

**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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**JUNE, 2024**

## DECLARATION

I declare that this research thesis is my original work and has not been presented in any other university/institution for consideration of any certification. This research has been complemented by referenced sources duly acknowledged. Where text, data (including spoken words), graphics, pictures or tables have been borrowed from other sources, including the internet, these are specifically accredited and references cited using current APA system and in accordance with anti-plagiarism regulations.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to GOD the fountain of all wisdom. I also dedicate this to my physically present family during this journey.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS**

<b>AECT</b>	Association for Educational Communications and Technology
<b>AMREF</b>	African Medical Research Foundation
<b>AVU</b>	African Virtual University
<b>CETUS</b>	Consortium for Educational Technology for University Systems
<b>CUE</b>	Commission for University Education
<b>DE</b>	Distance Education
<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>GOK</b>	The Government of Kenya
<b>ICDE</b>	International Council for Open and Distance Education
<b>ICTs</b>	Information Communication and Technology
<b>KICD</b>	Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development
<b>KISE</b>	Kenya Institute of Special Education
<b>MOOC</b>	Massive Open Online Courses
<b>NACOSTI</b>	National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation
<b>NOUN</b>	Open University of Nigeria
<b>OCW</b>	Open Course Ware
<b>ODeL</b>	Open, Distance and E-learning
<b>ODL</b>	Open and Distance Learning
<b>OERs</b>	Open Education Resources
<b>OU</b>	Open University
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
<b>SSA</b>	Sub-Saharan Africa
<b>STWOA</b>	School-To-Work Opportunities Act
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom

<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNISA</b>	University of South Africa
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>VOL</b>	Virtual and Open Learning
<b>WWW</b>	World Wide Web

## ABSTRACT

The following thesis explores the determinants of student retention within the Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) program at Kenyatta University, focusing on finalist postgraduate students. The study is framed within the context of increasing demand for flexible and accessible higher education options, which has led to the proliferation of VOL programs globally. Despite their growing popularity, these programs face significant challenges related to student retention, which can undermine their effectiveness and sustainability. The research problem addressed in this study is the identification and analysis of factors influencing student retention in the VOL program at Kenyatta University. The study examines the impact of career guidance and counseling services, administrative support, tutoring and mentoring services, and ICT infrastructure on student retention. It employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. Key findings reveal that career guidance and counseling services significantly influence student retention, with students valuing clear and comprehensive support for their academic and career planning. Administrative services also play a critical role, with effective complaint handling and communication identified as areas needing improvement. Tutoring and mentoring services are essential for student retention, particularly in enhancing tutor responsiveness and support for independent study. Additionally, robust ICT services are crucial for providing the flexibility and accessibility needed in a VOL program, although challenges related to technical support and connectivity persist. Based on these findings, the study concludes with several recommendations aimed at improving student retention in the VOL program at Kenyatta University. These include enhancing career guidance and counseling services, improving administrative support mechanisms, strengthening tutoring and mentoring services, and leveraging ICT for enhanced learning. By addressing these areas, Kenyatta University can enhance student engagement, satisfaction, and retention rates, ultimately promoting the success and effectiveness of its VOL program. Therefore, the research contributes to the broader understanding of student retention in virtual and open learning environments, offering practical insights for higher education institutions seeking to optimize their support services and foster a culture of academic success and inclusivity.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter serves as the cornerstone for the comprehensive investigation into the influence of student support services on postgraduate student retention in Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) programs within Kenyan public universities. The background illuminates the surge in higher education demand in Kenya and the pivotal role of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in meeting this demand. Articulating the problem, the study addresses the challenge of high attrition rates in ODL, particularly in Kenya's public universities. The purpose of the study is to scrutinize how academic support services impact postgraduate student persistence, with specific objectives exploring the effects of career guidance, administrative services, tutoring, mentoring, and ICT services. Research questions intricately align with these objectives. The study's significance underscores its practical contributions, while assumptions lay foundational premises. Acknowledging limitations in accessing respondents, delimitation clarifies the study's scope, centering on Kenyatta University. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks guide analyses, and a definition of significant terms ensures shared understanding. This introduction sets the stage for a holistic exploration of the intricate dynamics shaping VOL in the Kenyan educational landscape.

### **1.2 Background of the Study**

In the dynamic landscape of higher education in Kenya, the demand for tertiary education has witnessed an unprecedented surge, surpassing that of other East African countries (Kipchumba, 2019). This surge has resulted in a remarkable

increase in university enrollments, with a growing number of individuals seeking advanced education. However, this surge has created a persistent shortage of university-level education opportunities relative to the increasing numbers of aspiring students. To address this educational imbalance, public institutions in Kenya, notably Kenyatta University, have implemented various strategies to expand enrollment capacities and meet the escalating demand for higher education. One notable strategy has been the adoption of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs, representing a paradigm shift from the traditional lecture-based, instructor-centered educational approach. As underscored by Loon (2021), ODL has gained prominence in addressing evolving educational needs and providing flexible alternatives for learners.

The ODL landscape, characterized by its ability to facilitate experiential learning, hands-on activities, research, and instruction in a distance learning space, has become a significant contributor to societal and economic growth. This approach is evolving into a fundamental component of mainstream educational institutions, both in developed and emerging nations. The global shift towards creating a more interconnected world, fostering higher education accessibility, and meeting the escalating demand for advanced learning is well-aligned with the concept of ODL. The Education for All (EFA) goals, as articulated by Chibambo (2022), further emphasizes ODL as a means to deliver high-quality education on a global scale. However, the ODL landscape in Kenya, particularly in public universities, has not been without challenges. Modise (2022) investigation into the quality of ODL in Kenyan universities revealed pervasive challenges, including inadequate funding, insufficient resources, outdated facilities, poor infrastructure, and a lack of support

for ODL. Mwaniki et al. (2020) identified obstacles such as a lack of ICT and eLearning infrastructure, further hindering the effective implementation of remote learning in Kenyan institutions. Although many universities in Kenya adopted Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs that leverage modern ICT technologies in teaching and learning over a decade ago, enrollment in these programs remains low compared to traditional face-to-face delivery methods. For instance, in 2016, Kenyatta University, with a total student population of approximately 70,000, had only about 6,000 students (8.5%) enrolled in the Digital School of Virtual and Open Learning (Mwaniki et al., 2020).

Kenyatta University, a prominent institution in Kenya, has responded to these challenges by being at the forefront of implementing ODL programs to cater to the diverse needs of learners. Over the years, ODL offerings at Kenyatta University have expanded across various models, including the school holiday model and online learning. Notably, the Digital School for Virtual and Open Learners (DSVOL), a significant unit within Kenyatta University, has played a pivotal role in this expansion. DSVOL, accounting for 8.5% of the university's student population, has become a cornerstone in providing ODL opportunities to a substantial portion of the student body. Over the past 15 years, Kenyatta University has been at the forefront of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) delivery, with its genesis traced back to the establishment of the Institute of Open Learning (IOL) in 2003. In its initial phases, the IOL pioneered distance education programs through a blended approach, utilizing print modules complemented by face-to-face tutorials conducted at university campuses and regional centers nationwide. However, in response to the evolving landscape of technology, the ODL program's mode of

delivery has undergone significant transformations. Reflecting its commitment to staying abreast of technological advancements, the IOL underwent rebranding, first as the Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) Institute and subsequently as the Digital School of Virtual and Open Learning (DSVOL). This adaptive evolution underscores Kenyatta University's dedication to providing innovative and responsive educational opportunities through its ODL initiatives.

Despite the benefits that ODL brings, challenges persist, and the quality of ODL in Kenyan universities, including Kenyatta University, remains a subject of scrutiny. Among the challenges faced by ODL students, particularly those enrolled in DSVOL, are obstacles related to administrative processes, counseling, guidance, tutoring, mentoring, and the integration of information communication and technology (ICT) services. Students engaged in ODL, and specifically within DSVOL, often grapple with a lack of comprehensive support, leading to lower completion rates compared to their counterparts in face-to-face institutions. Retention rates for students using the face-to-face option are almost 61% higher than those using the distance mode (Paulsen & McCormick, 2020). 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). Open Distance Learning (ODL) programs face considerable challenges with student retention, with dropout rates ranging from 10% to 20% higher than those in traditional classroom environments (Wambua et al., 2021). Notably, between 40% and 80% of students enrolled in ODL programs often withdraw before completing their courses. This highlights the pressing need to delve into the specific challenges



faced by DSVOL students and assess the impact of targeted support services on their retention rates.

In this context, the present study focused on understanding the unique challenges encountered by postgraduate students in DSVOL at Kenyatta University and examines the influence of learner support services, including career guidance, administrative assistance, tutoring and mentoring, and ICT services, on their retention. By addressing these challenges and evaluating the efficacy of support mechanisms, this research aimed to contribute valuable insights to the enhancement of ODL quality, particularly within the context of DSVOL at Kenyatta University.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

In the dynamic landscape of Kenyatta University's Digital School of Virtual and Open Learning (DSVOL), which constitutes a substantial 8.5% of the university's student population, the evolving scenario of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs has been both transformative and challenging. Over the past 15 years, DSVOL has been a key player in providing flexible learning opportunities, leveraging technological advancements to meet the diverse needs of learners. Despite its significant contributions, the DSVOL program faces multifaceted challenges, including administrative bottlenecks, limited counseling and guidance services, tutoring and mentoring gaps, and issues related to the integration of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) services. These challenges have cumulatively contributed to a situation where the retention rates of students enrolled in DSVOL programs are not optimal. The problem at hand, which this study aimed to address, lied in the identification and understanding of the specific

support services that are crucial for enhancing the retention of postgraduate students within the DSVOL framework at Kenyatta University. By delving into the nuances of the existing challenges and the support mechanisms in place, the study sheds light on how targeted interventions can be formulated to bolster retention rates and create a more conducive and supportive learning environment within the DSVOL context.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

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

#### **1.5 Objectives**

The study was directed by the subsequent specific aims:

- i To investigate how career guidance and counseling services for Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) contribute to the retention of post-graduate students at Kenyatta University.
- ii To analyze the effectiveness of administrative services for VOL in contributing to the retention of post-graduate students at Kenyatta University.
- iii To explore how tutoring and mentoring services for VOL contribute to the retention of post-graduate students at Kenyatta University.
- iv To investigate the role of ICT services for VOL in contributing to the retention of post-graduate students at Kenyatta University.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

This study aimed to address the following inquiries:

- i What impact does the provision of career guidance and counseling services for VOL have on the retention of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya?
- ii To what extent do the administrative services for VOL influence the retention of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya?
- iii What impact does the availability of tutoring and mentoring services for VOL have on the retention of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya?
- iv What is the extent of the influence of ICT services for VOL on the retention of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This research holds substantial significance for various stakeholders, encompassing public universities and policymakers, Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) students, researchers, and scholars. Firstly, for public universities and policymakers, the study provides invaluable insights into the student support services crucial for the success of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs, especially within the context of the Digital School of Virtual and Open Learning (DSVOL) at Kenyatta University. By offering a nuanced understanding of the challenges and requirements, the findings guide administrators in formulating policies that enhance the quality of ODL, ensuring that student support services are aligned with the unique needs of learners. This is particularly pertinent in the absence of clear guidelines on the administration of ODL programs in public institutions.

Secondly, for VOL students, the research serves as an awareness and guidance tool. By highlighting the importance of student support services, the study informs VOL students about the available resources that can contribute to their academic success. It encourages them to proactively seek assistance, fostering a sense of empowerment and connection with the support systems designed to address their diverse needs. Thirdly, for researchers and scholars, the study contributes to the academic community's understanding of the intricate relationship between student support services and ODL. By delving into the specific challenges faced by students in the DSVOL framework at Kenyatta University, the research establishes a reference point for future investigations. It encourages scholars to explore innovative approaches and interventions that can further enhance student support services in ODL contexts.

