

Quality Assurance Practices in Open and Distance Learning Mode at the Institute of Adult Education, Tanzania

Abstract:

This study explored about the learners' and tutors' perceptions on quality assurance practices in ODL mode at the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania. The study employed the case study design. The target population was 1400 ODL learners and 187 tutors in the Institute of Adult Education. The sample comprised of 140 ODL learners selected through simple random sampling technique and 60 tutors selected through purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using interview and questionnaire methods. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis method. The results revealed that learners had positive perception on the quality assurance practices in ODL program. They were assenting on the quality of the face to face, quality of tutors, mode of delivery, timely feedback and modes of assessment. Tutors had affirmative perception on instructional mode, learning outcomes, teaching and learning as well as assessments procedures. Also, the study revealed the challenges faced the implementation of quality assurance in ODL as absence of ODL policy, shortage of funds, lack of ODL experts and unavailability of ICT facilities at learning centres. It is therefore recommended that institution need to develop the quality assurance mechanisms that meets the context of ODL program. Furthermore, stakeholders should consider the ODL learning environments in relation to formulation of ODL policy and quality assurance normative documents for ODL mode.

Keywords: Quality assurance, Perception, Stakeholders, Program, Mode, Open and Distance Learning

Introduction

Quality Assurance (QA) practices is crucial for successful Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode. As ODL become a recognized mode of delivery, stakeholders have increased interest in understanding of its quality assurance process and procedures. Setting priorities to quality assurance in ODL is fundamental strategy for enhancing learners, tutors and institutional academic performance. Many higher learning institutions across the world have embraced an ODL mode in delivering educational contents (Palvia et al., 2018). The purpose of integrating the ODL mode of learning in higher education is to increase access to education, fulfill diverse demands of stakeholders and to provide quality education to immense group of learners at a minimum cost (Fidalgo, Thormann, Kulyk & Lencastre 2020). The increases of learners in opting ODL mode of learning also has alerted stakeholders including parents, tutors, employers and policy makers to query about the quality of education provided through this mode. Therefore, the quality in ODL have become a major concern of study.

Quality assurance practices in ODL enables stakeholders to increase their trust in order to promote the mode of delivery. The study conducted by Jung & Latchem, (2012); Shah & Jarzbkowski, (2013) had been indicated that quality assurance in ODL has been deemed as effective in Europe and some Asian countries including China, Malaysia and Japan. The situation has been note to be contrary in Sub-Saharan region whereby stakeholders have continued to question whether the education provided via ODL mode are worthwhile or not. In this context, it is significant to note that the stakeholders' beliefs, attitudes and

understanding of ODL mode may affect the quality of the education system. Further, it has been suggested that the learning atmosphere of ODL varies from the traditional face to face learning when it comes to the learners' supports, motivation, satisfaction and interaction, hence the quality of learning can rest on the level of interaction, material access and efficiency of learning (Allen & Seaman, 2017).

Open and distance learning is the unique method of learning since instructions and learning take place in an environment where the tutors and learners are geographically remote from each other most of the time (Burns, 2011). It presents an innovative and cost effective means of delivering training. The growth of ODL mode of delivery in different countries including Tanzania have increased access to education and greatly brought the learning flexibility in higher institutions (Jung, 2022). On the other hand, it is difficult to comprehend quality assurance in ODL due to the fact that it can mean different thing to different stakeholders. Quality assurance is an approach to manage quality and focuses on the management actions. It aims to apply agreed procedures and to attain defined standards as a matter of routine (Shah & Jarzbkowski, 2013). Huertas et al., (2018) pointed out that quality assurance in ODL is relatively new in Sub Saharan Africa. This truth clearly indicates that the quality of distance learning in developing countries are still at infant stage. Maimane (2016) stated that learners enrolled in ODL programs have different education backgrounds, intentions and needs. Therefore, it is critical to investigate their perception on the quality assurance practices.

The late of 1980s marked the evolution of quality assurance in higher education. In 2005, the East African Quality Assurance Framework (EAQAF) and the Inter University Council of East Africa (IUCEA) issued the resolution to promote quality assurance activities in for eastern African sub region. The intention was about information sharing on quality standards, benchmarks and best practices for traditional mode of delivery. However, quality assurance in ODL received a minimal attention. Moreover, the institutions offering education contents through ODL mode have persisted to be regarded as a second-chance education institution. In this regard, developers of open and distance learning program should thoughtful of how interested party perceive and react to the element of quality assurance (Bali & Liu, 2018) as curriculum, examination, registration process, learners support and face to face learning. To guarantee the quality of ODL education, Kanwar et al., (2019) established that the Open University of Nigeria and the Botswana Open University have recognized quality standards of ODL through imposing the quality assurance guidelines and policies.

