

# Attitudes of The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) Students Towards Distance Education

*Philipo Lonati Sanga*

E-mail: lonati\_f@yahoo.com

School of Education, University of Dar es Salaam

**Abstract:** *This paper is a descriptive study about attitudes of distance learners towards distance education at the university level. It has been established that in developing countries many students decide to join distance education programmes after missing opportunities in campus education systems. Likewise, this study confirmed that students join The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) after futile attempts at admission to campus universities in Tanzania or elsewhere. It was also disclosed that all other things being equal, mature applicants generally prefer to pursue their degree studies through the distance mode due to its flexibility and the possibility of earning while learning. Direct applicants (fresh from high school) are extremely marginalized in accessing information about distance learning, thus their initial choices for university education tend to focus on campus universities. The paper recommends, inter alia, more concerted efforts to publicize OUT and its programmes (especially through outreach activities in rural areas), for the government and general public to increase the support for the development and promotion of OUT, and to coordinate the institutions that offer distance learning programmes.*

**Keywords:** distance education; attitudes towards distance education; distance learners; Open University of Tanzania.

## INTRODUCTION

Tanzania recognizes the inability of campus universities to meet the increasing demand for higher education. Distance education, both single and dual modes, has been seen as one among the many crucial ways to meet this rapidly growing demand. Distance education offers opportunities to reduce the knowledge gap between nations and to counter the effects of brain drain. Despite the policies and strategies for implementing distance education, it is still a long way from realizing its full potential in Tanzania. There still remain a myriad of challenges to distance education, mainly related to the quality of education, reputation of the graduates, and limited resources. The growth and expansion of higher education has been a serious concern of the government of Tanzania since its independence in 1961. However, it has been difficult to satisfy all of the higher learning needs of the country by means of the traditional practice of building campuses (URT, 1990). Such a context compelled the government of Tanzania to consider establishing various systems of distance education.

The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) was established by the Act of Parliament No.17 of 1992 which became operational in 1993 as an independent, autonomous, and fully fledged single-mode institution authorized to award its own degrees and

certificates via distance education. The first batch of students was admitted in January 1994 (OUT, 2011). This Act was later repealed and replaced by the University Act No. 7 of 2005, then the OUT was re-registered and re-accredited by the Tanzania Commission of Universities (TCU) in 2006 (Mbwette and Kazungu, 2011).

For the purpose of this study, distance education is defined as an educational method in which the tutor and student are separated in space but not necessarily in time for the majority of the learning process. This separation is usually bridged by using instructional media such as print, audio, television, and computer (Smaldino *et al.*, 2008; Bates, 1997). Simonson (2003) in Smaldino *et al.* (2008:32) defines distance education as “institutional based formal education where the learning group is separated, and where the interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors.” It is implied in OUT (1993), URT (1990), and elsewhere that distance higher education programmes in Tanzania were established to provide: learning opportunities for aspiring Tanzanians who could not secure places in the existing campus higher education institutions, higher level manpower, an alternative and innovative method of learning which is not limited to a particular time and place such as opportunities to learn at their own pace and opportunities to maximize the limited educational resources, both human and material, by making higher education available beyond the lecture halls.

Tanzania, like many other countries of the world, is facing a continuous pressure to expand access to higher education, despite a perceived declining quality of education and a lack of sustainable funding possibilities. The symptoms of this fundamental imbalance between enrolments and funds are multiple: overcrowded lecture halls, poorly equipped learning facilities, internal and external brain drain of academic staff, declining research output, frequent strikes and campus closures, archaic and irrelevant curricula, and high graduate unemployment (Omari, 1991; Zeleza and Olukoshi, 2004). Fuelled by rapid population growth and a sudden increased access to primary and secondary education, the number of prospective Tanzanian students seeking admission into university education programmes is rapidly increasing. Under the present circumstances, however, only a tiny percentage of these prospective students are successful in gaining admission to university education programmes. It is stated in URT (2005) and the Tanzania Commission for Universities [TCU] (2011) that in Tanzania, the university-age participation rate has steadily remained at less than 0.3% of the eligible population for decades. Literature and anecdotal evidence indicate that improving the balance between access to and funding for higher education without making further sacrifices in quality is only possible through using distance education (Saint, cited in Sanga, 2007:3).