Therefore, this research was poised to instigate positive transformations within the landscape of ODL in Kenyan public universities, with a particular focus on the DSVOL program at Kenyatta University. The implications and recommendations derived from this study have the potential to influence policy-making, guide students in navigating their academic journeys, and stimulate further scholarly inquiry into the evolving domain of Open and Distance Learning.

### **1.7 Assumptions of the Study**

The following presumptions served as the basis for the intended investigation. That Kenyatta University's Student Support Services:

- i Recognizes the importance of student support services in enhancing Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs.

- ii Assumes students are aware of available support services, indicating they have access to resources to improve their learning experience.
- iii Assumes that well-designed support services can improve student retention in the DSVOL program.
- iv Assumes Kenyatta University is committed to continuous enhancement of its ODL programs, including the provision of student support services.
- v Assumes a shared belief in the significance of ODL, recognizing its role in expanding access to education and supporting its success.

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

- i Accessibility Challenges: The spread of COVID-19 and the subsequent shift to online education posed challenges in reaching sampled respondents, particularly ODL students located in different locations.
- ii Online Data Collection: The use of online platforms for data collection, such as Google Forms, extended the data collection period as respondents took varying amounts of time to respond, potentially impacting the timeliness of the data.
- iii Honest Opinions: Difficulty in ascertaining the honesty of respondents' opinions and experiences may have influenced the accuracy of data collected.
- iv Focus on Opinions: The study heavily relied on the opinions of students, potentially introducing subjectivity to the findings.

To mitigate the identified limitations, the research employed several strategic approaches. Firstly, recognizing the accessibility challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to online education, the study implemented alternative

communication channels, such as social media platforms, to reach out to sampled respondents, particularly those enrolled in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) program at Kenyatta University. Secondly, to address concerns regarding the timeliness of data collection associated with online platforms like Google Forms, the research team established clear deadlines for response submission, sent regular reminders to participants, and actively monitored response rates to ensure prompt data retrieval. Thirdly, in response to the difficulty in ascertaining the honesty of respondents' opinions, the study emphasized the importance of confidentiality and anonymity, reassuring participants of the confidentiality of their responses and employing validated scales to measure their perceptions accurately. Lastly, to mitigate potential subjectivity resulting from a focus on opinions, the research adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to triangulate findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of student retention within the VOL program at Kenyatta University.

### **1.9 Delimitation of the Study**

The study strategically delimited its scope to Kenyatta University, focusing on the Digital School of Virtual and Open Learning (DSVOL), a program integral to the institution and constituting 8.5% of its student population. The temporal scope spans the years 2020-2021, capturing a specific period amid the dynamic landscape of ODL program evolution at Kenyatta University. Kenyatta University's well established online platform and extensive experience make it an ideal case study for exploring factors influencing student retention in virtual and online learning programs. The study leverages rich data resources, diverse student populations, and

comprehensive support services to investigate the effectiveness of academic support services and potential interventions in online higher education. Evolutionary changes from the Institute of Open Learning (IOL) to Open Distance and e-learning (ODEl) Institute and, subsequently, to Digital School of Virtual and Open Learning (DSVOL) were traced, emphasizing the contemporary challenges. The study recognized the constraints of online data collection, necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings and conclusions are context-specific, applicable primarily to Kenyatta University's ODL environment, and may not be universally generalizable to all institutions offering ODL programs.

#### **1.10 Theoretical Framework**

The Transactional Theory, developed by Moore, provided a comprehensive lens through which to examine the variables central to this study. The theory defines "transactional distance" as the psychological and communication gap between learners and instructors, influenced by physical separation, course structure, and interaction levels. Emphasizing the role of "dialogue," it underscores meaningful communication to reduce transactional distance. "Structure" refers to the organization of educational programs, with well-structured courses aiding in clarity and order to diminish transactional distance. "Learner autonomy" is crucial, as increased independence correlates with reduced psychological gaps. The theory introduces the "Interaction Equivalency Theorem," highlighting the necessity of diverse interactions for effective learning. Similarly, the "Media Equivalency Theorem" stresses the importance of appropriately using different media to facilitate interactions. In summary, Transactional Distance Theory provides a comprehensive understanding of how psychological, communicative, and

organizational elements interact, shaping the efficacy of distance education experiences.

According to Moore (2018), communication breakdowns, misconceptions, and learning impairments may result from the student's inherent detachment from the lack of physical interaction during learning activities in DE. This difference is not related to physical proximity but rather to instructional methodology and student-instructor interaction. Transaction refers to how a student interacts with and responds to their environment (Moore, 2018). Each participant in the DE transaction is distinct in terms of their physical location, the method of accessing learning, the design of their learning environment, and the impact of the aforementioned on their interaction with the learning institution (Moore, 2018). In DE, the student's goal is to acquire knowledge using the available models provided by the learning institution, whereas the teachers' goal and the institution is to make learning as easy as possible for the student to do so. In any educational event, transactional distance does exist.

Within the Transactional Theory, career guidance and counseling services in ODL play a pivotal role in reducing transactional distance. The guidance and counseling offered to students contribute to effective communication (dialogue) and provide organizational support (Tsang et al., 2021). By fostering meaningful interactions, learners can navigate academic and career-related challenges, thereby decreasing the transactional distance. Administrative services, a crucial component of learner support, are viewed through the Transactional Theory as mechanisms to minimize transactional distance. Efficient administrative services, including enrollment processes, registration, and support at regional centers, enhance the organizational

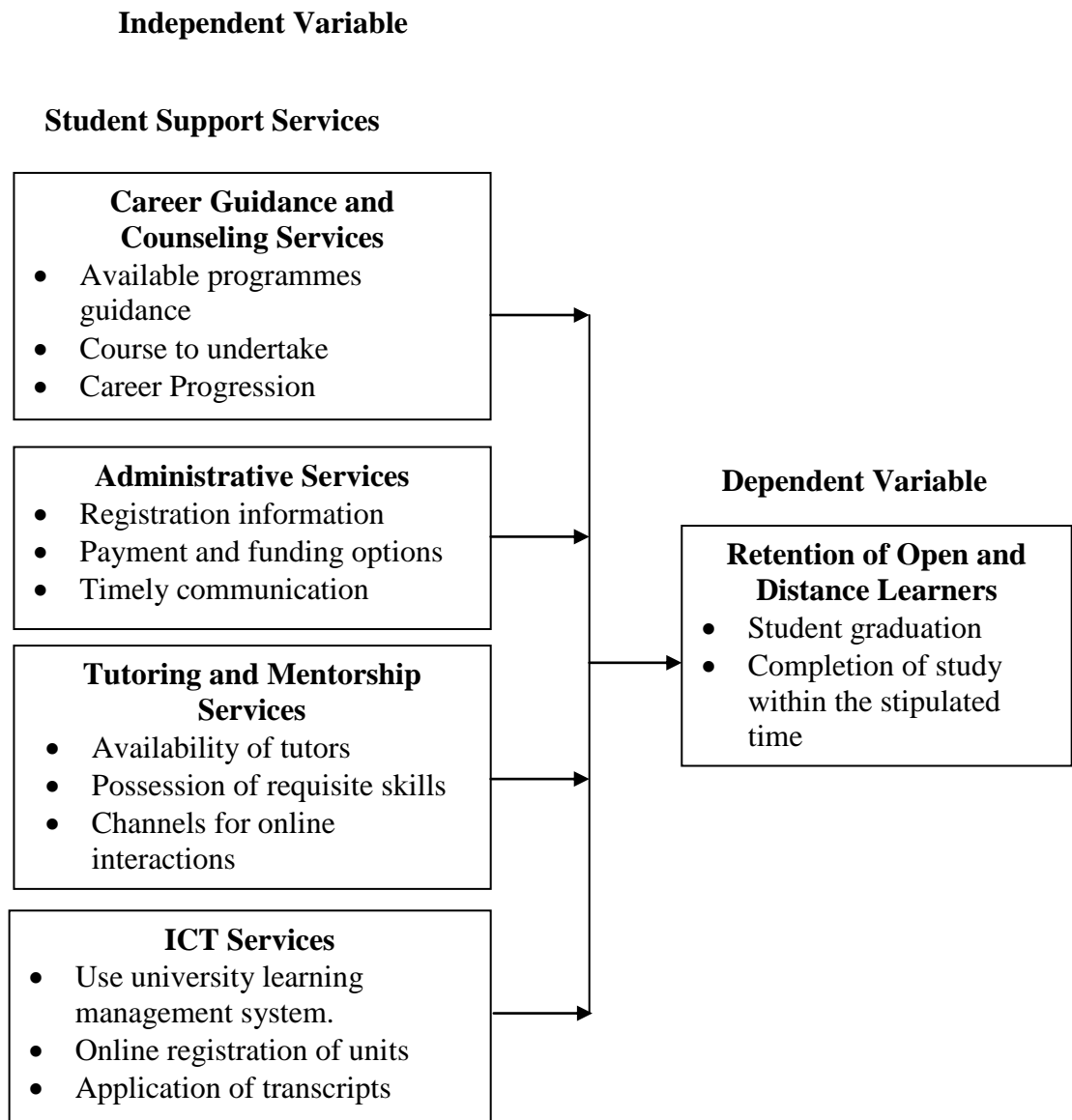


aspect of the learning environment. This, in turn, contributes to the overall success of ODL students by reducing barriers and facilitating smoother interactions. Tutoring and mentoring services are examined within the Transactional Theory framework as essential elements for reducing transactional distance. These support services provide personalized interactions (dialogue) and organizational structure, fostering an environment conducive to the success of ODL learners. The interaction between tutors/mentors and students serves to bridge gaps, ensuring a more engaged and supported learning experience.

Transactional Theory emphasizes the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services in reducing transactional distance (Batita, & Chen, 2022). Access to computers, internet resources, and communication tools enhances the dialogue and organizational aspects of the learning process. The integration of technology, as supported by Transactional Theory, contributes to a more connected and accessible learning environment. Retention, a critical outcome in ODL programs, is explored through the lens of Transactional Theory. The theory suggests that comprehensive and accessible support services, including career guidance, administrative efficiency, tutoring, mentoring, and ICT integration, contribute to reduced transactional distance. As transactional distance decreases, dialogue and learner autonomy improve, positively impacting retention rates. By adopting the Transactional Theory as the theoretical framework, this study aimed to holistically explore the interconnectedness of career guidance, administrative efficiency, tutoring, mentoring, ICT integration, and their collective impact on the retention of postgraduate students in Kenyatta University's ODL programs.

### 1.11 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**

The conceptual framework of this study is designed to elucidate the complex interplay between independent variable, Student Support Services (comprising

Career Guidance and Counseling Services, Administrative Services, Tutoring and Mentorship Services, and ICT Services), and the dependent variable, Retention of Open and Distance Learners. Career Guidance and Counseling Services within the framework encompass support mechanisms that extend beyond merely assisting students in choosing suitable courses. These services are designed to provide insight into available programs, aiding students in navigating their academic journey, and offering essential guidance for career progression. The assumption is that well-informed and supported students are more likely to persist in their studies.

Administrative Services, another facet of Student Support, play a pivotal role in student retention. This involves the timely dissemination of registration information, presenting diverse payment and funding options, and ensuring effective communication channels. An efficient administrative support system is expected to contribute positively to the overall student experience and, consequently, enhance retention rates. Tutoring and Mentorship Services constitute a critical component of the framework, acknowledging the significance of personalized academic support. Factors such as the availability of tutors, their possession of requisite skills, and the provision of effective channels for online interactions are considered instrumental in influencing student retention. These services aim to create a conducive learning environment, fostering academic growth and student engagement. The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Services into the conceptual framework recognizes the transformative impact of technology on education. This includes utilizing the university learning management system, enabling online registration

of units, and facilitating the application of transcripts. The assumption is that proficient use of technology enhances accessibility and convenience, thereby positively affecting retention rates.