The purpose of ODL mode usually differs includes increasing access to education (Maslen, (2020); Odhiambo, (2014); Lassleben & Martinez, (2016), technological and globalization changes (Allen & Seaman, 2017), labour market demand (Jung, 2022). Furthermore, Maslen (2020) reports that number of students enrolled in higher education globally is forecast to be more than double by 2025, to 264 million. The increasingly will necessitate higher learning institutions to adopt some forms of ODL to improve education access and equity. However, the question that comes up every time is whether the quality of ODL should be assessed by using the same criteria of conventional or should be assessed differently. This makes it difficult to trace quality assurance practices in ODL program. Kurt and Yildirim (2018) indicated that there is no significance difference between distance learning and face to face with regard to learners' satisfaction and quality. Waid-Lindberg (2017) contended that the quality of traditional conventional education has not great as it is in ODL due to its differences in terms of mode of delivery. It is from this context that there is limited systematic evidence and consensus across the region on the QA practices in ODL. Hence, the finding of this study could contribute to this debate.

In the year 2014/15, the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) experienced the increased number of learners who had to access tertiary education through ODL. As a result, the institute adopted ODL mode alongside the traditional mode as an innovative way of training learners

who could not attend on campus training because of various factors including the cost of learning, marital status and work. To enhance quality of education provision, the IAE has been focused on the quality of study materials, learner supports services, assessment, staffing and conducting face to face sessions for supporting learners' performance. Also, the IAE has established an internal quality assurance unit, and the quality assurance policy and implementation guidelines. Basically, the policy and guidelines focuses on traditional face to face program than ODL program. This has continued to raise concern about the quality of ODL. The major concern is about the quality of learning which is closely related to curriculum, learner supports, learning infrastructures and competency of graduates. Therefore, reason to conduct this study was to explore the stakeholders' perception of the quality assurance practices in open and distance learning program at the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania. The study findings could be significant for policy makers on matters relating to quality provision of ODL. Therefore, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the learners' perception on the quality assurance practices in ODL program in at the institute of adult education?
2. What are the tutors' perception on the quality assurance practices in ODL program at the institute of adult education?
3. What are the challenges of implementing quality assurance in ODL for higher learning institutions in Tanzania?

Review of Literature

Quality assurance in ODL are relatively new idea in Sub-Saharan Africa including Tanzania. Latchem (2016) demonstrated that institutional quality assurance agencies in the regional are perceived to be insufficient to carry out their functions. Moreover, the complexity involved in defining quality assurance in ODL have indicated different perception among stakeholders. To enhance quality for ODL program, the European countries have shown the parallel quality assurance framework for both ODL and conventional learning (Jung, 2022). In Africa, however there is a feeling that ODL are not as good as those in conventional learning. The more efforts of quality assurance have placed on conventional mode than ODL mode. The ODL program are more anxious with course design, materials and learner supports (Kanwar et al., 2019), the relevancy of assignments (Fidalgo, Thormann & Kulyk, 2020), clear instructions related to grading policy, feedback and competitiveness in the work place (Kihwelo, 2013).

In the United States, the perception of quality assurance in ODL had established in three sets of meta-dimensions; first, trust and engagement that affected the perceptions of top administrators; second aptitude, infrastructure, and accessibility, and the third, was perceptions of tutors and learners which had dominated by reliable interactions, self-efficacy, trust and institutional commitment (Al Awadh, 2021). The study carried out in by Zuhairi, Karthikeyan and Priyadarshana (2020) at the two universities in Sri Lanka and Indonesia found the challenges that quality assurance system in ODL is designed by the people who come mostly from the campus based institutions with little understanding of the principles of good practice of ODL. Fildago, Thormann, Kulyk and Lencastre (2020) focused on the learners' perceptions on distance education in Portugal, UAE and Ukraine. The results revealed that learners' had positive perceptions on the program, but the major concerns were on time management, motivation and the proficiency of the instructional language.

