

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

Abstract:

This study explored the learners' and tutors' perceptions of quality assurance practices in ODL mode at the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania. The study employed the sequential exploratory design. The target population was 1400 ODL learners and 187 tutors in the Institute of Adult Education. The sample comprised 140 ODL learners selected through a simple random sampling technique and 60 tutors selected through a purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using interview and questionnaire methods. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and the thematic content analysis method. The results revealed that learners had a positive perception of the quality assurance practices in the 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 perceptions of instructional mode, learning outcomes, teaching, and learning as well as assessment procedures. Also, the study revealed the challenges facing the implementation of quality assurance in ODL as the absence of ODL policy, shortage of funds, lack of ODL experts, and unavailability of ICT facilities at learning centres. It is therefore recommended that institutions need to develop quality assurance mechanisms that meet the context of the ODL program. Furthermore, stakeholders should consider the ODL learning environments about 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 are crucial for successful Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode. As ODL becomes a recognized mode of delivery, stakeholders have increased interest in understanding its quality assurance process and procedures. Setting priorities for quality assurance in ODL is a 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 content (Palvia et al., 2018). The purpose of integrating the ODL mode of learning in higher education is to increase access to education, fulfill the diverse demands of stakeholders, and provide quality education to an immense group of learners at a minimum cost (Fidalgo, Thormann, Kulyk & Lencastre 2020). The increase of learners opting ODL mode of learning also has alerted stakeholders including parents, tutors, employers, and policymakers to query about the quality of education provided through this mode. Therefore, QA in ODL becomes a major concern of study [19-21].

Quality assurance practices in ODL enable stakeholders to increase their trust to promote the mode of delivery. The study conducted by Jung & Latchem, (2012); and Shah & Jarzbnkowski, (2013) indicated that quality assurance in ODL has been deemed effective in Europe and some Asian countries including China, Malaysia and Japan. The situation has been note to be contrary in the Sub-Saharan region whereby stakeholders have continued to question whether the education provided via ODL mode is 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' support, 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 a 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 effective cost-effective means of delivering training. The growth of the ODL mode of delivery in different countries including Tanzania has increased access to education and greatly brought flexibility of learning in higher education institutions (Jung, 2022). On the other hand, it is difficult to comprehend quality assurance in ODL that because it can mean different things to different stakeholders. Quality assurance is an approach to managing quality and focuses on 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 indicates that the quality of distance learning in developing countries is still at an infant stage. Maimane (2016) stated that learners enrolled in ODL programs have different educational backgrounds, intentions, and needs. Therefore, it is critical to investigate their perception of quality assurance practices.

The late 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 a resolution to promote quality assurance activities in for Eastern African sub region. The intention was about information on quality standards, benchmarks, and best practices for the traditional mode of delivery. However, quality assurance in ODL received minimal attention. Moreover, the institutions offering education content through ODL mode have persisted in being regarded as second-chance education institutions. In this regard, developers of open and distance learning programs should be thoughtful of how interested parties perceive and react to the element of quality assurance (Bali & Liu, 2018) as curriculum, examination, registration process, learner 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 the quality standards of ODL by imposing quality assurance guidelines and policies.

The quality of ODL mode usually differs in access to education (Maslen, (2020); Odhiambo, (2014); changes of technology (Allen & Seaman, 2017), labour market demand (Jung, 2022). Maslen (2020) reports that the number of students enrolled in higher education globally is forecast to be more than double by 2025, to 264 million. The increase 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. Kurt and Yildirim (2018) indicated that there is no significant difference between distance learning and face face-to-face with regard to learners' satisfaction and quality. Waid-Lindberg (2017) contended that the quality of traditional conventional education is not as great as it is in ODL due to its differences in terms of mode of delivery. Therefore, there is limited systematic evidence and consensus across the region on the QA practices in ODL.

In the year 2014/15, the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) experienced an 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 the quality of education provision, the IAE has been focused on the quality of study materials, learner support 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. The policy and guidelines focuses on traditional face-to-face programs than ODL programs. This has continued to raise concerns about the quality of ODL. The major concern is about the quality of learning which is closely related to curriculum, learner support, learning infrastructures, and competency of graduates. Therefore, a reason to conduct this study was to explore the stakeholders' perception of the quality assurance practices in open and distance learning programs at the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania. The study findings could be significant for policymakers on matters relating to the quality provision of ODL. Therefore, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the tutors' perceive the quality assurance practices in ODL program at the Institute of adult education?
2. What are the learners' perceptions on the quality assurance practices in the 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

