Factors Affecting Students' Enrolment and Dropout at The Open University of Tanzania, Lindi Region

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Abstract: Factors affecting student enrolment and dropout were identified at OUT Lindi Region with strategies for increasing enrolment while reducing dropout. Quantitative and qualitative methods that involved documentary survey, questionnaires and interviews were used to collect the data.

The data were analyzed by Statistix (Version 7.0) Computer programme package (2000), Analytical Software SPSS Version 16 and Microsoft Office Excel (2007). The results indicated that 5% of the students enrolled were residents of Lindi Region and the rest (95%) were from other regions. From the total number of 529 students enrolled for the period of 17 years, 79% were male and 21% female. Out of the 53 students who graduated, 72% were male and 28% female. The overall findings revealed that as the students' enrolment increased, the dropout also increased. Identified dropout problems were related to social, personal, financial, academic, students support services and cultural factors.

It is recommended that raising awareness to the Lindi residents about valuing education can be done in schools, Teacher Resource Centers, religious groups and other groups or meetings. Other strategies that can be used include fliers to enhance the awareness and advertisements through television, newspapers, and radio. Face to face sessions should be strengthened, and ODL students to be encouraged to seek help for their personal, social and academic problems from University and student counselors. In addition, the University should regularly review curricula and study materials; have well equipped mini-computer labs and mini-libraries in all OUT centers. OUT should upgrade to College level, the Regional centres and decentralize them to District levels with the help from the Government. Females need to be sensitized and encouraged to study at OUT. OUT should use the proposed operation model in its activities.

Key words: factors, enrolment, dropout

INTRODUCTION

The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) was established by the Act of Parliament No.17 of 1992 that became operational on 1st March, 1993 by the publication of Notice No. 55 in the Tanzanian Official Gazette. The Universities Act No. 7 of 2005 governed the activities of OUT until January 2007 when its activities came directly under the Universities Charter (Mbwette, 2009). OUT temporary headquarters is situated along Kawawa Road in Kinondoni Municipality at the

Biafra grounds Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and the permanent premises are at Bungo, Kibaha in the Coast Region.

The Open University of Tanzania is an open and distance learning (ODL) accredited institution offering certificates, diplomas, degrees and postgraduate programmes. Education delivery was to be attained through various means of communication such as broadcasting, telecasting, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Moodle Platforms, correspondence, enhanced face-to-face, seminars, contact programmes or the combination of any two or more of such means (Kuhanga Report, 1990). Initially it was dominated by print materials which are now being replaced gradually by the Moodle platforms. ODL is an educational or learning process or system in which the teacher is separated geographically and in time from his or her students (C.O.L, 2000), as compared to the conventional universities. The following are the motto, vision, mission, aims and objectives of The Open University of Tanzania. The motto of The Open University of Tanzania is: "Affordable quality education for all"; The vision of the Open University of Tanzania is: "To be a leading world class University in the delivery of affordable quality education through open and distance learning, dynamic knowledge generation and application". The mission statement of the Open University of Tanzania states "To continuously provide quality affordable open and distance education, research and public services for sustainable and equitable social economic development of Tanzania in particular and the rest of Africa". The guiding plan theme is: "Commitment to quality outputs, integrity and pursuit for provision of affordable quality education for all". This study therefore, investigated the factors affecting students' enrolment and dropout at the Lindi Region with regards to the motto, mission, theme and the following aims and objectives of the OUT. The specific objectives of the OUT were to provide education to:

- those who could not attain it through conventional universities;
- adopt methods of learning that are not limited in time and geographical space;
- provide an opportunity for people to learn at their own pace and place;
- adopt a more cost effective higher education strategy in a wide range;
- produce more elite manpower experts.

To implement these objectives, OUT conducts its operations through 30 Regional centres and 69 study centres both in Tanzania mainland, the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba and beyond its borders. However, it is noted that the Government lacks enough experts to cater for different educational industry and the manpower for the other sectors. Msolla (2007) contends that Tanzania is facing challenges of acute shortage of qualified workforce including teachers at all levels, doctors, nurses, engineers and technicians. The findings of this research therefore, would serve to improve students' enrolment and thereby reduce the dropout and increase experts to the country: teachers, ICT experts, scientists, lawyers, economists, auditors, librarians, administrators, psychologists, philosophers, policy makers, researchers, managers to mention but a few.

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA, LINDI REGION GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Lindi Region is situated at the corner of East Coast Southern Tanzania. It is bordered by Mtwara Region southward, Indian Ocean eastern, Morogoro and Ruvuma Regions in the west and Coast Region in the north (Figure 1). Lindi Region is the 4th largest of the regions in Tanzania with an area of 67,000 km^2 out of this, 18,000 km^2 is Selous Game Reserve. It lies at Latitude 7°55´ S to 10°00´ South and Longitude 36°51´ to 40° 00´ East (Figure 2). Lindi Regional Centre is among the 30 regional centres in the country. It has four study centres: Kilwa Masoko, Nachingwea, Lindi Rural and Lindi Urban.
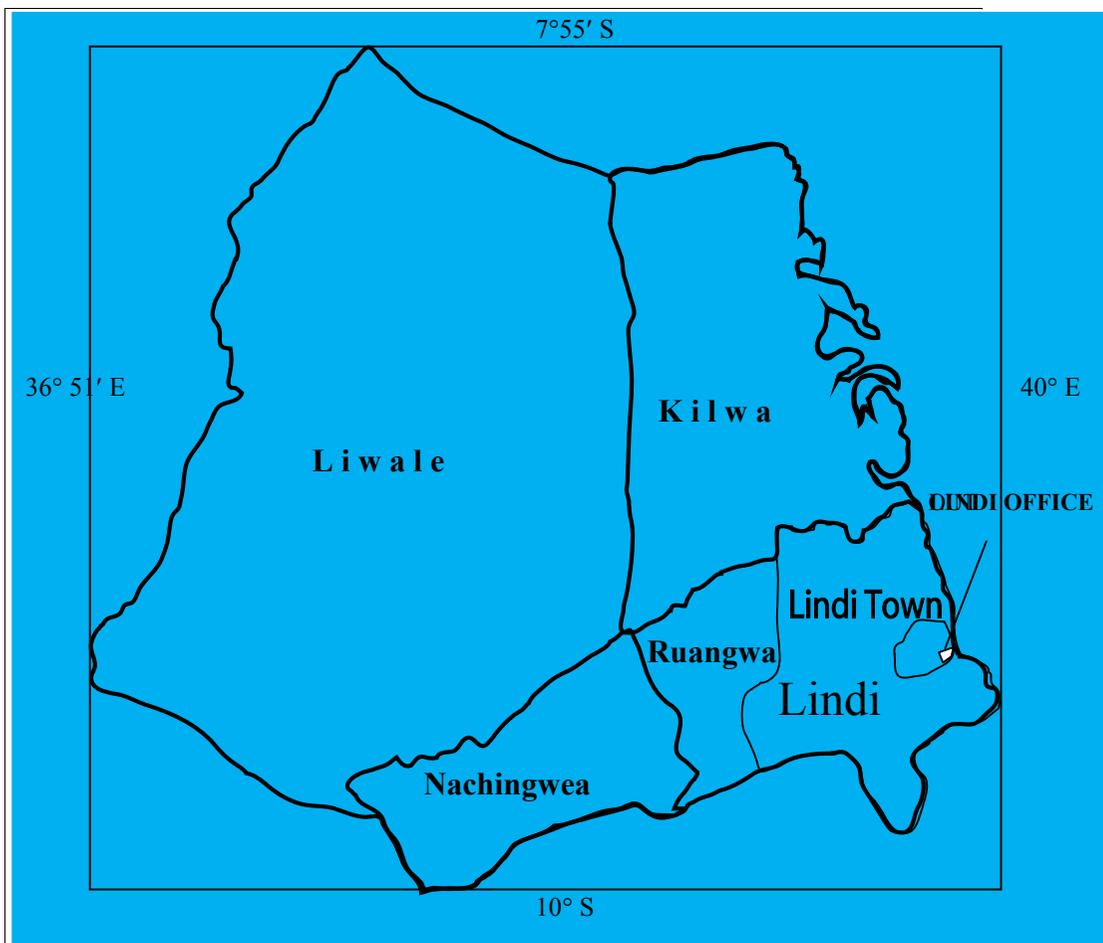
Figure. 1: Map of **Lindi Region, neighboring regions and Lindi Town**

