Information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University.

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Submitted as the thesis component in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Information Studies in the Information Studies Programme, School of Human and Social Studies, University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg)

2002

Supervised by
Professor Christine Stilwell
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Catherine Fungisai and two sons, Tafadzwa Lionel and Komborero Jason, who bore the loneliness and lack of attention as I left them on several occasions to attend studies and consult with my supervisor during the process of carrying out this study.
Declaration

The author hereby declares that the contents of this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, are his own work, and that the thesis has not been submitted simultaneously or, at any other time, for another degree.

Jasper Lee Maenzanise
Abstract

The study of information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) was undertaken with a view to understand the paths taken by the distance learners to identify, locate and make use of information resources to solve their problems, answer questions or to accomplish given tasks. This study was carried out after the realisation by the Library and Information Service Management that the distance learners were making very little use of the library and information resources that were put in place to expressly serve their needs.

It was critical for the study to establish the possible causes for this under-utilisation. The study investigated the socio-demographic and academic characteristics of the distance learners to verify the assumption that these characteristics affected the use of the LIS. The socio-economic commitments of the distance learners were investigated to determine how they impacted on the use of the LIS. Factors that possibly prevented the distance learners from using the ZOU LIS were investigated. The CCAUSAL factors included the cost in terms of both time and money to get to the LIS due to distance, currency or recency of the information, accessibility in terms of how easy it was to get to the LIS, usability as it implies the ease of consulting the LIS and locatibility of the LIS. The study investigated the use of other information sources and libraries and the CCAUSAL factors that possibly affected the use of them.

The results of the study revealed that the distance learners registered with the ZOU did follow specific information seeking patterns as a result of what the study’s acronym CCAUSASL suggested as factors. For instance, it was shown that on one hand, the distance factor affected 32.4% of the respondents who lived more than 51 kilometres from the LIS and on the other hand it was not much of a factor for the 34.1% and 32.4% who lived within the 0-10 and 11-20 kilometre ranges respectively.

The study sought recommendations from the respondents as the main users of the LIS on what Management should do in order to put in place effective and efficient ‘open’ library
systems that meets their requirements as distance learners. Their suggestions together with guidelines from the literature on library service provision in distance learning environments form the recommendations of the study.
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The ZOU staff, especially Ms Suwisa Muchengetwa who assisted tremendously with coding and entering data into the SPSS Editor, Mr Ariel Muvhunzwi who ran around seeking background information to the study, Ms Veronica Bukuta for coming up with the sampling frame from the Academic Registry records of the students who were registered with the ZOU at the time of carrying out the study, Ms Melody Chigerwe who helped with formatting of the lists of figures and tables, Mrs Siziba and Ellen for helping with the mailing of the questionnaires, all regional centre Coordinators and Library Assistants for administering the pre-test questionnaire as well as for following up on all questionnaires that were mailed to the distance learners and Mr Brian Pillay for desk to publishing of the map of Zimbabwe showing the distribution of the University’s regional centres throughout the country.

The sterling job and assistance given to the researcher by the University of Natal (PMB) Library staff such as Jenny, Ruth, Jillian, Nicky and Celeste are greatly appreciated.
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Map showing the Regional Centres of the Zimbabwe Open University

"Empowerment Through Open Learning"

CHINHOYI (MASHONALAND WEST)

MASVINGO

MUTARE

MASVINGO

MASHONALAND CENTRAL

Bindura

GWERU (MIDLANDS
REGION)

MUTARE (MANICALAND
REGION)

NULAWAYO REGION

ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY
Telephone (263) (4) 793003/7-9 Fax (263) (4) 791977
Box MP 1109 Mt Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The following is a list of abbreviations that are commonly used in the study:

ACRL  Association of College & Research Libraries
BCOMMA  Bachelor of Commerce – Accounting
VCOMMABF  Bachelor of Commerce – Banking and Finance
BCOMMF  Bachelor of Commerce – Finance
BCOMMAM  Bachelor of Commerce – Management
BEDAPPS  Bachelor of Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies
BScGES  Bachelor of Science Geography and Environmental Sciences
CCAUSAL  Cost in terms of time and money, currency or recency of Information, accessibility, usability and locatability of libraries and other information sources.
CDE  Centre for Distance Education
DEO  District Education Officer
EO  Education Officer
GCE  Graduate Certificate in Education
GSC  Graduate School Certificate
IDESA  Institute for Distance Education in Southern Africa
LIS  Library and Information Services
OU  Open University, U.K.
NUST  National University of Science & Technology
SADC  Southern African Development Community (replaced SADCC)
SADCC  Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference
UCDE  University College of Distance Education
UK  United Kingdom
UZ  University of Zimbabwe
ZINTEC  Zimbabwe Integrated Teachers Course
ZOU  Zimbabwe Open University
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) was started in 1993 as the Centre for Distance Education (CDE), then an inter-faculty unit of the University of Zimbabwe (UZ). It became the University College of Distance Education (UCDE) in 1996. On 1 March 1999, it was formally established as the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) through an Act of Parliament, Act No. 12/98.

As CDE and UCDE, it had focused on providing under- and post-graduate degree training in Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies through distance education. The programme was primarily meant for non-graduate teachers who were employed by the Government’s two ministries of education, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education.

The attainment of University status was a result of an increased popularity and demand for tertiary education through the distance and open learning mode of instruction. More programmes were added to include the Bachelor of Science (BSc.) Mathematics and Statistics, (BSc.) Geography and Environmental Studies, Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) English and Communication Studies, B.A. Media Studies, BSc Nursing Sciences, BSc Psychology, Management of Business Administration (MBA), BSc Industrial and Labour Studies and the Bachelor of Commerce (B.Comm.) degree suite. Today the ZOU is the single largest university in Zimbabwe with a current total student population of 18 223 at the time of carrying out this study. It is also the first of its kind in the country to offer tertiary education through distance education.
1.1 THE CURRENT LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE OF THE
ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY

The importance of library and information services in academic institutions cannot be
over-emphasised. Libraries provide the much needed resources and services required in
the teaching, learning and research activities of the institutions in which they are located.

The Zimbabwe Open University’s Library and Information Service (LIS), just like its
parent university, is decentralised in the country’s ten provinces. It is meant to serve
distance learners at each of the university’s regional centres. The accompanying map on
page xi shows the location of the ZOU regional centres throughout the country. At most
of these regional centres the libraries are housed in rather small rooms at premises, which
were formerly residential properties and are now being rented by the university. Books
and a few journals and newspapers form the basic information resources provided to the
distance learners.

The library book stock currently stands at 19,000 copies. Each regional centre has an
average of about 1,900 copies. This is quite a small collection compared to the 18,223
students currently in place with barely a book per each distance learner. Nevertheless,
these resources although inadequate, have been put in place and decentralised into
regions in order to provide information to support the learning experiences of the distance
learners.

In terms of services to distance learners, the LIS provides services from 9.00am to
6.00pm from Monday to Friday. It opens on Saturdays from 8.00am until 1.00pm. It does
not open on Sunday. There is limited circulation of resources as a result of the small
collection. Distance learners are permitted to make use of the LIS resources within the
library, particularly for reserved materials. They are allowed to borrow important items
for photocopying outside the LIS premises, since no photocopiers are in place in the LIS
system. The books are returned to the libraries immediately after photocopying. A few
ordinary books are permitted to go out of the LIS system (Maenzanise 2000:21), while
Important titles are placed on reserve for use within the LIS and for over the weekend borrowing.

Other services include the traditional reference, referrals and inter-library loans services found in face-to-face institutions. At times selective dissemination of specific subject materials is carried out for particular individuals when the need arises. Photocopies of requested articles are sometimes made available to distance learners. All these services are replicated in all of the regional centre libraries.

The absence of computers in the regional centre libraries for use by students and even by the library staff is a major challenge particularly in today's information age where there is a proliferation of electronic information resources on the Internet and the World Wide Web.

The LIS is also tasked with the receipt, organisation, shelving and dispatch of the course modules. These form the basic and only learning resources for the distance learners at this point in time. Plans are currently underway, however, to revamp and develop this learning resource to include audio-visual learning aids as an integral component of a comprehensive learning kit, such as is found in other distance and open learning universities. In his study of the existing library infrastructure and the current services offered by the ZOU LIS, Chikono (2001) noted the above outlined library and information service provision.

The above outline regarding the status of the basic learning material, the module, is relevant for the purposes of this investigation. The adequacy or inadequacy of the learning resources would almost certainly lead the ZOU distance learners to want or not to want to seek alternative sources of information that would supplement or even supplant such learning materials. Furthermore, the inadequacy of the LIS resources and services is also most likely to cause the distance learners to seek alternative sources of information.
1.2. DEFINITION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

It is important to provide, at this juncture, definitions of some key terms and concepts used in the study. The definitions are meant to share with the reader the same meanings. This helps in removing any ambiguity by introducing a standard meaning throughout the study.

**Access to information** – refers to the use of standard codes to arrange materials in libraries, which facilitate their quick identification, location and retrieval. The study also considers information accessing using a variety of other factors such as a library’s “...circulation policies and procedures, service hours, security arrangements, and actual operating efficiency” (Taylor, 1980:267).

Access to information is therefore generally taken to mean the ability of users to reach, retrieve and use a particularly required piece of information from wherever it may be located. As succinctly pointed out by Aitchison (1998:6), it “...includes the opportunity to use a library or libraries for locating and obtaining literature.”

**Distance education** – The concept has been defined in various ways but the definitions bear similar features. The following are some of the definitions gleaned from the literature on the subject:

“...an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner” (Perraton and Creed, 2000:1). Raymond III (2001) uses the definition from Verduin and Clark (1991), which states that distance education is “...any formal approach to learning in which a majority of the instruction occurs while the educator and learner are at a distance from each other.” Skinner (1997:71) defines it as “...Teaching and learning unencumbered by time or location....” Perry and Rumble in Hogson (1993:12) envisage a situation where “...the learner and the teacher are not face-to-face. In order for two-way communication to take place between them, a medium such as print, radio or the telephone has to be used.”
On the other hand, Kaye in Hogson (1993:12) compares distance education with the traditional classroom or campus-based instruction and notes that distance education "is characterised by a clear separation in space and time of the majority of teaching and learning activities. Teaching is to a large degree mediated through various technologies (print, audio, video, broadcasting, computers), and learning generally takes place on an individual basis through supported independent study in the student's home or workplace".

The study will therefore use all the meanings proffered in these definitions which consider the elements of distance from learning institutions and between the teacher and learner, the independent learning characteristics of distance learners, the need for supporting learning materials in print and other multimedia formats as well as need for the occasional contact between the teacher and learner in periodic face-to-face meetings or through the telephone and or facsimile and other telecommunication technologies.

**Distance learners** – By extension of the definition of distance education (Perraton and Creed 2000; Raymond III 2001; Verduin and Clark 1999; Skinner 1997; Perry and Rumble in Hogson 1993; Kaye in Hogson 1993), distance learners are students in institutions where the instructor and the students are at a distance from each other and are also removed by distance from centres of learning. They are also interchangeably referred to as off-campus students in contrast to on-campus students. This study prefers the term distance learners since the term off-campus student is also used to denote students in conventional institutions who do not live on campus.

**Face-to-face tertiary institutions** – The concept is used to refer to institutions that have a direct interaction between tutor and student in a classroom set-up. Such institutions have also been referred to as conventional institutions or the traditional institutions where distance education is regarded as a new concept having developed in the 1950s.

**Information needs** – For the purposes of this study, information needs are an indication that certain pieces of information are required for particular purposes, for students to accomplish specific objectives, such as for study purposes, writing assignments, research
papers or theses and dissertations. Such needs can be actually expressed and in some cases, these may be unexpressed, latent or potential needs.

**Information seeking patterns** (ISPs) - Information seeking can be defined as an attempt to look for, to find or to get information (Hornby, 1995: 1064). While a pattern is “...a way in which something happens, moves, develops or is arranged.” Therefore an information-seeking pattern can be an umbrella term that denotes the ways in which someone moves or behaves in order to get a particular piece of information. Kaniki (1991:149) views information seeking patterns as “…the process by which information needs are developed and the patterns an individual follows or pursues in order to resolve such need.”

**Library and information services** – The term will be used to denote the services that are offered in information resource centres. Such services include the:

- Reference and information services which are available at adequately designated points during established service hours: specialised in-depth assistance to individuals in the use of the library’s resources: specially prepared bibliographic guides and subject or topical research aids; lectures and courses in bibliographical research; services which facilitate access to non-print media and machine readable data bases; and services which will facilitate access to recorded information in other library collections (Taylor, 1980:266)

These services are of direct value to the institutions and the communities in which the resource centres are located as they provide access to the much needed specific facts and information.

**On-campus students** – These are students found in face-to-face institutions or conventional institutions where there is direct interaction between students and their instructors/tutors in a classroom set-up. They are also referred to as resident students. This study prefers to refer to them as on-campus students.
Open learning – Paine in Hogson (1993:11) defines open learning as “...a process which focuses on access to educational opportunities and a philosophy which makes learning more direct client and student centred. It is learning which allows the learner to choose how to learn, when to learn, where to learn, where to learn and what to learn as far as possible within the constraints of any education and training provision.”

Lewis and Spencer in Hogson (1993:11) view open learning as “...a term used to describe courses flexibly designed to meet individual requirements. It is often applied to provision which tries to remove barriers that prevent attendance at more traditional courses, but also suggests a learner centred philosophy.”

Perraton and Creed (2000:11) defined open learning as “...an organised educational activity based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on study are minimised in terms of access, or of time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination.” This definition lays emphasis on the use of carefully produced materials that would assist the distance learners to undertake their educational endeavours without much assistance from the tutor. In the case of the Zimbabwe Open University, such materials would be the modules produced for each course.

The above definitions on open learning tend to emphasize the need for flexibility on the part of the learner who determines how, when, where, and what to learn with the aid of instructional materials in print and multimedia formats. However, for purposes of this study, these definition will also include that of Lewis and Spencer in Hogson (1993) in which the educational process admits a broad spectrum of students that encompasses adult learners who because of their age, socio-economic commitments and the high costs often associated with learning at face-to-face institutions, could not attain tertiary education in conventional universities. This is lucidly summarised by Holt and Bonnici in Hogson (1993:12) that:

Open learning attempts to reduce, if not eliminate, a number of barriers, which either stop or impede certain groups of students from participating in formal education. Open learning also attempts to provide a learning environment, which
will provide these groups of students, on entering various courses of study, with the best possible chance of successfully completing the learning experiences they have chosen.

**Open and distance learning** – This is "...an umbrella term covering distance, open learning, and the use of (the printed or electronic module) in education" (Perraton and Creed, 2000:11).
1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.3.1. Description of the problem

As pointed out earlier, a total of 18,223 distance learners were enrolled with the ZOU at the time of carrying out this study, making it the single largest university that is able to reach out to this previously neglected group of learners. Most of the characteristics of distance learners that will be discussed in succeeding chapter three apply to the ZOU distance learners. They depend on printed courseware, the module, for their studies. Although they occasionally meet with their tutors and other students to share their problems and seek solutions to difficult areas in their studies, the use of libraries as a source for additional information resources becomes critical (Holowachuk, 1997). The Zimbabwe Open University’s Library and Information Services therefore treats its distance learners essentially as its core business as similarly viewed by Bremner (2001:54). The library’s collection of books, journals and newspapers, although limited in size, forms an essential component of the distance learners’ study, research and learning experience.

1.3.2. Problem statement

The provision and use of library and information resources and services is mandatory to the teaching, learning and research activities in tertiary education and to the ZOU in particular. The LIS was put in place, as mentioned in section 1.1, to support the learning experiences of distance learners. Yet to this day, it can be seen that despite the ever-increasing enrolment figures, the distance learners are not making much use of the library, its resources and services.

There is therefore a growing concern among the LIS management as to the possible causes of this little usage. Is it for instance a result of the above-mentioned characteristics of the distance learners that might be causing this little usage? Are these characteristics causing the distance learners to adopt information seeking patterns that drive them away from the LIS? Is it the near traditional set-up of the LIS such as the opening times from
8.00 am till 6.00 pm which may be failing to cater for the distance learners since the students are engaged in socio-economic activities for the better part of the day when the LIS is open? Are the distance learners aware of what library services are available? Are the distance learners using information resources and services from other information centres such as bookshops, public and unaffiliated university and college libraries? Or is it a case of what Bremner (1999:56) observed with the Open University’s Open Library that “…although students like to know a facility is available only a small percentage of them will actually have the time, or indeed find it necessary to make use of it.”

This study therefore seeks to answer these burning questions by investigating the information seeking patterns of distance learners, which may be caused by the discussed characteristics of distance learners reviewed in the literature in chapter three. It is important for the LIS management to know what possible ‘paths’ or moves are taken by distance learners to seek for information. This should help management to be highly innovative and put in place strategic plans and initiatives for the development of a vibrant and effective library and information service that responds positively to the identified information seeking patterns of the ZOU distance learners.

1.4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It becomes critical for the LIS management to decide whether it is necessary for the ZOU LIS to develop a traditional LIS, that is to say, one that is well stocked with a collection of books and journals that students come to borrow or use in the library, or whether the LIS should include a variety or ‘hybrid’ of services and resources which respond to the distance learners (Mulvaney 1999). For instance, the use of postal loan services, mobile book services and the use of satellite resource centres that reach out to the distance learners. The LIS management should also consider incorporating the use of information and communication technologies for the effective and efficient provision of library and information services in today’s information age.
The continued increase in distance learners entails that the LIS management should consider to “...adapt and revise library services (that need to be) offered to non-traditional students” (Mulvaney, 1999:5). The study will help management to possibly plan for a ‘new look’ LIS that would offer ‘hybridised services’ (Mulvaney, 1999:5) that are more focused and targeted to address the peculiar circumstances of the distance learners as identified in the literature review.

In investigating the information seeking patterns of distance learners, particularly those registered with the ZOU, the study will also help management to seriously consider the possibilities of implementing a paradigm shift from the current traditional perspective of the library as a single central place or a single collection of books centrally housed and controlled to which students go to seek for information (Mulvaney, 1999:5) to that of a ‘library sans frontiers’ that reaches out to the distance learners.

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:

- To establish the information seeking patterns of distance learners of the ZOU.
- To evaluate the extent and frequency of use of the ZOU LIS and any other neighbouring information resource centre(s).
- To establish whether the students know where else to go to search for information and whether they manage to locate the information that addresses their needs.
- To investigate whether the distance learners possess the relevant information searching and retrieval skills such as the use of library catalogues, indexing and abstracting tools.
- To investigate the distances and problems faced by distance learners in travelling to and from the ZOU LIS and any other information resource centre(s).
- To establish whether it is necessary for the university to just provide comprehensive learning materials instead of providing library resources and services to distance learners.
• To make recommendations on the possible planning strategies that the ZOU LIS ought to put in place in order to come up with a suitable information service system capable of addressing the information seeking patterns of distance learners.

