

# The Quest for Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning Practice in Tanzania

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**Abstract:** *Open and Distance Learning rather than conventional learning, commands a higher potential in engendering a knowledgeable society and related socio-economic transformation benefits. Using desktop survey methods, the study has identified ODL providers in the country, assessed the scope of programmes being offered, performance, and the nature of quality assurance mechanisms in place. It was found that in spite of the liberalisation of educational delivery in Tanzania, ODL provision is still carried out mostly by public institutions like Moshi University College of Cooperative and Business Studies (MUCCOBS), Institute of Adult Education (IAE), The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) and the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM). The potential of these and other ODL providers in the country to promote mass access to quality education at all levels of the education system has hardly been tapped due to policy and resource limitations.*

*Although each institution has put in place internal quality assurance mechanisms and structures for peer review, mechanism for accreditation by independent and competent ODL organisation is yet to be put in place. Lack of a National ODL Policy or even a pressure group to provide guidance on the procedures for putting in place and managing quality structures effectively, account for this significant lacuna in ODL practice in Tanzania. Besides examining the implication of this situation, the paper proposes measures to redress it.*

**Keywords:** Quality Assurance, Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

## INTRODUCTION

Distance education has existed in several forms in Tanzania, since the post – World War II period. For example, immediately after the War, correspondence courses were introduced by foreign commercial correspondence institutions in school education, business and management studies. After the attainment of independence in 1961, the Government introduced school radio programmes to supplement school teaching. The programmes were very popular during the 1960s and 1970s. Virtually, every primary and secondary school in the country had a radio set, and students had to spend at least several hours per week listening to appropriate programmes on the radio (Mattee, 1994). During the same period, the Government successfully implemented radio study group campaigns on various themes (Hall, 1978). The campaigns demonstrated beyond doubt the potential of radio as a powerful medium for reaching a wide mass of the people within a short time and without much investment in infrastructure. Small wonder, when the former Cooperative College launched its distance education courses in cooperative management and farming in 1965, it blended correspondence materials offered to learners with radio broadcasts.

Early in the 1970s, the government established the National Correspondence Institution (NCI) within the Institute of Adult Education, with the main purpose of providing continuing education opportunities to the neo-literates. The specific objectives of the NCI included to equip Tanzanians with knowledge and skills to fill jobs which meet the manpower needs of the country; to help Tanzanians understand the nation's policies, and thus participate more fully in carrying out national policies and programmes and to supplement efforts being made by leaders and adult educators in various departments of government to bring about economic and social development in the rural areas (Ntirukigwa, 1986). The major thrust of NCI programmes was in mass, secondary and professional education courses. This helped those with primary-level education to attain secondary level education (as a pre-requisite for professional training), and those with secondary-level education to obtain professional qualifications, particularly in the areas of public and business administration as well as in the teaching profession. The courses were targeted at adults mainly in rural areas with literacy but limited formal education (Dodds, 1996).

Other notable distance education programmes in Tanzania include the primary distance teacher training programme which was launched in the 1970s to supply teachers to meet the needs of the Universal Primary Education programme. The conventional teacher training colleges could not help solve the problem of teacher shortage, while the demand for teachers increased with the introduction of Universal Primary Education (Chale, 1992). Since then, the Ministry of Education has been collaborating with the Institute of Adult Education in organizing in-service teacher training programmes by distance learning methods. The African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF) programme, was established in the 1970s, to provide public education in health using distance learning methods, in addition to its flying doctor service (Chale, 1995). The Health and Sanitation through Water health education project (HESAWA) study group programme was launched in 1986. The target audience consisted of adults in rural communities in Tanzania's lake region. Distance education methods employed included audio-cassettes, flip-charts, participants' illustrated books, study groups and so on (Ibidem; Dodds, 1996). The efforts of the Government in providing open and distance learning opportunities to Tanzanians, reached their climax when The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) was established by Act No.17 of 1992 and became operational in 1993. Its first students were registered in January 1994. Some of the students managed to complete successfully non – degree and even undergraduate studies and were awarded their certificates at the OUT's maiden graduation ceremony held on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1999. These institutional examples demonstrate that ODL is well established in Tanzania. Furthermore, ODL provision has grown during the last 50 years in numbers of projects/institutions, programmes and students. This paper attempts to review relevant aspects of quality assurance in ODL provision in Tanzania. We start by examining the concept of quality assurance.

## **CONCEPT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE**

"Quality... you know what it is, yet you don't know what it is. But that's self-contradictory. But some things are better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what the quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes poof! There's nothing to talk about. But if you can't say what Quality is, how do we know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes it doesn't exist at all. But for practical purposes it really does exist. What else are the grades based on? Why would people pay fortunes for some things and throw others in the trash pile? Obviously some things are better than others... but what is the extent of 'betterness'? So

round and round you go, spinning mental wheels and nowhere to finding any place to get traction. What the hell is Quality? What is it?" (Pirsig, 1974)

The quote from Pirsig shows that there is no general consensus on the concept of quality. An objective definition of quality does not exist, because quality is, just like beauty, it is in the eyes of the beholder. Green (1994) makes a distinction between:

- *Quality as excellence*: The emphasis is on high-level standards.
- *Quality as fitness for purpose*: Achievement of formulated goals. It concerns the quality of the processes. However, this quality approach does not assure achievement of the threshold quality, particularly where an institution sets its goals too low, in order to easily achieve them. In this context, we have to discuss concurrently the fitness *for* purpose and the fitness *of* purpose.
- *Quality as a threshold*: In this view, quality is seen as meeting threshold requirements. This quality concept often forms the basis for accreditation decisions. Setting threshold standards might also hinder innovations. Compliance with the threshold standards does not stimulate innovations.
- *Quality as added value*: This concept emphasises what happens to the students. Education is about doing something to the student. Quality means the value added to the student during education and training. It is the method of formulating learning outcomes and realising the outcomes in the graduates. The basic quality question is: "What has he/she learnt?"
- *Quality as value for money*: This quality concept has its focus on efficiency. It measures outputs against inputs. It is often a concept supported by governments. The concept is connected with accountability.
- *Satisfaction of the client*: With the rise of the concept of the "student as a consumer", quality is described as: "something has quality when it meets the expectations of the consumer; quality is the satisfaction of the client".

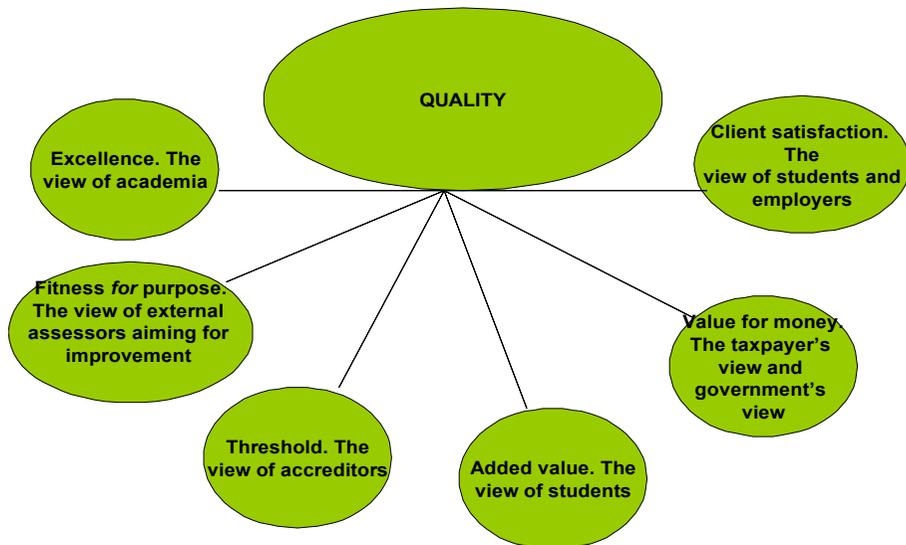


Figure 1: Different views of quality

In this paper, quality is conceived within this broad context. On the other hand, quality assurance has been defined as a programme for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of a project, service or facility to ensure that standards of quality are being met (Gast, 2009).

