
An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Support Services of Distance Learners of the Project 17,000 in Oromia Region (The Case of Tutorial Centers under Adama Teachers College)

Kassim Kimo*

Abstract: The main purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of the support services of distance learners of project 17,000 in Oromia Region with particular reference to the centers under the auspices and supervision of Adama Teachers College. The graduates from Adama Teachers College through this mode were target population of this study. Out of 21 tutorial centers, six centers (Adama, Bishoftu, Shashamane, Asella, Robe and Haramaya) were purposely selected for their high rate of dismissal cases and for their taking re-exams repeatedly. From these tutorial centers, a total of 72 tutors (12 tutors per center) and 350 graduates (out of 1075 graduates) were drawn proportionally by using systematic random sampling techniques. Center coordinators from each center were also taken as subjects of the study. To obtain the required information from the subjects, survey questionnaire were developed both for graduates and for tutors. Moreover, focus group discussion was also held with coordinators of the centers. Data collected through these instruments were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis revealed that the support services were not effective enough. Problem of provision of materials (modules), ineffective tutorial sessions, lack of feedback on assignments, lack of access to counseling and library services, ineffective laboratory sessions and radio programs were some of the factors that hindered the effectiveness of the support services of the program. Based on these findings, recommendations are forwarded to alleviate the problems.

* Lecturer, Psychology Department, Adama University

Background of the Study

The dominant feature of distance education is its physical situation. The teachers and learners are not in a direct contact to discuss together or give feedback to each other. Such learning situation requires effective learners' support services (Gunawardena, 1996). The support services should fulfill the distance learners' needs and render services that can stimulate the mind and encourage the academic development of the students (Simpson, 2000; Tait, 2000). There should be provision of enough materials through a variety of media, together with assignment to complete and feedback and other supports to assist students to pursue their studies.

The support services include access to library materials and facilities, delivery of course materials (modules), counseling, tutoring, and provision of information (Garrison, 1989; Rumble, 1992; Molefi, 2002). It also includes creating conducive environment for distance learning, motivating students to continue their education, encouraging socialization and promoting teamwork (Speer, 1996; West Brook & Moon, 1997; Kishore, 1998). These supports can be categorized into academic, which include such packages as tutorial, advising and counseling services and administrative functions, such as enrolment; admission and registration; record keeping; information provision; and delivery of study materials (Molefi, 2002).

Support services contribute to the process of a course as the learning materials (Hodgson, 1986), and help the learner to become competent and self-confident in learning, in social interactions and in self-evaluation. More specifically, Dillon and Blanchard (1991) cited in Usun, Salih (2004), described that support services build the confidence of the learner. For instance, less motivated students may benefit from interaction with the teacher or tutor. Less confident learners may need more group support than they need any other thing. Older learners may need more support in learning environments. Moreover, students need guidance in putting information together, reaching their tutors, completing and submitting assignments, and charting their progress (Porter, 1994 cited in Sherry, 1996). Support services are,

therefore, important from the psychological (emotional), sociological and other perspectives. Providing such services to the distance learning population is an important part of creating the feeling of belongingness in students.

One important means of analyzing the effectiveness of the teaching-learning experience in a distance education system is through the analysis of the learner support services (Kishore, 1998). Of course, many studies have been conducted to investigate how these support services benefit the students academically. For instance, studies on the effects of tutorial services and pertinent support at tutorial centers (Morgan & Morris, 1994; Stevenson & Sander, 1998) vis-à-vis the students' achievements have shown that such services result in positive learning outcomes.

In fact, the amount of support services an institution can offer largely depends on that particular institution's capacity and resources at its disposal. Despite these facts, different countries have been employing this program in their teachers' education system. For instance, teachers education for experienced, but unqualified teachers (e.g. Uganda, Brazil, and Nepal), upgrading teachers general level of qualification to meet new standards (e.g. Nigeria & Hong Kong), and emergency program to train teachers rapidly for the introduction of universal primary education (e.g. Tanzania and Zimbabwe) (TESO, 2003).

In the same way, in Ethiopia, within teachers education program, distance education has been used as one approach for upgrading teachers from a certificate to a diploma level and from there to a degree level. The country had been convinced to use distance education as the best alternative from among the many existing approaches (e.g., summer, evening and regular programs) of training teachers to overcome acute shortage of teachers at diploma level. This has enforced the country to design project 17,000 in 1993 E.C to upgrade 17,000 teachers who has been working in the primary 2nd cycle throughout the country without appropriate qualification for the level. The project was launched with financial support (aid) of AED/BESO I &

Il and Educational Media Agency as central coordinator of this program. Organizing tutorial centers, training tutors, managing the production and distribution of study materials (i.e., course modules with assignments and supplementary materials), and the like were managed mainly by EMA in collaboration with regional education bureaus. The support services, in light of project 1700, also include the delivery of course materials (modules, assignments, students handbook), tutoring in groups, giving constructive feedback on learners assignments, counseling/advice, access to library and laboratory facilities, and provision of information and others (EMA, 2000).

Adama Teachers College, as a responsible college in the country, had been given the responsibility to supervise about 4000 students who were enrolled during the onset of the program in twenty-one tutorial centers in seven zones in Oromia Region, and two tutorial centers in Afar Region. Out of these students, about 83% graduated. The remaining 17% were either dropouts or academic dismissals. The rates of dropout and dismissal were 63% and 37% respectively. Sixty-seven percent of them graduated without sitting for the re-exams. About 33% of the graduates took re-exams at different times. The re-exams were on different or the same courses. This rate also shows an increment from semester to semester and is high within the tutorial centers at teacher training institutes.