1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The investigation will seek to answer the following research questions:

• What are the information seeking patterns of distance learners of the ZOU?
• How much and how often do the distance learners make use of the LIS and any other neighbouring information resource centre(s)?
• Where else do the distance learners go to seek for information and do they manage to get the information they look for?
• Do the distance learners possess the relevant information searching and retrieval skills such as the use of library catalogues, indexes and abstracts?
• How far do the ZOU distance learners live from the LIS and what problems do they face in travelling to and from the LIS and any other information resource centre(s)?
• Should the university provide the distance learners with adequate learning materials instead of library resources and services?
• What library and information resources and services should the LIS management put in place that addresses the information seeking patterns of distance learners?

1.7. JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The investigation should assist in developing for the university, strategic plans for an appropriate and relevant LIS system that meets the needs of distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University. It should help in identifying other information resource centres such as unaffiliated university, college and public libraries, closest to the distance learners. This should enable the LIS management to establish cooperative and
synergic relations in which special and formal or informal arrangements can be made with these libraries for distance learners to be allowed access to their facilities.

In the case of the ZOU distance learners, the right to access information has often been hampered by lack of time to use libraries since they are preoccupied in other socio-economic activities for the better part of their time. Their location at a distance from the libraries often entails high costs involved in commuting to and from remote information resource centres. Some of these peculiar characteristics of distance learners may therefore cause what can be referred to as information seeking ‘burnout’.

The continued increase in distance education and its learners entail that college and university libraries located in distance education institutions, must “…adapt and revise library services (against) those offered to ‘traditional’ students” (Mulvaney 1999:9). It becomes critical for library services to be more focused and targeted to address the peculiar circumstances and characteristics of distance learners. An understanding of the information seeking patterns of the ZOU distance learners would be an important stage in the planning for a ‘library sans frontiers’.

It is also clear in the literature on library support to distance learners that user studies such as an investigation of the information seeking patterns of distance learners, need to be continuously carried out if innovative, appropriate and relevant library and information services are to be developed for distance learners (Tipton 2001; Guidelines for Library Support of Distance and Distributed Learning in Canada 2000; Gibson, Newton and Dixon 1999; Association of College and Research Libraries 1998; Kascus and Aguiler 1988; Niemi, Ehrhard and Neely 1988).

For instance, the Open Library of the Open University in the UK was able to respond to the needs of distance learners as expressed in a survey carried in 1999 by Bremner (1999). They were able to plan, tailor make and provide access to the kind of information that the students had indicated preference for in the survey. It is in the light of this earlier study that the current study is strongly justified to investigate and understand the
information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the ZOU, so that appropriate library and information services are developed and put in place specifically for them.

1.8. ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

The assumptions of this study are that:

- Distance learners are intrinsically different from face-to-face students and have special needs arising from their characteristics;
- Equal access to library resources and services would be given to all ZOU distance learners;
- The LIS would have adequate resources that can be provided to students at a distance through mobile book services and postal services;
- The LIS will be able to equip its distance learners with the relevant information-seeking skills required to search, identify and retrieve information in any library; and that
- The LIS would be able to establish smart partnerships and synergy with other unaffiliated conventional university, college and public libraries to facilitate a wider access to their resources by ZOU distance learners.

1.9. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

While informing the theoretical framework of the study, an outline of the open learning and distance education and the respective analysis of the characteristics of distance learners in the study are not meant to delve deeply into the pedagogies of open learning and distance education. These areas are only meant to provide the study with adequate background information on the expected behaviours of distance learners. This will be understood in relation to the situational factors that may or may not cause them to take particular and identifiable ‘paths’ (Kaniki, 1991) or strategies to access the Zimbabwe Open University’s Library and Information Services as well as any other information resource centres that they may visit.
It is also not within the purview of this study to embark on a needs assessment survey of the distance learners. Instead, it is meant to identify how the needs for information to write assignment papers, theses and dissertations, and to study for exams and tests influences the information seeking patterns of distance learners.

Some questions on information use and its appropriateness would be raised in the study only in so far as they are expected to have a particular bearing on the information seeking patterns. Such an effect arises where there is an identified deficiency or adequacy of the LIS or any neighbouring resource centres.

1.10. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER ONE

Chapter one is in the main, an introduction to the study. It provides a general background to the problem, identifies and clearly articulates the problem being faced by the ZOU LIS, that is, the observed little usage of the library services notwithstanding the important role of libraries as essential information support systems in the teaching, learning and research activities in tertiary institutions. Added to this problem is the increasingly large numbers of distance learners enrolled with the ZOU that would warrant an equally heavy use of the LIS.

The chapter also states the specific objectives of the study, outlines the research questions that the study seeks to answer and incorporates the purpose of the study, its justification, assumptions and limitations thereof. The terms and concepts and definitions used in the study are also explained in this chapter.

The following chapter two provides the historical background to the development of the Zimbabwe Open University with a view to place the advent of open learning and distance education in Zimbabwe in its proper context to developments in distance education elsewhere in the world.
CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

2.1. OPEN LEARNING AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Since the ZOU is in the business of offering tertiary education through open learning and distance education, it is important to devote a section of this chapter to clearly articulating this line of business. This would also help in identifying the unique characteristics of distance learners who are targeted by this mode of education. As a necessary corollary of this exploration, it would also lead to an understanding of some of the information seeking patterns of the distance learners in general and those registered with the ZOU in particular.

As noted in the preceding chapter on definition of terms and concepts used in the study, there are many definitions proffered in the literature on the concepts of open learning and distance education (Perraton and Creed 2000; Raymond III 2001; Gallacher, Osborne and Postle 1996; Holt and Bonnica in Hogson 1993; Kaye in Hogson 1993; Lewis and Spencer in Hogson 1993; Paine in Hogson 1993; Perry and Rumble in Hogson 1993; Verduin and Clark 1991; Jenkins in Okeem 1990; John in Okeem 1990; Lewis in Okeem 1990).

However, for the purposes of this study, the definition which treats open learning as client and student centred, allowing greater flexibility in determining how, when, where and what to learn focusing on set targets such as exam dates by the distance learners themselves will be used (Perraton and Creed 2000; Paine in Hogson 1993; Lewis and Spencer in Hogson 1993).

In addition, open learning also encompasses removing, reducing or eliminating several barriers, which in the past tended to impede certain groups of students from equal opportunities to gain access to and participate in formal education. Some of these barriers
include the high entry requirements, distance from conventional institutions and the lack of time due to economic and social engagements elsewhere (Holt and Bonnica in Hogson 1993; Lewis and Spencer in Hogson 1993).

Distance education or distance teaching is viewed as a formal approach to learning and teaching in which both the teacher/tutor and the learner are separated in time and space. In this mode of learning, the students are supported by learning materials or modules in various formats such as print, audio, video, broadcasting and information and communication technologies (Raymond III 2001; Perraton and Creed 2000; Kaye in Hogson 1993; Perry and Rumble in Hogson 1993; Verduin and Clark 1991).

It is clear in the literature surveyed that by the 1980s most countries the world over were contemplating, and others had already established, open learning and distance education policies (Gallacher et al. 1996; Jenkins in Okeem 1990; John in Okeem 1990). The major thrust of the policies was to ensure the provision of equal access to education for all. This is evident in Jensen’s comment that “...the world (resolved) to provide education for all by the year 2000.” (1990:28) Gallacher concurs when noting that these policies were meant to “…widen access and attract new students groups, or students from groups that have traditionally been under-represented within higher education.” (1996:418).

Several factors are observed in the literature surveyed that are said to lead to this call for change in the educational policies. The first appears to be the need to address the social imbalance and inequity created by the conventional education systems, which tended to disadvantage certain segments of society (Made 2000; Gatawa 1990). Consequent to the foregoing, these disadvantaged groups included those who did not have adequate resources to attend formal conventional education institutions, those without the requisite high entry marks, those who lived great distances from tertiary institutions and those because of work and other socio-economic commitments, could not find the time to attend the conventional educational systems. Thus Gallacher et al (1996:419) correctly noted that “…some educational systems systematically disadvantaged certain social
groups, measures were required to encourage wider participation for these groups for reasons of equity and social justice.

In Australia and Scotland, the need to change the educational policies and emphasize on 'education for all' is noted. The Australian government enacted a policy in the 1990s that focussed on opening up educational opportunities to the previously neglected socio-economic groups such as the following:

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups;
- Women;
- Non-English speaking groups; and
- Those from the rural and isolated areas (Gallacher et al. 1996)

In Scotland, calls were made to move away from the elitist education system adopted from Britain and move towards a more egalitarian system “...a mass system of higher education rather than the elite system that had existed” (Gallacher et al. 1996:421).

As a second factor contributing to the growth in importance of open learning and distance education, Gallacher et al. (1996) and Jenkins in Okeem (1990) attributed it to the increasing expenditure on education in the face of decreasing student enrolments in conventional educational systems. This is clearly articulated by Jenkins in Okeem (1990:28) who made the observation that “…for every 100 (students) who start primary school only one will get a university degree. The rest fall by the wayside.” It was then possible to predict at that time in 1990, that there would be 200 000 000 children below the age of 15 years by the year 2000. Of these, only 2 000 000 would proceed to tertiary education - ‘The rest will fall by the wayside’ (Jenkins in Okeem 1990) Therefore, faced with this scenario of dwindling high school learners joining the tertiary education, there was a growing need to consider alternative sources to recruit students or face being pushed out of business (Gallacher et al. 1996).

The Australian and Scottish examples also indicate that there was a noticeable decline in student enrolments in higher education in these countries. Hence it was pragmatic to
expand the recruitment drive as concurred by Pearson in Gallacher et al (1996:423) that "The impact of these demographic factors has also contributed to the continuing recognition that if higher education is to be expanded, ... then new student groups must be successfully targeted."

Open learning and distance education therefore became the most viable and pragmatic methods of coping with the economics of dwindling student enrolments, the need to address the social injustices and bring equity and democracy to educational systems and the need for sustained economic growth of nations through the active and capable participation of their educated populations. Yet the same cannot be said for Zimbabwe in the 1980s and early 1990s. The growth and expansion of distance education does not seem to have been influenced greatly by the economic pragmatism that gripped the rest of the world. It was instead the unprecedented increase in the number of students who clamoured for further education.

Related to the falling student numbers were also the meagre budgets that were being allocated to the education sector by national governments. Jenkins in Okeem (1990) observed that in the 1980s, 37 of the poorest countries, many of which are found in Africa, were spending 25% less of their budgets on education and even 50% less in the health sector. Thus through the economies of scale, increased student enrolments would guarantee an increased revenue base for tertiary institutions. This would help them keep their institutions floating above the financial woes that were being faced in conventional institutions as a result of dwindling student bases. As Jenkins in Okeem (1990:29) noted, "This, together with its potential and cost effectiveness, makes distance education an attractive proposition for countries which need to expand education rapidly and cheaply".

In the third factor, it is noted in the literature that the need to increase student intakes at tertiary levels was also driven by what Gallacher et al. (1996:419) called "...national self-interest" and preservation as economic powerhouses through an increased investment in an educated society. This would create a valuable human resource that is capable of fostering economic development of nations in the face of increasing competition on the
global market place in today’s information age. Gallacher et al. (1996:419) concur that the new emerging markets require “...highly skilled and multi-skilled flexible workforces if the advanced nations are able to compete in the global economy.”

The changes in educational systems started focussing on “vocationalism and flexibility...(which) enable workers to gain the particular kinds of education and training required for them, and help maximise their contribution to economic growth.” (Gallacher et al. 1996:419) Distance learners were thus seen to be better suited to contribute positively to economic development than the conventional students since they are seen to be able “…learn a new skill and then apply it at work the next day” (Jenkins in Okeem 1990:29).

It is therefore evident in the literature surveyed that open learning and distance education grew in importance throughout the world to address the following summarised major factors:

- The rise in cost of education and the need to realise adequate revenue to keep in business through economies of scale;
- The fall in numbers of conventional students hence reduced revenue to keep in business;
- The need to provide wider access to tertiary education to all citizenry; and
- The need to build on the capacity of a nation’s human resource that would contribute meaningfully to the development of nations.

Thus in Australia for instance, through a 1988 White Peper, open learning and distance education became an effective de jure policy and eight Distance Education Centres were established in existing campus-based universities (Gallacher et al 1996). It will be shown in subsequent sections how such centres are similar to those in the ZOU. These centres in Australia were established throughout the country in order to enable them to reach all the previously disadvantaged groups mentioned above. Other non-designated universities and colleges also offer both face-to-face and open learning and distance education courses as a dual mode pedagogical approach.
In Scotland on the other hand, the Open University of Scotland largely provides open learning and distance education. The University of the Highlands and Islands is reaching isolated communities throughout Scotland (Jenkins in Okeem 1990). Few other universities in Scotland offer open learning and distance education courses. There are also similarities between the Scottish Open University system and that of the ZOU.

Given this context, open learning and distance education has not been eagerly and readily taken up in Africa notwithstanding the presence of all the necessary ingredients and potentialities. For instance this is where the majority of the people were largely disadvantaged as a result of colonial domination. Exclusion of the masses from equal opportunity to basic education, let alone tertiary education, was a legacy of colonial rule designed to sustain the colonial administration’s political and socio-economic hegemony over the local people. The conventional education systems that were introduced were meant to serve the interests of the colonial master. Hence after independence, most African countries focussed on introducing major policy changes in education and introduce equitable and democratic access to education for all. Notwithstanding such an enabling environment, open learning and distance education has been rather slow in taking a firm hold in many African countries (Jenkins in Okeem 1990).

The only African country to introduce distance education in the 1950s was South Africa at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Its education system though is not regarded as ‘open’ as it should be, but rather as correspondence education, which is a form of distance education (Jenkins in Okeem 1990). The common practice in the few African countries offering open learning and distance education, however, is where they offer the dual modes of learning. Examples here include the Universities of Zambia, Lagos and Nairobi in the 1990s.

The most common forms of open learning and distance education systems introduced by most African countries after each country’s independence, were bent on producing en masse, teachers who were meant to go and teach students at both primary and secondary
school levels. The "Education for all" policies introduced after independence brought about compulsory primary education for all school going children. In the light of this, there was the need to produce as many teachers who would teach in the schools that mushroomed soon after independence.

Given this context, a programme was launched in Tanzania in the 1970s which was designed to train 45,000 trainee teachers at a distance who were to teach in primary schools in order to implement the Government's policy of providing primary education for all (Jenkins in Okeem 1990). Similarly in Nigeria, its National Teachers Institute had similar aims as the Tanzanian experience. While in Zimbabwe, "...after independence a scheme was introduced to train primary teachers partly in college and partly at a distance. The idea was to get more teachers into schools immediately in order to keep the promise to provide education for all as fast as possible," (Jenkins in Okeem 1990:30) The scheme was known as the Zimbabwe Integrated Teachers Course (ZINTEC) which by 1990 had produced 8,000 teachers. (Jenkins in Okeem 1990) This will be discussed further in the following section 2.2.

Other countries such as Kenya concentrated on providing upgrading courses for experienced but untrained teachers. The University of Zimbabwe also undertook similar upgrading courses to its graduates who were employed as teachers and offered a part-time Graduate Certificate Course (GCC). It will be shown in the succeeding sections how the ZOU was also borne out of the need to upgrade the primary and secondary school teachers who were trained at the conventional teachers’ training colleges, the ZINTEC programme and the UZ GCC.

Jenkins in Okeem (1990) also observed that during the 1990s several African countries introduced secondary education through distance education in government run institutions. Although not the major thrust of this section, it is worth noting the efforts made by African countries in providing further secondary educational qualifications through distance education to those students who failed to go through their secondary
examinations at first attempt. These students are invariably primary and post-secondary school age.

The scheme was used to cater for primary school going children who failed to complete their primary education at one sitting and fail to acquire secondary school qualifications. This form of education was done largely through correspondence in both the pre- and post-colonial era. As correctly noted by Made (2000), "...correspondence education provided an alternative route to higher education in Central Africa in general, and in the then Rhodesia, in particular." (Made 2000:21) For instance, it is noted that by the 1990s, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe had 14 000, 14 000 and 40 000 children respectively enrolled in this type of education (Jenkins in Okeem 1990).

Today in Zimbabwe, these correspondence courses still continue as a form of distance education largely offered by private institutions and colleges as also observed by the Williams Report (1989) discussed in the following sections. Jenkins in Okeem (1990:31) observed the successes achieved by this type of distance education in Zimbabwe when she noted that:

> It is interesting and significant that Zimbabwe, which entered the stage late and began using distance education ten or fifteen years later than its neighbours, has not only achieved excellent results with its schemes, but has also begun to incorporate distance education as a methodology within the national education system.

The schemes were thus successful for the teacher training and out-of-school secondary level education. At tertiary levels, with the exception of the correspondence type of distance education at UNISA, and the dual mode of education systems at the Universities of Zambia, Lagos and Nigeria in the early 1990s, not much else had been developed in terms of fully fledged open learning and distance education systems in Africa. It was only towards the late 1990s that the Open University of Tanzania and the Zimbabwe Open University were established as truly open learning and distance education tertiary
institutions in Africa. The following section 2.2 provides a historical perspective to the development of open learning and distance education in Zimbabwe.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, the growth and expansion of open learning in the 1980s and 1990s can therefore be regarded as an educational landmark. This mode of learning is offering many capable and willing students an opportunity to continue with further studies wherever they are, whenever they want, at their own pace using their own initiatives. Open learning and distance education systems are seen to be offering equal opportunities and as democratic educational processes that are designed to benefit all the citizenry in a given country. At the same time, such systems are also allowing tertiary institutions the opportunity to realise adequate revenue through economies of scale.

The mode of learning enables institutions to produce graduates who, because of their characteristic socio-economic commitments, are able to address real life problems at their respective work places and hence contribute meaningfully to the economic development of nations. This helps nations to strategically position themselves in the new and competitive global market place.

To sum up on the characteristics of distance learners that are outstanding in this section, the literature reviewed thus tends to emphasize that distance learners do have the capability to determine when they want to learn, what they want to learn, how they will learn and what methods they would employ towards attaining their objectives. One would rather treat this as a seamless and independent characteristic that requires minimum guidance and leadership from an instructor or tutor. Such a characteristic, it would appear, tends to impact on the information seeking patterns of distance learners if the ability to seek for alternative sources of information elsewhere other than the ZOU LIS can be regarded as a seamless, independent and unguided resourcefulness.

The distance learners are also invariably distantly removed from formal tertiary institutions and learn from their homes and work places. Most importantly, the distance learners represent a larger cross section of the previously disadvantaged groups of
societies throughout the world, regardless of whether in a developed or developing country. It is important to realise the need to provide equal access to educational institutions to these groups of students.

Associated with this need to provide equal access to tertiary institutions is also the related need to provide equal access to library and information service systems that support the teaching, learning and research needs of the tertiary institutions. This issue will be dealt with critically in Chapter Three.

