

On-Campus Students' Perception of Distance Learning

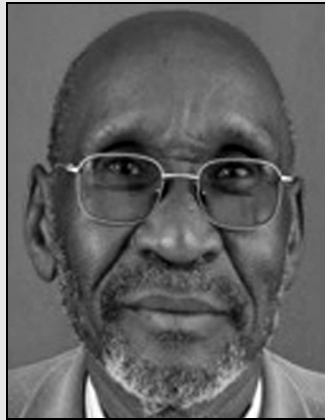
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INTRODUCTION

Through human history, education as a process of knowledge and skills acquisition has neither being confined to one mode of learning or delivery nor to one type of setting. Indeed, its content and delivery has always been dependent on the stage of civilization and the level of technological development. In this context, the evolution of distance learning has been intertwined with human history. This mode of learning became formalized in 1700s, when it was

practiced through correspondence education (Harting & Erthal, 2005). Over the years, particularly after the industrial revolution, conventional learning gained more prominence over distance learning across all the societies of the world, its coexistence with distance learning cannot be denied. The coming of printing technology enhanced distance learning through correspondence. Indeed, before the emergence of new technologies in education, the boundaries between the two modes of learning were in relation to time and space, level and control. Today these boundaries have been blurred by technology, leading to convergence of the two modes (Bjarnason, 2004). Today most institutions are embracing open, distance, and e-learning in lieu of the print-based mode. This shift is driven by high cost of print materials and the ubiquitous nature of e-learning.

Globally, the number of students who are enrolling in online learning is increasing. The eight countries leading the way in online education are: United States, India, China, South Korea, Malaysia, United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa. In the United States, a recent report shows that about 6.3 million students, representing approximately 35% of the university student population, are enrolled in at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2017; Betts, 2017; Smith, 2016; Talheimer, 2017). Most of these stu-



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dents are undergraduates. The popular distance education programs are in the order of: business and economics; followed by social sciences and applied sciences; third in order are: life sciences, medicine and health, engineering and technology, and humanities and arts. The smallest numbers of distance education programs are recorded in environmental sciences, law, and natural sciences.

ODL DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATION IN KENYA

In a developing country like Kenya, delivery of education and training is primarily conducted under conventional mode (Kenya Education Network, 2013). Like in other developing countries, where institutions have adopted ODL primarily for teacher training, the print-based mode is the most favorable choice (Perraton, 2010). The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education and training delivery is both relatively new and low. This situation is dictated by a number of factors that include poor power and Internet connectivity, high cost of information and communication technologies, and poor open and distance learning (ODL) policy at both national and institutional levels (Gunga & Ricketts, 2007; & Republic of Kenya, 2017).

Though open and distance learning is not new in Kenya, the growth of local providers and its acceptance as one of the graduation pathways is relatively new. It entered Kenya's education system during the colonial era, and its e-learning component was incorporated into higher education institutions in late 1990s. For 30 years during postcolonial period, it got stunted. Its reemergence in higher education was by default. This development and transformation of nonelectronic ODL to open and distance e-learning (ODEL) can be put into three overlapping phases.

PHASE 1: COMBINED CORRESPONDENCE AND PRINT-BASED ERA (1960s–1970s)

There were two key ODL players during this era. The first aspect of this phase is characterized by learning that was delivered through correspondence by foreign institutions, mainly from the United Kingdom, led by the University of London, and South Africa, being spearheaded by the University of South Africa. A number of local tertiary institutions facilitated the delivery of ODL programs from these institutions. The target groups were secondary school and university learners. The second segment of this era is characterized by the entry of local ODL players, namely: University of Nairobi established extra mural studies popularly referred to as adult and continuing education.

PHASE 2: COMBINED RADIO AND PRINT MATERIAL ERA (LATE 1960s–1980s)

By late 1960s two successful radio programs supported by print materials were launched by the Ministries of Education and Health and Ministry of Education initiated radio programs for primary and junior secondary schools and in-service training programs for health workers, respectively (Jenkins, 1990a, 1990b). Though these two programs were successful, they were discontinued when the donor funding ended.

PHASE 3: COMBINED PRINT AND E-LEARNING ERA (1990s-TO-DATE)

Though this phase is dominated by a majority of institutions moving to e-learning, there are still institutions that conduct their distance learning by use of print materials. Egerton University established print-based distance learning program with the Ministry of Defence in 1998. The

program is offered to this day. Unlike other developing countries, Kenya has never used television to deliver education programs. The e-learning phase has been enhanced by improved electricity and ICT penetration in the country and the legal framework. The two major e-learning catalysts and events that characterized this phase are: the launch of African Virtual University (AVU) and the financial crisis in universities in 1990s.