The dependent variable, Retention of Open and Distance Learners, encompasses student graduation and the completion of studies within stipulated timeframes. The theoretical underpinning assumes that a comprehensive and effective suite of Student Support Services positively influences students, reducing dropout rates and contributing to successful academic outcomes. Therefore, the conceptual framework posits that a holistic approach to Student Support Services, addressing career guidance, administrative efficiency, tutoring, mentorship, and technological integration, collectively enhances the retention of Open and Distance Learners. This framework establishes the groundwork for exploring and understanding the multifaceted relationships among these variables in the context of Kenyatta University's Digital School of Virtual and Open Learning (DSVOL). Intervening variables mediate the relationship between independent variables like career guidance, counseling services, administrative services, tutoring and mentorship services, and ICT services and the dependent variable, retention of open and distance learners. These variables influence students' decisions, motivations, and retention outcomes. For example, career guidance and counseling services' availability, assistance in course selection, and support for career progression affect students' satisfaction and engagement. Intervening variables help explain the complex pathways through which these variables influence retention.

## 1.12 Definition of Significant Terms

**Administrative Support:** Assistance for distance education students in obtaining information efficiently. In this study, it covers support related to admission, tuition fees, and communication of announcements.

**Guidance and Counseling:** Formal or informal assistance enhancing students' academic, personal, career, and social aspects. In this study, it includes advice provided to VOL postgraduate students to aid course selection based on interests.

**ICT Services:** Involves electronic devices and software facilitating online access to academic services for postgraduate students.

**Mentoring:** This is a mutually beneficial partnership between distance education tutors and students. Here, mentoring supports postgraduate students in career guidance and specialization identification.

**Public Universities:** Government-operated higher learning institutions relying on public funds. This study focuses on Kenyatta University, with the highest number of VOL postgraduate students.

**Retention:** The duration a student is registered and attending classes. In this study, it assesses the proportion of postgraduate students successfully meeting program requirements within the specified timeframe, defining success through program completion.

**Student Support Services:** Encompasses all forms of aid provided to postgraduate VOL students by Kenyatta University, aiming to ensure their timely completion of chosen courses and successful graduation. This includes guidance, counseling, mentoring, tutoring, administrative support, and ICT services.

**Tutoring:** Teaching distance learners, involving sharing specific unit course materials for a semester.

**Virtual and Open Learning (VOL):** The process of obtaining a university degree using electronic and digital media for course material dissemination and lecture delivery. In the VOL program, this involves transmitting educational materials through online platforms and communicating with lecturers and tutors online.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In contemporary education, Open Distance Learning (ODL) has emerged as a transformative mode, providing unparalleled accessibility and flexibility to learners. This alternative educational approach facilitates learning beyond the constraints of physical classrooms, reaching diverse demographics. Central to the efficacy of ODL programs is the seamless integration and functionality of learner support services. As ODL endeavors to transcend geographical boundaries and cater to the unique needs of a varied student population, the significance of learner support services cannot be overstated. This literature review undertook the synthesis of insights gleaned from several sources, each serving as a nuanced lens into the multifaceted landscape of ODL. These articles collectively unraveled the intricate tapestry of learner support services, encapsulating pivotal themes such as career guidance and counseling, administrative services, tutoring and mentoring, ICT services, and retention. The synthesis aimed to distill the collective wisdom embedded in these articles, offering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interplay between learner support services and the success of learners in the ODL paradigm. By delving into these diverse perspectives, this review illuminates the intricate ecosystem that sustains ODL and propels learner success in this evolving educational landscape.

#### **2.2 Student Support Services**

The synthesis of findings from Bampo (2020), Nyakiringa (2023), Wanderi et al. (2019), and Lumadi (2021) provides a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted

role that student support services play in the success, retention, and overall learning experiences of distance education students. Bampo's (2020) study in Ghana emphasizes the critical influence of support services on the academic journey of distance education students. The findings underscore the need for sustained learner-tutor and learner-learner interaction. The study suggests that consistent support, including academic, counseling, and administrative, is essential for progression and program completion. In the context of the project, this highlights the significance of establishing robust communication channels and mentorship programs to ensure ongoing support for ODL students at Kenyatta University.

Nyakiringa's (2023) research in Kenya explores the utilization of support services, with a specific focus on learner motivation and resource accessibility. The study emphasizes the importance of learner motivation in utilizing available services. This insight aligns with our project's goal of enhancing learner engagement by identifying motivational factors and ensuring that resources are easily accessible. Recommendations from this study, such as revitalizing regional centers and promoting blended learning, are directly applicable to our efforts in improving support service accessibility. Also, Wanderi et al's. (2019) study in Kenyan public universities centers on continuous monitoring and improvement of learner support services. The emphasis on ongoing evaluation aligns with our project's objective of creating a dynamic support system. By continuously monitoring and adapting services, our project responds effectively to the evolving needs of ODL students at Kenyatta University, contributing to their overall success and graduation.



Lumadi's (2021) investigation in South Africa delves into the integration of student support services with curriculum implementation. The findings highlight the significance of aligning support services with the curriculum to enhance teaching and learning. This insight was crucial for our project, emphasizing the need to ensure that support services not only address administrative aspects but also contribute directly to an enriched learning experience for ODL students. Therefore, the comprehensive synthesis of these studies underscored the importance of a holistic approach to student support services. It emphasized the need for sustained interaction, resource accessibility, continuous monitoring, and integration with the curriculum. These insights guided our project in creating a robust and adaptive support system tailored to the unique needs of ODL students at Kenyatta University, fostering their success and retention.

### **2.3 Career Guidance and Counseling Services for VOL**

The study conducted by Ndege et al. (2023) significantly contributes to the understanding of the impact of learner academic support services, particularly focusing on career guidance and counseling, on the retention of Open Distance Learning (ODL) students. The research places a distinct emphasis on various elements of academic support services, including advisory support, mentorship, tutorial services, course materials, and feedback. Each of these components is identified as pivotal in shaping the educational journey of ODL learners and influencing their likelihood of retention. The findings collectively stress the interconnectedness of these support services in creating a conducive learning environment.

Advisory support emerges as a crucial factor, guiding ODL learners through their academic pursuits. The provision of timely and relevant advice ensures that students navigate their courses effectively, contributing to a positive learning experience. Moreover, mentorship is identified as a significant contributor to learner retention. The establishment of mentor-mentee relationships fosters a sense of connection and guidance, addressing potential feelings of isolation that ODL students may encounter. Tutorial services play a key role in academic support, providing learners with additional resources and assistance to enhance their understanding of course materials (Mahmood, 2020). The study underscores the importance of these services in facilitating the learning process for ODL students, contributing to their overall success and retention.

Course materials support is highlighted as a critical aspect, emphasizing the need for relevant and updated resources. The study recommends routine revisions to ensure the alignment of course materials with the latest curriculum. This insight suggests that up-to-date and pertinent resources positively impact learner engagement and, consequently, retention. Feedback mechanisms are explored as part of academic support services, although the study identifies them as not statistically significant predictors of learner retention. While feedback may not emerge as a direct influencer, its presence in the array of support services signifies the importance of continuous communication between educators and learners.

In conclusion, the study by Ndege et al., (2023) provides a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced roles played by various academic support services, particularly focusing on advisory support, mentorship, tutorial services, course materials, and feedback. The findings underline the intricate connections among

these elements and their collective influence on creating an environment conducive to the success and retention of ODL learners. This analysis informs the broader discourse on the significance of tailored academic support services in the context of Open Distance Learning.

#### **2.4 Administrative Services for VOL**

The studies conducted by Wambua et al. (2021) and Kisimbii et al. (2020) shed light on the crucial role of administrative services in Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) programs, with a specific focus on academic performance and learner retention. In the study led by Wambua et al. (2021), the researchers delve into the broader context of learner support systems and their impact on the academic performance of Bachelor of Education (Arts) students. Administrative services emerge as a vital component of the overall support system, contributing significantly to the academic success of students. The findings emphasize that a well-functioning administrative support structure positively influences academic performance. Notably, the study recommends specific attention to guidance and counseling support within the administrative framework. This nuanced approach recognizes the multifaceted needs of learners, advocating for a comprehensive system that incorporates both academic and personal guidance.

Similarly, Kisimbii et al. (2020) focuses on the University of Nairobi, exploring the influence of administrative support services on the retention of distance learners. The research establishes a clear and statistically significant link between administrative support services and learner retention. The findings underscore the importance of efficient administrative processes, including enrollment, admission, registration, and record-keeping, in fostering an environment conducive to learner

retention. The study's emphasis on the University of Nairobi provides valuable insights into the specific dynamics of administrative support services in a prominent institution, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their impact.

Therefore, both studies highlight the indispensable role of administrative services in VOL programs. The findings collectively underscore that a well-organized and responsive administrative support system positively affects not only academic performance but also plays a pivotal role in learner retention. The nuanced recommendations, such as specific attention to guidance and counseling, provide actionable insights for institutions aiming to enhance their administrative support structures in the context of Virtual and Open Learning. This comprehensive analysis contributes to the broader discourse on the significance of administrative services in ensuring the success and retention of learners in VOL programs.

## **2.5 Tutoring and Mentoring Services for VOL**

The study conducted by Wanderi et al. (2019) offers a comprehensive exploration of instructional support services and their direct correlation with retention in Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) programs. The research establishes a substantial and positive relationship between instructional support and the overall success of Open Distance Learning (ODL) learners, underlining the pivotal role of these services in creating a conducive learning environment. The primary focus of the study was to unravel the intricate dynamics between instructional support services and learner retention. The findings underscore a statistically significant positive relationship, shedding light on the indispensable nature of instructional support in the realm of ODL. By emphasizing this positive correlation, the study implies that

an effective instructional support system contributes significantly to higher retention rates among learners in VOL programs.

A noteworthy aspect highlighted in the study is the critical role of personalized and interactive learning experiences within instructional support services. The findings emphasize that tailoring support to individual learners' needs, coupled with fostering interactive learning environments, plays a crucial role in the success of ODL learners. This personalized approach addresses the diverse learning styles and requirements of VOL students, creating an environment that is not only supportive but also engaging. In essence, the research by Wanderi et al. (2019) contributes substantively to the understanding of tutoring and mentoring services in VOL. The positive relationship established between instructional support and retention emphasizes the need for educational institutions to prioritize and enhance these services. The call for personalized and interactive learning experiences resonates with the broader shift toward learner-centric education. Overall, this comprehensive analysis provides valuable insights for institutions seeking to optimize tutoring and mentoring services, ultimately fostering an environment conducive to the success and retention of learners in Virtual and Open Learning programs.

## **2.6 ICT Services for VOL**

The research conducted by Kisimbii (2019) delves into Learner Support Services (LSS), with a specific focus on Technological Support Services, and its impact on learner retention at the University of Nairobi. The study underscores the indispensable role played by technological support in influencing the retention of learners in Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) programs. The primary objective of

Kisimbii's study was to unravel the intricate dynamics between Technological Support Services and learner retention. The findings highlight a significant positive influence, emphasizing the critical nature of technological support in the context of learner retention. This suggests that an effective implementation of technological support services contributes substantially to higher retention rates among learners in VOL programs.

A noteworthy aspect emphasized in the study is the recommendation for enhancing ICT infrastructure. The findings stress the importance of robust and accessible ICT infrastructure for learners engaged in VOL programs. This recommendation reflects the growing significance of technology in modern education, especially in the context of open and distance learning. The study encourages educational institutions to invest in and optimize their ICT resources to provide a seamless and technologically enriched learning experience. Furthermore, the study advocates for maximizing available media and technology. By harnessing the full potential of existing media and technology, institutions can create an environment that aligns with the evolving needs and preferences of learners engaged in VOL. This recommendation acknowledges the transformative role that technology can play in enhancing the overall learning experience, making it more interactive, engaging, and accessible.

