THE EXPERIENCE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN PROVIDING CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION: THE CASE OF MOSHI CO-OPERATIVE UNIVERSITY

By
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Abstract

Open and Distance Learning (ODL), also called distance education, is an instructional delivery system that doesn't require the student and the instructor to be at the same place. The concept and practice of distance education suggests an educational approach designed to reach learners at their homes and offices as such; provide learning resources for them to qualify without attending formal classes in person, or create opportunities for lifelong learning, no matter where or when they want to study.

Co-operatives are member-based organizations; formed and managed by the members themselves. In order for the members to manage their organization properly they must have the necessary skills that have to be instilled through education which is functional and continuing. This type of education should be taken where the co-operators are. This is because co-operators have their own full time occupations and they only serve the co-operative on part time basis and hence the need for distance education.

Given the potential for ODL it has in broadening the chances for people in accessing education, this paper examines the experiences of Moshi Co-operative University in providing co-operative education through distance education.

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Key Words: Open and Distance Learning, Co-operative education, Moshi Co-operative University

1.   Introduction

Open and Distance Learning (ODL), also called distance education, is an instructional delivery system that doesn't require the student and the instructor to be at the same place. UNESCO (2002) defines distance education as any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print. The concept of distance education suggests an educational approach designed to reach learners in their homes/offices/shops, etc, provide learning resources for them to qualify without attending formal classes in person, or create opportunities for lifelong learning, no matter where or when they want to study (Ladipo and Adelana n.d.).

There are two modes that facilitate delivery of distance education; that is: synchronous and asynchronous learning. In a synchronous learning, all participants are "present" at the same time. The arrangement resembles a traditional classroom setting only that the participants are located at a remote place. Typical synchronous distance learning arrangements are like what happens in a webinar, direct-broadcast satellite, radio streaming and telephone. In an asynchronous learning, the students are not required to be together at the same time. Examples of asynchronous learning are such as; correspondence studies, e-mail, video and audio recordings and print materials.

According to the Commonwealth of Learning (2000), ODL has a number of advantages over the conversional mode of education system. First, it overcomes the problem of physical distance and time which are the normal barriers under the conversional education arrangement. Second, it solves the problem of time or scheduling. In this case, client groups unwilling or unable to assemble together frequently, learners engaged in full-timework and individuals with family and community commitments can access education under distance. Third, distance education makes it possible to expand the limited number of places available for campus-based institutions in situation when they are few in number and have stringent entrance requirements. Fourth, it accommodates low enrolments over a long period of time or low enrolments in one geographic place but additional enrolments elsewhere.

Co-operatives are member-based organizations, formed and managed by the members themselves. In order for the members to manage their organization properly they must have the necessary knowledge and skills and probably attitude that have to be instilled through functional and continuing education. Uronu *et al* (2010) argue that this type of education should be taken where the co-operators are because they have their own full time occupations and they only serve the Co-operative on part time basis and hence the need for distance

education. Given the potential that ODL has in broadening the chances for the people in accessing education, this paper examines the experience of MoCU in providing co-operative education through ODL in Tanzania.

1.1 Problem Statement

MoCU aspires to become a centre of excellence in co-operative education and practice. Co-operative education is the education that is offered to the members, leaders and staff on management, leadership and operational systems for the good performance of their co-operative. There is a need to document practices, approaches and processes in co-operative education through ODL. Documenting practices, trends and challenges is useful to provide insight to co-operative education providers to improve the mode of delivery through ODL. Over the years there has been a gap in systematic documentation of the practices, trends and challenges of co-operative education through ODL at MoCU. This paper which documents the experience of ODL in providing co-operative education is an attempt to fill such a gap.

1.2 Objectives

The main objective of the study was to assess the conduct of ODL over the years at MoCU and, specifically, had the following objectives;
  i. Examine history and trend of delivery of co-operative education through ODL
  ii. Identify the challenges that face the delivery of co-operative education through ODL
  iii. Propose suggestions on how to improve the delivery of co-operative education through ODL at MoCU

1.3 Justification of the Study

ODL has the potential in broadening the chances for the people in accessing education. This paper examines the experiences of MoCU in providing co-operative through ODL in Tanzania. Findings of this study will be useful to improve the practices and approaches in the delivery of co-operative education by MoCU. The study is also useful to researchers and other practitioners of ODL in Tanzania and elsewhere.