African Virtual University was launched in 1997 with Kenyatta University and Egerton University being the pioneer partners. This initiative was wholly funded by the World Bank. The inception of AVU marked the first time e-learning entered higher education institutions in Kenya. The AVU programs were delivered via satellite from foreign institutions based in Australia and the United States, namely: Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Curtin University, and New Jersey Institute of Technology.

The financial crisis faced by the public universities in early 1990s forced the universities to admit fees paying students to be taught together with government-sponsored students. This income generation strategy was constrained by space limitations and a growing number of full-time employees who needed part-time and evening courses, weekend courses, and face-to-face sessions during vacations in the case of serving primary and secondary school teachers. These emerging market demands forced universities that were established as conventional to turn to open distance and e-learning as a vehicle for increasing the revenue base convert themselves into dual mode institutions, and establish satellite campuses within the country and across the border for purposes of providing semidistance learning. A common phenomenon across all these phases is the inclusion of a face-to-face component.

ODL AND E-LEARNING CHALLENGES AND EMERGING PROSPECTS

The challenges and the prospects of introducing ODL and e-learning as a supplementary and complementary to conventional mode of learning vary from region to region, country to country, and from institution to institution. The primary determinants of ODL and e-learning success in developing countries include acceptability of qualifications by the tutors, learners, and the employers; institutional preparedness in terms of infrastructural investment and human capacity; policy and quality assurance (Kamau, 1999; Siaciwena, 1983; Southern African Development Community, 2004, 2012).

E-READINESS CHALLENGES

While it is fashionable for dual mode institutions of higher learning to be seen to embrace e-learning, one of the major challenges facing Kenya's e-learning providers is their e-readiness. The driving force behind the adaptation of e-learning mode among all the providers in the country is the enhancement of income generation. This at times overshadows the institutions' e-readiness to deliver quality e-learning. Under this situation, many of the providers lack adequate facilities and support services to deliver online programs. For these institutions, the basic entry of the application of e-learning in instructional delivery brought in new infrastructural demands. The dual-mode institutions, which are the bulk of those seeking to be e-learning providers, are at different levels of e-readiness. Kenya Education Network (KENET, 2013) defined e-readiness as "a measure of preparedness of a university or institution to use ICT to enhance the quality of learning, teaching, and research" (p. viii). KENET conducted e-readiness surveys in 2006, 2008, and 2013 in 30 private and public universities in Kenya. Egerton University was one of 30 institutions surveyed.

Oketch, Njihia, and Wausi (2014) pointed out that institutional e-readiness “assessment allows institutions to design systems and put in place appropriate measures that are required for its success. The assessment should include learners’ ability to adapt to technological changes, collaborative training and synchronous as well as asynchronous self-paced training” (p. 30). The five categories of e-readiness indicators that KENET (2013) used are: networked access, networked campus, networked learning, networked society, and institutional ICT strategies. From these five categories KENET developed 17 e-readiness indicators. Each indicator was staged on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 represented unprepared and 4 represented the highest level of preparedness. The 2013 e-readiness survey indicated that:

- Networked PC per 100 students was low. However, this was compensated by large number of students who owned laptop computers.
- Fifty percent of the students who did not have laptops resorted to cyber cafes for computer and Internet access.
- Twenty-five percent of the students assessed computers and the Internet from cyber cafes.
- Seventeen percent of the students accessed computers from their campuses. This indicates that the universities had low computer laboratories.
- Of the 17 e-readiness indicators applied, only two, the ICT in workplace and network environment, scored 3 in a 4-point scale, indicating satisfactory level of e-readiness. These were the only changes in e-readiness between 2008 and 2013. The other 15 indicators scored less than 3 indicating none-readiness.

Interesting issues expressed by students though not in place or available in their universities included:

- Their preference for blended courses.

- Their preference for their instructors to use more learning management systems (LMS) and open content available on YouTube or Khan Academy.

From the survey findings KENET (2013) concluded inter alia that:

- Those universities are still predominantly traditional in their teaching methods and students have little exposure to institutional application of educational technologies.
- Universities still need to invest more in educational technologies and computer laboratories.
- While most universities had ICT policies, implementation of these policies is low.