The Open University of Tanzania complements campus education by offering chances for the expansion of educational opportunities at a relatively lower direct cost to students and by ensuring more equitable access to education than exists through conventional systems (Harry *et al.*, 1994). Further, it makes possible for higher education seekers to have access to higher education opportunities at

relatively convenient situations. It is observed that the cumulative total enrolment of Foundation course students, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate students had risen from 776 in 1994/95 to 34,438 in 2009/10 (OUT, 2006: ii; TCU, 2011), thus surpassing student enrolment of any other existing university in the country. Despite the benefits which testify to distance education's value, students and prospective students do not accept this mode of learning very confidently. Tanzanians, youth in particular, seem to be inadequately informed about distance education as a mode of learning throughout their early stages of obtaining education. As such, the distance education system is both theoretically and practically experienced for the first time at the university level for the majority of Tanzanian students. Then, what criteria do these youths use for 'choosing' to engage in either campus or distance education modes of delivery?

The Tanzanian campus universities, especially public ones, are consistently rigorous in their admissions procedures and have for a long time now been most local applicants' first priority. The University of Dar es Salaam [UDSM] (2005) supposes that one good indicator of the demand for university education is the admission rate, i.e. comparing the number of candidates who applied to those who were actually admitted in any given year.

For most OUT students, application for admittance to it has tended to be a last resort after missing chances at campus universities. This continues to happen despite the fact that while abiding by the Commonwealth Universities' standards, OUT has deliberate efforts in place to simplify entry requirements in terms of prior qualifications compared to campus universities (Bhalalusesa, 2005). For example, one criterion for direct applicants' suitability to join OUT is having at least two principal passes at any sitting, whereas campus universities would generally demand at least two principle passes with total points not below 4.5 from the same examination sitting. Distance education calls for students to have an awareness of what active learning entails and an interaction with the study environment in order to achieve the goal of a self-directed learner. This is possible when distance education aspirants have the right attitude and preparedness towards this mode of delivery. Many writers have a feeling that distance education programmes are not adequately publicized, for instance:

The greatest setback of distance education programme is lack of public awareness of its existence, its modus operandi, and how a prospective distance learner can be part of its programme. . . the same foggy understanding informs the level of patronage, funding and zeal it gets from the public, operators and government (Mwana, 2006).

Unlike personality, attitudes are expected to change as a function of experience. Although it is as well true that hereditary variables may indirectly affect attitudes (Tesser, 1993), various factors can influence attitudes towards distance education; some of these factors include their exposure to and previous experience with distance education or preparatory education and socialization (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999), teacher and peer/student interaction (including teaching and learning methods), and institutional support such as library services, guidance, and

counseling. Towards this perspective, this study assumed that access to information pertaining to distance education forms the basis for awareness for choosing a distance education (or campus) mode of delivery, hence influencing the attitudes towards distance education. And that, if all prospective applicants had enough correct information about the pros and cons of distance (and campus) education prior to seeking admission into a university, the campus and distance education modes of delivery would be equally competitive.

### **PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study was concerned with the task of exploring the ways and means in which applicants to OUT obtain prerequisite information that determines their priority choice for university education. What do potential learners know before the start of distance education degree courses and how do they acquire this knowledge? What attitudes are developed from this information? What is known of their views and preferences regarding university institutions/modes of delivery?