Some relevant features of quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation include:

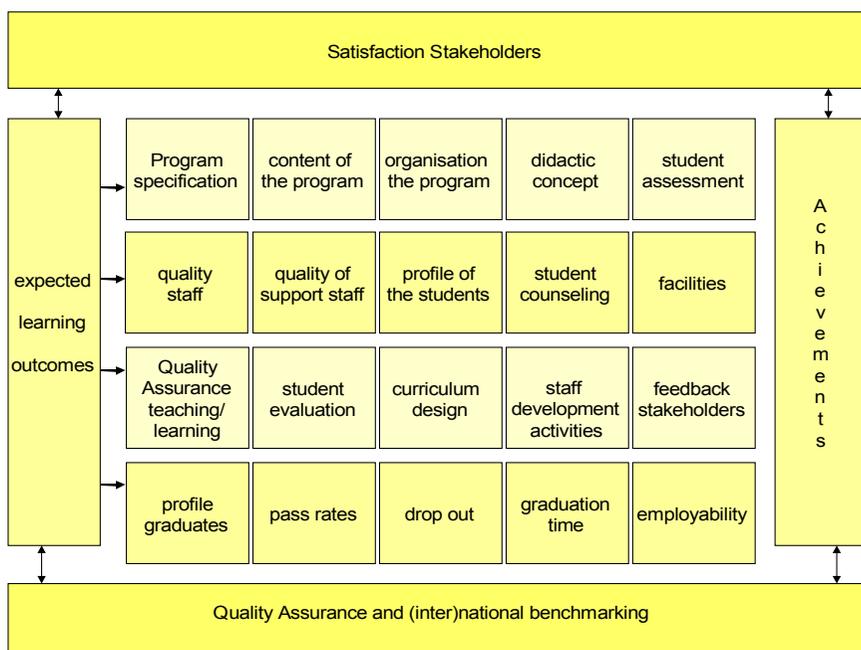
- Setting institutional mission and vision;
- Assessment of the pursuit and achievement of institutional mission and vision;
- Focus on internal processes, systems and structures (*Ibidem*).

Within the specific context of ODL, quality is defined as fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation capabilities (Gandhe, 2009). Exceptional high standards, perfection and consistency in the three criteria, are the basis of a quality ODL system. Meanwhile, a quality ODL system should be fit for pursuing and realizing educational and training goals capable of:

- Promoting socio-economic transformation of the society.
- Empowering individual learners with appropriate knowledge, skills and values for a meaningful and gainful life.
- Creating, preserving and transmitting useful knowledge and skills from one generation to another.

Given that other goals for education and training can be subsumed under the over-arching goal of socio-economic transformation, in the context of developing countries, the following features should be the target of the process of socio-economic transformation through ODL mediated education and training programmes (Thirlwall, 2009: 66 – 67):

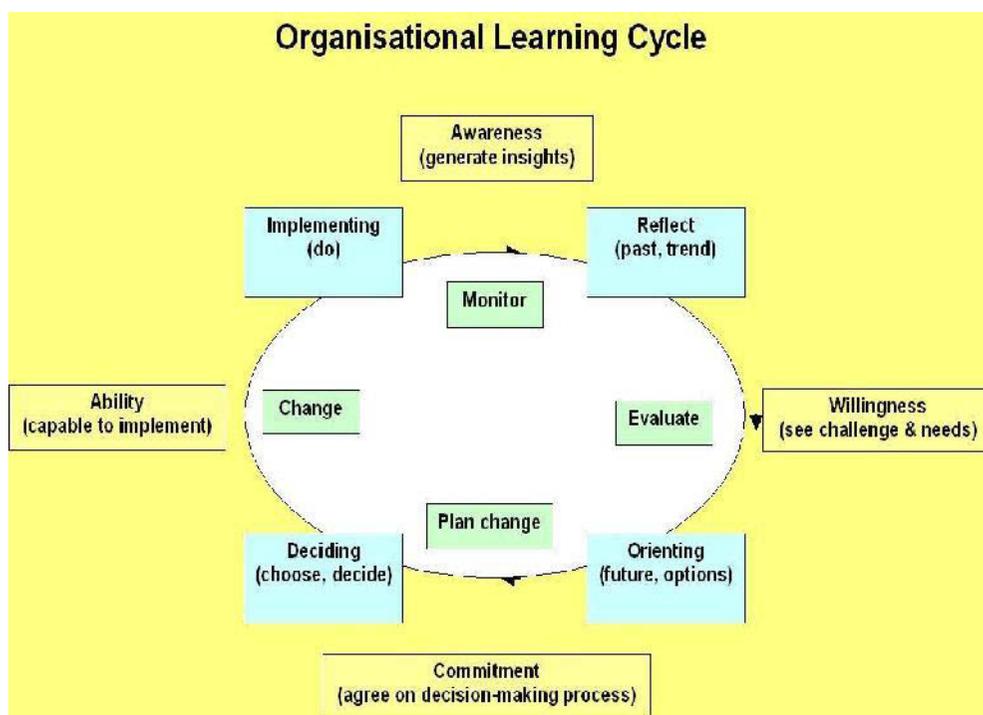
- Economies dominated by agriculture, petty services and trading
- Low level capital accumulation
- Population growth rate exceeding economic growth rate
- Exports dominated by primary commodities
- The “curse” of natural resources
- Weak institutional structures.



**Figure 2: Learning process**  
**Source: Gast, 2009**

Areas of quality concern in ODL include curriculum design, content and organisation; teaching, learning and assessment; student progression and assessment, and student support and guidance (Gandhe, *op.cit*). Besides areas of quality concern, assessment of quality in education in general and ODL in particular, has a three-pronged approach – internal quality assurance mechanism, evaluation by peers and accreditation by an independent and competent organization. Any ODL institution is expected to adhere to this comprehensive approach in its quality assurance process (*Ibidem*). Furthermore, while completion rates, graduation rates, cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness, skill development and post-guidance performance constitute the traditional measures of success in education, the production of independent and self-directed learners is an additional, if not a critical criterion of quality in ODL (Babygeya, 2009). To achieve set objectives and meet stakeholders’ satisfaction, the learning process has to be designed in a manner in which inputs, process and outputs are based on international as well as national quality assurance benchmarks and well elaborated learning outcomes, as illustrated in the model (Figure 2).