2. Practices and Trends for Delivery of Education through ODL

2.1 Evolution of delivery of education through ODL

Access of education to all regardless of age, gender, race, location has made education to be a necessity to humanity. Earliest attempts of distance education provision to those who had no access to formal classes were in the early 18

century where the mail correspondence dominated as the main mode of distance education delivery. The first distance education course in the modern sense was provided by Sir Isaac in the 1840s, who taught a system of shorthand by mailing texts transcribed into shorthand on post cards and receiving transcriptions from his students in return for correction [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_education]. Over the years ODL has evolved over four major phases in its mode of delivery and communication (UNESCO, 2002). The phases are:

i.   Correspondence systems

Correspondence systems originated at the end of the nineteenth century and are still the most widely used form of distance education in less developed countries. This is based on study guides in printed texts. Interaction in the correspondence system is by printed documents being sent through postal systems.

ii.   Educational television and radio systems

The system uses various delivery technologies; terrestrial, satellite, and cable television and radio. This system delivers live or recorded lectures to both individual home-based learners and groups of learners in remote classrooms where some face-to-face support might be provided.

iii.   Multimedia systems

Multimedia systems encompass text, audio, video, and computer-based materials, and usually some face-to-face learner support delivered to both individuals and groups. In this approach,
Programmes are prepared for distribution over large numbers of learners, usually located across a whole country. Most Open Universities use this system.

iv.   Internet-based systems

In the internet based system, multimedia materials (text, audio, video and computer- based) in electronic format are delivered to individuals through computers, along with access to databases and electronic libraries. The system enable teacher-student and student-student, one-to-one, one-to many, and many-to-many interactions, synchronously or asynchronously, through e-mail, computer conferences.

2.2   *Open and Distance Learning at MoCU*

MoCU is a dual mode public higher learning institution with full-time/residential and open and distance learning programmes. For the time,

MoCU has a total of 25 full time programmes i.e. Seven-Certificate programmes, Five-Diploma programmes, 10-Undergraduate degree programmes, Three-Masters programmes and a PhD programme by research. Programmes that are offered through distance education include; Basic Book-keeping for Primary Co-operative Societies (BBPC), Leadership and Management Programme for Primary Co-operative (LMPC), and Leadership and Management for Savings and Credit Co-operative Societies (PLM and C). Others are; Foundation Certificate in SACCOS Management (FC-SACCOS), Professional SACCOS Management (PC-SACCOs) and Postgraduate Diploma in SACCOS Management (PGD-SACCOS).

MoCU is one of the oldest open and distance learning providers in Tanzania. Other providers are; The University of Dar es Salaam, The Institute of Adult Education and the Open University of Tanzania. The Open University of Tanzania is by far the largest distance education provider in the country.

The history of MoCU dates back to January, 1963 when the Co-operative College was established. The primary objective of the college was to train human resources of the Co-operative sector under the then Ministry of Co-operative and Community Development. The college was subsequently established through the Co-operative College Act No 32 of 1932 as an autonomous institution with its own governing body. In 2004, the College was transformed into Moshi University College of Co-operative and Business Studies (MUCCoBS) as the Constituent College of Sokoine University of Agriculture. In 2014 the University College was upgraded into a fully-fledged university.

Distance education started being offered in 1965 by the then Co-operative Education Centre (CEC). The CEC was established in July, 1964 by agreement between the Government of Tanzania on behalf of the Co-operative Union of Tanganyika (CUT) and the Nordic Co-operative Consortium.

3.   Research Methodology

This paper is a result of a desk research done at MoCU. Data were collected from student registers and records on ODL at the Department of Distance Education within the Institute of Continuing Co-operative Education (ICCE). Data were also collected from research reports and other documents. Consultations were made with individuals who are involved in the delivery of ODL. These are such as trainers, support staff and students within the Department of Distance Education at MoCU.

4.   The Conduct and Organisation of ODL from 1965 to 2015

4.1   The conduct of ODL from 1965 to 1989

According to Donge (n.d.), distance education programmes were introduced as a measure to solve the problems of delivery of education to the rural poor who were organized in co-operatives but were not well equipped with management skills and not able to monitor the world markets. The distance education targeted members, staff and leaders of co-operative societies and unions. In this regard, the distance education aimed at; i) raising the members' awareness and consciousness in Co-operative work, ii) enabling the members to participate constructively in management and promotion of their Co-operative and iii) equipping the employees of Co-operatives with knowledge and skills they needed to perform their duties.