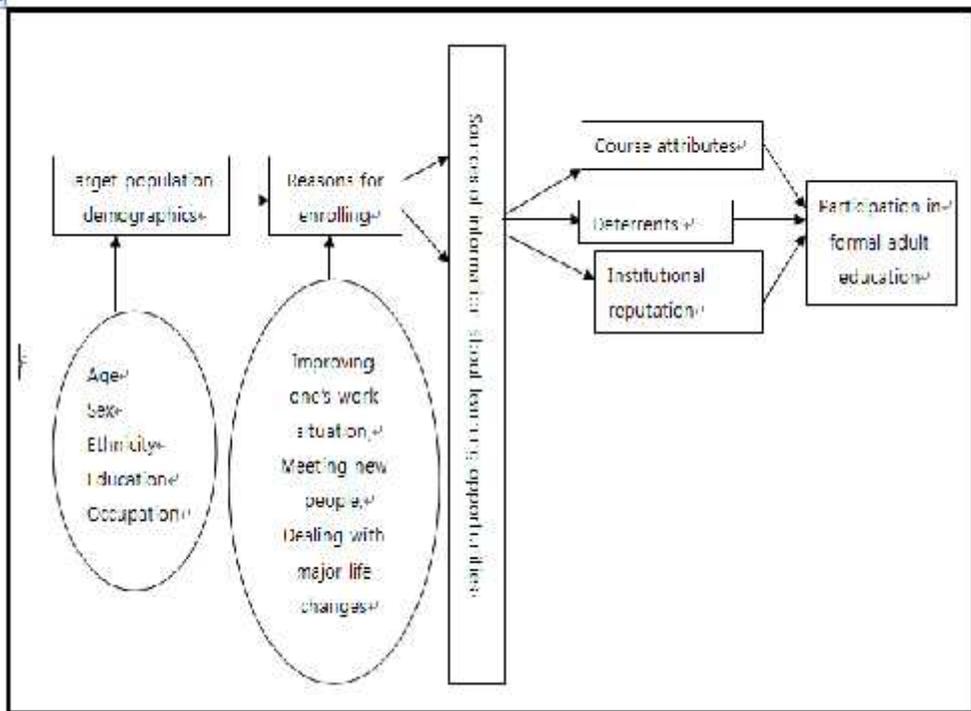
The data to be collected was expected to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To specify relevant ways and means through which applicants obtain information prior to selecting OUT for their university education,
- To assess students' factors for university preferences and their attitudes towards studying through distance modes, and
- To examine OUT students' opinions on the credibility of OUT and its programmes.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Henry and Basile's Decision Model (see figure 2) is relatively contemporary and unique in its incorporation of both *motivational* factors and *deterrents* to participation in education in explaining adults' decision to participate in formal adult education programmes. The model begins with the target population or beneficiaries and its characteristics such as age, sex, socio-economic status, race (and ethnicity), education, and occupation. The various reasons for enrolling in an educational programme like meeting new people or making new friends, improving one's work situation, and dealing with major life changes are related to sources of information about learning opportunities which are available (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). This brings to attention three more factors, which are: course quality, deterrents, and institutional reputation. Henry and Basile explain that there is a possibility for a strong motivation for attending a specific university to be suppressed by the lack of specific course offerings or by some negative impression of the programme or institution. In other cases, a strong institutional reputation and availability of a convenient course may induce participation despite a weak motivational interest.

However, the assertion by Henry and Basile that vocational reasons are a particularly strong motivator for adults to participate in formal education programmes should not be considered to be a general case. Factors for participation (and non-participation) are diverse and may be complex to explain. For example, Thorpe (1993) affirms that peers may influence each other in deciding participation in and satisfaction with distance education programmes. More often than not, adults like youth make decisions as a result of the influence of mob psychology.



**Figure 2: Participation in Formal Adult Education Model [Modified Henry and Basile's (1994) Decision Model]**

*Source:* Researcher's modification from Merriam and Caffarella (1999: 65)

## METHODOLOGY

This study predominantly employed a qualitative research approach because the aim was to obtain an 'in-depth look' (Cohen, 1976; Brymen, 2001) at particular OUT students' attitudes towards distance education at the university level. This was thought to be an appropriate approach as it is close to the relevant data (insiders' perspective), it is flexible, discovery-oriented, and descriptive, typically context-based, and provides a holistic study of the targeted phenomena (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000).

## AREA OF STUDY

The study focused on distance education at the university level. The Open University of Tanzania is evidently the only well established single mode institution which offers university education through distance modes of delivery in Tanzania. Potential respondents for this study were drawn from two selected regions: Iringa and Dar es Salaam (DSM). DSM is the headquarters of OUT, hence it was believed that it could be possible to obtain authentic data from central administrators and official documents. It was also assumed that residents of this region have taken advantage of the proximity to OUT headquarters and access to reliable sources of information in order to become well acquainted with its programmes. On the other hand, Iringa was selected to be a representative of the remote regions in which publicity is not well covered in most of its districts.

## THE POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The target population in this study included both prospective and continuing students of OUT. On the other hand, accessible population included continuing students of OUT from the Iringa and DSM regions.

