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**Institutional Provision of Tutorial Support Services – A prerequisite
in Influencing Learner Participation in Distance Learning
Programmes: The Case of Distance Learning Students Undertaking
Diploma Course in Selected Distance Training Centers of the
College of Education, University of Rwanda.**

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Institutional Provision of Tutorial Support Services – A prerequisite in Influencing Learner Participation in Distance Learning Programmes: The Case of Distance Learning Students Undertaking Diploma Course in Selected Distance Training Centers of the College of Education, University of Rwanda.

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose was to assess the influence of the provision of tutorial support services on learner participation in distance learning programmes in the College of Education, University of Rwanda. The objectives were to establish the extent to which scheduling of tutorial meetings for face-to-face classes influence learner participation in distance learning programmes; assess whether provision of career guidance and counselling services influence learner participation in distance learning programmes; establish the extent to which scheduling of workshops and seminars influence learner participation in distance learning programmes; assess whether scheduling of peers meeting for discussion and interaction influence learner participation in distance learning programmes and to establish the extent to which library services influence learner participation in distance learning programmes.

Methodology: The methodology utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches and embraced by a cross-sectional study design which was employed to collect data from the six selected Distance learning centers in the college of Education. A sample study comprised of 315 students out of 1,474 that formed the target population.

Findings: Findings showed that provision of tutorial support services positively and significantly influence learner participation in the distance learning as indicated by regression coefficient of $\beta = 270.222$ $t = 6389$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis H_0 : was rejected and the alternative (H_1) was accepted that provision of tutorial support services have no significant effect on learner participation in the distance learning in the College of Education. Even though, findings from the study provide a strong indication that learner participation is influenced by tutorial support services such as scheduling of tutorial meeting face-to-face classes, provision of career guidance and counselling services, scheduling of the workshops and seminars, scheduling of peers meeting for discussion and interaction and library services, they are inadequate. In addition, the study did not find scheduling of workshops and seminars, as well as provision of career guidance and counselling services indicators to be statistically significant.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The unique contribution for this study in practice is that the University of Rwanda should lay down practical strategies of providing the necessary support services to learners and ensuring that digital technologies are enhanced to enable them to effectively and efficiently participate through discussions and interactions amongst themselves. In theory, this study will open up new room for academic discussions in the pedagogic perspectives and to policy imperatives, the government should find funding mechanisms on what works well for the successful delivery of distance learning programmes.

Key terms: *Distance learning, tutorial support services, e-learning, learner participation*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of learner support has been used for decades in different distance learning institutions worldwide. To attract learner participation in distance learning programmes, many distance education institutions agitated for the needed support to ensure that they succeed. Thus far, effective tutorial support services are important means of enabling learners to cope up with the academic and individual demands of distance education institutions. The Open university of the United Kingdom which was established in 1969 is one of the internationally recognized institutions that has learner support system in place for adult learners in lieu of the assessment, timeliness in teaching as well as providing feedback to students (Tait, 2004). Tait further mentions that Open University of United Kingdom's first year of inception, made sure that teaching learning materials and the integration of multi-media platform into its support systems are availed. The new innovations in those days were, printed materials, Television and radio broadcast programmes, face-to-face tutorials as well as some residential schools.

According to Simpson and Gibbs (2004), the main features of the OUUK as having 13 Regional centres, 260 study/learning centers, some form of residential schools' experience offered for students with their tutors where each tutor had 25 learners to support, students have personal counsellors supporting learners throughout their study and employed part-time tutors to teach by correspondence and assess and grade 50% of the work a student needs to finish course. There were also call centers in place to deal with student queries.

In USA, the University of Maryland University College was founded in 1947 and became autonomous in 1972. According to Allen (2004), Its mission focused on adult and part-time students with the following features: has about 91,000 learners, 3100 faculty worldwide courses delivered in the face-to-face format, 71% of its learners register online, library support services for both students and faculty including a 24 hours, 7 days a week as well as a two-way interactive mode that uses a two-way online video conferencing

In Nigeria, the Nigerian Teacher institute was established in 1976 as the only single mode distance education with the aim of training teachers to address serious teacher shortages in the country. In those days, the following characterized its learner support activities; face-to-face contact sessions, tutoring, course materials, library services, enquiry and admission services, pre-registration counselling, record keeping, information management and other administrative systems in the country (Olugbenga Ojo, 2006).

The old University of South Africa has been in existence for over 100 years which was mainly correspondence in nature. Mbatha and Naidoo (2010) point out that UNISA was founded in 1873 as an examination body but it evolved to become a university college that offered education through correspondence. The University now prides itself as the only comprehensive dedicated ODL institution in South Africa (Unisa, 2008).

