

AN APPRAISAL OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION IN DISTANCE EDUCATION; THE TANZANIAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Distance Education is a developing field in Tanzania and is emerging as a significant component of life-long and training. This is evidenced in the number of distance education programmes currently operating. These range from secondary education, teacher training, and vocational education to higher education. Within such contexts the importance of research and evaluation for scientific discovery, innovation and professional development can not be over emphasised. In this paper the role, and challenges of carrying out research and evaluation in distance education especially in a developing country like Tanzania are examined. The paper also makes an effort to review recent research works in distance education in Tanzania (for example, Mwinyichande, 1997, Kilato, 1997, Bhalalusesa, 1998, Mcharazo, (1998.), Sigalla, (1999), Bhalalusesa et al, 2000, and Kakili (2001), to delineate the major focus of such studies and the merging issues. Overall, it has been noted that most of these studies are small-scale case studies conducted for academic purposes (either as requirements for Masters Programmes or PhD), The focus has mainly been on students experiences of teaming at a distance and the challenges of learning within this mode of delivery in a developing country like Tanzania, while the contribution of such type of research is recognised especially in generation of knowledge and contribution to literature, this paper argues for action-oriented studies that are undertaken collaboratively among members of staff within distance education institutions and those outside the institutions who are working fox a common goal.

Although such studies are small-scale due to problems of time, funding and expertise among practitioners, they have proved powerful in similar systems in revealing assumptions embedded in "the system", as a -whole, which ought to be challenged. More importantly application back to practice and use of findings in this type of research is direct.

Drawing on this discussion, the paper goes on to suggest areas (research gaps^ where research in distance education in Tanzania ought to be undertaken, The paper ends with examination of the role of DEATA (Distance Education Association of Tanzania) and the contribution it can make in so far as research and evaluation in distance education is concerned.