Scale

0   50   100

N
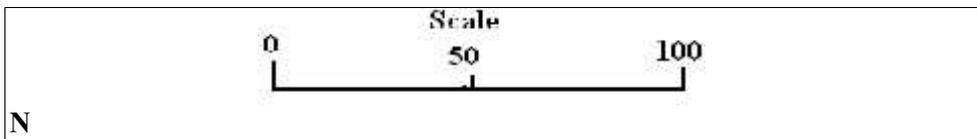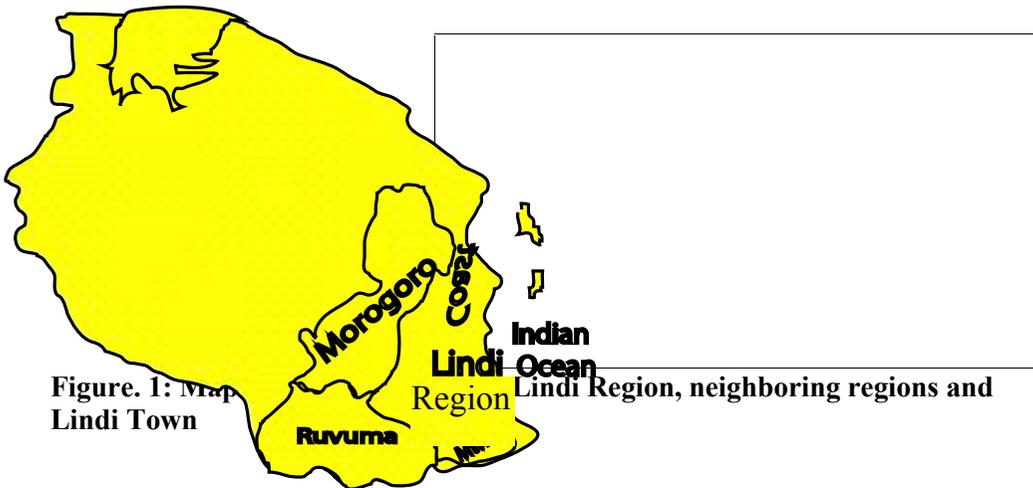
Figure. 2: Map of Lindi Region showing the six (6) Districts and the OUT Regional office

The main objectives of the present study were to:

(i) Identify the factors responsible for the students enrolment and dropout trend at OUT, Lindi Region from 1994 to 2009/2010; and

(ii) Suggest strategies for increasing students' enrolment and reducing dropouts at OUT, Lindi Region through open and distance learning (ODL) methods.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative research methods, specifically surveys, that documentary reviews were used to collect data to find out the number of students enrolled and the dropouts. Qualitative methods were used to find out the factors responsible for the students' enrolment and dropout trends; methods used included questionnaires and interviews.

Research Instruments

The research tools involved unpublished documentary reviews; the use of open ended unstructured as well as closed, semi structured and open ended structured questionnaires and semi structured interviews. The questionnaires and interviews

focused on the learners socio-economic and the educational background. It also focused on learners' perceptions of ODL programmes to include among others the course delivery system, instructional process, study materials, evaluation of performance, gender equity, and cost effectiveness. Also support services from OUT lecturers, tutors, administrators, the students' progress at OUT, problems encountered, reasons and their future plans for strengthening and improving the situation were among the focus, (See Appendix I for sample questions). There was personal administration of the questionnaires and the interviews, mailing and telephoning.

Sample, Sampling and Selection of the Participants

Participatory approach method involved selection of active students who are the direct beneficiaries of OUT programmes, which include the graduates and the dormant students. Purposive sampling was used to identify the lecturers, tutors, decision and policy makers, administrators, parents, guardians and the students' leaders to be involved in the study. Data collection procedures involved three phases: phase one dealt with documentary reviews, phase two was questionnaire administration and during phase three interviews were conducted.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using statistical techniques such as content analysis, averages, percentages, ratios and graphs by Microsoft Excel (2007), SPSS version 16.0 for Windows, (2007) and the Statistix version 7.0 (2000) computer programmes package.

RESULTS

The results of this study aimed to foster educational monitoring and development at OUT Lindi Region by documenting enrolment and dropout trend. Table 1 below shows the student enrollment and graduation trends at Lindi Region for the past 17 years, i.e. from 1994 to 2009/10. The findings indicate fluctuating enrolment trend and the number of the graduates.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The age of the respondents ranged from 20 years to 60 and above with an average of 32 years. Married respondents were 69.4% and unmarried 30.6%, the employed were 95.4% while the unemployed were 4.6%. Some of the students (40%) were from other colleges. The sample comprised of farmers, clerks, secretaries, the police, teachers, tutors and lecturers. Almost half of the students (49.9%) were teachers. Academic qualifications ranged from Secondary School Certificate education up to Doctor of Philosophy. The majority of the students (65.3%) were living in urban areas while 34.7% lived in rural areas.