It is very common for those distance learners to claim re-exams. Among the cases presented by the students, lack of adequate support services was the most frequent one. This attracted the attention of the researcher to assess the effectiveness of the support services in light of what was proposed by EMA and other stakeholders during the onset of the project. This research, therefore, addressed the following basic questions:

- Did the program offer effective support services?
- Were the participants of the project satisfied with the support services?
- What were the prevailing factors that might have hindered the effectiveness of the support services?

Significance of the Study

The result of this research is expected to create a major shift in how stakeholders should think about effectiveness in distance education. It helps them to assess their responsibilities in offering and using support services. It is also expected to identify factors that have negatively influenced the effectiveness of the support services. Generally, the result is expected to have a great contribution to improve and strengthen appropriate support system in the future.

Delimitation of the Study

The study was confined to Oromia Region with special reference to Adama Teachers College. It was also concerned with tutorial centers that Adama Teachers College has been supervising over the last four years of the program. This study involves tutors, coordinators at tutorial centers and graduates. The study, in general, focuses on assessment of the effectiveness of the support services.

Operational Definitions of some Important Terms or Phrases in the Study

- 1 **Coordinator:** is a person in charge of managing all pertinent activities in the tutorial center.
- 2 **Distance learners:** 1st Cycle Primary School Teachers who had been trained through Distance Education.
- 3 **Project, 17000:** Project initiated by the government to upgrade 17,000 1st cycle primary school teachers to a diploma through Distance Education.
- 4 **Support services:** learner support concerned with a range of human and non-human resources to guide and facilitate the educational transaction.
- 5 **Tutees/students:** trainees or distance learners in the distance education program.
- 6 **Tutorial Center:** school or college or any place where distance

learners (tutees) and teachers (tutors) come together for face-to-face discussion.

- 7 **Tutors:** teachers who have been assigned to offer support for a specific course at a tutorial center in the distance education program.

Abbreviations Used in the Study

- 1 **AED:** Academy for Educational Development
- 2 **ATC:** Adama Teachers College
- 3 **BESO:** Basic Education Strategic Objective
- 4 **EMA:** Educational Media Agency
- 5 **MOE:** Ministry of Education
- 6 **OEB:** Oromia Education Bureau
- 7 **TESO:** Teachers Education System Overhaul

Design of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to assess the prevailing factors that hindered the effectiveness of the support services in Oromia Region with particular reference to the centers under the auspices and supervision of Adama Teachers College. The subjects, instruments of data collection and method of analysis are presented in the following order.

Subjects of the Study

Target Population

The populations of the study are all diploma graduates from Adama Teachers College through distance education in the project 17,000. It consists of a total of 3245 graduates, out of which 2810 and 434 are males and females, respectively. All tutorial center coordinators and tutors are also the target population of the study.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Out of 21 tutorial centers, Adama, Bishoftu, Shashamane, Asella, Robe and Haramaya which were under the supervision of Adama Teachers College were selected for the study. These centers were purposely selected mainly because of a higher dismissed and re-exam rates seen at these centers.. From these tutorial centers 12 tutors per center were represented using systematic random sampling. Similarly, 6 tutorial center coordinators (i.e., one from each center) were taken as the subjects of the study. Likewise, 350 graduates were selected from the 1075 graduates. The selection was made using systemic random sampling techniques.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

To obtain the required information, survey questionnaire was developed and distributed to graduates, and tutors at their tutorial centers. Most of the items in the questionnaire were closed ended in which respondents were asked to indicate their responses from the suggested alternatives. There were also some open-ended items in the questionnaire. In addition, structured interview questions were used to gather data from tutorial center coordinators.

The questionnaire was piloted at Dodola Tutorial Center to identify pitfalls and possible misunderstanding. After pointing the questionnaire, some items were modified and others were rejected.

The modified questionnaire was, then, administered to respondents at their respective areas. Focus group discussion was also employed with coordinators of the centers in focus. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data.

Analysis of Responses of Respondents

Under this section, data on tutees' and tutors' background, on tutorial sessions, tutors, assignments, modules, study skills and counseling service, library and laboratory and management (coordinating) were analyzed.

Analysis of Tutees and Tutors Background

The data collected from 350 tutees and 72 tutors in six tutorial centers through questionnaire were analyzed and interpreted. The analysis of the respondents' background shows that most of the tutees (i.e. 92.1%) were teaching in grades 5 – 8 (second cycle) and about 7.9% were teaching in grades 1 – 4 (first cycle). This indicates that they have been teaching without appropriate qualification. The analysis of the data also reveals that there is a perfect relationship between the subjects the respondents were teaching and the department they were enrolled in for their diploma. This means that they were assigned to teach the subjects they were attending in the project 17,000 for their diploma. The service year of the 80% of tutees ranges from 11-31 years. On average, however, the service year of these participants is 16 years. Most teachers (71%) are within the age range of 31 to 50, with an average of 36 years of age. About 44.3% and 55.7% of them were also from urban and rural areas respectively. The average distance these tutees travel to tutorial centers during tutorial sessions was 45 kilometers. However, 51% of the respondents reported that they traveled up to 175 kilometers to reach their tutorial centers. Regarding their marital status, about 85.4% of them were married, and more than 77% of them have 1 – 9 children.

Concerning tutors' qualification, it was reported that about 65% of them were M.A/M.Sc holders while the remaining 35% were B.A/B.Ed holders. It is believed that trainees can benefit from the tutorial sessions they received given by qualified tutors. The service years of these respondents range from 1 to 23 years while 60% of them served between 15-23 years. About 69% of the respondents had no training as a tutor.

Generally, from the analysis of the profile of tutees and tutors, it can be learned that distance that learners' travel and tutors' lack of training seem to have repercussions on the support systems of the program. However, the fact that qualified tutors can have positive contribution to course delivery.