2.2. DISTANCE EDUCATION AT TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

Education in post-independent Zimbabwe was mainly bent on seeking redress to the unequal and undemocratic access to educational opportunities afforded to the majority of the Black people during the colonial dispensation. Gatawa (1990:100) made the following observation regarding this inequity in educational provision during the colonial era:

The years of colonial rule were characterised by a systematic neglect of educational provision to the majority of the population. About half of Zimbabwe’s eight million (people) had been denied access to any organised and meaningful education. This situation was clearly unacceptable, and could not be allowed to continue after independence.

Made (2000:12) equally reveals this inequality in the provision of education during the colonial era:

Certain inequalities in educational opportunities between black and white students were of long standing. Since 1930, education had been compulsory for all white children until they reached fifteen years of age; education was still not compulsory for black children ...inability to pay school fees represented a severe
hardship and was frequently an obstacle to education for blacks, white children whose parents had not paid their school fees were not denied access to schools.

It was therefore incumbent upon the government to address this situation immediately on attaining independence. It went on to declare access to education as a basic human right and adopted a policy of free education for all. This after all is what the people had fought for. It was believed that education for their children would bring about poverty eradication and prosperity. Made (2000:11) concurs “Education was seen as an advantage ... where the greater number of opportunities for employment made the advantages of education more visible.”

While unequal access to educational opportunities was felt between the elite few and the not so rich elsewhere in the world (Gallacher et al 1996; Jenkins in Okeem 1990; John in Okeem 1990), in Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular, this inequity appears to have been very much a factor of colonial domination.

The government, as similarly experienced elsewhere in the world (Rowland and Rubbert 2001; Gallacher et al 1996; Jenkins in Okeem 1990), also saw the opportunity of promoting national socio-economic development by investing in its human development through mass education. Commenting on the government’s commitment to education in this regard, the then Prime Minister for Zimbabwe, R.G. Mugabe, emphasized that it was “…a priority function of government because educated children played a meaningful role in all sectors of economic development.” (Mugabe cited in Teachers Forum 1985:5-6)

The result was an unprecedented expansion of the education system as concurred by Gatawa that “From a primary school population of 850 000 in 1980, the figure rose to a record high of 2 million plus by end of 1981.” (1990:101)

This expansion of education also entailed a matching increase in the number of qualified teachers in the many schools that the government built, particularly in the rural areas that had suffered the most from the colonial segregatory policies. It was nonetheless difficult to put in place adequate and qualified teachers in these schools since there was a general
dearth of such teachers. The government decided to try out an education system that was used during the liberation war to train and produce teachers at a fast pace. These teachers were required to have a socialist orientation as dictated by the ideology of the liberation war against colonialism. As a result, the government launched in 1981 the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC), which, as highlighted by the then Prime Minister, R.G. Mugabe, was “…an extension of the teacher education system introduced during the liberation war…. (it) placed a lot of emphasis on integrating theory with practice” (Mugabe cited in Teachers Forum 1985:6).

According to Gatawa (1990:101), the ZINTEC programme was designed as a “…combination of distance and face-to-face teaching…. (meant) to train primary school teachers on the job.” It therefore represents the first education system where distance education models of learning were employed at tertiary levels alongside the face-to-face mode. Among several objectives discussed by Gatawa (1990) the following are objectives of the ZINTEC programme significant to this section of the study:

- The programme was meant to generate a high turnout of teachers that were urgently required to run the many schools that mushroomed soon after independence, particularly in the rural areas;
- It was meant to marry theory and practice by producing teachers who had a sense of duty to society through an education system that is responsive to the needs of society;
- The programme was meant to use teachers as agents of change who were to facilitate the transformation of the country from a capitalist to a socialist orientation according to the ideology of the liberation struggle; and
- To ensure that education was made a basic human right and mandatory to all people rather than a preserve of a few elite as was the case in the colonial era.

It can be discerned from the foregoing objectives that the programme bore all the necessary ingredients of distance education systems introduced throughout the world. A major ingredient that can be added to the identified enabling situations is the existence of a large and untapped student base, which needed to be accommodated in further
education through this new model of pedagogical instruction. It will be demonstrated that the programme heralded an important milestone in the conventional educational systems and led many government officials to reconsider the existing pedagogical paradigms in relation to the suitability of the distance education model vis a vis Zimbabwe's needs to afford tertiary education to many in view of limited resources.

2.2.1. Structure of the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Certificate (ZINTEC) Programme

According to the Teachers Forum (1985), the programme, which is still running today, used the same syllabus as was used in the conventional teacher training colleges. The programme used learning materials or modules, which were produced at the national centre and distributed to colleges throughout the country. The colleges in turn would distribute these to the respective students on enrolment. The programme is made up of three distinct but closely integrated phases.

The first phase consisted of a full school term, which is spent in college. The students were taught basic classroom management skills through face-to-face instruction. The second phase lasted for three years and four months. During this time the student teachers were placed in schools, mostly in the rural areas, where they were allocated teaching responsibilities.

The following adapted from Gatawa (1990) provides a brief outline of the requirements of this phase which essentially illustrates the dual mode of distance-cum-face-to-face mode of learning:

- Student teachers were required to attend vacation classes after every two terms at the ZINTEC colleges;

1 There were four ZINTEC Colleges established throughout the country, which provided the bulk of the face-to-face component of the dual mode of instruction. Today some of these have been phased out and only two are left with the alleviation of the shortage of teachers.
• They were also expected to attend fortnightly day seminars, especially on Saturdays, to solve specific problems that they encounter during their private studies and teaching practice;

• School-based tutorials were also held at the schools that they teach;

• They were observed and supervised as they taught by trained teachers, field lectures from their colleges, headmasters, District Education Officers (DEOs) and Education Officers (EOs);

• Cluster meetings and demonstrations by trained teachers and headmasters were held;

• Students were expected to participate in production-oriented projects such as the construction of clean water boreholes and wells and sanitary toilets such as the prototype Blair toilets designed as appropriate technology systems for rural areas where there is no reticulated sewer systems;

• They also held evening classes for adults and young students who, due to pressing income generating socio-economic activities, were not able to pursue their educational goals through the conventional educational system;

• The student trainee teachers also found time to listen to radio lessons once a week which are meant to augment on their correspondence texts as well as listen to administrative announcements pertaining to their programme;

• Theoretical training generally continued using their correspondence texts or modules; and

• The second phase ended with an examination held in the last two terms and conducted by field college lecturers and a team of University of Zimbabwe external assessors. (Gatawa 1990)

The final third phase lasted for 16 weeks and was spent in college revising and writing exams.

The ZINTEC Colleges had equal status with the other conventional teacher training colleges since they were all regarded as associate colleges of the University and their
examinations were certified by the UZ. Hence ‘parity of esteem’\textsuperscript{2} was guaranteed albeit initially it might have suffered low esteem. This was because it was seen as a crash programme due to its intensity and since it was bent on fast tracking the training and output of qualified teachers. This suspicion was succinctly summarised by Grace Moyoweshumba (cited in Teachers Forum 1985) among others, who felt that:

“...People were very suspicious of us and the whole ZINTEC programme. There were some misunderstandings between us and some headmasters, teachers, parents, and some times with pupils as well. We had therefore to work very hard to prove to everybody that we were serious about our work, and that our course was just as good, if not better than any.” (Teachers Forum 1985:6)

Moreover suspicion could also have been contributed by the novelty of the distance education mode as a new pedagogical paradigm even among education specialists.

\textbf{2.2.2. Benefits of the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education (ZINTEC) programme to Zimbabwe}

The programme succeeded in meeting its objective to produce high calibre teachers in as short a time as was possible in order to meet the vast enrolment expansion after independence, particularly at the primary school levels. The ZINTEC teachers were therefore able to fill a vacuum of qualified teachers particularly in the rural areas were they were most needed. The programme was also meant to ensure that “...student teachers must get actively involved in community projects, so as to integrate the school with the community surrounding it.” (Teachers’ Forum 1985: 6) It managed to integrate theory with practice and helped to make education relevant to society and contribute positively to national development. In 1985, there were four ZINTEC Colleges each taking an average of 200 student teachers and there had already been 11 intakes by then.

\footnote{2Mr Saul Murimba when interviewed by this researcher on 26 April 2002 used the term. It denotes measures of equal worth in terms of quality educational standards, qualifications, syllabi, instruction and the final graduates.}
It is noted that among the students themselves, the programme was also popular since they were regarded as in full-time employment and were able to earn a salary while pursuing their training unlike in other conventional teacher training colleges. Koul and Jenkins (1990:99) noted that “Distance education made it possible to launch a four year training programme in which the trainee-teachers could take full teaching responsibilities while on the course.” These sentiments were summarised by one of these students, Shakespeare Kupemba (cited in Teachers Forum 1985) who indicated that he “...did not want to spend a long time in college depending on my already stretched-out parents. ZINTEC appealed to me immediately because it provided a source of livelihood.” (Teachers Forum 1985:6) The point that is made here that distance learners are gainfully employed elsewhere is of major significance to this study. Such a characteristic, as will be demonstrated in the subsequent chapter three, will be investigated to determine what impact it has on the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the ZOU.

The students also appreciated the socialist orientation of the programme, since it was seen to be in line with the government’s ideology at that time. The students are also said to have appreciated the integration of theory with practice although this might have brought too much to bear on their studies.

On the whole, the ZINTEC programme contributed to national transformation and showed distance education as a possible new paradigm in educational provision in Zimbabwe. It heralded the introduction of distance education as a viable and appropriate pedagogical approach that could be made use of in Zimbabwe as early as 1981. The mode of instruction, albeit launched as a distance education-cum-face-to-face model of instruction, made a landmark variation to the conventional three-year on-campus course. The ZINTEC programme essentially differed in its approach in that it focused more on integrating development-oriented activities with the theory of education. Being also a new approach to teaching and learning, its socio-academic credibility was assured by being affiliated to the UZ, just like the other conventional colleges. A further departure
from the conventional students was that the ZINTEC students were regarded as full-time employees and hence received a full salary during their training (Koul and Jenkins 1990).

The ZINTEC programme is therefore pertinent to this study in that it provides the historical perspective to the introduction of distance education at tertiary levels in Zimbabwe. It also demonstrates that distance education is a flexible mode of instruction, which can be made to adapt to pressing educational problems such as the need to meet the needs for education and training of large groups. It will be demonstrated in the succeeding section 2.3 how the ZINTEC programme provided the pragmatic framework on which distance education was to be provided at university levels.

2.3. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

It has been amply demonstrated in the preceding sections 2.1 and 2.3 respectively that distance education as a concept had been introduced prior to and after the attainment of independence in most African countries in general and in Zimbabwe in particular. It had, however, existed largely in the form of correspondence education offering opportunities to primary and secondary school pupils to supplement the exams that they failed to pass at their first sitting.

It has also been amply demonstrated that the ZINTEC programme introduced in 1981 in Zimbabwe, became the precursor to distance education at tertiary levels, notwithstanding the fact that it was offered as a dual mode of instruction together with the face-to-face mode.

Yet it is curious to note that after the ZINTEC programme, there seemed to lack an enthusiastic and immediate follow up to introduce distance education in other tertiary institutions such as the UZ. It appeared to have been the case notwithstanding the enabling environment for such a mode of education. That is to say, the massive expansion
of primary and secondary education necessarily created an even greater demand for further education at university level. The succeeding sections however demonstrate how distance education was finally introduced at the UZ and the subsequent establishment of the Zimbabwe Open University.

The literature reviewed and interviews held with persons who were involved in the initial planning processes, indicate that there were several committees and commissions of inquiry that were put in place to investigate and carry out feasibility studies on the introduction of distance education at university level. Prominent among the reports compiled by these investigations and feasibility studies are the following that this researcher was able to identify:

- The University of Zimbabwe Distance Education Feasibility Study. 1986;
- Report of the University of Zimbabwe Vice Chancellor's Committee of Inquiry into High Failure Rates. 1982. (mentioned in Made 2000:33);
- Zimbabwe Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Establishment of a Second University or Campus Under the Chairmanship of Mr. P.R.C. Williams To His Excellency, The President. February 1989. (hereinafter referred to in short as the Williams Report);
- Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate Teaching in the University of Zimbabwe Centre for Distance Education. August 1994. Chaired by Dr. Nziramasanga; and the
- Report of the Committee for the Further Development of University Distance Education. February 1995. Chaired by Professor F.G.W. Hill (hereinafter referred to as the Hill Report in short).

Among the reports identified, this researcher was able to access the Williams and Hill reports only. These provided the much valuable sources of secondary information that was required to give an outline of the historical development of the ZOU. At the same
time, it proved a daunting task to try to be as analytical as possible given the limited nature of the literature on the topic. To this end, interviews of senior officials who participated in the early planning stages were used as a way of providing a balanced analysis and a true picture of the events leading to the establishment of the ZOU. The following are the senior officers who were interviewed:

- Mr Saul Murimba – Interviewed on 26 April 2002;
- Mrs Melania Rukanda – Interviewed on 01 May 2002; and
- Professor Walter Kamba – Although a detailed interview was not conducted, he was able to refer this researcher to the Williams Report in the Ministry of Higher Education Library; and
- Professor Kuzvinetsa Peter Dzvimbo, Vice Chancellor of the ZOU at the time the interview was conducted, was interviewed on 03 May 2002;

Their inputs contributed immensely to the literature reviewed in this section.

2.3.1. The report of the University of Zimbabwe (UZ)Vice Chancellor’s Committee of Inquiry into High Failure Rates

The committee was largely put in place to investigate the high failure rate that was witnessed at the University of Zimbabwe during the years 1980 and 1981. (Made 2000) Among its major recommendations, the report noted that the UZ had reached near capacity in terms of the total number of student population it was designed to hold. This had been a result of large enrolments caused by the increasing demand for university education. The expansion of primary and secondary education, as noted in the preceding sections 2.1. and 2.2. respectively, led to this over enrolment at the UZ. Thus the Committee recommended that:

plans should begin to be made for the establishment of a second university campus in Zimbabwe….the best and cost effective way to do this is to set up another campus of the University of Zimbabwe, which will grow towards specialisation in certain fields of study such as Education/and or Science Technology. The campus could eventually grow into a College of the University
of Zimbabwe and perhaps into a second university in the long run.” (Report cited in Made 2000:34)

According to Made (2000) the recommendation was not treated with the urgency it deserved, both by the UZ and the Government. The issue had to be raised and investigated in yet another feasibility study that was undertaken in 1986.

2.3.2. The 1986 UZ feasibility study on distance education

The Williams Commission (1989) as well as the Hill Committee Report (1995) observed that as a result of the continued rise in the demand for university education by both school leavers and adults in Zimbabwe, the University of Zimbabwe undertook a feasibility study on the possibility of introducing distance education. Again as already pointed out, the main driving force behind the establishment of distance education at university level, was the need to address the increasing demand for university education from large numbers of willing and capable students produced by an expanded education system.

Thus the Williams Commission reported that in 1986, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation “...in response to a request...funded a feasibility study on distance education at the University of Zimbabwe.” (1989:7) The following were its major terms of reference:

- To explore the demand for university education through distance education;
- To investigate possible teaching methods that could be used in this new mode of learning; and
- To recommend possible structures that could put in place to support the distance education programme.

The feasibility study was able to establish the existence of a large demand for university education through distance teaching (Williams Commission 1989; Hill Committee Report 1995). The following are the major recommendations it made:
• It was highly recommended that the UZ should go ahead and establish a programme of distance education. The Hill Report commented on this recommendation thus, "... (the study) identified a large potential demand for university distance education and recommended that the University of Zimbabwe should introduce distance education, beginning with the Bachelor of Arts General, Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Law." (1995:6);

• It was recommended that the UZ should establish a distance education centre that would co-ordinate the design and development of distance education courses and learning materials. The Williams Report made the following comment regarding the purpose of such a centre "... (it would) coordinate the design and delivery of distance-teaching materials and to provide the necessary support services. There would also be regional support services in major centres of Zimbabwe." (1989:8)

It will be shown in the following sections that the concept of regional centres is still applicable in the ZOU of today;

• It was also recommended that there was need for the UZ to consider existing initiatives that were already in place to set up distance education programmes within the then Southern African Development Cooperation and Co-ordination (SADCC). Such initiatives had been undertaken by the Commonwealth of Learning to establish the Institute for Distance Education in Southern Africa (IDESIA);

• The study recommended that a dual mode of instruction such as is practised in Australia "...where each faculty and department offers the same courses in both the conventional face-to-face mode and the distance mode." (Williams Commission 1989:8; Hill Committee Report 1995:8)

It is important to note that the study had recommended a mode that has also been discussed in the literature reviewed (Gallacher et al 1996; Peters 1998); and

• The Williams Commission noted that the development of the distance education programme was to consider and be guided by the following principles:
  • In this dual mode of pedagogical instruction, there should be ‘parity’ between the modes of study, curriculum construction and
the assessment requirements in both face-to-face and distance education modes of instruction;

- The 'parity' was to be assured with the involvement of all faculty at UZ;
- Adequate distance education learning materials had to be put in place if the programme was to be successful; and
- The programme should be adequately flexible to accommodate the horizontal and vertical articulation of programmes.

Yet despite the recommendations made by the feasibility study, the distance education programme did not immediately get off the ground at the University of Zimbabwe. It is not clear as to what could have caused such delays. This delay was also pointed out by Murimba (2002) and Rukanda (2002). However, the Williams Commission was effectively followed-up only three years later to deal with the issue of rising demand for university education at the UZ. This became one of its terms of reference. The following section 2.2.3 analyses the contributions of this commission of inquiry to the introduction of distance education at the UZ.

2.3.3. The 1989 Williams report

The expansion of university education in Zimbabwe became urgent as a result of the heavy investment in education by government (Gatawa 1990; Jenkins in Okeem 1990; Made 2000). The government required high-level staff to spearhead the national socio-economic transformation and development. According to the Williams Report, such personnel were required to:

3 The inadequacy of learning materials has always been the raison de etre for establishing LIS support systems. In the ZOU today, as in the previous CDE, the distance education programs suffered low esteem due to inadequate learning materials.

4 This enables learners to transfer from distance education to conventional universities, from one level to the next higher degree or change programmes with the accumulation of the requisite credits.
staff new developmental services to replace skilled personnel at both professional and sub-professional levels who have left the country and to provide manpower for the spectacular increase in the education sector itself. Current challenges include developing the manpower required to apply and adapt rapidly advancing technology to Zimbabwe’s problems, to make good severe shortages in many technical and scientific fields, and to localise posts presently filled by expatriate personnel. (1989:n.p.)

Thus the government actively encouraged more people to attain university education. These would spearhead the economic development of the country. It has been seen in the literature reviewed (Mugabe cited in Teachers Forum 1985; Jenkins in Okeem 1990; Gallacher et al 1996) that this was one of the contributing factors for governments worldwide to take up distance education as a way of developing their human resource while at work. Rowland and Rubbert (2001:755) also pointed out the advantages of providing higher education to mature and working students when they commented that, “Mature students in full-time employment bring valuable expertise to universities, and lecturers often recognise their ability to create a truly lifelong learning community that is based on social inclusion”.