Furthermore, for the learning to be effective and in order to create maximum long-term impact in activities, the learning process has to be contextualised within the organisational learning circle as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Organisational Learning Cycle Model**  
**Source: Gast, 2009**

On the basis of the organizational learning cycle, a relevant learning process in ODL has to be based on a deliberate desire for change. Learners should be assisted to acquire awareness for change through insights and critical reflection of past trends; willingness to change after appreciating underlying challenges and needs; correct orientation on desirable future options, in order to choose/decide for change. Furthermore, the learning process has to capacitate learners with knowledge, skills and values to implement changes successfully. Besides these virtues, learning processes organized within the context of the organizational learning cycle, mitigate effectively the adverse hallmarks of ODL (Komba, 2007):

- (i) Misinformation, low quality provision, bogus institutions, “diploma mills” and qualifications of limited validity.
- (ii) Non-transferability of credits between institutions within and among countries.
- (iii) Lack of international validity and portability of qualifications earned through ODL programmes.
- (iv) Lack of transparency, coherence and fairness of procedures used for recognition of qualifications earned through ODL programmes.

Learning processes organized within the context of the organizational learning cycle, enable ODL institutions, quality assurance and accreditation agencies, qualification recognition and credential evaluation agencies, advisory and information centres, professional bodies as well as governments arrive at policies which will protect learners from the foregoing practices. Below, we examine the need for ODL programmes in Tanzania.

### **THE NEED FOR ODL PROGRAMMES IN TANZANIA**

Tanzania developed its first comprehensive education and training policy (ETP) in 1995 after three decades of independence (URT, 1995). The policy encompasses the entire education sector including the Non-Formal Education (NFE) sub-sector. The policy stipulates that NFE constitutes Informal and Adult Education covering literacy, post literacy, continuing education and higher education. Furthermore, the policy provides for NFE to be recognized, promoted, strengthened, coordinated and integrated with formal education and training systems. Certainly, this arrangement provides for a conducive environment for every Tanzanian citizen to access education as a constitutional basic right as stipulated in Article XI (2): “Everyone has the right to self education and every citizen should be free to pursue education in every field of his/her choice up to the highest level of his/her merit and ability” (URT, 1984).

Contemporary Tanzania’s need for ODL programmes is a result of government’s aim to improve educational access, equity and equality and to create a lifelong learning population. The adoption of policy strategies like Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education For All (EFA), National Development Vision 2025; Poverty Alleviation Strategy, 2002; National Strategy for Growth and Poverty Reduction (NSGPR I & II); Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP); and a number of sector frameworks such as Education and Training Policy (ETP) 1995; Higher Education Policy; Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP, 1999); etc., testify to this commitment. The current education system and economic structures are obviously not adequate for they have a tendency of marginalizing vulnerable segments of the population, particularly women, rural dwellers, out of school youth, the unemployed, pastoralists, etc (SADC, 2007). In the light of the foregoing, a number of established public and private institutions offer ODL programmes in the country, as discussed below.

### **Institute of Adult Education (IAE)**

One among the roles of the Institute of Adult Education (IAE, 1975), stipulated in its establishment Act No.12 is to provide correspondence education under the Distance Education Department (DED) (previously known as National Correspondence Institution (NCI). The economic crisis of the 1980s as well as the decision to set up OUT in 1992 derailed the implementation of the recommendation of the Makwetta Commission to upgrade NCI into an autonomous National Institute of Distance Education. Moreover, the Fourth Schedule (Section 64), of Act No. 17 of 1992, provided for the NCI to constitute the nucleus of the Institute of Continuing Education (ICE), of OUT. However, the provision was never implemented. Eventually, it was deleted by Act No. 3 of 1995 (OUT, 2001: 242).

As NCI, the IAE's DED has been providing foundation and continuing education courses since 1972. The courses target primary school leavers, dropouts and workers who want to upgrade their levels of education and junior secondary school leavers preparing for "A" level National Examinations. The programmes offered are as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: ODL Programmes and Courses Offered by IAE – DED: 1972 – 2005**

S/N	Programmes	Courses	Target Group	Level
1	Mas Education/ Foundation courses	Basic Arithmetic, English, Home, Economics, Bookkeeping, Civics and Agriculture.	Primary Education dropouts and post literacy level six graduates	Elementary
2	Secondary Education	Standard Seven <b>modules:</b> Mathematics, English, History, Civics, Geography, Biology and Kiswahili	Level 1 – 2 equivalent to "O" level Secondary Education	National Secondary Education Certificate
3	Professional/ Vocational courses	Man in organization, Production Management labour law, Book-keeping and elementary auditing	Secondary education school leavers or workers	Certificate
4	Teacher Education upgrading courses	Secondary education and teaching methodology	Grade "C" and "B" teachers wishing to raise level of education or acquire entry qualifications for teacher grade "A" education course	Grade A Teacher certificate course
5.	Evening programme	Open schooling	Post primary students	"O" Level and "A" level examination certificate.

*Source:* IAE, 2009

The Institute's special programme for training teachers for UPE conducted from 1976 to 1978 was able to enroll 45,596 out of which 36,297 (79.6%) completed the course and were awarded Teacher Grade "C" certificates. Similarly, 16,777 students were enrolled in upgrading courses between 1980 and 1987, whereby 6,798 (40.52%) completed the course. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training continued to provide upgrading courses to C/B teachers who are teaching in primary schools. The in-service courses upgrade these groups of teachers to Grade III A level enabling them to acquire higher level of knowledge and skills for better performance in their career (Katoba and Kimathy, 2005).

The IAE has enrolled a total of 333,857 students in various correspondence courses since the inception of its distance learning programme in 1972. The total number of Students' enrolment for Secondary education stage I and II in the last five years from 2004 to June, 2009 is 39,686 (Mahai, *et a.l, op.cit*).

### **The Tanzania Global Development Learning Centre (TGDLC)**

The Tanzania Global Development Learning Centre (TGDLC) is one of the Institutions in the country with modern IT equipment. It is a government Institution and member of World Bank Initiative - Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) ([www.gdln.org](http://www.gdln.org)). TGDLC forms part of over 120 existing knowledge sharing hubs on six continents under GDLN.

The Centre provides for global dialogues, video conference courses, online courses, face to face and blended courses. These courses are organized in collaboration with the government and other institutions within and outside the country (TGDLC, 2008).



**Figure 4: A class in session at TGDLC.**

Source [www.gdln.org](http://www.gdln.org))

As indicated in the Table 2, TGDLC offers within and outside the country, high profile short courses mostly for executives, strictly on commercial terms.

### **Moshi University College of Co - operative and Business Studies (MUCCOBS)**

It is the oldest training institution in Tanzania, with more than 50 years of teaching experience in the fields of co-operative accounting, co-operative management and rural development. MUCCOBS came into being as a result of upgrading the former Cooperative College into a Constituent College of Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) in May 2004. Starting as a Commercial College of a Regional Cooperative Union after the Second World War, the College was upgraded into a National Cooperative College in 1963. With 18 regional centres scattered all over the country, the College served as a training institution for the co-operative movement and staff of the Ministry responsible for co-operative development.