Analysis of Tutees and Tutors Response to Tutorial Sessions

Table 1: A Summary of Tutees Responses to Questions about Tutorial Sessions.

Statements	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M
Attending tutorial sessions regularly.	350	-	297 (84.8%)	23 (15.2%)	-	2.67
All tutorial sessions were effectively used.	350	-	123 (35.1%)	227 (64.9%)	-	2.38
Satisfied with tutorial sessions.	350	62 (17.9%)	179 (51.0%)	88 (25.5%)	21 (6.0%)	2.80
Tutor's tutoring methodology is appropriate.	350	28 (7.9%)	195 (55.6%)	90 (25.8%)	37 (10.6%)	2.61
Tutor's subject mastery is adequate.	350	62 (17.9%)	179 (51.0%)	88 (25.2%)	21 (6.0%)	2.81

Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1, N= Number of participants, M= Mean

As shown in Table 1 above, about 84.8% of tutees responded that they attended tutorial sessions regularly, whereas 15.2% of them did not attend all tutorial sessions. As can also be seen from the same table, about 64.9% of tutees confirmed that most sessions were ineffective. However, the analyses also indicate that more than 63.0% and 68.0% of tutees found tutor's tutoring methodology and subject mastery appropriate and adequate respectively.

Table 2: A Summary of Tutors Responses to Questions Related to Tutorial Session

Statements	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M
Students attended all tutorial sessions regularly.	72	5 (7.2%)	26 (35.4%)	36 (50.0%)	5 (7.4%)	2.43
All tutorial sessions were effective.	72	1 (1.4%)	22 (29.9%)	44 (61.2%)	5 (7.5%)	2.26
Tutorial center lacked facilities.	72	2 (3.0%)	18 (24.3%)	36 (50.0%)	16 (22.7%)	2.08
Students were satisfied and benefited from tutorial sessions.	72	2 (3.0%)	18 (24.3%)	36 (50.0%)	16 (22.7%)	2.08
All tutorial session were carried out in fixed tutorial schedules.	72	2 (3.0%)	23 (31.3%)	32 (44.8%)	15 (20.9%)	2.17

Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1, N= Number of participants, M= Mean

As can be seen in Table 2 above, more than 56.0% of tutors indicated that most students did not regularly attend tutorial sessions. Besides, 68.0% of tutors also responded that most sessions were ineffective. About 77.0% of respondents believed that tutorial centers lacked facilities and students did not benefit from tutorial sessions respectively. Similarly, 66% of respondents disagreed with the notion that all tutorial session were carried out in fixed tutorial schedules.

Analysis of Tutees and Tutors Responses to Questions about Tutors

Table 3: A Summary of Tutees Responses to Questions about Tutors.

Statements	N	Yes	No
Providing feedback to questions answered wrongly.	350	116(33.0%)	234(67.0%)
Encouraging comments on corrected assignments were given.	350	121(34.4%)	229(65.6%)
Learning difficulties or other personal problems were discussed with tutors during tutorial sessions.	350	167(47.7%)	183(52.3%)
Arranging & attending one's own supportive tutorial sessions in work place and/or residence area was possible.	350	44(12.57%)	306(87.43%)
Doing all laboratory sessions during tutorial time was possible.	350	17(10%)	148(90.0%)

As shown in Table 3 above, about 67.0% of tutees responded that tutors did not comment on their assignment sheets particularly on questions the students have not attempted to answer. Likewise, 65.0% of respondents believed that they were not encouraged through comments and advice from their tutors. It was also reported by about 52.3% of respondents that there was poor communication between tutors and this has made it difficult to discuss different academic and personal issues. About 87.0% of tutees do not have their own supportive tutorial sessions in work place. The analysis also shows that 90.0% of tutees did not conduct any laboratory sessions during tutorial time.

Table 4: A Summary of Tutors Responses to Questions Related to Tutors.

Statements	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M
Competent tutors were selected & trained.	72	9 (12.1%)	30 (42.4%)	27 (37.0%)	6 (7.6%)	2.58
Tutors were insufficiently trained to provide appropriate study support.	72	9 (12.5%)	26 (35.9%)	33 (45.0%)	4 (6.3%)	2.56
Tutors carried out tutorial sessions with commitment in: Returning marked assignments and giving feedback.	72	3 (4.5%)	21 (28.8%)	41 (57.6)	7 (9.1%)	2.28
Giving information to prepare students to collect the next modules.	72	1 (1.5%)	15 (20.4%)	48 (66.2)	8 (11.9%)	2.12
Assisting students to find their way through the next module.	72	1 (1.5%)	16 (23.1%)	48 (66.2)	7 (9.2%)	2.15
Giving advice about the availability of other resources that might be helpful.	72	2 (3.0%)	21 (29.9%)	38 (52.2)	11 (14.9%)	2.19
Giving opportunities for students to get feedback.	72	2 (3%)	14 (19.7%)	47 (65.2)	9 (12.1%)	2.13
Giving particular help to those with various kinds of special needs.	72	8 (10.9%)	34 (46.9%)	17 (23.4%)	13 (18.8%)	2.51
Tutors were satisfied with incentives they were given.	72	3 (4.5%)	15 (20.9%)	36 (49.3)	18 (25.4%)	2.04

Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1, N= Number of participants, M= Mean

As can be seen in Table 4 above, about 53% of tutors believed that competent tutors were selected. However, more than 50% of them responded that they lacked training to provide appropriate study support. Regarding tutors' commitment in carrying out tutorial sessions the respondents reveal that more than 50% of tutors pointed out that they did not perform as required from point of view of tutorial sessions in general.

Analysis of Tutees and Tutors Responses to Questions about Assignments

Table 5: A Summary of Tutees Responses to Questions about Assignments.

