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**Students Support Services For Virtual and Open Learning and Its Influence on Retention of Students in Kenya: A Case of Kenyatta University**

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the impact of academic support services, including guidance and counseling, tutoring and mentorship, administrative, and ICT services, on the retention of open and distant learners in Kenyan public universities. The study employed the transformative learning theory and transaction theory as its theoretical foundations and used a descriptive survey methodology. The study's population consisted of two groups: 11 respondents from the Directorate of Student Affairs at the Digital School for Virtual and Open Learners and 2156 final-year postgraduate students from the Digital, Virtual & Open Learning School. The research employed purposive and stratified random sampling methods to select participants. Data collection involved interviews with key informants and standardized questionnaires. The results indicated that these academic support services positively influenced the persistence of postgraduate students, encouraging them to continue their studies until completion. The study recommended that Kenyatta University improve its communication department to provide timely feedback and essential information to final-year postgraduate students. The findings underscore the need for similar investigations at different universities to enhance comparative analysis of support services' effectiveness in student retention.

**Key Terms:** Kenya, Academic support services, Retention rates, Guidance and counseling, postgraduate students, Student retention

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**Introduction**

**Background of the Study**

The background of the study underscores the dynamic educational landscape in Kenya, where a substantial surge in the demand for higher education has become increasingly evident. This growing aspiration for academic advancement has led to a notable influx of individuals seeking enrollment in universities. Nonetheless, the available supply of university-level education still falls short of satisfying this surging demand, presenting a pressing challenge. In response to the pressing challenges of the conventional lecture-based educational model and the need to cater to the burgeoning demand, the paradigm of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is gaining prominence as an alternative educational approach. ODL offers a unique platform for experiential learning, research, and instruction in a distance learning environment, which is adaptable to the varying needs of learners.

The relevance of ODL transcends national boundaries, as it plays a pivotal role in making high-quality education accessible on a global scale. The approach is closely aligned with the Education for All (EFA) goals, underscoring its potential to provide education to diverse learners worldwide. However, the deployment of ODL is not without its challenges, including the incorporation of information and communication technology (ICT) in education, the rapid expansion of online learning, addressing the diverse needs of students, and accommodating part-time and mature-age learners. These issues resonate both within Kenya and on a global scale, underpinning the significance of ODL and the need to address its challenges.

In the Kenyan context, ODL is a pivotal force in higher education. However, it grapples with a range of challenges, from insufficient funding to outdated facilities, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of comprehensive support for ODL programs. To navigate these challenges and bolster the success of ODL, the provision of comprehensive student support services emerges as a critical element, encompassing academic, administrative, mentoring, tutoring, and ICT-related support. These services act as a cornerstone in helping students adapt to diverse learning styles and fostering their active engagement in the realm of ODL, while also addressing the technology proficiency of learners. This background information provides the context for the study's focal point, which centers on assessing the impact of academic support services on student retention within the framework of ODL in Kenyan universities.

**Statement of the Problem**

As evidenced by research Institutions that offer ODL programmes are responsible for developing students support services. These services are structured in a manner that ensures that they meet the needs of the students be it emotional, social or cognitive. They help to ensure that there exists

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not vacuum between the students and the tutor despite the existence of the distance. Open and distance education have benefited from the accessibility of student services. The "elephant in the room" regarding distance education, however, is the high attrition and low pass rates. Due to its availability in both traditional classroom settings and online, the London University International Programme is an excellent point of comparison. It was shown that retention rates for students using the face-to-face option were almost 61% higher than those using the distance mode. Another example is the university of BRAOU India whose graduation rate for open and distance learners was 14% in the year 2018 while that of University of South Africa stood at 6%. This challenge is more adverse in developing countries. For instance, in Kenya the distance learner's retention rates in public universities was 4% in 2018. Particularly, the dropout rates were higher for post graduate students enrolled to the Digital School of Virtual and Open Learning (DSVOL).

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to determine how various forms of student assistance affect the likelihood that graduate students would continue their studies via the Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) program. The reason for this is because it has been shown that student support programs significantly increase student retention. Hence, the study aids in finding out if student support services are existent in public universities and if they are existent, what their influence on student retention is. Kenyatta University was chosen by the fact that the institution has the highest number of students enrolled in the VOL programmes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This research aimed to learn whether or not Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) academic support services influence graduate students in Kenya to continue their education at public universities.

### **Objectives**

- i) The study was directed by the subsequent specific aims:
- ii) To assess the impact of career guidance and counseling services for VOL on the preservation of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya.
- iii) To evaluate the effect of administrative services for VOL on the preservation of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya.
- iv) To examine the impact of tutoring and mentoring services for VOL on the preservation of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya.
- v) To investigate the influence of ICT services for VOL on the preservation of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya.

### **Research Questions**

- i) This study aimed to address the following inquiries:
- ii) How does the provision of career guidance and counseling services for VOL impact the retention of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya?
- iii) To what extent do the administrative services for VOL influence the retention of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya?
- iv) Does the availability of tutoring and mentoring services for VOL have an impact on the retention of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya?

