

## **Career Guidance and Counseling Services for Virtual and Open Learning and its Impact on the Preservation of Post-Graduate Students in Kenyatta University, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of career guidance and counseling services for VOL on the preservation of post-graduate students in Kenyatta University, Kenya. This study used a descriptive survey approach that included quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The study's population comprised two groups. The first group comprised all 8 director and assistant directors of student affairs in Kenyatta University VOL Centres. The second group comprised all the 2156 finalist students enrolled for the VOL programme who are the most familiar with the challenges experienced by VOL students and from whom it was possible to obtain the record of students who may have dropped out. The study used a census approach to sample all 8 director and assistant directors of student affairs, while the Fisher's method was used to calculate the size of the postgraduate finalist sample. Original data was used in the study. After editing the quantitative data, handling void responses, coding, and categorizing the data, the information was imported into SPSS version 22 for analysis. The study found that career counseling and guidance services for VOL improved postgraduate student retention. This was demonstrated by a significant correlation  $r$  coefficient of 0.758. Specifically, the study concluded that career guidance and counseling influenced the retention of post-graduate students in Kenya's public universities. The study also concluded that student retention was influenced in the form of receiving encouragement to persist until they graduate, being encouraged to stay until completion of the academic degree, and receiving motivation to complete the course within the set period. According to the research's findings, the Ministry of Education's state Department of Higher Education should institutionalize guidance and counseling as mandatory student support services in Virtual and Open Learning (VOL). The research also suggests that the Kenyan government form strategic alliances with social institutions that would allow public learning institutions to easily access career guidance and counseling services as a student support service.

**Keywords:** *Career guidance and counseling services, preservation, virtual open learning, retention of learner.*

## 1.0 Introduction

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a factor in the growth of society and the economy. Both in rich and emerging nations, it is quickly evolving into a fundamental component of the mainstream of educational institutions (Buselic, 2012). ODL is at the centre of making the world a global village in terms of advancing higher education. This also aids in meeting the ever-increasing demand for higher education (Brent, Gibbs & Gruszczynska, 2012). Importantly, as stated in the Education for All (EFA) goals, ODL may support the delivery of high-quality education to the whole world (Hilton III, Wiley, Stein & Johnson, 2010). Both public and private institutions have shown a significant commitment to ODL. This can be explained by the fact that all stakeholders can identify the potential in ODL and want to tap into it. This is because schooling dynamics have changed and learners want to learn liberally, they don't want to be localized in a particular location for them to study (Buselic, 2012).

Wright (2011) noted that one of the challenges experienced by ODEL students was poor attitudes towards distance education among others. According to Krishnan (2012), when direct assistance from the teacher is not available, student support services become the main means of communication between the institution and the student. These services are crucial in providing the necessary amenities to ensure that the student feels comfortable and at ease while away from home. (Pulist, 2011). Simpson (2012) noted that fewer students finish their courses and graduate from open-distance education institutions worldwide than do students at face-to-face institutions. Simpson (2012) also noted that insufficient student support services are a major contributing factor to the increased drop-out rates and very low pass rates in ODL colleges. Segoe (2012) distinguished between two broad types of instructional aid for students. Support with the teaching is the first, followed by support for logistics and morale. Intellectual, mentoring, tutoring and all learning activities are all included in tutorial help. However, organizational/emotional support includes counseling, guidance, and any other non-academic student problems. This implies that institutes of remote learning should offer the necessary emotional support to students.