The mode of delivery was mainly through correspondence using the postal services and was centralized at Moshi. The students were either registered at CEC head office in Moshi or in the CEC offices located in the regions which were called Wings. For those who were registered at the Wings their registration forms were sent to CEC headquarters in Moshi but at registration they were given course materials; Letter 1 to 4 at the wing. Thereafter other communication and mailing were done by the CEC in Moshi.

At the start, there were 11 courses for which the students registered for studies. Later on other courses; Commercial Arithmetic and Principles of Management were added to make a total of 13 courses. Each course was studied in "modules" which were called letters (In Kiswahili *Barua*). Students were supposed to progress from the first letter to the last one in order to graduate. Each course had different number of letters and was offered either in both English and Kiswahili or only in Kiswahili/English. Commercial Arithmetic (CA) for example had the largest number of letters (15- letters) and was offered in English language only. *Table 1* shows the types of courses offered under correspondence.

Table 1: Courses offered under correspondence

S/N	Subject Ante	Title of the course	Letters	Language used
1	PSW	Primary Society Workers Course: A Course on Cooperation, Leadership and Supervision.	10	*E and **K
2	BPS	Book Keeping Elementary Course.	8	K and E
3	KZH	Duties of the Committee Men	5	K
4	RSS	Course on Consumer Co-operative	8	K
5	MUG	Principles of Management		K
6	ROBSS	Book Keeping for Consumer Cooperative Society with one shop	4	K and E
7	MU	Basic Economics	8	K
8	UV	Socialism in Villages	5	K
9	JM	How to Read the Balance Sheet	5	K
10	MKB	Principles of Good Agricultural Production	10	K
11	KZD	Stage one-Establishing a village shop Stage two-Activities of a village shop	Stage I -3 Stage II-4	K
12	CUW	Savings and Credit Union Workers' Course	4	K and E
13	CA	Commercial Arithmetic	15	E

Source: Ngowi, 1990

Key:
*E   =   English
**K   =   Kiswahili

At the start, in 1965, there were a total of 663 students registered for studies from all corners of the country (Including Zanzibar). There were also students registered from some African countries like; Botswana (seven students), Kenya (70 -students), Uganda (six students), Ethiopia (two students) and Malawi (one). The number of students registered for correspondence courses reached its peak in the years between 1971 and 1974 (Donge n.d. and Ngowi, 1980), with Primary Society Workers' course (PSW), Book-keeping elementary course (BPS) and Consumer Co-operative course having the largest number of students in that order. It worth to note that the beneficiaries for correspondence courses were not limited to co-operators but rather they had a wider clientele that included; secondary school students, secondary school leavers, civil service and parastatal organisations staff. Courses that were popular for students from non-Cooperative sector were CA, BE, VAM and MKB.

Table 2 shows the trend of students registered for correspondence courses between 1965 and 1989. There is an increase of registration of students from 1965 that reached a peak in 1971. From 1970s onwards, there is a decreasing trend that reached a minimum in the years between 1980 and 1984 when it started to pick up again. This is a reflection of the policy changes on co-

operatives that the country was undergoing. The co-operative unions were disbanded in 1975 while the same was done for the primary societies in 1976. The co-operatives were introduced in 1982 through Co-operative Societies Act No 14 of 1982. The changes affected negatively the registration of the students because now there were few students that were to be registered from the co-operatives. According to Kapanda and Kavuta (1990) in the years between 1977 and 1982 when the co-operatives were not there, the main recipients of the correspondence courses were from the Prime Minister's Office, Ujamaa villages which had engaged in cooperative ventures, secondary school students and leavers.

In the years that followed there were some efforts to revive the co-operatives through technical and financial support from the Nordic and European Economic Community countries. The technical and financial support was directed to both the College and Co-operative movement. The intervention through this support was for field based training followed up by correspondence courses which involved members, leaders and staff cooperative societies. This intervention is reflected in the increase of students registered from 1985 up to 1989.