**Table 2: TGDLC Ongoing Courses**

<b>Course</b>	<b>Dates/Venue</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>Fee</b>
Strategic Negotiations for Senior Managers	9th – 13th May, 2011; IFM, Dar es Salaam	Executive Assistants	TZS. 550,000
Executive Assistants Skills Development Advanced	16 <sup>th</sup> - 20th May, 2011; IFM, Dar es Salaam	Executive Assistants	TZS 720,000
Management and Leadership Skills Workshop	23rd - 27th May 2011; Dubai	Leaders	USD 4,500
Transformational Leadership for Women’s Empowerment Course (TLWE)	13 <sup>th</sup> - 17 June and 2 <sup>nd</sup> intake 20th - 24th June, 2011), Naura Springs Hotel, Arusha	Women Leaders	TZS. 550,000
Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)	28 June - 1st July 2011;	Executive Assistants	TZS 620,000
Microfinance Training of Trainers (MFTOT): A blended Learning Course;	December 2010 – April, 2011;	“	USD 50
Managing the 21st Century LGA;	27 <sup>th</sup> June -1 <sup>st</sup> July, 2011;	“	Fees: Tzs. 550,000/=
Fraud, Investigation and Prevention;	20 <sup>th</sup> -24th June, 2011;	“	Tzs. 550,000/=
Combating Corruption in the Public Sector	June 27-29, 2011	“	Tzs. 980,000/=
Improving Individual Performance: Benchmarking against top performing organizations		Executive Assistants	Tzs. 980,000/=

**Source:** [www.tgdlc.go.tz](http://www.tgdlc.go.tz)

The Cooperative College released its earliest courses – Principles of Cooperatism, Elementary Book-keeping and Management of Cooperative Societies, in 1965. All employees of primary cooperative societies as well as trainee cooperative inspectors were required to study courses offered by the Cooperative Education Centre by correspondence. Learners were advised to form study circles. In a study circle, a learner was given the opportunity to participate in the studies with other circle members but in the end he submitted personal solutions to assignments in the study units. Between 1965 and 1986, a total of 39,381 learners were enrolled in the study circles. Later on, the CEC introduced the

system of study groups supplemented by radio broadcasts. The study groups were forums for radio listening and discussion. Furthermore, the study groups were designed to assist semi-literate and illiterate learners to participate effectively in studies by contributing ideas and exchanging experiences with other group members. In a study group, members were required to write assignments and forward answers for correction as a group.

The first CEC programme was aired by the National Radio Channel on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1967. Unlike previous educational radio broadcasts, CEC radio programmes were well integrated with the corresponding study materials. The CEC distributed study units to all study groups with a timetable showing dates, time and the lesson to be covered by each radio broadcast. The CEC can rightly be regarded as the country's first distance education institution.

As indicated in Table 3, presently among a total of 22 programmes being offered by the College, only one programme is offered by distance learning. This shows that the former CEC was not able to transmit its entire package of distance learning programmes to MUCCOBS.

**Table 3: MUCCOBS Programmes**

<b>POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA PROGRAMMES</b>	
Postgraduate Diploma in Cooperative Business Management (PGD-CBM)	Fulltime One Year (Two Semesters) Pre – service and In – service Personnel
Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting and Finance (PGD-AF)	Fulltime One Year (Two Semesters) Pre – service and In – service Personnel
Postgraduate Diploma in Community Development (PGD-CD)	Fulltime One Year (Two Semesters) Pre – service and In – service Personnel
Postgraduate Diploma in Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies Management (PGD-SACCOS MGT)	Fulltime One Year (Two Semesters) Pre – service and In – service Personnel
<b>EVENING POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES</b>	
Postgraduate Diploma in Cooperative Business Management (PGD-CBM)	One and a half year – Pre – service and In – service Personnel, Moshi Campus only
Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting and Finance (PGD-AF)	One and a half year – Pre – service and In – service Personnel, Moshi Campus only
Postgraduate Diploma in Community Development (PGD-CD)	One and a half year – Pre – service and In – service Personnel, Moshi Campus only
Postgraduate Diploma in Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies Management (PGD-SACCOS MGT)	One and a half year – Pre – service and In – service Personnel, Moshi Campus only
<b>DISTANCE LEARNING POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME</b>	
Postgraduate Diploma in Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies Management (PGD-SACCOS MGT)	One and a half year distance learning

<b>DEGREE PROGRAMMES</b>	
Bachelor of Arts in Community Economic Development (BA-CED)	Three-year programme (six semesters) Pre-service and In-service personnel.
Bachelor of Arts in Accounting and Finance (BA-AF)	Three-year programme (six semesters) Pre-service and In-service personnel.
Bachelor of Arts in Cooperative Management and Accounting (BA-CMA)	Three-year programme (six semesters) Pre-service and In-service personnel.
Bachelor of Arts in Procurement and Supply Management (BA-PSM)	Three-year programme (six semesters) Pre-service and In-service personnel.
<b>DIPLOMA PROGRAMME</b>	
Diploma in Cooperative Management and Accounting (DCMA)	Two year programme (four semesters) Pre-service and In-service personnel.
<b>CERTIFICATE PROGRAMMES</b>	
Certificate in Management and Accounting (CMA)	One academic year (two semesters) programme for Pre – service and In-service candidates.
Certificate in Micro-Finance Management (CMF)	One academic year (two semesters) programme for Pre – service and In-service candidates.
Certificate in Accounting and Finance (CAF)	One academic year (two semesters) programme for Pre – service and In-service candidates.
Certificate in Information Technology (CIT)	One academic year (two semesters) programme for Pre – service and In-service candidates.

**Source:** [www.muccobs.ac.tz](http://www.muccobs.ac.tz)

### **INADES-Formation**

INADES is the French acronym for the African Institute for Economic and Social Development. INADES-Formation (IF) is an off-shoot institution formed with the aim of providing training to rural communities. It started its operations in 1962 in West African countries, with Abidjan, Ivory Coast, being the headquarters. The aim then was to train farmers and extension workers through seminars and correspondence courses. With time, more francophone countries were added, including Cameroon, Burkina-Faso, Chad, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo), Rwanda, Burundi and Togo. In the early 1970s, two anglophone countries Ethiopia and Kenya were included. The programme in Tanzania was started in 1989, as a branch of IF-Kenya. In 1992 it became an autonomous national office, IF-Tanzania, with its own offices in Dodoma in central Tanzania. From its creation in 1962, INADES-Formation devoted itself to correspondence training, first for African officers through the Economics course, and from 1965 for African farmers through the Agricultural Training course. Later on, other courses were added: Training in Rural Self-Advancement, also for farmers; Agricultural Extension and Small Projects Management for extension agents. Later still, a course on Perspectives in Development was designed for development workers. Correspondence courses dominated IF's training approach up to the 1990s, when other methods started taking precedence. At the end of the 1996/97 financial year, correspondence courses consumed only seven per cent of the time spent on activities in National Offices. There were 11,853 trainees enrolled on correspondence courses, compared with 20,599 in 1992/93, and more than 25,000 in 1989/90 (INADES-Formation, 1998).