Farirai and Richard (2015) have defined guidance and counseling as a method that has been specifically developed to aid open or distance learners in resolving any issues that may arise during their academic pursuit. Research has demonstrated that the provision of advisory or counseling services can enhance student retention rates in open-distance and electronic learning environments (Jane & Ross, 2008). These resources assist children who are economically and academically disadvantaged. The numerous issues experienced by students need the provision of constant support and counseling services, as stated by Farirai and Richard (2015) in their article on the implementation of open and distant learning (ODL). Grote (2010) posits that counseling and guidance services are advantageous for open and distant learners as they facilitate the development of a personalized comprehension of the challenges encountered. Kabate (2016) asserts that counseling services can serve as a viable retention strategy in open and distance learning (ODL) due to their ability to facilitate the development of personal connections with students. The integration of these two components is a characteristic feature of professional therapy. These interpersonal connections assist during periods of necessity. Furthermore, it offers instruction on how to surmount diverse challenges encountered during the process of learning.

The quality of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Kenya was investigated by Mayeku and Odera (2011). The research revealed that all the universities that were sampled encountered five challenges, namely inadequate funding, insufficient resources, outdated facilities, poor infrastructure, and a lack of support for ODL. According to Nyerere (2016), referenced in Chale

and Michaud (2009), ODL programs are given through residential and outside study in Kenyan universities. They identified obstacles to the delivery of remote learning courses related to money, expertise, and a lack of sufficient ICT infrastructure. In their study on the obstacles to implementing eLearning in Kenya by Tarus et al. (2015), 92% of respondents said a lack of ICT and eLearning infrastructure was a major one when asked what obstacles there were to implementing eLearning at Kenyan public institutions. The deployment of remote learning in Kenya is impeded by a range of challenges. This predicament is caused by several things, including network infrastructure limits, poor policy frameworks, and social- economic difficulties (Garbutt & Wanami, 2017).

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

According to studies Creating student support services is the responsibility of organisations that provide ODL programmes. These services are set up to guarantee that they satisfy the emotional, social, and cognitive needs of the kids. Despite the distance, they aid in ensuring that there is communication between the instructor and the pupils. The availability of student services has been beneficial for both distant and open learning. But when it comes to distance learning, the "elephant in the room" is the high attrition and low pass rates. The London University International Programme is a great place to start because it is offered both online and in conventional classroom environments. Research indicates that students who opted for the in-person option had retention rates that were over 61% higher than those of those who used the remote alternative. Another example is the University of BRAOU in India, which in 2018 had a graduation rate of 14% for open and distance learners compared to the University of South Africa's 6%. This problem is particularly severe in underdeveloped nations. For example, in Kenya, the public university remote learning retention rate in 2018 was 4%. In particular, postgraduate students enrolling in the Digital School of Virtual and Open Learning (DSVOL) had higher dropout rates. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to determine the impact of career guidance and counseling services for VOL on the preservation of post-graduate students in public universities in Kenya.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The study objective was to assess the impact of career guidance and counseling services for VOL on the preservation of post-graduate students at Kenyatta University in Kenya.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

This study was informed by the transaction theory. Moore's Transactional Theory (Moore, 2007) is one of the cornerstone ideas in the field of remote education is Moore's notion of transactional distance (1972; 1973; 1997; 2007). According to Moore (2007), communication breakdowns, misconceptions, and learning impairments may result from the student's inherent detachment from the lack of physical interaction during learning activities in DE. This difference is not related to physical proximity but rather to instructional methodology and student-instructor interaction. Transaction refers to how a student interacts with and responds to their environment. Each participant in the DE transaction is distinct in terms of their physical location, the method of accessing learning, the design of their learning environment, and the impact of the aforementioned on their interaction with the learning institution (Moore, 2007). In any educational event, transactional distance does exist, as acknowledged by Moore (1993) and Benson and Samarawickrema (2009), however, the impact of transactional distance is greater for learners enrolled in DE and online learning. Structures for supporting learners try to shorten the transactional distance.