Similarly it is clear from the literature reviewed that the government’s policy of free education for all after independence, albeit specifically aimed at primary and secondary school levels, almost certainly had a knock-on effect to increased demand for education at university levels. This expansion of education also led to the unprecedented increase in the number of successful applicants who were eager to enter mainstream university education. The UZ at the same time was the sole university in the country that could accommodate all these young enthusiasts, yet it could only take so much, that is to say, it was built to accommodate only 6 000 students at any one time (Williams Commission Report 1989). Ultimately it became inevitable for the UZ to start thinking in terms of expanding its facilities in order to meet this rising demand for university education. Some attempts were made to try to control the absorption of new candidates through the raising of entry qualifications. For instance, prior to 1988, the basic entry requirement to
the university was two grade ‘E’ passes or two points. But by 1988, "...it was virtually impossible to obtain a place with less than grade C, D, D, or (an equivalent of) seven points." (Williams Commission Report 1989: Chapter 4, p.1) Thus faced with this bottleneck at entry point, it was feared there was going to be a ‘backlash’ to the system whereby students would see it pointless to proceed to do Advanced level studies if only they were going to be denied the opportunity to progress to university education.

It was therefore at the behest of the UZ Vice Chancellor at that time, Professor Walter Kamba that the President of Zimbabwe set up a Commission on 25 April 1988 to investigate and make recommendations on the possibilities of expanding university education. Although its major terms of reference focused on the establishment of a second university/campus, the following term of reference is critical to this study. The Commission was tasked:

"To investigate and make recommendations on the need for tertiary institutions to fill existing and new gaps in the education system and the economy, with particular reference to the following areas – distance and continuing education, cooperatives, rural development, agriculture, forestry, manufacturing and any other areas relevant to the development needs of the nation.” (1989 Chapter 1: 1-2)

It should be noted that this term of reference was not surprising considering the experience and successes that the government had had with distance education through the ZINTEC programme. Moreover, the 1986 feasibility study on distance education carried out at the UZ, had also provided adequate evidence on the possibilities of establishing this mode of learning in Zimbabwe. It therefore was only a matter of time before this could be introduced at the university of Zimbabwe. It had also occurred to the Commission that the ‘time had come’ for Zimbabwe to seriously consider distance education as a real alternative mode of instruction best suited to Zimbabwe’s needs. (Williams Report 1989)
It was noted that the nature of the conventional university system was a major limiting factor to the furtherance of education among the majority of willing and capable students. The Williams Report viewed these conventional university systems as:

islands of seclusion separated from the rest of the world by high and narrowly defined entrance qualifications geared more to school leavers than to adult, by the physical separation of the campus from neighbouring land and by the university’s insistence that normal mode of study should require students to be in residence and to undertake full-time study on campus. (Williams Commission 1989 Chapter 9:1)

It went on to maintain that this trend was contrary to developments elsewhere in the world where universities were becoming more openly accessible to many and that this situation needed to be emulated in Zimbabwe.

Consequent to the foregoing, the commission benefited from the international experience in distance education from among its membership which was drawn from Ghana, Yugoslavia, the Commonwealth as represented by Mr Williams, its chairperson, visits that were made to East African countries as well as the United Kingdom. Members of the commission also visited the Open University in the UK and the College of Education for External Studies (CEES) in Kenya. The following are some of the factors that were said to have influenced the Commission’s investigation on the possibilities of distance education (Williams Report 1989):

- A survey of 500 public institutions in the Commonwealth countries which offered courses in secondary and tertiary levels through distance education carried out during its time provided practical distance education solutions;
- Distance education examples in China, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Canada and the UK and of course UNISA in South Africa;

5 It was learnt that Mr Williams had just been appointed to the Commonwealth of Learning, which was put in place to oversee the development of distance education in Commonwealth countries. No other better person could therefore been chosen to lead this Commission on the development of distance education at the UZ.
• Distance education courses that were offered at the universities in Kenya and at the Lagos Correspondence and Open Studies Institute;
• Neighbouring Zambia had already set up its own Department of Correspondence Studies;
• Tanzania was noted to have been in the process of investigating the establishment of an open university;

The Williams Report (1989) also considered, in its deliberations, the enabling ingredients that were obtaining in Zimbabwe that positively favoured introducing distance education. Such situations included the following among others:

• As mentioned in the preceding section 2.1 and 2.3 respectively, the Commission also noted the private studies at ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels that were being carried out through correspondence at private colleges such as the Central African Correspondence College (CACC), International Correspondence School, Rapid Results and the Zimbabwe Distance Education College (ZDECO);
• The Commission also noted the distance education learning materials or modules that were being used to up-grade workers at professional and other levels. For instance, the Ministry of Health was seen to have introduced distance education for its rural health staff;
• The Commission noted the ZINTEC programme that the Ministry of Education and Culture had been using to upgrade secondary and primary school teachers whilst in full-time employment. As noted by Chikono (2001:1) distance education “...had been used to primarily upgrade the quality of basic education by improving skills of teachers in primary and secondary schools”;
• It noted the many Zimbabweans who were studying with UNISA and made special mention of the implications this had on the country’s foreign currency reserves as well as on the need for the country to have its own capacity to adequately train its own people. It therefore considered the widespread opinion among those students who were studying at UNISA for the need for a similar university in Zimbabwe;
The Commission noted the distance education attempts that were made by the English Department to offer an Honours degree programme through distance education;

- It made mention of the Graduate Certificate in Education (Grad. CE) distance education programme that was offered and still is to this day, in the Faculty of Education. The programme involved "students coming into residence at the university for brief periods during the school holidays in January, April and August, but much of their course is by independent study which includes interaction at a distance with their UZ teachers to whom assignments are submitted by correspondence during school term." (Williams Report 1989 Chapter 9:7)

- The Commission concurred with the findings of the 1986 Feasibility Study that there was indeed such a great demand for such a mode of provision; and

- Moreover, the commission aptly noted that the UZ was indeed lagging behind other African universities when it commented that "...if there is an area in which U.Z. is lagging behind even by standards of other African universities, it is the provision of distance education and part-time studies." (1989 Chapter 2:11)

2.3.3.1. The benefits of distance education

The Williams Report (1989) outlined the benefits of introducing distance education and part-time studies to the majority of the people. It saw it possible to cater for a large number of capable students who were in employment elsewhere but are not able to attend formal university education because of such engagements. Such students in employment are often mature with substantial amounts of practical work experience, which they can bring to the learning environment (Rowland and Rubbert 2001).

Hence it was considered beneficial for university education to be provided to such people for their personal growth and development. It would also be beneficial to the nation since such people would not be required to leave their employment and go on long study periods. The universities would also benefit in that their curricula would be geared to address the real work situation thus avoiding degree programmes being too theoretical.
Hence it would be possible to marry theory and practice as observed with the ZINTEC programme. These are critical characteristics that will have a bearing on the thrust of this study as will be shown later in the subsequent chapter three. They have also been clearly brought out in the literature reviewed (Lewis and Spencer in Hogson 1993; Gatawa 1990; Perraton and Creed 2000; Teachers Forum 1985)

The Commission also noted that part-time and distance education programmes would be beneficial to the women who, because of their responsibilities at home had been unable to attend full-time studies. The Commission therefore aptly observed that distance education enables the old, young, rural and urban people to have easy access to the means of learning as well as providing the country’s workforce with opportunities to improve their skills. It can contribute positively to the quality and effectiveness of the learning process, and has many cost advantages over face-to-face education. (Williams Report 1989, Chapter 9:3)

- In its final submission, the Commission outlined many of the advantages of distance education as discussed in the succeeding chapter three. These were put forward in its arguments for the introduction of distance education at university level. Notwithstanding these recommendations, the Commission however did not argue for the establishment of the distance education at the UZ as of utmost priority per se. It instead recommended for the setting up of a second university/campus as top priority. It posited that it is at such a second university that the consideration for introducing distance education and/or part-time degree programmes could be further pursued.

Yet as observed above, despite these recommendations, the Committee went on to prefer to recommend as their utmost priority, the establishment of the second
university/campus. This university, the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) was to be established in 1991 in Bulawayo. However, as noted by the Hill Committee Report, the university failed to include distance education or any part-time programmes when it came into being. The distance education idea was pursued by a Task Force, which was put in place made up of Senior Officials from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the UZ staff (Hill Committee Report 1995; Murimba 2002; Rukanda 2002).

The Commission’s recommendations as well as the 1986 Feasibility study recommendations were taken up and in 1993, a Centre for Distance Education (CDE) was established in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zimbabwe. The following Section 2.6 provides the historical development of the CDE.

2.4. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CENTRE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION (CDE)

Similar to the circumstances leading to the establishment of the ZINTEC programme (Gatawa 1990), the CDE grew out of the need to train the large numbers of teachers that had been produced from the nation’s expansive teacher training programmes (Chikono 2001), including the ZINTEC programme itself. These teachers were predominantly holders of the certificate in education, which was the basic qualification at that level.

The Hill Report observed that “...the teacher population rose dramatically from about 22 000 to over 90 000, between 1980 and 1994” (1995:31). Of these, it was said that 30 000 lacked the adequate professional skills and academic qualifications for them to be able to discharge their duties and responsibilities effectively (Hill Report 1995). Among these

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6 For further details regarding the Commission’s recommendations regarding the preference for this second university See Zimbabwe Report of the Commission of Inquiry Into the Establishment of a Second University or Campus Under the Chairmanship of Mr P.R.C. Williams To His Excellency, The President. February 1989.
teachers, many had managed to rise to positions of managers, supervisors and administrators. Over time, they had managed to acquire rudimentary managerial and supervisory skills but without the requisite academic qualifications and professional skills training at university level. The Hill Report noted that “There... (were) over 15 000 heads of schools, education officers, regional directors and chief education officers who would be able to carry out their duties more effectively if they had an opportunity to pursue appropriate courses of study.” (1995:31) Hence there was an urgent need, as viewed by the government, to improve the overall efficiency of the education system and enforce total quality through effective teaching and efficient management and supervision of the schools and in the classroom.

It became imperative for the government, once more, to put in place an urgent staff-training programme that would address these training needs. Due to administrative, financial and logistical implications involved with sending such a huge workforce for training at conventional tertiary institutions, it became once more necessary for Government to consider other pragmatic ways of getting around this problem. It needed to ensure that its workforce received adequate training at university level without having to leave their jobs.7 Thus falling back on its experiences with the ZINTEC programme and drawing from experiences elsewhere in Africa and globally (Jenkins in Okeem 1990; Gallacher et al 1996), the government considered once more the distance education solution to address this urgent situation.

Also considered were the 1986 UZ Feasibility Report on Distance Education and the 1989 Williams Report. Thus with the participation of the UZ, the Ministry of Education and Culture established a Task Force which initiated discussions and negotiations with the Commonwealth of Learning to explore the possibilities of addressing the training needs of its personnel through the distance education mode. The latter had been

7 It would go back and create the teaching staff shortages experienced before the ZINTEC programme and would remove many a DEO and EO from Government Offices.
established to co-ordinate the establishment of distance education programmes in Commonwealth countries.

The UZ also engaged a distance education specialist from the University of Nairobi who was tasked to put in place a plan for the launching of the distance education programme in the Faculty of Education. Careful planning was required as was recommended by the Williams Commission. For instance, there was need to define and put in place proper management and administrative structures for the CDE with a full compliment of professional staff, full-time and part-time writers of distance learning materials or modules, programme co-ordinators and tutors, administrative staff, technical and secretarial staff. In this regard, the CDE had to be managed from a central administrative head office. This was to be complemented by regional centres that needed to be set up throughout the country’s major regions. These were meant to offer regional student support services.

Visits were planned to neighbouring distance education institutions such as UNISA. They were meant equip the CDE personnel with the requisite practical experience on how to run and manage the CDE. They also were required to acquaint personnel with what administrative structures that needed to be put in place. Other academic staff needed to be shown how to establish and write programmes and course syllabi, how to write and produce learning materials or modules and possibly consider revising and adopting learning materials form such institutions. There was also need to identify what student support services were required to be put in place, what financial arrangements and fees structures were needed as well as establish what policy frameworks (Hill Committee Report 1995:32).

The Hill Report (1995) emphasized that particular attention had to be given to the production of learning materials. It advocated that these had to be in place at least two years prior to the launching of the programme. Such materials needed to be highly interactive and modularised to enable the horizontal and vertical articulation of the programmes. It was therefore imperative to train all staff including module writers,
coordinators and tutors in the distance-learning mode of pedagogical instruction since this was a new phenomenon to most. Indeed, as concurred by Dzvimbo 2002; Murimba 2002; Rukanda 2002, there were quite a number of these training workshops, conferences and seminars, albeit “a bit lavishly” (Murimba 2002).

The Hill Committee Report also recommended that there be “…built-in evaluation mechanisms for formative, continuous and summative evaluation, to enable the Centre to consolidate and improve (own italics for emphasis)8 its programmes and services.” (1995:33) Yet this evaluation for consolidation and improvement seems to have been neglected over the years including the present day ZOU.

The Report called for the vigorous marketing and promotion of the CDE being essentially a new mode of learning, which was still alien to most people especially at university level. It correctly pointed that being a new concept, it was

recognised from the outset, that implementing these plans would require widespread advocacy and support…from University authorities, the Ministry of Higher Education and other concerned parties….Above all there was need for political, materials and adequate financial support from Government itself especially in the early stages of the development of the programme.

(Hill Committee Report 1995:34) Dzvimbo 2002; Murimba 2002; Rukanda 2002) concurred that there was indeed widespread marketing and promotion of the CDE, not

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8 There was a noticeable lack of review and evaluation of the CDE, UCDE and ZOU programmes, which often led to the introduction of more programmes than could be adequately accommodated. Moreover, similar problems experienced in the CDE programme, such as poorly written, inadequately compiled and published modules, kept cropping up even when the ZOU was in operation between 1999-2002. This showed a serious disregard to the fundamental recommendation made by the Hill Committee Report.
only among teachers and the civil service, but also in the private sector and industry. Hence there were interested candidates among those who were in management, administrative and training positions in the private sector.

It was therefore possible, through these preparations and together with ‘seed money’ received from the COL, to launch the Centre for Distance Education in March 1993 (Hill Report 1995; Dzvimbo 2002; Murimba 2002). The first batch of students was admitted in August for the Bachelor of Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies (the BEdAPPS). (Hill Report 1995) This programme was geared to train the teachers, educational administrators, supervisors and trainers among those who lacked the requisite university education and training.

2.5. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY (ZOU)

The Minister of Higher Education commissioned the Committee for the Further Development of University Distance Education in July 1994. This Ministry was put in place to be responsible for higher education and science and technology institutions. The Ministry of Education and Culture was left to be responsible for primary and secondary education.

The Committee was put in place about a year and a half after the launching of the CDE. Once more it appears time was now considered ripe to set up a distance education university as witnessed in the statement made by the Hill Report. The following observation was based on the evidence presented to it during its hearings, that the distance education university in Zimbabwe was:

“...long overdue...(such a university is required to meet) the ever increasing demand for university education, training and qualifications by the young school leavers, adults who missed out on university education, but are now ready for it,
and the manpower needs of an economy that is becoming more complex and compelled to compete globally to sell goods and services.” (1995:38)

The Committee, which was made up of “...ten high ranking members selected from a cross section of organisations and departments on the basis of their experience and qualifications” (Executive Summary of the Hill Committee Report 1995:n.p.) was mandated to achieve its objectives through the following terms of reference outlined in the Report:

- “To investigate the need for and assess the feasibility of setting up a Distance Education University or University College by March 1995, bearing in mind the manpower needs and development objectives of Zimbabwe;
- To review the existing distance education programme at the University of Zimbabwe particularly its adequacy in meeting the manpower needs and development objectives of the nation;
- To make recommendations on the relationships between the proposed/university college with other universities in Zimbabwe, particularly the University of Zimbabwe and the NUST;
- To make recommendations on the structure of the proposed university/university college, including student enrolment, the staff requirements, administration structures and the sequence of faculties to be established with regard to meeting the manpower needs of the country;
- To recommend the location of the university/university college bearing in mind the social, political, economic and other relevant factors;
- To recommend a plan for integrating and co-ordinating the various forms of distance education in the higher education sector.” (Hill Report 1995:n.p.)

For a detailed discussion of the Committee’s findings according to each of the Terms of Reference See Report of the Committee for Further development of University Distance Education. February 1995. Chaired by Professor F. W. G. Hill.
Armed with these Terms of Reference, the Hill Committee made substantial findings that culminated in the setting up of the University College of Distance Education from which further developed the Zimbabwe Open University. The following is a description of its major findings and recommendations for the establishment of the UCDE and the ZOU. Issues that have a direct and particular bearing on the study will be analysed in the following sections.

In its consideration of the evidence provided during its investigations, including inputs from the 1986 Feasibility Study on Distance Education and the 1989 Williams Commission, the Committee felt that it was no longer sufficient to recommend the establishment of just a distance education university. It was therefore argued that there was need for the distance education university to be more open and admit a wider cross section of capable and willing students who are deprived from such an educational opportunity due to various socio-economic barriers, age levels, work commitments and distance from educational institutions.

Basing on the evidence provided and experiences drawn from other open learning and distance education universities such as the Open University, the Committee proposed the establishment of an Open University that would adequately meet the expressed needs. It therefore felt that:

“... Open Universities are often, flexible in terms of entry requirements, courses offered and exit levels. They can teach for regular degrees or diplomas, or offer single courses, which do not lead to a degree or diploma, but meet the specific manpower needs of the economy. Open universities are also more flexible in their teaching strategies since they cater for students with different learning needs.” (Hill Committee Report 1995:38-39)

It is evident that this concept of open learning was also adopted from international experiences, particularly from the Open University, UK, which was the first open learning and distance education university (Harris 1987; Lewis in Okeem 1990; Verduin
Concurring with the 1989 Commission of Inquiry and 1986 Feasibility Study Reports, the Hill Report (1995) proposed that the B.Ed degree programme be continued from the CDE as its flagship programme. The following disciplines were recommended as top priority to be offered in the Open University:

- B.Ed in Educational disciplines as well as the post-graduate studies in education;
- B.A. in English and Geography and other related subjects;
- B.Sc. Mathematics and Statistics;
- Bachelor of Commerce; and
- B.Sc. Economics.

These were to be offered in the Faculties of Arts, Education, Science and Technology, Agriculture and Commerce. Other work-related certificate and diploma courses were to be introduced in the long-term.

The Report reiterated the requirement expressed in the setting up of the CDE as well as the recommendation from the Feasibility study that ample time needed to be given to the writing and production of learning materials for these programmes. The experiences learnt from the CDE case of inadequately prepared modules in which some were even plagiarised, provided a point of reference for the committee. There was need therefore to ensure that the module writers were adequately trained and that qualified lecturers from other universities would assist in writing modules. It is said the committee was assured of this cooperation from other existing universities.