### Sample and Sampling Procedures

In-depth interviews were conducted with seventeen continuing students of OUT sampled from Iringa and Dar es Salaam regions. Four male and three female continuing OUT students were interviewed in Iringa. The informants from Iringa were obtained by conveniently selecting cases available at the regional centre during examination days (the researcher stayed at this centre for the two examination weeks). Five male and five female informants were obtained from DSM by purposely identifying informants and asking for their consent to be interviewed after the researcher's briefing session. Appropriate time was arranged for meeting with each one. The concern was to have at least one representative case from each of the three major degree programmes: Education, Law, and Commerce (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Informants Interviewed From Iringa and Dar es Salaam by Degree Programme Being Pursued**

Degree Programme	Iringa			Dar es Salaam			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Education	2	2	4	0	5	5	2	7	9
Law	1	0	1	4	0	4	5	0	5
Commerce	1	1	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>

*Source: Compiled by researcher from field data*

### Research Instruments

The researcher decided to use different data collection instruments in order to cross-check the authenticity of data gathered and hence maximize the validity and reliability of this data. An in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interview was regarded as the most appropriate research strategy to capture attitudes of students towards distance modes of delivery. This form of qualitative research offers the advantages of focusing on the specific experiences and perceptions of individuals engaged in the area of interest, distance education in this case. The theoretical framework adopted for this study also prompts the use of qualitative data gathering techniques which welcome unfamiliar utterances and encourage sensitivity to context (Partlett and Hamilton, in Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000). In-depth interviews were one-on-one involving a meeting between the researcher and one informant at a time for between forty minutes and one hour. Triangulation included documentary review analysis to obtain secondary and some primary information. These are magazine articles and newspaper accounts, research reports, OUT circulars, brochures/booklets, and fliers.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this case involved deciding what meaning can be attributed to certain words or responses and what implications these words or responses have in relation to the topic that is being investigated. The analysis was qualitative and ongoing in the fieldwork and post fieldwork. In the case of interview extracts, the researcher started by recording the responses, transcribing, and labeling them. This facilitated the process of forming categories on the basis of research tasks. Next was the task of sorting and examining the specifically categorized data in search of the main themes. These themes were then described and analysed in light of the three research objectives. The ongoing data processing revealed some new ideas and emerging themes which compelled the researcher to examine further literature on particular themes and issues which were regarded as relevant to the study.

## **THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Students' Background Characteristics**

Assessing the common academic backgrounds of the selected OUT students was considered to be an important issue because, as suggested in the conceptual framework, learners' characteristics are a primary factor for participating in distance education (DE). The informants' responses led to the establishment of their profile. Overall, it was disclosed from interview responses that the marital statuses of the seventeen informants were as follows: eleven were married, four were single, and two were identified to be widows. The proximity of the informants' residences to a nearby OUT centre emerged to be another issue of interest. These were the results: Fourteen of the seventeen informants were coming from the vicinity [less than five kilometres away] of OUT regional centres, two were residing at a distance of about 250 kilometres away from the nearest OUT regional centre, and only one informant was coming from a very remote area of about 600 kilometres away from the nearest OUT regional centre.

It is worthwhile to note that up to the time of publication, the general composition of students at OUT had changed significantly from having more mature students than fresh-from-high-school students to having as many fresh-from-high-school students as mature students. The fact that all universities in Tanzania are of late being coordinated by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) is likely to be one of the important factors for this paradigm change.

### **SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT OUT**

Two themes were generated from responses to the question: '*How did you get information about OUT before you decided to apply for it?*'

#### **The Coverage of Publicity of the OUT**

Ten of the seventeen informants were of the view that OUT has managed to advertise itself in many areas within Tanzania. On top of that, they thought many prospective applicants do apply for admission into OUT programmes with adequate knowledge of distance education modes of delivery. They claimed that information about OUT is reasonably available and anyone who seeks it out is expected to obtain relevant information. One woman who is a fifth year students at OUT and in

her mid-fifties spoke candidly: “I got information about OUT several years before I decided to apply for it. This was 1999 but I decided to apply for admission into OUT in 2002 . . . I was successfully selected to pursue the Bachelor of Education.”

On the contrary, the remaining seven informants vehemently commented on the inadequacy of publicity of OUT and its programmes in most places in the country. They appreciated the fact that OUT is painstakingly advertising itself but revealed their reservations about the strategies being employed and the extent of coverage. They hastened to declare that access to information about OUT and its programmes is for some ‘privileged people’ who: either reside close to OUT centres or offices, have relatives who are aware of OUT, have access to various mass media, or have individual personal curiosity. For instance, one respondent disclosed to have known about OUT through his peers who were actually not involved in OUT programmes. Another informant highlighted that:

OUT struggles much to organize and execute strategies for its publicity, however, these strategies are not deliberately disseminated evenly all over the country such that the urban areas are the perpetual major beneficiaries while the rural, remote areas continue to miss the opportunity for accessing information.