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- v) What is the extent of the influence of ICT services for VOL on the retention of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study holds significant importance by addressing a crucial facet of Open and Distance Learning (ODL): the provision of essential student support services. ODL attracts learners for its convenience, driven by factors like technology-enabled education, familial and occupational commitments, and geographical remoteness from traditional educational institutions. However, a noteworthy proportion of these students often lacks the necessary skills for effective distance learning or remains unaware of how to develop these competencies. Consequently, they encounter various academic challenges, largely owing to the absence of accessible and effective support services.

The motivation behind this research stems from the awareness that ODL students require support that is frequently underestimated; with the misconception that technology alone can fulfill their needs. This study illuminates the obstacles and support requisites that ODL students may encounter, empowering them to cultivate effective coping mechanisms when confronted with academic impediments. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of raising awareness among distance learning providers about the support needs of both enrolled and prospective students. While many ODL programs offer various forms of learner assistance, these options are often either out of reach for students or offer limited practical value. Consequently, this research served as a call to action, advocating for enhanced student support services within ODL, ultimately benefiting not only students but also educational institutions and policymakers involved in the development and regulation of ODL programs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study was grounded in the integration of two fundamental theoretical perspectives: Transformative Learning Theory and Transactional Theory, which served as the guiding principles for examining the study variables and establishing statistical relationships. Transformative Learning Theory, originating from the work of Mezirow, focuses on the concept of transformative distance, emphasizing autonomous thought as a cornerstone in distance education. It underscores the importance of critically examining one's pre-existing beliefs and assumptions, particularly when encountering challenges that challenge their fundamental perspectives. Transformative learning promotes a shift in mindset and the development of coping strategies when faced with paradoxes or conflicting information. It prioritizes individual growth and highlights the role of reasonable, non-coercive communication in bringing about constructive change.

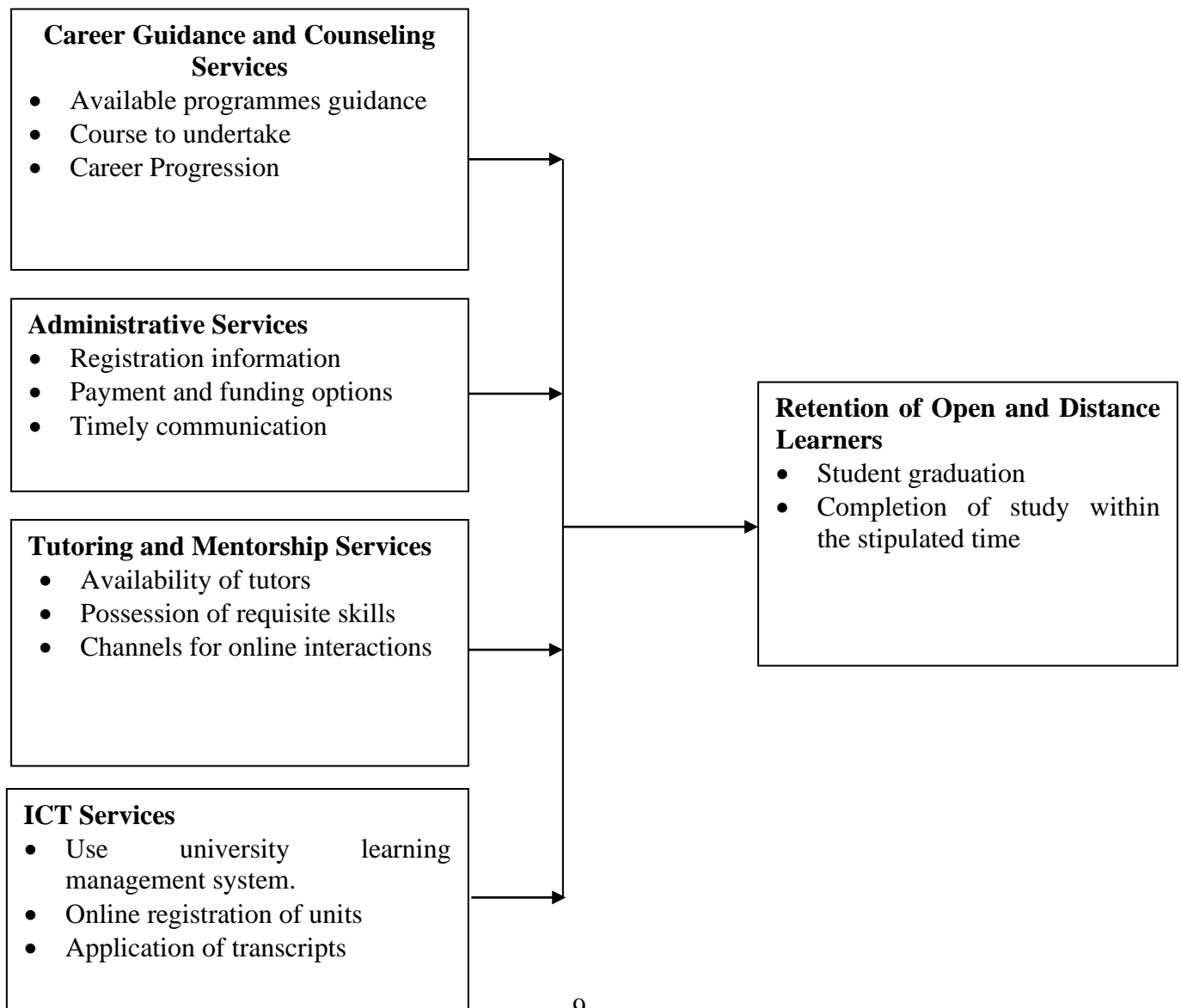
Transactional Theory, as advocated by Moore, introduces the concept of transactional distance, emphasizing the impact of the student's detachment from physical interaction during distance education. This distance is not solely related to physical proximity but is more intricately connected to instructional methodology and student-instructor interaction. Transactional Theory highlights the importance of reducing transactional distance through effective communication, well-structured course design, and learner autonomy. It recognizes that the balance between dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy is essential for an optimal