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded on the constructivist and stakeholders' theory. The theories informs that learners' views, attitudes and satisfaction of stakeholders have impact on the quality of distance education. However, quality assurance in ODL is a relatively new idea in Sub-Saharan Africa including Tanzania. Latchem (2016) demonstrated that institutional quality assurance agencies in the region are perceived to be insufficient to carry out their functions. The complexity involved in defining quality assurance in ODL has indicated different perceptions among stakeholders. To enhance the quality of the 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 ODLs are not as good as those in conventional learning. More efforts of quality assurance have been placed on conventional mode than ODL mode. The ODL program is 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 workplace (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, perceptions of tutors and learners which had dominated by reliable interactions, self-efficacy, trust and institutional commitment (Al Awadh, 2021). The study carried out by Zuhairi, Karthikeyan, and Priyadarshana (2020) at the two universities in Sri Lanka and Indonesia found the challenges that the quality assurance system in ODL is designed by the people who come mostly from 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 of distance education in Portugal, UAE, and Ukraine. The results revealed that learners' had positive perceptions of the program, but the major concerns were on time management, motivation, and the proficiency of the instructional language.

Works of literature have described the challenges **that** face ODL institutions in assuring quality. According to Jung (2022), the vital constraints that the institutions are likely to encounter are a lack of ODL policy, inadequate study materials, learners' dropout rate, and limited access to internet facilities. Also, the author observed another challenge which is the lack of agreement on whether the standards used to determine quality in conventional systems can be used the same as used in ODL. Dhawan (2020) stated that the practices of QA in ODL

are 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 are based on three aspects 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 faced by the education mode. These were based on but not limited to curriculum, quality of learning materials, and 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 tend to pay attention to the quality of inputs than outputs. Therefore, the 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 of the quality assurance practices in the 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.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted sequential exploratory design. Sequential exploratory design combine qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in a sequence phases (Creswell & Plan Clark, 2018). The sequential exploratory design was appropriate since collected the qualitative data followed by quantitative data in phases. Based on the design, the study focused on individuals or groups of respondents and seeks to understand their feelings, perception, and experiences of events or processes in-depth. Moreover, the justifications for 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 a simple random sampling technique. Sixty (60) tutors were taken purposively as key informants of the study. The rationale for embracing different categories of participants was to attain a broad understanding of the study variable.

Instruments

Data was collected through self-structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions. The questionnaires were developed for all categories of respondents. The type of questionnaires produced answers that 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 on 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 questionnaires from respondents. The interviews were conducted in sequence with 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, analyse, 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 were analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used to analyse data.

Validity and Reliability

To determine the validity of the instruments in this study, the questionnaire was pretested to a sample of 30 respondents, and their feedback was included to improve the tool. The purpose was to determine the face and content validity of the instruments. The interview guide was peer-reviewed by tutors and supervisors to scrutiny spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. The trustworthiness of key respondents was also important for validity and reliability of qualitative data. Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to calculate the inter-rater reliability of quantitative data.

Results and Discussion

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

Variable	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
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 females than males probably due to either family responsibilities or flexibility of learning. Concerning education level of respondents, the results show that 80(40%) had a certificate, 60(30%) had a diploma education, 40(20%) had a bachelor's 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 experience, 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.

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

This study sought to examine the learner's perceptions of 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. The results revealed that the majority 60% of respondents strongly agreed and 40% agreed with the statement that face-to-face distance learning meets 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 had to meet the needs and expectations of stakeholders. Similarly, the study discovered that 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, the provision of effective feedback attracts learner's readiness and enhances the quality of the program.

Also, the content the of the module was generally perceived to be effective and the needs of learning as 35.7% strongly agreed 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, and 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 of 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 provide 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 the 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 is enhanced in the examination process	-	-	-	90(64.2)	50(35.7)
The quality of tutors meet the learners 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 the examination process. This corresponds with Maijo (2021), who found that learners were dissatisfied with examination papers since they 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, and 21.4% agreed that the quality of tutors meets the needs of learners. This means that respondents had a positive perception of the quality of tutors in the ODL mode. The result was in line with Choman (2022) who stated that the quality of tutors in the ODL program is a significant tool for enhancing the quality of learners' performance. A minority of respondents (21.4%) disagreed, 14.2% strongly disagreed and 7.1% were neutral about the quality of tutors about learners needs.

