EMBEDDING TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR STANDARDIZATION 9001:2008 FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION: PERSPECTIVES OF LEARNERS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to establish perspectives of learners on the extent to which embedding Total Quality Management in International Organization for Standardization 9001:2008 impacts on continuous improvement of Distance Education in Kenya at the University of Nairobi. The study was guided by a Total Quality Management theory to explain how the management team in an institution is entirely responsible for ensuring that quality management systems are implemented to attain quality delivery of services for customer satisfaction. The study used mixed method in a case study design. The approach entails employing both qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection, analysis and presentation. Through triangulation data was validated. Sampling techniques used to sample students for Focus Group discussion were: criterion; stratified purposeful; and random sampling. The Dean, School of Continuing Distance Education and the Chairman of the department of educational studies were selected through the use of intensity sampling technique. Data collection instruments included interview guide used to collect data from the Dean and the Chairman. A Focus Group Discussions guide and the Course Experiential Rating Matrices were used to collect data from students. The study concluded that although The University of Nairobi has been credited as the leader in the provision of DE and being the pioneer University to offer programmes on DE, the status may not be sustainable. This conclusion is based on students' ratings on the determinants of DE where majority were rated on strongly disagree and disagree scale by the participants. Analysis from the focus group discussions affirmed the fact that there is need to improve on the several aspects provided by SCDE to improve on the service delivery. Themes that emerged to support this conclusion included: flawed evaluation process; faulty curriculum delivery; lack of team work among students; challenges related to study modules; inadequate information and lack of care and support.

Keywords: Total Quality Management, International Organization for Standardization 9001:2008, Continuous Improvement, Distance Education, Perspectives of Learners.

INTRODUCTION

The role of Distance Education (DE) as a strategy of increasing access to higher education from the time of independence to date has continued to be mainstreamed as a mode of learning through policy framework as evidenced by Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 where Kenya recommended the establishment of an Open University and use of ODL in human resource development (Sessional Paper, 2005).

To meet the demand through an alternative strategy, the School of Continuing and Distance Education (SCDE) in the College of Education and External Studies at The University of

Nairobi started offering training through Distance Education since 1967 (Otiende, 2009; Nyaigoti, 2004). The School has consistently maintained its position of leadership by being the torch bearer in the area of Distance Education (DE). It has faithfully carried out its mandate of providing quality education and extending the University's reach and thus providing training opportunities to the wider population in Kenya (GOK, 2010).

From the foregone discussion, it is evident through the DE mode of study the University of Nairobi is able to offer a range programmes. However, this is not without challenges. A study by Anyona (2009) on the status and challenges of open and distance learning in Kenya's public universities with focus on university of Nairobi and Kenyatta University which are International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 2001:9001 certified, revealed several problems such as lack of supplementary materials such as audio-cassettes, video cassettes, slides and experimental kits which would reinforce each other in private study were not available. In addition, students lacked study guides which would give a broad view within a context of the courses to be studied.

In the recent years, debate on the quality of education provided through DE mode of study has gained a lot of momentum as corroborated by Steyns (2009). Steyns asserted that the need for quality education is the single most important issue today and quality makes the difference between success and failure. Key stakeholders in education which include: universities, governments, employers and students world over have argued that education provided through DE ought to meet national needs by training graduates with relevant labor and social skills to implement national goals (Deshmukh, 2005).

Institutions of higher learning the world over are under pressure to increase access for higher education and on improving the quality of teaching and learning. In response to these demands and in view of the limited resources available, institutions are considering management approaches such as Total Quality Management (TQM) being suitable for quality delivery of services (Deshmukh, 2005). TQM approaches which include: leadership; customer focus; benchmarking; continuous improvement; and teamwork have successfully been used for quality improvement in institutions where DE mode of study is part of teaching and learning (Sewart, 2003).

Total Quality Management which was initially developed as a strategic option for manufacturing industries, adopts a philosophy of continuous improvement and of putting the customer first. The concept is now being widely and successfully implemented in service industries, which include education. When translated into educational terms, the philosophy is consistent with a learner-centered approach in the education sector (Mcllroy & Walker, 2007). Presently, many institutions of higher learning in Kenya have adopted different ISO 9001:2008 as the sole quality management systems. However, if the SCDE is to remain being the leader in the provision of DE and address the challenges as articulated by Anyona (2009), the need to incorporate TQM approaches into the existing ISO 9001:2008 version cannot be underscored.

There has been a major emphasis globally for training institutions to seek certification for quality management systems like the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001:2008 (Berry, 1991). The ISO 9001:2008 standards were created to meet the following objectives; to improve the quality of operations to meet customers' and stakeholders' stated and implied need; to provide confidence to customers and other stakeholders that quality

requirements are being achieved in the delivered product; and to provide confidence that quality system requirements are fulfilled.