ODL POLICY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE CHALLENGES

Kenya’s poorly articulated policy on ODL only serves the purpose of legitimizing its provision, but is not for enhancing its growth as an alternative mode for the provision of education and training to enhance human resources. ODL remains a peripheral stream in policy recognition. This status exposes ODL provision in the country to vagaries of market forces and institutional exploitation of the learners (Maritim, 2009). While significant resources are generated from ODL streams, these resources are diverted to building facilities such as laboratories for conventional learners. Little funds were plowed back to enhance the learning conditions of distance learners.

Most of the institutions that claim to offer e-learning provide learners with PDF files uploaded to their platforms, compendiums, and sketchy lecture notes. It was only in 2014 when the Commission for University Education came up with guidelines and standards for the provision of distance learning. The presence of a well-articulated national or regional policy

gives recognition and creditability to ODL qualifications and creates an environment that promotes positive perception of ODL graduates in the market, harmonization of the provision of ODL in the country and across member states. In Kenya, ODL development has been left to the institution's discretion. While the government education and training policies encourage public universities to utilize ODL to improve access and equity in higher education; it does not provide financial support for infrastructure as in the case of traditional streams, staff salaries or subsidies, running cost, material development, and capacity building (Republic of Kenya, 2005, 2007, 2012).

Sessional Papers No. 1 of 2005 (Republic of Kenya, 2005) and No. 14 of 2012 (Republic of Kenya, 2012) encouraged conventional public universities to expand access and equity in higher education through ODL and e-learning. Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012 specially states that in addressing expansion of access and equity in higher education the government will implement the following policies: "expand open and distance education (ODL) in universities by leveraging on ICT to take advantage of ICT infrastructure within the country and establish the Open University of Kenya by 2014" (Republic of Kenya, 2012, p. 123). In view of weak policy environment, the establishment of the Open University remains a dream.

The Kenya Vision 2030, the long-term development blueprint for the country, also recognizes the importance of e-learning in scaling up access and equity in higher education. Vision 2030 is very specific and categorical on the need for the utility of ODL and e-learning with respect to enhancing access, equity, and quality of education and training at technical industrial and vocational educational training and university levels. It points out the need to introduce (Republic of Kenya, 2007, p. 85):

- Open and distance learning to enhance access to university education, especially to the financially disadvantaged;
- E-learning and blended learning as an alternative mode of delivery of education in order to improve both access and quality of education.

The policy documents are positive toward the provision of ODL. However, they lack controls on how the institutions should provide ODL. In the absence of a single-mode ODL institution, the provisions of these policy directions are attempts to mainstream ODL in face-to-face institutions. Up to 2012, the institutions that were offering or facilitating foreign institutions to conduct ODL in the country did not have effective quality assurance systems. The 1985 Universities Act had no provision for ODL institutions and programs and hence the quality assurance agency in the country had no legal powers to control the provision of ODL. The role of the facilitating institutions was to receive the study materials from education providers and pass on to the learners, administer examinations, and provide learner support services. The Universities Act of 2012 strengthened quality assurance in both private and public universities. Unfortunately, in most cases, dual mode distance learning providers and the Commission for University Education, the national quality assurance agency, apply in many instances conventional rules and procedures to those who study under nonconventional situations. The pillars and the principles of distance learning include self-pacing and flexibility.

EMERGING E-LEARNING PROSPECTS

The growth in online enrollment in both developed and developing countries has been catalyzed and buttressed inter alia by:

- increase in the number of institutions that are becoming dual mode. In view of advances in ICT, it is now rare to find purely conventional institutions and e-learning has become the “new norm” in institutions of higher learning (Betts, 2017; Bjarnason, 2004; King, 2012; Chen, 2002);
 - advances in ICT have brought about convergence of instructional modes in all learning institutions (Bertrand, 2013; Watson, 2008);
 - increase in online courses and programs that have been developed primarily for attraction of high enrollment; these courses and programs are accommodating the needs of students in terms of mode, pace, place, and time of study (Friedman, 2018; Smith, 2016);
 - increase in the incorporation of online courses into on-campus courses (Carlson et al., 2016);
 - increase of virtual universities and “cross-border education” networks (Diallo, Traore, & Fernandes, 2010; Olcott, 2013);
 - recognition and accreditation of online courses by international and national quality assurance agencies (Commission for University Education, 2014; Middlehurst & Campbell, 2004);
 - diminishing absorption capacity of traditional face-to-face institutions in view of rising student population, in the case of developing countries (Mohamedbhai, 2011);
 - Scaling up of learning opportunities through widening access to higher education (Diallo et al., 2010; Garrett & Verbik, 2004);
 - decreasing per capita funding to higher education by the national governments called for institutions to resort to the use of ICT for cost effective solutions for increasing institutional resource base by attracting fees paying students (Mohamedbhai, 2011);
 - state investments in the Internet infrastructure, especially fiber optic connectivity, thus lowering Internet cost (Andriotis, 2015; Republic of Kenya, 2017);
 - increase in competition between telecoms and Internet service providers leading to lower cost and thus resulting in increased adoption of Internet and mobile technologies (Andriotis, 2015); and
 - while the growth in online learning looks small in developing countries, except in South Africa, it is still significant given that up to early 2000 many conventional institutions had no ODL streams. Kenya presents a good example of this scenario. In 1963, the official enrollment figures in tertiary institutions only reflect conventional learners. By 2016/2017 academic year, 500,000 students were enrolled in both private and public universities (Republic of Kenya, 2017). Official government statistics classify all university students as if they are all conventional, hence making it difficult to unmask or segregate the few who study online. However, it is estimated that approximately 30,000 were enrolled in online learning, representing 6% of the student population (Kenya Education Network, 2013). The challenge of the number of students studying through distance learning is not unique to developing countries. While reviewing the status of ODL in Europe, Carlson et al. (2016), noted that “student numbers in distance education are difficult to estimate” (p. 28).
- Studies from other countries and in-country that have compared the provision of education through e-learning and conventional modes and those of ratings by students of instructions offered on campus and off campus are supportive and persuasive to the introduction of e-learning where resources and other conditions permit. Such studies have found:

- that e-learning tends to outperform classroom instruction (Talheimer, 2017);
- that off-campus students perceive blended learning as creating the largest benefits (Talheimer, 2017). This is because blended learning takes the best of both aspects of real and virtual environments.
- that students prefer blended learning that combines face to face or onsite learning and online, rather than the traditional face-to-face teaching (Kenya Education Network, 2013).
- that older students, women, and full-time employees were more likely to enroll or show preference for distance learning courses over face to face (Harris & Gibson, 2006).
- that students see e-learning as an expected and integral part of the learning process within higher education and where learners get such benefits as ease of access to resources (Concannon, Flynn, & Campbell, 2005).
- that on-campus and off-campus students show no difference in assessment of online instructions and quality (Spooner, Jordan, Algozzine, & Spooner, 1999).

THE PROBLEM

Although the studies from developed countries consistently show e-learning support by both off- and on-campus students, this position might not hold across all learning institutions in developing countries where e-learning is still at infancy. Egerton University, where the study was undertaken, has three campuses: Njoro, Nakuru, and Nairobi. Nakuru and Nairobi were established in early 2000 for income generation through admission of fees paying students. With the emerging concept of "full-time part-time student," the students in these two campuses take their courses both during the day and in the evenings. In view of declining number of fee-paying students

in the last 2 years leading to low fee collection, the university management made a decision in January 2018 to merge these campuses and transfer the students to Njoro campus. The merger process involved consultations with the students as the major stakeholders. The deans and the directors of the faculties affected held a discussion forum with the students. The task of director of the Egerton University College of Open and Distance Learning in these consultations was to disseminate information and highlight to the affected students, the benefits of e-learning mode of study. During the consultations, the students who were affected vehemently rejected being migrated to e-learning mode. One student leader who spoke on behalf of others made two key rejection points by stating that:

1. "We do not want to migrate to e-learning because we want to interact with the lecturers and hence students are saying no to e-learning.
2. In the current trimester system, we complete our 4-year degree programs in 2 and half years."

The statements of student leaders are assumed to reflect the collective opinions of the student population. This reaction to e-learning reflects either lack of knowledge of the functionalities of e-learning platform, the learning management system or a fixation on traditional mode, fear or uncertainty in program completion through this mode. The first statement portrays a picture where students seem not to embrace the obvious benefits of e-learning that includes seamlessness in delivery with respect to learning being placeless, timeless, and borderless; that is, the nature of e-learning being ubiquitous. The software used by Egerton University in e-learning is Moodle. Moodle is an interactive LMS [(also known as a course management system, or virtual learning management environment, or managed

learning environment (Holmes & Gardner, 2008; Robb, 2004; Vai & Sosulski, 2011)]. It is an Internet-based medium. The negative implication for those in technologically disadvantaged locations is therefore that the users should be in a place with Internet connectivity. The second ground for the objection to e-learning demonstrates a lack of the concept of learner-centered environment in e-learning course that includes such facets as self-pacing and flexibility. This allows online learners to move quickly through content and, potentially, graduate early. Hence, trimester system is not the only route to early graduation.