The specific support for students according to Unisa includes: tuition support which take the form of detailed, individualized and timely feedback to formative assessment; regional tutorials in the modes of (face-to-face, online, telematics) that is accessible to students; remedial interventions such as responsible open admission programmes to help underprepared students to

achieve success; peer self-help group; different voices and promoting dialogue between teacher and student in order to decrease the distance between student and study materials.

A study that conducted in Botswana has shown that learner support services are widely provided to their students. In most institutions these services are categorized into three major types namely; academic support services, counselling support and administrative support services. Academic support services involve tutorial and mentoring; counselling support services involve resolving personal difficulties while administrative support involves registration, monitoring and evaluation and preparation of study canters (Zuma, 2014), (Bundala et al ,2020).

In Uganda with specific reference to Makerere University, student support services comprise occasional on-campus face-to-face sessions, study group meetings, upcountry study centers, Bbuye 2012). According to Aguti (2004), study centers support learners to have access to library services and opportunities for students to interact with tutors. The study centers aim to provide ODL students with tutorial, library, reading and discussion space plus administration including assignment submission and registration.

Conversely, the contemporary gross tertiary education enrollment ratio in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is 9.4%, which is well below the global average of 38% and yet, Africa is viewed as a potential market for expansion of tertiary institutions and largest regions in the world with above one billion of people (UNESCO Institute of Statistics data, 2020).

Contextually, the Government of Rwanda through the Ministry of Education introduced free primary Education in 2003. As a result of this strategy, the enrollment rate increased from 23,227 to 86,478 in 2012 for primary education (NISR,2015). In 2008, twelve-year basic education (12YBE) was introduced and the outcome of this initiative was that a number of high school graduates who qualify to join higher learning institutions rose from 9,000 to 12,000 students. Even though efforts were made to increase enrollment in higher learning institutions, only 25% of the candidates are admitted to colleges and universities every year.

Similarly, 47.4% of the teaching force were employed in the primary sector but without necessary qualifications while in secondary education, 45% of the teaching force are also untrained. Thus, the need for distance learning for in-service teachers to upgrade and attain necessary requirements for teaching services and to bridge the human resource gap in the education sector. (Government of Rwanda ,2015)

Problem Statement

According to the College of Education, University of Rwanda annual report (2018), at the beginning of distance learning programme in the College of Education in 2001, five hundred in - service teachers were admitted in the first cohort at a Diploma level. Unfortunately, after 20 years of existence, only five thousand one hundred and ninety-five students (5195) have graduated from the distance learning programme. However, a serious drawback is that there are many high school graduates and employees in various organizations who want to register for the distance courses in various disciplines but they were never given any positive response.

The college of Education in its attributions extends tutorial support services spread over 10 distance training centers in the country. Some of the features that characterize learner support activities include but not limited to Face-to-face tutorial sessions during secondary school

holidays, tutors give weekend tutorials throughout the term, gives assignments and scores and ensures that attendance during the tutorial sessions are observed. In addition, some learners who enrolled for distance education for a two- year Diploma course take three years or more to complete their studies. This is an indication that there are underlying factors that affect the delivery of distance learning programmes and that learner support services provided by the college of Education might not be sufficient to motivate them to accomplish their studies. However, a serious drawback is that there are many high school graduates and employees in various organizations who want to register for the distance courses in various disciplines but they were never given any positive response. Moreover, current learners seem to be faced with so many hurdles such as inadequate learner support services by tutors, limited access to library services, scheduling of tutorial meeting face-to-face classes, scheduling of guidance and counselling services, scheduling of workshops and seminars and insufficient digital tools in education delivery.

This resonates with Oumbi and Nkuyuubwatsi (2019) who reiterated that the crucial challenge being faced by distance learners around the globe is inadequate learner support services for the growing number of student's enrollments in ODeL programmes. As indicated by Chokoe (2015), these challenges range from infrastructural and finance restrictions to human resources, unsatisfactory organization of face-to-face classes, insufficient guidance and counselling services, inadequate library support service especially in remote areas as well as insufficient support from the University management. This study therefore intended to explore tutorial support services in pursuit of contributing to the process of offering an effective distance education and learner participation in distance learning programmes.

Objectives of the Study

The research objectives were:

To establish the extent to which scheduling of tutorial meetings for face-to-face classes influence learner participation in distance learning programmes.