In terms of student support structures and services, the Committee observed the following requirements that needed to be put in place for such an open university to be fully operational:

- There was need for an efficient central administration system that would foresee the writing, editing, printing and distribution of learning materials. The centre
would also process written assignments. Administer exams and maintain accurate records at both the national and regional centres;

- An efficient system for the recruitment, selection, training and monitoring of tutors, markers and guidance/counsellors should be set up;

- The committee, for the first time, made the recommendation that there needed to be collaboration and assistance from other universities in the provision of library and information services, “Collaboration with other educational institutions and organisations in library and other resource provisions is needed” (Hill Report 1995:42). However, the report could not specify how such support services and collaboration were to be enforced from other universities. It is pertinent to note that the Hill Report, just like the other preceding inquiries, failed to include professional librarians in their membership of esteemed professionals particularly considering the important role of libraries in supporting university education. Had this been done, may be the LIS would have been better provided for;

- The Committee advocated the need to set up regional centres with adequate staff and resource centres such as libraries and supplementary learning materials; and

- There was also need to further decentralise the university to reach the district levels throughout the country.

Taking note of the fact that students on a distance education programme will be scattered all over the country, there is need for further decentralisation of the support services to be as close to the students as is possible. It is therefore essential that district study centres be established as a matter of policy and those students be encouraged to form study circles at levels lower than the district (1995:43).

Regarding the establishment of the Open University by 1995, the Committee noted that due to time constraints, the projected time frame could not be met. Instead it was suggested that a university college of distance education be established in the interim while all the recommended requirements for putting in place the university are finalised. This way, the University College of Distance Education (UCDE) replaced the Centre for
Distance Education. It was expected that the UCDE would become the "...nucleus of the new autonomous university with immediate effect." (Hill Report 1995:44)

At the same time, the Committee envisaged a new time frame for the establishment of the Open University. This was therefore timed for 1997 or 1998. It was proposed this new university should be set up in Gweru, a town in the Midlands region of Zimbabwe. This region is central to all parts of Zimbabwe and so it was believed it would easily be accessible to distance learners from all corners of the country.

The name of the university was recommended to be the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) although this was not within the purview of the terms of reference of the Committee. According to the Committee, the name "...seemed to give the new university a national character. Consequently, the Committee recommends that the university should be named the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU)" (Hill Committee Report's underlining 1995:45). The Report strongly recommended that such a university be established through an Act of Parliament. Full administrative structures were to be in place, that is to say, there needed to be a university Council and Senate provided for in the constitution together with a whole full complement of senior management staff, academic staff, technical and clerical staff.

It was recommended that the ZOU should have the following in place:

1. A National Centre
2. Regional Centres in all the country's 10 regions;
3. Structure should be decentralised;
4. Study Centres to cover the district levels of regions;
5. Regional Centres tasked with the following:
   - The registration of students in their locales.
   - Distributing learning materials to students.
   - Holding tutorials.
   - Conducting examinations.
   - Organising district study centres.
• Making arrangement for weekend tutorials and residential sessions.
• Booking classroom facilities and examination halls.
• Providing library services (*throughout the country at each regional centre*) (own addition)

6. National Centre recommended to do the following:
• Coordinate and facilitate the distance education and open learning process.
• Curriculum development.
• Production of learning materials.
• Establishing expert course teams of educationalists, editors, course designers, markers and others.
• Ensuring high quality teaching and learning materials are produced.
• Processing examination questions, examination timetables, examination results and announcing and publishing examination results and conferring degrees.
• Coordinate the horizontal and vertical articulation of programmes between the ZOU and other conventional universities.
• *Coordinate all library services provision at national and district centres*¹⁰

7. The Committee recommended that the ZOU should recruit both normal university entrants as well as working adult, privately employed or otherwise, the unemployed and even those who prefer to learn for pleasure. To this end, it was recommended that the ZOU should provide for lifelong learning;

8. The Committee observed that through the economies of scale, that is to say increased student enrolments due to the desirability of part-time and distance education programmes, would make the ZOU programmes cost effective and affordable to the majority of the people;

¹⁰The researcher's own addition after noting the omission of such a fundamental support service provision to open learning and distance education. This is the major thrust of this study, to understand the information seeking patterns of distance learners with a view to plan, design and implement appropriate and relevant library and information services that address the ZOU distance learners.
9. The high flexibility of the distance education programmes was recommended as it was seen to be:

attractive because learners are able to study what they want, when and where they want as well as determine their own pace so study. This control over time and place is particularly valuable and convenient for working people (especially women) and those in remote areas (Hill Report 1995:48) (Italics own emphasis)

10. In its teaching methods, it was recommended that the ZOU should use the printed module as its core teaching and learning material. These needed to be comprehensive and highly interactive to enable easy understanding by distance learners in the absence of tutors. The Committee recommended that other media formats could be developed at a later stage such as the use of the radio and television and satellite broadcast.

11. It was recommended that regular tutorial meetings organised at the regional and district levels would supplement learning and teaching materials. The importance of such tutorials was aptly summarised by the report that:

This ensures regular communication not only between tutor and student but also provides for regular contact amongst students themselves.... (they) assist students to discipline themselves to study at a steady pace regularly and allows for the marking and discussion assignments with the teaching modules....the service will ensure timeous delivery of course materials, and assignments and their marking. Furthermore this system allows for student counselling (Hill Committee Report 1995:51)

It was therefore in consideration of the 1986 UZ Feasibility Study on Distance Education, The Williams Commission Report of 1989 and the Hill Committee Report of 1995 that the open learning and distance education university finally came into being. The University College of Distance Education briefly existed as recommended by the Hill Report as a caretaker institution and was subsequently replaced on 1st March 1999 by the Zimbabwe Open University. The university was eventually established through an Act of Parliament, Act No. 12/98 as recommended by the Hill Committee. Today the ZOU
largely exists with the structure, functions and services also recommended by the Hill Report (1995).

2.6. THE ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY AND THE PROVISION OF OPEN LEARNING AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

Today the mandate of the university is to provide accessible, flexible, high quality and relevant university education to the nation as noted by Maenzanise (2000: 15):

The raison d’être in setting up the Zimbabwe Open University can be said to be the need to provide affordable and market-driven learning, teaching and research programs at first and post-graduate degree levels to students previously disadvantaged by limited time, great distances from and high costs involved with attaining such educational qualifications at resident universities. The Zimbabwe Open University is providing that opportunity by offering seamless, timeless and reasonably priced education to all prospective students.

The definitions of distance education provided in the preceding chapter one also applies to the distance education offered with the ZOU. They help to illustrate that the Zimbabwe Open University is in the business of offering education to learners who are distantly removed “in space and time” from the parent institution (Harris 1987; Williams Report 1989; Verduin and Clark 1991; Kaye in Hogson 1993; Perry and Rumble in Hogson 1993; Hill Report 1995; McCormack 1996; Perraton and Creed 2000). It therefore employs the single mode of the distance education pedagogical approach.

Adding further on the definitions on open learning in the literature on the subject (Harris 1987; Perraton and Creed 1998; Paine in Hogson 1993; Lewis and Spencer in Hogson 1993; Holt and Bonnica in Hogson 1993), the ZOU thrives to take cognisance of the “…experiential learning and knowledge gained through years and experience by learners. This is in keeping with the philosophy of open learning which is intended to enable the adult learner to access ZOU’s degree, diploma and certificate programmes” (Mhasvi,
2000: W9). The university opens its doors to all students from various walks of life, particularly adult learners who may not have gone through all of the formal levels of education but possess a tremendous wealth of experience and knowledge of the job that they do.

Distance education everywhere has therefore gained popularity as the most appropriate form of education business that can reach out to a wide audience of learners. It has changed its status from its previous backwaters of poor education offered through 'correspondence' to an eminent position where it is now recognised as a "...legitimate part of mainstream education to be used separately or in combination with face-to-face education" (Perraton and Creed, 2000: 28).

The ZOU includes, to a limited extent, face-to-face mode of instruction through weekend tutorials and residential sessions. Here distance learners meet at designated places in the regions fortnightly or once per semester for several days and receive tutorship and mentoring from ZOU academic staff, both full-time and part-time. This however would not make it a fully-fledged 'dual mode' of pedagogical approach suggested by Peters (1998:15). The face-to-face element seems to be used to accommodate the distance learners and provide, for want of better terminology, the 'human face' to their learning experience.

2.7. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER TWO

Open learning and distance education at tertiary levels took quite a long time to be established in Zimbabwe. More than a century and a half from the time correspondence education was first felt in Europe and the USA (Rowntree 1992). About seventeen years after the first distance education programme, the ZINTEC programme, was introduced. And more than ten years since the first feasibility study on establishing distance education at the university level was conducted. It can be safely deduced that this delay to implement the concept might have been due to the novelty of the concept in the country.
rather than mere complacency. If anything, the time span taken is characteristic of the process of formulating, designing and finally implementing major policy issues.

Moreover, distance education represented a new teaching and learning paradigm ever experienced in the country among the educationists themselves and the ordinary masses in general. Indeed even globally, the concept is relatively new having started growing in the mid-twentieth century. Thus Zimbabwe benefited from experiences encountered in countries such as South Africa, Tanzania, Australia, Scotland and the UK who were forerunners in implementing this mode of instruction.

A serious omission this researcher noted is the almost total disregard to the development of ‘open’ library systems as critical support systems in distance education. Most of the investigations and feasibility studies conducted by various Task Groups, Commissions and Committee of inquiries did not set out to investigate and recommend the development of such systems alongside the pedagogical approach. Being a new paradigm in the teaching and learning profession, which is supported by libraries, it is this researcher’s view that open learning and distance education mode of instruction certainly has implications on the type, functions and services that any library established in this environment is likely to experience. Therefore, this becomes a big gap in the development of open learning and distance education in general and at university levels in particular. The failure to include LIS professionals among their eminent membership during these investigations is indicative to the total disregard given to the development of libraries as effective support systems, let alone the profession itself.

It is the intention of this study therefore to attempt to fill this gap by investigating the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the ZOU. The findings of the study, it is hoped, would provide the parameters within which to plan, design, implement, monitor and evaluate the provision of effective library and information services in a distance-learning environment. The following chapter three will thus focus on the information seeking patterns of library users, the characteristics of distance learners and an analysis of the library service provision in open learning and distance
education institutions. This chapter will thus place the study in proper context to developments and practices elsewhere on the international scene.
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. SCOPE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is meant to place into proper perspective the major elements of investigation that the project seeks to analyse critically, that is, the information seeking patterns (ISPs) of the ZOU distance learners who make use of its LIS. The literature surveyed thus relates to the following listed major areas of study. Other areas will also be discussed in the course of the study:

- Further discussion of terms and concepts;
- Information seeking patterns of library users;
- Open learning and distance education in tertiary institutions;
- Characteristics of distance learners;
- Library services to distance learners; and
- The use of information and communication technologies in library service provision.

3.2. INFORMATION SEEKING PATTERNS OF LIBRARY USERS

This section will establish the importance of information seeking patterns of library users in general as evidenced in the literature reviewed. This is aimed at providing the foundation or conceptual framework for investigating the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the ZOU. The section attempts to establish why it is critical to understand the information seeking patterns of library and information services. Such an understanding, as aptly observed by Kaniki (1989), enables library and information science professionals, to design, implement, monitor and evaluate library and information systems that are best suited to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of users.

Most library and information service systems and the institutions that they serve, tend to assume the actual and potential needs of their users. It is therefore common to find that
most library collections are actually oriented to the needs of these library and information centres and institutions. This is as far as they can go in anticipating and meeting the needs of users. For instance, academic libraries have always endeavoured to support the teaching, learning and research needs of the academic community. This is exactly the nature of the business of the institutions, but the exact needs of the academic community, are seldom established with any specificity.

The Proceedings of the Conference on the Needs of Occupational, Ethnic, and Other Groups in the US (1973) cited in Chen and Hemon (1982:4) made this poignant observation that “…it is easier to be explicit about what an institution needs than about what users, and potential users need. Being explicit about the needs of a given user population requires continuous, systematic, and sensitive contact with that user population.” It is noted that such detailed investigation of user needs lack because libraries and the institutions that they serve usually lack the wherewithal or the research capacity to continuously and systematically investigate the needs of their users.

It is therefore clearly articulated in the literature reviewed (Jannich 2001; Spink and Cole 2001; Sprague 1994; Zondi 1991; Kaniki 1989; Krikelas 1983; Chen and Hemon 1982) that investigations into the information seeking patterns of library users help to understand the complex decision making processes that are made by users. This helps to explain why users neglect or make optimum use of libraries and how they eventually resort to seeking information elsewhere, if they neglect to use specific library facilities provided within their institutions.

Information seeking patterns as an area of study is a sub-section of the generic research area of user studies in the profession of library and information science. Brittain in Kaniki (1989:64) defines user studies as “empirical studies of the use of, the demand for, or need for information.” Other related sub-sections of user studies include Information Needs Analysis and Information Flow studies.
Judging by the wealth of research in this area (Chen and Hernon 1982; Krikelas 1983; Kaniki 1989), user studies form “...the largest single body of research literature in librarianship” as commented by Krikelas (1983:5). Such user studies provide insights into the use and non-use of library resources and services. The user studies provide the basis for deciding how best to meet the diverse needs of library users using the best strategies that would have been identified and recommended by the studies (Sprague 1994).

Commenting on the importance of user studies in his foreword to Chen and Hernon’s study on Information Seeking, Hayes concurs that user studies “...provide essential information for guidance and new direction in the future planning of library and information programs and services.” (Hayes in Chen and Hernon 1982:xi) Studies of information seeking patterns often lead to the identification of information needs of users. For instance, Kaniki posits that “…by understanding the information seeking process of an individual or group of people, it is possible to understand and assess his/her or their information needs.” (1989:7)

It is argued in the literature on the subject (Chen and Hernon 1982; Krikelas 1983; Kaniki 1989; Zondi 1991; Janneh 2001) that it is difficult to define and understand information needs as a concept in itself, but that, though this is often regarded as rather too simplistic, this has to be learnt and understood from the context in which the information need is sought to be fulfilled or addressed. Hence Chen and Hernon (1982) posit that information needs arise the moment that one is faced with a problem that requires solving. Krikelas (1983:6) also defines information need as “…a recognition of the existence of this uncertainty in the personal, or work-related, life of an individual.” Spink and Cole (2001) point out the importance of situational relevance in order to understand the information needs of ordinary citizens such as low-income groups in a community.

The concept of information need is made complex by the realisation that it is possible to recognise a need and hence steps can be taken to satisfy that need. On the other hand, it is also possible not to be able to realise the existence of a need and hence not take any steps to satisfy the need or whilst taking steps to address a different need altogether, the need
that is not realised will be addressed simultaneously and unconsciously. This complex dual state of existence of needs within individuals led researchers such as Rosenbloom and Wolek and Debons cited in Kaniki (1989) to postulate that it is possible individuals may or may not realise an information need.

The dilemma in establishing a concrete definition of information needs is made even more complex by a lack of a single and standard definition of the concept ‘information’ itself. It is therefore important to devote sub-sections of this section to an understanding of the concepts of ‘information’ and ‘information needs’ individually to be able to establish a functional definition of the broader concept of ‘information seeking patterns’.

3.1.1. Understanding the concept of ‘information’

A single definition of this concept has tended to be highly illusive as observed elsewhere by this researcher (Maenzanise 2002:2). Several definitions have been proffered throughout the literature reviewed on the subject (Krikelas 1983; Kaniki 1989; Braman cited in Browne 1997; Browne 1997; Feathers and Sturges 1997; Chambers 21st Century dictionary 1999; Harrod’s librarian’s glossary and reference book 2000; Jannneh 2001). Most definitions tend to treat information as a collection of data that is capable of being communicated in various formats such as text on paper or stored on electronic formats as structured text or ordinary text, images, graphics, audio and video formats (Feathers and Sturges 1997; Chambers 21st Century dictionary 1999; Harrod’s librarian’s glossary and reference book 2000). This data is said to emanate from a wide spectrum of disciplines.

Chen and Hemon (1982:5) concur with this definition and perceive information as “…all knowledge, ideas, facts, data, and imaginative works of mind which are communicated formally or informally in any format.” Kaniki is more assertive and defines information as “…simply (an) awareness of the available data and nothing more” (1989:67) taking his cue from Debons (cited in Kaniki 1989) who made a distinction between information, data and knowledge. Debons posited that information is a cognitive process, which occupies the space between data and knowledge. This approach is also taken up by Hayes
cited in Browne who also saw information as separate from knowledge where the latter is “...an outcome of integrating new and prior information” (Hayes cited in Browne 1997:264).

The social sciences have tended to suggest definitions that dwell on the mental and cognitive processes, the objective and subjective approaches in (Shannon’s 1949) model of communication. In the first approach, information is treated as a real and tangible mental process hidden from other people and can only make sense once it is released, moved, stored in various formats, relocated and passed on to someone else. While in the subjective approach, information is treated as symbols embedded in the human brain, which can only make sense, by the manipulation of these symbols based on the individual’s experiences with other symbols already existing in the brain.

These approaches are reminiscent of the communication theory, which proposes that information is ideas imprinted on the mind, which are interpreted by the individual based on his/her experiences. The ideas make sense or become information when they are communicated to another individual(s) who perceive the same meaning. The existence of ‘noise’ or interruptions and other distortions between the sender and receiver, as a matter of course, plays havoc with the actual information, which may be distorted Shannon 1949).

It appears the cognitive- and abstract-related definitions of information as mental process tend to make it difficult to establish a more pragmatic definition of information. It is pertinent to define information in relation to its everyday use, albeit still borrowing much from the social sciences, in order to retain what Kaniki’s (1989) asserts should be a pure and simple understanding of the term. This study will therefore define information as a collection of data, facts, ideas and other imaginative works of the mind in recorded forms such as text, electronic, graphics, video, audio, the ‘internet’ and oral forms capable of being communicated to others. The acquisition of this information, in whatever format, leads to knowledge accumulation. The information can be made useful where it is used to solve a problem or matter of concern and to accomplish a given task. It can also be
acquired for itself without any immediate use. This will be demonstrated in following sections on understanding information needs.

3.1.2. Understanding the concept of ‘need’

Similar to the concepts of information, the concept of need has also proved to be highly illusive in rendering itself to a single and standard definition. There are varied approaches in the literature on this concept, which have made the task of establishing a single definition quite a formidable one (Krikelas 1983; Debons in Kaniki 1989; Kaniki 1989). Kaniki employed Debons’ approach, which treats needs from a physiological and biological standpoint. This approach views a need as “A state of lacking which can be relinquished through a commodity, such a commodity may be information” (Kaniki 1989:68). The state of lacking is said to cause certain behaviours within people, which make them seek to resolve that state of lacking. Such needs are classified as perceived or recognised needs. Krikelas on the other hand defines need as “…(a) recognition of the existence of uncertainty and to observe the resolution...(of that uncertainty)”. Instead of something missing, it appears this approach envisages a need arising when one is unsure about something and hence takes steps to remove this uncertainty.