Statements	N	Yes	No
Submitting all course assignment per semester & tutorial session.	350	360(87.43%)	44(12.57%)
Working on assignment independently.	350	248(70.9%)	102(29.1%)
Work on assignments in-group.	350	176(50.3%)	174(49.7%)
An experience of coping from friends' assignments.	350	65(18.5%)	285(81.5%)
Seen while coping from assignments	350	188(53.6%)	162(46.4%)
Received feedback on assignments per course regularly.	350	148(42.4%)	202(57.4%)
Benefited from those assignments feedback.	350	204(58.3%)	146(41.7%)

Regarding assignments, the tutees were asked different questions on assignment. Tables 5 above summarized their responses. As can be seen from the table, about 87.43% of tutees submitted all assignments regularly every semester and tutorial session. Most of these respondents (70.9%) did their assignments independently whereas about 50.3% of them did their assignments in groups. 81.5% of tutees responded that they had no experience of copying from friends' assignments, though about 53.6% of them have seen others while coping from their friends. Similarly, even though about 57% of tutees did not receive feedback on assignments per course regularly, about 58.3% of them responded that they benefited from feedback of assignments.

Table 6: A Summary of Tutors Responses to Questions about Assignments.

Statements	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M
All assignments were effectively completed by students.	72	4 (6.0%)	25 (34.3%)	36 (49.3%)	7 (10.4%)	2.36
All assignments were not submitted by students on time.	72	15 (19.4%)	43 (59.7%)	14 (19.4%)	1 (1.5%)	3.03
All assignments were well-commented on by tutors.	72	4 (4.4%)	37 (51.5%)	29 (41.2%)	2 (2.9%)	2.59
Students received timely feedback on their assignments per tutorial session.	72	7 (9.0%)	47 (65.7%)	17 (23.9%)	1 (1.4%)	2.83
Students benefited from their assignments feedback.	72	4 (6.1%)	41 (56.1%)	24 (33.3%)	3 (4.5%)	2.64
Results of assignments were reported to responsible college on time.	72	11 (14.7%)	17 (23.5%)	28 (39.7%)	16 (22.1%)	2.32

Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1, N= Number of participants, M= Mean

As reported in Table 6 above, even though about 59% of tutors agreed that most assignments were not effectively completed by students, about 78% of them responded that they did not submit all assignments on time. About 55% and 75% of respondents believe that all assignments were properly commented on and students received the required respectively. Similarly, 62% of respondents agreed that students have benefited from the comments. However, 62% of respondents agreed that results were not reported to responsible college on time.

Analysis of Tutees and Tutors Responses to Questions about Study Skills and Counseling Services

Table 7: A Summary of Tutees Responses to Questions on Study Skills.

Statements	N	Yes	No
Having habit of study with your friends.	350	306(87.43%)	44(12.6%)
Having a regular study program at home.	350	260(74.2%)	90(25.8%)
Having support from center coordinator.	350	209(59.7%)	141(40.3%)

As shown in Table 7 above, about 87% of the tutees preferred to study with friends. About 25% of the respondents did not have regular study program (schedule) at home. The majority of these respondents studied their subjects at home, particularly at night. About 59% of them did not talk regularly to center coordinator and/or about the problems they encountered in their study.

Table 8: A Summary of Tutors Responses to Questions Related to Counseling Services.

Statements	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M
Assistance to develop time management and study skills were properly managed.	72	-	10 (13.6%)	45 (62.1%)	17 (24.3%)	1.97
Students were motivated & inspired to continue their study.	72	6 (9.0%)	7 (9.0%)	31 (43.3%)	28 (38.7%)	1.87
Students benefited from counseling services.	72	1 (1.5%)	13 (17.6%)	38 (52.9%)	20 (28.0%)	1.93
There was counseling service in tutorial centers.	72	1 (1.5%)	14 (20.0%)	36 (50.0%)	21 (28.5%)	1.93
Students were given orientation each semester.	72	7 (9.2%)	24 (33.8%)	31 (43.1%)	10 (13.8%)	2.39

Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1, N= Number of participants, M= Mean
As shown in Table 8 above, 13.6% of the tutors believed that tutees were encouraged to use effective time management. They said that they were

assisted by their tutors to develop effective study skills. Only about 13% of the respondents replied that tutees were motivated & inspired to continue their study. Likewise, only 21% and 19% of the tutors agreed with the existence of counseling services. They also said the tutees benefited from counseling services.

Analysis of Tutees and Tutors Responses to Questions about Modules

Table 9: A Summary of Tutees Responses to Questions about Modules

Statements	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M
Materials (modules) were distributed before tutorial sessions.	350	-	38 (11.0%)	312 (89.0%)	-	2.11
Distribution of modules was based on schedule.	350	-	32 (9.0%)	318 (91.0%)	-	2.09
Methods of delivery of modules were effective.	350	-	18 (5.0%)	332 (95%)	-	2.05
The contents presented in the course modules were easy to follow & understand.	350	-	220 (62.8%)	114 (32.6%)	16 (46.0%)	2.58
The presentation of the contents in the course modules is very attractive & motivating.	350	-	221 (62.9%)	127 (36.4%)	2 (0.7%)	2.63
The language of presentation of the course module is very simple & easy to understand.	350	-	216 (61.6%)	125 (35.8%)	9 (2.6%)	2.59
Activities given in the modules are relevant to the topic you studied.	350	-	334 (95.4%)	16 (4.6%)	-	2.95

Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1, N= Number of participants, M= Mean

As can be seen from Table 9 above, about 62% of tutees agreed with the notion that contents of the course modules were easy to understand,

presentation of contents were very attractive and motivating, and language of presentation of the course module were very simple & easy to understand. On the top of this, 95% of them confirmed that activities given in the modules were relevant to the topic they studied. On the other hand, only 11%, 9%, and 5% of tutees responded that modules were distributed before tutorial sessions, stuck to schedule, and effective module delivery respectively.