The purpose of the present research was to look into how students who have been exposed to the traditional mode of learning in their undergraduate studies think of pursuing their future studies and professional development through ODL. Given the prevailing conditions, where employers no longer release employees for long-term conventional face-to-face training or pursuance of further studies, a large number of the current students undertaking their studies through conventional mode are potential future distance learners and hence their current perception of e-learning helps in the development of e-learning strategies. According to familiarity principle and cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), there exists in human beings a consistency in their cognition to develop a preference for practices or objects or perceptions or beliefs that they are familiar with or those that have been exposed to. Under this principle and theory, it was expected in this study that the traditional mode of learning has had a significant exposure effect on the students to the extent of influencing their future choice of mode of study and mindset with a bias toward conventional mode of study.

This study was undertaken in Kenya, where, though the teaching methods at the university level are predominantly conventional face to face, the universities are

now investing in e-learning in the hope that this mode will increase both the student numbers and the institution's resource base in future. In such a context, there are a number of technology related challenges at both macro and micro levels. Egerton University, where the study sample was drawn, is the fourth largest public university, with a student population of about 25,000. Though the university has been conducting print-based distance learning since 1998, it launched e-learning programs in the 2014/2015 academic year and approximately 1% of the student population was enrolled in online programs during 2017/2018 academic year.

METHODOLOGY

The overarching question being addressed by this study is: how do students who are following traditional mode of learning and unfamiliar with distance mode perceive ODL as their future mode for further studies and professional development? The study sets out to answer the following sub-questions:

- What aspects of distance learning do on-campus students perceive as attractive?
- What aspects of distance learning do they perceive as repulsive?

SUBJECTS

A sample of 119 students who were enrolled for a diploma in education and bachelor of education (arts-secondary option) at Egerton University volunteered to participate in the study. This included 61 males and 58 females, with age ranging from 18 to 30 years (M age = 23, SD = 2.7). The majority of participants, 95%, were fourth-year bachelor of education students. Though previous studies have shown gender differences in volunteering, with more females than males tending to volunteer to participate in studies (Musick

& Wilson, 2008), gender differences in participation in this sample did not show a major difference between males and females to warrant concrete evidence for the opposition to such findings.

PROCEDURE

In order to answer the two questions posed in the study, data were collected through a survey method. The survey was carried out between mid-January and late February 2018. This involves administration of the questionnaires to both diploma and Bachelor of Education students. The survey instrument had two parts: open questions and a few closed questions. The closed-questions captured demographic data and questions intended to measure both attractiveness and repulsive factors provided ODL related statements to be responded to by use of Likert-type scale from 1 to 4 (least reason for attractiveness or nonattractiveness; somehow the reason for attractiveness or nonattractiveness; secondary reason for attractiveness or non-attractiveness; primary reason for attractiveness or nonattractiveness).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data was grouped into two major clusters: demographic profile of the subjects and students' future learning preferences.

PROFILE OF THE SUBJECTS

The various e-learning related demographic data gathered from the study subjects in order to remotely gauge their current inclination toward ODL included:

E-READINESS

With the advances in ICT, the communications tools that an ordinary modern university student should have include: smartphone, tablet, laptop, and e-mail address. The ownership of these devices is

a good indicator of the students' readiness to take advantage of and adapt to technological changes that are entering the learning environment in higher education institutions. Indeed, at this time and age, the utility of e-learning in learning, teaching, training, and research is taken as a "norm" (Betts, 2017). A good number of the sampled students owned devices that facilitate e-learning, namely:

- smartphone, 20%;
- smartphone and e-mail, 35%; and
- smartphone, laptop and e-mail 27%.

Interestingly, the results show that less than one percent of the students do not own these devices, which is encouraging because this indicates that if e-learning is introduced in a number of education programs and possibly in other programs, students and lecturers will have active engagement. The students' acquired e-readiness is likely to be carried into the future as Oketch et al.(2014) argued that e-readiness is not one-time event and that once the momentum has been achieved the probability of its continuity in future is high.

ODL AWARENESS

Prior to their admission in 2014/2015 academic year, the majority of the students, 88%, were not aware of ODL provision at Egerton University. Interestingly, on the question of the mode of study they could have chosen if they had prior knowledge of ODL existence at Egerton University, equal numbers (44%) would have chosen either mode. In general, this position suggests a positive perception toward ODL.