The present study found that many students of OUT happened to get information about its existence in their final stages of applying for higher education. This happened almost by chance to many students after they were rejected from other campus higher education institutions.

### **Main Sources of Obtaining Information about OUT**

#### ***Word-of-Mouth Advertising***

Twelve informants reported to have found out about OUT and its programmes through word-of-mouth advertising. This involves both those individuals who are either working with OUT or studied/are studying through this mode of delivery. There were, however, some informants who knew about OUT and its programmes through colleagues who were not directly involved with OUT in any way, but who were aware of the existence of this mode of delivery. Regarding the means through which he got information about OUT, a medical practitioner who was by then a fifth year student pursuing a Bachelor of Commerce and Management overtly spoke out that: “My father is a civil servant and he studied through the correspondence mode during colonialism. Moreover, my brother is working with OUT as a lecturer.” Another informant who got information about OUT before he decided to apply for admission, seemingly very satisfied studying through this mode, narrated:

I hunted for fellows who had pursued their degree studies particularly the Bachelor of Law from OUT. They provided me with some details about studying through (the) distance mode and I decided to visit the Regional Centre to get more details.

#### ***Advertisement from Mass Media***

Ten informants stated that they got information through mass media, particularly local newspapers and radio broadcasting. Radio broadcasting proved to be more effective for advertising in urban areas where electricity is at least reliable and many

radio broadcasting stations are established. Seven informants (about 40%) underscored the effectiveness of local newspapers, particularly those written in Swahili, the national language. Only two informants mentioned television to be one of the media through which they got information. Though the researcher was not interested in knowing why TV is not an effective means through which information was acquired, it is natural to consider issues such as the affordability of TVs, programmes which TV viewers are habitually watching, financial affordability and electric power problems to be among the reasons. Although the internet is a modern medium through which people can easily and quickly obtain an array of information, only one informant admitted to have got information about OUT through this source. Certainly the problems associated with internet connectivity, affordability and accessibility throughout the country, both rural and urban areas, cannot be overemphasised.

### ***Physical Visit and Outreach Programs***

In this context, physical visit refers to the prospective student's act of paying a visit to any OUT office/centre or an OUT official paying a visit to potential students, whereas, an outreach programme is any deliberate effort by OUT officials to visit places such as schools or villages with the intention of publicizing OUT programs. Only six informants pointed to this as their most influential source of information, and most of them actually decided to visit OUT offices for further information after having heard ambiguous details about it. One informant in her early fifties, after having struggled for many years in upgrading from a primary-school teaching post confidently claimed:

The then Minister for Education and Culture visited our school in 1995. Among the issues he clarified was the need for employees to enroll with the Open University to pursue their degree studies. He went as far as disclosing that the government has decided to lessen the tuition fee . . . His speech stimulated and enabled me to recognize that OUT is a public university. Hence I applied for it.

Despite the obvious likelihood of the effectiveness of outreach programmes, The Open University of Tanzania has exploited this opportunity only to its minimum potential. For instance, this study has established that regional centres are still not adequately active in utilizing their autonomy for publicizing OUT programmes within their areas of jurisdiction.

### **UNIVERSITIES INITIALLY SELECTED AND FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED THEIR PREFERENCES**

With this, the objective was to identify the universities the participants initially selected (the order of preference) and the possible criteria they used to reach such decisions. This could possibly suggest the informants' level of awareness of the availability of various types of universities including The Open University of Tanzania. Special attention was paid on the order of preference by focusing on the comparison between campus and distance modes of delivery.