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001:2008 attains the above broad objectives through its eight principles namely, customer focus; leadership; involvement of people; process approach; system approach to management; continual improvement; factual approach to decision making and mutual beneficial suppliers relationship. Customer focus which is the focal point of this paper is where a customer is defined as anyone, a person, group or organization, which receives, services or consumes products or services from a supplier Divya (2009). In the context of this study the customers were the DE students receiving services at SCDE being the supplier. In a broader context, parents, guardians, employers are also customers. Ray (2011) argues that customers are the bloodstream of any organization. The customer focus principle is addressed and reflected in the ISO 9001:2008 standard requirements by: communication with customers; care for customer property; the determination of customer needs and expectation; and finally a top management commitment to ensure that all staff is committed to their work with the aim of delighting their customers.

The integration of TQM and ISO 9001:2008 for continuous improvement is becoming a common practice in institutions as evidenced by research Gatawa in Zambia (2008) and Okulenga in Haiti (2011). If the SCDE is to continue being the leader in the provision of DE, it is critical to establish whether the TQM approaches are embedded with the existing ISO 9001:2008 quality systems for continuous improvement of distance education to enhance organizational competitiveness. The study sought to explore the extent to which University of Nairobi may be embedding TQM approaches with ISO 9001:2008 standards for a continuous improvement of its DE program. The study established the rating of the students on the key determinants of quality DE, which included: student support services, curriculum and instruction, provider commitment, and evaluation and assessment from the TQM perspectives. Hence the research question- how do students rate the quality of services provided at the School of Continuing Distance Education?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is strong emphasis on the provision of learner support, which is designed to facilitate interaction and communication between students and academic staff (Garrison & Baynton, 1987). Student Support Services (SSS) are required to ensure the provision of holistic education. These services can be in the form of facilities, administration, learning materials, reading and reference materials, human interaction and moral support. The TQM quality criterion of measuring quality point out that the support services require constant interactions between instructional designers, counselors, student support staff, administrators, technical staff, support staff and students.

Tait (2004), while commenting on the importance of SSS pointed out that, learners without support are most liable to delay their completion of a programme or drop out altogether. Omondi (2008), in his study on the influence of learner support services on the academic performance of DE learners strongly recommended the need for institutional management to establish policies and procedures used to set up students' support services. He emphasized on the importance of administrative services, academic services, and publicity services as being pivotal components of SSS. Research has consistently shown that, without the necessary student support services, DE programme will not succeed (Rae, 1989; Rumble, 1992; Odumbe, 2000; Gikonyo, 2005). It is important that providers of DE have quality assurance

measures to ensure that students receive the support needed to achieve their educational goals.

Moore (1989), in support of TQM principle of customer focus pointed out that methods of accessing out of class materials, such as those provided by individual school media centers or local libraries should be taken into consideration in the provision of student support services. He states that accessibility of a distance instructor is an important support issue. He further argued that provision of facilities like library determines the performance of campus students. Proponents of TQM principles and their relevance in DE allude that students need to be appraised of the ways they can reach their teachers. This is usually done, through long distance phone calls, fax machine, and the Internet. A block of time on the system could be provided at each site during a specific day when the instructor and student could 'meet' via technology or a physical visit to the centre.

According to Bowara (2002), instructors need to provide their distance-learning students with timely feedback concerning assignments and tests. In addition, TQM measures of quality in DE demand that students are constantly provided with opportunities to interact with their instructor and fellow students. This timely feedback to DE students inspires confidence to the students whose age mainly ranges from thirty-five years to forty years who might have been left out of formal training (Taplin, 2001).

Gikonyo (2005), using the ex-post facto research design undertook a study on the effect of learner support services on the performance of DE at The University of Nairobi. The researcher used open and closed-ended questionnaires and individual interviews. The study found out that, among other administrative support systems provided by the University of Nairobi to DE students, contact and communication with tutors and programme coordinators need to be improved. This situation is believed to improve learning. The researcher further pointed out that luck or presence of support services determines whether or not the students fully connect with their training institutions. The study explored whether the effects of learner support services in a TQM and ISO certified learning environment would depict the same results.

According to Cohen (2003), DE programmes need to be flexible and designed with national needs as well as the needs of prospective learners and employers in mind. In the context of TQM, the course designs and structures ought to encourage access and be responsive to changing environments (Tait, 2002). The curriculum should also ensure that the learning and assessment methods are appropriate in line with the desired outcomes of the programmes. He further argued that the Curriculum should be designed in such a manner that it is taught and evaluated within the allocated time by the institution of higher learning. Moore (1989), while commenting on the nature of curriculum for distance learners pointed out that, in well-developed systems, distance courses are designed to accommodate vast and varied segments of the population including, business, government, and education. Courses are offered in a multitude of subjects across the curricula. Therefore course designs and curricula are critical to any educational endeavor.