1. To assess whether provision of career guidance and counselling services influence learner participation in distance learning programmes
2. To establish the extent to which scheduling of workshops and seminars influence learner participation in distance learning programmes;
3. To assess whether scheduling of peers meeting for discussion and interaction influence learner participation in distance learning programmes
4. To establish the extent to which library services influence learner participation in distance learning programmes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework in this study is informed by constructivism and systems theories. constructivism and systems theories are related to the current study because both theories help to engage learners involved in distance learning to become self- directed and to seek for information on their own initiatives. Constructivism theory according to Berger (2000) is a learning model based on the nature of knowledge and interaction via learners' explanations,

collaborations, critical evaluation, comments and information sharing. In this aspect, knowledge is constructed through critical, analytical and rational decisions and improvement in selecting course enrolment and training programs

Drawing on the work of oxygotsky, Stephen Asuuk (2008), constructivists focuses on knowledge construction in collaboration with others through making pairs and group work activities. This enables learners to have exposure on many view points on topic under discussion. In regard to group work, much emphasis is put on open interaction using different multi- media materials, such as tutorial meeting sessions, audio and video conferencing, email accounts or chat rooms. In this aspect, group interactions influences theories that dwell on the socio-emotional and cognitive benefits of working in a group. The interaction and exchange of information, ideas, attitudes and perception on different viewpoints raised in group work builds learner's self-esteem; learning how to accommodate each other's viewpoints and enhancement of capacities in listening and communication skills that enable learners to solve tasks which are designed to promote learning.

As defined by Woudstra (2009), a systems theory is a set of mutually dependent parts that work together as a whole towards achieving certain goals in which performance is better than those individual parts of the system. According to Lai et al. (2017), a system's theory puts mechanisms in place to ensure practical changes in an organization. The organization in this context is reflected as supra system. Distance education institutions have many operational systems which includes; administration sub-systems which is responsible for policy implementation, course development, delivery and examination. However, it can be noted that each of the sub-systems mentioned above operate separately. In agreement with the sub-systems explained, Assey (2004) highlighted that anything affecting one system, affects the entire system. Distance learning therefore, play a vital role in management of programmes as services are brought near learners.

Learner Participation in Distance Learning Programme

The term Learner participation, refer to the act of learning and engagement of learners in order to be able to develop communication networks, exchanging their feelings, opinions and viewpoints during discussions and interactions in their studies. Therefore, understanding learner participation is vital to any learning environment to boost teaching and learning using learning management systems (Hrastinski, 2009; Sama Haniya, Lic Pacquette, 2020). Hrastinski further noted that learning and participation are interrelated, implying that learning outcomes and experiences are satisfactory.

In the literature review, Davies (2005) and Nurbiha et. Al., (2015) measured the degree of learner participation employing digital tools in communication among themselves while in different study locations. The study findings revealed that students who failed some particular units were as a result of their passive participation in interactive discussions while others who often meet via communication networks perform well in examinations.

Another study carried out by Cregan (2005) revealed that learners who meet frequently to discuss using online student portals passed all registered modules. This was further emphasized by Helena et. Al., (2011) who noted that voluntary participation in group discussions significantly contribute to the learner's success rate. In addition, learner participation is viewed by Dan Davis et. al (2018) as a learning process which makes the learner to realize potentials of

using different learning strategies through engagement, dialogue and interaction. In addition, Jeongju Lee et.al. (2019), alludes that learner participation in distance and e-learning leads to positive learning outcomes, such as a high level of learning achievement and higher-order thinking abilities, as it permits learners to vigorously engage in learning anytime and anywhere.

The reasons for learner participation in distance learning programmes are many but the top most benefit of distance learning is its flexibility. Learners can choose when, where, and how they learn by selecting the place, time and medium for their education. (Education.com, 2020). For employees who want to upgrade their qualifications while on job, distance learning creates a relaxed schedule that works for them better. On one hand, many people intend to participate in distance and e-learning programmes because of the envisaged backing from their employers who pay school fees for them. On the other hand, obtaining diploma certificates in education, in-service teachers enjoy pay increases and promotions, thereby, conforming the view that employers support contribute to the transfer of knowledge acquisition from classrooms to work place.

In view of this, one can say that learners are motivated to participate in distance learning distance learners due to its flexibility, timeliness, dependability and less costs for students in the programme. In conformity with the above observation, Savery JR, (2015) noted that learners become responsible for their learning because distance learning provides them with the occasion to decide what, how and when to learn. According to Schneider (2013), most of aspirants for undertaking distance learning courses do so because of their strong desire to advance their knowledge and skills. They are also motivated to learn because of the perception that their success will assist them to achieve recognition in academic excellence and work place promotion.