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learning environment. Both theories converge in the study's focus on learner support services as a means to bridge the transactional distance and facilitate transformative learning. The study acknowledges the significance of promoting dialogue, well-structured learning environments, and learner autonomy to enhance the effectiveness of distance education programs. It highlights the need for student support services to address the existing imbalances in public universities and emphasizes the relevance of these theories in the context of postgraduate students enrolled in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs.

### Conceptual Framework

By providing a visual representation of the connections between the study's variables, conceptual frameworks serve as a form of model source (Shikalepo, 2020). The dependent variable is open and distance education, while the independent variable is student support services.



**Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework**

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### **Literature Review**

The paper reviews the findings of previous research on student retention in the Open and Distance Learning (ODEL) program. It highlights the importance of effective learner support systems for distance learners, including academic, non-academic, community service, engagement in the hidden curriculum, extracurricular activities, and successful program completion. Student support services cover all forms of aid to learning, including academic, non-academic, community service, engagement in the hidden curriculum, extracurricular activities, and successful program completion. Most universities are transitioning from traditional to online modes without fully understanding the diverse requirements and qualities of distance learning students. Distance learners often lack previous experience with online learning settings and self-study learning skills, which impedes their speed of adjusting to self-study. Learner support systems should be planned with the student's needs in mind, considering both internal and external factors. Organizational systems often fail to capture students' interest, leading to a lack of seeking help. The UNISA Task Team 4 report (2010) acknowledges that reactive systems often miss identifying students encountering challenges due to complicated circumstances. Profiling is crucial to assist students who have not yet discovered talents and/or weaknesses.

Massey University of New Zealand has implemented an all-inclusive and hands-on student support structure, integrating distance learning services into existing structures of on-campus students. All students could benefit from support systems, but those attending dual-mode institutions would see the most immediate benefits. Integrating learner support services with other services is essential, and universities should create channels for students to provide feedback on aspects affecting their learning experience. In Kenya, the Commission for University Education (CUE) Standard and Guidelines suggest that universities should create channels for students to provide feedback on learning experiences, establish formal processes for approval and assessment, and evaluate academic departments and units directly serving students. Quality assurance reviews are conducted in academic, administrative, and service departments, as well as schools, faculties, and study programs.

Retention of students is a critical aspect of a university's success, and it is influenced by three main factors: the atmosphere and culture of the institution, the financial aspects of the institution, and the support provided to students. Unsatisfactory retention rates can lead to the closure of many higher education institutions, as well as financial implications for the institution. One of the main reasons for low student retention in online learning (ODL) is the belief that ODL is a secondary option to on-campus delivery. This perception can lead to students giving up on their education due to high costs associated with course materials. Low retention rates can also lead to certification issues and reputational damage. Career counseling is essential for students to make informed decisions before, during, and after a course. Career planning can help students determine their current and future directions, overcome misconceptions about career choices, and increase their competitiveness for positions. Effective career coaching can improve job rates for graduates and boost the institution's reputation. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) was enacted in 1994 to facilitate the transition of young individuals from school to work, providing them with a sense of economic direction. However, few programs, such as Open University, have structured guidance for remote learners, making it difficult for students to receive help.

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A student's academic path from enrollment through graduation is known as the "student walk or student life cycle." To ensure smooth academic lives, prospective college students should receive proactive support, considering factors such as the institution's credibility, program-related inquiries, enrollment and registration protocols, payment and funding alternatives, pre-study preparation, technical guidance, study habits, motivation, yearly re-registration, course progression, graduation, and alumni feedback. Career guidance and learner assistance should be provided during the pre-course period and during the course itself, as per UNISA Task Team 4 report (2010). These services help students select classes that align with their individual profile, skills, and life goals. Career decision-making is a key factor in student persistence and graduation rates. The fields of career guidance and counseling are growing rapidly in developing nations like Pakistan, Chile, Romania, Poland, and the Philippines. Research has shown that students view academic assistance programs favorably and satisfaction with administrative support, guidance, and counseling services. Engaging students in mentorship and peer support programs can result in retention improvements of up to 20% and a return on investment of up to 295.