Duffy (2001) proposed that in terms of the actual course design and the structure of the materials and learning activities, it is a useful practice to aim to start slowly and build the course tempo over time. He further argued that faculty must be available to assist students on how to effectively use the study materials. This assistance can be done on line or face-to-face session. In recognizing the cognitive load issues of the early part of a learning process, it is

reasonable to allow more time for the learners to engage with the content and with each other than might be thought appropriate in other circumstances. Similarly, it makes sense to design the course in such a way that the early tasks are relatively simple so that learners can achieve early success. In longer programmes that may involve a number of component courses, it is recommended that the first course in a programme be short, interesting, and relatively undemanding. In conclusion, Duffy points out that this approach allows confidence, capability and technical fluency to be developed by the learners.

The scheduling tempo of the programmes' content can be benchmarked to ensure that learners attain the necessary competencies (Wiggins, 1992). According to Wong (1999) and Mariani (2001), both experts of DE, there ought to be a specified set of minimum hardware, software and operating system requirements for a technology-based distance programme. It is however important to note that programmes or organizations will have differing minimum requirements. However, Roberts and DeWitt (1999) hold that while curriculum and instructional requirements may vary from programme to programme, TQM mark of quality demands that students are fully informed on matters regarding the technical aspects of programmes like the basic entry qualifications, duration of programmes, and the career opportunities related to pertaining to the programme of study.

A well-run DE is the product of people, planning, and technology. It does not happen overnight and neither is it bereft of problems. As the demand for education increases at rates that seem exponential in nature, the intricacies of operating DE programmes on a daily basis become equally complicated (Rumble, 1992). The leadership's commitment to attain success is reflected on the time, money and the support given to both the faculty and the administrative staff to achieve the objectives of an institution (Steyn, 2009).

Williams (2003), commenting on the importance of provider commitment on provision of quality DE pointed out that compared to conventional providers of education, DE providers must assume greater responsibility in their planning, organizing, coordinating and budgeting tasks to ensure that the peculiar needs that characterize DE environment are attained. According to Creech (2009), leadership in a TQM environment aimed at improving DE institutions is expected to be flexible and be prepared to deal with technical difficulties to foster student achievements. Creech (2009) further argued that because of the peculiar needs of the learners on DE mode of study, providers are expected to establish reliable appeal systems to support the students. Institutions have the responsibility to identify student needs and the ability to solve problems associated with distance learning environments.

Provider commitment in DE provision is determined by assessing some management principle determinants such as the presence or absence of the mission statement of DE, and establishing whether an institution has the necessary resources for a programme to support the teaching faculty (Murgatroyd, 1992; Miller, 1991; Rumble, 1992). For a continuous improvement, DE providers are supposed to be assessed to establish whether they have adequate academic and financial resources to support all functions required in the management of DE.

In a TQM set up, Provider commitment is determined by establishing whether the providers undertake both internal and external needs assessment to establish the appropriate programme to be offered (Williams, 2003). In the same way, Deshmukh (2005) pointed out that an institution's commitment is determined by establishing whether it has clear policies and procedures on how programmes would be reviewed for improvement. This is because DE

systems require tighter management than the conventional educational process of delivery. This is attributed to the inherent complicity and interdependence of their parts. Snowden and Daniel (2008) in the same line of thought pointed out that, to enhance quality in line with TQM philosophy, the need for tighter management is valued.

Researchers in DE point out that the credibility of any institution offering academic programmes through DE is determined by the credibility of the evaluation and assessment process (Lewis, 2006). The proponents of TQM emphasize that DE providers need to ensure that programmes are dedicated to identifiable standards that guide assessment of student learning and any impact on programme structure and pedagogy that arise from technological innovation.

There has been a shift in accreditation emphasis from resources and process of education to outcomes of student learning as the basis for programme and institutional evaluation (Glidden, 1998; Eaton, 1999). This represents a substantial challenge to the process of setting and applying quality standards. The DE providers need to be clear enough to guide evaluation, yet broad enough to accommodate a variety of models and innovative approaches to training. Regardless of how standards are set, ideally, they allow for desired outcomes to be achieved while encouraging innovation in instructional approaches, methods of reaching students, training goals and objectives. Moreover, a good assessment process, which is well benchmarked in line with TQM philosophy,   represents a comprehensive evaluation of the learner, requires standardization of content, faculty competence and careful documentation.

The issues of quality assessment in DE are best addressed within the broader context of technological advances that can potentially enhance and change professional education regardless of context. Many of the same validity and reliability issues that arise in psychological testing also arise in assessment of learners. Several issues bear particular attention. First, there is the issue of plagiarism. The advent of technology has made plagiarism easier to accomplish with the access of information that exists on the World Wide Web. This study is guided by the view that while there are no foolproof methods to prevent plagiarism, providers are challenged to be more vigilant to control such vices. This can be done by use of technical measures to assist in ensuring copyright infringement does not take place for materials placed on the web (IHEP, 1999a). In view of the reviewed literature, it may be argued that embedding TQM approaches with ISO 9001:2008 may assist in addressing the challenges faced in student evaluation and assessment.