In regard to access to library services, it is believed that while learners are doing assignments, librarians can offer learners specific research assistance by availing reference books, e-books, journals and other technological devices. Moreover, library services are viewed as precursor for performance through research and development. This resonates with Proudfoot and Kebritchi (2017) who reiterated that the dire role of the library is to improve and increase e-learning education and to offer information resources for users and librarians play an important role as information keepers. In addition, Sharifsbadi (2006) noted that librarians play a significant role of providing information to library users.

Meanwhile, Block (2008) noted that the significance of library services to learning cannot be underrated and that learners should continuously be encouraged to seek library support. Huwiler, Anja G, (2016) conducted a study on library support services. The findings showed that libraries need to ensure easy access to services for distance learners and raise awareness of their existence by using different marketing strategies.

In context of Rwanda, mobile library services are provided by the College of Education to fulfill learner support strategies which include; lending services for learners, postage of books to learners and reference materials for students and tutors in different study centers. In regard to success of the distance learning programme, Ndagijimana (2016) noted that some learners find it helpful to learn as a group which strengthens them to enjoy companionship and friendship. In a related development, Kang (2013) explained that physical interactions between instructors and

learners play an important role in increasing enrollment into universities. While Awla (2014) noted that the instructor can be able to adjust to the prospectus in order to able to satisfy learning styles and preferences of the learners. Physical interactions also enable learners to decide on the ways of learning and brighter students are able to help other students with learning difficulties.

In this aspect, Goyal E et al. (2015), explained that constructivism theory which help the learner to construct his or her own knowledge based on experience and interpretation. In relation to this, Sherry (2003) alluded that social constructivism plays a critical role in increasing knowledge through social interaction and information exchange. In all ways, social interaction in learning processes facilitates exposure, limitation and curiosity.

Tutorial Support Services and Learner Participation in Distance Learning Programmes.

Distance learning institutions are increasingly gaining popularity nowadays. They seem to exhibit flexibility in accepting larger number of learners. In essence, learner's flexibility virtually removes all physical barriers to education. However, other researchers such as Falowo, (2007) noted barriers to learner participation in distance learning programmes including residential costs, transport costs to attend weekend tutorials and student isolation.

A similar view is held by Kotler et al, (2012) who stressed that without student support services, learners are likely to drop out of the programme due to difficulties such as expenses of study, disruption of family life, perceived triviality of their studies and lack of support from employers for those who have jobs. Therefore, the necessary support services can be equated with customer satisfaction in the business world, in lieu of this, the reputation of the distance learning institutions could be maintained and sustained.

The tutor's role according to Jeff^r et al. (2009), is to mark assignments with care so as to significant feedback and to provide appropriate support. Additional emphasis by Donkor (2011), recognizes the primary role of tutors during face-to-face sessions. They make learning materials more understandable thereby motivating learners to succeed in distance learning programmes. The motivational techniques such as using assignments to reinforcement tutoring, devising ways of making interaction among students, tutor's availability to assist students through career guidance and counselling services contribute to learner's success.

In recognition of the important contribution of tutors in academic achievements, Stoten (2016) lauds that tutors should be well looked after by DE institutions because they are faced with unprecedented challenges related to learner's attitudes towards academic work, personal, family circumstances and salary increase.

In regard to on-line learning environs, Nsiah (2011) explained that instructors function as guide to students, assisting them to track the learning pace and to fully utilize on-line means in the absence of face-to-face meetings. This is also linked to what Fang Lai, et al. (2013), who explained that tutorial support services offered to students in distance education mode of learning are principally geared toward bridging the gap between learner and tutor. In relation to this, Anderson et al. (2012) emphasized that the tutors' role is to take part in teaching process as it is part and parcel of their duties and responsibilities. Tutors use a wider range of teaching techniques which encourages students to interact thereby, promoting dialogue that enables learners to respond to questions raised by tutors.

In addition, the primary purpose of tutoring in higher learning institutions is to create and build a strong social relationship with learners which results into effective learning strategies. (Hye-Jung Lee, et al.; 2016). Tutoring according to David Pérez-Jorge et.al, (2020) ought to accompany learners in the development of learning charms and strategies, personal development plans to study well different subjects which must conform to individual characteristics and formative contexts. On the basis of the contemporary learning contexts and the reality left by COVID-19 pandemic requires changes between instructors and learners using digital technologies in education delivery.

As far as career guidance and counselling services are concerned, counselors assist students in creating plans and choices that meet with their personal development plans. Supervision of counseling services in education settings, identify barriers to learning and how to overcome them, help learners to transfer from education to work and career growth and opportunities. In this respect, guidance and counseling interventions target all aspects of student's life. As cited in Lasode et al., (2017), guidance and counseling interventions is categorized in three following ways: techniques and learning difficulties, strategies on variety learning strategies and how to use learning time judiciously.