In both instances however, it is possible to surmise that a need arises from a perceived gap in what one already knows. This gap, it is apparent, causes uncertainty or a lacking in the knowledge one could be having. The gap therefore propels one to take action to fill the void or to remove the lacking and uncertainty. It is evidently related to what one already knows.

Considering that information is data, ideas, facts, and other imaginative works of the mind in whatever format, an information need becomes, therefore, and by extension of this understanding, the gap in the information that one already has stored. This is knowledge at any rate, which must be fulfilled for that knowledge to be whole again. This way, the definition that treats knowledge as information gained, would be a
necessary corollary of this explanation of the concept of information. It is therefore pertinent to observe that information need propels one to seek for additional information in order for one to be able to address a specific situation that would have caused a gap in what one already knows.

This approach is made still more complicated by the argument that it is possible to find in people some needs which are not readily recognisable or which are not perceived and yet exist within organisms. Such needs often require someone else who is specially trained to identify the needs for them. According to Kaniki (1989), such needs are often identified in a patient-doctor relationship where patients in most cases do not know the exact nature of their ailments and what to do or take heal these ailments. Similarly in the library and information science field, librarians and information specialists help users to identify their specific needs for what information that best meets their specific needs.

Taylor in Krikelas (1983) also makes a similar suggestion that it is possible to find people who do not always articulate what they perceive to be a need in what they actually express as a need. This problem occurs where there are further distinctions that are made in the literature between ‘needs’, ‘demands’ and ‘wants’ (Krikelas 1983). Here, demands are viewed as articulated or expressed ‘wants’ and the latter are treated as conscious needs. The question becomes, when does one realise one has a need which will eventually lead to its expression, correctly or incorrectly, for instance, the need for one to eat something? Being a physiological need, it triggers off certain behaviours that make one look for food. The perceived need can be interpreted as a ‘want’ or conscious need, to a ‘demand’ which can be regarded as forceful when one’s behaviour or efforts to get the food are being delayed or frustrated.

Kaniki (1989), however, contends that there are certain needs, which are not easy to discern, and neither are their levels of satisfaction, without the use of surveys. The satisfaction of needs requires one to clearly articulate those needs that need satisfying. Hence surveys of user needs are carried out in order to enable people to clearly articulate
those needs to enable the investigators to design strategies that are best suited to satisfying the expressed needs.

Krikelas also alludes to the existence of another school of thought, which dwells on the existence of 'unexpressed' or 'unconscious' need as mentioned by researchers in this school. The school of thought seems to point out that since this need is in the unconscious sub-field of the human mind, it is possible nothing would be done to solve that need until one is conscious of the need. Childers in Krikelas (1983:8) refers to such needs as 'kinetic' and 'potential' needs. The former refers to needs that are directed towards answering a specific problem. The latter refers to needs that remain unconsciously concealed in attitudes, values and impulses. Information acquired through the potential needs arena is thought to remain dormant and not put to immediate use. While the information acquired to address the kinetic needs is put to immediate use. Krikelas goes further to delineate the activities that are associated with kinetic needs as information seeking behaviours while those associated with potential needs are designated as information gathering or sourcing behaviours. (Krikelas 1983:8)

3.1.3. Understanding the concept of 'information need'

The concept of information need, like the other concepts discussed in the foregoing sections, has been widely dealt with in the literature on the subject (Chen and Heron 1982; Krikelas 1983; Kaniki 1989; Zondi 1991; Janneh 2001 Rosenbloom and Wolek in Kaniki 1989; Debons in Kaniki 1989). This study also views and discusses the concept in the manner in which it has been studied.

As correctly observed by Kaniki, "...the intangibility of 'information' and 'needs' per se, have led to the difficulty in understanding and the lack of consensus among information professionals as to what constitute information needs(s)" (1989:71) These concepts have remained largely cognitive mental processes that are only understood through the resultant behaviour. In this case, the resultant behaviour is the information seeking
patterns that are therefore used to discern the needs for certain types of information in preference to any other.

Thus far, information needs can be said to be, by extension of the definitions of information and needs suggested from the literature as discussed above, the expressed or unexpressed wants, which can translate to demand, for data and facts in written format, images, graphics, audio, video and other multimedia formats. The formats of information would be required to fulfil a need as determined by the socio-economic, cultural, political, educational and other human pursuits.

Chen and Hernon (1982:5) suggest a more pragmatic definition and view information need as "...arises(ing) whenever individuals find themselves in a situation requiring such knowledge to deal with the situation as they see fit. Such information needs arise in all aspects of everyday life: the home, the office, in relations with family or friends or the insurance company, out of idle curiosity, or as a requirement of work." Hence information need could be understood well in relation to the situation in which the individual who perceived that need created it.

It is also argued in the literature that since it is difficult to quantify the concept information need by itself, it could also be understood and measured through information seeking patterns, as will be shown in the following section which are an observable behaviour resulting from the need for information. By understanding the information seeking patterns and information gathering or sourcing by users, it is possible to discern their information needs, expressed or unexpressed and conscious or unconscious respectively (Krikelas 1983; Kaniki 1989).

Information needs of users must therefore be viewed and understood from the perspective of the individual seeker. The information that they require must also be contextualised to the situations where the information need was first perceived. It is important to take into account of the situational relevance to the information needs of the users (Spink and Cole 2001). The usefulness of that information can only be understood in so far as it is able to
meet the expressed satisfaction of the individual seeker. Thus sacrosanct to investigating information seeking patterns is the individual seeker as tacitly pointed out by Chen and Hernon (1982:6) when they stated that “Any attempt to depict general trends and tendencies in information seeking must admit the human individual as the centre of the phenomenon, consider his or her view, need, options and prejudices\(^1\) as significant and influential elements deserving investigations.” This in turn leads to devising the best ways of addressing those information needs.

3.1.4. Information seeking patterns

It is realised in the literature that users adopt information-seeking patterns in order to satisfy an actually expressed or perceived need. Spink and Cole (2001:45) regarded information seeking as “...a complex information and communication activity requiring access to diverse sources of information to deal with personal, social, and work-related problems.” Chen and Hernon aptly define information-seeking patterns as “...the paths pursued by individuals in the attempt to resolve a need.” (1982:6) Debons in Kaniki (1989:71) views information seeking patterns as “…a cognitive state which is triggered by the imbalance in an organism. Information searching on the other hand is merely a logistical process whose object is to satisfy that state.”

The latter view is also shared by Krikelas who posits that compared to information seeking patterns, information gathering is seen as “…those activities in which stimuli are accepted and held in storage to be recalled on demand (authors underlining). Such efforts may have a purpose (directed but not problem-specific); they are activities that have become known as ‘keeping up with the literature’ or ‘current awareness’” (1983:9). Hence those who gather information for later use without a specific need for it such as,

\(^1\) Italics by this researcher to underscore the importance of this study in investigating whether ZOU distance learners are preferring other information providers as a result of their peculiar situations or contexts.
for solving a specific problem or serving a desired purpose, are referred to as information gatekeepers, innovators, or part of the elite in society (Krikelas 1983).

It is argued by Kaniki (1989) that various methodologies are carried out to study the information seeking patterns of users. On one hand, there are methodologies that focus on understanding the communication patterns that are displayed by users in their quest for information as proffered by Parker and Paisley in Kaniki (1989:73). On the other hand, Chen and Hernon, and Salasin and Cedar in Kaniki (1989) suggest methodologies that dwell on understanding the information seeking situations or episodes of person(s) in order to determine information needs. This implies that users are found in certain situations as determined by their social, educational, cultural, economic, political and personal characteristics, which produce immediate needs for information. Spink and Cole (2001:45) concur with this view when they observed in their study of information seeking channels used by African American low-income households that the effective provision of information services to low income citizens “...depends on a sensitive assessment of their information needs, an assessment that goes beyond description of information use.”

Studies of information seeking patterns of library users provide libraries with first hand information pertaining to the how, where, why and when users consult which information providers in preference for which others that may be available. They provide the baseline information regarding the possible behaviour of users when they are faced with an information need. The importance of these studies was underscored by Chen and Hernon (1982:6) when they noted that they are:

…meant to generate baseline data depicting the dimensions of who gets what information from where, and why. These data specifically relate the nature of information providers (e.g., their accessibility, their linkages with other providers, and their “built-in” institutional barriers that make them inaccessible to others) to that of information seekers (e.g., their awareness of their own problems, their ability to explain it to those who would help them, and their cognisance of alternative providers...) the range of information providers consulted could be identified and their interrelationships among them better understood.
User studies have thus been used to study the information seeking behaviours and patterns of user groups as determined by their unique situations. For instance user studies have been used to study the information seeking patterns of library users in the following different situations:

- of social scientists, scientists such as physicists and humanists;
- of urban dwellers such as New England dwellers studied by Chen and Hernon (1982);
- of African American low-income households (Spink and Cole 2001);
- of rural dwellers such as agriculturalists (Kaniki 1989; Janneh 2001);
- of first year students at the University of Zululand (Zondi 1991);
- how post-graduate students on a part-time coursework programme at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, SA, access books and journal articles (Aitchison 1998);
- how information is provided to the aurally impaired school going adolescents in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa (Pantshwa 2000); and
- the information seeking patterns of administrative staff and non-faculty professionals at the Ohio State University (Sprague 1994).

This study therefore falls within this realm of user studies and employs the methodology extant in the sub-field of information seeking of library users to understand the information needs of distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University. There are not many studies, in the literature reviewed, other than the one in the above list by Aitchison (1998), that have been carried out to investigate the information seeking patterns of distance learners.

Chikono (2001), as a requirement for the fulfilment of the Higher National Diploma in Library and Information Science at the Harare Polytechnic, carried out in 2001, an investigation into the library services offered by the ZOU to its distance learners. In this study, he evaluated the existing ZOU LIS infrastructure and attempted to examine the current services that were available to distance learners with a view to outline the problems that were faced by the library in terms of providing a value added service to its
users. This study therefore drew from his findings in terms of current library and information services provision and attempted to establish whether there was any significant relationship between his findings and this researcher's own.

- This study therefore breaks new ground and departs from Chikono's (2000) approach in that it seeks to understand the information needs of distance learners following the conceptual framework as outlined by other studies in information seeking patterns of users.

The study also draws from Cuthbertson's (1992) study on Libraries and Academic Development Strategies in South African Universities, which was submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Library and Information Science. The study focuses on providing user education programmes to students who because of apartheid, were not well prepared for studies and use of libraries at tertiary levels. The study therefore focused on how best libraries and their staff can offer services to previously neglected users such as the "black" (author's single quotes to denote African students specifically) students in South Africa, where distance learners at the University of South Africa (UNISA) were considered as such. Her case study of a library instruction programme that was integrated into a first year history course at UNISA provides a test case for the introduction of similar user education programmes at the ZOU, especially where UNISA by largely servicing distance learners (Cuthbertson 1992:6), is in the same business as the ZOU. It was essential therefore for the study to emphasize on "...the problems of distance education and the special role of the library in this medium" (Cuthbertson 1992:6). It will be shown in the succeeding section 3.5 that such user instruction programmes in distance education libraries can be offered using today's information and communication technologies.

A study such as the one being undertaken by this researcher should endeavour to articulate the major aspects of information seeking patterns of ZOU distance learners from understanding the situations from which the need for information arises, to the characteristics of the information seekers, and hence to the information providers that
were consulted. This will be done within the conceptual framework provided in the literature (Spink and Cole; Pantshwa 2000; Aitchison 1998; Sprague 1994; Zondi 1991; Kaniki 1989; Chen and Hernon 1982).

Two issues are critical to the study of information seeking patterns of users. Firstly, it is important to understand the reasons why users make use or non-use of information providers where the library is one such a provider. Various factors have been identified in the studies, which tend to indicate this use or non-use of libraries. Kaniki (1989:77) outlined below what this researcher acronymed CCAUSAL factors that affect the use or non-use of libraries by distance learners:

- **Cost factor**, both in terms of how much money and time it takes one to consult an information provider;
- **Currency or recency** of information resources offered by the provider; and
- **Accessibility** as it relates to the ease of getting to the provider;
- **Usability** as it implies the ease of consulting information from the provider;
- **Locatibility** as it relates to where the information provider can be found.

The CCAUSAL factors identified by Kaniki (1989) can be used to provide answers to the following three questions that are fundamental to the information seeking patterns of users:

- What information sources do various users in their different work situations consult?
- Why do they use these information sources? and
- How do they perceive the institution(s) library as an information provider?

Slade in Chikono (2001:1-2) also pointed out similar problems faced by distance learners such as “...distance from the library; limited access hours; availability of appropriate materials; restrictive loan period...time pressures....” According to Kaniki (1989:77) the use and non-use of an information provider in seeking information is wholly determined by the “...individuals or groups of individuals' preference for an information provider..."
(which) is more likely to correspond to his or her estimate of ease of using such an information provider."

Secondly, the value placed on the information by the users affects their information seeking patterns. This value relates to the actually intended purpose for that information. This is influenced by the respective characteristics of the information seeker as determined by their background. The socio-economic, educational, political, cultural and the work place background of users influence the value they place on the information that they seek. This determines the purpose for which they require the information, be it to learn, study and prepare for examinations or for research to solve particular work-related problems and projects (Kaniki 1989). Thus the variance in the value placed on the information required between and among users and user groups seems to indicate that it is possible to discern differences in information seeking patterns between such individual users and groups of users.

Salasin and Hardy in Kaniki (1989:78) concur that “it should be possible to analyse differences in information seeking behaviour between groups of individuals who, by reason of education, training, and habit are likely to perceive some information sources easier to use than others.” Hence the study of information seeking channels used by African American low-income households by Spink and Cole (2001:45) can be said to emphasize on a specific user group because of the nature of the information required as well as the sensitiveness with which their needs are assessed. It is the intention of this study to investigate whether the use or non-use of the ZOU LIS, as an information provider, by its distance learners could be attributed to these findings in the literature, where the distance learners themselves are a special user group made sensitive by the fact that they were often neglected in terms of access to higher education opportunities as well as the provision of library and information services to them. The focus of this study, therefore, is on the ZOU learners rather than the academic and other staff of the university.
The ZOU LIS, like other libraries, is only but one such an example of an information provider. Other providers merely act as referrals or what Kaniki (1989:78) refers to as ‘sign posts’ to other final information providers. According to Chen and Hernon (1982:5) other providers include “Any individual, agency, publication, organisation, institution, or a group of institutions that is utilised by the individual as a means to meeting this need is an information provider.” This study focuses on the library as the major provider of information to the ZOU distance learners since it was put in place to respond to their information requirements.

Naturally, in the course of the investigation, it becomes incumbent upon the study to identify other providers to which the distance learners could be resorting to as a result of the above-discussed factors. These factors may militate against the ZOU LIS particularly when the system was put in place without an adequate understanding of the information needs of distance learners or due to other unplanned eventualities and situations. Thus an understanding of the information seeking patterns of ZOU distance learners and the reasons cited heretofore for the use or non-use of the LIS, will enable the LIS management to put in place relevant strategic plans that are designed to serve the information needs of the distance learners.

The existence of many players or other information providers introduces the inevitable element of competition, that the ZOU LIS would be forced to contend with, in the provision of the best and most appropriate information resources and services to the distance learners. The ZOU LIS must be able to rise up to the occasion and face or adapt to this competition. This could be done by strategically positioning the LIS to adequately address and meet the needs of distance learners. An investigation of the information seeking patterns of ZOU distance learners would therefore enable the LIS to strategically position itself since it would be able to identify the information needs of its users and serve those needs appropriately.

It would also enable the LIS to put in place co-operative relations and synergy with other providers where competition cannot be matched. Otherwise, failure to rise to the occasion
provided by competition would spell obsolescence, decay and non-use of the LIS as aptly put by Chen and Hernon (1982:7):

The alternative to competition and adoption is irrelevance, disuse, and organisational decay, a lapse of dynamic (academic and) public resources into mere archival warehouses, and, it is likely, the eventual disappearance.... (of the LIS system)"

Strategic plans therefore help to put in place information providing service systems that are proactive and relevant to the information needs of its users. This is critical in order to also avoid what is perceived by Kaniki (1989) as a passive provider and put in place in its stead, a ‘library sans frontier’.12 Thus he correctly pointed out that:

The passive role is the function where a library only ensures that any document or information needed by a potential user is made available...at the time of demand.

The active role on the other hand is the function where the service brings documents or information to the attention of the user on a continuous basis, whether or not these documents are actually requested. (1989:79)

It is noted that the passive role of most libraries in the past has been very much a case of neglecting, or failure on the part of many, to carry out the critical user studies, and information seeking patterns in particular, to determine the exact information needs of their users.

It is thus through this realisation that this study becomes all the more necessary to know the information seeking patterns, hence the information needs of the actual and potential distance learners as a user community of the LIS in order to be an active and relevant information provider.

12 The concept is coined from the French term sans frontiere, which means without borders. It is being used here to further extend the concept to mean the paradigm shift of the LIS in distance education from a passive central place to which user go to that of a vibrant and responsive service that goes out to investigate the needs of its users and makes the extra mile to go where the distance learners are actually situated.
The passive provision of information service in most libraries is a result of what Chen and Hernon (1982:4) precisely regard as "...a shadowy picture of the information needs of (its users)...(which also results in) a shadowy determination of the success of...efforts to meet these needs."

3.2. CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

An understanding of the characteristics of distance learners (Heery 1996:4) assumes a centre stage in the study of the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the ZOU. These students are quite different from on-campus students. It is the purpose of this study to determine whether their characteristics have a cause and effect on any identifiable patterns in the ways in which they seek for information.

Several writers studied in the foregoing chapter one on open learning and distance education (Raymond III 2001; Perraton and Creed 2000; Aitchison 1998; Peters 1998; Holowachuk 1997; Berge 1996; Goodson 1995; Heery 1996; Heller-Ross 1996; Perry and Rumble in Hogson 1993; Kaye in Hogson 1993; Paine in Hogson 1993; Lewis and Spencer in Hogson 1993; Holt and Bonnici in Hogson 1993; Verduin and Clark 1991; Harris 1987), tend to identify implicitly in their discussions and tacitly in their definitions of the concepts, the following listed peculiar characteristics of distance learners:

- The distance learners are invariably located at a distance from tertiary institutions.
- The instructors are equally far removed from the students themselves.
- Distance learners are often engaged in various socio-economic activities.
- Study is often limited due to the pressing economic, social and geographic problems.
- Distance learners form a group of students that was previously disadvantaged and prevented from participating in formal education by several barriers such as high cost of tertiary education at conventional institutions, high entry requirements, lack of time due to distance, engagements in socio-economic activities and gender and racial inequities.
The open learning and distance education mode of tertiary learning seems to have been introduced to provide democratic and equal opportunity for all to education and tertiary education in particular.