METHODOLOGY

The study used mixed method in a case study design which entails employing both qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection, analysis and presentation. (Creswell, 2011; & Denzin, 2001). The qualitative approach was the main design its appropriateness being reinforced by Guba, (1990); Mertens, (2012) who opine that qualitative approach allows the respondents to describe what is meaningful to them than being restricted to predetermined categories. Further qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate for this study since the exploration of TQM as it is embedded in ISO 9001:2008 for the management of DE needed to be explored due to the limited literature available about it. This study collected data containing interactions among students concerning their personal experience on the quality of services provided by SCDE. Data in this category was obtained from the student's focus group interview.

Data in quantitative approach was attained by the use of the Course Experiential Rating Matrix (CERM) questionnaire. The CERM is a standardized tool with certified content validity in rating the quality of services in DE in line with TQM criterion as advocated by Inmanni (2007) and affirmed by Olugbenga (2010).

Target population comprised of 5,200 students undertaking Bachelor of education programme on DE mode in different levels of study referred to as parts. Using the criterion sampling method, all the Part VI students in the department of educational studies were deemed most suitable to participate in the study since they had the longest stay in SCDE and therefore could give in-depth information on the quality of services. Since the population of students in Part VI was 1,000, a sample size of 3% was appropriate for collecting in-depth information during the interview. The students were divided into sub group according to sex to ensure representation of both sexes. The group was considered homogeneous in variables considered critical to this study. These groups constituted 632 males and 368 females. From each group, 3% was selected proportionately. These made 30 respondents, where 19 were male and 11 female. The respondents were divided in to three groups each with 3 female and 6 male making a total of 9 respondents in each focus group. According to Creswell (1998), random purposeful technique adds credibility when potential purposeful sample is too large. Through stratified purposeful technique, the 30 respondents who participated in the focus group interviews were sampled.

In addition, a total of 300 participants who filled the CERM for quantitative data were sampled through the use of simple random sampling technique as recommended by (Isaac,1998 ; Westmeyer, 2009) who argued that while using a standardized tool in rating the quality of distance learning programmes, with a homogeneous population a sample size of not less than 31% from each stratum of the population is adequate selected through the lottery method. Students were required to rate on Quality of DE Provided at SCDE based on the following dimensions: Curriculum and Instruction; Examination Management; Students Support Services and Provider Commitment. The findings and discussion are presented in the section below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using the CERM, the study sought to establish how the students rated the quality of DE at SCDE. The strongly agree and agree ratings were combined and reported as agreed. Similarly, the strongly disagree and disagree ratings were combined and reported as disagreed.

Table 1 yielded results indicating that, 69.5% of the respondents agreed that the curriculum was efficiently designed to meet their career aspirations, while 29.8% of them disagreed with the same statement. The findings mirror Cohen's (2003) argument that DE programmes need to be flexible and designed with national needs as well as the needs of prospective learners and employers in mind. The results show that majority of the respondents by 72.6% disagreed with the statement that the curriculum was designed to encourage self-study by incorporating an appropriate number of self-evaluation exercises with only 18% in agreement. This finding was further evidenced by the respondents during the focus group discussions when they expressed their disappointments on quality and availability of modules. An overwhelming majority of the respondents by 79.3% agreed that the course content had clear and easy language to understand with only 20.1% disagreed. However, though the course content was easy to understand, the majority of the respondents, 73.4% felt that learning materials were not designed with the purpose of engaging the students both intellectually and practically

with only 17.3% in agreement. The findings provided useful insights into areas related to curriculum which the provider will need to consider improving to achieve customer care satisfaction. The importance of designing a curriculum that is responsive to the changing environment was cited by Moore (1989).

During the focus group interview, a respondent expressed a lot of confidence with the faculty's mastery of content; the respondent commented that: "I can rate them between 90-100%" (interview, FG3M, August30, 2013). This was consistent with the respondents' ratings where the majority, 72.7% of students agreed that lecturers demonstrate a clear mastery of content with only 22.3% in disagreement. In a TQM learning environment aimed at ensuring continuous improvement of DE, students are expected to be guided on how to effectively use the study materials (Duffy, 2001). However, the analysis illustrated that 71.6% of the respondents disagreed that they were adequately guided on how to use the learning materials with only 27% in agreement.

According to Cohen (2003), DE programmes need to be flexible and designed in such a manner that all content is taught and evaluated within the allocated time. The study ratings indicated that a significant number of respondents, 63.6% agreed that the syllabi were long and adequately covered within the stipulated time, while 31.4% of them disagreed with the same statement. The study found that care was taken in the production of the study materials. This observation was evidenced by respondents rating where 65.5% of students agreed that care was taken in the preparation of the course materials to ensure that they were well-bound and packaged in portable sizes with only 19.4% of them in disagreement. Towards this end a respondent during the focus group interview was recorded saying: "the study materials are not very voluminous, I mean the size is not discouraging and they are neatly bound"(interview, FG1M, August 28, 2013).This may be interpreted to mean that there was good effort put into the development of the curriculum and instructional materials.