USE OF LIBRARY E-RESOURCES

The University Library has learning resources in both print and soft forms. For hard copies, the checkout system is in place. The e-resources subscribed by the

library are e-books and e-journals, which can be accessed within and outside the campus by both the staff and students. The instrument administered sought to find out the students' awareness of and engagement with the library's e-resources. This awareness was measured by use of a binary choice of 1 = Yes and 2 = No. The results on the level of awareness as indicated as Yes responses to these e-learning resources are as follows: E-books 53% and E-journals 54%. These results are encouraging for a university where it is not mandatory for lecturers to use both conventional and online notes for the teaching their students. This is another indicator of e-readiness. The levels of students' use of electronic devices to access and engage with library e-resources were: smartphones 61%, library computers 59%, laptops 39%, and tablets 8 percent. On the rate of library computer use for access of library resources, it is encouraging that the students are relatively frequent users of library computers.

COUNTERCHECKING QUALITY OF LECTURE NOTES

The import and the impact of ICT in learning is that it enables students to countercheck and compare what they are getting from their lecturers with other sources. Two aspects of this were measured. One was to find out using binary scale of 1=Yes and 2= No whether the students do benchmarking of their lecture notes with other sources. On this aspect, the results indicate that 81% had done the comparison of the lecturer's notes with other sources such as reference books or Internet sources. The other aspect was their self-assessment of the quality of the lectures' notes. On a 4-point Likert scale measure of the comparability in quality of the lecturer's notes with other sources, the responses were as follows:

- lecture notes were of excellent quality, 21%;
- lecture notes were of good quality, 49%;
- lecture notes were of fair quality, 11%;
- and
- lecture notes were of poor quality, 0%.

This is a positive reflection of quality teaching and satisfaction by the students with what they receive from their lecturers.

From the sample profile, it is clear that though the sample was not distance learners, their e-readiness; their previous lack of ODL awareness of the existence at Egerton University prior to admission to conventional mode; use of their electronic devices to access library e-resources and to countercheck the quality of lecturers' notes suggest the need for Egerton University to buttress these intrinsic motivations by the students by adding the use of ICT into the conventional learning environment. The students appear to be ahead of the university in embracing ICT application in learning.

FUTURE LEARNING PREFERENCES AND REFLECTIONS

Inclination to a particular preferred choice was looked into through identification of enablers of preferred mode; establishment of respondents' readiness to recommend ODL mode to others; their preferred future mode of study; and finally their specific ODL elements that either attract or repulse them in the choice of an ODL mode.

PREFERRED FUTURE STUDY MODE

Upon graduation from a conventional mode, the majority, 88%, preferred continuing their studies through e-learning. Their preferred mode of instruction is that which incorporates a combination of e-learning and traditional face-to-face instruction. This is the same mode recommended by 71% of the respondents for

adoption by the university. The stand-alone print-based ODL delivery mode is the least favored option. The blended approach concurs with KENET (2013) survey. The reasons the respondents gave for recommending this blended mode for adoption by Egerton University are summarized below.

1. Pure e-learning is inconvenient to some students, but blended mode is more convenient to all.
2. E-learning component is available any-time (24 hours).
3. Less expensive in terms of fees, accommodation and travel cost.
4. The two methods combined supplement one another:
 - Face-to-face provides the learner with opportunity for clarification of issues/things that may not be clear on e-learning mode.
 - Both address different needs for different learners.
 - Fits everyone's needs.
 - E-learning works for some learning activities and face to face takes care of practical/field experiment and step by step illustration or demonstration or calculation. That is, where a course has a practical component or the content is complex.
 - Face-to-face component/session brings back one from village to campus life-reconnection with campus life.
 - Caters for both the young who prefer traditional face-to-face mode and the working class who favor e-learning mode.
 - Appropriate for slow and fast learners.
5. E-learning makes learning enjoyable and gives up-to-date information.
6. Gives a chance to those involved elsewhere and wish to further their studies.
7. Good for those from some parts of the country without Internet connectivity.
8. E-learning is more efficient for post-graduate studies while the traditional learning is more convenient for undergraduate studies. That is, e-learning is for mature learners who know what they want.
9. Traditional mode alone is time consuming. Traditional mode alone is slow and wasteful.
10. E-learning enhances acquisition of technological skills.
11. Efficiency in time saving with respect to coverage of the content and on resources.
12. E-learning component is placeless and timeless/time-friendly learning.
13. Accountable with respect to tracking learners learning progress.
14. Enhances cultural integration and coexistence.
15. Reduces transitional barriers/borderless.
16. Boosts Egerton University's vision of being a world class university.
17. Global trend. The world is going digital.
18. Egerton is still behind in e-learning.
19. Strike-free. Time is wasted in the institution when lecturers are on strike.