However, difficulties with access for students using online learning (ODL) have been identified. A study by Arko-Achemfuor (2017) found that students in remote locations cannot appropriately use support resources, negatively impacting their academic performance. The research recommends UNISA increase its support services and train academic and support personnel on how to make the most of them. Administrative support is crucial for distance education students, as it provides accurate information within stipulated time. Proactive administrative support helps reduce transactional gaps and encourages social interaction with administration. Communication between teachers, students, and institutions is essential for providing information and overcoming barriers. Administrative support encompasses various roles such as enrollment, admittance, registration, documentation, information distribution, and study material delivery. Therefore, career guidance and counseling services are essential for students in remote education; as they help them develop personal responsibility, adjust to social, educational, and other factors. Coordination of instructional and evaluation functions is essential for efficient service delivery and accountability.

Nall (2017) studied the impact of Student Support Services (SSS) programs on low-income, first-generation college students, finding that interpersonal connections with faculty and staff significantly impact a student's drive to finish their degree. Kiraithe (2015) found that mentoring, administrative support, tutorial support, and advice and counseling all had a significant impact on student retention. Kisimbii, Gakuu, and Kidombo (2020) conducted a study on the impact of Administrative Support Services (LSS) on the retention of distance learners at the University of Nairobi. The study found that administrative support services offered by the University of Nairobi significantly impacted the retention rates of distance learners. Tutoring and mentoring services are essential for students in online education. Tutors work closely with students, providing guidance and counseling, and can be planned as in-person activities or in conjunction with distant learning methods. Mentors play a crucial role in helping students achieve their goals and pass on knowledge to future generations.

Mentorship help students master key skills for online learning, such as time management, self-regulation, accountability, self-governing learning, student-centered learning, assignment

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completion, and stress management. Technical training on using and interacting with the online learning system is also essential for students. A study conducted at the open Polytechnic of New Zealand, the Korean National University, and the Open University of the United Kingdom found that encouraging students to enroll in mentorship and peer support programs may yield better retention rates and a return on investment. Musingafi et al. (2015) and Laichena, Ayot, and Ndethiu (2018) conducted studies on the challenges faced by distance education students at ZOU, Kenya's public institutions, and the impact of teaching and learning services on student retention. The study found that time constraints, technology issues, poor grades, and lack of resources were common complaints among ODL students.

Laichena, Ayot, and Ndethiu (2018) also found that most teaching and learning services were poorly rated by students. Pop, Swanepoel, and Barkhuizen (2013) found a significant correlation between mentorship and graduate intern retention at a South African ICT company. Nyaga (2011) found that public colleges report fewer student disturbances and anti-social behavior incidents than private universities, indicating the success of advice and counseling services. Watiri (2013) investigated the impact of learner support on academic achievement, finding that orientation programs helped students adjust to college life but did not adequately meet their psycho-social needs. Access to specialized IT facilities was difficult, but library services were easily accessible. Students generally indicated satisfaction with the assistance provided. Baruah (2011) found high student retention in Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) due to the use of e-learning tools. Igun (2010) found that Nigerian postgraduate students lacked motivation and faced challenges in their studies. Omondi (2008) investigated how learner support affected academic performance, finding that orientation programs aided students in adjusting to college life but did not adequately meet their psycho-social needs.

Hussain and Suleman's (2017) study on the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in chemistry students' retention and achievement found that ICT teaching techniques improved student outcomes compared to traditional methods. Kaundo's (2018) study on student support services in open, distance, and electronic learning found that offering learner support services is a crucial strategy for maintaining students in these institutions and ensuring high completion rates. The evolving landscape of higher education is influenced by globalization and interconnected society, necessitating the adoption of open and remote learning modalities. Developing transparent and efficient regulatory frameworks is crucial for realizing the educational benefits of open and remote learning and mitigating rising educational costs. A student-centered approach suggests that students should be classified based on their enrollment in a course or program, and that remote, online, and unmoderated instruction delivery should be integrated into laws and regulations. Department of Education (DE) programs have the potential to grow to large sizes, but they often face challenges that are not immediately apparent to new students. To address these challenges, distance education must continue to find its place in the educational community and adapt to the growing demand for an educated workforce.



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### **Research Design and Methodology**

The research methodology employed in this study focused on the relationship between student support services for open and distant learning students and retention. The study was conducted at Kenyatta University, which is one of the oldest and most established ODL programmes in Kenya. The university's location allowed for the collection of data from both numerical and non-numerical sources. The target population for the study was divided into two groups: the 8 director and assistant directors of student affairs in Kenyatta University VOL Centres, who have extensive knowledge about the VOL programme, and the 2156 finalist students enrolled for the VOL program, who are familiar with the challenges faced by VOL students and may have dropped out.

Sampling procedures and sample size were used to select participants for each subset of respondents. The census approach was used to include all the director and assistant directors of student affairs, while Fisher's method was used to calculate the size of the postgraduate finalist sample. Due to the small size of the study population, 326 individuals in their last year of graduate school were selected as the projected sample size. Data processing processes were also employed for data acquisition and analysis. The study used a descriptive survey approach, which included both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. This approach allowed for the identification of a statistically and demographically representative sample of the entire study population.