Since the collapse of CEC distance education programmes in the mid-1980s, IF-Tanzania has been the only institution in Tanzania offering distance education in the form of correspondence courses to farmers and rural-based development workers. Originally IF-Tanzania operated two parallel programmes:

- (i) Correspondence courses offered to trainees from all over the country.
- (ii) Seminars organised for farmers and extension workers in Dodoma, Singida and Morogoro regions.

The initial activities of IF-Tanzania were to run an agricultural training course in the form of seminars for farmers at Ipala Mission near Dodoma. Later, the Agricultural Training course was offered by correspondence to farmers and extension workers, using booklets which had been developed at IF-Kenya. While the Kenyan booklets have now been replaced by new books developed to reflect the Tanzanian context, this course has been the most durable and the most popular, and has come to symbolise the original mission of IF. In due course, two other courses were added: Management for Development Workers (in English), using books developed by IF-Kenya and CORATAFRICA (a development management NGO); and Leadership and Development, a revised and expanded Kiswahili version using materials developed at IF-Tanzania. The former course was aimed mostly at those who had completed at least four years of secondary education, and were either working or aspired to work as development workers, village leaders, middle-level managers, extension workers, teachers, trainers, religious leaders and government officials. The latter course was aimed primarily at farmer leaders (for example, of groups, cooperatives or income-generating projects), extension workers and other rural development workers with at least primary

As with the rest of the IF network, emphasis has significantly shifted in recent years from correspondence courses to other approaches. The correspondence courses were seen as merely facilitating the transfer of knowledge from experts to farmers without really creating the necessary capacity for managing change in the rural context. As a result, correspondence courses are seen as merely playing a supplementary role to the main approach, and slowly the amount of time and resources devoted to correspondence courses has declined. During the 1998 reporting year, only a total 106 person-days were devoted to the marking of assignment sheets from trainees, and out of these, only 25 days were contributed by IF-Tanzania staff, compared to 823 days devoted to the training projects. Thus, currently, correspondence courses no longer form the core of IF activities, but rather are seen as supporting the training projects and benefiting those who cannot be reached directly by IF-Tanzania, but who are still interested to acquire this knowledge. In this particular case, the institution is a replica of SUA's ICE as discussed below.

### **Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA)**

SUA was established on the 1st July, 1984 by Parliamentary Act No. 6 of the same year. The University is currently made up of four campuses and one constituent college. The campuses are the Main Campus and Solomon Mahlangu Campus in Morogoro; the Olmotonyi Campus in Arusha, and the Mazumbai Campus in Lushoto. The constituent college is Moshi University College of Cooperative and Business Studies (MUCCoBS) located in Moshi Municipality.

SUA has four mandates, namely training, research, consultancy and outreach. The Institute of Continuing Education (ICE) in collaboration with faculties, centers and other institutes offers short-term in-service programmes to field and operational staff as well as training and extension services to farmers and community leaders. It also coordinates outreach

programmes where distance learning is based. Activities of the ICE revolve around four major programming areas:

- Extension and farmer's education
- Continuing education
- Educational technology
- Distance learning and correspondence

SUA TV is one of the facilities that provide distance learning and adult education. The SUA TV is also an education technology facility managed by the ICE. Programmes broadcast by SUA TV cover a wide range of disciplines including: agriculture e.g. documentary programme on research activities and agricultural technologies, management of natural resources, human health and nutrition, soil conservation and land management, integrated pest management, environment and development, veterinary, animal health and production. Also there are cross-cutting issues like gender, HIV/AIDS and good governance. Furthermore, the SUA TV encourages programme exchange and cooperation with other TV stations worldwide ([sua@suanet.ac.tz](mailto:sua@suanet.ac.tz)). This account shows clearly that SUA employs distance learning methods in offering support services to some of its conventional mode programmes.

#### **The Southern Africa Extension Unit (SAEU)**

The SAEU is a distance education institution. Initiated as a project during the 1983 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the Unit was set up in Dar es Salaam, in November 1984, to serve the educational and training needs of South African youths and adults living in exile in Eastern and Southern Africa. SAEU courses for the exiles focused on the foundation and secondary levels of education. Up to the time of the repatriation of the South African exiles, more than 3000 students had been enrolled by the SAEU in its distance learning programme in Angola, Botswana, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The SAEU took the following three transformational steps between 1990 and 1994 to cope with the repatriation of its traditional target group:

- (i) introduced vocational courses to South African students in exile;
- (ii) extended the courses to the returnees in South Africa;
- (iii) diversified its role in order to cater for other refugees and non-refugees;
- (iv) introduced the Local Government Councillors' Distance Training Programme in Tanzania;
- (v) extended its distance learning programme to Burundian refugees in Western Tanzania.

As a result of diversifying its role in order to cater for non-refugee communities, the SAEU mounted the Local Government Councillors' Distance Training Programme in Tanzania in 1995. A total of 3000 councillors studied and completed the three modules of the programme designed to introduce them to their roles in a multi-party democracy system. While the SAEU has immense experience and even a track record in providing ODL programmes within and outside the country, it has not been able to sustain its services in this area due to the time limitations of the specific projects it undertakes from time to time.

#### **The Open University of Tanzania (OUT)**

The Open University of Tanzania is a fully-fledged public higher education institution. It was established by an Act of Parliament No. 17 of 1992 which was assented on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1992. With a view to streamlining the management and coordination of quality assurance in programmes offered in both public and private universities in the country, since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007, the Act has been supplanted by the Umbrella Universities Act No. 7 of

2005 and OUT Charter. OUT is mandated to conduct academic programmes leading to award of certificates, diplomas, undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications using open and distance learning approaches.

OUT launched its programmes in 1994 with a modest involvement of 766 students. Currently, a cumulative student enrollment in non-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes is 11,914, 31,569 and 4,164 respectively. With a total enrollment of more than 47,000 students, OUT has qualified as the largest tertiary institution in the country. Furthermore, OUT has been able to offer to the adult population a broad range of academic programmes at the non-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate levels as well as demand driven courses in the form of seminars, workshops and tailor made courses. This thrust has enabled the University to come up with programmes which are responsive to community needs. Meanwhile, more than 3,000 students have graduated in all academic programmes including the non-degree and postgraduate programmes, seminars, workshops and tailor made courses (OUT, 2010: 22). The following Tables (4, 5, 6, & 7), show cumulative enrolment in non-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

**Table 4: Cumulative Enrolment in Non – Degree Programmes: 1996 – 2009/10**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
OFC	6707	3180	9306
CYP – Diploma	498	175	673
CCDE	73	27	100
ODDEOL	62	24	86

**Source: The Open University of Tanzania (January 2010): Facts and Figures, p.20**

Non-degree programmes, specifically the Foundation Course (OFC), were introduced two years after the launching of undergraduate programmes. The purpose of this non-degree programme was to widen access to undergraduate courses. To date, the OFC is the leading programme in terms of students' enrollment. This shows that many adults in the country are eager to pursue higher learning but they lack direct entry qualifications to university level courses.