Table 1: Enrolment Trend and Graduates at OUT Lindi Regional Centre, 1994-2009/10

Years	Male Enrollment	Female Enrollment	Total Enrollment	% Male	% Female	Graduates Male Female

1994	06	00	06	100	00	-	-
1995	07	00	07	100	00	-	-
1996	09	00	09	100	00	-	-
1997	11	00	11	100	00	-	-
1998	09	01	10	90	10	-	-
1999	04	00	04	100	00	-	-
2000	14	00	14	100	00	-	-
2001	31	06	37	84	16	-	-
2002	24	06	30	80	20	-	-
2003	28	05	33	85	15	-	-
2004	30	08	38	81	19	-	-
2005	29	13	42	69	31	08	02
2006	24	11	35	69	31	04	00
2007	65	14	79	82	18	04	02
2007/08	49	09	58	84	16	03	04
2008/09	43	20	63	68	32	07	03
2009/10	36	17	53	68	32	12	04
Grand total	**419**	**110**	**529**	**79 %**	**21%**	**38/72 %**	**15/28 %**

Source: OUT Lindi Regional Office Database

Table 1 shows that out of a total of 529 students who enrolled during the past 17 years, the majority (79%) were males while only one fifth (21%) were females; and out of the total only 53 students graduated. Among them 72% are male and 28% female. Table 2 shows the dropout trend and at the OUT Lindi Regional centre.

Table 2: Dropout Trend and (%) at OUT Lindi Regional Centre From 1994-2009/10

Years	Total Enrollment	Total Dropout	Percentage (%)
1994	06	02	33 %
1995	07	01	14%
1996	09	06	66%
1997	11	02	18%
1998	10	04	40%
1999	04	01	25%
2000	14	06	42%
2001	37	21	56%
2002	30	04	13%
2003	33	02	06%
2004	38	14	36%
2005	42	17	40%
2006	35	11	31%
2007	79	10	12%
2007/08	58	09	15%

2008/09	63	05	08%
2009/10	53	08	15%
Total	**529**	**123**	**23%**

Table 2 indicates that 23% of the enrolled students dropped out during the past 17 years, and that 77% continued with their studies.

The trends of the students' enrolment and dropouts are also shown in figures 1 through 4 below. Generally both the male and the female students' enrolment shows an increase but fluctuating trends. The darker bar bands represent the male enrolment trend; while the lighter bar bands indicate the female enrolment trends (Figure 1).
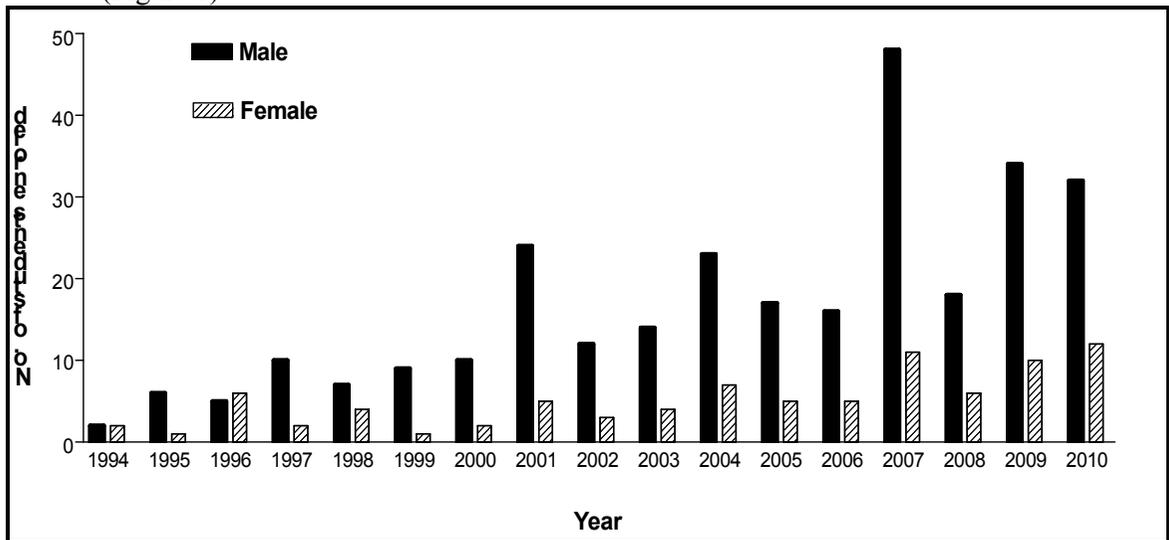
Figure 1: OUT Lindi Regional Centre Students Enrolment Trend

The number of male students enrolled was higher than the female students. The Figure also shows that the number of students' enrollment increased from the year 1994 up to 1997, and then dropped in 1998. It then increased to the year 2001 with a decrease in year 2002 then increased up to the year 2004 with a drop in the years 2005 through 2006. Enrollment reached its maximum in the year 2007 and dropped in 2008 during the overlapping of the two enrolments 2007/2008 changing to two semesters of study period instead of the whole year.

Figure 2 below indicates OUT Lindi Regional Centre students' dropout trend with darker bar bands representing the male dropout trend; while the lighter bar bands indicate the female dropout trend.
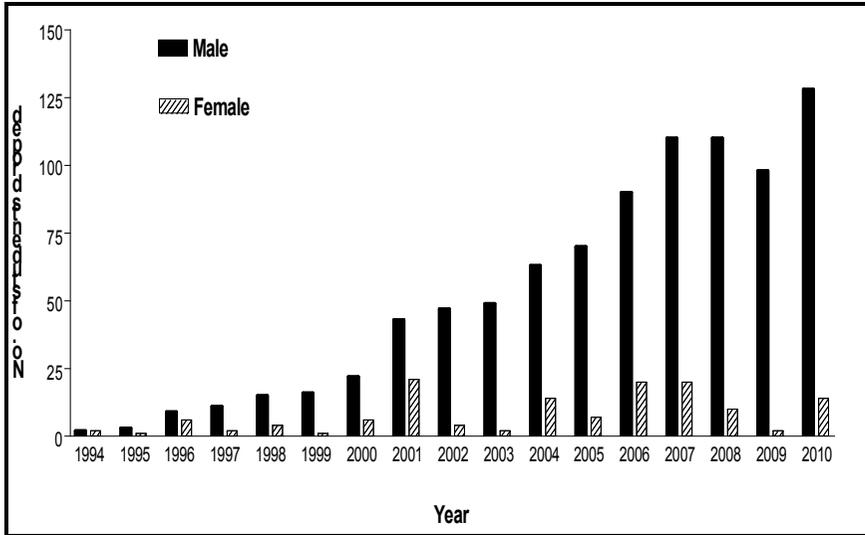
Figure 2: OUT Lindi Regional Centre Students Dropout Trend