The respondents' recommendations for Egerton University's needs to adopt blended learning reflect several themes. First, these recommendations provide the ground for drawing strategies that an entrant to e-learning environment like Egerton University should take into account. Second, the findings from the present study support previous research that has reported the benefits of e-learning and blended learning (Concannon et al., 2005; Kenya Education Network, 2013; Talheimer, 2017). A number of the reported benefits of e-learning and blended learning mode for learners given in Table 2 are that the learners have the benefits of both real physical contacts with their tutors and

the virtual access to learning materials anywhere and anytime.

RECOMMENDATION TO OTHERS

Ones recommendation to a friend or a family member for a course or a program through a specific mode is a reflection and an indicator of his/her positive preference. On a binary choice of 1 = Yes and 2 = No to the question: "Would you recommend a friend or relative to study through any mode of distance learning?," 86% of the respondents responded in affirmative, the recommendations differed on the programs as follows: undergraduate programs 21%, postgraduate programs 66%. This differential preference may be age related, with undergraduate programs attracting younger learners who may also require guidance and mentoring from tutors, while learning by mature learners is intrinsically motivated (Knowles, 1984).

ENABLERS OF PREFERRED MODE

Enablers are those factors that are seen as facilitating preference for e-learning mode of study. These were captured by responses to a question: "What will determine your future choice of your preferred mode of study? The reasons are categorized into four categories according the locus of control, namely:

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- Course duration;
- quality of course content;
- online study/learning mode;
- availability of course/ learning materials/ instructional method in use and accessibility; and
- Internet availability/accessibility to mode of learning/e-learning.

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- Undergraduate graduation grade;
- pleasure of studying and working;

- life commitments/self-determination/ family roles;
- learner's interest/mastery/program of interest;
- place of residence/work and distance to the university;
- personnel resources/financial status/ cost; and
- technological tools such as laptops, smartphone.

WORK-RELATED FACTORS

- Availability of time from work and type of occupation/ convenience; and
- kind of business/work/activity involved in.

ODL ATTRACTION AND REPULSIVE FACTORS

In this item, respondents rated on a 4-point Likert scale the reasons they perceived as attracting them to ODL mode and those that they perceived as repulsing them from choosing ODL as their preferred mode of study for further studies and professional development. The rating was based on key elements of ODL that are found in the literature and national and institutional policies. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the levels of attraction and repulsion of ODL elements. DL refers to distance learning.

Interestingly, three factors that stood out to be attracting the respondents to ODL mode are cost of studying, the fact that ODL is technology driven and ODL is a mature-aged friendly mode. Surprisingly, the fact that distance learning is recognized by the Commission for University Education (CUE) and being taught by the same lecturers as those of a conventional stream are not considered as the pulling factors toward choosing ODL mode of study in the future. These findings may be interpreted in view of the courses and the programs they intend to pursue.

The three factors that were identified as repulsive to pursuing studies through ODEL are the heavy dependency of ODEL

Table 1. Level of Attraction to ODL

ODL Elements	1 = Least Reason	2 = Somehow the Reason	3 = Secondary Reason	4 = Primary Reason
DL is recognized by Commission for University Education.	24 (20%)	10 (8%)	14 (12%)	22 (19%)
DL is relatively less expensive.	10 (8%)	13 (11%)	19 (16%)	27 (23%)
DL is remotely taught by same university lecturers.	14 (12%)	22 (19%)	15 (13%)	12 (10%)
DL is technology assisted and driven.	9 (8%)	13 (11%)	16 (13%)	32 (27%)
DL is mature-aged friendly mode.	13 (11%)	10 (8%)	13 (11%)	26 (22%)

Table 2. Levels of Repulsion to ODL

ODL Elements	1 = Least Reason	2 = Somehow the Reason	3 = Secondary Reason	4 = Primary Reason
DL is a relatively new graduation pathway in Kenya.	27 (23%)	10 (8%)	16 (13%)	19 (16%)
DL is too technology dependent.	14 (12%)	19 (16%)	12 (10%)	25 (21%)
DL is too demanding and rigorous to a learner.	18 (15%)	12 (10%)	19 (16%)	13 (11%)
DL is low in a structured time for study.	18 (15%)	14 (12%)	17 (14%)	11 (9%)
DL is unfamiliar mode for graduates of traditional mode	22 (19%)	12 (10%)	12 (10%)	22 (19%)

on technology, unfamiliarity of ODEL to graduates of conventional stream, and high demands of distance learning on a learner. Technology is reflected as both as an attraction and repulsion factor. This component may be in reference to such factors as poor power and Internet connectivity in some locations in the country where learners may find themselves.