The research methodology employed in this study focused on the relationship between student support services for open and distant learning students and retention. The study utilized original data collected through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. These methods were designed to gather primary information from the field, ensuring that the research questions were answered, hypotheses were tested, and outcomes were evaluated. The questionnaires had both open-ended and closed-ended questions, and participants responded either audibly or by checking boxes to indicate their agreement or disagreement. The main interview guide included free-form questions pertinent to the research aims. A pilot study was conducted to determine the feasibility of larger, more in-depth inquiries. Pilot tests are essential for determining the validity of a study and the dependability of the instruments being used. In this case, 22 students enrolled in the ODL program from the school of public health were selected to assess the effectiveness and relevance of the questionnaires as a data collection tool.

Validity refers to the extent to which a test provides a reliable assessment of the material for which it was created. The questionnaire must represent the research term used and exhibit reliability, veracity, and accuracy. The research looked at both content and constructs validity, with the questionnaire broken down into subcomponents and verified by two randomly designated VOL administrators. Reliability is crucial for the consistency, stability, or dependability of information. The magnitude of inaccuracy has an impact on reliability in research, and a reliability cut-off value of 0.7 was considered acceptable for this investigation.

In conclusion, the study utilized original data collected through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument. The research process involves data acquisition to disseminate accurate information and develop viable projects. The researcher ensures anonymity and uses the instruments for academic analysis. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, surveys were exclusively accessible online.

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Interviews were conducted with Director and Assistant Directors of Student Affairs, either face-to-face or via telephone. Data analysis aims to provide findings that can be assessed. Data processing involves converting survey responses into a format for statistical analysis, which includes coding, editing, data entry, and process control. After editing, handling void responses, coding, and categorizing the data, the information is imported into SPSS version 22 for analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques are used, with frequencies and percentages for descriptive statistics and correlation analyses for inferential statistics. Tables and graphs are created in Excel. In-depth interviews with key informants yield qualitative material, which is analyzed for themes and presented in coherent prose. The project report includes both quantitative and qualitative findings. The operationalization of variables is shown in Table 3.1.

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**Table 3.1 Data Analysis and Variables Operationalization**

Independent Variables		Dependent Variables		Analysis
Career Guidance and Counseling Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Available programmes guidance</li> <li>Course undertake to</li> <li>Career Progression</li> </ul>	Retention of Open and Distance Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student graduation</li> <li>Completion of study within the stipulated time</li> </ul>	<u><b>Quantitative</b></u> Descriptive Frequency and percentages <u>Inferential</u> Correlation <u><b>Qualitative</b></u> Continuous prose form
Administrative Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registration information</li> <li>Payment and funding options</li> <li>Timely communication</li> </ul>	Retention of Open and Distance Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student graduation</li> <li>Completion of study within the stipulated time</li> </ul>	<u><b>Quantitative</b></u> Descriptive Frequency and percentages <u>Inferential</u> Correlation <u><b>Qualitative</b></u> Continuous prose form
Tutoring and Mentorship Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability of tutors</li> <li>Possession of requisite skills</li> <li>Channels for online interactions</li> </ul>	Retention of Open and Distance Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student graduation</li> <li>Completion of study within the stipulated time</li> </ul>	<u><b>Quantitative</b></u> Descriptive Frequency and percentages <u>Inferential</u> Correlation <u><b>Qualitative</b></u> Continuous prose form
ICT Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use university learning management system.</li> <li>Online registration of units</li> <li>Application of transcripts</li> </ul>	Retention of Open and Distance Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student graduation</li> <li>Completion of study within the stipulated time</li> </ul>	<u><b>Quantitative</b></u> Descriptive Frequency and percentages <u>Inferential</u> Correlation <u><b>Qualitative</b></u> Continuous prose form

**Source: Researcher (2022)**

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### **Data Analysis Results**

The data analysis revealed that the response rate for the survey was 91.4% for finalist postgraduate students, while the director and assistant directors of student affairs had a response rate of 75% as shown in Table 4.1. The demographic information revealed that the majority of the finalist postgraduate students were female, with a gender ratio of 64% to 36%. The age group was predominantly middle-aged, with 42.3% of the sample population aged 65 and above. The year of admission for the post-graduate course was varied, with 28.2% admitted in 2019, 13.7% in 2016, 10.7% in 2018, 9.8% in 2017, 8.5% in 2020, and 4.7% in 2014 as shown in Table 4.2. The period of study varied, with 47.4% stating 0-3 years, 32.5% 4-7 years, 14.9% 8-11 years, and 5.2% 12-15 years as shown in Table 4.3. These results suggest that financial, family, work, and academic challenges may impede the completion of postgraduate studies.