Therefore, Kisimbii's research contributes significantly to our understanding of ICT services in VOL. The positive influence established between Technological Support Services and learner retention underscores the need for educational institutions to prioritize and optimize their technological support infrastructure. The recommendations for enhancing ICT infrastructure and maximizing available

media and technology provide actionable insights for institutions seeking to leverage technology effectively, ultimately fostering an environment conducive to the retention and success of learners in Virtual and Open Learning programs.

## **2.7 Retention**

Nyakiringa's (2023) study, rooted in the Transactional Distance Theory, provides a comprehensive evaluation of the utilization of support services in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs in Kenya. The research particularly highlights the challenges associated with closed regional study centers and underscores the imperative of revitalization in addressing these challenges. The findings emphasize the pivotal role of learner motivation and resource accessibility as key factors influencing retention rates in ODL programs. The study recognizes the challenges posed by closed regional study centers, which hinder learners' access to essential resources. This constraint on resource accessibility contributes to the overall low retention rates observed in ODL programs. Nyakiringa's findings advocate for the revitalization of closed regional study centers, proposing a strategic approach to overcome the limitations and ensure that learners have adequate access to resources.

A central theme in Nyakiringa's research is the significance of learner motivation in improving retention rates. The study aligns with Transactional Distance Theory, emphasizing that motivated learners are more likely to overcome challenges and persist in their studies. The findings highlight the need for strategies that enhance learner motivation, acknowledging its crucial role in fostering a positive learning environment conducive to higher retention rates. Kisimbii (2019) focuses on the impact of Learner Support Services (LSS) on the retention of distance learners at

the University of Nairobi. The study contributes to the broader understanding of factors influencing retention by specifically examining the role of support services. Kisimbii's research underscores the positive influence of effective support services on learner retention.

Therefore, both Nyakiringa's and Kisimbii's studies underscore the intricate dynamics involved in retaining learners in ODL programs. Nyakiringa's emphasis on the challenges of closed regional study centers and the importance of revitalization aligns with Kisimbii's focus on the positive impact of Learner Support Services. Together, these studies highlight the multifaceted nature of retention in ODL, emphasizing the need for strategic interventions that address challenges, enhance resource accessibility, and prioritize learner motivation to foster higher retention rates in Open and Distance Learning programs.

## **2.8 Gaps Literature Review**

The literature review provides valuable insights into the multifaceted landscape of ODL and the pivotal role of learner support services in ensuring the success and retention of learners. However, there are several gaps in the existing literature that warrant further exploration. Firstly, while the reviewed studies emphasize the importance of learner support services such as career guidance, counseling, administrative services, tutoring, mentoring, and ICT services, there is a lack of in-depth analysis regarding the specific strategies and interventions that effectively enhance these services to support learner retention. Additionally, the literature primarily focuses on the role of support services in influencing retention rates, but there is limited discussion on the underlying mechanisms or processes through which these services impact learner outcomes. Moreover, while some studies



highlight challenges related to resource accessibility and learner motivation, there is a need for more research exploring innovative approaches to address these challenges and improve retention rates in ODL programs. Furthermore, the reviewed studies predominantly focus on specific geographical contexts, such as Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other settings. Therefore, future research should aim to address these gaps by conducting comprehensive investigations into effective strategies for enhancing learner support services, understanding the mechanisms driving their impact on retention, exploring innovative approaches to address challenges, and examining the applicability of findings across diverse geographical contexts. By addressing these gaps, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing retention in ODL programs and inform the development of evidence-based interventions to support learner success.

## **2.9 Summary of Literature Review**

This literature review culminates in highlighting the intricate and interconnected web that exists between career guidance, administrative efficiency, tutoring, mentoring, technological integration, and retention strategies within the realm of Open Distance Learning (ODL). The synthesis of findings from diverse articles accentuates the evolving landscape of ODL and the pivotal role played by a spectrum of support services in shaping the trajectory of ODL learners. Career guidance emerges as a cornerstone in the success of ODL learners, with the literature consistently pointing towards its significance in providing direction and purpose. The studies collectively argue that a lack of access to career guidance can

detrimentally impact retention rates, emphasizing the need for remote accessibility and integration into the curriculum.

Administrative efficiency stands out as another critical theme, with a consensus among studies about the profound impact of streamlined enrollment processes, efficient communication, and improved infrastructure at regional centers. The findings suggest that an administrative system tailored to the unique needs of ODL students significantly contributes to their academic success. Tutoring and mentoring services are underscored as indispensable components in fostering a conducive learning environment for ODL students. Whether delivered online or in-person, these services provide academic support, guidance, and a sense of belonging, aligning with the broader theme of creating a supportive community for learners.

Technological integration, as highlighted by studies focusing on ICT services, emerges as a linchpin for success in ODL programs. The literature emphasizes the crucial role of ICT infrastructure, including access to computers, internet, online resources, and communication tools. Enhancing these services ensures a seamless learning experience and contributes to higher retention rates. Retention strategies, unequivocally point to the positive correlation between comprehensive and accessible support services and improved retention rates in ODL programs. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of support services are recommended to adapt to the dynamic needs of ODL learners. As institutions navigate the dynamic landscape of ODL, this synthesis underscores the continual need for innovation and refinement of support services. The imperative is not only to meet the current needs of ODL students but to anticipate and address future challenges. The holistic

success of learners in open distance learning hinges on institutions' ability to adapt, innovate, and consistently enhance support services to create an environment where learners can thrive.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This section addresses the methodologies employed to achieve the research objectives. The study placed significant emphasis on various aspects of the research, including the research design, study population or target population, sample size, sampling tactics, tools, methodology, and data processing processes utilized for data acquisition and analysis.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The research design employed in this study was used a descriptive survey design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis and inferential statistics. This methodological choice was made to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between student support services for open and distance learning (ODL) students and retention. Descriptive survey research, as elucidated by Schoch (2020), involves gathering data from individuals affiliated with the educational system, which was apt for examining the status quo of student support services and retention in ODL programs. The descriptive survey approach allowed for the identification of a sample that was both statistically and demographically representative of the study population, enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The study design focused on capturing a snapshot of the current situation, aligning with the research objective to assess the impact of various support services on retention in ODL programs.

Furthermore, while the descriptive survey approach primarily focused on recording the current state of affairs, the study also utilized inferential statistical techniques, such as correlation analysis, to explore potential relationships between variables. This integration of both descriptive and inferential methods aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon, moving beyond mere description to inferential analysis of the data collected. The rationale for incorporating inferential statistics was to delve deeper into the underlying relationships between student support services and retention, thereby enriching the analysis and interpretation of the findings. Overall, the research design was carefully chosen to address the research objectives effectively, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the complex dynamics between student support services and retention in ODL programs. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods within a descriptive survey framework, the study aimed to provide robust insights that contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of open and distance learning.

### **3.3 Location of the Study**

The study focused on Kenyatta University, situated in Kiambu County and Nairobi City County, Kenya, as the research setting. Kenyatta University was selected due to its long-standing history and well-established open and distance learning (ODL) programs, making it an ideal context for examining the provision of student support services and their impact on retention. With a significant population of ODL students enrolled across various programs, Kenyatta University offered ample opportunities to investigate the effectiveness of support services in facilitating student retention. The choice of this institution was strategic, aiming to

gain insights into the structures and systems implemented to support ODL students, thus providing valuable implications for enhancing retention strategies in similar educational contexts.

### **3.4 Target Population**

The target population for this study consisted of two main groups within Kenyatta University's open and distance learning (ODL) program. Firstly, the study included the director and all eight coordinators of student affairs at Kenyatta University's VOL centers. These individuals were chosen due to their extensive knowledge and experience in managing student affairs within the ODL program, making them valuable sources of information regarding student support services. Secondly, the study focused on all 2156 postgraduate students in their final year of study within the VOL program. Postgraduate students were selected because they are often more familiar with the challenges faced by ODL students, especially in terms of program completion and retention. Additionally, focusing on postgraduate students allowed for a more focused investigation into the specific needs and experiences of students at an advanced academic level. By targeting these two groups, the study aimed to capture insights from both administrative stakeholders and students themselves, providing a comprehensive understanding of student support services and their impact on retention in the ODL program at Kenyatta University.

The target population, consisting of postgraduate students in their final year of study within the VOL program at Kenyatta University, is distributed across various graduate programs. These programs may include fields such as education, business, public health, social sciences, and others offered by the university. The distribution of the target population based on graduate programs varies, with

different numbers of students enrolled in each program. For example, the education program might have a larger number of students compared to the business program. Understanding this distribution is essential for ensuring representation from each graduate program when drawing the sample for the study. By stratifying the sample based on the distribution of the target population across graduate programs, researchers can ensure that the findings are reflective of the diverse experiences and perspectives within the VOL program at Kenyatta University.

### **3.5 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size**

In selecting the sample for the study, two distinct groups were considered: the directors and coordinators of student affairs (DSAs) and the final-year postgraduate students enrolled in the VOL program at Kenyatta University. For the DSAs group, a census approach was utilized, including all eight DSAs who oversee student affairs at various centers of Kenyatta University. To determine the sample size for final-year postgraduate students, Fisher's method was employed. With a finite population of 2156 final-year postgraduate students, the formula for calculating the sample size is:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

- $n$  = Sample size
- $N$  = Population size (2156)
- $e$  = Margin of error (0.05, assuming a 5% margin of error)

By substituting the values into the formula:

$$n = \frac{2156}{1 + 2156(0.05^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{2156}{1 + 2156(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{2156}{1 + 5.39}$$

$$n \approx \frac{2156}{6.39}$$

$$n \approx 337.80$$



postgraduate students is approximately 338. Therefore, the total sample size for the study comprises 8 DSAs and 338 final-year postgraduate students, totaling 346 participants. To ensure fairness and representation across graduate programs, the distribution of the sample was based on enrollment figures from each program. By distributing the sample in this manner, each graduate program would be represented in the study, allowing for more comprehensive insights into the experiences and challenges faced by postgraduate students in different academic disciplines. This approach ensured that the findings were not biased towards any particular program and enhances the generalizability of the results to the entire population of postgraduate students enrolled in Kenyatta University's VOL program.



### **3.6 Data Collection Instruments**

In this study, a combination of structured questionnaires and key informant interviews were utilized as data collection instruments. These instruments were carefully designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data relevant to the research objectives. The questionnaire was structured to include both open-ended and closed-ended questions, covering various aspects related to student support services, retention, and other relevant variables. The questionnaire was divided into sections, each focusing on different dimensions of the study, such as career guidance and counseling services, administrative services, tutoring and mentoring services, ICT services, and retention. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide detailed insights, while closed-ended questions provided quantitative data that could be analyzed statistically.

Key informant interviews were conducted with selected administrators and staff members who were knowledgeable about the provision of student support services in the VOL program. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in questioning while ensuring that key topics were covered consistently across all interviews. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and included prompts to explore various aspects of student support services, challenges faced by students, and potential areas for improvement. Prior to the main data collection phase, a pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness and relevance of the data collection instruments. A small sample of VOL students from the School of Public Health was selected to participate in the pilot study. Their feedback was used to refine the questionnaire and interview guide, ensuring clarity, comprehensibility, and relevance to the research objectives.

To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, internal consistency measures were employed, including the calculation of the Cronbach alpha coefficient. This statistical measure evaluates the consistency of responses across multiple items within the questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha coefficient value was 0.81. A high Cronbach alpha value indicates greater internal consistency, suggesting that the questionnaire items are measuring the same underlying construct reliably (Karakaya & Alparslan, 2022). The validity of the instruments was ensured through content validation by experts in the field of education and research. Two VOL administrators reviewed the questionnaire and interview guide to assess their clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the study. Their feedback was used to make necessary revisions and enhancements to the instruments, enhancing their validity and reliability.

