

VIEWS OF STUDENTS ON SUPPORT SERVICES AT COLLEGE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

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Abstract

This study examined the views of distance education students on the kind of support services available at the College of Distance Education. Adopting the descriptive survey design, the study investigated the state of selected student support services at the College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast. The stratified and simple random sampling procedures were employed to select a sample size of 645 out of 3,678 students offering Bachelor of Education programme from study centres across the country. Questionnaire was used to collect data which were analysed with frequencies and means. Participants confirmed that relevant study materials were supplied at the beginning of each semester. In addition, course tutors were punctual to class and displayed mastery of subject matter. Findings of the study further revealed that though counselling and advisory services were available, there were no dedicated help line nor internet counselling platforms for students. Administrative and information services were also averagely offered to students. It was recommended that management take steps to improve on administrative and information, and counselling and advisory services to help students progress smoothly in their academic work through timely provision of information and introduction of e-counselling services.

Keywords: distance education, study materials, instructional processes, counselling services, information services

Introduction

One of the major interfaces provided by distance education institutions to aid students with their learning is student support services (Simpson, 2016; Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). It is seen as a compensation for the isolated learner in the absence of live support from the teachers (Krishnan, 2012). Various distance learning institutions have broad support services provided to enhance students' learning. Robinson as cited in Nsamba and Mankoe (2017) outlines student support services to include services such as provision of study centres and financial assistance, career services, interaction with teaching and administrative staff, guidance on learning, feedback on assignments, counselling, tutoring, learning support services (academics), advisory services and course registration. The major focus of these services is to help students perform well in their studies, with the assumption that the degree of students' success on distance learning programmes depends on the amount of support services available to them (Simpson, 2016). This is critical because students and their lecturers are physically separated (Allen & Seaman, 2014). It was in line with the above discussion that this study investigated four of the support services (study materials, instructional processes, counselling, and advisory services, and administrative and information) that are available to students at the College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast. These four services were selected among many others because they were most salient ones in terms of the academic needs of the distance education student.

Literature Review

The current study looked at four of the support services peculiar to students offering Distance Education programmes at the selected research site. These were study materials, instructional processes, counselling and advisory services, and administrative and information services. Literature on the views of other researchers on these four variables are discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

Study materials constitute a major support service for distance learning students. Ipaye as cited in Arko-Achemfour (2015) posits that much emphasis is placed on study materials by distance learning institutions because it serves as one of the major strategies for getting the content of various courses to students. He emphasized that in recent times institutions mostly focus on the use of technology to disseminate

these study materials to students. As opined by Duhaney (2006) however, access to reliable internet facilities and cost constraints faced by most developing countries had called for blended distance education or some form of technological integration. In support of the above assertion, Rackaway (2012) mentioned that one of the dominant pedagogies in most higher education institutions had been textbook-based, even though there is a great increase towards the use of web-based technologies.

In most developing countries, there seems to be quite significant number of students who do not have enough funds for computers or lack access to sufficient and stable internet facilities (Kritzer & Vu, 2019). A study on online student support services based on quality frameworks by Stewart, Godson, Miertschin, Norwood and Ezell (2013) identified content modules as a major source of support service for students. The study noted that in most courses, modules were developed to facilitate the delivery of content and broke the course outlines into reasonable units for easy management by distance students. They contained the objectives, content outlines, content presentation in power point, streamed video, and assignments. The major feature was that students could easily click through the module sequence and resources to engage in the learning process. Again, each module was set up so that students could easily assess themselves through the online delivery format (Stewart et al., 2013). In addition, a study by Eze (2017) in Nigeria using a sample of 100 high school students found that the availability of instructional or study materials was positively linked with students' academic progress. This might be obvious because, when the necessary study materials are provided, they enhance the understanding of learners which might lead to sustainable interest and an improvement in academic performance. Eze (2017) therefore recommended that students are supported with requisite study materials to help increase interest, improve performance, and ensure smooth academic work among students. In another instance, Fozdar and Kumar (2007) conducted a study to examine the effect of study materials on retention of open and distance learning students. Using a sample of 65 students offering Bachelor of Science at Open University of India, the study found that the use of mobile phones/tablets and modules could improve retention of students. According to Fozdar and Kumar (2007), study materials enhanced teaching/ learning processes and improved the efficacy of existing students. The picture as portrayed

in the above studies perfectly fit into the description of distance education students of the University of Cape Coast as they rely on study materials for content matter knowledge while study in the comfort of their homes. Thus, study materials serve as a good source of support service for them to progress smoothly in their academic pursuits.