**Table 4.1: Response Rate**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Sampled Respondents</b>	<b>Actual Respondents</b>	<b>Return Rate</b>
Director and Assistant Directors of Student Affairs	8	6	75.0%
Finalist postgraduate students	326	234	71.2%

**Table 4.2: Year of Admission for Post-Graduate Course**

<b>Year of Admission</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
2006	3	0.9
2008	2	0.9
2009	8	3.4
2010	8	3.4
2011	11	4.7
2012	8	3.4
2013	8	3.4
2014	11	4.7
2015	10	4.3
2016	31	13.7
2017	23	9.8
2018	25	10.7
2019	66	28.2
2020	20	8.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100</b>

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**Table 4.3: Period of Study**

Number of Years	Frequency	Percent
0 - 3	111	47.4
4 - 7	76	32.5
8 - 11	35	14.9
12 - 15	12	5.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100</b>

The study reveals that 79.1% of finalist postgraduate students chose virtual and open learning (VOL) due to full-time employment, affordability, IT skills, and geographical location flexibility as shown in Table 4.4. The students also rated the status of student support services in their institution, with 46.6% rating them average and 33.3% as good. 81.6% of students received career guidance and counseling, while 67.1% received administrative support, 74.3% received tutoring and mentoring, 63.7% received ICT support, and 6.0% received other support services as shown in Table 4.5 to Table 4.7. The study also found that 62.8% of students received adequate career guidance and counseling services, supporting the assertion that ODL students need ongoing help and counseling as shown in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.4: Reason for Choice of VOL**

Reason	Yes	No
I am on full time employment	79.1	20.9
It is affordable	64.5	35.5
I am good in IT	54.3	45.7
It is not limited to geographical location	82.5	17.5
Others	8.5	91.5

**Table 4.5: Status of Students Support Services**

Status of Student Support Services	Frequency	Percent
Poor	47	20.1
Average	109	46.6
Good	78	33.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4.6: Available Students Support Services**

Student Support Services	Yes	No
Career guidance and counseling	81.6	18.4
Administrative	67.1	32.9
Tutoring and mentoring	74.8	25.2
ICT services	63.7	36.3
Others	6.0	94.0

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**Table 4.7: Mode of Delivery Used**

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Print mode	22	9.4
Recorded Tutorials	90	38.5
Video conferencing	39	16.7
Virtual	83	35.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4.8: Provision of Career Guidance and Counseling Services**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No	87	37.2
Yes	147	62.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100</b>

The study reveals that most finalist postgraduate students receive academic guidance and counseling services, with 62.8% agreeing that they receive sufficient information on distant learning, 60.2% being given adequate information about the VOL program, and 55.6% receiving career guidance before making a decision on which course to undertake as shown in Table 4.9. However, there is room for improvement, as a small proportion of students disagreed. The study also revealed that students are introduced to human resources, channels for support, and no trouble comprehending the registration process. Challenges faced by students in accessing career guidance include contacting university teaching staff, lacked personalized attention, delays in responses, and lack of clarity in guidance. These results highlight the need for improvement in career guidance and counseling services as shown in Table4.10.

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**Table 4.9: Nature of Career Guidance and Counseling Services**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Mea n</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>
I obtain sufficient information on distant learning to understand how it differs from traditional classroom instruction.	12.4%	16.7%	8.1%	49.6%	13.2%	3.3	1.3
I was given adequate information about the programme offered under the VOL programme.	11.5%	18.8%	9.4%	45.7%	14.5%	3.3	1.3
I received career guidance before making a decision on which course to undertake.	22.6%	15.4%	6.4%	41.5%	14.1%	3.1	1.4
I received guidance on the expected progression of my course.	14.5%	16.2%	7.7%	47.0%	14.5%	3.3	1.3
I received clear guidance on what is my role as a student under the VOL program.	17.5%	19.7%	6.4%	47.0%	9.4%	3.1	1.3
I was introduced to human resources that can support my learning and introduced to channels which I can use to reach out in-case I was in need of any form of assistance.	19.7%	16.2%	9.0%	43.6%	11.5%	3.1	1.4
I had no trouble comprehending the registration process.	16.2%	16.2%	9.0%	44.9%	13.7%	3.2	1.3
<b>Average</b>						<b>3.2</b>	<b>1.3</b>

**Table 4.10: Challenges when Accessing Career Guidance and Counseling Services**

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Contacting the university teaching staff	49.1	50.9
Lack of personalized attention	47.0	53.0
Delays in response	52.6	47.4
Lack of clarity in the guidance provided	50.0	50.0
Others	16.7	83.3

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The study examines the impact of VOL's administrative services on graduate student retention in public Kenyan institutions. The results of Table 4.11 and Table 4.12 show that 71.8% of finalist postgraduate students believe they receive adequate administrative services, with 64.5% agreeing that information about the institution's credibility and integrity is readily available, registration information is simple to acquire, and the registration process is logical and obvious. The majority of students agree with the claims about the character of administrative services, but there is room for improvement. Key interviewees also state that administrative services provided include checking financial undertakings, managing sit-in exams, and coordinating resumption of studies.