Table 2: Number of students registered between 1965 and 1989
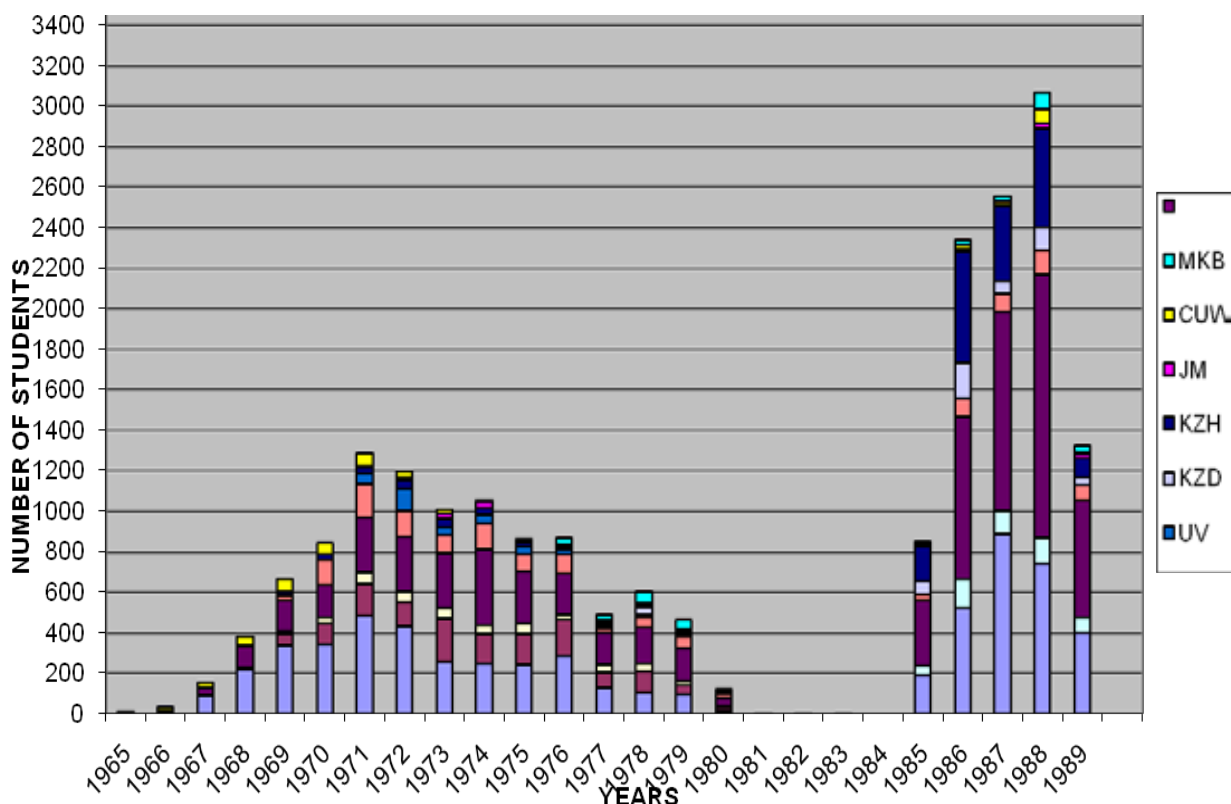
Source: Ngowi, 1990 and Distance Education Department

Due to communication problems between CEC headquarters in Moshi and the students in the regions it was decided to open offices in four zones; Eastern, Southern, Western and Northern to facilitate the learning process. In 1972 the zonal office were replaced by regional offices that were called wings. At the start, there were 12 wings out of 20 regions of Tanzania (Donge, n.d.). Between 1979 and 1995 the wings increased to 22, one in each of the 22 regions of Tanzania. The wings were under Wing Tutors whose responsibilities were to; i) enrol students at a closer place, ii) guide students and counsel them, iii) make follow-up of students and make elaborations of subjects not clearly understood and iv) advise students on what courses to take.

When it was realized that students needed more support in learning, on January 1967, radio broadcasts through a programme titled "*JifunzeUshirika*" – 'Let us Learn Cooperation' was established to supplement the print materials sent through the correspondence. The broadcast was done through the national radio –"Radio Tanzania" free of charge. The broadcasts lasted for 30 minutes with a repeat air session. According to Chimgege (1987), cited by Donge (n.d.), the radio broadcast were very useful such that the co-operators and the general community were tempted to listen to radios frequently and in the process being able to learn in a relaxed mood and also while working in their farms.