### **3.7 Pre-testing of the Research Instrument**

The pre-testing of the research instrument involved assessing its effectiveness and relevance in gathering data for the study. A subset comprising 10% of the questionnaire sample, totaling 22 students enrolled in the ODL program from the School of Public Health, was selected for the pilot study. These participants were chosen randomly to ensure representation. The purpose of the pilot study was to identify any potential issues with the questionnaire, such as ambiguities or misunderstandings, and to make necessary adjustments before full-scale implementation. During the pilot study, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire, and their responses were analyzed to determine the clarity, appropriateness, and effectiveness of the instrument. Any ambiguous or confusing questions were revised based on feedback from the pilot participants. Additionally,

the pilot participants' responses were not included in the main study to avoid bias. The pilot study ensured that the questionnaire was refined and optimized for the main data collection phase, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the research instrument.

### **3.7.1 Validity of the Instrument**

The validity of the research instrument was assessed to ensure that it accurately measured the intended variables and provided reliable data for analysis. Both content and construct validity were considered in the evaluation process. Content validity was ensured by breaking down the questionnaire into various subcomponents, each closely aligned with the conceptual framework of the study. Additionally, the questionnaire was reviewed by two VOL administrators to verify the relevance, clarity, and significance of the questions. To further enhance validity, adjustments were made to the questionnaire based on the administrators' feedback, ensuring that the instrument effectively captured the intended constructs. Construct validity was established by examining whether the questionnaire accurately represented the underlying theoretical concepts and constructs of the study. By incorporating feedback from domain experts and ensuring alignment with the research objectives, the questionnaire was refined to enhance its validity.

### **3.7.2 Reliability of the Instrument**

The reliability of the research instrument was assessed to determine the consistency and stability of the data obtained from the questionnaire. Internal consistency, a key aspect of reliability, was evaluated using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This coefficient measures the extent to which the items in the questionnaire are correlated with each other, providing a measure of the

instrument's reliability. The questionnaire underwent internal consistency analysis to ensure that the items related to each construct or variable were coherent and consistent. By calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each construct, the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.81 was considered acceptable, indicating good internal consistency among the items. The reliability analysis aimed to ensure that the questionnaire consistently measured the intended constructs across different respondents. By assessing internal consistency and establishing reliability thresholds, the study ensured that the research instrument provided consistent and dependable data for analysis.

### **3.8 Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection procedure involved systematic steps to ensure the acquisition of accurate and reliable data from the study participants. Participants were informed about the confidentiality of their responses and assured that the collected data would be used solely for academic analysis purposes. Additionally, the researcher obtained a letter of introduction from the institution to facilitate data collection. Due to the extensive outbreak of COVID-19, data collection was primarily conducted through online means, such as online surveys. However, for key informant interviews with Directors and Coordinators of Student Affairs, both face-to-face and telephone interviews were utilized based on the participants' preferences. Prior arrangements were made with the respondents to schedule interviews, ensuring a higher turnout rate.

The researcher ensured ethical considerations were met throughout the data collection process, obtaining necessary clearances from the relevant authorities such as National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation

(NACOSTI). Additionally, the proposal was approved by the appropriate ethics review board to ensure compliance with research ethics standards. The data collection procedure was designed to minimize biases and ensure the integrity of the collected data. By providing clear instructions to participants, maintaining anonymity, and obtaining necessary approvals, the study aimed to collect high-quality data that could be analyzed effectively to address the research objectives.

### **3.9 Methods of Data Analysis and Presentation**

The methods of data analysis and presentation were meticulously designed to ensure the accurate interpretation and dissemination of research findings. Following data collection, the quantitative data were processed and analyzed using statistical software, primarily SPSS version 22. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed to explore relationships and patterns within the data. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were utilized to summarize the characteristics of the study variables. Additionally, inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis, were conducted to examine the relationships between variables and test hypotheses. Qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes. This involved a systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting the qualitative data to derive meaningful insights.

The presentation of findings involved the use of tables, graphs, and narrative descriptions to communicate the results effectively. Excel was utilized alongside SPSS to create visual representations of the data, enhancing the clarity and comprehensibility of the findings. The operationalization of variables was detailed in Table 3.1, providing a comprehensive overview of the relationship between

independent and dependent variables. Overall, the methods of data analysis and presentation were designed to provide a rigorous and systematic approach to analyzing the research data. By combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, the study aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomena and generate meaningful insights to address the research objectives.

**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 to undertake</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>	<b>Quantitative</b> <u>Descriptive</u> Frequency and percentages <u>Inferential</u> Correlation <b>Qualitative</b> 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>	<b>Quantitative</b> <u>Descriptive</u> Frequency and percentages <u>Inferential</u> Correlation <b>Qualitative</b> 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>	<b>Quantitative</b> <u>Descriptive</u> Frequency and percentages <u>Inferential</u> Correlation <b>Qualitative</b> 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>	<b>Quantitative</b> <u>Descriptive</u> Frequency and percentages <u>Inferential</u> Correlation <b>Qualitative</b> Continuous prose form

Source: Researcher (2022)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

The following chapter thoroughly analyzes the gathered data and offers insights into the findings of the study. It initiates with an exploration of the demographic profile of the participants, setting the stage for a detailed investigation into the determinants of student retention in postgraduate programs. By employing both descriptive and inferential statistics, this chapter unveils the intricate relationships among diverse variables and the retention rates of students. Through a structured presentation, it aims to shed light on the factors influencing student retention, thereby contributing to a deeper comprehension of the dynamics within postgraduate education. With a comprehensive approach, this chapter provides valuable implications for policy-making and educational practice in fostering student success and academic advancement.

#### 4.2 Response Rate

**Table 4.1: Response Rate**

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

The survey was completed by postgraduate candidates and the director and deputy directors of student affairs. The researcher was only able to contact six of the student affairs coordinators and directors, although the sample size for director and coordinators was eight. However, out of the total 326 potential finalist postgraduate students, the researcher was able to effectively administer the

questionnaires to 234. This suggests that the sample size used by the researcher was adequate. The findings of the response rate are shown in Table 4.1. From Table 4.1, the finalist postgraduate students had a response rate of 71.2%, while the director and coordinators of student affairs had a response rate of 75%. Fosnacht et al. (2017) state that a response rate of 60% is excellent, a response rate of 70% is excellent, and a response rate of 50% is suitable for publishing and analysis. In light of this, a response rate of 75.0% for the director and coordinators of student affairs is suitable for publication, while a rate of 71.2% for postgraduate candidates who made the finals is excellent for data analysis.

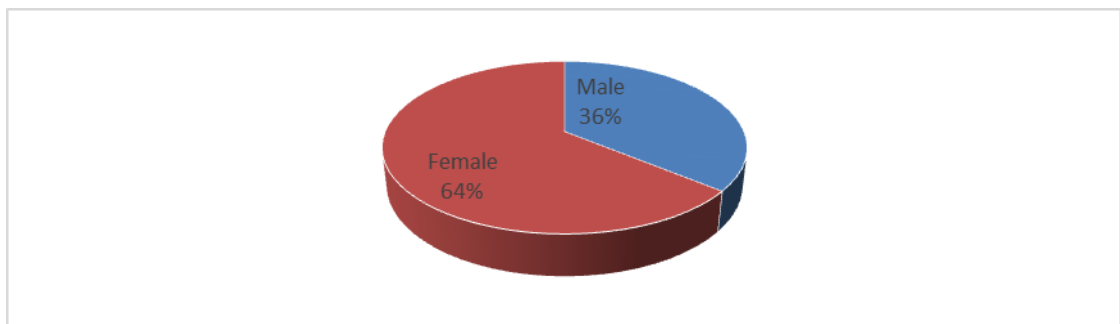
### **4.3 Demographics**

#### **4.3.1 Gender of the Finalist Postgraduate Students**

The gender distribution among finalist postgraduate students reveals an interesting trend, with a notable majority of female participants compared to their male counterparts. Specifically, the female-to-male ratio was observed to be 64% to 36% as shown in Figure 4.1. This discrepancy suggests a preference among women for the Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) mode of education, as opposed to traditional face-to-face learning methods. What is the percentage of face to face and who are you quoting?. This inclination towards VOL mode among female students can be attributed to various factors, including the disproportionate burden of household and caregiving responsibilities often placed on women. With many women juggling multiple roles as homemakers, caregivers, and professionals, the flexibility offered by VOL programs becomes particularly appealing. Unlike traditional classroom-based learning, VOL allows students to engage with course materials and participate in academic activities at their own pace and convenience, thereby accommodating their diverse responsibilities and commitments.



The observed gender disparity underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by female students in accessing higher education. By understanding the factors influencing gender preferences in learning modes, educational institutions can tailor their programs and support services to better meet the needs of all students, regardless of gender identity. Moreover, promoting inclusivity and gender equity in education involves creating environments that empower women to pursue their academic goals and aspirations without being hindered by societal expectations or caregiving responsibilities.

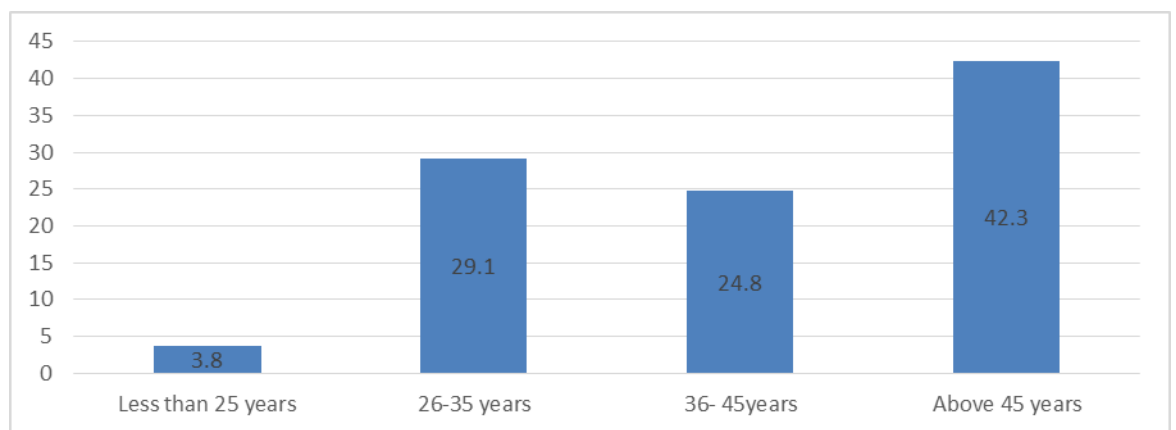


**Figure 4.1: Gender of Finalist Postgraduate Students**

#### **4.3.2 Age Distribution**

The age distribution of participants in the study serves as a crucial demographic aspect providing insights into the composition of the postgraduate student body. The analysis revealed a diverse range of ages among the respondents, showcasing the heterogeneous nature of the student population. Notably, the majority of participants fell within the age of above 45 years, comprising 42.3% of the sample. This suggests a significant proportion of young adults pursuing postgraduate studies, possibly indicative of the trend towards higher education attainment at an earlier stage of professional development.

Furthermore, a notable presence of mature students was observed, with individuals aged 26 to 35 years constituting 29.1% of the sample as shown in Figure 4.2. This demographic segment highlights the inclusion of mid-career professionals and individuals seeking career advancement opportunities through postgraduate education. Additionally, a smaller yet noteworthy proportion of respondents aged 36 to 45 years (24.8%) and less than 25 years (3.8%) reflect the presence of lifelong learners and seasoned professionals engaging in continuous education initiatives as shown in Figure 4.2. Overall, the age distribution underscores the diverse educational pathways and motivations driving individuals to pursue postgraduate studies across various stages of their personal and professional lives. Understanding these demographic dynamics is essential for designing targeted support mechanisms and tailored academic interventions to enhance student engagement, retention, and success in postgraduate programs.