Literature points out clearly that though University of South Africa is revered as one of the leading institutions in distance learning, tuition was initially based on postal correspondence with limited face-to-face interaction (Baloyi, 2015). The study materials were print based, supplemented by face-to-face tutorials, of which attendance was not compulsory. In the year 2008 however, the focus of tuition was reviewed to include technology and multimedia interaction with technologies (Baloyi, 2015). In discussing the use of study materials among distance education students, Bogdanović (2012) had contended that subject matter content presented in texts only sometimes causes information overload. Bogdanović (2012) further reiterated that problems are also created in relation to the level of attraction and attention among students when using only one content delivery channel (especially text). This is due to the fact that learners find it difficult to create the needed associations and connections between new information and previous experiences. Bogdanović (2012) therefore, suggested a combination of text, sound, and image, if possible, as it “significantly increases the attraction of attention, deepens the experiences of the participants and has a greater possibility of creating associations between different representations of certain information” (p.38). In support, Eze (2017) was of the view that the importance of study materials in achieving the set instructional objective cannot be over-emphasised. This is because, without study materials such as modules, markers, and other facilities, teaching and learning becomes too abstract and unlively. It is worth noting from the above discussions that most of the authors laid emphasis on the fact that study materials served as a form of support service for students especially distance learners (Baloyi, 2015; Messo, 2014; Bogdanović, 2012; Dzakiria, 2005). It is in line with this that the current study focused on seeking the views of the students for whom these materials were developed. It is believed that their views would serve as a good source of information for administrators and academics who develop content modules for distance education students at the College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast.

Counselling and advisory services are the kind of support service aimed at taking care of critical issues which may have impact on students (Sekyi, 2013). Counselling and advisory services specifically target the academic, social, personal, conceptual, health, family and spiritual aspects of students' lives. Counselling encourages one-on-one relationship between individuals with problems but cannot provide immediate solutions and a professional worker whose training and experience qualifies him to help others in solving problems (Kankam & Oniuehu, as cited in Sekyi, 2013). In support of this assertion, Sekyi (2013) stressed that counselling helps in the identification of barriers and provides solution to them. As distance education students, there are myriad of learning difficulties which demand the provision of counselling services. These include, among others, how to learn effectively, use time judiciously and effectively combine learning with other equally demanding work schedules (Somuah, Dankyi, & Dankyi, 2014). In the view of Nsiah (2011), distance education students become confident with teaching and learning delivery systems when they are given the necessary know-how that concerns their studies. A study on counselling and/or advisory services by Hagahmed (2014) using sample from Arabian Universities revealed that university students who were counselled and advised academically scored more points in their semester grade point average than those who did not receive such services. Similarly, Holsey-Hyman's (2015) study in the United States found that students who received advice and counselling services from their professors and academic advisors built the needed relationships and rapport to influence their ability to stay on their programmes of study. It is in line with the above discussion that the study of Arhin, Wang'eri and Kigen (2017) recommended the need to make counselling and advisory services more practical to address the specific needs of distance education students.