Literatures have described the challenges which face ODL institutions in assuring quality. According to Jung (2022), the vital constraints which the institutions are likely to encounter are lack of ODL policy, inadequate study materials, learners' dropout rate and limited access to internet facilities. Also, the author observed another challenge that is the lack of agreement

on whether the standards used to determine quality in conventional system can be used the same as used in ODL. Dhawan (2020) stated that the practices of QA in ODL is not universal because the environment is not the same from institution to institution and country to country. In Bangladesh, the perceptions and challenges of quality assurance practices had based on three aspects of people, place and program of the institution (Ferdousi, Ahmed & Momen, 2022). The positive impact of QA practices was evidently in improving the performance of students and supporting staff in the institution.

In Africa, several studies have been conducted to investigate the stakeholders' perception and challenges of quality provision in ODL (Kanwar *et al.*, (2019); Maphosa, Mthethwa-Kunene and Rugube (2020); Shahanga, Ogondiek, and Kigobe (2021). The feelings of stakeholders on the quality assurance practices in ODL were determined as positive regardless of the constraints face the education mode. These were based on but not limited to curriculum, quality of learning materials, lack of funds, face to face, examination management, regulative and normative drivers and learner support services. The practice undertaken to ensure quality in ODL differs from traditional face to face. Aisyah, Samsiyah, Wulandari & Juliana (2019) described that ODL institutions tends to pay attention on the quality of inputs than outputs. Therefore, perception of stakeholders on the quality assurance practice should be explored because positive perception of stakeholders can improve the quality of ODL. While little is known about the learners' and tutors' perception in the quality assurance practices in ODL program, this study sought to fill in the research gap by making an exploration on quality assurance practices in the ODL mode by drawing the experience from the Institute of Adult Education.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a case study design. According to Yin (2014), a case study design as an empirical study that makes interpretation of experiences with multiple units of analysis and investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context. The case study was appropriate because focuses on individuals or groups of actors and seeks to understand their feelings, perception and experience of events or processes in-depth. The justifications of using this design were based on the uniqueness, characteristics, functions and organization structure of the area of study; the Institute of Adult Education.

Population and Sampling

The study targeted a total population of 1400 ODL learners who were registered in the 2022/2023 academic year and 187 tutors. These included ODL learners, tutors, quality assurance unit, campus managers, examination and admission officers' learners and ODL coordinators. This category of respondents provided the measure of the sample study due to having knowledge on the quality assurance practices in ODL mode of delivery. One hundred forty (140) registered ODL learners from different learning centres including Buhongwa, Geita, Singida, Iringa, Dar es Salaam and Kigoma were taken by using simple random sampling technique. Sixty (60) tutors were taken purposively as key informants of the study. The rationale of embracing different categories of participants was to attain a broad understanding on the study variable.

Instruments

Data was collected through self-structured questionnaires with closed ended questions. The questionnaires were developed to all categories of respondents. The type of questionnaires

produced answers which could be subject to descriptive statistical analysis (Cohen et al., 2007). The interview schedule was employed for tutors. The purpose was mainly to solicit in-depth data of the quality assurance practices in ODL. The period of two months from December 2023 to January 2024 was used to distribute and collect and collect questionnaire from respondents. The interviews were conducted in sequence to key informants. The interview was written and face to face and was recorded by using diaries.

Data Analysis

Qualitative items were analysed by using the thematic analysis approach. The thematic analysis approaches attempt to identify, analyses, interpret and report themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Quantitative data from the questionnaire was analysed through descriptive statistics in terms of frequencies and percentages. The descriptive statistics was analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used to analyse

Validity and Reliability

To determine validity of the instruments in this study, the questionnaire was pretested to sample of 30 respondents and their feedback was included to improve the tool. The purpose was to determine face and content validity of the instruments. The interview guide was peer reviewed by tutors and supervisors to scrutiny spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Reliability was determined by using inter-rater reliability in which the instrument was piloted to discover any ambiguities then to address them.

Ethical Consideration

Ethics is generally a set of moral principles about what is right or wrong, proper or improper (White, 2005). Respondents in this study were asked their consent to participate in the study. In the data collection process, anonymity and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) pointed out that anonymity and confidentiality is the right to individuals' privacy. Therefore, respondents participated in this study voluntarily.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion on the data collected from the field. The analysis of results has organized into demographic details of respondents and then analysis of results based on analysis of research questions.