**Figure 4.2: Age of Finalist Postgraduate Students**

### 4.3.3 Post-Graduate Course Distribution

**Table 4.2: Post-Graduate Course Distribution**

<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>

The distribution of post-graduate students across different years of admission provides insight into the composition of the postgraduate cohort over time. The notable concentration of admissions between 2016 and 2020 suggests a trend where a substantial influx of students joined postgraduate programs during these years as shown in Table 4.2. This pattern may indicate a higher enrollment rate in master's programs during this period compared to doctoral programs. The higher

number of master's students aligns with the broader trend in higher education, where master's degrees are often more common and accessible than doctoral degrees. The variation in admissions across different years also reflects the dynamics of student intake and institutional capacity over time.

**Table 4.3: Period of Study**

<b>Number of Years</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
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 distribution of finalist postgraduate students based on the number of years they have been studying sheds light on the duration of their academic journey. The prevalence of students studying for 0-3 years suggests a significant portion of the cohort is in the early stages of their postgraduate programs as shown in Table 4.3. This could indicate a continuous flow of new entrants into postgraduate education. Conversely, the presence of students studying for 4-7 years and beyond highlights the challenges and complexities associated with completing postgraduate degrees within the typical timeframe. Factors such as financial constraints, personal responsibilities, and academic obstacles can contribute to prolonged study durations. The distribution underscores the importance of understanding the diverse needs and experiences of postgraduate students to support their academic success and timely completion of their programs.

## 4.4 Influence of Career Guidance and Counseling Services

### 4.4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The findings pertaining to the influence of career guidance and counseling services on student retention are summarized in Table 4.4 below.

**Table 4.4: Influence 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>Mean</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>

**SD- Strongly Disagree D- Disagree N – Neutral A -Agree SA – Strongly Agree**

The section on Career Guidance and Counseling Services delves into the perceptions and experiences of postgraduate students regarding the support and information provided to them within the Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) program. The findings, derived from a Likert scale measurement, illuminate various facets of career guidance and counseling services offered to the students. The survey results in Table 4.4, reveal that a significant proportion of respondents, representing 49.6%, expressed agreement with the statement "I obtain sufficient information on distant learning to understand how it differs from traditional classroom instruction." This suggests a generally positive perception among students regarding the clarity and comprehensiveness of information provided to them regarding the unique aspects of distant learning modalities compared to traditional classroom settings.

Similarly, regarding the adequacy of information regarding the VOL program, 45.7% of respondents agreed that they were given adequate information about the program, while 41.5% acknowledged receiving career guidance before deciding on their course of study as shown in Table 4.4. These findings highlight the importance of providing comprehensive information and guidance to students, enabling them to make informed decisions about their academic pursuits and career paths. Additionally, nearly half of the respondents (47.0%) agreed that they received clear guidance on the expected progression of their course, indicating a need for structured guidance and support throughout their academic journey within the VOL program. However, it is noteworthy that a significant percentage of respondents expressed neutrality or disagreement with certain statements, suggesting areas where improvements in service delivery may be warranted.

Further analysis reveals that while a majority of respondents (47.0%) agreed that they received clear guidance on their roles as students within the VOL program, a notable proportion (19.7%) expressed dissatisfaction or uncertainty in this regard as shown in Table 4.4. This underscores the importance of clarifying student roles and responsibilities within the VOL program to foster a conducive learning environment and mitigate potential sources of confusion or frustration among students. Regarding access to support resources, 43.6% of respondents agreed that they were introduced to human resources that could support their learning and were provided with channels to reach out for assistance when needed. However, a sizable percentage of respondents expressed dissatisfaction or uncertainty in this aspect, indicating potential gaps in facilitating access to support services and resources for students within the VOL program.

Moreover, while the majority of respondents (44.9%) indicated that they had no trouble comprehending the registration process, a significant proportion expressed varying degrees of difficulty or uncertainty (16.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed). This highlights the importance of streamlining administrative processes and enhancing communication channels to facilitate smooth navigation of procedural requirements for students within the VOL program. Overall, the findings underscore the significance of providing comprehensive career guidance and counseling services to postgraduate students enrolled in the VOL program. While the majority of respondents expressed positive perceptions regarding various aspects of the services provided, there are areas identified where improvements could enhance the overall student experience and facilitate their academic success within the VOL program. Addressing these findings through targeted interventions

and service enhancements can contribute to fostering a supportive and conducive learning environment for postgraduate students pursuing their academic goals within the VOL program. The findings regarding the positive impact of career guidance and counseling services on student retention align with previous research. Yang & Wong (2020) emphasized the multifaceted role of these services in supporting students throughout their academic journey. Similarly, the significant positive correlation coefficient found in the inferential statistics underscores the importance of these services, consistent with prior studies (Yang & Wong, 2020).

#### **4.4.2 Inferential Statistics**

The robust positive correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.758$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), as shown in Table 4.8 below, between access to career guidance and counseling services and postgraduate student retention underscores the pivotal role of these support services in enhancing student success within the VOL program. This correlation implies that as the availability and effectiveness of career guidance and counseling services increase, there is a corresponding improvement in student retention rates. Effective career guidance and counseling services play a multifaceted role in supporting students throughout their academic journey (Yang & Wong, 2020). They assist students in making informed decisions regarding their academic and career pathways, provide guidance on course selection and program requirements, and offer support in overcoming academic and personal challenges that may arise during their studies.

Moreover, these services contribute to the overall well-being and satisfaction of students, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement within the academic community. By addressing students' academic and career-related concerns, career



guidance and counseling services create an enabling environment conducive to academic success and persistence. Therefore, the strong positive correlation between access to career guidance and counseling services and postgraduate student retention underscores the significance of providing comprehensive support services to meet the diverse needs of students. Institutions like Kenyatta University can leverage these findings to prioritize and enhance the provision of career guidance and counseling services, thereby fostering a supportive learning environment conducive to student success and retention in the VOL program.

## 4.5 Influence of Administrative Services

### 4.5.1 Descriptive Statistics

**Table 4.5: Nature of Administrative 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>
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>

**SD- Strongly Disagree D- Disagree N – Neutral A -Agree SA – Strongly Agree**

The role of administrative services in supporting postgraduate students within the Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) program is critical for ensuring a seamless academic experience. Table 4.5 provides insights into students' perceptions regarding the availability and effectiveness of administrative services, shedding light on areas of strength and potential improvement. The data reveals that a significant majority of students agree or strongly agree that essential information about the credibility and integrity of the institution was readily available during their initial inquiries before enrolling. Similarly, a substantial percentage of students find the university's website registration information easy to access and comprehend, indicating effective communication and transparency in administrative processes.

Furthermore, the registration process itself is perceived positively by the majority of students, with many indicating that it was laid out logically and that they had no trouble understanding it. This suggests that administrative efforts to streamline registration procedures and provide clear guidance have been largely successful in facilitating student enrollment. However, while the majority of students agree that information about payment and funding options is readily available, there are areas identified for improvement. For instance, a notable proportion of students express dissatisfaction with the handling of complaints, indicating a need for more prompt and effective resolution mechanisms. Moreover, timely communication of information and feedback between students and the institution is perceived to be lacking by a significant portion of respondents. Improving communication channels and ensuring timely responses to student inquiries and concerns could

enhance the overall student experience and foster a greater sense of engagement and satisfaction.

Additionally, while the majority of students perceive academic and financial records to be accurate and error-free, there is still room for improvement in this area to ensure data integrity and reliability. Overall, while the findings suggest that administrative services within the VOL program are generally perceived positively by students, there are areas identified for refinement and enhancement. Addressing these areas of concern through targeted interventions and improvements in service delivery can contribute to fostering a supportive and conducive learning environment for postgraduate students and ultimately enhance student retention within the program. The positive perceptions of administrative services align with prior research by Yang and Wong (2020), highlighting the importance of effective administrative support in promoting student success and persistence. Additionally, the significant positive correlation coefficient found in the inferential statistics corroborates the critical role of administrative services in enhancing student retention. Despite the generally positive perceptions, areas for improvement in administrative services were identified, particularly in handling complaints and timely communication of information.

#### **4.5.2 Inferential Statistics**

The substantial positive correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.799$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) observed between administrative services and student retention underscores the critical importance of effective administrative support in promoting student success and persistence within the VOL program as shown in Table 4.8 below. This correlation suggests that as the quality and accessibility of administrative services improve,

there is a corresponding increase in student retention rates. The findings are consistent with the research of Yang and Wong (2020), who emphasized the indispensable role of administrative support in enhancing retention within open and distance learning contexts. Yang and Wong's study emphasized the significant impact of administrative services on student satisfaction, engagement, and ultimately, their decision to persist in their studies.

Administrative services encompass a wide range of support functions, including registration assistance, academic advising, financial aid counseling, and student record management. These services play a crucial role in facilitating students' academic journey, ensuring they have access to the resources and information needed to navigate their educational experience successfully. Effective administrative support not only streamlines administrative processes but also fosters a supportive and conducive learning environment. By providing timely and responsive assistance to student inquiries and concerns, administrative staff contribute to students' overall satisfaction and sense of belonging within the academic community. Moreover, efficient administrative services contribute to students' overall academic experience and success by reducing barriers to enrollment, facilitating course registration, and ensuring the smooth progression of their academic journey. This, in turn, positively influences student retention rates and contributes to the overall success of the VOL program.

## **4.6 Influence of Tutoring and Mentoring Services**

### **4.6.1 Descriptive Statistics**

Tutoring and mentoring services play a vital role in supporting postgraduate students enrolled in the Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) program. This section delved into the perceptions of students regarding these services, analyzing their effectiveness and relevance in the context of student retention.

**Table 4.6: 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>Mean</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>

**SD- Strongly Disagree D- Disagree N – Neutral A -Agree SA – Strongly Agree**

The data presented in Table 4.6 offers insights into students' perceptions of tutoring and mentoring services. Responses to various statements were categorized based on levels of agreement, providing a comprehensive overview of students' experiences. A substantial portion of students, 64.9%, reported having a mentor, highlighting the prevalence of mentorship within the VOL program. Furthermore,

47.8% of students indicated that their mentors were available when needed. This suggests that mentorship programs are actively utilized by students and that mentors play a significant role in providing guidance and support.

A notable finding is that nearly half of the students (49.5%) expressed confidence in their ability to engage in independent study, while a similar percentage (50.5%) believed they possessed adequate time management skills. These findings underscore the importance of fostering self-directed learning and time management skills among students, crucial aspects for success in distance education programs. The majority of students (61.1%) perceived their tutors to be responsive to their needs and interests. This indicates that tutors are actively engaged in supporting students and addressing their concerns. However, it is worth noting that a significant portion of students (24.9%) expressed disagreement or strong disagreement with this statement, suggesting that improvements may be needed to enhance tutor responsiveness.

Students reported positive experiences regarding access to course materials and online interactions with tutors. A majority of students (59.7%) indicated that tutors provide the required course materials promptly, indicating an effective support mechanism. Additionally, a substantial percentage (66.7%) affirmed the existence of established channels for online interactions with tutors, facilitating communication and support beyond traditional classroom settings. The findings from Table 4.6 have implications for student retention within the VOL program. Effective tutoring and mentoring services contribute to enhanced student engagement, satisfaction, and ultimately, retention. Students who perceive their mentors as available and supportive are more likely to persist in their studies,



feeling valued and supported throughout their academic journey. The positive experiences reported by students regarding tutoring and mentoring services align with previous research by Tung (2012), emphasizing the transformative impact of these services on student learning experiences and academic performance.