Conceptual Frame Work for the study

This study is underpinned by the provision of tutorial support services with its measurable indicators of: scheduling of tutorial meetings for Face-to-face classes, career guidance and counselling services, scheduling of workshops and seminars, scheduling of peers meeting for discussion and interaction and library services. Provision of tutorial support services help learners to overcome learning difficulties, thus, attracting attention of many people to participate in distance learning programmes.

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

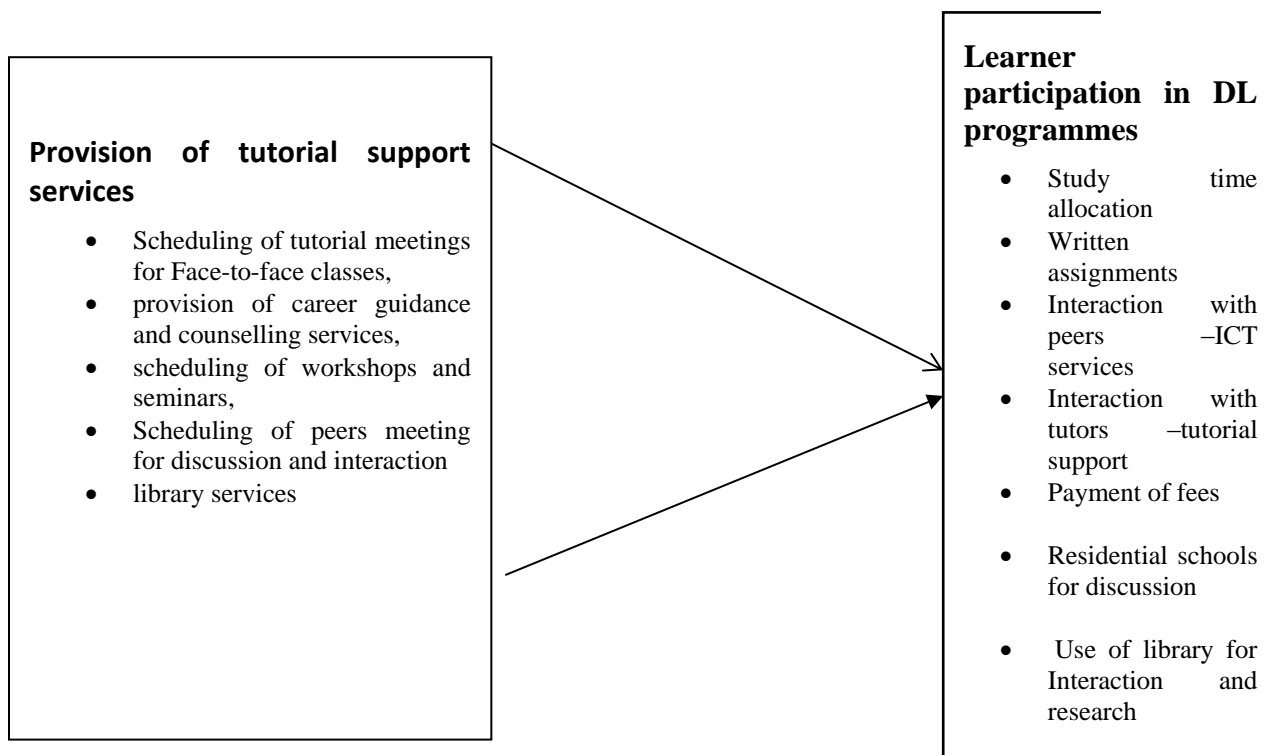


Figure 1: Conceptual frame work

RESEARCH METHODS AND STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The study objectives were to establish the influence of the provision of tutorial support services on learner participation in distance learning programmes. The primary data were collected using self-administered questionnaire from sampled in-service teachers undertaking a Diploma course in education and used interview guide questions to 45 participants comprised of the administrators, course coordinators, provincial heads of distance training centers and some instructors who were randomly selected for the key informant interviews and focus group discussions. On the part of quantitative approach, a sample study comprised of 315 students out of 1, 474 that formed the target population, thus, totaling to 360 participants in the study. The study was embraced by a cross-sectional design which was employed to collect data from the six selected Distance learning centers in the College of Education.

Learner participation was deliberately evaluated in light of five research questions that aimed to establish the extent to which scheduling of tutorial meetings for face-to-face classes influence learner participation in distance learning programmes: assess whether provision of career guidance and counselling services influence learner participation in distance learning programmes; establish the extent to which scheduling of workshops and seminars influence learner participation in distance learning programmes; assess whether scheduling of peers

meeting for discussion and interaction influence learner participation in distance learning programmes and to establish the extent to which library services influence learner participation in distance learning programmes.