To make the radio broadcast effective, radio listening groups were established. In the radio listening groups, it was possible for group members to exchange ideas and also to be visited by the Wing Tutors to supplement the learning. However, due to increased cost, radio broadcasts were stopped to be aired in the year 1998 (Donge, n.d.) and only to be re-established again in the year 2002 with different title "*TuimarisheUshirika*" (Let us Strengthen Cooperation). The programme was aired once per week through Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC).

4.2 The conduct of ODL from 1990 to 2004

In 1993, the functions of the CEC were integrated into the Co-operative College. This integration resulted into the creation of the Directorate of Field Education (DFE) whose functions were drafted to be; i) prepare training materials for field education, ii) conduct survey on training needs for co-operative organizations and groups, iii) conduct seminars, workshops, short courses for members, staff and committee members of co-operatives and prepare them to take up advanced courses at the Co-operative College iv) conduct correspondence courses, and v) conduct special seminars for women and youth in order to raise their participation in decision making and development of viable economic projects.

This particular period witnessed some policy changes in the Co-operative sector. In 1991 the Co-operative Societies Act No 15 was enacted. This was followed by enactment of Co-operative Societies Act No 20 of in the year 2003. Both Acts demanded the transformation of Co-operative societies to be member-based and as economic viable entities managed by skilled members, leaders and staff. Skills for the co-operators could be gained through functional education and continuing education through residential and distance education programmes. However, no actions were taken to update and develop new materials for the correspondence courses to respond to the emerged needs and changes of the co-operatives and the general economy of the country. This is reflected by the low number of students registered under different courses in the years from 1990 up to 2004 except for the year 1999. The increase of students registered in 1999 because of personal effort of the then Deputy Minister responsible for Co-operatives. The Minister directed the college staff go to the field to register students. The directive came with funding from the ministry responsible for co-operatives. This particular Minister before assuming the cabinet position happened to work as a teaching staff of the then Moshi Co-operative College (now MoCU). *Table 3* shows the trend of student registered from 1990 to 2004.

**Table 3: Number of students registered between 1990 and 2004**
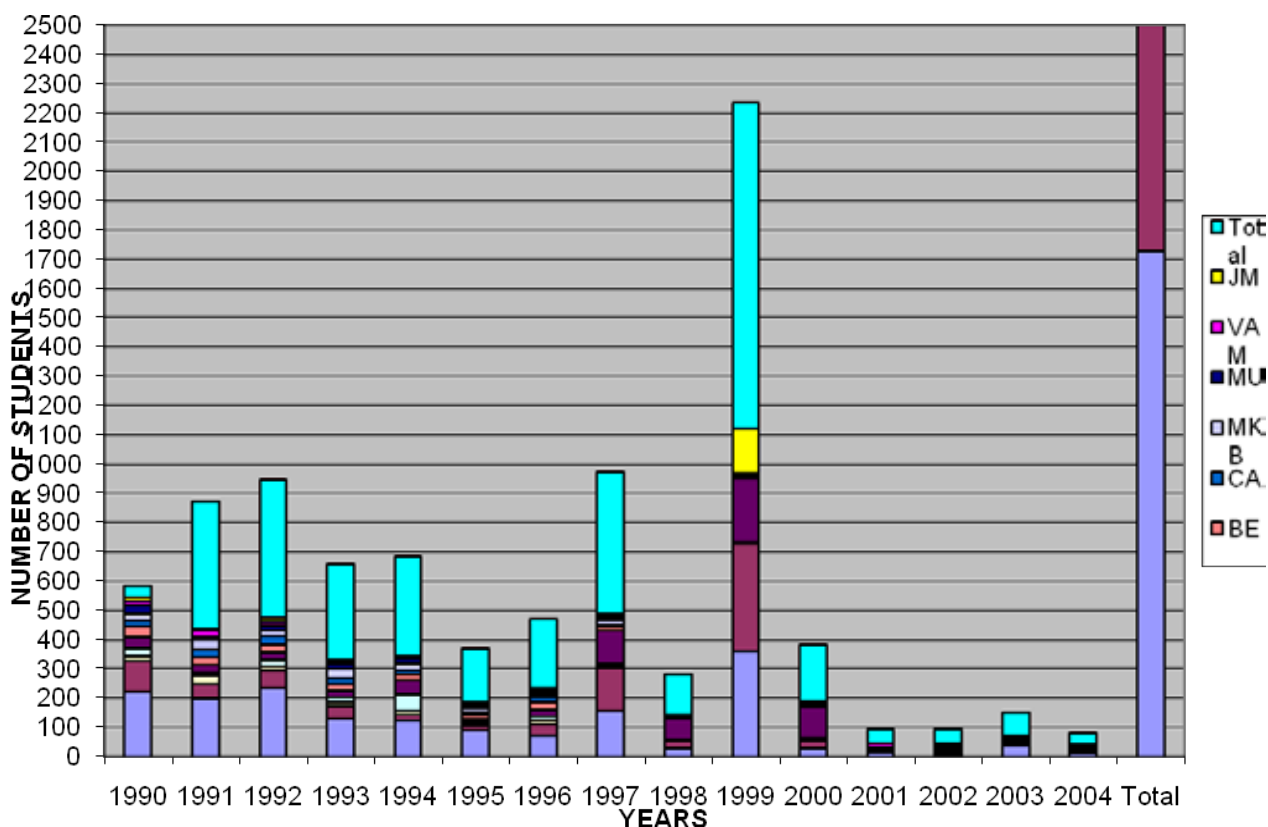
Source: Distance Education Department