**Table 4.11: Provision of Administrative Services**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No	66	28.2
Yes	168	71.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100</b>



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**Table 4.12: Nature of Administrative Services**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Mea n</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>
Information about the credibility and integrity of our institution was readily available when i was making initial inquiries before enrolling.	11.5%	16.2%	7.7%	44.4%	20.1%	3.5	1.3
The university's website's registration information is simple to acquire.	8.1%	13.2%	7.3%	50.4%	20.9%	3.6	1.2
The registration process was laid out in a logical and obvious way.	10.3%	11.5%	9.8%	50.9%	17.5%	3.5	1.2
I had no trouble understanding the registration process.	10.3%	11.5%	9.4%	50.0%	18.8%	3.6	1.2
Information about the payment and funding options is readily available.	11.5%	15.0%	7.3%	48.3%	17.9%	3.5	1.3
Complaints are handled promptly and possible solutions are presented to the students in a timely manner.	17.9%	20.5%	20.1%	29.1%	12.4%	3.0	1.3
There exist timely communication of information and relaying of necessary feedback between the students and our institution.	17.1%	12.4%	12.0%	44.9%	13.7%	3.3	1.3
All records, be it academic or financial, are accurate and error free.	10.7%	16.2%	10.7%	45.3%	17.1%	3.4	1.2
<b>Average</b>						<b>3.4</b>	<b>1.3</b>

A survey of postgraduate students at Kenyatta University revealed challenges in accessing administrative services, including bureaucratic procedures, lack of network connectivity, delays in responses, and unfriendly online portal usability. These issues were attributed to the university's lack of funds, resources, updated facilities, infrastructure, and skilled labor. Tutoring and mentoring services were also surveyed, with 62.8% of respondents stating they received adequate support as shown in table 4.13 and 4.14. However, the nature of

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these services was below average, with most students agreeing on the nature of these services. The university also provided career advice, library and research seminars, individual lectures, and timed tutorials. However, the proportion of students who disagreed with some statements was slightly above average, indicating room for improvement as shown in Table 4.15.

**Table 4.13: Challenges when Accessing Administrative Services**

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Bureaucratic procedures	61.1	38.9
Lack of network connectivity	38.0	62.0
Delays in response	62.0	38.0
Unfriendly usability of the online portal	36.8	63.2
Others	12.8	87.2

**Table 4.14: Provision of Tutoring and Mentoring Services**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No	87	37.2
Yes	147	62.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100</b>

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**Table 4.15: Nature of Tutoring and Mentoring Services**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Me an</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>
I have a mentor.	16.2%	17.9%	17.9%	36.8%	11.1%	3.1	1.3
My mentor is available when I have a problem.	15.8%	22.2%	17.9%	35.0%	9.0%	3.0	1.3
I have the necessary information and abilities for independent study.	13.2%	20.9%	16.2%	33.3%	16.2%	3.2	1.3
I have understanding of and expertise in time management.	12.4%	22.6%	14.5%	33.8%	16.7%	3.2	1.3
Our tutors are responsive to my needs and interests.	8.1%	18.8%	12.0%	42.3%	18.8%	3.4	1.2
Our tutors possess the requisite skills about VOL programmes.	8.1%	17.9%	11.1%	46.2%	16.7%	3.5	1.2
There exist established channels that allow for online interactions with our tutors.	5.1%	16.2%	12.0%	48.3%	18.4%	3.6	1.1
Our tutors are timely to provide the required course materials necessary for our learning.	8.1%	18.8%	13.2%	41.9%	17.9%	3.4	1.2
My tutors are available when I contact them.	6.8%	21.8%	10.7%	43.2%	17.5%	3.4	1.2
<b>Average</b>						<b>3.3</b>	<b>1.2</b>

The study reveals postgraduate students in Kenya face challenges in accessing tutoring and mentoring services, with 42.7% citing poor coordination between tutors and learners, 36.3% lacking network connectivity, 53.8% lacking personalized attention, 29.5% experiencing unfriendly usability of the online portal, and 16.7% experiencing delays in posting learning materials as shown in table 4.16. The study also investigates the impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on the retention of postgraduate students in publicly funded universities in Kenya. The study found that 67.9% of the finalist postgraduate students received adequate ICT services, but the nature of these services was subpar as shown in table 4.17. The study also found that students are offered advisory information and guidance on various ICT services, but there is still room for improvement.

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**Table 4.16: Challenges when Accessing Tutoring and Mentoring Services**

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Poor coordination between the tutors and learners	42.7	57.3
Lack of network connectivity	36.3	63.7
Lack of personalized attention	53.8	46.2
Unfriendly usability of the online portal	29.5	70.5
Others	16.7	83.3

**Table 4.17: Provision of ICT Services**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No	75	32.1
Yes	159	67.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100</b>

A survey among graduate students revealed challenges in accessing ICT services, including lack of ICT competency, network connectivity, unfriendly online portal usability, and lack of personalized attention as shown in table 4.18. The lack of adequate ICT and eLearning infrastructure was cited by 92% of respondents in a 2015 study. Over half of respondents were encouraged to continue their courses through distance learning, with 45.8% agreeing that academic support services contribute to high retention rates as shown in table 4.19. Support services help minimize stressors, improve planning, and develop a natural social contract with the institution as shown in table 4.20.