The number of male students who dropped out was higher than that of the female students. The number of female students who dropped out was very low in the years 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2009. The trend of the number of students dropping out increased from the year 1994 through 2010. The rate of student dropped outs mimicked the students' enrolment trend. That is, as the students' enrolment increased, the number of students who dropped out also increased. Figure 3 shows the students enrolled and dropped out trend during the years 1994-2010.
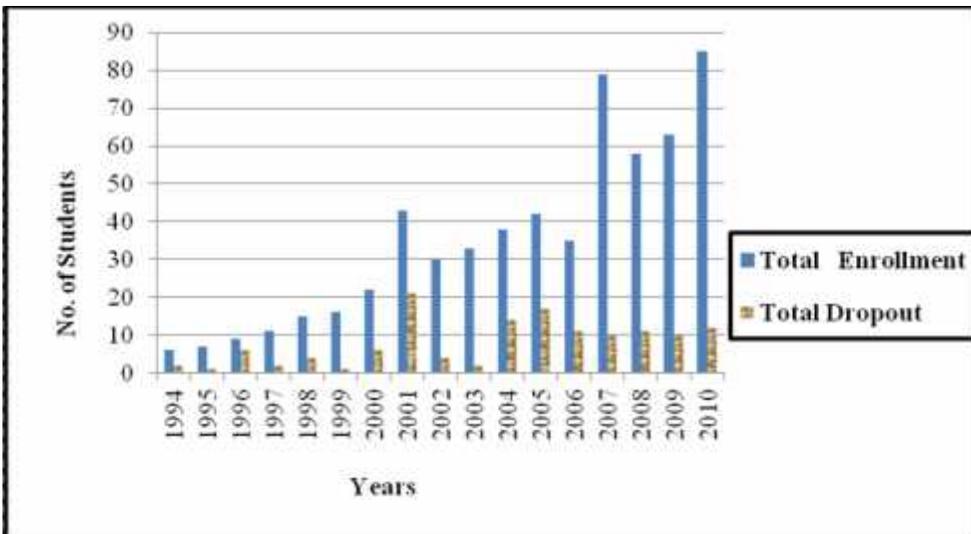

Figure 3: Total Students Enrolled and Dropped Out From 1994-2010

The respondents have expressed several reasons for their dropout from studies in response to the questionnaires as depicted in Table 3. Some respondents indicated one reason, but most of them indicated more than one reasons.

Table 3: Main Reasons for the ODL Students' Dropout at Lindi Regional Centre (n = 50)*

S/No	Reasons for dropping out	Absolute Frequencies	Percentage
1	Cultural background of not valuing education	26	52%
2	Insufficient student support services: guidance and counseling	6	12%
3	Family commitments	6	12%
4	Job commitments	6	12%
5	Financial factors	6	12%
6	Insufficient ODL study materials	8	16%
7	Lack of ICT facilities to access internet search engines	8	16%
8	Lack of enough Lectures during face-to-face sessions	6	12%
9	Insufficient student background entry qualifications	4	08%
10	No marked differences in salary scale for graduates and others	4	08%
11	Poor infrastructure and distance barrier-far from the study centre	6	12%
12	Insufficient timely student progress feedback	6	12%
13	Negative attitude towards ODL, some prefer conventional universities	8	16%
	TOTAL	**100**	-

* Note that some respondents gave more than one reason, thus total can be more/less than 100%)

Some identified reasons for the ODL students dropout included discouragements from some employers, difficult course content and high rate of supplementary, as in educational psychology, increase of petty business in towns and cities that attract mostly males, and mismatched employment status against the graduate ambitions. The interviewed variables and the learners perceptions identified during this study are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Variables and the Learner's Perceptions (N = 50)

S/No	Variables	Perceptions	Absolute Frequencies	Percentage
1	Course delivery system (ODL)	Effective	9	18%
		Moderate	12	24%
2	Instructional process	Sufficient	6	12%
		Not sufficient	28	56%
3	Study materials	Sufficient	3	06%
		Not sufficient	32	64%
4	Evaluation process	Timely and fair	20	40%
		Not Timely & Fair	5	10%
5	Cost effectiveness	Expensive	8	16%
		Moderate and affordable	15	30%
6	Students' support services	Enough	8	16%
		Not Enough	6	12%
7	Students' progress reports and feedback	Fair and Timely	17	34%
		Unfair and Late	18	36%
8	Gender equity and mainstreaming	Not Satisfactory	15	30%
		Satisfactory	8	16%
9	Problems encountered by the learners about Lecturers	Lecturers enough	2	04%
		Lecturers not enough	9	18%

Figures 4 through 10 reveal the trend in variables and the respondents perceptions identified during this study. Figure 4 shows the respondents' views on the course delivery system.

Majority (24%) of the respondents, view the course delivery system in open and distance learning (ODL) mode as moderate.
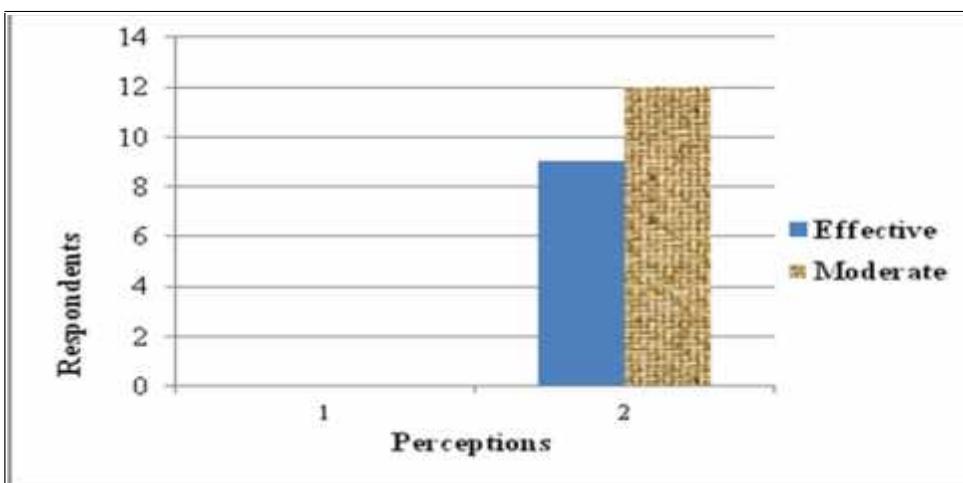

Figure 4: Course Delivery System (ODL)

As in the ODL course delivery system, majority of the respondents (56%) perceived the instructional process as not sufficient. Figure 5 portrays the instructional process in ODL.
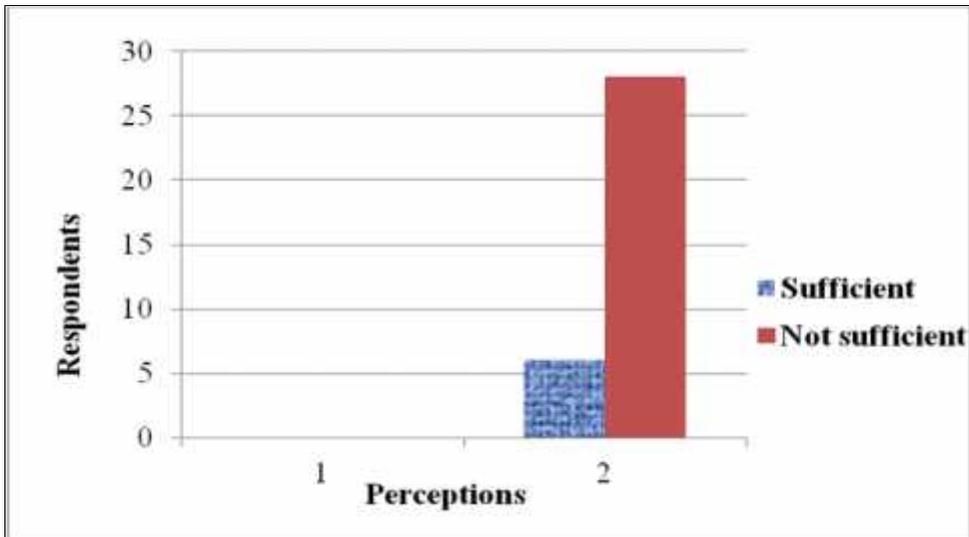