Moore's Transactional Theory, according to Shearer (2010), outlines an interaction between three attributes that constitute any DE program. They are conversation, organization, and learner autonomy. The interaction between the three attributes can either shorten or lengthen the transactional distance. Conversations and connections that take place during the interactions are referred to as dialogue. The institution, the instructor, the student, and the instructional materials have all made important contributions. In other words, it represents dialogue and opinion exchange between educators and students. To foster replies that enhance learning and overall learning outcomes, dialogue should follow a structure that constructively builds upon the contributions of all participants. This suggests that the transactional distance increases in the absence of reciprocal and authentic connections while it decreases in the opposite situation. Support structures encourage dialogue by lowering communication barriers (Shearer, 2010).”

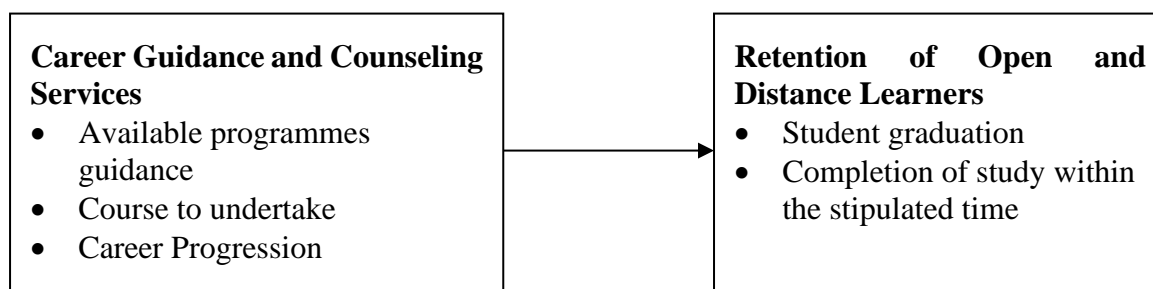
Theoretical underpinning for learner support is also provided by Moore's Transactional Theory (Moore, 2007). The transactional distance and dialogue have an inverse relationship where dialogue improves with decreases in the transaction distance. Additionally, with a general decrease in the requirement for learner support, well-structured discussion enhances learner autonomy. However, the current environment in public universities is not as desirable. Rarely are dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy in balance. To attain a balance of the three elements learner support is required due to this skewness. Support frameworks encompass all techniques that promote communication, order, and learner autonomy. Support frameworks, for instance, promote discourse by providing open communication channels between all parties involved. The fact that the need for student support services by postgraduate students enrolled in ODL programs to bridge the transaction distance is explained makes the theory pertinent.

#### 1.4 Conceptual Framework

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

##### Independent variable

##### Dependent Variable



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

According to UNISA Task Team 4 report (2010), career guidance and counseling learner support should be provided when the course is introduced to the market. This helps in providing timely career guidance and counseling to students to enable them to choose courses that fit them best (Subotzky & Prinsloo, 2011). Career guidance and counseling continue for the entire period the students are enrolled. This paves the way for instruction in which pupils take ownership of their own decisions. Students are encouraged to participate in mentoring schemes to help them succeed in their studies. This study focused on various attributes of career

guidance and counseling which will include availability of programme guidance, courses to undertake, and career progression

## 2.0 Literature Review

According to Segoe (2012), effective learner support systems are crucial to the success of distance learners. Certain services need to be developed to cater to the students. Additionally, it is critical to budget for and implement a variety of well-planned support systems to allow distance learning students to master autonomous study and develop their ability to communicate in a virtual setting (Arko-Achemfuor, 2017).

Most universities are transitioning from traditional mode of teaching to both traditional and online modes without fully understanding that remote learning is a different pedagogy that necessitates organizational reorganization, notably in terms of policy and course development, (Power & GouldMorven, 2011). According to Lentell (2012), more and more young people are enrolling in online degree programs without properly considering the difficulties they may encounter. Lentell (2012) has attributed the increase in enrollment in Open University (OU) distance learning programs in the United Kingdom (UK) among students aged 18 to 24 to the volatile job market in the region.