Table 10: A Summary of Tutors Response Questions about Modules.

Statements	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M
Materials (modules) were distributed on time.	72	5 (7.7%)	18 (24.6%)	38 (52.3%)	11 (15.4%)	2.31
Distribution of modules was based on schedule.	72	5 (6.2%)	13 (18.5%)	42 (58.5%)	12 (16.9%)	2.15
Methods of delivery of modules were effective.	72	7 (9.1%)	29 (40.9%)	25 (34.8%)	11 (15.2%)	2.4
There were complaints about non-receipt of materials/modules).	72	5 (6.1%)	13 (18.2%)	39 (54.5%)	15 (21.2%)	2.11
There were complaints about wrong receipt of packages.	72	1 (1.6%)	33 (46.0%)	32 (44.4%)	6 (7.9%)	2.4
Students were satisfied with modules distribution.	72	3 (4.6%)	15 (20.0%)	42 (58.5%)	12 (16.9%)	2.4
Students were satisfied with schedule of module distribution.	72	2 (3.0)	12 (16.4)	50 (70.1%)	8 (10.4 %)	2.11

Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1, N= Number of participants, M= Mean

In Table 10 above, it is revealed by 67%, 75% and 47% of tutors that modules were not distributed in time; the distribution did not go according to schedule, and there was often a wrong distribution of packages, respectively. In the same way, about 24% of them responded that there were complaints about wrong receipt of packages. About 27% and 19% of tutors responded that students were satisfied both with modules distribution and

schedules for distribution of modules

Analysis of Tutees and Tutors Responses to Questions about Library and Laboratory Services.

Table 11: A Summary of Tutors Responses to Questions on Library, Laboratory (Science & Language).

Statements	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M
Electronic media were used at tutorial centers.	72	-	30 (41.8%)	34 (46.3%)	8 (10.9%)	2.31
Laboratories sessions in science were effectively carried out.	72	-	7 (9.3%)	44 (61.1%)	21 (29.6%)	1.81
For language, radio manuals, cassette, schedules were effectively used.	72	27 (37.3%)	9 (12.1%)	33 (46.6%)	2 (4.0%)	2.83
Students were provided with library services.	72	-	7 (10.4%)	38 (52.2%)	27 (37.4%)	2.35

Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1, N= Number of participants, M= Mean

As shown in Table 11 above, about 90% of tutors and tutees (in their responses to open ended questionnaire) confirmed that most laboratory sessions in science courses were completely ignored. Similarly, about 88% of respondents (language course tutors and tutees in their responses to open ended questionnaire) shared the same view, i.e., radio manuals, cassette, and schedules were not used effectively. Besides, the analysis shows that students (89% of tutors in the Table) were not provided with library services. The respondents (both tutors and tutees) witnessed that the program was not supported by library services. Some reference books (supplementary to modules) that were available in the library of tutorial centers were not given to the trainees in and/or out of the library even when these were recommended by tutors.

Analysis of Tutees and Tutors Responses to Questions about Center Coordinator

Table 12: A Summary of Tutors Responses to Questions Related to Center Coordinators.

Statements	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	M
Tutorial center was well organized and managed by coordinator.	72	7(10.3%)	24 (33.8%)	31(42.6%)	10(13.3%)	2.39
Tutorial center was frequently supervised by : Adama Teachers College.	72	-	28(39.6%)	30(41.4%)	14(19.0%)	2.19
Oromia Education Bureau.	72	1(1.7%)	12(16.9%)	36(49.2%)	23 (32.2%)	1.87
Zonal Education Office.	72	-	11 (15.5%)	27(37.9%)	34(46.6%)	1.68
EMA/MOE	72	-	5(7.5%)	36(49.1%)	31 (43.4%)	1.64
The coordinator of tutorial center was efficient in: Organizing counseling services.	72	4(5.4%)	21 (30.0%)	35(48.2%)	12(16.4%)	2.4
Facilitating tutorial sessions.	72	5(6.7%)	13 (18.3%)	42(58.3%)	12 (16.7%)	2.15
Having communication with college.	72	6(9.1%)	11 (15.2%)	47(65.2%)	8 (10.6%)	2.21
Disseminating information to students.	72	5 (7.6%)	15(21.2%)	43(59.1%)	9(12.1%)	2.22
Orienting tutors & students.	72	6 (7.7%)	20(27.7%)	39(53.9%)	8(10.8%)	2.36
Distributing materials.	72	4 (6.1%)	16 (22.7%)	41(56.1%)	11 (15.2%)	1.96
Organizing assignment results.	72	5(7.5%)	19(25.8%)	37(51.5%)	11(15.2%)	2.25
Students were satisfied with managerial skill of the coordinator.	72	6 (7.9%)	26 (36.5%)	32(44.4%)	8(11.1%)	2.42
Tutors were satisfied with managerial skills of the coordinator.	72	3(4.6%)	23(31.3%)	37 (51.6%)	9(12.5%)	2.78

Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1, N= Number of participants, M= Mean

Regarding managerial skills of coordinators of tutorial centers, as evaluated by tutors (see Table 12 above), most tutors responded that tutorial centers

coordinators were inefficient in organizing counseling services, facilitating tutorial sessions, and communicating with responsible colleges. In the same way, the majority of the respondents believed that the coordinators were inefficient in disseminating information, distributing materials and organizing assignment results. As shown in the Table, about 55% and 64% of tutees and tutors, respectively, were not satisfied with managerial skills of the coordinators in organizing and facilitating tutorial centers.