Although the respondents were confident that the curriculum was designed to meet their career aspirations, a large number of them, 68.1% felt that the content was not updated, accurately and thus is limited to suit their educational demands. The data revealed that an overwhelming majority of 74.6% of the respondents indicated that support for the provision of course material at the centers was not well organized and reliable with only 19.7% in agreement.

The foregone discussions on student's ratings on curriculum and instruction indicated some of the aspects of curriculum and instruction which the SCDE has provided and have met the expectation of the DE students. The discussions also focused on areas that the SCDE had to make efforts to improve on for a continuous improvement of DE.

The findings in Table 2 revealed that, 73.8% respondents were of the view that final examination adequately covered the course content taught with only 25.1% not in agreement. This finding confirms the argument that a good assessment process, which is well benchmarked in line with TQM philosophy, represents a comprehensive evaluation of the learners (Glidden & Eaton, 1998). The findings indicated that adequate information on examination schedule is communicated on time. This was affirmed by the majority of the respondents, 67% of them feeling that examination information was provided on time, while 26.9% did not share the same opinion. A respondent who during the focus group discussion remarked affirmed this position: "at least the examination schedule is made available in good time and we are able to prepare fairly well for the examination" (interview, FG3F, August 30,

2013). The respondents felt that the examination management was characterized by many complains. Analysis revealed a large number, 64.7% of respondents felt that examination complains were many with only 26.6% who felt that they were minimal. The study revealed lack of innovation in the management of examination. This was affirmed by the majority, 72.9% of whom were of the opinion that there was lack of variety in the examination management, while 21.3% of respondents felt that varied methods were used in assessment. Analysis of the data revealed that there was no established appeal system provided to the students. Statistical analysis showed that 72.9% felt that there was no established appeal system with only 29.4% felt that there was an appeal system. This finding takes a departure from Creech's (2009) argument that institutions providing DE need to establish reliable appeal systems to support the students.

According to Moore (1989), students on DE programmes are expected to be provided with support services which are availed at designated study centers. This was however not the case at the SCDE as a majority, 69.5% reported that academic progress was not easily and readily available at the extra mural centers. The results indicate that 68.1% of the respondents disagreed, that academic progress was closely monitored through the programme and early warnings are provided to the students at risk of discontinuation, with only 29.4% of them agreeing. Examination preparations, which included aspects like good typesetting to minimize errors, were considered important in DE management. The respondents' rating showed that this was not the case at the SCDE, as the majority, 65.1% of them felt that examination papers were not well prepared; only 24.7% of them were in agreement with the affirmative statement. This position was affirmed by a respondent who remarked that: "some examination papers have typing errors so the invigilator has to keep reading corrections to though it is not a rampant problem" (interview, FG2F, August 29, 2013). Appropriate examination administration procedures did not seem to exist at the SCDE. This is evidenced by majority of respondents where 74.7% were in disagreement with the statement that the administration of examinations was properly done with only 23.3% in agreement.

According to Bowara (2002), DE providers are expected to leverage on information technology to support the students. The study findings took a departure from this argument as the majority, 64.5% of the respondents disagreed that there was adequate technological support provided to students to submit their assessments Online with only 25.5% of them in agreement. Based on the above discussions it was therefore argued that, students rating on examination management provided important insights into what respondents considered to have failed to meet their expectations.

The student ratings on student support services were analyzed as shown in Table 3. This table shows that the majority of the respondents, 81% did not agree with the statement that the University showed commitment in all aspects of the students learning, welfare and graduation needs; only 15.1% agreed with the statement. This finding was consistent with the student remarks during the focus group interview when they said they had no information about their graduation hence "we cannot plan for the graduation at all, we feel our welfare is not taken into consideration" (interview, FG1M August 28, 2013). The study findings clearly indicated lack of study groups among the DE students at the SCDE. This was evidenced by the majority, 61.6% of the respondents who disagreed with the statement that learners were encouraged to create and participate in "communities of learning" with only 31.9% in agreement. Lack of support to form study groups was affirmed by respondents during the group interviews who shared his experiences and said: "I always desire to have an opportunity to meet with my classmates to discuss and exchange ideas but that is not

facilitated by the university, it's hard to study alone" (interview, FG3M, August 30, 2013). The findings were contrary to the argument by Stewart (2003) who pointed out that for students studying on a DE mode of study to remain focused and engaged in their studies; teams of study are considered a very critical pillar in providing support to each other. The analysis indicated that communication was viewed as a challenge at the SCDE with only 31.2% students agreeing that there were reliable channels of communication for individual academic support for learners either by telephone, or any other form of online communication with an overwhelming of 67.4% in disagreement. The study showed that majority; 72% respondents agreed that the semester dates were communicated early to the students with only 19.7% in disagreement. Failure to have reliable channels of communication may have led to lack of the respondents having all adequate information on their study as indicated by only 24.9% students who agreed that learners were provided with adequate information on their studies when required with a majority 65.7% in disagreement.