All statistical analysis for quantitative data results was computed with the help of SPSS software version 22.0. to condense the data into a form that is good enough for determining whether there were relationships between independent and dependent while qualitative information was thematically analyzed.

STUDY FINDINGS CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Description of Learner Participation (Dependent Variable) in the Learning Process

In regard to learner participation in distance learning programme, two hundred and seven (207) (72.6%) of the learners revealed that they took more than one day to register using online means and only thirty (30) (10.5%) spent one day using online means. Another 25 (8.8%) took five hours to register using online means while twenty-three (23) which account for eight point one percent (8.1%) took one hour on registration. Seventy-two point six percent (72.6%) of the respondents were dissatisfied with the registration process.

The study also enquired about learners' attendance of tutorials during face-to-face sessions. The majority of respondents ninety-eight point two percent (98.2%) indicated that they attended 40 hours of the weekend tutorials during face-to-face last semester and only five 5 (1.8%) respondents indicated having attended above 40 hours in face-to-face sessions in the preceding semester.

In addition, the study enquired about number of hours spent in the weekend tutorial support services. Two hundred and eighty of the respondents (280) account for ninety-eight point two percent (98.2%) reported attending more than 40 hours of the weekend tutorials during face-to-face in that semester while only five (5) accounts for one point eight percent (1.8%) reported no attendance.

On the number of tutorial hours missed during face-to-face learning sessions, two hundred and forty-six (86.3%) reported that they missed 10-15 hours in that semester. The reasons given The reasons given for two hundred and forty-six percent (86.3%) who missed lectures were lack of transport to the study center while eleven point six percent (11.6%) reported lack of time due to family responsibilities. Another zero point four percent of the respondents (0.4%) reported health related problems as the cause for missing lectures during the semester.

Concerning registration for courses in the semester, two hundred and eighty-two (98.9%) of the respondents had registered for six course units while only three percent (1.1%) had registered for three (3) course units. Students who registered for few modules had special cases related to either repeating the failed modules or inability to pay for six course units. Regarding the number of assignments submitted per course unit in the semester, two hundred and eighty-two (98.2% of the respondents reported submitting two assignments per course unit. The reason for submitting all the assignments is that it is a prerequisite for writing examinations at the University of Rwanda. Three account for eleven point one percent (1.1%) of the respondents reported submitting one

assignment. The reason for submitting one assignment was that the assignment they had submitted earlier had been misplaced.

In regard to tuition fee payments, all respondents 285 (100%) reported paying ten thousand Rwandan francs per course unit, an equivalent of 12 USD (United states dollars). This constituted one percent of the total fee, the rest of which is subsidized by the government of Rwanda.

Concerning time spent on home study, two hundred and sixty-nine, ninety-four point four percent (94.4%) of the respondents reported spending two hours while 11 (3.9%) devoted only one hour and only 5 (1.8%) spent three hours per day. Regarding frequency of meetings to discuss academic issues, one hundred and sixty-nine, fifty-nine point three percent (59.3%) of the respondents reported meeting with two colleagues while one hundred and twelve (112) account for thirty-nine point three percent (39.3) indicated meeting with three colleagues per day and only four (4) account for one point four percent (1.4%) reported meeting with three colleagues in one day.

Enquiry was also made about frequency of visits by learners to read in the library in a week. One hundred and seventy-eight (62.5%) of the respondents reported that they did not go to a physical library to read due to limited time available at the secondary schools where they teach. Another ninety-nine (34.7%) of the respondents reported that they visited a physical library to read once a week during their pedagogical day off and only eight (8) (2.8%) indicated visiting the library to read in a week.

Concerning the frequency of using e-learning resources in a week, one hundred and forty-two (49.8%) of the respondents indicated that they did not read e-learning resources because of lack of internet connectivity in their respective schools. Another one hundred and nineteen (41.8%) reported using e-learning resources once a week to read while 10 (3.5%) reported using internet resources twice a week and one (0.4%) indicated using it twice a week while another one responded using it once a week. Students also were asked to state other sources of their learning materials. Two hundred and eighteen (76.5%) of the respondents indicated that they only read modules provided by the College of Education. Another sixty-seven (23.5%) of the respondents reported that they were buying internet bundles for their telephones to access e-learning materials. On the frequency of meetings by peers for interaction and discussions, two hundred and twenty-six (79.3%) of the respondents indicated that they met once a week while fifty-nine (20.7%) met twice a week.