4.3 The conduct of ODL from 2005 to 2015

a) Correspondence courses

During this period there were few students registered for correspondence courses. For example, between 2004 and 2013, there were only 413 students who were registered giving an average of about 41 students per year. This could be attributed by the fact that the course materials were outdated in content and outlook and involvement of DFE staff in the regions was minimal.

Table 4: Number of students registered between 2005 and 2015
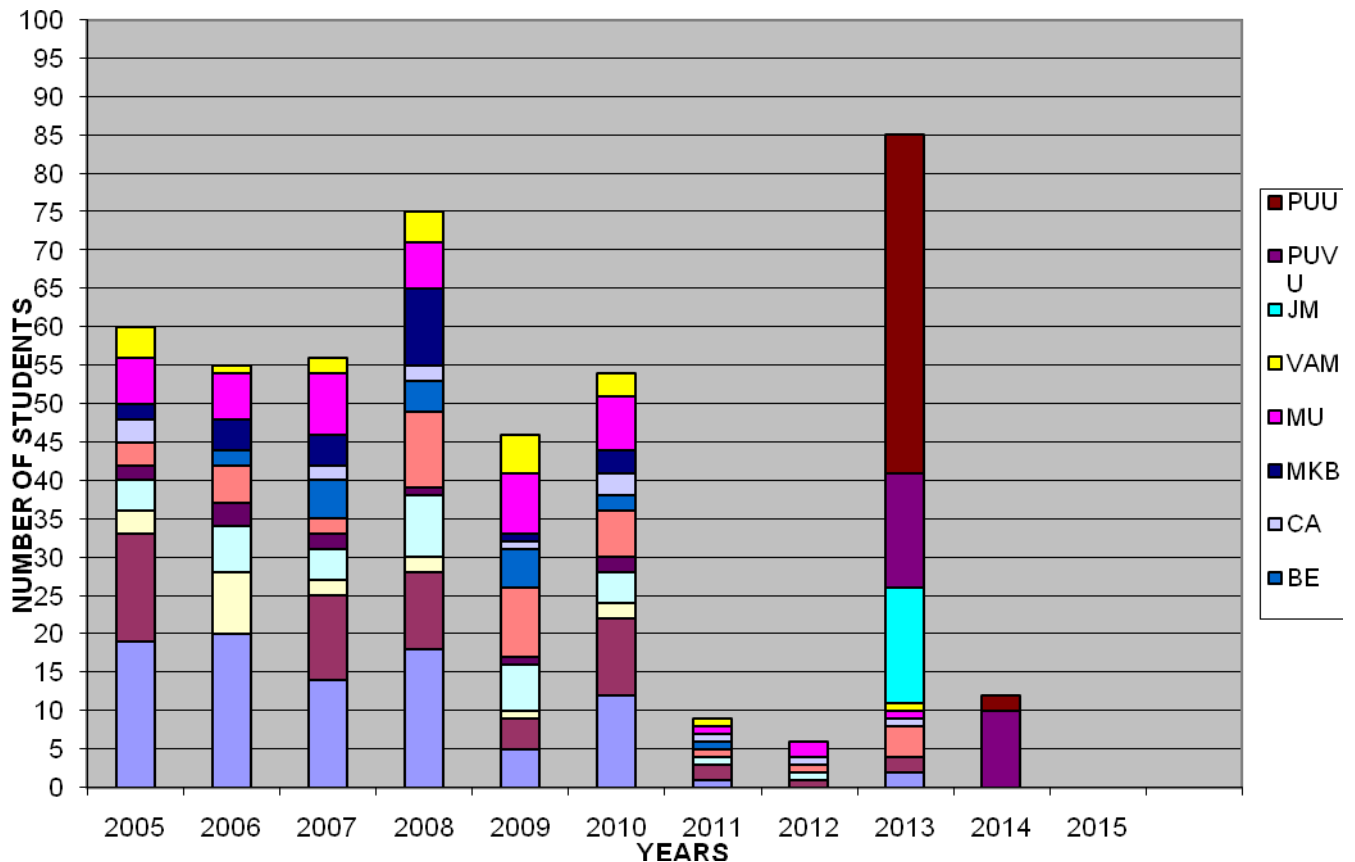
Source: Distance Education Department