Analysis indicated that the majority of the respondents, 65.6% felt orientation seminar did not provide all required information to assist them in their academic welfare with only 31.9% in agreement. The findings were not consistent with the argument by Creech (2009) who pointed out that, DE providers have a responsibility to provide all necessary information on the programmes. During one of the focus group interviews, a respondent described the orientation as sketchy. Garrison and Bayton (1987) who view TQM an appropriate approach for continuous improvement of DE argued that effective face to face session entail groups who can interact with the faculty, technical staff and administrators. The findings were contrary to this argument as evidenced by the majority of the respondents, 66.7% who felt that the tutor to learner ratio during the resident classes held during the holiday was not sufficiently small to enable tutors to know the learners as individuals with only 20.1% in agreement. The state of big classes during the residence classes was affirmed by a respondent who shared their experience saying: "the class size clearly does not allow any time for the tutor to have an moment to listen to our concerns, you cannot ask any question and expect adequate responses, we are simply too many" (interview, FG3F, August 30, 2013). This is contrary to Burge's (2008) argument that TQM should encourage innovative and flexible approaches that could be tailored to meet students' needs, capacity, interest and experience and motivation.

Analysis of data revealed that more respondents, 63.4% felt that the university had no adequate computers in all Extra Mural Centers where students can have access to electronic sources with only 33.7% in agreement. Further, Moore, (1989) argued that provision of facilities like library determines the performance of students. The findings of the study were contrary to Moore's argument. This was evidenced by majority of the respondents 46.3% who felt the library was not well equipped with adequate resources to support the students with only 39.1% in agreement. Provision of counseling was important aspect of student support services for student on DE mode of study for moral support.

The study revealed the students have no adequate access to counseling for personal difficulties related to their study as evidenced by majority 62.2% of respondents who were in disagreement and only 35.3% in agreement. The study showed that only 22.9% students agreed that the faculty was trained and has adequate skills to use interactive teaching methods like use of PowerPoint with majority 67% in disagreement. Consistent with earlier findings in this study where a high percentage felt that the appeal systems were not sufficient to support students, while rating student support services, only 42.3% respondents agreed that there were adequate procedures in place to receive students' complaints with majority 52.7% in

disagreement. Student rating on provider commitment on the services was discussed as shown by data on Table 4 below.

In Table 4 the majority, of respondents, 75.3% felt that the university's vision and mission was articulated in all correspondence to students with only 19% in disagreement. The findings were consistent with Murgatroyd's (2011) assertion that providers of DE who provide adequate information on their mission and core values for students are viewed positively by the students. Analysis revealed that only 27.6% of the respondents agreed that there was a published statement by the provider on the students' social welfare with the majority, 69.9% of the respondents disagreeing with the statement.

In a TQM learning environment, opportunities are supposed to be accorded to all applicants who meet the admission requirements irrespective of their social backgrounds (Wiechers, 1996). The study result indicated that the majority of the respondents, 71.1% felt that the provider had not put in place systems to ensure that the enrollment cater for all students irrespective of gender and other physical challenges with only 20.1% in agreement. This rating was affirmed during the focus group interview when a respondent pointed out that: "for the years I have been a student, I have never seen a physical handicapped student in this programme, does it mean that they have no training needs" (interview, FG1F, August 28, 2013). Analysis of the data revealed that significantly more than half of the respondents, 66.6% felt that the provider did not ensure that equal opportunities were provided to all students studying in different extra mural centers with only 26.2% in agreement.

The study revealed that only 30.1% of the respondents agreed that the provider involves the students in providing solutions to challenges which they encounter during their study with majority of the respondents 67.4% in disagreement. Deming (1996), a proponent of TQM argued that institutions offering programmes on DE mode of study are expected to have very effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that all processes are monitored to attain quality services. The findings of the study were not consistent with his argument as evidenced by the majority of the respondents, 67.3% of whom felt that the provider has not set out monitoring procedures to ensure that all rules and regulations are implemented, evaluated and amended if necessary with only 19.7% in agreement.

The study revealed that the respondents did not participate in co curriculum activities hence "none of the students in this programme has ever attended any open day or any sports day. We don't see the need because nobody invites us anyway" (interview, FG1M, 28, August, 2103). This was affirmed by student rating where the majority, 62.4% felt that the provider did not set out clear guidelines on how distance learners participated in non-academic activities in the University with only 33.3% in agreement. Analysis reveal that adequate information related to the programme was not availed as evidenced by the rating where only 34% students agreed that Enrolment practices are characterized by the provision of accurate and helpful information about the programme entry requirements with 60.2% in disagreement.