In distance education and its related programmes, communication between teachers and learners, and their institutions is quintessential for meaningful teaching and learning. Effective information service encourages interaction and communication between teachers and learners (Kiraithe, 2015). The manager's role of ensuring information delivery to distance education students in relation to enrolment, admission, registration, record keeping, and delivery of relevant study materials cannot be overemphasised. Administrative and

information services focus on the support students receive in terms of information on admission, registration, examination, academic timetable, and the entire teaching and learning processes (Welch & Reed, 2005). Contributing to the above discussion, Mbuva (2007) pointed out that when services such as dissemination of administrative information are provided by the management of distance education institutions, students become well informed on what to do at every point in time. A study by Kiraithe (2015) using descriptive survey in which 72 distance education students were sampled through the stratified sampling procedure found that, provision of administrative and information services was positively related to students' ability to complete their programmes of study. Using a sample of 170 distance education students from nine out of the ten study centres in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, Sam-Tagoe and Akuamoah Boateng (2018) conducted a study to examine perspectives of students on the administrative services provided by the College of Distance Education. It was found that participants were not satisfied with the level of administrative support they enjoyed from the College at the regional level. The authors therefore recommended that structures are put in place to improve this important service.

This last session of the review discussed the fourth support service which was instructional or teaching and learning processes. According to Geri (2012), instructional processes explain all the activities that provide the means for students to achieve the desired goals of a particular course of study. In particular, an effective instructional process must give a summary of description regarding the strategies and methods employed in the teaching and learning of a course. It is in this regard that Chaudry and Rahman (2010) concluded in their study that good instructional processes especially in distance education positively affected students' ability to understand and manage their courses of study. This is because instructional processes make use of systematic development of instructional specifications through the use of learning and instructional theory to ensure quality of instruction. In a typical distance education learning environment where students are taught using weekly face to face meetings and/or classes, instructors need to develop ways of effectively communicating concepts to the understanding of students. While emphasising the relevance of instructional design, Chaudry and Rahman (2010) used a sample of 120 academics from institutions in Pakistan to assess how

they defined instructional processes. The study found that some courses did not contain sufficient activities and illustrations and that, the entire teaching and learning process did not conform to the instructional objectives (Chaudry & Rahman, 2010). The researchers therefore concluded that, when instructional processes are not carried out well it affects the overall performance of students and can be devastating in the case of students on distance education programmes (Chaudry & Rahman, 2010).

A study conducted by Messo (2014) at the Open University of Tanzania examined students' views on variables such as procedures for registration, clarity of course outlines, course tutors' availability, administrative processes, study materials, instructional approaches and examination practices. The descriptive survey design employed both qualitative and quantitative methods and a sample of 305 students were selected for the study. Messo (2014) found that about 71.5% of the participants had positive perception of the quality of the programmes they were studying. However, they indicated that there was insufficiency of study materials, lack of internet services and supportive academic staff in the regional centres.

It can be observed from the above discussion that study materials, counselling and advisory services, administrative and information services and instructional processes as support services play important role in academic work of students in general and distance education students in particular. Therefore, when students do not receive the requisite amounts of any of these support services, the effect might be derailing. Though some studies had looked at some forms of support services for distance education students at the College, these studies focused on just one service (Arhin, Wang'eri & Kigen 2017) or few study centres (Sam-Tagoe & Akuamoah-Boateng, 2018). The current study intended to seek the views of students on state of the selected support services which are provided for distance education students by the College using study centres across the country at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana.

Purpose of the Study

The study focused on investigating the views of students on the state of selected support services at the College of Distance Education of the University of Cape Coast so as to provide Management with the needed information for decision making. Based on the purpose of the

study, the following research questions were formulated; a) in what ways do study materials serve as a form of support service for students on distance education programmes? b) how do instructional processes support students on distance education programmes? c) how do counselling and advisory services support students on distance education programmes? d) in what ways do administrative and information services serve as a form of support service for students on distance education programmes?