Discussions of Results of the Study

Under this section, the analyses of tutees and tutors responses to questions on tutorial sessions, tutors, assignments, modules, study skills & counseling service, library & laboratory, management (coordinating) will be made under each topic.

Discussions of Tutees and Tutors Response to Questions on Tutorial Sessions

It is apparent that most tutees believed that they attended tutorial sessions regularly whereas some of these respondents did not attend all tutorial sessions. This happened to be so because, for instance, of lack of information, long-distance from tutorial center and inconsistent tutorial timetable. In contrast to this, tutors believed that more than half of the students did not attend tutorial sessions regularly. In fact, they shared the same reasons with tutees for not attending sessions. In support of tutees' responses the discussion held with center coordinators revealed that the majority of students attended tutorial classes regularly. However, due to personal and administrative inconveniences, some tutees were not regular beneficiaries of the tutorial session. From administrative point of view, tutorial schedules were not fixed most of the time (subjected to change from time to time). Most tutees also come from rural areas where there was no access to transportation and information. Nevertheless, coordinators believed that the effort that had been made to control them through attendance was not satisfactory.

As can also be seen from the analysis of both tutees' and tutors' responses, it appears that most sessions were rather ineffective. Some of the reasons cited by tutees are scarcity of modules, delay in the distribution of modules, absence of tutors (sometimes) and poor co-ordination at tutorial centers. Similarly, tutors also reasoned out that those sessions lacked coordination, training for tutors, facility and follow up. The result is not consistent with related literature reviewed (Rumble, 1992; Molefi, 2002; Stevenson & Sander, 1998).

The results of the discussions made with coordinators also indicated that the tutorial services were not effective because lecturing dominates the sessions. This has encouraged most tutees to come to tutorial session without properly reading the modules. All coordinators unanimously pointed out that tutees had no experience of self-learning. This often seems to disable tutors to cover the modules contents. Moreover, coordinators' general observation indicates that tutorial sessions were not effective enough, partly because of lack of preparation of the tutees ahead of time, and partly because of the inadequate preparation of tutors to help their tutees which deviates from principles of distance learning (Molefi, 2002; EMA, 2000; Morgan & Morris, 1994).

As a result, some tutees have organized their own group tutorial sessions in their working place to fill the gaps. Most of these tutees indicated that they have benefited considerably from the tutorial sessions organized by interested groups either on the basis of payment for tutors or without payment in some cases. However, in coordinators' views, tutees were not satisfied with the tutorial given. Some of the causes for the dissatisfactions were acute shortages of modules (mainly caused by late printing, slow delivery and poor distribution), and insufficient time allocation for tutorial sessions. It was stressed by coordinators that sometimes the coordinators and the teachers fail to get access to information related to the program. That is, there was a mismatch between each tutorial session and the semesters of the distance learning. Lack of discussion with students on

how tutorials should help them achieve course objectives and lack of orienting tutors on how to carry out tutorial sessions were other core problems described by coordinators. Therefore, it is apparent to believe that those tutorial sessions were not as effectively used by tutees as planned during the onset of the program as described in different documents (EMA, 2000; Molefi, 2002).

Discussions of Tutees and Tutors' Responses to Questions about Tutors

The analysis of responses of tutees indicates that tutees agreement with tutors' appropriate teaching methodology and adequate subject mastery. Nevertheless, poor preparation, lack of interest and experience, lack of punctuality and absenteeism, failure to cover course contents were some of the tutors' drawbacks identified by the tutees. It was also suggested briefly by those tutees that those tutors' defects could be improved through offering them short term training, developing appropriate controlling mechanism, giving orientation, improving their attitudes and promoting continuous professional development programs.

Furthermore, tutees also indicated that tutors did not comment on tutees assignment sheets particularly on questions they have not attempted to answer. The majority of these respondents said they were not encouraged through comments and advice from their tutors. Similarly, the majority of tutors also shared the same feeling in returning marked assignments and giving written feedback. It was also reported by tutees and tutors that there was poor communication between tutors and tutees in providing information on modules, assisting students to find their way through the modules, giving advice about the availability of other resources (e.g. study skills) that might be helpful. In tutees' opinion, therefore, most tutors were found to be unhelpful and uncooperative to solve tutees' academic problems.

The tutees suggested some of the reasons why tutors do not commit themselves to their assignment. Among these were lack of training and inappropriate orientation about how to undertake tutorial sessions, dissatisfaction due to small incentives they were given, and discouraging

factors from decision making bodies. As a result of these and other factors, most assignments were not well commented on by tutors and were not returned to students during tutorial sessions or through other means. In turn, tutees did not receive timely feedback (corrected assignments with comments) to ensure their learning progress. From the analysis, it is evident that tutors seemed not to carry out their responsibilities as indicated in the training manuals and other relevant literature (EMA, 2000; Sherry, 1996).

Discussions of Tutees and Tutors' Responses to Questions about Assignments

It is evident that the majority of tutees believed that they submitted all assignments regularly every semester and tutorial session. Most of these respondents did their assignments independently although there were some who did assignments in group. However, according to tutors most assignments were not effectively completed by students and submitted in time. In addition to this, these tutors believed that some modules were distributed without assignment. This problem causes inconvenience in completing and submitting assignments in time. In the same way, some tutees pointed out that they copied assignments from their friends due to the fact that some modules were distributed without assignments. In support of this, the tutors reported that some tutees have submitted photocopied assignment together with partially deleted name of their other students. It was also pointed out by most tutors that some assignments were also completed and submitted during tutorial sessions without having relevance to those questions. Some respondents (tutees and tutors) also pointed out that there were assignments completed by other people who are not students on payment. The main reasons for which tutees copied assignments from each other are failure of tutors to crosscheck assignments, tutees lack of time to complete assignments, workload in school, and scarcity of modules.