Attracting, educating, and retaining students are the three pillars on which a university or college stands or falls. Student retention is a complex issue that has three components. These three dynamics are linked and rely on one another. A facility's atmosphere and culture can be improved, which will also enhance the experience of the institution's many diverse stakeholders (Seidman, 2012). Unsatisfactory retention rates are a persistent issue for universities around the world. A higher education institution's survival depends on maintaining high student retention rates. Poor retention rates put many higher education institutions at risk of going out of business. Before taking any kind of action, educational institutions of higher learning need to figure out what's wrong and how extensive the problem is (Cotter, 2013).

Although dropout rates differ from nation to nation, the core causes continue to be a set of irrational expectations on the part of potential students and a lack of effective student assistance in universities. Less emphasis is dedicated to assisting students in making wise decisions before enrollment, even if much work has been put into maintaining students in the teaching programs and institutions that they have joined (Van Stolk et al., 2017). Consequently, one of the biggest problems with a distant education system is student retention.

Counseling, according to Kottler and Shepard (2014), is the encouragement and advice required by learners in addition to customized support aligned to their subjects. In certain open and distant learning systems, counseling students is considered a formal job performed by counselors or tutor counselors. The goal of counseling is to assist the individual receiving it in making decisions that are in their best interests. The counseling function must be created to address the possibility of student counseling needs before, during, and after a course (Hecker & Thorpe, 2015)."

Wen (2019) analyzed the value of career counseling in higher education institutions in light of student needs and institutional development. With the aid of career planning, students can determine their current and future directions as well as their personal ambitions. They can overcome any misconceptions about picking occupations, choose their study paths, and uncover their prospective skills to increase their competitiveness for positions with the support of such career coaching. Students can gain from effective career coaching by reaching their entire potential in life by following the recommendations with a long-term vision for career planning. As a result of improving job rates for graduates and promoting required educational

modifications, career counseling at universities can boost the institution's reputation (Gao, 2019).

There is a consensus among scholars that professional development should be a fundamental aspect of career counseling education in the United States, even for students who enter the field immediately after completing high school. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) was enacted by legislators in 1994 to facilitate the transition of young individuals from school to work (STW) and provide them with a sense of economic direction. The absence of a clear economic orientation among the contemporary youth has motivated the enactment of this legislation. Solberg et al. (2012). Scholars who investigate the significance of STW interventions generally align themselves with one of two perspectives: either they espouse the belief that STW initiatives are advantageous for all student cohorts, including those who intend to pursue post-secondary education, or they hold a contrary viewpoint. The STWOA's definition of STW activities encompasses a range of experiences, including both classroom-based instruction on career pathways, career awareness, and work readiness, as well as practical opportunities such as utilizing career centers, engaging in workplace shadowing, participating in internships or summer jobs, receiving workplace mentoring, and engaging in community service (Griffith et al., 2011).

Tutors in ODL perform a variety of counseling duties for the students. These consist of responding to questions that are not linked to the course; assisting students when undertaking the course; counseling students and enlightening them about the available options after they finalize their courses; and answering questions about ODL systems (Hecker & Thorpe, 2015). Apparently, only a few institutions, such as Open University, have structured this form of guidance for remote learners. Hence, help is only available to those who pursue it but otherwise unavailable to students who don't bother to inquire. Thus, students must understand how to motivate themselves and commit to the program to succeed (Daniel, 2016).

A student's academic path from enrollment through graduation is sometimes referred to as "the student walk or student life cycle (Pratt, 2020). According to Pratt (2020), there are key moments during this time when students should get proactive support to make sure their academic lives run smoothly. Prospective college students take into account various factors when evaluating their options. The credibility and legitimacy of the institution, program-related inquiries, enrollment and registration protocols, payment and funding alternatives, pre-study preparation, technical guidance, study habits, motivation, yearly re-registration, course progression, graduation, and alumni feedback are all factors that may impact a student's probability of completing their program.