Figure5: Instructional Process in ODL

Figure 6 shows the availability of the study materials. Like in the instructional process in ODL, majority of the respondents (64%) perceived that the study materials were not sufficient.
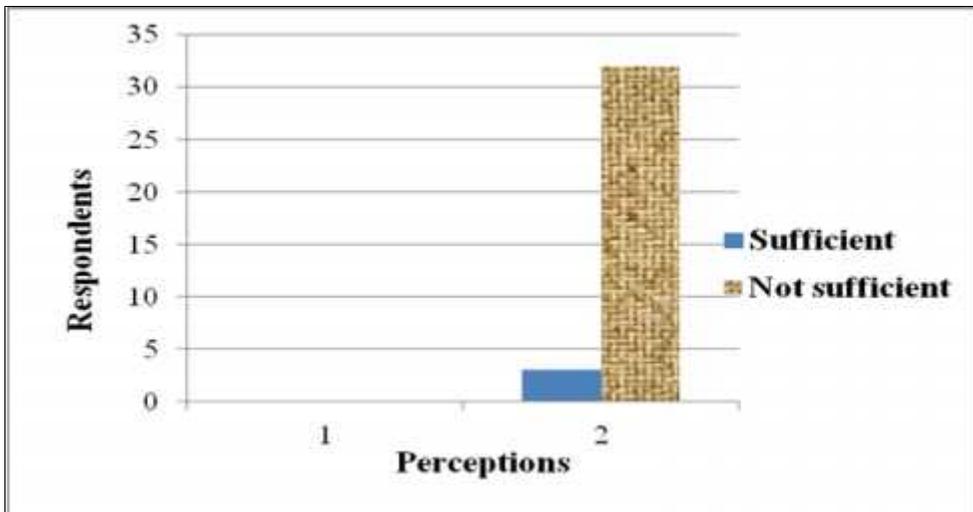

Figure 6: Availability of Study Materials

Majority of students were of the opinion that the evaluation process was timely and fair. Many of the respondents (30%) perceived cost effectiveness in ODL as being moderate and affordable. Figure 7 shows the students support services as viwed by respondents.
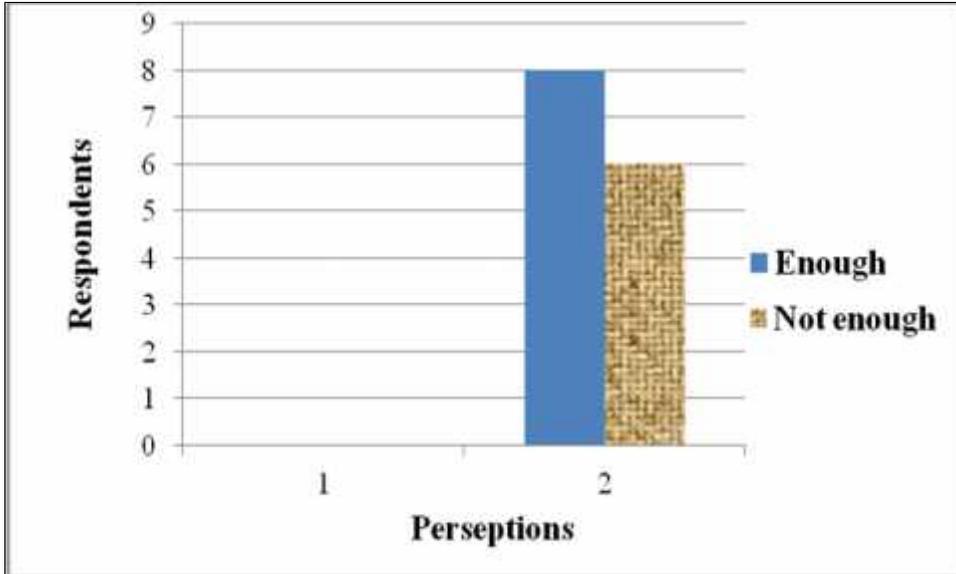
Figure 7: Students' Perception of Support Services

The students' support services were viewed by the respondents as enough (16%), but the difference is not big from those who perceived it as not enough (12%). Figure 8 portrays the students' perception of progress reports and feedback.
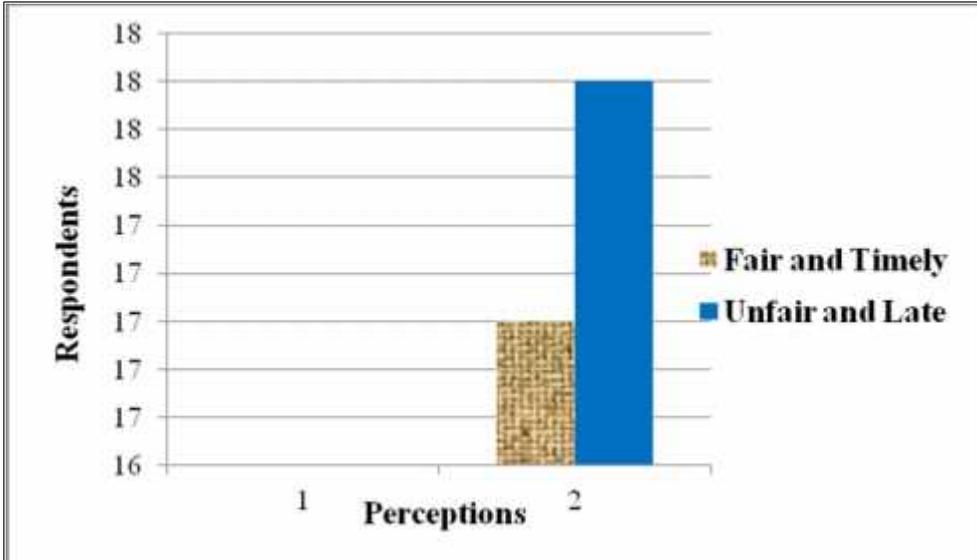