Distance learners are usually mature or adult people of over 25 years of age with varying years of experience in their socio-economic activities.

They are thus able to relate theory of what they learn to the realities of their work environments thereby contributing meaningfully the development of their countries.

They are able to independently determine how to learn, when to learn, where to learn and what to learn as determined by their situational constraints.

Their long years of separation from formal education in conventional institutions may impede the need to follow guided and instructor-based learning.

Study packs/kits consisting of print and electronic self-study modules, lecture summaries and audio-visuals are used to reach out and teach the distance learners.

Their courses and learning materials are specifically designed in a flexible way in order to meet individual requirements.

Radio and television can be used to teach outside the classroom environment.

Converging information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as video-conferencing, teleconferencing, satellite-based technologies and the Internet become very useful in reaching the distance learners individually or as a group in today’s information age.

Bremner (2001:54) aptly sums up the characteristics of distance learners by taking note of the sentiments that the distance learners might have whilst learning at a distance:

Imagine for a moment that you are a student. You are studying, along with 175 000 others at a University you never visit. You learn from academic professors that you never meet, and your course is delivered not by face-to-face lectures, but through course books, videos, and other multimedia that you can use whenever you want. You do have some personal contact with tutors and contact fellow students via a computer conference, but in the main you follow your own timetable to meet course deadlines.
The above listed characteristics therefore generally seem to indicate that distance learners rarely visit their institutions for assistance. It echoes the independent characteristic that requires minimum guidance and supervision from an instructor or tutor as observed in the preceding section 2.3 of this chapter. These assertions have some implications on the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the ZOU. Their non-attendance of colleges and universities is a form of behaviour, which will impact on their use or non-use of the library and information service provided in tertiary institutions. And their independence presupposes an ability to seek for alternative information resources with minimum assistance from the libraries that are meant to serve them. Hence the need for this study to explicate the impact of these characteristics on the information seeking patterns of the distance learners registered with the ZOU.

3.3. LIBRARY SERVICES TO DISTANCE LEARNERS

It is pertinent to reiterate here the observation made in the forgoing chapter one that the important role of libraries in tertiary institutions as critical information support systems cannot be overemphasized. The Carnegie Report cited in Kascus and Aguiler (1988:32) reinforces the importance of libraries when it noted, “The quality of education is measured by the resources for learning on the campus and the extent to which students become independent, self-directed learners.” While Tipton concurs that “library support is an essential part of any academic programme including those offered through distance learning.” (2001:394) Of significance in Tipton’s comment is the need to provide library services equally to both on-campus and off-campus/distance learners as concurred by Gibson, Newton and Dixon (1999:226) that “…there should be equal provision for both distance learners and on-campus students.”

Bremner’s (2001:54) account of the development of the Open Library for distance learners at the Open University, UK, stands testimony to the important role of libraries in distance education tertiary institutions. In this account, that the UK Department of Education had made an earlier policy decision in 1966 which considered it “...impractical to offer library services to OU students.” The library that was in existence
then was meant to serve researchers, academic staff, course designers and writers of
course modules only. The distance learners were expected to fend for themselves and
augment on the learning materials they were provided at registration through the use of
other unaffiliated university, college and public libraries closest to them. Possibly not
surprising if analysed from the point of view of the independent and unguided
learning and resourcefulness of distance learners.

However, as a result of increased agitation by the distance learners for the need of library
support from the parent institution, further studies were carried out to determine and
validate this need. These studies such as the notable Follet and Dearing Report (Bremner
2001:54) “...encouraged libraries to consider students as their core business ... (and the)
information held within libraries was seen as an essential part of the students’ learning
experience and an awareness of how to utilise this resource was an important part of their
time at University.”

Similarly, this study seeks to explicate the characteristics of distance learners with a view
to determine how they impact on their information seeking patterns. This, it is envisaged,
would help in designing innovative library services that meet the needs of the distance
learners registered with the ZOU.

In the light of the further studies that were carried out to determine the extent of need for
library services by the OU distance learners, it is said that OU Library changed its remit
in 1995 and started providing library and information services to support the teaching,
learning and research needs to both on-campus and off-campus students and academe
(Bremner 2001)

The need for equity in the provision of library and information resources and services to
distance learners has also been emphasized in the literature on the subject (McLean 2001;
Gibson et al. 1999; Cuthbertson 1992; Kascus and Aguiler 1988; Niemi 1988). The
apparent disquiet in the provision of library support services to tertiary institutions arises
where it is argued, particularly in countries like Canada and Australia with well
developed distance education systems, that there is a very low library and information service provision to distance learners. Hence Kascus aptly noted that “...many academic librarians have given little thought to the special needs of students enrolled in off-campus programs.” (1988:29)

The seemingly disproportionate service provision seems to emanate from the low regard accorded to off-campus/distance education programmes by the on-campus students and academe (Tipton 2001; Kascus and Aguiler 1988) particularly in institutions that offer both on-campus and off-campus models of education delivery. Kascus and Aguiler (1988:30) had this to say about the low esteem given to off-campus programmes, “From the on-campus faculty perspective, off-campus programs are considered to be of lesser importance; off-campus programs are perceived to be a threat; and off-campus students are perceived to be less serious.” Something akin to ‘children of a lesser God’, it would seem.

The low regard seems to exist even among professional librarians. These often associate distance education programs and library service provision as a heavy financial drain and an unnecessary strain on the human resources. This researcher had an occasion to experience such perceptions when trying to mobilise support from other unaffiliated university and college libraries. This was seen to be a pragmatic way of providing the ZOU distance learners with a much wider access to other library services. The researcher was told in no uncertain terms that the ZOU distance learners cause untoward drain, wear and tear on library resources, which are also regarded as a financial drain and an unnecessary strain on the human resources.

It is also in the light of these arguments that Cuthbertson (1992:9) emphasized that at “...the cornerstone of academic development is the relevance of the educational experience, and therefore the library, as a symbol, and its policies and procedures must reflect the interests and material circumstances of its students.” The library is therefore seen as a vehicle of academic freedom even among distance learners.
Gibson et al. (1999:223) clearly articulates the need for strategic planning by stating that:

Developing services for off-campus students requires a strategic approach.
Planning, deciding priorities, committing these priorities to formal guidelines and using these guidelines to shape the implementation of services are important steps in ensuring a match between long-term objectives and day-to-day operations.

Rodrigues, cited in Gibson et al. (1999:223) also underscores the need for careful planning of library service provision to distance learners by noting that “If your destination is service to distance learners, then planning should be the first item on your item on your agenda.”

While Lebowitz, also in Gibson et al. (1999) and Tipton (2001), emphasize the need to carry out critical needs assessment surveys of distance learners. This would enable the formulation of realistic and achievable aims and objectives in the strategic plans. Tipton (2000:394) therefore comments that,

surveys of user satisfaction or dissatisfaction are important in identifying problems and issues faced by distance students in accessing library services and resources. Such assessment provides the basis for quality assurance and continuous improvement.

It is important to reiterate here that by carrying out an investigation into the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University, it was hoped that the survey results would be used in the strategic planning of appropriate library and information service provision to ZOU distance learners as emphasized in the preceding chapter one.

In the developed countries of United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, where there are well developed distance education library support services, it is noted in the literature (McLean 2000; Guidelines for Library Support...in Canada 2000; Gibson et al. 1999; Association of College and Research Libraries 1998; Kopp 1991; Kascus and Aguiler 1988) that these have developed policies and guidelines governing and directing the provision of library services to distance learners through rigorous planning and
discussion. Notable in the countries mentioned are the guidelines that have been put in place by the Association of College and Research Libraries Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services compiled by American universities and colleges in conjunction with the American Library Association. These have been used as prototypes in developing guidelines in other countries. The following are examples of such guidelines:


- **Canada**: *Guidelines for Library Support of Distance Learning in Canada 2000 guidelines* [approved by CLA Executive Council in November 2000];


- **United States**: *ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services 1998 guidelines* [approved at ALA in June 1998].

This information on guidelines is adapted from ‘Resources for Distance Learning Library Services’ (2002)

The guidelines were put in place to address critical and common factors that were impacting on distance education and the provision of library services to distance learners. Some of these factors include the growing importance of open learning and distance education in tertiary education as outlined in the preceding sub-section 2.1.1; the widening educational opportunities being offered to many students through the distance education mode of learning; the need to expand the provision of library and information resources and services to locations other than the central campus as in conventional institutions; the need to provide equitable services to all students undertaking tertiary education; and increased demand for library resources and services by academe and support staff at a distance.

The guidelines have also been compiled recognising the important role of libraries in supporting tertiary education and the need to provide equal access to library and
information resources and services to distance learners as offered to on-campus learners. This rationale is succinctly reiterated by the ACRL (1998:1) which stated that,

Library resources and services in institutions of higher education must meet the needs of all their faculty, students, and academic support staff, wherever these individuals are located, whether on a main campus, off-campus, in distance education or extended campus programs, or in the absence of a campus at all.

The guidelines are therefore meant to be used by “...administrators at all levels of post secondary education, librarians planning for and managing distance learning library services, as in the case of this researcher, other librarians and staff working with distance learning program, staff, faculty, and sponsors of academic programs, as well as accrediting and licensing agencies.” (ACRL 1998:1) Realising the importance of these guidelines, Kascus and Arguiler (1988) call for the transformation of the guidelines into standards, which can be enforced on institutions bent on offering open learning and distance modes of instruction. The standards can be used to benchmark and evaluate library service provision to distance learners in these institutions compared to them being just guidelines that may or may not be followed.

It is noticeable that the guidelines and the literature surveyed on library provision to distance learners, seem to bear common philosophical foundations, which underpin the provision of library and information support services to distance learners (Tipton 2001; Guidelines for Library Support...in Canada 2000; Gibson et al. 1999; ACRL 1998; Kopp 1991; Kascus and Aguiler 1988). These philosophical foundations bear the following precepts:

- The fundamental consideration that libraries play a critical and essential role in the provision and attainment of “…superior academic skills in the post-secondary education, regardless of where the students, faculty, and programs are located.” (ACRL 1998:3);

- That the distance learners and academe are entitled to the same library and information resources as students and academe at on-campus institutions;
• The different characteristics, situations and environments in which distance learners and academe operate require that they be provided with equitable access to resources using “...more personalized services than would be expected on campus” (Guidelines for Library Support... in Canada 2000:3);

• That the director of library and information services in distance education need to mobilize, through the Chief Executive Officer of the parent institution and its governance structure, increased funding, separate from the regular library budget, for the support of distance education library services;

• The director also needs to ensure that distance learners are actually provided access to appropriate library resources in both print and electronic formats that are available through the Internet and the World Wide Web. These resources should support the teaching, learning and research needs of the parent institutions;

• The director of library and information services, with the involvement of the academe, administrators at the national centre and in the regional sites/centres, including librarians from unaffiliated libraries, should formulate, develop, implement, review and evaluate strategic plans for effective library service provision to the distance learners;

• The director of library and information services, through the involvement of regional site librarians, need to carry out continuous user studies such as needs assessments and user behaviour and information seeking patterns to identify, develop, coordinate, and assess valuable, effective and appropriate library service provision in distance learning environments. This is one of the major objectives of this study whose results are hoped will contribute towards the design and implementation of appropriate LIS systems. It is correctly pointed out by the ACRL that it requires, “innovative approaches (for) the design and evaluation of special procedures or systems to meet these needs...(of distance learners)” (1998:3)

• Since it is most likely that distance learners will opt to use the resources and services of other unaffiliated libraries closet to their locations, some of these libraries, it has been pointed out earlier above in the discussion, “...may be unable or unwilling to provide the necessary support.” (Guidelines for Library
Support... in Canada 2000) The onus is therefore upon the director of library and information services form the central library to broker special formal or informal agreements and establish cooperative relations and synergy with these unaffiliated libraries so that the distance learners can be allowed to use their facilities and services. These resources and services should not be seen merely as substitutes or supplements of the requesting library’s services but must be seen to reflect the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the parent institution of the requesting library. (ACRL 1998)

The guidelines however follow a similar format of presentation with local variations of detail of operations to suite the prevailing local conditions and the needs of the distance learners in the individual countries.

In terms of services that ought to be provided to distance learners, these guideline also bear features similar to those suggested in the models and templates of distance education library and information service provision developed by Kascus and Arguiler (1988) and Brophy cited in Gibson et al. (1999) respectively. These models shall be considered briefly in this section since the guidelines are more detailed for the purposes of this study.

The Kascus and Aguiler model consists of three distinct but closely related components, namely, the need for a central or home library complimented by a site or regional centre library, the need to have in place a specifically designated distance education librarian and the need to establish strategic partnership through formally written or informal cooperative agreements with other unaffiliated university and college libraries (Kascus and Aguiler 1988).

It is suggested in the model that the central library acts as the primary source of materials. The off-campus librarian is the primary means of providing access to and delivery of information resources to distance learners at sites or regional centres close to the learners. While the formal or informal service agreements with other university and college libraries serve to provide extended and enhanced library resources and services to the
distance learners nearly located to them. This model resembles the current LIS in place in the ZOU as pointed out in chapter one. Kascus and Aguiler (1988) suggest that the following services be offered from the central library:

- Toll-free telephone numbers dedicated for use by distance learners;
- Reference and information services;
- Online database searching;
- Circulation of books, journals and audio-visual materials;
- Inter-library lending services;
- Photocopying of journal articles; and
- Document delivery services.

The off-campus librarian is expected to offer the following service, which in some cases are a necessary duplication of the central library but offered at distance sites or regional centres:

- Liaising with all off-campus programmes coordinators;
- Reference and information services;
- Bibliographic instruction;
- Preparation of specialised bibliographies;
- Compilation and distribution of information packages;
- Orientating academe on the available services;
- Public relations;
- Marketing and advertising library resources and services to distance learners and the academe; and
- Evaluating the effectiveness of library and information services. (Kascus and Aguiler 1988)

The role of the affiliated library services offered from other university and college libraries closely located to areas where distance learners live could supplement the
resources and services provided from the central or home library. These include the
following services in the suggested model:

- Reciprocal borrowing privileges;
- Reference and information;
- Reserved reading collection;
- Access to bibliographic tools;
- Bibliographic instruction; and
- Copies of the home library’s print or online public access catalogue. (Kascus and
  Aguilier 1988)

It is pertinent to reiterate at this juncture the importance of cooperation between the
distance learning library system and that from unaffiliated libraries. This is so since it is a
mammoth task for any one library to adequately serve the personalised needs of distance
learners.

Brophy, cited in Gibson et al. (1999), designed a template for library and information
support services to distance learners similar in many respects to the model suggested by
Kascus and Aguilier (1988). The following are the services proffered in this template that
should be offered by a distance education library and information service support system:

- There must be a central or main site, which houses collections of materials that
  exclusively support distance learning. This core collection must be supported by
  small core collections at remote sites near the distance learners. This structure is
  again similar to the current system in place at the ZOU LIS as indicated in the
  preceding chapter one;
- The provision of access to online public access catalogues through reliable
  networks;
- The use of fax services to receive and send documents to remote sites;
- The provision of dedicated staff who offer services to distance learners;
- The delivery of materials to distance learners through the post, mail and fax
  services;
- Reference services;
- Skills training of staff and students in online help; and
- Advocacy and publicity through bulletins, guides etc.
The current LIS does not yet use postal services to deliver materials to distance learners. Online help services are not yet in place nor are the online public access catalogues. The latter is still being developed using the freely available UNESCO database management software, CDS/ISIS, windows version.

3.4. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICTs) AND LIBRARY SERVICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION ENVIRONMENTS

Library and information services provision to distance learners cannot be complete without taking into cognisance the provision of services in today’s information age. The information age, also referred to as the digital era, is characterised by the connection or wiring up of more than “…40 million people…to the Internet (which itself is) a Collections of computers around the world linked to cables like ordinary telephone lines allowing the transport of digitised information.” (Panos Media Briefing No.16/October 1995:2) In order for one to be wired up to this Internet, also referred to as the global information superhighway or the cyberspace, one requires a computer, connected to a modem and an efficient telephone line. Finally one would require connection to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) who provides the ‘last mile’ of wiring to the global networks.

These technologies form part of what is popularly referred to as the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in today’s information age. The late 20\textsuperscript{th} and early 21\textsuperscript{st} Centuries are periods that are being referred to as the information age because of the large-scale transformation of society being caused by the ICTs as observed by Rowland and Rubbert (2001) in their analysis of changes taking place in the higher educational systems in the UK. The ICTs are “…generating a new industrial revolution already as significant and far reaching as those of the past.” (Bangemann cited in Addo 2000:144)
3.4.1. ICTs in open learning and distance education environments

The Information age is witnessing an increase in the use of ICTs for academic purposes (Mambo 1999:42). There are deliberate and purposeful efforts to harness and make optimum use of the new information and communication technologies to support the expansion and improvement of education. Open learning and distance education systems are increasingly making use of ICTs such as computer conferencing, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, interactive websites and electronic mail to contact and teach students at a distance (Cochrane 1996; Carty et al 1996).

In addition to the ICTs, radio and television are also being used to extend teaching outside the classroom. The Internet and the World Wide Web are being used to distribute learning and teaching materials to distance learners. Electronic courses are being designed and used to reach and teach students at a distance. On the whole, ICTs are increasingly being seen as “…valuable tools for expanding access to higher education while strengthening education quality and relevance.” (Association for the Advancement of Education in Africa [ADEAA])

Open learning and distance education systems are therefore making use of asynchronous and synchronous communication technologies. Asynchronous systems such as the electronic mail and computer-based conferencing systems, are offering “…opportunities for distance learning students to communicate with their tutors and each other.” (Cochrane 1996:317) Synchronous technologies such as videoconferencing “…permit real-time communication between groups or individuals in a limited number of locations, generally two.” (Cochrane 1996:318) This technology simulates a real time communication between groups and individuals over great distances in what is now known in the information age as ‘virtual reality’.

The use of videoconferencing in distance education systems can be readily seen in the UK, The USA and from Australia to Spain. This has been made possible by the rapid technological advances and the associated decrease in costs as the technologies become
readily available. The videoconferencing system requires a video camera, a television monitor, a CODEC, an audio unit that is often set up in a dedicated room or studio, microphones spread around a specially designated table plus additional cameras. Using this equipment, a group of students at one end would be able to communicate with a group at another end over transmission media such as dedicated phone lines, twisted-pair, fibre optic cabling as well as via satellite transmissions.

Videoconferencing is being used by academics from diverse academic backgrounds to provide access to tertiary education to learners in remote areas. It has great potential for use in rural areas since it is possible to link central places to remote areas.

