

## Learners' self efficacy and academic performance of distance learning students in selected Kenyan public universities.

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### Abstract

Academic performance of distance learning students has been of concern to researchers. Several researches done since 1920s in developed countries have revealed that there is no significant difference in performance between distance learning students and conventional students. In Kenya, however, the result findings have been inconsistent. The objective of this study was to establish the moderating influence of learners' self efficacy on the relationship between institutional factors and academic performance of distance learning students. The study is based on pragmatism due to its focus on objectivity and use of scientific methods. Mixed methods of research were used. The target population consisted of 847 Bachelor of Education (Arts) distance learning students, 149 lecturers teaching distance learning students and 2 administrators in charge of distance learning programmes. The research instruments consisted of questionnaires, interview guides, document analysis and the instrument for measuring academic performance. The findings indicated that the moderating influence of learners' self efficacy on the relationship between institutional factors and academic performance was statistically significant.

**Key words:** Distance learning students, learners' self efficacy, academic performance

### Introduction

Globally, the increase in population, the rapid growth in technology and the benefits which accrue to both the individual and the society as a result of investment in education, have resulted to rapid adoption of the distance learning mode of study. Consequently, researchers have been interested in studying variables contributing to academic performance. Bandura (2001) explained that environmental factors and personal factors contribute to the learner's behavior. In a university, institutional factors constitute the environment of the learners. Some of the key institutional factors include the learner support system, curriculum resources and instructional techniques. The learner support system is a key determinant of effectiveness of distance learning mode of study (Hwang, Yang & Kim, 2010; Global Watch Missions, 2006). Curriculum resources also influence academic performance of students (Jagero, Adetoro & Adekunle, 2013; Musau & Migosi, 2013). Students' perception of instructional techniques as worthwhile, influence their academic performance Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Theall & Franklin, 1990). Self efficacy is a personal characteristic which influences academic performance of a student (Zajacova, Lynch & Espenshade, 2005; Johan, Valcke & Cai, 2009)

Academic performance is one of the key determinants of quality of education offered in institutions (Kyoshaba, 2009). Student academic performance ultimately impacts on career choice, personal income, individual's well-being, opportunities for better life and nature of participation in community life (Benford & Gess-Newsome, 2006; Battle & Lewis, 2002). Several years of research in developed countries have consistently revealed that there is no significant difference in performance between distance learning students and conventional students (Russell, 2002; Gallagher, Dobrosielski-Vergona, Wingard & Williams, 2005; Crowley et al, 1999). In Kenya, however, the results have been inconsistent (Mboroki, 2007; Mutonga, 2011; Wambugu, 2012). The objective of this study was to establish the moderating influence of learners' self efficacy on the relationship between institutional factors and academic performance of distance learning students in selected Kenyan public universities.

## Methodology

The philosophical foundation of this study is based on an overlap of three schools of thought; constructivism, social cognitive and system's theories. The three theories emphasize the need to structure institutional factors so well that the expected learning outcomes are achieved. The research paradigm of this study is pragmatism due to its emphasizes on the need for objectivity and use of scientific methods in research. This study adopted ex post facto design (Orodho 2005). In this study the independent variables were library resources and instructional materials. The dependent variable was the cumulative mean score of Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year distance learning students. The study was conducted in the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University. The study further adopted a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques (mixed –method research techniques) which supplement each other. (Kothari, 2004).The target consisted of 847 Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year distance learning students, 149 lecturers who teach Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year distance learning students and 2 administrators in charge of distance learning programmes from the selected Kenyan public universities. The sample size from the selected Kenyan public universities consisted of 475 Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year distance learning students, 125 lecturers teaching Bachelor of Education (Arts) third year distance learning students and 2 administrators in charge of distance learning programmes. In this study, questionnaires, interviews guides, document analysis and the document for measuring academic performance were used.

## Results

The response rate was above 50% from all the categories of respondents which was considered significant for the study

### Response rate.

Item	Category of respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Filled Questionnaires and returned- Questionnaires Not Returned	Lecturers	73	58.4%
	Lecturers	52	41.6%
	Total	125	100
Filled Questionnaires and returned	Bachelor of Education ( Arts) third year Distance Learning Students	305	64.2%
	Questionnaires Not Returned	Bachelor of Education ( Arts) third year Distance Learning Students	170
	Total	475	100
Interviews Conducted	Administrators	2	100%

### Hypothesis: Learners Self-Efficacy does not moderate the Relationship between Institutional Factors and Academic Performance

The objective of the study was to establish the moderating influence of learners' self-efficacy on the relationship between institutional factors and academic performance of distance learning students in selected Kenyan public universities. The hypothesis predicted that learners' self-efficacy does not moderate the relationship between institutional factors and academic performance. To establish the moderating influence of learners' self-efficacy on the relationship between institutional factors (learner support system, curriculum materials and instructional techniques) and academic performance of distance learners in selected Kenyan public universities, measures of learner support system, curriculum materials, instructional techniques, self-efficacy and academic performance were collapsed in order to establish their composite indices.

The moderating effect of learner's self-efficacy on the relationship between institutional factors and academic performance of distance learners in selected Kenyan public universities was tested. Learners' self-efficacy was introduced as a moderating variable to the relationship between institutional factors (learner support system, curriculum resources and instructional techniques) and academic performance of distance learners in selected Kenyan public universities. Stepwise regression analysis was used to establish the moderating effect of learners' self-efficacy on the relationship between institutional factors and academic performance of distance learners in selected Kenyan public universities.

The research findings revealed that learners' self-efficacy produces a statistically significant effect when introduced as a moderating variable to the relationship between institutional factors and academic performance of distance learners in selected Kenyan public universities. This is explained by an increase in  $R^2$  from 0.100 to 0.177. This implies that the academic performance of distance learners in selected Kenyan public universities increases from 10.0 % to 17.7% in the presence of learners' self-efficacy as a moderating variable.

### **Learners Self-Efficacy does not Moderate the Relationship between Institutional Factors and Academic Performance**

Model	$\beta^*$	$R^2$	p-value	F-value
Direct relationship	0.316	0.100	0.000	33.65
Moderating relationship	0.495	0.177	0.000	46.684

Results presented show that introducing learners' self-efficacy on the relationship between institutional factors and academic performance of distance learners in selected Kenyan public universities produces a statistically significant effect. This is explained  $p < 0.05$  thus rejection of hypothesis as stated.

The findings of the study showed that the moderating variable of self-efficacy had a positive significant influence on the relationship between institutional factors and distance learning students' academic performance. This implies that the selected Kenyan public universities should put mechanisms in place to enhance the self efficacy of the students.

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