The discussion made with center coordinators also made clear that assignments were not thoughtfully and regularly done by the learners. In their opinion it seems impossible to free students from plagiarism some copied from each other while others might not even respond completely.

There was a great problem in getting the assignments to make the necessary administrative arrangement and preparations for the tutorial sessions. Each activity was not well commented on by the tutors with positive and constructive remarks. As a result, tutees did not know their mistakes. In fact, timely feedback was not possible as the tutees were always behind time specified for submission. Despite these limitations, coordinators believed that students benefited from the assignment they did since they got the chance to revise their portion/contents, prepare themselves for final exams and raise questions for discussion during or after tutorial sessions. Generally, the discussions, as a whole, show that most tutees were engaged in copying assignments from each other. This might affect the essence of self- learning and learning through assignment. This contradicts the principles reviewed in related literature (Garrison, 1989; Porter, 1994 cited in Sherry, 1996).

Discussion of Tutees and Tutors Responses to Questions about Study Skills and Counseling Services

As shown in the data analysis, most of the tutees preferred to study with friends, but yet some of them did not have regular study program (schedule) at home. The analysis also reveals that the majority of tutees did not talk regularly to center coordinator and/or about the problems they encountered in their study. Moreover, tutors also believed that tutees were poorly encouraged to manage their time effectively. They were rarely assisted by their tutors to develop effective study skills.

The result of the focus group discussion with coordinators also indicated that the existence of counseling services including study skills was very important for distance learners. However, this service was not satisfactory so far due to the tutees' limited access to communication with the center. The students did not get information that could allow them to think positively about the program. The tutors did not play any role in counseling the tutees. However, tutors role was expected to go beyond conducting tutorial sessions; they should also assume a counseling role. The students were always raising

questions, but the tutors did not seem to have addressed their problems. This in turn might be attributed to the lack of orientation on the part of tutors on what they were expected to do as tutors.

Coordinators also argued that assistance to develop time management and study skills was not satisfactory, since no training was given for tutors in this respect. Tutees were limited to getting little services during tutorial services. Lack of materials on counseling and study skills was another factor that hindered the service at tutorial centers.

The coordinators of the respective tutorial centers also believed that the negative attitudes developed towards the program from the society were another source of the learners' dissatisfaction. For instance, it was repeatedly said that the society believes that the program does not last long: it has no responsible body from top. Hence, it was not well programmed in the way it could run smoothly. The view seems to severely affect distance learners' psychological makeup.

As can be inferred from the analysis, the findings are inconsistent with the existing literature in the area (Speer, 1996; West Brook & Moon, 1997; Kishore, 1998). Most students seemed to be de-motivated to continue their study in the program. They eventually might drop out of the program, since the program lacked key factors.

Discussion of Tutees and Tutors Responses to Questions about Modules

The analysis revealed both tutors and tutees believed that modules were not distributed in time; the distribution was not based on appropriate schedule.

There was often wrong distribution of packages. Tutees confirmed that, the contents of modules were presented in attractive and motivating methods, but tutors said the tutees did not seem to be satisfied with the mode and schedule of module distribution. Besides, both tutees and tutors witnessed that some modules were received from EMA and Oromia Education Bureau without accompanying assignments. Some were also incomplete or they were out of module sequence. Thus, as one of the components of support systems, the delivery of learning material seems to be ineffective (Garrison, 1989; Rumble, 1992; Molefi, 2002; Hodgson, 1986).

Discussion of Tutees and Tutors Responses to Questions about Library and Laboratory Services

From the analysis, the majority of tutors and tutees (in their responses to open ended questionnaire) confirmed that most laboratory sessions in science courses were completely ignored. Students did not get supplementary support to enrich their understanding and also to make their lesson more practical. Similarly, most of the respondents (language course tutors and tutees in their responses to open-ended questionnaire) shared the same view that radio manuals, cassette, and schedules were not used properly. The problem is not mainly attributed to lack of resources. In fact, every tutorial center had received a TV set with all its apparatus, a tape recorder with cassettes to broadcast the program during tutorial sessions and related manuals (student's radio manuals) from EMA. It is believed that students should have utilized laboratory sessions in science courses and radio program in language courses to enrich their understanding. Besides, the analysis shows that students were not provided with library services. The respondents (both tutors and tutees) witnessed that the program was not supported by library services. Some reference books (supplementary to modules) that were available in the library of tutorial centers were not given to the trainees in and/or out of the library when recommended by their tutors. The learners in general seem to suffer lack of access to library service and laboratory support in science and language courses.

Discussion of Tutees and Tutors Responses to Questions about Center Coordinator

Regarding managerial skills of coordinators of tutorial centers, most tutors responded that tutorial center coordinators were inefficient in organizing counseling services, facilitating tutorial sessions, and communicating with responsible colleges. However, the majority of respondents said that coordinators were efficient in disseminating information to tutors and students, and efficient in distributing materials and organizing assignment results. Some respondents, both tutees and tutors, pointed out that there was unorganized laboratory and library services, unwise use of supporting materials(such a TV set, a Tape player), poor service delivery (orientation, counseling, etc) and other shortcomings. All these are examples of poor management and coordination of tutorial centers.

As shown in the analyses part both tutees and tutors were not satisfied with managerial skills of the coordinators in organizing and facilitating tutorial centers. It was noted by respondents that tutorial center coordinators viewed the program not as a part and parcel of their regular duty; they viewed it as somebody else's task placed on them. As a result of such a wrong perception of duty, coordinators could not exert their maximum effort to provide effective service delivery.