About the availability of the internet and other ICT facilities in the learning centre, 28.5% strongly disagreed and 25% disagreed with the statement. This means that the majority of respondents (53.5%) were not comfortable with the availability of the 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 the internet and other ICT facilities in the learning centre. Therefore, the availability of the internet and other ICT facilities is important for the ODL program. The study also revealed the learners' perception about the relevance of the mode of delivery and whether meets the needs of learners. The result indicates that 25% strongly agreed, and 28.5% agreed that the mode of delivery is relevant and meets the needs of the learners.

Research Question 2: What are the tutors' perceptions 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 the majority of the respondents had a positive perception of the quality assurance practices in ODL mode as 50% strongly agreed and 41.6% agreed. This implies that tutors had positive perceptions of the quality assurance of the ODL program in terms of clients' satisfaction with the services provided. Qualitative data however revealed that

respondents had diverse opinions on the quality of the ODL program in regard to client satisfactions with the program. One of the respondents reported that;

'To me, the 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 a positively test the quality of education when the program is properly managed.'

The study also indicated that respondents had a negative perception of the quality assurance of the ODL program as they were not comfortable with the availability of internet services at the learning centre. Furthermore, the respondents revealed that the remoteness of the learner due to geographic location and unavailability of ICT facilities were the challenges of the ODL program. This implies that institutions need to improve internet connectivity for the enhancement of the quality of the ODL program. Dobbs *et al.*, (2017) found that the 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 for attaining quality.

The respondents were also asked to provide their perception of the quality of the ODL program in terms of learning outcomes. The results show that 25% of respondents strongly agreed, and 33.3% agreed with the statement. Some scholars (Kihwelo, (2013; Tsabedze & Ngoepe (2020) indicate that quality assurance in ODL is emphasized to enhance stakeholders' pleasure in the learning outcomes. Moreover, the tutors' perception of the quality assurance in ODL was also presented in terms of effective teaching and learning. The results 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 about learning outcomes, teaching, and learning. One of the respondents revealed that the "quality of ODL program is not the same as conventional program because seminar presentation is not practical for ODL learners". Tutors' engagement in curriculum review and marking of assignments 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' assignments has an impact on quality improvement. Tomasik *et al.*, (2021) asserted that quality assurance in ODL should consider; active engagement and interaction, effective course design, and learner support.

Table 3: Tutors' perceptions of 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 for ODL learners	40(66.6%)	20(33.3%)	-	-	-
There are adequate learning infrastructures and support services for the ODL program	8(13.3%)	7(11.6%)	3(5%)	18(30%)	24(40%)

The learning infrastructures and other support services in the ODL program were perceived to be a challenge as qualitative data from one of the tutors indicated that; “*ODL centres had no adequate learning facilities like conducive environment, internet, and other infrastructures*”. This demonstrates that the majority of respondents had a negative perception of 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 that lead to negative perception of 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 programs?

This question sought to determine the challenges that face the institutions in implementing quality assurance in ODL programs. The results as indicated in Table 4 show that 45(22.5%) of respondents revealed the absence of ODL policy, and 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 have encountered a 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 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 a 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 programs have 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 differs 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 the ODL program are 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 such as insufficient teaching and learning materials, low quality of some modules, and shortage of tutors during the face-to-face sessions. For example, one of the 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 several challenges in implementing quality assurance in ODL as lack of quality assurance experts, inadequate funds, lack of ODL policy, poor perception of the ODL program, and lack of training among tutors. Therefore, ODL program are faced with endogenous and exogenous challenges.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that the majority of respondents have positive perception of the quality practices of the ODL program. They were impressed with the quality of face-to-face, assessment and the content of the modules. They were also comfortable with the quality of the program due to the fact that they were satisfied with the ODL program and promotes the learning outcomes. They had positive perception about 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. Therefore, the study recommends stakeholders’ perception of the quality assurance practices in ODL should be studied by using numerous approaches to understand more about the ODL mode. The findings of this study should help program developers to design and implement the effective ODL program based on the needs and perceptions of stakeholders. Moreover, the stakeholders in ODL mode or program should consider all learning environments about 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.