**Table 5: Cumulative Undergraduate Students' Enrolment: 1994 – 2009/10**

<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Cumulative Enrolment</b>	<b>% age</b>
Arts and Social Sciences	11151	35.3%
Law	5498	17.4%
Education	5585	17.7%
Business Management	4791	15.2%
Science, Technology and Environmental Studies	4544	14.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31569</b>	<b>100%</b>

Although there was a fluctuating enrollment trend in various faculties during the first six years of the University (1994 – 2000), currently, there is a steady rising enrollment trend in all faculties. This trend signifies growing recognition and trust by the community to the undergraduate programmes on offer at OUT. While FASS has the highest admission (34%)

followed by FLW (19%) and FED (17%); FBM and FSTES have the least enrollment (15%). In fact, FSTES has the least enrollment among all the faculties.

**Table 6: Cumulative Undergraduate Students' Admission by Programme and Gender 1994 – 2009/10**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% age (Prog)</b>
BA(Gen)	1862	577	2439	7.7
BA(Ed)	5266	1990	7256	23.0
BCom(Gen)	1216	178	1394	4.4
Bcom(Ed)	321	65	386	1.2
Bed.	3704	1828	5532	17.5
LLB	4707	791	5498	17.4
BSc(Gen)	1544	453	1997	6.3
BSc(Ed)	1847	390	2237	7.1
BBA(Gen)	2007	479	2486	7.9
BBA(Ed)	393	121	514	1.6
BA Tourism	327	74	401	1.3
BSc. ICT	148	17	165	0.5
Bed(SE)	43	21	64	0.2
BA Social Work	129	143	272	0.9
BA Sociology	333	272	605	1.9
BA Journalism	37	6	43	0.1
BA(M.C)	95	40	135	0.4
BSc. (ES)	121	24	145	0.5
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>24100</b>	<b>7469</b>	<b>31569</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: The Open University of Tanzania (January 2010):  
Facts and Figures, pp.6 - 7**

Admission into postgraduate programmes shows significant enrolment rates in humanities and the social sciences but extremely low admission rate in MSc.(Table 7).

**Table 7: Cumulative Postgraduate Students' Admission by Programmes and Gender: 2001 – 2009/10**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>
PGDE	334	75	409
MDist. Ed.	202	83	285
Med	252	117	369
MA	133	34	167
MBA	2132	433	2565
MSc.	10	8	18
PGDL	203	25	228

LLM	22	6	28
PhD	81	14	95
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3369</b>	<b>795</b>	<b>4164</b>

**Source: The Open University of Tanzania (January 2010): Facts and Figures, p.17**

One of the objectives for setting up OUT was to take education and training opportunities to the door steps of willing adult learners among disadvantaged groups such as women, people with disabilities, nomadic communities and even marginalized school leavers particularly in remote and rural areas in Tanzania and beyond. OUT is yet to assess the extent to which this challenge has been realized. However, available data show that the University has not registered significant impact in remote and upcountry regions where the majority of the people in the country reside (OUT, 2008:14 – 15). For example, in Tanzania Mainland, Dar es Salaam Region has the largest share of enrollment (10,993 out of 34,828 students) while Lindi has the lowest enrollment (414). In Zanzibar, the Zanzibar Centre has registered 775 students while Pemba Centre has the lowest enrollment in the whole country (75) (Ibidem). Furthermore, in spite of its open entry criteria and the fact that women are the majority in the country, female students constitute a minority of student population at OUT (Ibidem).

#### **The Distance Education Association of Tanzania (DEATA)**

The Distance Education Association of Tanzania (DEATA) is a national association, which was established in December 1992 and registered in August 1993. Besides individual members, its institutional membership currently consists of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT); The Open University of Tanzania (OUT); the University of Dar es Salaam (School of Education); Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA); Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS); Southern African Extension Unit (SAEU); Institute of Adult Education (IAE), and Moshi University College of Cooperative and Business Studies (MUCCOBS).

The goal of DEATA is to promote networking and collaboration among distance education professionals in Tanzania, by way of organizing conferences, workshops, seminars, etc; as well as by providing for them a platform for networking with distance education and open learning professionals and organizations in the World. Furthermore, the Association aims to facilitate formulation and adoption of a comprehensive National Policy for Non-Formal Education (NFE), Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This task is extremely crucial in Tanzania, as educational enrollments and budgets for education at all levels, are still very low. In such a situation, distance education has an important role to play in enhancing access to quality education cost-effective. In order to realize this objective, distance education practitioners have to network and share resources for optimal delivery of services.

Since its inauguration, the Association has been involved in a range of professional development activities, including representing the country at regional and international distance education gatherings; participating in a National Forum on the formulation of proposals for a National ODL Policy in 1997; and running professional development workshops on topics such as study materials' development, provision of student support services, planning for sustainable distance education programmes, etc. Besides assisting in setting up National Distance Education Associations in the sister East African countries of Kenya and Uganda, DEATA organized and hosted the founding meeting of the Open Learning and Distance Education Association of Eastern Africa (OLDEA- EA), in Dar es Salaam, in September, 1998 ([www.virtualcampuses.eu/OLDEA-EA](http://www.virtualcampuses.eu/OLDEA-EA)).

OLDEA–EA country members include [Kenya](#), [Uganda](#), [Tanzania](#), [Malawi](#) and [Seychelles](#). Each of the five countries has representative national association as follows:

- [Kenya](#) - Open Learning Association of Kenya (OPLAK)
- [Uganda](#) - Uganda National Distance and Open Learning (UNADOL)
- [Tanzania](#) - Distance Education Association of Tanzania (DEATA)
- [Malawi](#) - Open Distance Education Association of Malawi (ODEAM)
- On OLDEA establishment, [Seychelles](#) was in the process of registering a National Association.

The Aims and Objectives of OLDEA-EA were cited in an undated [African Virtual University report to UNESCO](#) as follows:

- Promote professionalism in Open and Distance Education
- Promote scholarship by way of organizing conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.
- Provide a platform for networking with other organizations in the world.
- Facilitate development of Information communication Technology (ICT) policy within member countries.
- Exchange information and materials on distance education.
- Advance the educational course by supporting broad based levels of education from basic education to tertiary levels.
- Promote research and evaluation of distance education and open learning in East Africa.
- Promote and enhance quality Assurance in distance education.
- Provide a platform for sharing of learning materials and expertise within the sub-region.
- Encourage publication of distance and open learning journals, refereed journals and other scholarly materials within the region.

In spite of their noble objectives and even initial achievements, both DEATA and OLDEA–EA have been dormant pressure groups for quite some time now.<sup>3</sup>

### **University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM)**

This is the oldest higher learning institution in the country. Since its inception as a National University in 1970, UDSM has grown steadily both in student numbers and academic programmes. From 1998, UDSM started to supplement conventional teaching and learning with e – learning in order to:

- Meet new learner styles.
- Reduce training cost per student.
- Meet increased demand of access to higher education.

The extent to which the University was failing to cope up with the rising demand for access to its “lecture theatres” is apparent from Table 8.

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<sup>3</sup> In a Special Meeting held on the occasion of the National ODL Conference in Arusha on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2011, DEATA members resolved to revive the Association by filling in vacant posts within the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee consisting of Prof. E. Bhalalusesa (Chair), Prof. E. T. Bisanda (Vice Chair), Dr. C. K. Muganda (Secretary), Dr. F. Mafumiko (Asst. Secretary), Mr. J. Kiluma (Treasurer) and Prof. E. K. Maritim (Editor), was mandated to revamp the Association and organise General Elections within one year.