It was revealed that fourteen out of the seventeen informants (82.4%) had initially chosen a campus higher education institution as contrasted to the three informants

who made OUT their first choice. Noticeably, out of those whose first choice was a campus institution, the majority (twelve out of fourteen) had chosen the University of Dar es Salaam as their first choice. Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) and Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology (DIT) were mentioned as the first choice by only one informant each. Other higher education institutions that were mentioned are: Mzumbe University (MU), a second choice, and the Institute of Finance Management (IFM), also a second choice. The data clearly suggests that most of the informants selected campus public universities in preference to OUT which is also a public university but which acts through distance modes of delivery. Absolutely none of the participants suggested to have had selected a private university as his/her first choice. Evidently, until data collecting period for this study private university education in Tanzania was still not perceived as equally credible with public university education. The researcher further discovered from the informants' responses that a seemingly a larger proportion of students join OUT not as a consequence of their preference for it. Besides being attracted by the cheap direct costs and flexible time management, there might be some other circumstances that compel the majority of these students to find themselves studying through this mode. A fifty-year old woman who had had an academic life consisting of a myriad of bitter testimonies narrated:

With my 5.5 points I applied for admission into the UDSM in 1990. I was not selected. I applied again in 1991; still I was not lucky to be selected. I did not lose hope, thus I decided to apply for the third time in 1992. But, this time I applied under the mature age entry qualifications. Unfortunately, I failed the mature entry examination. Four years later I decided to apply for admission into OUT. This time I made it.

Others explained the same situation by affirming that they joined OUT as an alternative after having been unsuccessful in obtaining campus admission elsewhere. It was established that the informants were not very well informed about the availability of various modes of education within the country. They were aware of the presence of campus public universities, but they considered OUT to be a private and non-accredited university. Their preference for campus public universities was justified by the opinion that such institutions are well furnished with facilities, their students are less over-worked, and graduates are accorded high status by the general community and employers. However, three informants who applied for OUT as their first choice had a positive opinion about their decision, for instance, one of them remarked, "I have learnt to believe that graduates from OUT are generally more competitive in terms of skills acquired than their counterparts from the campus universities. OUT students enjoy independence, self-directedness and active participation." Of the seventeen informants, only two of them claimed OUT as their sole choice despite their strong desire to study through the campus mode. They attributed this to their poor past academic performance which mitigated their qualification to compete for admission into campus universities.

#### **STUDENTS' OPINIONS ON THE CREDIBILITY OF THE OUT AND ITS PROGRAMMES**

The basic question, *what opinion do you have regarding your future in terms of employability and chances for further learning?* Intended to establish whether or

not studying through OUT has raised their self-esteem and recognition, whether or not they expect to improve and/or gain new job skills, or whether or not they expect to attain qualifications for job promotion and further learning.

Fourteen out of seventeen informants (82.4%) declared to be assured about their future after completing studies at OUT. They provided evidence of being pleased with the DE mode of delivery in which they are involved. They confidently asserted that graduates from OUT are just as comparable and sometimes more knowledgeable and skilful than those from the campus mode of delivery. ‘As long as a graduate from OUT devotes enough time for independent learning, he/she is expected to be more knowledgeable and skilful than his/her counterpart from the campus universities’ (Law student). These observations concur with the finding by Clark, *et al.* cited in Jamlan (2004) that distance students are being better prepared for work than campus students. Likewise, this allegation is in line with OUT’s Vice Chancellor’s declaration (Mbwette, 2010) during the 2010 orientation programme for new and continuing students:

I wish to emphasize that, students studying at OUT are qualified students (and at times even more qualified) just like students in any other universities in Tanzania and as such, there is no reason for one to regard them as second class students as some uninformed people erroneously think at times.

In addition to that, it was revealed that students who had opted to enroll in studies at OUT with adequate information about DE were remarkably positive about their future after completing their studies. Likewise, having a role model who participated in distance education proved to be another factor for uplifting the students’ self-esteem and certainty for employability. These informants argued that the differences existing between OUT and campus universities and their students are only insignificant.

Degrees through OUT are just legitimate . . . There are many friends of mine who were promoted to higher job positions and bigger salaries in various sectors after graduating from OUT. By the way, OUT has promised to retain me as an academic staff after my graduation on condition that I have to excel in the final examinations (Bachelor of Education student, second year).

However, they pointed out that studying through distance education modes deprives students of the opportunity for effective social interaction among themselves. Social interaction for students is vital for cultivating desirable work habits. Three informants exposed that they joined OUT by chance and that they were still worried about their future after completing their studies. Having applied several times for admission at campus universities without success, their enthusiasm for higher education compelled them to join OUT as a last resort. One of them had strongly regretted joining OUT and stated that this mode of delivery is too difficult and entails many complications. She admitted that academic performance evaluations of OUT students are not reliable because she has witnessed many instances of cheating. She further remarked, “Surely, I can’t advise anyone seeking for higher education to select OUT as his/her first choice, unless he/she has completely missed other opportunities.”