Career guidance and learner assistance should be offered when the course is being advertised as well as during the pre-course period as stated by UNISA Task Team 4 report (2010). At this stage, potential students get career guidance and counseling to assist them in selecting classes most suited to their profile, set of skills, and life goals. Subotzky and Prinsloo (2011) cite career decision-making as a factor that influences student persistence and graduation rates favorably. Once a decision has been made with knowledge, career guidance, and counseling continue throughout the period that the student is enrolled in a program. At that point, registered students receive assistance in developing a sense of personal responsibility and adjusting to social, educational, and other intervening variables. Students are encouraged to participate in mentoring programs as they acquire confidence which spurs them to mentor their juniors after finalizing their course.

The fields of career guidance and counseling are experiencing rapid growth in developing nations such as Pakistan, Chile, Romania, Poland, and the Philippines. Despite being relatively new, these fields are expanding at a notable pace. Zahid et al. (2020) conducted a study that identified various factors that influence the position of the CGC, including political, infrastructure-related, economic, social, cultural, and policy-related issues.

Kariuki (2010) researched how prospective teachers felt about available student support programs. The University of Nairobi's School of Continuing and Distance Education was the target of the probe. The results of the survey showed that students viewed academic assistance programs favorably. In addition, the quality of the university's administrative support, guidance, and counseling services was seen favorably by students, and their satisfaction with them was reported.

According to a study conducted by the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, the Open University of the United Kingdom, and the Korean National University engaging students in mentorship and peer support programs may result in retention improvements of up to 20% and a return on investment of up to 295 (Bolgle, 2010). The report did claim that career guidance and counseling services might still be very profitable.

The difficulties with access that students encounter when using their ODL mode of study were examined by Arko-Achemfuor (2017). To learn more about the difficulties students have in using the support services the university provides, a focus group and a series of questionnaires were used in a mixed-methods approach. It was established that although most of the support resources are available, students in remote locations cannot appropriately use them, which has a negative influence on their academic performance. The research recommends that UNISA increase its support services and train its academic and support personnel as well as its students on how to make the most of them.

Nafukho (2016) looked at how the service variable combination (s) given by Student Support Services' (SSS) TRIO program affected the participants' academic achievement and retention rates in a Four-Year Institution in the Southern United States. Three hundred and seven (307) students who took part in the TRIO program during the 2003–2004 academic year made up the target population. The total minutes allocated to service characteristics offered by SSS and program participants' academic performance and retention rates were investigated using regression analysis. The results show that the length of time spent engaging in cultural enrichment activities and one-on-one counseling correlates significantly with improved academic performance.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This study used a descriptive survey approach that included quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. This approach was efficacious as it facilitated the identification of a sample that was both statistically and demographically representative of the entire study population (Morrison et al., 2011). The study's population comprised two groups. The first group comprised all 8 director and assistant directors of student affairs in Kenyatta University VOL Centres. The second group comprised all the 2156 finalist students enrolled for the VOL programme who are the most familiar with the challenges experienced by VOL students and from whom it was possible to obtain the record of students who may have dropped out. The study used a census approach to sample all 8 director and assistant directors of student affairs, while the Fisher's method was used to calculate the size of the postgraduate finalist sample. Original data was used in the study. After editing the quantitative data, handling void responses, coding, and categorizing the data, the information was imported into SPSS version

22 for analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used. Frequencies and percentages were utilized for descriptive statistics, while correlation analyses were conducted for inferential statistics. Tables and graphs were made in Excel in addition to SPSS. In-depth interviews with important informants yielded qualitative material, which was analyzed for themes and presented in coherent prose.

#### 4.0 Results and Discussion

##### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The major purpose of the research was to determine whether and how the provision of career guidance and counseling services for VOL affected the retention of graduate students at Kenya's public universities.