CONCLUSIONS

Although The University of Nairobi has been credited as the leader in the provision of DE and being the pioneer University to offer programmes on DE, the status may not be sustainable. This conclusion is based on students' ratings on the determinants of DE where majority were rated on strongly disagree and disagree scale by the participants. Analysis from

the focus group discussions affirmed the fact that there is need to improve on the several aspects provided by SCDE to improve on the service delivery. Themes that emerged to support this conclusion included: flawed evaluation process; faulty curriculum delivery; lack of team work among students; challenges related to study modules; inadequate information and lack of care and support.

From the study findings, it was concluded that though, Total Quality Management may be embedded in the ISO 9001:2008 quality management systems at the University of Nairobi. This however appears to be at the basic level of practice in view of the students ratings on the quality of services provided at the SCDE. The study therefore concluded that being an ISO certified organization does not guarantee creating, developing and sustaining the TQM quality culture of delighting the customer.

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Table 1: *Students' Ratings on Curriculum and Instruction*

Statement	Strongly Agree f %	Agree f %	Undecided f %	Disagree F %	Strongly Disagree f %	Likert Mean
The curriculum is efficiently designed to meet my career aspiration.	107 (38.0)	90 (31.5)	2 (0.7)	43 (14.7)	45 (15.1)	2.37
The curriculum is designed to encourage self-study by incorporating an appropriate number of self-evaluation exercises.	5 (1.8)	47 (16.2)	28 (9.4)	118 (41.7)	88 (30.9)	2.1600
The course content has clear and easy language to understand.	92 (32.3)	133 (47.0)	2 (0.7)	39 (13.3)	21 (6.8)	2.15
The learning materials are designed with the purpose of engaging the students both intellectually and practically.	17 (6.1)	33 (11.2)	28 (9.4)	111 (39.2)	97 (34.2)	3.84
Lecturers demonstrate a clear Mastery of content.	57 (19.7)	150 (53.0)	14 (5.0)	44 (15.1)	22 (7.2)	2.37
The students are adequately guided on how to use the learning materials.	19 (6.1)	60 (20.9)	4 (1.4)	119 (42.1)	84 (29.5)	3.68
The syllabi are long and manageable to be covered within the stipulated time.	69 (24.2)	109 (39.4)	16 (5.1)	64 (22.4)	27 (9.0)	2.53
The course content is up to date, accurate, and relevant to suit the current developments in the subjects.	24 (7.9)	48 (16.5)	23 (7.5)	109 (39.1)	83 (29.0)	3.65
Care is taken in the preparation of the course materials to ensure that they are well-bound and packaged in portable sizes.	70 (24.5)	114 (41.0)	46 (15.1)	37 (12.6)	22 (6.8)	2.36
There is variety of teaching methods to cater for all learners.	13 (3.9)	62 (21.5)	10 (3.6)	96 (33.7)	106 (37.3)	3.79
The pages and text are designed well to enhance readability and attractiveness.	87 (30.5)	120 (42.3)	26 (9.3)	42 (14.3)	12 (3.6)	2.18
Support for the provision of course material at the centers is well organized and reliable.	21 (6.8)	38 (12.9)	18 (5.7)	131 (47.0)	79 (27.6)	3.76
Mean	**19.20**	**31.60**	**6.10**	**25.80**	**17.30**	**2.90**

Table 2: *Students' Rating on Examination Management at SCDE*

Statement	Strongly Agree f %	Agree f %	Undecided f %	Disagree f %	Strongly Disagree f %	Likert Mean
Final examination adequately covers the course content taught.	84 (30.1)	122 (43.7)	3 (1.1)	40 (14.3)	30 (10.8)	2.32
There are clear procedures on how examination results will be communicated to DE students.	76 (27.2)	111 (39.8)	17 (6.1)	56 (20.1)	19 (6.8)	2.39
Complains about results are minimal.	23 (8.3)	51 (18.3)	24 (8.6)	114 (41.0)	66 (23.7)	3.54
A variety of assessment methods are used in the program.	19 (6.9)	40 (14.4)	28 (10.1)	109 (39.4)	81 (29.2)	3.7
There is an effective and efficient appeal system where students can air their examination grievances.	26 (9.3)	56 (20.1)	2 (0.7)	99 (35.5)	96 (34.4)	3.66
Students' academic progress is easily and readily available at the extra mural centers.	28 (10.0)	37 (13.3)	20 (7.2)	120 (43.0)	74 (26.5)	3.63
The examinations are set to meet the level of study.	92 (33.0)	115 (41.2)	25 (9.0)	35 (12.5)	12 (4.3)	2.14
The examination schedule is communicated in due time for students to prepare for examinations.	74 (26.5)	144 (51.6)	5 (1.8)	48 (17.2)	8 (2.9)	2.18
Student academic progress is closely monitored throughout the programme and early warnings are provided for students at risk.	24 (8.6)	54 (19.4)	11(3.9)	133 (47.7)	57 (20.4)	3.52
The examination papers are well prepared with no type setting errors and there are no irregularities	24 (8.6)	45 (16.1)	26 (9.3)	114 (40.9)	70 (25.1)	2.42
The administration of the examination is done properly.	15 (5.4)	50 (17.9)	3 (1.1)	142 (50.9	69 (24.7)	2.28
There is adequate technological support provided to students to submit their assessments on-line.	32 (11.5)	39 (14.0)	28 (10.0)	97 (34.8)	83 (29.7)	3.57