Variable	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
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Sex (n=200)	Female	134	67
	Male	66	33
	Total	200	100
Education level (n=200)	Certificate	80	40
	College/Diploma	60	30
	Bachelor degree	40	20
	Postgraduate	20	10
	Total	200	100
Age in years (n=200)	30-40 years	112	56
	41-50 years	60	30
	50 + years	28	14
	Total	200	100
Experiences (n=60)	1-5 years	15	25
	6-10 years	14	23
	11-20 years	27	45
	20 + years	4	6
	Total	60	100
Occupation (n=200)	Tutors	60	30
	ODL learners	140	70

Table 1: Demographic Details of Respondents

Demographic Details of Respondents

The demographic details of respondents included sex, educational level, age group and working experiences. The analysis as indicated in Table 1 revealed that 134 (67%) were female as compared to male respondents 66(33%). Bali & Liu (2018) disclosed that in most cases the ODL program attracts more female than male probably due to either family responsibilities or flexibility of learning. With regard to education level of respondents, the results show that 80(40%) had a certificate, 60(30%) had diploma education, 40(20%) had bachelor degree, whereas only 10% had a postgraduate education. The analysis revealed that majority of respondents 112(56%) had age between 30- 40 years, 60(30%) had age between 41-50 years, while 28(14%) had 50+ years old. The mean age of respondents was 34 years. With regard to working experience, the results revealed that 27(45%) had 11-20 years of working experiences, 15(25%) had 1-5 years, 14(23%) had 6-10 years and only 4(6%) had stayed in the institute for more than 20 years.

Analysis of Research Questions

This section presents the result based on the research questions that that guided the study as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the learners' perception on the quality assurance practices in ODL mode at the institute of adult education?

This study sought to examine the learner's perceptions on the quality assurance practices in ODL mode. The frequency and percentage were calculated for each of the statements in the Likert scale of five points as indicated in Table 2. Qualitative analysis was grounded on

thematic analysis approach. The results revealed that majority 60% of respondents strongly agreed and 40% agreed with the statement that face to face of distance learning meet learners' expectations. It was further revealed that 55.7% strongly agreed and 28.5% agreed that assessment procedures were evidently to learners. Dobbs et al., (2017) found that the quality assurance in ODL have to meet needs and expectations of stakeholders. Similarly, the study discovered 57.4% strongly agreed and 28.5% agreed that facilitators provide effective and timely feedback to the students. This finding was in line with Qadri (2018) who asserted that feedback received from the tutor in distance education plays a vital component in the success of the learners. Therefore, provision of effective feedback, attracts learner's readiness and enhance the quality of the program.

Also, the content of the of the module was generally perceived to be effective and satisfies the needs of learning as 35.7% strongly agreed and 28.5% agreed with the statement and 24.9% disagreed. Only 10.7% of respondents were neutral with the statement. According to COL (2019), attaining the quality of distance education requires a multidimensional approach that includes curriculum and course design, material development, effective face to face and student assessment. This implies that the contents of the module should be designed to suit the needs and expectations of ODL learners.

Table 2: Learners' Perception on the Quality Assurance Practices in ODL

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Face to face meet learners' expectations	84(60)	56(40%)			
Assessment provided are clear to learners	78(55.7)	40(28.5)	-	22(15.7)	-
Facilitators provides effective and timely feedback to the students	80(57.4)	40(28.5)	5(3.5)	10(7.1)	5(3.5)
Learners are comfortable with contents of the module and satisfies the needs of learning	50(35.7)	40(28.5)	15(10.7)	20(14.2)	15(10.7)
Quality are enhanced in examination process	-	-	-	90(64.2)	50(35.7)
Quality of tutors meet the leaners needs	50(35.7)	30(21.4)	10(7.1)	30(21.4)	20(14.2)
Internet and other ICT facilities are available in the learning centre	25(17.8)	10(7.1)	30(21.4)	35(25)	40(28.5)
The mode of delivery is relevant and meets the needs of learners	35(25)	40(28.5)	30(21.4)	20(14.2)	15(10.7)

The study on the other hand, revealed that the quality of examination was perceived negatively as 64.2% disagreed and 35.7% strongly disagreed with the statement that quality is enhanced in examination process. This results corresponds with Maijo (2021), who found that learners were dissatisfied with examination papers since were not in line with the module contents. Qualitative data however found that some respondents were dissatisfied with how examination queries were handled. The analysis also revealed that 35.7% strongly agreed, 21.4% agreed that quality of tutors meet the needs of learners. This means that respondents had positive perception on the quality of tutors in the ODL mode. The result was in line with Choman (2022) who stated that the quality of tutors in ODL program is a significant tool for enhancing the quality of learners' performance. Minority of respondents (21.4%) disagreed, 14.2% strongly disagreed and 7.1% were neutral the quality of tutors in relation to learners needs.