Figure 8: Students' Progress and Feedback

As in the case of students support services, there was no much difference for the students' progress reports and feedback. Some respondents viewed it fair and timely (34%) while others perceived it as unfair and late (36%). Figure 9 illustrates gender equity and mainstreaming.
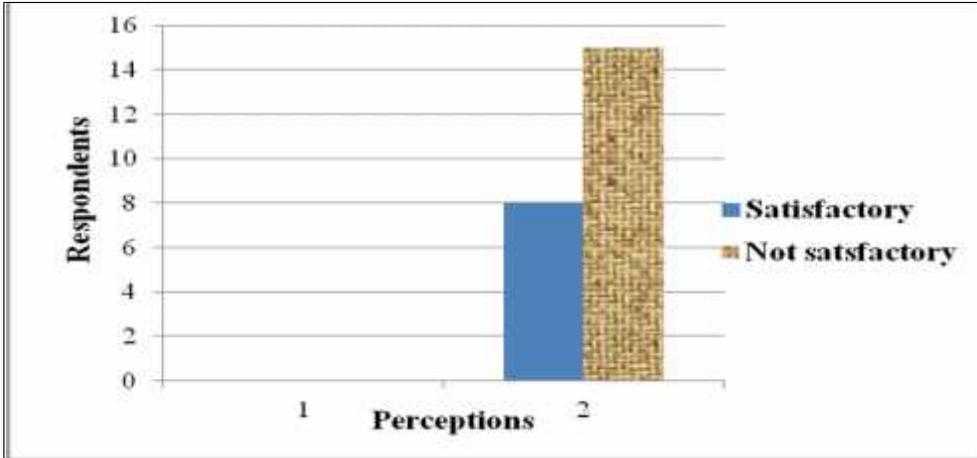
Figure 9: Gender Equity and Mainstreaming

Gender equity and mainstreaming was perceived by majority of the respondents (30%) as not satisfactory, while (16%) said it was satisfactory. Figure 10 illustrates the problems learners encountered during face-to-face sessions.
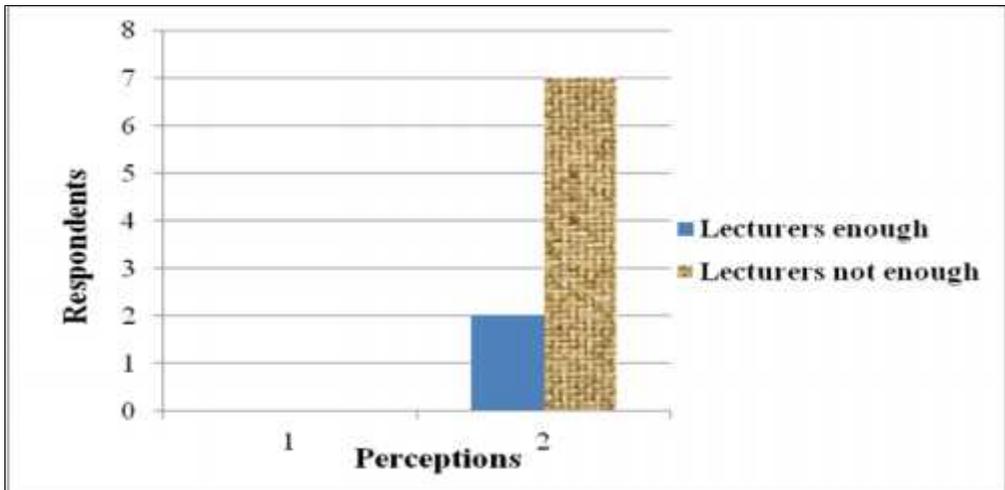

Fig. 4.10: Problems learners encounter during face-to-face session

Majority of the interviewees (18%) perceived the lecturers to be not enough while a small number (04%) said they were enough.

DISCUSSION

This study focused on the students' enrolment and dropout by considering The Open University of Tanzania Lindi Region learning environment and the teaching-learning resources in the ODL mode. One of the objectives of the study was to identify the factors responsible for the students' enrolment and dropout trend at OUT, Lindi Region from 1994 to 2009/2010. From the data (Table 1) it was revealed that the highest percentage (66%) of students dropout was in 1996 and the lowest percentage (06%) in 2003. The research findings revealed that as the

students' enrolment increased the dropout also increased (Figures 1 and 4). The number of male students who dropped out was higher than that of the female students and yet there was a higher male enrolment rate (79%) compared to female enrolment (21%) as depicted in Table 1 and Figure 4 above. Data from survey indicated that 72% of male students continued with their studies to completion during the whole period of 17 years from 1994 to 2009/2010 and the female proportion was 28%. The implications of these trends indicate that gender equity and mainstreaming need to be considered on ODL mode of teaching and learning. The reasons for dropout by ODL students given by the respondents have been identified into five categories: (i) Cultural background factors (ii) Social and personal factors (iii) Financial problems (iv) Academic related factors, and (v) Students support services.

Cultural Background Factors

Lindi Region is like some other societies in less developed areas; the residents do not value education. People of this area have other things which they value most such as weddings and initiation ceremonies, traditional dances, playing "*bao*" (board game) and music to mention just a few. Sometimes their religious beliefs and/or family responsibilities prevent women from advancing in education.

In this study, it was found that more than half (52%) of the reasons were cultural. Agenda 21, chapter 36 of UNECE (2003) emphasizes that: "Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of people to address environmental and development issues". Mbogo (2009) while citing UNECE (2003) indicated that sustainable development is one of the main goals of formal and non-formal education from pre-school to higher education and adult education. It is a measure for awareness-raising and as a fundamental tool for improving patterns of consumption and production.

The adoption of ODL mode is supposed to expand and improve student enrollment especially females who due to their biological roles and child nurturing do not have flexible work schedules as their male counterparts. It is argued that ODL offers alternatives to workers who cannot leave their offices and go to conventional type of teaching and learning. This could be the effective way and an opportunity to learn at their paces and places. Not only that but also the disadvantaged groups such as the disabled people can as well learn through ODL mode since the methods are not limited in time and geographical space. With this flexibility in ODL, conflicts between employers and employees or family members are reduced compared to conventional education systems, since with ODL they can study while working or taking care of the family. This is similar to Kitula (2011), Ofaha (2011), and Ojo (2011) who came to the same conclusion from their studies. The researchers found that ODL is an opportunity to reduce the gap between socio-economic groups and gender, marginalized and vulnerable groups who have been excluded from access to education in conventional system due to their perceived limitations.

Social and Personal Factors

Social and personal factors encompass students' university entry qualifications, family/job commitments, confidence, satisfaction, attitude towards ODL, absence of

interaction with fellow students and relevance of the knowledge acquired to the learner and the society. For instance some respondents stated: 'I had personal problems of time management about family, job roles, and health problems'. One said that ladies get married at early age. Some got discouragement from the employers-unwillingness to release workers/students during examination sessions, another one pointed out about laziness and lack of seriousness in studies while others have negative attitude towards ODL, hence think conventional teaching and learning as better in interacting with others.

These findings are similar to Fozdar *et al.* (2006) who reported personal reasons such as (i) lack of sufficient time for study due to: (a) change in family circumstances; (b) change in employment status (c) marriage (ii) poor health condition and (iii) absence of interaction with other students as reasons for student low enrollment and students dropout. Problems cited such as "lack of time" are acute, especially in cases where students are employed and who must also shoulder domestic cores. Such students may not balance their personal obligations and their educational pursuits, and are often left with little or no choice but to dropout (McGivney, 2004). For such students, factors such as 'lack of time', 'poor guidance', 'lack of feedback on time', 'time management' and 'unrealistic expectations' all contribute to withdrawal (Garland, 1993). In conventional university settings, students are brought together to interact face-to-face in various activities such as classes, seminars, group activities, homework and other social gatherings. On the other hand, in ODL settings at the Open University of Tanzania, students interact at their Regional centres during face-to-face sessions, main timed tests, laboratory sessions and University annual examinations. Students view face-to-face sessions as not compulsory to attend, others such as tests or examinations are compulsory for them. This is the same to what was reported by Utley (2002) who found out that few students attend face-to-face theory classes, because attendance is not compulsory. Because of this students feel isolated and decide to dropout.