##### 4.1.1 Provision of Career Guidance and Counseling Services

The finalist postgraduate students were asked to state whether they received adequate career guidance and counseling services. Table 1 illustrates that 62.8% of the respondent's responses were yes while 37.2% stated no. This is a pointer that Kenyatta University strives to provide career guidance and counseling services though the support service does not meet all the needs of the postgraduate students. These findings provide evidence in support of the assertions made by Farirai and Richards (2015) that ODL students need continual help and counseling since they are confronted with challenges regularly.

**Table 1: Provision of Career Guidance and Counseling Services**

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

##### 4.1.2 Nature of Career Guidance and Counseling Services

The finalist postgraduate students were requested to respond to statements reflecting the nature of career guidance and counseling services that they receive. Table 1 shows that 62.8% agreed that they obtained sufficient information on distance learning to understand how it differs from traditional classroom instruction, 60.2% posited that they were given adequate information about the programme offered under the VOL programme while 55.6% alluded that they received career guidance before making a decision on which course to undertake. Results also revealed that 61.5% retorted that they received guidance on the expected progression of their course, 56.4% asserted that they received clear guidance on what is their role as a student under the VOL program, while 55.1% agreed that they were introduced to human resources that can support their learning and introduced to channels which they can use to reach out in-case they needed any form of assistance.

Further, 58.6% stated that they had no trouble comprehending the registration process. The results show that the students indeed receive academic guidance and counseling services. However, there is room for improvement as there was a small proportion of students who disagreed. The average mean score of 3.2 implies that most of the finalist postgraduate students agreed with the statements on the nature of career guidance and counseling services. However, the proportion was slightly above average which is an indicator that there is still room for improvement. The variation of the responses was demonstrated by a standard deviation of 1.3.



**Table 2: Nature of Career Guidance and Counseling Services**

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

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

The interviewees who played a pivotal role in the research were also urged to detail the career assistance and counseling programs available to the pupils. In response they stated that on admission, students are guided to select the appropriate course in tandem with their strengths, during studies, the students are availed with catalogues to select their units with the student portal continuously informing them about their performance in their studies, they also forward to the students through email any communication and information regarding their studies.

They also stated that there are students' wardens who help students sort issues when they are not able to access the lecturers. They also noted that there is a fully-fledged guidance and counseling department at the main campus where students are referred to the department by the digital school. Further, they stated that the senior administrator allocates units to the students, and the exam coordinator also ensures that exam regulations are adhered to.

#### **4.1.3 Challenges when Accessing Career Guidance and Counseling Services**

The postgraduate students who were chosen to go on to the next round were questioned about the challenges they faced while seeking career guidance and assistance. Results in Table 3 show that 49.1% posited that contacting the university teaching staff was a challenge, 47.0% stated that they lacked personalized attention, 52.6% stated that they experienced a delay in

getting responses, 50% stated there lacked clarity in the guidance provided while 16.7% stated other challenges. These challenges included the poor flow of information, inability to join virtual classes due to lack of a corporate email, having to sit-in CAT and exam yet this is an online school, inaccessibility of units done, and poor etiquette by the customer care personnel. The results point to the areas that require improvement. These results are in line with those found by Nyerere and coworkers (2012), who studied the many obstacles that prevent ODeL in Kenya from reaching its full potential. These challenges included low teaching staff levels, delayed production of study materials, insufficient funding, and lack of proper use of available resources.

**Table 3: Challenges when Accessing Career Guidance and Counseling Services**

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

#### 4.2 Correlation Analysis

The correlation results show the association between academic support services for Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) on the retention of post-graduate students.

**Table 4: Pearson Correlation**

Variable	Postgraduate student retention	Career guidance and counseling services
Postgraduate student retention	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) 1	
Career guidance and counseling services	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) .758** 0.000	1

Access to career support and counseling services is positively correlated with postgraduate student retention ( $r = 0.758$ ,  $P 0.0001$ ), according to the study's findings. This suggests that a one-unit increase in career counseling and advising services could result in a 0.758% improvement in retention. These results are consistent with those found by Kariuki (2010), who studied the perceptions of the effectiveness of learner support services held by distance education students enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (Arts) program. The results of the survey showed that students viewed academic assistance programs favorably. Additionally, it was found that students had a favorable opinion of and were content with the caliber of the university's administrative assistance, guidance, and counseling services. Hence, the management of Kenyatta University ought to have a keen focus on ensuring that students receive the necessary guidance and counseling support services as it enhances student retention.