Table 3: *Students' Rating on the Students Support Services*

Statement	Strongly Agree f %	Agree f %	Undecided f %	Disagree f %	Strongly Disagree f %	Likert Mean
The University shows commitment in all aspects of the students learning, examination and graduation needs.	10 (3.6)	32 (11.5)	11 (3.9)	118 (42.3)	108 (38.7)	4.01
Learners are encouraged to create and participate in "communities of learning" (teams).	6 (2.2)	83 (29.7)	18 (6.5)	113 (40.5)	59 (21.1)	3.49
There are reliable channels of communication for individual academic support for learners either by telephone, or any other form of online communication.	31 (11.1)	56 (20.1)	4 (1.4)	118 (42.3)	70 (25.1)	3.5
The semester dates are communicated early to the students.	84 (30.1)	117 (41.9)	23 (8.2)	40 (14.3)	15 (5.4)	2.23
Learners are provided with adequate information on their studies when required.	23 (8.3)	46 (16.6)	26 (9.4)	118 (42.6)	64 (23.1)	3.56
The orientation seminars provide all the necessary information required by the students during their study.	25 (9.1)	63 (22.8)	7 (2.5)	101 (36.6)	80 (29.0)	3.54
The tutor/learner ratio during the resident classes held during the holiday is sufficiently small to enable tutors to know the learners as individuals.	18(6.5)	38(13.6)	37(13.3)	111(39.8)	75(26.9)	3.67
The University has adequate computers in all Extra Mural Centers where students can have access to electronic sources.	28 (10.0)	66 (23.7)	8 (2.9)	108 (38.70	69 (24.7)	3.44
The library is well equipped with adequate resources to support the students.	27 (9.7)	2 (29.4)	3 (4.7)	103 (36.9)	54 (9.4)	3.27
Students have adequate access to counseling for personal difficulties related to their study.	26 (9.4)	72 (25.9)	7 (2.5)	109 (39.2)	64 (23.0)	3.41
The faculty is trained and has adequate kills to use interactive teaching methods like use of PowerPoint.	19 (6.8)	45 (16.1)	28 (10.0)	105 (37.6)	82 (29.4)	3.67
There are adequate procedures in place to receive students complain.	42 (15.1)	76 (27.2)	14 (5.0)	95 (34.1)	52 (18.6)	3.14
Mean	**10.0**	**23.2**	**5.6**	**37.6**	**23.6**	**3.42**

Table 4:*Students' Rating on Provider Commitment*

Statement	Strongly Agree f %	Agree f %	Undecided f %	Disagree f %	Strongly Disagree f %	Likert Mean
The University's vision and mission is articulated in all correspondence to students.	104 (37.3)	106 (38.0)	16 (5.7)	41 (14.7)	12 (4.3)	2.11
There is published statement by the provider on the students' social welfare.	17 (6.1)	60 (21.5)	7 (2.5)	137 (49.1)	58 (20.8)	3.57
The provider has put in place systems to ensure that the enrollment cater for all students irrespective of gender and other physical challenges.	12 (4.3)	44 (15.8)	23 (8.2)	109 (39.1)	91(32.6)	3.80
The provider ensures that equal opportunities are provided to all students studying in different extra mural centers.	29 (10.4)	44 (15.8)	20 (7.2)	136 (48.7)	50 (17.9)	3.48
The provider involves the students in providing solutions to challenges which they encounter during their study.	26 (9.3)	58 (20.8)	7 (2.5)	101 (36.2)	87 (31.2)	3.59
The provider has set out monitoring procedures to ensure that all rules and regulations are implemented, evaluated and amended if necessary.	15 (5.4)	40 (14.3)	36 (12.9)	105 (37.6)	83 (29.7)	3.72
The provider has set out clear guidelines on how distance learners can participate in non-academic in activities in the university.	24 (8.6)	69 (24.7)	12 (4.3)	79 (46.6)	44 (15.8)	2.64
Enrolment practices are characterized by the provision of accurate and helpful information about the programme entry requirements.	16 (5.7)	79 (28.3)	16 (5.7)	88 (31.5)	80 (28.7)	3.49
Mean	**11.8**	**28.1**	**6.1**	**32.3**	**18.7**	**3.26**