### **Benefits of the Distance Education Mode**

Another question was set to assess the informants' opinions about their awareness of the benefits of distance education. Six salient benefits were outlined out of a long list of merits of this mode of education.

#### ***Learning while Earning***

The opportunity of studying while continuing with routine activities emerged as the strongest factor for student satisfaction with this mode of education. Mature students, in particular, expressed their contentment with the fact that they don't need to give up their jobs when studying through this mode. Distance education "provides training while earning" (Harry, *et al.*, 1994), thus making it a suitable choice for all kinds of professional enhancement through providing education while allowing students to maintain their usual daily schedules.

#### ***Promoting Independence and Self-directedness***

Some informants expressed their satisfaction with this system due to the degree of freedom and self-directedness they are able to enjoy. Students are made responsible for their own learning and they have a greater choice over the content of what is being learnt, learning strategies, and the rate of learning. Above all, the flexibility of time management attracts many mature students to pursue their higher education through distance modes. One mature student remarked:

My poor performance narrowed my chances for application into higher education institutions into only one choice, OUT. I thank God I was selected. Moreover, I am happy that I normally feel comfortable with the system. It allows learning while attending to other responsibilities. It gives an opportunity for postponing the submission of assignments, doing tests and examinations . . .

#### ***Low Direct Expenses***

Informants underscored the issue of low direct financial costs incurred by learners. This study found that distance education can be a cost-effective [direct costs] alternative to campus education, in which inadequate resources could be efficiently used. Informants described that distance education is relatively cheap if indirect costs which are shouldered by students themselves, for example, payments for reference textbooks, remedial tuition, internet access, and stationery are disregarded.

#### ***Lax Entry Qualifications***

Documentary review revealed that entry qualifications are deliberately softened to allow even some of those who could not meet the stringent requirements of campus universities to be admitted into the distance education mode. At OUT, applicants are required to possess at least two principal passes at any grade (OUT, 1993) in contrast with the campus university's general requirement of two principal passes at the same sitting with total points not below 4.5 for non-science and 2.5 for science students (where A=5; B=4; C=3; D=2; E=1; S=0.5). In addition, people who have never gone beyond the Ordinary level of education have an opportunity of passing through a one-year Foundation course to prepare them for university education. In order to do so they should have a minimum of five passes at their Ordinary level

examination. It was observed that lax entry criteria facilitate access to higher education for the majority, hence reducing the stringent admission requirements inherent in the campus universities.

Of course, these admission criteria are a clear reflection of OUT's unlimited capacity for admission as opposed to the limited capacity of campus universities. However, it is essential to note that the lax admission qualifications do not amount to lax exit qualification.

### *Needs-oriented and Flexible Programmes*

Informants perceived distance education to be more flexible than campus education by means of offering a wide range of programmes, many of which are demand-driven. The contemporary local and global labour markets seem to influence education seekers to hunt for more 'marketable' courses, hence a need for an institution that can offer more needs-oriented and flexible programmes. It was well affirmed by one informant that "OUT programmes are regularly reviewed and re-designed in accordance with the contemporary needs of individuals and the society."

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study indicates that many students joined OUT without prior adequate information about its strengths and limitations. Moreover, it has been discovered that the majority of students apply for OUT admission after having applied, without success, for admission to campus universities. Although the general attitudes of OUT students towards distance education continue to be somewhat hesitant, with time, students who are admitted into OUT generally change their attitudes towards this mode from ambivalent to positive. More facts, opportunities, and challenges inherent in this mode of delivery are becoming well known by the general public as The Open University of Tanzania strives to constantly publicize itself, although rural areas continue to be marginalized in this aspect. It is imperative to bear in mind that students studying through this mode are not necessarily intrinsically motivated; rather they might have opted for it as last resort after futile attempts at admission to other universities.

Some recommendations can be made on the basis of the findings of this study:

**More Strategies for Publicity of the OUT and its Programmes:** The efforts to publicize OUT and its programmes need to be done more strategically and extensively. Both traditional technologies and modern technologies should be used appropriately and in multiple ways. Remote and rural areas ought to be given a special consideration because they are technologically marginalized. To this effect, outreach events to high schools and other strategic places presumably promise to bring tremendous impact on prospective students' attitudes towards distance modes of delivery.