This study was instigated by the position taken by students in one Egerton University campus, Nairobi campus, which was due for closure due to its nonsustainability as a conventional campus. The overall finding was that Njoro campus students did not hold the same views on ODL as the Nairobi campus students as indicated by:

- their willingness to further their studies and professional development through ODL;

- recommendation to others to study through ODL; and
- recommendations to Egerton University to adopt blended learning mode.

The Nairobi campus students' opposition to e-learning may have been a reactionary position to the university's decision to relocate them to Njoro campus rather than their true cognition about ODL mode of learning.

LIMITATIONS

First, the use of volunteers poses limits of this research approach: a weak level of external validity. Second, because the researcher was a class lecturer for the two groups that participated in the study, the results may have been influenced to some extent by the "Hawthorne effect." Third,

in addition, this study was conducted in one faculty, the Faculty of Education, and in one university, Egerton University. The university has 10 faculties and Egerton University is a new entrant to the e-learning mode of teaching and learning. Again, this is a situation where external validity is compromised and hence the findings of this research are not generalizable to other faculties and institutions.

Fourth, there is slight difference in situation between Njoro, the study sample group, and Nairobi campus students. In the case of the Nairobi situation, students had the choice of either continuing with what they are familiar with or being forced to the e-learning situation. With students' power, they knew they can change the situation in their favor. They had to publicly deny the benefits of e-learning to achieve their goal of ensuring that the campus is not closed down by the administration. Njoro students were looking into the future and that future might have limited or no options for them.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this study was to find out the preferred future mode of learning of graduates of a conventional mode of learning. The objective of the study was twofold: (a) to identify the aspects of distance learning the on-campus students perceive as attractive and (b) the aspects of distance learning do they perceive as repulsive. While the traditional method of face to face remains dominant at Egerton University (KENET, 2013), as the university becomes a dual-mode institution, it has adopted e-learning in delivering education to a small population of off-campus students. This new approach is yet to be applied to on-campus students as supplementary and complementary to the conventional mode. The principle of familiarity and cognitive dissonance theory would have predicted that those who have been exposed to the conventional mode of learning would prefer

to continue with that approach upon graduation. This study was anchored on these two paradigms. However, this may be an unrealistic position, given the prevailing conditions in the world of work and multiplicity of roles and responsibilities one gets upon graduation. In addition, the diminishing postgraduate opportunities for full-time sponsored study in conventional institutions are becoming a reality, and hence those who seek further studies are forced to seek alternative modes of study. In this respect, the well-established concept of "full-time part-time student" in developed countries is taking root in developing countries.

The results of the study point to the fact that upon graduation from conventional set up, the graduates prefer to continue their further studies and professional development through distance learning, preferably e-learning. It is recommended that Egerton University diversifies a process it has already started, the delivery of instruction through adoption of "blended learning." The study has implications for institutional planning strategies for e-learning, as the indications are that the market forces driving learners to ODL are unlikely to change in the near future. Some of the views expressed by the sampled students for making ODL their preferred study mode have direct implications on e-content development, technology choice, and institutional preparedness. There is one major limitation of this study. The sample was drawn from undergraduate bachelor of education and diploma students, and this may not be a representative of the entire student population in other programs such as law, humanities, science, natural resources, health science, agriculture, commerce, and veterinary medicine.

Finally, much more research will be needed on students' self-reported use of e-books and e-journals in the library. These may be counterchecked with log-ins in the library. The question is: what do students

actually search while in the library? This is in view of the general public perception that the current students are not serious users of library resources. This study shows that conventional learners favor ODL for their future studies. Assuming that the fourth limitation stated above brought about this choice, and suppose a condition favorable to conventional mode is created, will ODL still remains their favorable option? In this context, a second study may look at a scenario where the experimenter provides a situation that creates a dilemma in making a choice between ODL and conventional mode of learning. Such an experiment may consider:

Control group being those who undertook their undergraduate studies through ODL and being put in a situation of making a choice between continuing with ODL mode at postgraduate level or changing to conventional mode.

Experimental group being those who undertook their undergraduate studies through conventional mode and being presented with a situation where “a scholarship” is being offered to undertake studies through either ODL or conventional mode.

From cognitive dissonance theory perspective, the question is, “does the offer of scholarship, as a condition or a dilemma that creates a conflict in cognition, make a difference on the choice of the mode of study?”

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