Based on a training needs assessment done in 2009, a process to review the courses was started so that the study materials could address contemporary issues in the co-operative movement. Reviewing involved updating the content, re-writing them so that they become attractive and renaming them to reflect the current demand of skills and knowledge. Reviewing of the study materials took into account also the desire to widen the clientele groups to be served. The clientele group was widened to include not only the members, leaders and staff of co-operatives but also individuals who aspire to strengthen their skills in cooperative entrepreneurship.

The review exercise resulted in the following new study materials.
i.   Basic Bookkeeping for Primary Co-operative Societies (BBPC) with 5-modules to replace BPS
ii. Leadership and Management Programme for Primary Co-operative (LMPC) with 3- modules to replace PSW
iii. Leadership and Management Programme for Savings and Credit Co-operative Societies with 4-modules to replace VAM

There is need for a concerted effort in marketing them to attract students. So far in the year 2013/2014, a total of 25 and 46 students have registered to

study Basic Bookkeeping for Primary Co-operative Societies (PUVU) and Leadership and Management Programme for Primary Co-operative (PUU), respectively.

(b)   Professional Financial Co-operative Management Programme PFCMP)

From the year 2006, the University (then MUCCoBS) started running Professional Financial Co-operative Management Programme (PFCMP). The programme was launched by the university through a technical and financial assistance from Development International Desjardins (DID). The aim of PFCMP is to equip Savings and Credit Co-operative Societies (SACCOS) and other Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) practitioners with appropriate knowledge and skills to carry out governance and managerial functions. *Table 5* shows the different PFCMP programmes.

Table 5: Programmes under PCMP

S/N	Title of the Course	Target group	Duration	Number of Modules	Language
1	Foundation Certificate in SACCOS Management (FC-SACCOs)	Managers, Board members and employee	39-Weeks	6 Plus Field Assignment	Kiswahili
2.	Professional SACOOS management (PC-SACCOs)	Members, Managers and employee	39-Weeks	7 Plus a Practical assignment	English
3	Postgraduate Diploma in SACCOs Management (PGD-SACCO)	Individuals who need advanced academic and professional knowledge in governance and management of SACCOS	18 to 27 Months	10 Plus a Research Project	English

Source: Distance Education Department

PFCMP programme started being run by department of Finance and Banking under the Faculty of Business and Information Sciences (FBIS). In May 2014, the programme was transferred to Department of Distance Education under the Institute of Continuing Co-operative Education (ICCE). The trend (see *Table 6*) shows that there is a fall of students registered for the course from 2010/2011 to 2013/2014. However, a recruitment campaign was done by the department in collaboration with the regional offices and this has resulted in 87 students being registered in the year 2014/2015 (FC-SACCO -43 students, PC-SACCO -44 students and PGD-SACCO - 14 students). As a strategy to increase number of faculty members who can supervise the students undertaking this programme a total of 20 staff at the regional offices and at the headquarters have registered for a crash programme to study PC-SACCOS in 2014.