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**Table 4.18: Nature of ICT Services**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>
I have solid experience using the university's learning management system.	9.0%	29.5%	10.7%	34.2%	16.7%	3.2	1.3
I am able to register my semester's units using the learning management system.	9.0%	21.4%	11.1%	39.7%	18.8%	3.4	1.3
I am able to apply for transcripts online.	11.1%	22.2%	14.5%	34.6%	17.5%	3.3	1.3
I am able to apply for semester offs online.	15.8%	23.9%	21.4%	29.5%	9.4%	2.9	1.2
I am able to apply for refunds online	12.8%	30.8%	19.2%	27.4%	9.8%	2.9	1.2
I am able to apply for certificates online.	13.2%	24.8%	22.2%	29.1%	10.7%	3.0	1.2
I am able to apply for graduation online	12.0%	20.1%	17.5%	35.9%	14.5%	3.2	1.3
<b>Average</b>						<b>3.1</b>	<b>1.3</b>

**Table 4.19: Challenges when Accessing ICT Services**

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Lack of ICT competency	35.5	64.5
Lack of network connectivity	42.3	57.7
Unfriendly usability of the online portal	38.0	62.0
Lack of personalized attention	44.9	55.1
Others	15.8	84.2

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**Table 4.20: Student Retention**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
The academic support services offered through distant learning motivate me to keep going till i finish.	7.7%	14.5%	24.8%	30.3%	22.6%
Due to the academic support services offered by remote learning, I plan to continue until the academic degree is completed.	6.0%	10.3%	17.9%	39.3%	26.5%
I am motivated to finish the course by the academic assistance services offered within the allotted time.	8.7%	13.0%	30.3%	26.0%	22.1%
The student retention rates in our institution is high owing to the academic support services provided.	11.1%	20.1%	23.1%	24.4%	21.4%
I am willing to refer other students to our institution owing to the academic support services provided.	10.7%	12.4%	25.6%	28.2%	23.1%

The study found a positive correlation between academic support services for Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) and postgraduate student retention. Access to career counseling and counseling services was positively correlated with retention, with a one-unit increase in these services resulting in a 0.758% improvement as shown in table 4.21. Administrative services also showed a favorable correlation with retention, with an increase of one unit resulting in a 0.79 percentage point increase. Tutoring and mentorship services were positively related to retention, with a one-unit increase in these services leading to a 0.800-unit increase. ICT services were also positively related to retention, with a 0.773 percentage point increase implied by a small increase in ICT services.

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**Table 4.21: Pearson Correlation**

Variable		Postgraduate student retention	Career guidance and counseling services	Administrative services	Tutoring and mentoring services	ICT services
Postgraduate student retention	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
Career guidance and counseling services	Pearson Correlation	.758**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000				
Administrative services	Pearson Correlation	.799**	.711**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000			
Tutoring and mentoring services	Pearson Correlation	.800**	.738**	.779**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		
ICT services	Pearson Correlation	.773**	.756**	.819**	.754**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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### **Discussion of Findings**

The results showed a significant correlation ( $r$  coefficient of 0.758) between career counselling and VOL services and postgraduate student retention. Students received adequate information on distance education, career guidance, expected progression, and their role as a student under the VOL program. The study also found that the directors and assistant directors guided students to select appropriate courses, provided catalogues, and emailed communication. However, barriers such as lack of personalized attention, delayed responses, and poor flow of information impeded the effective provision of career counseling and counseling services. Administrative services provided by VOL also contributed to increased graduate student retention, with a significant correlation ( $r$ -coefficient of 0.799). However, challenges such as bureaucratic procedures, network connectivity, and delay in responses, unfriendly online portal usability, and inaccessibility of semester results impeded the effective provision of administrative services.

Results showed that these programs increased student retention, with a significant correlation  $r$  coefficient of 0.800. The study also found that the university provided adequate tutoring and mentoring services, including career advice, library and research seminars, individual lectures, and timed tutorials. However, challenges such as poor coordination between tutors and learners, lack of network connectivity, personalized attention, and unfriendly online portal usability hindered the effective provision of these services. The study also found that ICT services for VOL made college students more likely to stay in school, with a significant correlation  $r$  coefficient of 0.773. The study also suggested providing students with various support services to ensure the highest graduation rate in open, remote, and electronic learning.

### **Conclusion**

The study showed how Kenyatta University's Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) academic support services affected its graduate students' retention rate. When the students began participating in the academic support programs, their grades improved significantly. Career assistance and counseling services provided by Kenyatta University contribute to the institution's success in retaining postgraduate students. Therefore results of this study suggest that Kenyatta University's administrative services have a significant favorable effect on the retention of graduate students. Moreover, the results of this study suggest that Kenyatta University's retention rates for graduate students are improved by the availability of tutoring and mentoring services. Also, ICT services have a favorable effect on the retention of Kenyatta University's post-graduate students.

### **Recommendations**

The Kenyan government's Ministry of Information and Communications Technology should collaborate with university administrations to provide VOL graduate students with guidance on acquiring ICT infrastructure and student support services. Strategic alliances with public institutions could enable them to purchase ICT devices like PCs and MIFIs, enabling VOL graduate students access to education. Practice recommendations include revamping the communication department, deploying competent IT personnel, eliminating bureaucratic procedures, and encouraging students to upgrade their IT skills. Further studies should consider comparing the findings to other universities, determining which components of academic support



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services should receive more attention, and conducting a comparable study at a private university.

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