Provision of Tutorial Support Services and Learner Participation in Distance Learning Programme

The objective was formulated to evaluate the extent to which provision of tutorial services availed to students influence them to participate in the distance education and e-learning programmes in the College of Education. Provision of tutorial support services considered in this study consisted of scheduling of tutorial meeting for face-to- face classes, career guidance and counselling services, scheduling of workshops and seminars and scheduling of peer meetings for discussion and interaction.

Provision of Tutorial Services from Analogue Scale Data

Participants rated the overall adequacy of tutorial support services provided by the College of Education, University of Rwanda, using the scale of 1 to 10, where 1 denoted least adequate and 10 represented most adequate provision. The findings are shown in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Provision of Tutorial Support Services from Visual Analogue Scale data

Score	Frequency	Percent
10	2	0.70
8	3	1.05
6	104	36.4
5	151	52.9
4	25	8.7
Total	285	100

As shown in Table 1, two respondents (0.70%) gave a rating of three, 1.05% a rating of 8 104 (36.4%) gave a rating of 151 (52.9% a rating of 25(8.7%) and a rating of 4. Thus the majority of respondents (89.3%) rated provision of tutorial support services as average and above.

Correlation Analysis for Provision of Tutorial Support Services and Learner Participation in Distance Learning programme

Correlation consideration was used to examine the strength and trend of the linear relationship between tutorial support services and learner Participation in distance learning programme. The results are as illustrated in the following Table 2;

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients for provision of tutorial Support Services and Learner Participation in Distance Learning Programme

		Provision of tutorial SS	Learner participation
Tutorial SS	Pearson	1	0.355
	Correlation (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	285	285
Learner participation	Pearson	0.355	1
	Correlation (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	285	285

Findings on the above Table 2 show that there is a positive and significant relationship between provision of tutorial support services and learner participation in distance learning programme in the College of Education, with $r = 0.355$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$. This suggested that tutorial support services could have an influence on learner participation in distance learning in the College of Education.

Regression Analysis of Provision of Tutorial Support Services and Learner Participation in Distance learning Programme

Simple linear regression enquiry was further used to establish how provision of tutorial support services influence learner participation in distance learning programme. The hypotheses stated that:

H₀: Provision of tutorial support services does not have significant influence on learner participation in the distance learning programme.

H₁ : Provision of tutorial services have significant influence on learner participation in distance learning programme. Summary model of the influence of provision of tutorial support services and learner participation is illustrated in the following Table 3:

Table 3: Summary Model for Provision of Tutorial Support Services

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	R square change	F-change	Df1	Df2	Sig. change	Durbin Watson
1	.641	0.411	0.403	458.0695	0.411	48.903	4	280	0.000	2.236

The summary model for coefficient of determination in Table 3 for the influence of provision of tutorial support services on learner participation was $R^2 = 0.411$. This means that 41.1% of the variance in learner participation in the distance learning programme is explained by provision of tutorial support services. Furthermore, analysis of variance was applied to measure the extent to which the model is a good fit for the data analyzed. Therefore, the results from the ANOVA for the influence of provision of tutorial support services on learner participation in distance learning programme are shown in the Table 4 as follows:

Table 4: ANOVA for Provision of Tutorial Support Services

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	41045086	4	10261271	48.903	0.000
	Residual	58751753	280	209827.7		
	Total	99796839	284			

The above Table 4 show that F- calculated (48.903) is bigger than the F-critical (2.41) while the p-value ($p=0.000$) is less than the significant level ($p=0.05$). This meant that the model was a good fit for the data analyzed. It also means that the model may be used to predict the influence of provision of tutorial support services on learner participation in the distance learning programme.

Further analysis of coefficients of regression for the influence of provision of tutorial support services on learner participation was done. Table 5 shows coefficients of regression.

Table 5: Coefficients for Provision of Tutorial Support Services on Learner Participation in the Distance Learning Programme

	Unstandard coefficients		Standard	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients B		
1 (Constant)	71454.3	228.382		312.871	0.000
Tutorial support services	270.22	42.292	0.355	6.389	0.000

Analysis of regression coefficients was done and the coefficients of determination for the hypothesis was as shown below:

$$Y = 71454.3 + 270.222X$$

Where Y- Learner participation in distance learning programme

X- Provision of tutorial support services

The results indicated that provision of tutorial support services positively and significantly influence learner participation in the distance learning programme as it is illustrated in coefficient of regression $\beta = 270.222$ $t = 6389$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis H_0 : was rejected and the alternative (H_1) was accepted that learner support services have significant influence on learner participation in Distance learning programmes.

In any given distance education institution, tutorial support services are very crucial in influencing learner participation in distance learning programmes as the services enable the learner to effectively and efficiently carry out their studies. The findings indicated that provision of tutorial services such as weekend tutorial sessions, career guidance services, workshops and seminars and provision of opportunities for peer's meetings for discussion and interaction have positive and significant influence on learner participation in distance learning programmes.