The focus group discussion made with coordinators indicated that distance education was not very often perceived as a part and parcel of their regular work. The program, therefore, suffered a lot from shortage of manpower and budget at tutorial centers. Moreover, other problems outlined by coordinators are:

- 1 absence of assignments in some modules;
- 2 lack of fixed schedule for assignment submission;
- 3 lack of checking and giving feedback;
- 4 weak management in studying the module;
- 5 students' poor background in the subject;
- 6 lack of facility and sufficient time to study;

- 7 fear about whether they will be able to receive a valid diploma;
- 8 Students' fear of submitting assignments completed by non-tutor teachers on payment;
- 9 problem of copying from other students;
- 10 Correcting and giving feedback to students on assignments seemed to be tedious and unattractive to tutors since the money given for marking assignments was not satisfactory; and
- 11 Lack of standard for marking and grading.

Because of these and other problems observed in the program, people often said that the program lacked sense of ownership. However, BESO, EMA, MOE, regional education and capacity building bureau, zonal education departments, Woreda education offices, tutorial centers and responsible colleges were the owners and responsible bodies. In fact, all of or some of these stakeholders did not seem to play their roles effectively (EMA, 2000).

Conclusion

From the discussions of the responses of tutees, tutors, and coordinators, it is apparent that support systems such as tutorial sessions, learning through assignments, modules distribution; access to library, laboratory and counseling services were not as effective as planned during the onset of the program. In light of the results of the study, the lack of provisions of information and learning materials/modules (mainly caused by late printing, slow delivery and poor distribution), ineffective tutorial sessions & insufficient tutorial time allocation, lack of feedback on assignments, lack of access to counseling and library services, ineffective laboratory sessions (in science courses) and radio programs (in language courses) are core factors that hindered the effectiveness of the support systems of the program. Moreover, lack of proper training and orientation for both tutors and coordinators, lack of proper orientation for tutees, negative attitudes towards the program, frequent transfer of tutors and coordinators from centers, inadequate time for tutoring, poor managerial skills in organizing and facilitating tutorial centers, and lack of continuous follow-up of stakeholders had also a share in creating ineffective and inappropriate support

systems in every tutorial center. The participants of the project hardly received effective and appropriate supportive systems in every center, and as a result, they seemed to be dissatisfied.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the researcher recommends the following points to alleviate problems in similar situations:

- 1 Tutors and coordinators should be trained effectively on principles of distance learning, and its support systems, and on how to offer support effectively and sufficiently. In the same way, tutees should also be properly oriented about advantages of attending tutorial sessions, completing assignments and getting counseling services.
- 2 Access to library services at tutorial centers should be established for the participants of the program. Appropriate library services with relevant books and facilities should be organized and be made available for use at their learning center to promote the tutees' study skills.
- 3 For language courses, supporting materials for radio program such as teacher's guide, student text, cassette, tape recorder and timetable for broadcasting should be available to all. Similarly, supporting laboratory sessions in science courses should be facilitated and equipped with all laboratory chemicals and apparatus.
- 4 Tutees should be provided with materials such as pamphlets, posters, and handbook that may help them improve their study skills. Students also need to be provided with academic calendar, time management and major principles, characteristics and success in distance learning.
- 5 Finally, the researcher recommends further study into the effect of support services on academic performance of distance learners.

References

- EMA. (2000). *Supporting Distance Learners. A Tutor's Guide*. Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa.

- Guanwardena, N. (1996). *Designing Learner Support for Media-based Distance Education*. Paper Presented at Turkey First International Distance Education Symposium, (PP. 271-280). Turkey: Ankura; MONE-FRTED.
- Garrison, D.R (1989). *Understanding Distance Educations: A Framework for the Tuture*. London: Routledge.
- Hodgson, V. E. (1986). *The Inter-relationship between Support and Learning Materials Programme* **Learning and Educational Technology**, 23 (1), 56-61.
- Keegan, D. (1996). **Foundations of Distance Education** (3rd ed.). London, Routledge.
- Kishore, S (1998). *Student Support and Quality Indicators in Distance Learning*, **Indian Journal of Open Learning**, 7(2), 205-212.
- Moore, M.G. (1989). *Recruiting and Retaining Adult students in Distance Education*. In P.S. Cookson (ed.), **Recruiting & Retaining Adult Students. New Direction for Continuing Education**. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass, 1989.
- Molefi, F. (2002). *Support Services for Distance Education Students at the Department of Non-Formal Education*. Paper presented at the Distance Education Workshop for Setswana Part-Time Writers, DNFE.
- Morgan, C. & Morris, G. (1994). *The Student View of Tutorial Support: Report of a Survey of Open University Education Students*. **Open Learning**, 9(1), 22-33.
- Rumble, G. (1992). **The Management of Distance Learning System**. Paris: UNESCO and IIEP.

- Simpson, O. (2000). **Supporting Students in Open and Distance Learning**. London: Kogan Page.
- Sherry, L. (1996). *Issues in Distance Learning*. **International Journal of Educational Telecommunications**, 1 (4), 337-365.
- Speer, T.L. (1996). *A Nation of Students*. **American Demographics**, 32-45.
- Stevenson, K. & Sander, P. (1998). *How do Open University Students Expect to be taught at Tutorials?* **Open Learning**, 13(2), 42-46.
- Tait, A. (2000). *Planning Student Support for Open and Distance Learning*. **Open Learning**, 15(3), 287-299.
- TESO. (2003). *A National Curriculum Guidelines for In-service Teacher Education Programmes*. Ministry of Education. Addis Ababa.
- Usun, S. (2004). *Learner Support Services in Distance Education System*. **Turkish Journal of Distance Education**, 5(4).
- West Brook, T.S. & Moon, D.K.M. (1997). *Lessons Learned from the Delivery of a Graduate Business Degree Program Utilizing International Television*. **The Journal of Continuing Higher Education**, 25-33.