The mode of delivery for PFCMP involves communication mainly through the internet. The face to face sessions is held at the start of the course, when doing graded exercise and timed tests which are done at Moshi or at other designated places. *Table 6* shows the summary and trend of students registered in Tanzania

Table 6: Students registered in Tanzania

| Intake year | Name of the Programme | | | |
	FC-SACCOS	PC-SACCOS	PGD-SACCOS	Total
Feb 2006 (Pilot)	-	62	-	62
Nov. 2006	-	114	-	114
2007/2008	50	65	73	118
2008/2009	33	42	62	137
2009/2010	36	74	50	160
2010/2011	35	64	17	116
2011/2012	55	34	19	108
2012/2013	29	48	20	97
2013/2014	25	30	11	66
Total	**263**	**533**	**252**	**1,048**

Source: Distance Education Department

Since 2010, PFCMP is also being run in Uganda using similar mode of delivery. The University is implementing this in collaboration with the Uganda Co-operative Alliance (UCA). *Table 7* shows the summary and trend of students registered in Uganda.

Table 7: Students registered under PFCMP in Uganda

Academic year	Students registered
2010/2011	167
2011/2012	137
2012/2013	75
2013/2014	55
Total	**434**

Source: Distance Education Department

4.4 Challenges in the Conduct and Organisation of ODL at MoCU

i) Problem of recognition of the certificates by other authorities

Despite the success in terms of registering a large number of students, distance education through correspondence courses faced some challenges. Certificates that were offered by CEC were not officially recognised by employers and professional bodies like National Board of Auditors and Accountants (NBAA) and National Board of Materials Management (NBMM). This acted as a disincentive to some individuals not to continue or register for the courses (Kapanda and

Kavuta, 1990). As such the correspondence courses did not provide definite chances for upward training opportunities. This problem still faces the PFCMP programme courses today. Graduates of the PC- SACCOS and FC- SACCOS are not recognised to qualify for registration into different courses even by MoCU.

ii)   Management of ODL

There was also the problem of supervision of the students. Marking of the scripts was centralised at CEC headquarters. Although there were Tutors at the Wings, they played minimal roles in troubleshooting students' complaints such as inconsistence in marking of the scripts and delays in communication between the Wings and CEC headquarters (Kapanda and Kavuta, 1990). This caused some students either to spend too much time to complete the courses or even to drop from them.

iii)   Changes in country policies on co-operatives

Changes in the policies and co-operative sector in the middle of 1970s impacted negatively in the conduct of the early correspondences courses. The changes included; enactment of the Villages and *Ujamaa* Villages Act of 1975 that made all villages as multipurpose co-operatives and disbanding of the co-operatives in 1976. Making the villages multipurpose co-operatives made them not to be member based. This had a negative impact to the number of students being registered for correspondence courses because the catchment areas, the co-operative societies and unions, were not there (Ngowi, 1980).

iv)   Courses being outdated

The correspondence course materials were designed in 1960s. Over the years they have not been reviewed to take care of the changes that have occurred in the Co-operative movement and the social economic development of the target clientele. Kapanda and Kavuta (1990), Uronu *et al*, (2010), Mruma (2010) noted that the fact that the courses remained almost the same over years without and any modification in the design and content was a reason for the drop of the number of students and also for the disinterest in drawing students into the course.

v)   Quality assurance of the courses

Distance learning is increasingly becoming a common strategy in disseminating of higher and professional educational and as an instrument for transformation. However, this transformation cannot come about without high quality of the system and what the system offers (Msonganzila and Haule, 2014). There is a challenge in quality assurance issues specifically; how effective could the management of the learning and evaluation be done in a situation where the

learner and teacher are separated. In the management of PFCMP as conducted by MoCU, Msonganzila and Haule (2014) have noted that the one of problem is dishonesty and plagiarism by the students in examinations and exercises.

vi) Duration of the courses under ODL

The correspondence courses, as they were designed, had no limit in terms of the duration for one to go through and graduate. This made some students to drag on for years studying the same course. This also in a way caused problems in tracking student progress. The laxity on part of the college not making the necessary follow up on students might have caused some students to drop from studies. It is worth noting that the reviewed course materials now have been given a limit of one year duration for one to study.

5.   Conclusion

MoCU, as a pioneer in ODL in Tanzania, has accumulated experience that spans for 50 years. It is also worth to note that MoCU has now become a centre of Excellence in Co-operative and Business Management in Eastern Africa.

It is better if this experience is used to design new courses or even design a mechanism that would make the available programmes be delivered through distance arrangements; and in the process serve a wider audience of co-operators and the community at large.

When this is done it is important to make sure that graduates for the various courses offered through ODL become eligible for admission into different courses here at MoCU and elsewhere for vertical advancement.

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