The findings established that face-to-face sessions in the College of Education, University of Rwanda are prepared to enable learners to meet with instructors who give feedback to all learners' concerns by offering explanations or clarifications on specific questions provided by subject tutors. The study findings also showed that weekend tutorial sessions are important because tutorials bring learners and tutors physically together to interact and improve teaching and learning processes.

These results agree with Hye-Jung Lee, et al. (2016) who noted that the primary purpose of tutoring is to create and build a strong relationship with learners which would lead to effective learning. They added that Higher learning institutions use tutorial support services to enhance students' engagement and build social relationship among learners.

Face-to-face tutorial sessions in a residential school are moderated by tutors who are assigned to provide explanations on study modules based on the questions raised by learners. The findings resonate with Stoten (2016) who acknowledged significant role of tutors in achieving academic

success. He commended that they ought to be well looked after by distance education institutions because they are faced with unprecedented challenges related to low level of performance in examinations which requires them to double their efforts to support learners in every aspect. This would lead to change student's attitudes towards academic work and to solve personal problems too.

Career guidance and counselling services provided were put into consideration to ascertain how the services were offered to achieve learning objectives. To acquire necessary information, interviews were conducted with tutors who provide tutorial support sessions on weekends. It was revealed by informant (P1) that counselling services were not adequately provided in the distance learning centers. In response to why counselling services were inadequate, respondents revealed that they are not professionals in the field of counselling and psychology and they have never been trained on guidance and counselling services. However, tutors considered themselves to be mature enough to have counselling basics related to academic improvement and performance based on their field of specializations.

Furthermore, informant (P2) noted that there are no special rooms where guidance and counselling services can be hosted in distance training centers. It was therefore emphasized that a counsellor should meet with students in a private room so that they can both feel comfortable and confident that the conversation would yield good expectations. He however, noted that guidance and counselling services requires special and skilled people to serve the purpose of assisting students to solve not only academic, but also to solve social issues and problems.

Furthermore, informants (P3 and P4) emphasized that counseling services are important for the distance students:

Through guidance and counselling, emotions and personal concerns of learners are addressed and this motivates learners to participate in the distance learning programme effectively...Counsellors take care of critical issues that affect aspects of learners lives and which may have impact on their status as students. Counsellors usually target the academic, social, personal, occupational, health, family and spiritual aspects of a student's life that have impact on their studies.

In regard to scheduling of tutorial meetings for face-to-face classes, tutors and provincial coordinators of study centers were further interviewed. One informant (P5) revealed that weekend tutorial sessions are frequently conducted because the College of Education pays tutors on the basis of the number of hours taught in a semester.

The provincial coordinators keep a record of all tutors who participated in the weekend tutorials and the number of hours taught. When payment is requested, the provincial coordinator attaches attendance list and payment is done instantly. This transparent approach of handling tutorial support services is highly appreciated. It also motivates teachers because they get additional income at the end of the month.

However, other informants (P6 and 7), revealed that some students do not attend weekend tutorial face-to-face meetings due to various reasons. One main reason is that most of distance learning students come from remote areas. They have to travel between 10-20 kilometers and some times more than that from their homes while others are constrained by lack of transport to

the learning centers. This affects the smooth running of the distance programme. In addition, some students do not have the opportunity to engage with peers for discussion and interaction. When asked about students who miss weekend tutorial sessions, tutors said they are mostly female students with family commitments.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having based on the findings of the study which have been discussed, conclusions were made in respect of the study objectives. It was observed through the findings of this study that provision of tutorial support services, have a positive and significant relationship between provision of tutorial support services and learner participation in the distance learning programme in the College of Education. This meant that tutorial support services have a significant and positive influence on learner participation in distance learning programmes.

Even though, findings from the study provide a strong indication that learner participation is influenced by tutorial support services such as scheduling of tutorial meeting face-to-face classes, provision of career guidance and counselling services, scheduling of the workshops and seminars, scheduling of peers meeting for discussion and interaction and library services, they are inadequate. In addition, the study did not find scheduling of workshops and seminars, as well as provision of career guidance and counselling services indicators to be statistically significant. Therefore, in practice, the University of Rwanda should lay down practical strategies of providing the necessary support services to learners and ensuring that digital technologies are enhanced to enable them to effectively and efficiently participate through discussions and interactions amongst themselves. This study will open up new room for academic discussions in the pedagogic perspectives. In regard to policy imperatives, the government should find funding mechanisms on what works well for the successful delivery of distance learning programmes.

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