Methodology

Study Design

The study employed descriptive survey design which was deemed appropriate for this study because it allowed for data to be collected from a population at one point in time to draw inferences based on beliefs, attitudes, opinions or practices (Creswell, 2014). Descriptive survey design involves collecting data for the purpose of describing existing conditions and determining the degree of existence of the phenomenon under study (Leavy, 2017). Thus, the design was suitable for this study as it intended soliciting the views and beliefs of students on existing support services they enjoyed on the distance education programmes. The opinions and views obtained from the participants might help answer the problem being investigated, making the use of descriptive survey appropriate. This design also has the advantage of collecting information within a short period of time.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The stratified and simple random sampling techniques were employed to select a sample of 645 from a population of 3,678 students offering Bachelor of Education programmes from three zonal centres of the College of Distance Education. The regions were first categorized into three zones (ie. Northern, Middle and Southern). Each of these zones constituted a stratum in this study. The Northern Zone comprised of the Upper East, Upper West and Northern Regions. The Ashanti, Brong Ahafo and Eastern regions made up the Middle Zone whereas Central, Western, Volta and Greater Accra constituted the Southern Zone. The Slovin's formula (Amin, 2005) was employed to determine the specific sample size of the study. This was followed by the determination of the specific number of respondents in each stratum using the proportional allocation method (Kothari, 2013). Finally, with

the help the lottery method, the simple random sampling was used to select the respondents from each of the three zonal regions. The use of the lottery method aided in reducing sampling biases by giving equal chances to each of the participants selected to be part of the study. In all, 548 participants returned validly filled questionnaire for use in the data analysis, which represented a return rate of 85%, deemed appropriate for the quantitative analysis (Rogelburg & Stanton, 2007).

Research Instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire with a four-point likert scale was designed to collect data from the participants. The options were strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3) and strongly agree (4). The questionnaire was in five sections. Section A consisted of the bio data of respondents, Section B looked at study materials, Section C focused on instructional processes, Section D was made up of items on counselling and advisory services while Section E consisted of items on administrative and information services. This type of questionnaire was deemed useful in collecting quantitative data.

The questionnaire was validated using experts such as the Unit Coordinators in charge of support services at the College of Distance Education, two lecturers working at the College and two students who were graduates of the College. The Cronbach's alpha of reliability was used to assess the extent to which the items were positively interrelated to each and how they worked together to measure the variables used in this study. The reliability coefficient for the items in the questionnaire was 0.85. This was seen to be very good because that Pallant (2013) had asserted that if an alpha coefficient of an instrument is 0.7 or above, it is considered to be reliable.

Data Analysis

The study generated mainly quantitative data which were analysed with descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. A four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree and 4 = Strongly Agree) was used to measure items on each variable with 1 indicating the respondents' least agreement to the statements and 4 depicting respondents' highest agreement to the statement. A standardized mean was estimated and that mean values of 2.50 or above (that is $1+2+3+4/4=2.5$) indicated that respondents agreed to the statements

whereas mean values below 2.50 showed respondents' disagreement to the statements. These were supported with frequencies and percentages. The findings were presented in tabular form.

Results and Discussion

Background of Participants

The study participants were made up of 143 (26%) students offering Bachelor in Basic Education and 405 (74%) Bachelor of Psychology and Foundations' students. There were 298 (54%) male students and 250 (46%) female students. The age range of the participants were 21-25 (16%), 26-30 (51%), 31-35 (22%), 36-40 (7%) and participants aged above 40 were 4%. It was found that 304(56%) of the participants were single, 242 (43%) were married while only 2 (1%) students were either divorced or separated.

The study sought the views of participants on the state of study materials supplied in their areas of study. The results obtained from the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Study Materials

Statement	Agree		Disagree		M	SD
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Relevant study materials are supplied	405	73.9	143	26.1	2.95	0.91
The modules are self-explanatory	412	75.1	136	24.8	2.90	0.88
The modules contain right information	319	58.3	229	41.7	2.64	0.92
The modules give necessary guidance	455	83.0	93	17.0	3.03	0.68
The modules are self-explanatory	406	74.1	142	25.9	2.80	0.79
The modules contain self-assessment exercises	511	93.2	37	6.8	3.31	0.75
The modules are well printed	290	52.9	258	47.1	2.53	0.86
Total					2.88	0.83