Ethical Approval and Consent

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 for their consent to participate in the study. In the data collection process, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) pointed out that anonymity and confidentiality are the rights to individuals’ privacy. Therefore, respondents participated in this study voluntarily.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Option 1:

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

Option 2:

Author(s) hereby declare that generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models, etc have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts. This explanation will include list the name, version, model, and source of the generative AI technology and as well as the all input prompts provided to a generative AI technology

Details of the AI usage are given below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

References

1. Aisyah, S., Samsiyah, S., Wulandari, F. R., & Juliana, A. (2019). Quality assurance in open and distance education: Experience from Universitas Terbuka. In International Conference on Open and Innovative Education (ICOIE) 2019, 10–12 July 2019, The Open University of Hong Kong.
2. Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2017). Digital learning compass: Distance education enrollment report 2017. Babson Survey Research Group. <https://onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/digitallearningcompassenrollment2017>.
3. Bignoux, S & Sund. K.J (2018). Tutoring executives online: what drives perceived quality? Behaviour & Information Technology, 37:7, 703-713, DOI: 10. 1080/ 014 4 929 X.20 18.1474254.
4. Dobbs, R.; Waid-Lindberg, C.A. (2017). Students' Perceptions of Online Courses: The Effect of Online Course Experience *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, V18 N1 P93-109 2017
5. Ferdousi, F., Ahmed, A. and Momen, M.A. (2022), "Evolution of quality assurance practices in enhancing the quality of open and distance education in a developing nation: a case study", *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 147-160. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAOUJ-02-2022-0025>

6. Fidalgo, P., Thormann, J., Kulyk, O. et al. (2020). Students' Perceptions on Distance Education: A Multinational Study. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 17, Article No. 18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00194-2>
7. Jung, I. (2022). Quality Assurance in Online, Open, and Distance Education. *Handbook of Open, Distance and Digital Education*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0351-9_39-1
8. Jung, I. and Latchem, C. (2012) Quality assurance and accreditation in distance education: Models, policies and research. NY: Routledge.
9. Kanwar, A., Mohee, R., Carr, A., Ortlieb, K. & Sukon, K. (2019). A Neo-Institutionalist Approach to Understanding Drivers of Quality Assurance in ODL: The Case of the Open University of Mauritius. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 20(4), pp.79–98. <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v20i4.411>
10. Kihwelo, P. F. (2013). Quality assurance systems in open and distance learning: A search for normative judgement. *Huria*, 14. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/huria/article/view/110764/100513>
11. Kisanga, S.H. and Machumu, H.J. (2014) Quality assurance practices in higher education institutions: Lessons from Africa. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5 (6), 144-156.
12. Latchem, C. (2016). Open and distance learning quality assurance in Commonwealth universities. Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning. Retrieved from <http://oasis.col.org/bitstream/handle/>
13. Ossiannilsson, E., Williams, K., Camilleri, A., & Brown, M. Quality models in online and open education around the globe. State of the art and recommendations. Oslo: International Council for Open and Distance Education. 2015 Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/>
14. Seyfried, M., & Pohlenz, P. (2018). Assessing quality assurance in higher education: Quality managers' perceptions of effectiveness. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 8(3), 258–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2018.1474777>.
15. Shah, M. and Jarzabkowski, L. (2013). The Australian higher education QA framework: From improvement-led to compliance-driven. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 17 (3), pp.96-106.
16. Shahanga, F Ogoniek, M and Kigobe, J. (2021). Students' Involvement in Quality Assurance Processes: Current Practices in Teacher Colleges in Tanzania. *Global Journal of Educational Research and Management (GERMANE)*, 1(3), pp. 130-144.
17. Zuhairi, A., Karthikeyan, N. and Priyadarshana, S.T. (2020), "Supporting students to succeed in open and distance learning in the Open University of Sri Lanka and Universitas Terbuka Indonesia", *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 13-35. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAOUJ-09-2019-0038>
18. Zuhairi, A., Raymundo, M.R.D.R. and Mir, K. (2020), "Implementing quality assurance system for open and distance learning in three Asian open universities: Philippines, Indonesia and Pakistan", *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 297-320. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAOUJ-05-2020-003>
19. Issah, S. (2022). Investigating the Willingness and Perception of Participants in Responding to Electronic and Manual Quality Assurance Surveys: The Case of Colleges of Education in Ghana. *Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science*, 35(12), 43–63. <https://doi.org/10.9734/jesbs/2022/v35i121194>
20. Makiya, R., Mnyanyi, C., & Ngirwa, C. (2023). Examining School Quality Assurance Criteria for Enhancing Learning Achievements in Public Primary Schools in Arusha

Region, Tanzania. Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences, 20(2), 1–13.
<https://doi.org/10.9734/arjass/2023/v20i2442>

21. Kaplan AM, Haenlein M. Higher education and the digital revolution: About MOOCs, SPOCs, social media, and the Cookie Monster. Business horizons. 2016 Jul 1;59(4):441-50.

UNDER PEER REVIEW