The findings are also similar to Fozdar *et al.* (2006) who in their study in India reported absence of interaction among students as a reason for student dropouts. Although distance to the study center for the disabled students may also pose problems of dropout, ODL education can reach the unreachable. Kinash and Crichton, (2007); Moisey (2004); Paist (1995) contend that distance learning programmes offer flexibility in location, flexibility of studying at own pace, ability to choose where and when to study. There is also personal attitudinal problem in resisting changing from traditional ODL dual mode to blended teaching and learning in modern ICT technologies.

Financial Problems
Regarding financial requirements, the findings showed that 30% of respondents indicated to be moderate and affordable while 16% said it was expensive. Some respondents perceived this as moderate and affordable because they were lucky enough to obtain loans from the Higher Education Students Loan Board (HSLB) in Tanzania or get financial support from their employers. For example, some respondent stated: 'I had financial problems to attend laboratory practicals', another

one stated that: 'there is discouragement from Students' Loan Board and the employers', two third-year students had difficulties in securing a loan. And another third year female student said 'I have financial constraints to attend field practicals'. These findings are similar to Krishnan (2004), Fozdar *et al.* (2006), Biswas and Mythili (2006). Fozdar *et al.* (2006) found that ODL students faced constraints due to: (a) high programme fee (8.88%) and (b) high expenditure on account of attending laboratory courses (38.24%).

Laboratory practicals in ODL are intensive programmes of study and at The Open University of Tanzania such programmes take place in conventional universities which have the facilities for the duration of one to two months. Cost for attending laboratory practical becomes expensive because the students do not live in the same area where the facilities are and have to meet boarding and lodging costs as well as travel to and from the place together with secretarial services. This is also reflected by Young (1994), Erman and Fethi (2006).

One student had this to say "The most important reason [for dropout] for me is financial problem. I am working in my company, and we are facing financial constraints in my company while attending the programme." Financial problems can be solved by providing 100% loan to the students and OUT to build its own laboratories. Ligembe, (2009) stated that: "There is no any reason whatsoever for any Tanzanian to miss higher education opportunity in this country or abroad because of either cost or space while OUT is there all over the country and abroad. What is needed is to ensure that OUT regional centres are well equipped in terms of all necessary resources so that majority can study while they stay at their home at the least cost".

Academic Related Factors
On academic factors problems, 56% of respondents identified lack of ICT facilities, study materials not available on time and insufficient instructional process. Some respondents said that their progress report or feedback was not timely. In a similar observation, Reuben (2011) viewed that at the OUT there is large enrollment which does not match with the number of facilitators. He also noted that there was excessive dependency on printed study materials as the basic and only mode of interaction with the ODL providers. The same was noted by Okopi (2011) at National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) who found out that 74% of course materials were not available for collection on time. The implication of this situation is that the students could be discouraged then lose motivation and hence, dropout. This is also in line with Wood (1996) and Thompson (1997) propositions that the success of any programme depends largely on improving the quality of student learning packages. Garison (1987), McCreary (1990) and Fenner (1998) contend that the learners dropout from ODL if they perceive that their interests or goals and the course structure do not match. For example, Chyung, Winiecki and Fenner (1998) found that adult distance learners who dropped out often did so because they were dissatisfied with the course content or learning environment, or there was a discrepancy between their professional or personal interests and the course structure. Fan and Chan (1997) found that the course being too difficult was a

significant reason for dropping out. They also found that education background can be a contributing factor, particularly if the students had insufficient background content knowledge for the course they were studying. However, Dale (1996) and McNicle (2004) found that the essential areas of learner expectations were regular contact with teachers/tutors, quick response and support for learning. If these expectations are not met, students at risk may drop out of their programmes. Other problems cited by at least two respondents in the interviews concerning the academic factors were:

> Loss of some scripts of some students, high rate of supplementary examinations, especially in psychology programme, face-to-face sessions time being short, and postponement of face-to-face and teaching practice. Others are, abrupt changes in the examination time table, some lecturers compose Main Timed Tests beyond the legal range, hence it becomes too difficulty and unfair, lecturers are few compared to the number of students and do not carter for all subjects. There are less resources in faculties to write study materials, increase of incompletes in the Students' Academic Record Information System (SARIS), there was some misplacement/delay of the students results, lack of well stocked libraries, electricity and internet services not available in rural areas, and low level of understanding the importance of education.

These academic problems especially those of insufficient study materials and instructional process can be mitigated by the Government to improve OUT funding and employ more manpower in order to deliver timely study materials to students during registration. OUT workers have to improve customer care by adhering to the client service charter (2010) and improve instructional process, management and administration of ODL teaching and learning.

Students Support Services
Concerning student support services in this study, it was revealed 16% of the respondents viewed those as enough while 12% perceived them as insufficient. In this study, student support services are related to the distance covered from home to the study centres and the field areas/laboratories for science students, provisions for students with special needs, guidance and counseling to the students, orientation to the newly admitted students before registration, reliable power supply and internet availability or connectivity, motivation, customer care and prompt responsiveness to the students' inquiries or challenges.

Other challenges of ODL found by Reuben (2011) were in specific areas of legitimacy and public acceptance, monitoring, research and evaluation, policy planning, learner support and application of ICTs. Fozdar *et al.* (2006) had also found that the major reason leading to students' decision to withdraw was the distance to the study centre from their residence (64.70%). Students encountered problems in attending the laboratory sessions due to distance; 52.94% could not afford the costs. They (47.06%) also cited insufficient guidance and counseling sessions therefore they needed more guidance and counseling. Two third-year students stated that there is poor customer care especially at the Headquarters, harsh

language when students follow up their results record at the Headquarters, insufficient orientation of the students before enrolment and lack of knowledge on Information Communication Technology (ICT) to access internet.

Temu (2009) found that tackling distance and technology can also alleviate the difficulties and challenges of sending study materials and examinations to centres under slippery and gorgeous bad roads during rainy seasons in remote areas without ICT facilities, libraries and electricity. Peach (2005) also found that student support services have a very important and vital role to play in helping students successfully complete their programmes of study. About provisions for disabled students, The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) Charter and Rules (2007) as well as Students Affairs Policy have put in place support services for the students regardless of disabilities. This means all people regardless of their disabilities have the right to enter OUT's programmes and make use of the services it provides (Bagandanshwa, 2009).