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

It can be observed from Table 1 that participants concurred with most of the issues raised on the course modules with overall mean value of 2.88 (SD = 0.83). It is worth noting that most of the participants agreed that the modules they used gave them useful guidance, hints, and suggestions as they progressed on their academic work. This was supported by 455 (83%) participants and with a mean value of 3.03 (SD = 0.68), which indicated that the participants were satisfied with the content of the study modules. These findings confirmed a similar result from the study of Stewart et al. (2013) and Sam-Tagoe and Akuamoah-Boateng (2018) which also identified content modules as a major source of support service for students. On the issue of whether the study modules contained enough self-assessment questions and exercises to test their knowledge on the content discussed, 511 representing 93% of the participants agreed. This was confirmed with a mean value of 3.31 (SD = 0.75). The study went further to find out from participants if they were supplied with the relevant study materials at the beginning of every semester as part of the support services provided by the institution. The participants showed their agreement to this statement (Mean = 2.95, SD = 0.91) with a total of 405 (74%) of them concurring as found in the study of Fozdar and Kumar (2007). One can note from Table 1 that just a little over half of the participants agreed (Mean = 2.64 and SD = 0.92) to the fact that the study modules contained the rightful and enough information needed for their course of study as concurred by Stewart et al. (2013). More importantly, though the participants agreed (Mean = 2.53, SD = 0.86) that the study modules were well printed, 258 representing 47% disagreed with this statement. This supports the finding of Messo (2014) where the participants reiterated that there were errors in some of the modules supplied to them. These study modules were not fully online due to some challenges encountered with stability of internet services for all students across the length and breadth of the country. Therefore, the printed study modules served as a source of content matter for the students and as opined by Eze (2017), the achievement of instructional goals are directly linked to the quality of the study materials among students on distance learning programmes.

The second support service this study focused on was instructional processes. This was considered very important as facilitators (course tutors) are engaged to help students deal with the content of the study modules during face-to-face sessions. The

responses of the participants on the various issues on the instructional processes are as seen in Table 2

Table 2: Instructional Process

Statement	Agree		Disagree		Mean	SD
	n	%	n	%		
Course tutors are punctual	493	90.0	55	10.0	3.36	0.77
Course tutors are always available at the study centres	448	81.7	100	18.3	3.17	0.80
Course tutors display interest in the subject matter	509	92.8	39	7.2	3.30	0.66
Course tutors display mastery of the subject matter	466	85.0	72	13.1	3.11	0.84
Course tutors clearly communicate important course objectives	467	85.3	75	13.7	3.12	0.77
Course tutors provide clear instructions on course learning activities	458	83.6	84	15.3	3.02	0.74
Course tutors provide prompt feedback	370	67.5	177	32.3	2.80	0.80
Course tutors help to focus discussion on relevant issues	485	88.5	63	11.5	3.11	0.63
Course tutors communicate important time frames for learning activities	424	77.4	124	22.6	3.00	0.73
Course tutors are helpful in guiding me clarify my thinking	466	85.0	77	14.1	3.15	0.68
Course tutors develop good interpersonal relationship	502	91.6	66	8.4	3.19	0.58

Statement	Agree		Disagree		Mean	SD
	n	%	n	%		
Course tutors encourage collaboration among students by discussion forums	379	69.1	169	30.8	2.86	0.86
Course tutors encourage diversity of opinion among students	496	90.5	48	8.7	3.17	0.66
Total					3.10	1.36

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

The participants were in agreement with most of the statements on instructional processes they underwent during the face-to-face sessions as one can observe from Table 2 (Mean=3.10, SD=1.36). The participants highly agreed that course tutors were very punctual to class during their face-to-face sessions. This was supported with a mean value of 3.36 (SD = 0.77) which represented 493 (90%) of the participants. This result established the importance of the monitoring services the College has instituted to ensure that course tutors make the best use of the time allocated for facilitation. The monitoring is a form of supervision of the teaching staff engaged by the College at various study centres. Staff of the College visit the study centres to monitor the facilitation and course tutors are remunerated based on their punctuality and availability for the face-to-face sessions. This finding was an indication that the monitoring services had yielded some positive results. The participants agreed (Mean = 3.30, SD=0.66) that course tutors displayed a great interest in the subject matter of the courses they facilitate as 509 (93%) of the participants supported this assertion. This finding also confirms the fact that great efforts go into the recruitment process and engagement of the course tutors such that the best and the most qualified applicants are given the opportunity to facilitate the courses at the various study centres. This statement was further complimented by 466 (85%) participants who agreed (Mean = 3.11, SD = 0.84) that course tutors displayed mastery of the subject matter.