With regard to the availability of internet and other ICT facilities in the learning centre, 28.5% strongly disagreed and 25% disagreed with the statement. This means that majority of respondents (53.5%) were not comfortable with the availability of internet and other ICT

facilities at the learning centres. Agrawal and Sharma (2014) argued that the quality of ODL is generally impressed by the type of ICT facilities offered, time and learners' profile. In contrast, the study established that 17.8% strongly agreed, 7.1% agreed and 21.4% were neutral with the statement. This implies that learners were very anxious about the availability of internet and other ICT facilities in the learning centre. Therefore, the availability of internet and other ICT facilities are important for ODL program. The study also revealed the learners' perception with regard to the relevance of the mode of delivery whether meets the needs of learners. The result indicates that 25% strongly agreed, 28.5% agreed that mode of delivery is relevant and meets the needs of the learners.

Research Question 2: What are the tutors' perception on the quality assurance practices in ODL mode at the institute of adult education?

The question required to establish the tutors' perception on the quality assurance practices in ODL mode of delivery at the institute of adult education. The results as indicated in Table 3 revealed that majority of respondent had positive perception on the quality assurance practices in ODL mode as 50% strongly agreed and 41.6% agreed. This implies that tutors had positive perceptions on the quality assurance of ODL program in terms of clients' satisfactions with the services provided. Qualitative data however revealed that respondents had diverse opinions on the quality of ODL program in regard to client satisfactions with the program. One of the respondents argued that;

'To me, ODL program is suitable for learners who cannot undertake the campus based training, it satisfies the needs of learners, hence, learners who are taking their studies through this mode of delivery, can test the quality of education in positive manner when the program is properly managed.'

The study also indicated that respondents had negative perception on the quality assurance of ODL program as they were not comfortable with the availability of internet services at the learning centre. Furthermore, the respondents revealed that remoteness of the learner due to geographic location and unavailability of ICT facilities were the challenge of ODL program. This implies that institution need to improve the internet connectivity for enhancement of quality of ODL program. Dobbs *et al.*, (2017) found that quality of ODL is attained when stakeholders are satisfied with the services provided. For instance, the analysis established that the availability of ICT facilities could promote the quality of ODL Therefore, quality assurance in distance education is about setting criteria of attaining quality.

The respondents were also asked to provide their perception on the quality of ODL program in terms of learning outcomes. The results shown that 25% of respondents strongly agreed, 33.3% agreed with the statement. Kihwelo, (2013); Tsabedze and Ngoepe (2020) indicated that quality assurance in ODL is emphasized to enhance stakeholders' pleasure on the learning outcomes. Moreover, the tutors' perception on the quality assurance in ODL was also presented in terms of effective teaching and learning. The result show that 41.6% of respondents strongly agreed and 25% agreed with the statement, hence, quality in ODL exists where there is effective teaching and learning.

However, during the interview respondents had different views on the quality of ODL in relation to learning outcomes, teaching and learning. One of the respondents revealed that "quality of ODL program is not the same as conventional program due to the fact that seminar presentation is not practical for ODL learners". Tutors' engagement in curriculum review and marking of assignment was revealed to be positive as 41.6% strongly agreed and 25% agreed with the statement. This implies tutors' engagement in curriculum review and marking of learners' assignment has impact in quality improvement. Tomasik *et al.*, (2021) asserted that

quality assurance in ODL should consider; active engagement and interaction, effective course design and learner supports.

Table 3: Tutors' perceptions on QA practices in ODL mode

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Quality of ODL is to be satisfied with the program and services provided	30(50%)	25(41.6%)	5(8.3%)	-	-
Quality in ODL is about achieving learning outcomes	15(25%)	20(33.3%)	10(16.6%)	9(15%)	6(10%)
Quality in ODL is perceived as effective teaching and learning	25(41.6%)	15(25%)	5(8.3%)	10(16.6%)	5(8.3%)
Tutors have been engaged in curriculum design and review	18(30%)	25(41.6%)	6(10%)	15(25%)	6(10%)
I have been engaged in coordinating ODL	11(18.3%)	23(38.3%)	8(13.3)	14(23.3%)	4(6.6%)
I have been engaged in quality assurance processes	21(35%)	23(38.3%)	2(3.3%)	10(16.6%)	4(6.6%)
I have been engaged in teaching and marking assignments of ODL learners	40(66.6%)	20(33.3%)	-	-	-
There is adequate learning infrastructures and support services for ODL program	8(13.3%)	7(11.6%)	3(5%)	18(30%)	24(40%)

The learning infrastructures and other support services in ODL program was perceived to be a challenge as qualitative data indicated that; "ODL centres had no adequate learning facilities like conducive environment, internet and other infrastructures". This demonstrates that majority of respondents had negative perception on the availability of learning infrastructures and other learner support services. The results were in line with Olayemi, Adam & Olayemi, (2021) who stated that the central limitations which lead to negative perception on the quality of ODL is the deficiency of study materials, learners' dropout rate and limited access to the internet.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges facing higher learning institutions in implementing quality assurance in ODL program?