**Regular and more Meaningful Face-to-Face Meetings:** The face-to-face sessions conducted by OUT twice a year need to be more meaningful to learners in order for them to have opportunities for expressing their general concerns and academic

problems. The core problem with these face-to-face sessions seems to be related to the manner in which they are conducted.

**Single Mode vs. Dual Mode:** This study has pointed out that, if OUT disregard heading to strategically improving its services, higher education aspirants in Tanzania would normally opt for the campus mode whenever given an opportunity to select for themselves. Traditionally, the campus mode of learning has been consistently accorded high status and credibility. It has also been straightforwardly argued in this paper that distance modes of delivery are imperative in widening the participation in and access to education and improving the quality of said education with flexibility in the pace and rate of learning. While the government is urged to expand its support to make the existing single mode institution (The Open University of Tanzania) even more vibrant, some highly credible campus universities are strongly advised to establish and promote distance learning programmes.

## References

- Bates, T. (1997). *Technology: Open Learning and Distance Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Bhalalusesa, E. P. (2005). "Major Achievements and Important Challenges: Expanding Tanzania Higher Education Opportunities through Distance Learning," *Journal of Access Policy & Practice*, Volume 2, No. 2.
- Bryman, A. (2001). *Social Research Methods*. London: Oxford Press.
- Cohen, L. (1976). *Educational Research in Classroom and School*. London: Harper Fraenkel, J. R. and Wallen, N. E. (2000). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*. Toronto: McGraw Hill.
- Jamlan, M. (2004). Faculty Opinions towards Introducing e-learning at the University of Bahrain. Retrieved from [www.irrodl.org/content/v.52/jamlan.html](http://www.irrodl.org/content/v.52/jamlan.html).
- The Open University of Tanzania [OUT](1993). *Student Handbook*. Dar es Salaam: Key Hole Publishers.
- Harry, K., Keegan, D. and John, M. (1994). *Distance Education, New Perspectives*. London: Croom, Helm.
- Mbwette, T. S. A. (2010). Statement for New and Continuing OUT Students from the Vice Chancellor during Orientation on 13th & 14th November 2010. Open University of Tanzania.
- Mbwette, T. S. A. and Kazungu, K. G. M. (2011). Seventeen Years of Delivery of Open and Distance Education by the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) in East Africa and Beyond. Paper presented at ACDE Conference and General Assembly, Dar es Salaam-Tanzania.
- Merriam, S. B. and Caffarella, R. S. (1999). *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Mwana, H. (2006). Distance Education: Relevance and Setbacks. *The African Newspaper*, June 10, 2006. p. 9.
- Omari, I. M. (1991). *Higher Education at Crossroads in Africa*. Nairobi: Mani Graphics Ltd.

- Sanga, P. L. (2007). Students' Attitudes towards University Distance Education in Tanzania focusing on The Open University of Tanzania-OUT. Unpublished M.A (Education). Thesis. University of Dar es Salaam.
- Smaldino, S. E., Lowther, D. L. and Russell, J. D. (2008). *Instructional Technology and Media for Learning*, 10<sup>th</sup> Ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Tanzania Commission for Universities (2011). *Students Guidebook for the Central Admission System for Higher Education Institutions 2010/2011*. Dar es Salaam: TCU
- Tesser, A. (1993). On the Importance of Heritability in Psychological Research: The case of Attitudes. *Psychological Review*, 100, 129-142.
- The Open University of Tanzania [OUT] (2006). *Facts and Figures 2001-2006*. Dar es Salaam: Open University of Tanzania.
- The Open University of Tanzania [OUT] (2011). *OUT Prospectus 2010/2011*. Dar es Salaam: Open University of Tanzania.
- The United Republic of Tanzania [URT] (1990). *Report of the Committee on the Establishment of an Open University in Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam: Key Hole Publishers.
- The United Republic of Tanzania [URT] (2005). *Review of Financial Sustainability in Financing Higher Education in Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam: MSHET.
- Thorpe, M. (1993). *Evaluating Open and Distance Learning*. Essex: Longman.
- University of Dar es Salaam [UDSM] (2005). *Facts and Figures 2004/2005*. University of Dar es Salaam: Directorate of Planning and Development.
- Zezeza, P. and Olukoshi, A. (2004). *African Universities in the Twenty-first Century*. Dakar: CODESRIA.