#### **4.6.2 Inferential Statistics**

The substantial positive correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.800$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) observed between tutoring and mentoring services and student retention from Table 4.8 highlights the pivotal role of personalized academic support in facilitating student success and persistence within the VOL program. This correlation indicates that as the availability and effectiveness of tutoring and mentoring services increase, there is a corresponding improvement in student retention rates. The findings align with prior research, particularly the insights provided by Tung (2012), who emphasized the transformative impact of tutorial support services on students' learning experiences and overall academic performance. Tung's research underscored the crucial role of mentorship and tutoring in helping students identify their individual learning styles, strengths, and areas for improvement, thereby contributing to enhanced academic outcomes and increased retention rates.

Tutoring and mentoring services offer tailored academic assistance, guidance, and encouragement to students, addressing their specific learning needs and challenges. These services provide students with valuable opportunities for one-on-one interaction with experienced mentors and tutors who can offer personalized academic support, clarify course concepts, and provide guidance on study strategies and time management skills. Furthermore, tutoring and mentoring programs foster a sense of belonging and connectedness among students,

promoting engagement and academic persistence. By establishing supportive relationships with mentors and tutors, students feel more empowered and motivated to overcome academic obstacles and achieve their educational goals. The significant positive correlation coefficient found in the inferential statistics supports the importance of personalized academic support in facilitating student success and persistence as observed by Tung (2012).

## **4.7 Influence of ICT Services**

### **4.7.1 Descriptive Statistics**

The utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services is integral to the Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) program's success. This section examines the impact of ICT services on student retention, as perceived by postgraduate students, with reference to Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7: 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>

**SD- Strongly Disagree D- Disagree N – Neutral A -Agree SA – Strongly Agree**

The data presented in Table 4.7 offers insights into students' experiences with various ICT services provided by the university. Responses were categorized based on levels of agreement, providing a comprehensive overview of students' proficiency and satisfaction with these services. A significant majority of students (51.7%) reported having solid experience using the university's learning management system (LMS). This indicates a high level of familiarity and proficiency with the primary platform for accessing course materials, submitting

assignments, and engaging with course content. Students also expressed positive perceptions regarding online registration and application processes facilitated by ICT services. Over two-thirds of students (58.5%) affirmed their ability to register semester units using the LMS, while a similar percentage (52.3%) reported being able to apply for transcripts online. Additionally, a majority of students (50.4%) indicated satisfaction with the online application process for graduation.

While the overall perceptions of ICT services are positive, some areas require attention. A notable finding is the lower satisfaction levels with certain online application processes, such as applying for semester offs, refunds, and certificates. These results suggest potential areas for improvement in the user experience and functionality of these online services. The effective utilization of ICT services is closely linked to student retention within the VOL program. Access to user-friendly online platforms for course registration, application processes, and academic support enhances students' overall learning experience and reduces barriers to participation. Furthermore, the convenience and accessibility afforded by ICT services contribute to increased student satisfaction and engagement, factors known to positively impact retention rates. Therefore, the findings underscore the importance of ICT services in supporting student retention within the VOL program. By addressing challenges and optimizing online platforms, institutions can enhance the overall learning experience and promote student success in distance education settings.

#### **4.7.2 Inferential Statistics**

The significant positive correlation coefficient, shown in Table 4.8, ( $r = 0.773$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between ICT services and student retention highlights the pivotal role of

technology in promoting student success and persistence in the VOL program. This correlation suggests that as students have better access to and utilization of ICT resources, there is a corresponding increase in their likelihood to remain enrolled and engaged in their studies. Potter (2013) emphasized the critical importance of technical support in enabling students to effectively leverage IT resources for learning purposes. This includes access to learning management systems, online libraries, virtual classrooms, and other digital tools essential for distance education. By providing robust technical support services, institutions like Kenyatta University can empower students to navigate the online learning environment with confidence and proficiency.

The findings underscore the transformative potential of ICT services in enhancing the educational experience for distance learners. By embracing technology-enabled learning modalities, students gain greater flexibility, accessibility, and interactivity in their academic pursuits. Moreover, ICT services facilitate seamless communication, collaboration, and information access, thereby enriching the overall learning experience and fostering a sense of connectedness within the virtual learning community. Efficient ICT services not only enhance students' academic experience but also contribute to their overall satisfaction and success in the VOL program. By ensuring reliable access to digital resources, technical support staff play a crucial role in mitigating technological barriers and empowering students to achieve their academic goals. The positive perceptions of ICT services, particularly regarding the learning management system and online registration processes, align with previous research by Potter (2013), highlighting the importance of technology-enabled learning modalities in supporting distance

learners. Additionally, the significant positive correlation coefficient found in the inferential statistics supports the pivotal role of ICT services in promoting student success and persistence.

The table provides a summary of the Pearson correlation coefficients between postgraduate student retention and each academic support service, including career guidance and counseling services, administrative services, tutoring and mentoring services, and ICT services. The significant positive correlations highlight the interrelationship between these services and their collective impact on student retention.

**Table 4.8: Pearson Correlation**

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

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

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter Five presents a synthesis of the key findings of the study, culminating in concise conclusions and actionable recommendations. Through a focused examination of the research objectives, this chapter provides valuable insights into the determinants of student retention within the Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) program at Kenyatta University. By drawing upon the consolidated approach to data presentation, analysis, and discussion, this chapter offers a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing student retention, thereby informing strategic interventions and policy recommendations to enhance student success and program effectiveness.

#### **5.2 Summary of Research Findings**

The summary of research findings focuses on the specific context of Kenyatta University, highlighting key insights derived from the analysis of data collected from finalist postgraduate students within the VOL program.

##### **5.2.1 Career Guidance and Counseling Services for VOL and Retention of Post-Graduate Students**

The analysis revealed a significant correlation between access to career guidance and counseling services and student retention within the VOL program. Despite generally positive perceptions regarding the clarity and comprehensiveness of information provided, areas for improvement were identified, particularly in clarifying student roles and facilitating access to support resources.



### **5.2.2 Administrative Services for VOL and Retention of Post-Graduate Students**

Administrative services emerged as a critical determinant of student retention within the VOL program, with a substantial positive correlation observed between administrative support and retention rates. While overall perceptions of administrative services were positive, opportunities for improvement exist, particularly in handling complaints and facilitating timely communication. By addressing these areas of concern, Kenyatta University can enhance the overall student experience and promote retention within the program.

### **5.2.3 Tutoring and Mentoring Services for VOL and Retention of Post-Graduate Students**

Tutoring and mentoring services play a vital role in supporting student retention within the VOL program, with a significant positive correlation observed between access to these services and retention rates. While overall perceptions were positive, areas for improvement were identified, particularly in enhancing tutor responsiveness and support for independent study.

### **5.2.4 ICT Services for VOL and Retention of Post-Graduate Students**

ICT services emerged as a crucial enabler of student retention within the VOL program, offering greater flexibility, accessibility, and connectivity in the learning process. While overall perceptions were positive, challenges related to technical support and connectivity were identified. By addressing these challenges and leveraging ICT to its full potential, Kenyatta University can create a dynamic learning environment that empowers students to succeed and thrive in their academic pursuits.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The conclusions drawn from the study are informed by each research objective, providing a succinct summary of the key findings and their implications for student retention within the VOL program at Kenyatta University.

1. **To Assess the Influence of Career Guidance and Counseling Services on Student Retention:** The study found a significant positive correlation between access to career guidance and counseling services and student retention within the VOL program. Despite generally positive perceptions, areas for improvement were identified, highlighting the need for enhanced support mechanisms to foster student success and retention.
2. **To Examine the Impact of Administrative Services on Student Retention:** Administrative services emerged as a critical determinant of student retention within the VOL program, with a substantial positive correlation observed between administrative support and retention rates. Addressing challenges related to complaints handling and communication can further enhance the overall student experience and promote retention within the program.
3. **To Evaluate the Role of Tutoring and Mentoring Services in Enhancing Student Retention:** Tutoring and mentoring services play a vital role in supporting student retention within the VOL program, with a significant positive correlation observed between access to these services and retention rates. Enhancing tutor responsiveness and support for independent study can further strengthen student support mechanisms and promote retention.

4. To Investigate the Influence of ICT Services on Student Retention: ICT services emerged as a crucial enabler of student retention within the VOL program, offering greater flexibility and accessibility in the learning process. Addressing challenges related to technical support and connectivity can enhance the effectiveness of ICT services in supporting student success and retention.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

The recommendations provided are informed by the research findings, offering actionable strategies to enhance student retention within the VOL program at Kenyatta University. They include:

1. Enhancing Career Guidance and Counseling Services: Kenyatta University should prioritize the enhancement of career guidance and counseling services, ensuring tailored support to meet the diverse needs of postgraduate students. This includes clarifying student roles, facilitating access to support resources, and providing comprehensive career planning assistance.
2. Improving Administrative Support Mechanisms: Addressing challenges related to complaints handling and communication is essential to enhance administrative support and promote student retention within the VOL program. Kenyatta University should invest in training and capacity building for administrative staff to improve service delivery and responsiveness to student inquiries and concerns.
3. Strengthening Tutoring and Mentoring Services: Enhancing tutor responsiveness and support for independent study is critical to strengthening

tutoring and mentoring services within the VOL program. Kenyatta University should provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for tutors and mentors to enhance their effectiveness in supporting student learning and retention.

4. Leveraging ICT for Enhanced Learning: Addressing challenges related to technical support and connectivity is essential to leveraging ICT for enhanced learning within the VOL program. Kenyatta University should invest in infrastructure upgrades and technical support services to ensure seamless access to online resources and communication channels for students.

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the determinants of student retention within the VOL program at Kenyatta University. By addressing key areas of improvement identified in career guidance and counseling services, administrative support, tutoring and mentoring services, ICT services, and socio-demographic considerations, Kenyatta University can enhance student engagement, satisfaction, and ultimately, retention rates within the program. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of continuous evaluation and refinement of support services to adapt to evolving student needs and promote a culture of academic success and inclusivity within higher education institutions.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Introduction Letter

Dear Sir/ Madam,

#### **RE: ACADEMIC RESEARCH PROJECT**

I am a PhD student at Kenyatta University (KU). I wish to conduct a research entitled “**students support services for open and distance learning and its influence on retention of students in Kenya: a case study of Kenyatta University**”. To collect the necessary data for addressing the study's research goals, a questionnaire has been created. The reason I'm writing to you is to ask for your permission to gather data on this crucial issue.

Please be aware that the study will be carried out as academic research and that any information supplied will be held in complete confidence. To preserve secrecy, strict ethical guidelines will be followed, and neither the study's findings nor its reporting will make any mention of specific people.

Your consent will be greatly valued.

Yours Sincerely

**Lukas Gathui Ngaruiya**



If others, please specify .....

6. (a) How can you rate the status of student support services in your institution?

Good [ ] Average [ ] Poor [ ]

7. Have you ever received any of the following student support services provided by Kenyatta University?

<b>Student Support Services</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Career guidance and counseling services		
Administrative		
Tutoring and mentoring		
ICT services		
Others		

If others, please specify .....

8. What is the mode of delivery used?

Print mode [ ] Recorded Tutorials [ ]

Video Conferencing [ ] Virtual [ ]

### **Section B: Academic Guidance and Counseling Services**

9. Do you receive adequate academic guidance and counseling services in your institution?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

If Yes, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on academic guidance and counseling services on a scale of 1-5 where: 5 Strongly Agree, 4 Agree, 3 Neutral, 2 Disagree, 1 Strongly Disagree.

<b>Statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
1. I obtain sufficient information on distant learning to understand how it differs from traditional classroom instruction.					
2. I was given adequate information about the programme offered under the VOL programme.					
3. I received career guidance before making a decision on which course to undertake.					
4. I received guidance on the expected progression of my course.					
5. I received clear guidance on what is my role as a student under the VOL program.					
6. 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.					
7. I had no trouble comprehending the registration process.					