The office of the Dean of Students coordinates these services regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, creed or disability and in the Institute of Educational Technology (IET) there is an office designated for disabled people. Kisoza (2009) observed that the main strength of OUT is the motivated human resource that demonstrated the potential capabilities in the realms of research and consultancy. He noted that what is needed is sustainable capacity building through proper skill building and mentoring. Guidance and counseling to the students during orientation about ODL mode of study and throughout the study period help to alleviate their queries and challenges.

Orientation to the newly admitted students before registration helps them to make an informed decision in their selection of study programmes according to their background knowledge and experiences. Internet availability enhances the students to get extra materials or references for supplementing their course study materials. Good customer care and prompt responsiveness to the students' inquiries or challenges help to avoid dropout.

In a summary, insufficient academic support and cultural background barriers were found to be the main reasons for dropout from the studies at OUT Lindi Regional centre. This paper proposes the strategies to increase the enrollment of the students while reducing the dropouts:
(i)   To design and distribute fliers indicating the benefits of studying with OUT, as well as advertisements of OUT programmes through television, newspapers, and radio.

(ii)   There is a need to update study materials to be uploaded on Moodle platforms, and to mentor the newly recruited staff and strengthen face-to-face sessions.

(iii)   ODL students should be willing to seek help for their personal, social and academic problems and the Universities to have biannual meetings between the students and OUT management.

(iv) To build a well equipped ICT computer labs and mini-libraries in all the Regional Centres as well as OUT own laboratories for practicals at Bungo Kibaha; Use mobile smart phones, iPhone, iPod, iPad, Moodle platforms and Open Education Resources (OER) for references.

(v) OUT to update study programmes to include Public and Occupational Health, B.Sc. Agriculture (Varisanga and Mhoma, 2009), Engineering (Bisanda, 2009) to carter for more technical experts, built industry, agriculture, and environmental sectors;

(vi) OUT to decentralize the Regional centres to the District centre levels and upgrade the Regional centres to College levels with the help of Government;

(vii) Conduct further research to investigate on ICT blended learning mode of study to enhance the ODL Moodle platforms;

(viii) Conduct research on factors contributing to the increasing non-attendance in science and technology programmes and challenges facing disabled people to access ODL;

(ix) Engage OUT Alumni in partnerships for improving support services delivered in ICT blended mode of teaching and learning and role model others to join and study with the OUT.

(x) Encourage women to join and study with OUT.

The proposed OUT conceptual operation model (Figure 11) can share these views to achieve the OUT objectives while increasing enrolment and reducing dropouts for socio-economic development in Tanzania.

3 | Quality Curriculum Design and Review

4 | Quality content Development and Review

5 | Admin. Policy & New Learners Certificates Screening before Enrolment

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11

9 | Recruitment of Quality Staff and Integrity Committee

7 | Institutional Monitoring and Promotion

Quality Teaching, Learning, Guidance & Counseling to avoid Dropouts

Evaluation of Learners support Services

Diligent Quality Assurance Unit

Quality Learners Assessment

Professional Handling of Learners Queries and Challenges

Frontline Staff Good Customer Care
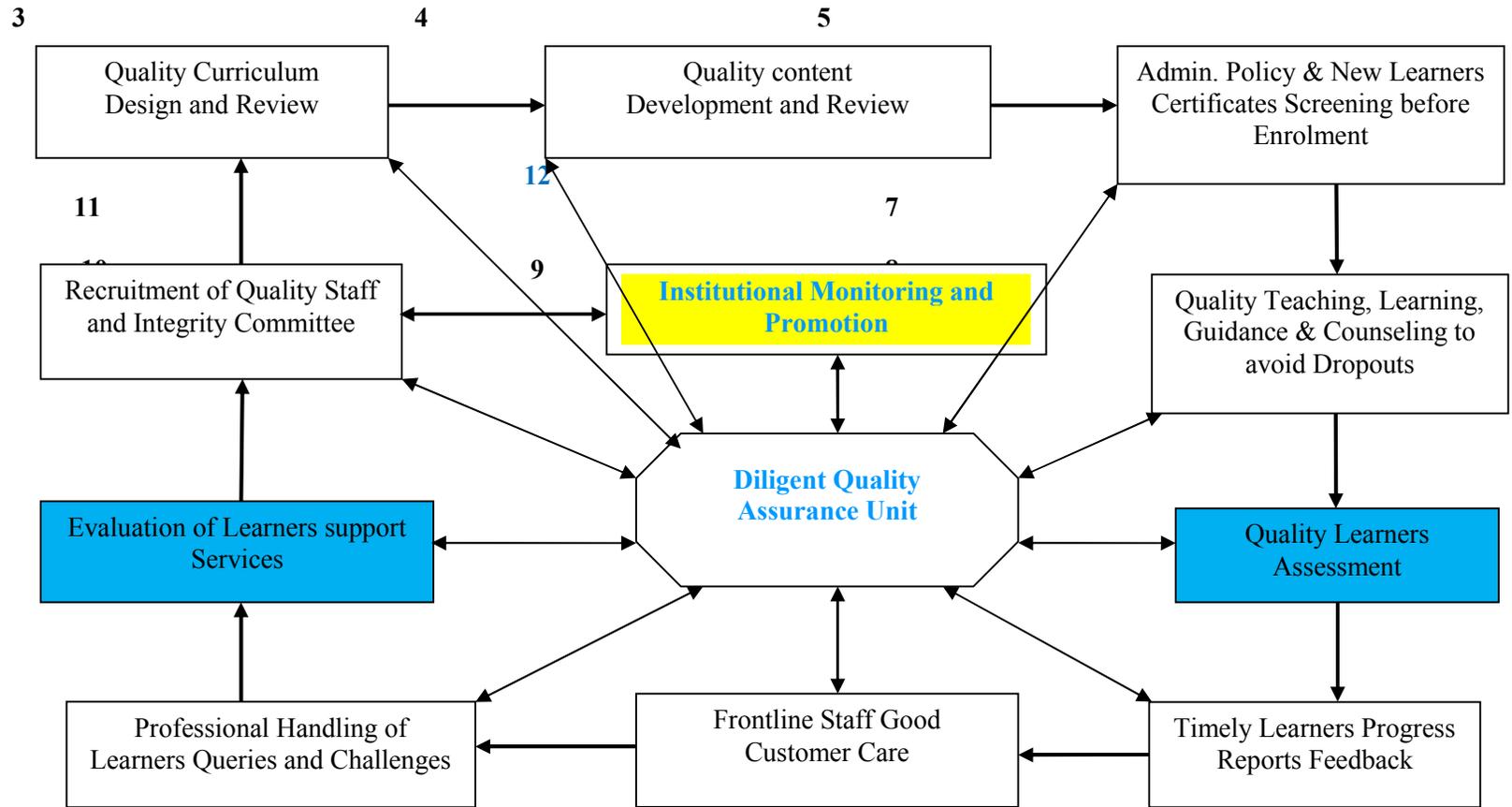
Timely Learners Progress Reports Feedback

Figure 11: Proposed OUT Conceptual Operation Model

Source; Irene Aurelia Tarimo (2012)

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