The enquiries on issues such as course tutors communicating important course objectives clearly, providing clear instructions on learning activities, helping to focus discussion on relevant issues to ensure effective use of time for facilitation and being helpful in guiding

students to clarify ideas and understanding of subject content were all agreed on by the participants with mean values ranging between 3.02 (SD = 0.74) and 3.15 (SD = 0.68). It is important to note that though 370 (68%) of the participants agreed (Mean = 2.80 SD = 0.80) to the fact that the course tutors provided prompt feedback, the 32% who disagreed to this issue was quite large enough to warrant action by the Management of the College to find solution to help improve the situation. Another area of concern was participants' reaction to the statement on whether course tutors encouraged collaboration among students through chats, discussion forums, skype, Whatsapp and other media. This was supported by 379 participants representing 69% and with a mean 2.86 (SD = 0.86). This finding was quite encouraging as it is an indication that participants were gradually using internet facilities for communication. It serves as fertile ground to roll out major online teaching and learning through the distance education mode. The above findings are in line with the concerns raised by Crosling, Heagney and Thomas (2009) that developing and utilising of teaching and learning strategies promote a more active and student-centred approach to learning. This intend draws on students' previous experiences and helps to enhance students' engagement and course commitment.

The third category of support services the study explored was counselling and advisory services. The responses from the participants are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Counselling and Advisory Services

Statement	Agree		Disagree		Mean	SD
	n	%	n	%		
I was given adequate orientation	432	79.7	111	20.3	3.08	0.90
I receive advice on learning and study skills	372	67.8	176	32.1	2.75	0.80
I have an academic counsellor at my study centre	144	26.2	397	72.5	2.05	0.91
My centre coordinator gives advice on career prospects	302	55.1	243	44.4	2.52	0.90

Statement	Agree		Disagree		Mean	SD
	n	%	n	%		
I access the counsellor at the university when the need arises	192	35.0	353	64.4	2.12	0.95
I get peer counselling from fellow students	349	63.7	193	35.2	2.61	0.90
I have channels of sharing my challenges with fellow students	355	64.7	183	34.3	2.68	0.95
Students are organised into peer support groups	183	33.4	359	65.5	2.21	0.85
College has a dedicated student helpline	197	35.9	339	61.9	2.12	1.01
College has a 24-hour internet counselling platform	138	25.2	403	73.5	1.84	0.94
Total					2.40	0.91

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Table 3 indicates mixed reaction of students to the kind of counselling and advisory services available to them at their various study centres, with mean values ranging from 1.84 (SD = 0.80) to 3.08 (SD = 1.01). An average mean of 2.40 (SD = 0.91) was a confirmation of the current state of counselling and advisory services offered to distance education students at the University of Cape Coast as viewed by the participants. The results showed that most of the respondents (ranging between 64% and 80%) indicated their agreement with the statements on adequate orientation given when they enrolled on the distance education programme, receiving of advice on learning and study skills, getting peer counselling from their colleagues and the provision of channels for sharing their challenges with their fellow students. The mean scores for these items ranged between 2.61 and 3.08 which is above the standardized mean score of 2.50.

On the contrary, the results in Table 3 depict 397 (72.5%) respondents disagreed to the statement “I have an academic counsellor at my study centre” (Mean = 2.05, SD = 0.80). Again, 339 of the respondents representing 62% disagreed with the statement that they

can access the counsellors at the University when the need arises (Mean = 2.12, SD = 0.95) and that students were organized into peer groups (Mean = 2.21, SD = 0.85). Table 3 also shows respondents' disagreement with the statement that "the University has a dedicated students' helpline "(Mean = 2.12, SD=1.01). The respondents further disagreed with the item on whether the university has an internet counselling platform which runs for 24 hours. Their strong disagreement with this statement was reflected in the least mean score (Mean =1.84, SD = 0.94) among the items measuring the extent of counselling and advisory services available to students of the College of Distance Education. The picture as depicted from the above findings was an indication that the College needed to put in measures to improve the counselling and advisory services offered to its students. As reiterated by Arhin et al. (2017), Brown and Kenney (2014) and Pietras (2010), the provision of counselling and advisory services play a critical role in the academic life of distance education learners and efforts must be made to tailor the services to specific needs of such students.