**Table 8: Variation Between Application and Registration Levels at the UDSM: 2002/03 – 2006/07**

Year	Applied	Registered	% age
2002/03	6,171	3,423	55
2003/04	6,036	3,582	59
2004/05	8,616	4,264	43
2005/06	17,164	4,475	26
2006/07	15,185	7,049	46

*Source: UDSM Facts and Figures 2006/2007*

Efforts made in order to address the problem of coping up with rising enrollment through e-teaching and learning, include introducing and improving ICT infrastructure by:

- Putting in place fiber optic backbone and networking in all UDSM Units.
- Providing video conferencing facilities.
- Establishing computer labs in all Faculties and Departments.
- Connecting the University network to the Internet.
- Setting up Centre for Virtual Learning (CVL) to spearhead, coordinate and train staff and students in all ODeL oriented activities.

Current Projects and Plans in ODeL underway at the UDSM include:

- (i) Enhancing University Teaching and Learning Capacity through the ICT mediated distance learning mode.
- (ii) Creating UDSM E-Content Warehouse through E-pedagogy.
- (iii) Building of three ODeL Centres.
- (iv) Developing E-Content for three programmes (PGDE, PGDEM and BBA) (Twaakyondo, 2008).

### **Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Place**

A review of ODL institutions in the country show that none has put in place structures for assessing quality within the three-pronged approach – internal quality assurance mechanism, evaluation by peers and accreditation by an independent and competent organization. As a matter of fact, only structures for internal quality assurance and accreditation by independent and competent organizations are available in most institutions. However, presently, ODL institutions are accredited by mainstream regulatory authorities like National Council for Technical Education (NACTE) and the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU). In India, besides the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) which is the equivalent of TCU, a Distance Education Council has been set up under IGNOU, to regulate open and distance learning universities and other higher educational ODL institutions in the country (Gandhe, op.cit). A similar structure for evaluation by peers is, therefore, missing in the case of Tanzania. On the other hand, institutional availability of the basic elements of internal quality assurance notably Quality Assurance Unit (QAU), Staffing, Policy and Procedures (teaching and learning; study materials development; staff recruitment; students' admission; assessment; certification and awards; research and publications) and Monitoring Tools (Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS), Directorate of Examinations' Syndicate (DES), ICT infrastructure and Needs Assessment questionnaires Clients' Service Charter), is illustrated in Table 9.

**Table 9: Institutional Status of Internal Quality Assurance Mechanism**

Institution	QAU	Staffing	Policy/Proc	Monitoring Tools	Remarks
IAE	n/a	n/a	<b>a</b>	n/a	Undedicated
TGDLC	n/a	n/a	<b>a</b>	n/a	“
MUCCOBS	n/a	n/a	<b>a</b>	n/a	“
INADES F	n/a	n/a	<b>a</b>	n/a	“
SUA	<b>a</b>	<b>a</b>	<b>a</b>	n/a	“
SAEU	<b>a</b>	<b>a</b>	<b>a</b>	n/a	“
OUT	<b>a</b>	<b>a</b>	<b>a</b>	<b>A</b>	Dedicated
DEATA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Civil Society
UDSM	<b>a</b>	<b>a</b>	<b>a</b>	n/a	Undedicated

**Key:**

a – available

n/a – not available

Table 9 shows that it is only OUT which has put in place a comprehensive internal quality assurance mechanism.

... OUT has created the Directorate for Examination Syndicate solely dedicated to examinations. This directorate has a specific department responsible for records and qualifications. OUT has also strengthened its unit responsible for quality assurance by recruiting full time officers responsible for monitoring and evaluation. The University has also formulated policies and operational procedures for quality assurance, research and publication, consultancy, study materials development, admission and registration, ICT, Human Resource Management and student affairs. The service delivery to the University students and other stakeholders of the open and distance learning (OUT, 2011).

In April 2011, a team of external assessors noted that “whereas in 2004 the quality assurance unit did not even exist, it is now gradually assuming its place in the institution. QA policy and guidelines have been drafted together with stakeholders and the unit is now staffed (Rakels and Jensen, 2011: 37).

Lack of comprehensive internal quality assurance mechanisms among other ODL providers in the country may be attributed to their status as undedicated distance teaching institutions. In spite of this, it is cautioned that available student enrollment and completion data raise serious questions on equity, quality and sustainability of ODL programmes in Tanzania (Komba, op.cit). For example, although ODL provides flexibility in learning, women participation in ODL programmes is significantly low. Completion rate is also very low. At OUT, an institutional review report has noted the need “. . . to investigate on the facts and figures related to student drop out rates, graduation rates and on the involvement of more females. The low numbers of active students and of female students are worrisome . . . ” (Rakels and Jensen, op.cit:11). While low enrolment rate in e-learning programmes offered by UDSM and even TGDLC are due to prohibitive fees, low enrolment rate in other ODL institutions is certainly a function of other factors, as discussed below.

It is generally agreed that the quality of an educational system can be gauged from students’ enrolment, persistence, drop outs and graduation rates; tracer studies; feedback from employers and the general public and quality of instructional system/study materials. We will provide brief comments on students’ enrollment, persistence, and drop outs and graduation

rates and quality of study materials. In the absence of reliable research data on the other criteria, comments on the same need to be deferred to another paper.

Students' enrolment data provided for each institution are quite encouraging. They show how ODL institutions and programmes can easily defy time, space, geographical and even socio-economic barriers in order to massify access to educational and training opportunities. Incidentally, ODL's appeal to politicians and policy makers is mostly informed by and restricted to its capacity in massifying access to educational and training opportunities with minimal cost. Thus, "the low tuition fees are a reason often mentioned by students as the most important reason to study at OUT" (Ibidem). However, while entry is essential, what matters most is the exit. In most ODL institutions and programmes, data on persistence, drop outs and graduation rates are either classified or inversely proportional to enrollment targets. What can be inferred from this situation is that besides high students, enrolment levels, ODL institutions are also characterised by high levels of inactive/passive and drop out rates. While the assessment of quality is problematic, measures of drop out are one proxy for a measure of quality (Perraton, 2007). If education is interesting, affordable and clearly relevant to the students, then they are likely to persist and complete all the cycles (Ibidem). ODL is more affordable than conventional learning, however, the onus of making it interesting and clearly relevant to students rests with the respective institutions. Admittedly, this aspect has several dimensions, however, here we will deal with the role of study materials in enhancing persistence and graduation rates in ODL.

Teaching in ODL is characterised by the separation of the teacher and learner, and of the learner from the learning group, with the interpersonal face-to-face communication of conventional education being replaced by an apersonal mode of communication mediated by technology (Keegan, 2001). While the quality of learning achieved is related to the quality of the learning materials provided by the ODL system, the propensity to drop out from the programmes by the enrollees can be attenuated by the planning of quality learning materials (Sukati, 2009:10).

