of provision of curriculum resources. The findings in this study are inconsistent with the finding by Bowa (2008) whose study revealed that course books, library and internet materials were generally inadequate. This means that the selected Kenyan public universities had improved in regards to provision of curriculum resources.

Hypothesis: There is no Relationship between Curriculum Resources and Academic Performance of Distance Learning Students

The objective for this study was to establish the extent to which curriculum resources influence academic performance of distance learning students in selected Kenyan public universities. The hypothesis predicted that there is no relationship between curriculum resources and academic performance of distance learning students. To test this hypothesis a bivariate regression analysis was carried for each of the sub items under curriculum resources to determine how each affected the academic performance of distance learning students in selected Kenyan public universities

Bivariate regression results for Curriculum Resources and academic performance

Item	β^*	R^2	P	t-value	F
Library resources	0.937	0.070	0.000	4.754	22.59
Instructional materials/modules	0.810	0.054	0.000	4.415	17.18
Curriculum resources	.966	0.081	0.000	5.168	26.71

The outcome of the bivariate regression shows that the library resources statistically and significantly influence the academic performance (p -value =0.000, R^2 =0.070) although at a low level (7.0%). The results also show that instructional materials/modules statistically and significantly influence the academic performance (R^2 =0.054,

P=0.000) although at a low level (5.4%). The composite curriculum resources explains 8.1% of the variance in distance learners' academic performance ($R^2=0.081$, P=0.000). This outcome indicates that there exists a positive relation between curriculum resources and academic performance of distance learning students from selected Kenyan public universities but at a low level of 8.1%.

Discussions

The findings of this study are consistent with different studies which indicate that there is a significant relationship between curriculum resources and academic performance (Adetoro & Adekinle, 2013; Jagero, 2013; Musau & Migosi, 2013). However, the findings in this study are inconsistent with the finding by Bowa (2008) whose study revealed that course books, library and internet materials were generally inadequate. This means that the selected Kenyan public universities had improved in regards to provision of curriculum resources. However, much more needs to be done in the selected Kenyan public universities in regards to provision of curriculum resources because although there is a positive relation between curriculum resources and academic performance of distance learning students from selected Kenyan public universities the level is low, 8.1%.

Conclusion

The fact that curriculum resources influence academic performance of distance learning students in selected Kenyan public universities calls upon universities to develop strategies which enhance accessibility, adequacy and use of reference books and e-journals as well as developing strategies which increase availability, relevance and usage of instructional materials. Specific measures should be put in place to ensure that the curriculum resources can be accessed and used easily by learners.

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