#### 4.3 Discussion of Findings

The major purpose of this research was to analyse the impact of VOL career counseling and advising on graduate student retention at publicly funded Kenyan institutions. Career counseling and guidance services for VOL improved postgraduate student retention. This was

demonstrated by a significant correlation  $r$  coefficient of 0.758. The results were also supported by the assertion by most finalist postgraduate students that Kenyatta University provides adequate career guidance and counseling services. Thuryrajah, Ahmed, and Jeyakumar (2017) discovered similar results when examining the impact of counseling services at universities in Melaka. The study showed that access to counseling services by students impacted the students, educational and personal development positively.

In addition, they agreed that; they received adequate information on distance education, they were given adequate information about the programme offered under the VOL programme, they received career guidance before making a decision on which course to undertake, they received guidance on the expected progression of their course, they received clear guidance on what is their role as a student under the VOL program, they learned about the availability of human resources that can help them learn and introduced to channels which they can use to reach out in-case they were in need of any form of assistance and that they had no trouble comprehending the registration process. The findings presented are in alignment with the research conducted by Mporananayo and Opiyo (2018), wherein they aimed to examine the impact of career guidance services provided by the administration of public universities in Rwanda on the academic performance of students. The study's results showed a favorable association between students' academic achievement and the expansion of career counseling services, as measured by better GPAs.

The directors and assistant directors also supported the findings and retorted that they guide students to select the appropriate course in tandem with their strengths on admission and avail the students with catalogues to select their units during studies with the student portal continuously informing them about their performance in their studies, they also forward to the students through email any communication and information regarding their studies. Further, stated that there are students' wardens who help students sort issues when they are not able to access the lecturers.

The results, however, indicated that some barriers existed which impeded the effective provision of career advising and counseling services. These included challenges of contacting the university teaching staff, lack of personalized attention, delay in getting responses, lack of clarity in the guidance provided, poor flow of information, inability to join virtual classes due to lack of a corporate email, having to do a sit-in CAT and exam yet this is an online school, inaccessibility of units done and poor etiquette by the customer care personnel. These results corroborate the research conducted by Arko-Achemfuor (2017), who investigated the difficulties learners have due to lack of access while using ODL. The results illustrated that although the institution has put in place requisite support services for students, the level of access for students in rural areas was inadequate which had adverse effects on their studies.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

Specifically, the study concluded that career guidance and counseling influenced the retention of post-graduate students in Kenya's public universities. The study also concluded that student retention was influenced in the form of receiving encouragement to persist until they graduate, being encouraged to stay until completion of the academic degree, and receiving motivation to complete the course within the set period.

Further, the study concluded that career guidance and counseling services provided as an academic support service in Virtual and Open Learning (VOL) contributed to success in retaining postgraduate students, according to the research. In addition to positively affecting

the graduate students' retention rate, their grades improved significantly after participating in this academic support program.

## 6.0 Recommendations

According to the research's findings, the Ministry of Education's State Department of Higher Education should institutionalize guidance and counseling as mandatory student support services in Virtual and Open Learning (VOL). The research also suggests that the Kenyan government form strategic alliances with social institutions that would allow public learning institutions to easily access career guidance and counseling services as a student support service.

Owing to the fact that most finalist postgraduate students cited delays in communication as a major challenge to student support services, Kenyatta University may revamp its communication department in the graduate school such that there are no delays in giving feedback to the finalist postgraduate students. Additionally, they should also ensure timely relaying of important information to the students.

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