10. What challenges do you experience when accessing academic guidance and counseling services from your institution?

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Contacting the university teaching staff		
Lack of personalized attention		
Delays in response		
Lack of clarity in the guidance provided		
Others		

If others, please specify .....

.....

**Section C: Administrative Services**

11. Do you receive adequate administrative services in your institution?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

If Yes, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on administrative services on a scale of 1-5 where: 5 Strongly Agree, 4 Agree, 3 Neutral, 2 Disagree, 1 Strongly Disagree.

<b>Statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
1. Information about the credibility and integrity of our institution was readily available when i was making initial inquiries before enrolling.					
2. The university's website's registration information is simple to acquire.					
3. The registration process was laid out in a logical and obvious way.					
4. I had no trouble understanding the registration process.					
5. Information about the payment and funding options is readily available.					
6. Complaints are handled promptly and possible solutions are presented to the students in a timely manner.					
7. There exist timely communication of information and relaying of necessary feedback between the students and our institution.					
8. All records, be it academic or financial, are accurate and error free.					

12. What challenges do you experience when accessing administrative services from your institution?

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Bureaucratic procedures		
Lack of network connectivity		
Delays in response		
Unfriendly usability of the online portal		
Others		

If others, please specify .....



**Section D: Tutoring and Mentoring Services**

13. Do you receive adequate tutoring and mentoring services in your institution?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

If Yes, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on tutoring and mentoring services on a scale of 1-5 where: 5 Strongly Agree, 4 Agree, 3 Neutral, 2 Disagree, 1 Strongly Disagree.

<b>Statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
1. I have a mentor.					
2. My mentor is available when I have a problem.					
3. I have the necessary information and abilities for independent study.					
4. I have understanding of and expertise in time management.					
5. Our tutors are responsive to my needs and interests.					
6. Our tutors possess the requisite skills about VOL programmes.					
7. There exist established channels that allow for online interactions with our tutors.					
8. Our tutors are timely to provide the required course materials necessary for our learning.					
9. My tutors are available when I contact them.					

14. What challenges do you experience when accessing tutoring and mentorship services from your institution?

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Poor coordination between the tutors and learners		
Lack of network connectivity		
Lack of personalized attention		
Unfriendly usability of the online portal		
Others		

If others, please specify .....

**Section E: ICT Services**

15. Do you receive adequate ICT services in your institution?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

If Yes, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on ICT services on a scale of 1-5 where: 5 Strongly Agree, 4 Agree, 3 Neutral, 2 Disagree, 1 Strongly Disagree.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. I have solid experience using the university's learning management system.					
2. I am able to register my semester's units using the learning management system.					
3. I am able to apply for transcripts online.					
4. I am able to apply for semester offs online.					
5. I am able to apply for refunds online					
6. I am able to apply for certificates online.					
7. I am able to apply for graduation online					

16. What challenges do you experience when accessing ICT services from your institution?

Challenge	Yes	No
Lack of ICT competency		
Lack of network connectivity		
Unfriendly usability of the online portal		
Others		

If others, please specify .....

**Section F: Student Retention**

17. Please respond to the following question regarding the retention of students in your institution on a scale of 1-5 where: 5 Strongly Agree, 4 Agree, 3 Neutral, 2 Disagree, 1 Strongly Disagree.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. The academic support services offered through distant learning motivate me to keep going till i finish.					
2. Due to the academic support services offered by remote learning, I plan to continue until the academic degree is completed.					
3. I am motivated to finish the course by the academic assistance services offered within the allotted time.					
4. The student retention rates in our institution is high owing to the academic support services provided.					
5. I am willing to refer other students to our institution owing to the academic support services provided.					

### **Appendix III: Interview Schedule Consent Form**

My Name is Lukas Gathui Ngaruiya. I am PHD student from Kenyatta University. I am conducting a study on “Academic Support Services for Virtual and Open Learners and Retention of Post Graduate Students in Kenya: A Case of Kenyatta University”. the information will be used by the Ministry of Education and aid in policy formulation in line with the importance of academic support services particularly for students enrolled for virtual and open learning programmes.

#### **Procedures to be followed**

Participation in this study will require that you provide answers to some questions using An interview guide that has been designed and will be used to gather relevant information to address the research objectives of the study.

You have the right to refuse participation in this study as participation in the study is voluntary. You may ask questions related to the study at any time. You may also stop being in the study at any time without any consequences.

#### **Benefits**

The study strengthens existing students support services in the university for the benefit of the learner.

#### **Confidentiality**

The interview will be conducted in a private setting. Your name will not be recorded on the questionnaire. The data collected will be used for purpose of this study and not any other. All protocols of data security will be adhered to.

#### **Contact information**

## **Appendix IV: Interview Guide**

1. What are some of the challenges you have experienced when offering virtual and open learning programmes?
2. What is the role of your department in the provision of academic support services provided to students of virtual and open learning?
3. Comment on the support services provided to students in the provision of the following services in relation to student retention.
  - a) Academic guidance and counseling services
  - b) Administrative services
  - c) Tutoring and mentorship services
  - d) ICT services
4. What are the drop-out rates in your institution?
5. Is there anything you would like to add?

**This is the end of our session. Thank you for your time**

## Appendix V: Letter of Approval of Research Proposal

KENYATTA UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL

E-mail: [dean-graduate@ku.ac.ke](mailto:dean-graduate@ku.ac.ke)  
Website: [www.ku.ac.ke](http://www.ku.ac.ke)

P.O. Box 43844, 00100  
NAIROBI, KENYA  
Tel. 810901 Ext. 57530

Internal Memo

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FROM: Dean, Graduate School  
TO: Mr. Ngaruiya L. Gathui  
C/o Department of Educ. Mngt. Policy & Curr. Studies  
Kenyatta University

DATE: 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2020  
REF: E83/CE/10774/08

**SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL**


We acknowledge the receipt of your revised Research Proposal entitled "Academic Support Services for Virtual and Open Learners and Retention of Post Graduate Students in Kenya: A Case of Kenyatta University" as per recommendations raised by the Graduate School Board of 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2020.


You may now proceed with your Data collection, subject to clearance with the Director General, National Commission for Science Technology & Innovation subject to seeking approval from Kenyatta University Management.

As you embark on your data collection, please note that you will be required to submit to Graduate School completed supervision Tracking and Progress Report Forms. The Forms are available at the University's Website under Graduate School webpage downloads.

By copy of this letter, the Registrar (Academic) is hereby requested to grant you substantive registration for your Ph.D. studies.

Thank you.

  
PROF. ELISHIBA KIMANI  
DEAN, GRADUATE SCHOOL



c.c. Registrar (Academic) Att. Mrs. Lucy Njenga  
Chairman, Department of Educ. Mngt. Policy & Curr. Studies

Supervisor

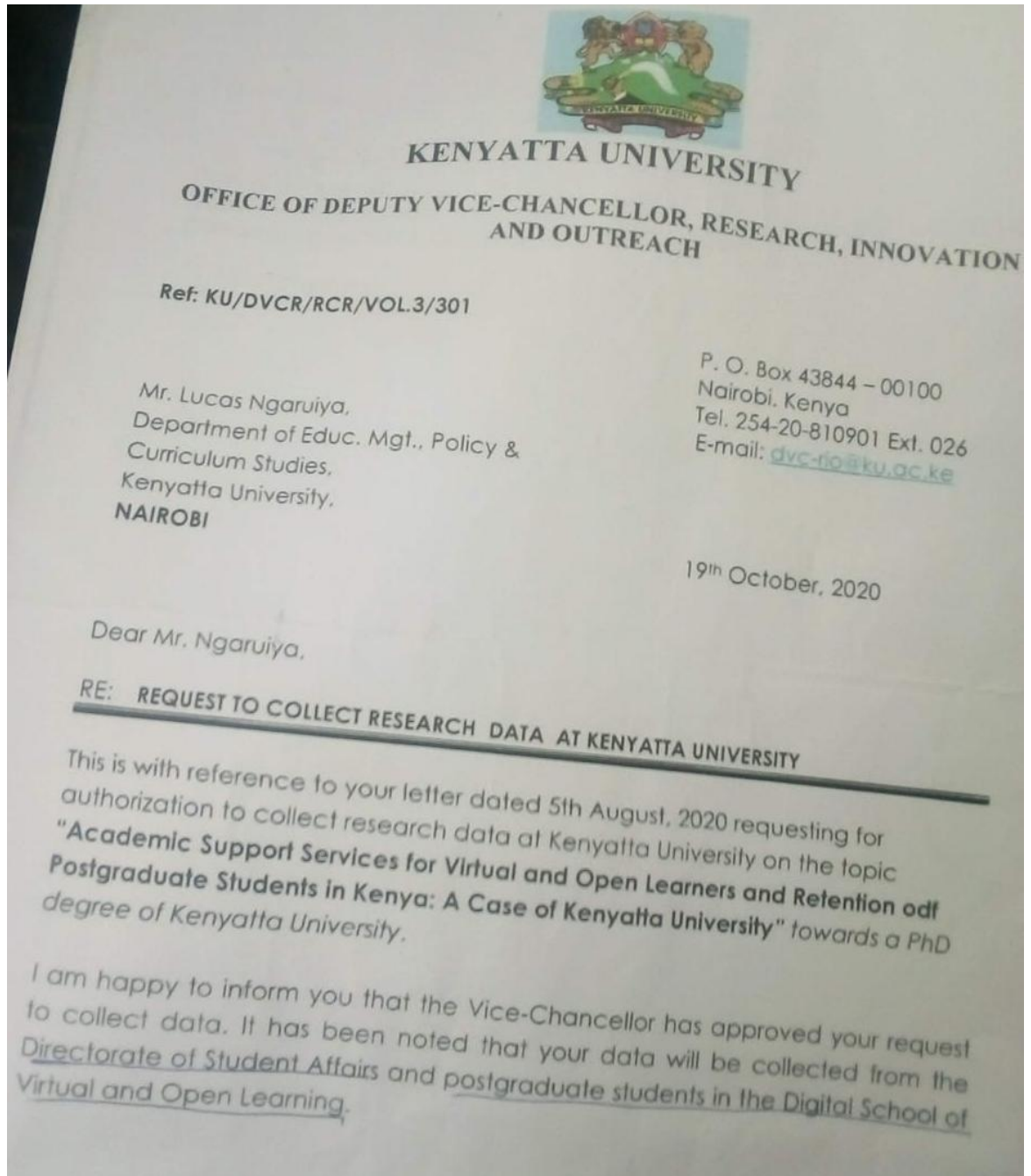
1. Dr. Nibert Ogeta  
C/o Dept of Educ. Mngt. Policy & Curr. Studies  
Kenyatta University
2. Dr. Peter Nyaga Muchanje  
C/o Dept of Educ. Mngt. Policy & Curr. Studies  
Kenyatta University

RM/cao

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*Committed to Creativity, Excellence & Self-Reliance*

**Appendix VI: Letter of Authorization**





Appendix VII: Research Permit

 <b>REPUBLIC OF KENYA</b>	 <b>NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &amp; INNOVATION</b>
Ref No: <b>869468</b>	Date of Issue: <b>20/July/2020</b>
<b>RESEARCH LICENSE</b>	
	
<b>This is to Certify that Mr.. Lukas Gathui Gathui of Kenyatta University, has been licensed to conduct research in Kiambu, Nairobi on the topic: ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES FOR VIRTUAL AND OPEN LEARNERS AND RETENTION OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN KENYA: A CASE OF KENYATTA UNIVERSITY for the period ending : 20/July/2021.</b>	
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<b>869468</b> Applicant Identification Number	 Director General <b>NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &amp; INNOVATION</b>
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