Research question four examined administrative and information services offered to students and Table 4 depicts the views of the respondents.

Table 4: Administrative and Information Services

Statement	Agree		Disagree		Mean	S D
	n	%	n	%		
Students' handbook was useful	471	86.0	68	12.4	3.07	0.87
Information on semester's calendar are useful	509	92.9	38	6.9	3.46	0.67
Vital information is communicated to students promptly	393	71.8	155	28.2	2.95	0.87
Online communication is effectively used	284	51.8	259	47.3	2.50	0.94
Important updates are on the university website	326	59.5	216	39.4	2.60	0.96
Text messages are effective for prompt communication	312	56.9	235	42.9	2.59	0.92
University has a call centre for my questions anytime	290	53.0	254	46.4	2.59	1.63

Statement	Agree		Disagree		Mean	S D
	n	%	n	%		
Coordinators provide regular information to students	466	85.1	81	14.7	3.18	0.79
Coordinators help in registration and handle problems	456	83.2	92	16.7	3.11	0.82
University personnel are prompt in handling problems	327	59.7	220	40.2	2.62	0.91
Total					2.87	0.94

Source: Fieldwork (2019)

As seen in Table 4, the respondents agreed with most of the items on administrative and information services available to distance education students with an average mean of 2.87 and standard deviation of 0.94. As depicted in Table 4, 509 (93%) of the respondents were of the view that they obtained useful information about academic activities from the semester calendar provided by the College as evidenced in the high mean score ($M=3.46$, $SD=0.67$). These included dates and other materials for face-to-face tutorials, course registration, quizzes, and examinations. Again, it is clear from Table 4 that 466 (85%) and 456 (83%) of the respondents claimed that study centre coordinators provided regular information to them and helped with issues related to course registration, handling problems and queries with means values of ($M=3.18$, $SD=0.79$) and ($M=3.11$, $SD=0.82$) respectively.

Though the respondents' view on other items measuring administrative and information services such as effective use of online communication, mobile SMS communication and reliable call centre were positive ($M=2.50$, $SD=0.94$; $M=2.59$, $SD=0.92$ and $M=2.59$, $SD=1.63$), they were just a little over the standardized mean score. This implied that just a little over half of the entire study sample agreed with the statements. The implication is that management must work on improving ways of communicating to the students' body as concurred by Kiraithe (2015) and Mbuva (2007) who found that when better channels of dissemination of administrative information are provided by the management of distance education institutions, students become well informed on what to do at every point in time, improve their

interest in what they study and are more likely to stay on their programmes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

One of the important elements that count towards the success of distance education programmes are the views learners have towards quality of support services they accessed as students. The need for support services in the academic lives of distance education students cannot be underestimated. It is worth noting that there were generally positive views of students on the support services they enjoyed at the College of Distance Education in terms of nature of study materials, instructional processes, and administrative and information services. Based on the outlined findings, the study recommended that:

1. Administrators and managers of the College must take a serious look at the content and printing of study materials to help improve understanding and generate the needed confidence and interest among students.
2. Counselling and advisory lecturers at the College must consider using the social media platforms and e-counselling approaches to reach out to students.
3. Counselling services should be offered to students by professional counsellors and not paraprofessional as study centre coordinators. It would also be important for the Management of the University to appoint counsellors and lecturers with counselling background to the regional offices to provide counselling services for students in their respective regions. Generally, efforts must be made in improving counselling and advisory services especially at the study centres for students.
4. Administrators and managers of the College must make deliberate efforts to enhance the delivery of information to students using various media, especially the social media platforms, to facilitate effective communication students.

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