This question sought to determine the challenges that face the institutions in implementing quality assurance in ODL program. The results as indicated in Table 4 shows that 45(22.5%) of respondents revealed the absence of ODL policy, lack of ODL experts 40(20%) were the challenges that impeded the quality assurance practice in ODL. According to Seyfried and Pohlenz (2018), many ODL institutions in Sub Saharan region are encountered by the deficiency of ODL policy and the degree of understanding the quality assurance activities. In the same vein, Zuhairi Raymundo and Mir (2020) argued that the skill levels and experience of the staff may tremble the provision of quality of distance learning programs. Therefore, the lack of ODL policy and lack of ODL experts poses challenges in implementing quality in ODL programs.

Furthermore, 43(21.5%) revealed the inadequate of funds, 38(19%) indicated organization culture while 34(17%) indicated leadership style. The result implies that deficit of funding creates a questionable condition on the quality of distance learning program. Likewise, Mahlang (2018) pointed out that quality assurance practices in ODL program has been encountered with the lack of funding, managerial and leadership skills. In contrast, the analysis presented through qualitative data acknowledged that though there is no ODL policy the assessment model of ODL students differ from that of conventional students. This

result was in line with another respondent's responses that "using the conventional classroom quality criteria to ODL is somewhat not satisfactory because ODL differs significantly from conventional classrooms in terms of learning environment, interaction and ICT facilities."

Table 4: Challenges Facing the Implementation of Quality Assurance in ODL

Challenges of QA in ODL	Frequencies (N)	Percentages (%)
Organizational culture	38	19
Inadequate funds from the government	43	21.5
Lack of ODL experts	40	20
Lack ODL policy	45	22.5
Leadership	34	17
Total	200	100

The respondents' responses were also presented through qualitative data, respondents however acknowledged that quality practices in ODL program is confronted by diverse challenges. One of the respondents, for example, indicated that; "lack of capacity building training for facilitators, deprived arrangement of learning materials, communication barriers between management and implementer hamper the quality assurance in ODL". Also, the qualitative analysis revealed other challenges as insufficient teaching and learning materials, low quality of some module and shortage of tutors during the face to face sessions. For example, one of respondents said; "content of the modules is of low quality, for example, Entrepreneurship skills and 'Basics of Research' for NTA Level 5 & 6 lacks clarities in content."

The study also presented the challenges facing the quality of ODL based on the Student Academic Records and Information System (SARIS), the respondents indicated that "the system is experienced with 'incomplete outputs' of learners' assignments and examination scores. Furthermore, the analysis from the interview however exposed number of challenges in implementing quality assurance in ODL as lack of quality assurance experts, inadequate fund, lack of ODL policy, poor perception of ODL program, lack of training among tutors. Therefore, ODL program are faced by endogenous and exogenous challenges.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section presents the conclusion and then gives recommendation of the study.

Conclusions

The study concludes that majority of respondents has positive perception on the quality practices of ODL program. They were impressed with the quality of face to face, assessment and content of the modules. They were also comfortable with the quality of the program due to the fact that they satisfied with the ODL program and promotes the learning outcomes. The had positive perception with regard to the engagement of tutors and learners in curriculum review, teaching and learning process. The findings further illustrated that quality assurance practices in ODL program faced with diverse challenges including the absence of ODL policy, lack of funds, lack of ODL experts organizational culture and leadership style.

Recommendations

This study therefore recommends stakeholders' perception on the quality assurance practices in ODL should be studied by using numerous approaches so as to understand more about the ODL mode. The findings of this study should comprehend to program developers to design

and implement the effective ODL program based on the needs and perception of stakeholders. The stakeholders in ODL mode or program should consider all learning environments in relation to quality assurance practices in higher education. The higher learning institutions offering education through ODL mode need to collaborate with stakeholders on the best practices of developing the ODL policy and quality assurance framework.

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