Important areas requiring critical assessment in order to determine the quality of study materials include content, presentation and learning (Ibidem). Content requires assessment of aspects like alignment with curriculum demands; satisfactory treatment of content; expertise for content development; accuracy, currency and authenticity of content. Presentation covers aspects like organisation of instructional materials, pacing of content, ease of use and readability of instructional materials. Finally, learning covers areas like interactive learners' activities, assessment strategies, motivational strategies, learners' guidance and support (Ibidem). In the specific case of OUT, it has been noted:

"For The Open University of Tanzania, operating largely in correspondence mode, study materials are of critical importance as they replace to a large extent the role of the teacher. The provision of quality materials is thus a must" (Rakels and Jensen, op.cit: 48). Regarding the quality of materials, the institutional review asserts ". . . opinions vary strongly. OUT makes use of self-developed materials, but also of materials from partner institutions in Kenya, Nigeria and India. While some are perceived to be of good standard, a commonly heard complaint is about contextualisation. Examples and exercises focus on the situation in the country of origin and do not necessarily match the context in Tanzania." (Ibidem: 49). The report concludes, "it is strongly advised that OUT steps up its quality control over study materials. In terms of availability, timely supply and quality of content, there is room for improvement. Use should be made of digital learning resources openly and without cost as open educational resources (OERs) (Ibidem).

The desire to attain mass access to quality education is common among many countries in the world. Cooperation in the establishment of national and regional networks of ODL learning centres will go a long way towards closer integration. Joint ventures in the design, production and dissemination of distance learning materials will help reduce the cost of education and training by maximising on the economies of scale offered by the ODL approach (Komba, op.cit). In the specific case of Tanzania, this role could be assumed effectively by DEATA or OLDEA–EA. Meanwhile, challenges facing the country in promoting ODL need to be considered as well, in the quest for quality assurance.

### **The Challenges Facing Tanzania in Promoting ODL**

In the absence of a proactive national ODL policy, the challenges facing the country in promoting ODL include:

- (i) Underfunding by Government which has resulted in ODL providers accumulating huge debts.
- (ii) Low fees charged for programmes on offer.
- (iii) Excessive dependency of students on printed study materials as the basic and only mode of interaction with the ODL providers.
- (iv) Big facilitator–student ratio.
- (v) Large enrollment which does not match with the number of facilitators.
- (vi) Lack of reliable power throughout the country (Mahai, *et al.* op.cit).

Other challenges are in the specific areas of legitimacy and public acceptance, monitoring, research and evaluation, policy planning, learner support and application of ICTs (Siaciwena, 2008).

#### **(a) Legitimacy and Public Acceptance**

Legitimacy and public acceptance of ODL is essential for successful implementation of programmes. Many educational policy makers and planners are skeptical about the legitimacy and quality of ODL, on grounds that it does not and cannot offer the same quality as conventional on–campus education as ODL programmes have lower entry qualifications. In this case, “the cart is put before the horse” as quality is judged at the level of input, rather than at the level of output /achievement. In any case, ODL programmes should strive to achieve legitimacy by demonstrating that their quality in terms of content, delivery, assessment and outcomes is equal to, or better than, the traditional forms of education.

#### **(b) Monitoring, Research and Evaluation**

Weak understanding and knowledge about the potential and limitations of ODL can be attributed to, among other reasons, a lack of an adequate research and evaluation base in ODL. Such a database is needed to support informed policy choices and to demonstrate the positive results of ODL. Many programmes/ institutions either do not have dedicated research and evaluation units/staff or are still in a formative stage.

#### **(c) Policy and Planning**

New programmes need to be aligned with existing policy frameworks, to ensure that they are not marginalized but considered a legitimate part of ODL provision. Planning for ODL requires alignment to several sets of policies such as those on ICTs, gender, education, poverty eradication, National Vision 2025, MDGs, etc in order to enhance legitimacy and public acceptance. Apart from the SADC Protocol on Education and Training, the Region does not have any comprehensive ODL frameworks nor Strategic Plans for ODL. Similarly,

many SADC member states, Tanzania included, have neither national policies nor strategic plans on ODL.

It should be noted that in order to realize economies of scale, many ODL programmes are normally large scale. Their operational cost and complexity necessitate development of partnerships in delivery and provision of learner support services. In the absence of relevant policy frameworks, effective partnerships remain elusive with grave consequences on learner support.

#### **(d) Learner Support**

In many institutions learner support services are limited and this raises questions about the effectiveness of programmes in developing relevant skills and imparting knowledge. Learner support systems tend to be centralized and make little use of ICTs. Besides relevant policy frameworks for promoting institutional linkages and effective partnerships, multi-level training for learner support providers is also essential.

#### **(e) Application of ICTs**

Many SADC member countries have under developed ICT infrastructure. Similarly, there are no comprehensive plans or strategies for utilizing ICTs. Furthermore, ICT skills among ODL practitioners and learners are still at a low level. Adoption, access and effective use of ICTs' mediated teaching and learning throughout the country, are essential prerequisites for overcoming distance as a barrier to information transfer, processing and sharing in ODL.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has discussed the situation pertaining to the quality of the ODL practice in Tanzania. It has outlined the scope of academic programmes being offered by different institutions. It has been shown that the programmes on offer, in ODL institutions range from tailor made short courses, seminars, workshops, certificate and diploma courses to undergraduate and postgraduate courses in social sciences, humanities, technology and natural sciences. ODL institutions have been shown to be fairly successful in enhancing admission rates in most of their programmes as a result of charging affordable fees and provision of outreach services through Regional and Virtual Learning Centres.

Areas of quality concern in ODL have been identified to include curriculum design, content and organisation; teaching, learning and assessment; student progression and assessment; and student support and guidance. Besides areas of quality concern, assessment of quality in education in general and ODL in particular, has a three-pronged approach – internal quality assurance mechanism, evaluation by peers and accreditation by an independent and competent organization. Furthermore, while completion rates, graduation rates, cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness, skill development and post-guidance performance constitute the traditional measures of success in education, the production of independent and self-directed learners is an additional and a critical criterion of quality in ODL. A review of ODL institutions in the country show that none has put in place structures for assessing quality within such a comprehensive context. Only structures for internal quality assurance are available in these institutions. Presently, ODL institutions are accredited by mainstream regulatory authorities like National Council for Technical Education (NACTE) and the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU).

Besides regulatory structures, it has been argued that quality of learning achieved in ODL, is related to the quality of the learning materials provided to the students. Similarly, the propensity to drop out from the programmes by the enrollees can be attenuated by the

planning of quality learning materials. Meanwhile, lack of a proactive National ODL policy leads to random adoption of different systems and standards, unnecessary duplication of effort and wastage of scarce resources. There is also a lack of teamwork approach to the development of study materials. Furthermore, this lacuna undermines the capacity of the ODL institutions to grapple with inhibitive factors to their mission and vision like underfunding, charging non-market fees in most programmes, excessive dependency of students on printed study materials, high facilitators' – students' ratio and inadequate access levels to ICT infrastructure.

The last challenge is a major inhibitive factor to the provision of ICTs' mediated teaching and learning throughout the country. These facilities are essential for overcoming distance as a barrier to information transfer, processing and sharing in distance education and open learning. With the ICT revolution, many of the challenges that ODL is facing will be a feature of the past. To realize this objective, it is essential for ODL providers in Tanzania to strive to enhance the status of their programmes in learners' support and application of ICTs. Other areas in which the status of programmes require appraisal are legitimacy and public acceptance, monitoring, research and evaluation and policy planning.

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