3.4.2. ICTs and library and information service provision

Developments in the above mentioned technologies, the Internet, WWW, the migration from host-based proprietary systems to client-server architecture, relational database structures, the development of operating platforms such as UNIX and Windows systems as well as various communication protocols such as the Z39.50, have all tended to develop “...outwith [without] developments in the library management systems, (but) this is changing as suppliers introduce features and systems that are closely related” (Guy 1996:127). Today library systems such as Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) are being developed in line with the technological advances in library systems.

In developed countries, ICTs are increasingly being used in information collection, processing, organisation, retrieval and dissemination. Networks are being used to locate, exchange and share information, research findings and new knowledge. Videoconferencing is being used to provide the following services in libraries:

- To support user education programmes;
- To provide reference and advisory services;
• To contact students, academic and support staff at other locations and campuses; and
• To provide linkages and networks between public libraries, schools, further education colleges and university libraries.

In addition to the above stated services, staff training and development needs can be met through the use of training seminars and presentations on multi-site campus or between institutions using videoconferencing (Cochrane 1996). Members of staff from one institution can participate in professional development programmes offered by another institution. The technology thus enables institutions to save on time and costs in training staff members away from the parent institution.

Videoconferencing is also being used to conduct ‘virtual’ meetings for the exchange of information, decision-making, demonstrations and the use of expert advice in the day-to-day management and administration of LIS systems. Videoconferencing facilitates networking of special interest groups thus allowing collaboration and support among professionals through workshops, seminars and conferences that can be conducted in a virtual reality set-up (Cochrane 1996).

For instance, in Europe and in the USA, several projects were undertaken to investigate and demonstrate how ICTs can be integrated with library and information service provision in open learning and distance education environments. Such projects include the EDUCATE project, DEDICATE project which replaced the EDUCATE project, the LIBERATION, DERAL and BIBDEL project to name just a few of these numerous programmes. The following is a brief summary of each of these projects the details of which could be obtained from the website addresses given in the bibliography.

According to Thomasson and Fjallbrant (1996:295), the EDUCATE programme or the End-User Course in Information Access through Communication Technology, is “…a self-paced user education course in the selection and use of information sources and to provide a structured interface to relevant high quality resources.” The EDUCATE programme was put in place as a multi-media programme that could be used as self-
instruction materials in formal courses and also as distance learning courseware. It was largely based on the WWW with hyperlinks to sections within the programme and to other relevant resources in the global village. The programme was initiated to assist users in developing skills and systematic methods of searching for information relevant to their studies, project work and literature reviews in research projects. Users were to be trained to be aware of the availability of a wide range of information sources that are available for their needs. The programme was also meant to act as a current awareness tool that helps users to keep abreast of current publications in their particular fields.

On the whole, the EDUCATE program was designed as a formal multi-media programme to be used as a component in formal courses in library user education and information literacy programmes. The development of the programme as a self-paced and self-instruction tool enabled it to be relevant and beneficial in open learning and distance education environments.

The EDUCATE project ended in May 1997 and was replaced by the DEDICATE project whose aim was “...to develop cost-effective distance education courses in information literacy...extend(ing) the benefits arising from the prior EDUCATE project, and its subsequent products, to a number of test sites in Central and Eastern Europe, thereby enabling them to take advantage of technical innovations in training in information literacy.” (http://www.cordis.eu/labs/en/ Visited 28 December 2002) Similar to the EDUCATE program, the DEDICATE project also offered network-based distance learning courses with particular attention and support given to the distance learners. The support was viewed to be necessary in today’s information age, which is characterised by large-scale use of ICTs. The DEDICATE project set out to develop cost-effective distance education courses in information literacy and programmes for networked learner support through the use of asynchronous and synchronous communication technologies.

Distance education library use courses that were designed in the project were demonstrated and tested at four library sites in technological universities in Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania. The project was coordinated from the Chalmers
University of Technology Library. This researcher had the opportunity to discuss and understudy the project during his contact visit to Sweden during February to March 2001.

The DEDICATE project also focused on introducing the training the trainers courses initially for library staff on how to access and use electronic information resources in networked environments. The project also went on to set up demonstration sites that were to be used for further developing user education programmes at the designated sites. The project made use of web-based resources for training in information literacy and facilitating easy access to courses.

The LIBERATION project was started in May 1996 and ended in November 1998. It was meant to demonstrate that “...modern libraries must provide a dynamic, annotated and easily searchable information space that is not restricted by physical boundaries. The project investigates(ed) the extent to which materials can be distributed and linked, practically, over local servers, CDs and the Internet.” (http://www.cordis.eu/libs/en/ Visited 28 December 2002) The project provided a basis for libraries to compare the cost of accessing various types of electronic materials in order to increase efficiency in the production and use of multimedia resources in libraries.

The DERAL project was intended to integrate library services with open learning and distance education programmes. It was started in May 1998 and ought to have ended sometime in the year 2000. The project also aimed to “...encourage the public libraries to play an increasingly important part in transferring information, knowledge and education to users who had difficulty in following normal course of study. This often applies to those living in rural areas, to the unemployed and to elderly or disabled people who cannot normally attend university, college or high school.” (http://www.cordis.eu/libs/en/ Visited 28 December 2002) The project aimed to demonstrate that education and library services could be extended to the rural areas and enable people to learn whilst in their various work places and areas of residence.
The project made use of multimedia learning resources that were geared on the national curricula. It also used self-paced training kits for inculcating information use skills. Encyclopedic resources were made available through networked databases, email facilities, access to electronic resources and digitised resources such as images, films, video and sound recordings were provided.

According to the CORDIS Home Page (Visited 28 December 2002) the BIBDEL project was started in February 1994 and ended in November 1995. It was put in place “…to explore, identify and improve the availability and accessibility to the remote users of the services provided modern library services by demonstrating that library services can be delivered to users at a distance instead of users being required to visit libraries. It recognises(ed) that many users who need to study do not have access to library services they need” (http://www.cordis.cu/libs/en/) ICTs can make this possible through the provision of cost effective remote access to library catalogues, databases, reference services and document delivery services.

Hence it can be seen from the above summaries of projects that utilised ICTs in providing and integrating open learning and distance education with library service provision that as succinctly pointed out by Rowland and Rubbert (2001:743), the “…distance learning programmes, with their distinctive information provision …, represent the best development of a new pedagogy for the information age.”

3.4.3. The use of ICTs in Africa

Yet the same cannot be said of ICT developments in most of the African countries in general and Zimbabwe in particular. In Africa, with the exception of South Africa, developments in the use of computers, telecommunications and networking technologies have been generally slow. The impact of the Internet on peoples’ lives is tending to show that its access locally, regionally and internationally is increasingly segregated to a few corporate organisations, institutions and a few rich elite (Roth 2001:174). It is being
limited to a few because of the huge capital outlay required to buy the computer, modem, efficient telecommunications and subscriptions to ISPs in order to be connected to the Internet.

The adoption of ICTs in Africa, and in Zimbabwe in particular, has been slow because of some of the following factors:

- Most African countries are least industrialised with the lowest per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), that is to say, low average incomes to the people. The low GDP entails little disposable income to afford the purchase of the ICTs and connectivity to the Internet becomes unaffordable. On the other hand, South Africa with a more advanced economy and better GDP than most Africa countries is therefore not surprisingly in the forefront of ICT developments.
- Africa lacks adequate and reliable telecommunications infrastructure;
- There is a general lack of foreign currency, ‘forex’, as there is little surplus to export on the competitive global markets thereby earning the hard currencies required to procure the ICTs and other telecommunication equipment;
- Hence the limited computers and other requisite hardware in turn becomes an inhibiting factor for the growth and expansion of ICTs in Africa;
- High percentages of illiteracy levels and hence low levels of skilled personnel to install, make use of, maintain and sustain the ICTs;
- According to Mambo (1999), about 90% of Africa’s population is located in rural areas which predominantly do not have access to ICTs since these technologies cannot spread to the rural areas due to lack of funds which are required to buy the relevant equipment; and
- Over-reliance on donor support for the supply of the much-needed hardware (Mambo 1999).

Until 1995, the Internet had been the preserve of the high-income earners in the developed countries. Even the poor in these countries could not, and still cannot, access the Internet. A digital divide is therefore a distinction that has come to be associated with those that have access to the new technologies, the Internet and other communication
technologies and those that do not as conceded by Irving (1999:1) who saw the digital divide as “...the divide between those with access to new technologies and those without.”

However, Internet connectivity has been on the increase since 1995. For instance, only 4 African countries were reported to have Internet connectivity in 1995. By 1999, this had risen to 51 countries (Balow 1999:1). Recently it has been shown that all of the 54 African countries now have Internet connectivity in their capital cities (http://paradigm.un.apc.org/africa/ Visited 28 December 2002). Internet users have also grown to more than one million and there are more than 150 000 ISPs in Africa.

As observed by Mambo (1999), Internet connectivity gained momentum through the use of electronic mail programs such as BitNet, FidoNet and Unix-to-Unix CoPy (UUCP). For instance, Mambo (1999) further noted that in the Southern African Development Committee (SADC) region, countries that had full internet connectivity including File Transfer Protocol (FTP) and Internet mail included Angola, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia (and Zimbabwe omitted in Mambo 1999). Malawi was noted to have at that time, a FidoNet email connection that is largely “...a personal computer-based dial up networking system.” (Mambo 1999:437)

A comparative analysis between Zimbabwe and South Africa will show that the latter is far better developed in terms of ICTs. For instance, it is said that Zimbabwe has 212 fixed lines, 55 mobile lines, about 20 000 dial up Internet subscribers, an international bandwidth of 4 096 kbps with 64K local and international link. It has 1 416 Internet Hosts and 10 Internet Access Providers. The Zimbabwe Post and Telecommunications (ZPTC) is the sole national telecommunications operator with a monopoly over the local loop (http://paradigm.un.apc.org/africa/countdet.CFM?countries_ISO_Code=ZW (2002))

On the other hand, South Africa is said to have 5 075 fixed lines, 2 500 mobile lines, 650 000 dial up Internet subscribers, an international bandwidth of 400 000 Kbps, 167 635 Internet Hosts, a 64K local and international link. There is competition in local loop, a
duopoly instead of monopoly. It has been acknowledged that the "... Internet market in South Africa is very much larger than any other on the continent, being in the top 20 Internet usage countries worldwide."


3.4.4. ICTs and the ZOU LIS

In its strategic plan, the Zimbabwe Open University has as one of key strategic objectives, to be an ICT driven institution. This was to be achieved through several operational objectives amongst which are the following:

- Facilitating information and data flow in teaching and learning processes, and establishing administrative linkages and networks;
- Providing for bulk data storage and retrieval systems;
- Procuring hardware and software for the university;
- Establishing an IT help desk; and

Yet today, not much has been done as yet to realise this strategic objective. Although a number of computers have been procured, largely through purchases, many more still need to be purchased particularly for use by the ZOU distance learners.

Similarly for the ZOU LIS, the University has the development of an effective and efficient LIS as one of its strategic objectives. The operational objectives for the LIS that are relevant in this section include the following:

- The acquisition of print and electronic information resources; and
- Library automation designed to put in place a virtual LIS and the procurement of an automated library management system (LIS business Strategic Plan for the Period 2002-2005 2002:np)
Here, like in the ICT strategic objectives, not much has been accomplished to this day in terms of ICT developments in the LIS. The lack of 'forex' and limited funding cited in the preceding section 3.5.3 coupled with bureaucratic procurement procedures have all contributed to low ICT developments in the LIS and Information Technology Service Units of the University.

Despite these limitations, the university as a whole does have access to the Internet through two ISPs, Ecoweb and Mweb. A direct radio link to the Post and Telecommunications Corporation (PTC), the local telecommunications authority, allows the university to have access to Internet Mail. Electronic mail is also spread throughout the university's regional centres. However, access to the email is still limited to one workstation, which in most cases is often located in the Regional Administrator's Office. This in itself is very limiting to the use of the service. The distance learners do not have any access to the Internet in the university, as there are no facilities and physical structures to house the computers for use by the students. The Libraries do not have even a computer for use by the Regional Centre Library Assistants, let alone for accessing by the students.

Therefore if ICTs are to be fully developed in the ZOU, there is need to ensure that the distance learners have access to computers. For instance it was reported that at the Open University (OU) in the United Kingdom (UK), "...65% of students have access to computer equipment...." (Carty et al 1996:306). This access to ICTs assures some measure of computer use skills among the OU distance learners, which is critical in the optimum use of ICTs in libraries. These skills enable the distance learners to "...feel (overly) confident about the technology (such as)...the use of databases, document delivery and the Internet." (Carty et al 1996:307).

Hence the ZOU needs to put in place, through its IT Service Unit, a robust network that would facilitate networking of all libraries in the ZOU LIS system thus also linking the National Centre library to the regional centre libraries spread out throughout the country's ten regions as pointed in section 1.1 of chapter one. The network will need to
be of high capacity to ensure that high quality and high performance services such as transmitting digital images or videoconferencing, is made possible over the network.

As in the OU 'open' library systems, the ZOU distance learners will need to be allotted access to the network either through a serial connection or Point-to-Point Protocol (PPP) connection (Carty et al 1996). The serial connection would enable the student machines to be set up as terminals from which they would be able to access the ZOU LIS electronic services and access the LIS OPAC and catalogues from other libraries through a text-based WWW browser such as LYNX, Explorer or Netscape.

The Point-to-Point Protocol enables students to have access to full Internet connection and the use of graphic-based WWW browsers, telnet and file transfer protocols. The University will need to make available to the students, through its Library system, a PC and a modem with a file transfer rate of 28 000 bits per second (Carty et al 1996).

Document delivery services being offered to distance learners at the OU, UK, will also need to be offered in the ZOU LIS. Such services can be offered through options such as the 'one-stop-search' services and the full-text delivery to screen available with some databases. The former service entails searching and document ordering from one database. Once electronic resources have been identified, the documents will be requested and delivered by facsimile, mail or by courier. In the latter document delivery service, the database only allows the searching and identification of required resources. The ordering of the information resources is done via another database. The delivery through fax, email/'snail' mail or by courier will then be done by yet another service provider.

The full-text delivery to screen service appears to be the most suitable that the ZOU LIS might like to consider implementing since it is convenient and the information is accessed immediately. It might on the other hand means users spending a bit longer on the machine searching and identifying required information. Added with a slow browser
as well as the peak and off-peak searching times, the service may be affected in its efficiency.

The ZOU LIS would also need to consider the videoconferencing programs discussed earlier in sub-section 3.5.2. These would be used to offer user-education, current awareness and marketing of LIS programmes to distance learners. Computer conferencing and videoconferencing would be sued to supplement course materials thus adding an extra dimension to distance learning. The LIS, with the assistance of the IT Unit, would need to identify and select appropriate conferencing systems.

The LIS could also consider offering WWW services. The large gamut of electronic resources that is increasingly and readily becoming available on the Internet and the Web, for free or at cost would make it incumbent upon the LIS to select and vet the amount and quality of resources for use by its users. There are also direct implications to students such as cost, ability to surf the Internet and the Web, the availability of time since they have other socio-economic commitments elsewhere, and the ability to select relevant and high quality resources from chaff which can be likened to finding a needle from the haystack. Carty (1996:312) observed the same problems with the OU distance learners when she noted that, “The ease with which students can make links from one source to another means that they can spend a lot of time, and money on telephone charges, following up leads which do not necessarily take them to the information they require.”

Hence the students would need to be taught what search engines to use, what authoritative databases to consult, which information gateways to use such as the Social Science Information Gateways (SOSIG) and Bulletin Board for Libraries (BUBL). These provide access to quality information.

The LIS would also need to establish an information service help-desk. Although it is common to find such help desks being offered by the IT or Computing service units of universities, it would be important for the LIS to have such an information help-desk which handles issues to do with the content of information rather than the conduit or
medium through which information passes, the latter being the preserve of the Central Computing help-desks (Carty 1996:312). Such a help-desk would need to be readily available to the distance learners during day- and night times, hence the need for it to operate round the clock. Contact to such a help desk could be made possible by the provision of dedicated fax, telephone lines, email and the WWW conferencing system.

In using the ICTs, the LIS would also need to consider the use of online help materials on the use of databases, electronic resources and document delivery services. Such online instructional materials could be provided via the LIS’s Web pages and it could be provided on CD-ROM and other multi-media formats. Here again the self-help instructional materials such as the EDUCATE programme discussed in sub-section 3.5.1. could be used to design such online help materials.

In order for the ZOU LIS to be able to offer the services, there is need for it to put in place staff with the requisite technical infrastructure skills that are required to link all the services discussed in the preceding sections. The staff would need authoring and presentation skills required to produce instructional materials. Otherwise, the LIS would need to rely on expertise abounding within the university from its Research and Development Unit which is in charge of the production of highly interactive and self-paced learning and study materials. Moreover, the LIS staff ought to have improved attitudes and public relations skills to serve the distance learners whose confidence in using ICTs to search and access information resources, would need to be gained through assurance and being made to feel at ease.

3.5. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER THREE

It has been essential to demonstrate in chapter three the growing importance of open learning and distance education in tertiary institutions globally and in particular in the ZOU. It is offering equal opportunity to all peoples previously under-privileged to access education at all levels, and in tertiary institutions in particular. It has also been of significant importance to understand the characteristics of distance learners that are most
likely to influence the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the ZOU. These will be major areas of foci in the investigations.

An analysis of global trends in the provision of library and information service support systems to distance learners, academe and researchers, is critical to the study as it provides an insight on how to develop strategic plans and initiatives in the provision of appropriate services to the ZOU distance learners. Guidelines on appropriate distance education library service provision such as promulgated in the ACRL (1998) guidelines, The 2000 Canadian guidelines, the Kascus and Aguiler (1988) model and Brophy’s (In Gibson et al. 1999) template of distance education library services, provide concrete examples of practical library service provision to distance learners and academe.

It is evident throughout the literature that libraries in distance education institutions play a critical role in maintaining high standards in their teaching, learning and research endeavours. To this end, there is therefore the need for such libraries to provide equitable services as offered in on-campus libraries and made more special by the special characteristics, environments and locations of distance learners further afield from the resident institutions. The need for cooperation with other unaffiliated university and college libraries in this endeavour cannot be over-emphasized. This is particularly so since no one library can adequately serve all the needs of its users, particularly in the case if serving an extensive and widely disbursed user population in distance education.

An analysis of the impact of information and communication technologies on education in today’s information age served to show that the same ICT’s being used to support distance education would need to be harnessed to support library and information service provision in open learning and distance education libraries. ICTs would need to be used to support user education programmes, to provide reference and advisory services, to contact students, academic and support staff at remote locations and to provide linkages and networks between public libraries, schools, further education colleges and other university libraries. This is necessary because the global information environment is being rapidly transformed by the use of ICTs in the higher education sector as observed
by Rowland and Rubbert (2001:758). It was further noted, however, that despite the proliferation of ICTs in developed countries and how the use of electronic facilities are making information gathering a lot easier for distance learners, “…there is still a long way to go until institutional information services are optimised in the HE sector [in developing countries in general and in Zimbabwe in particular]” (Rowland and Rubbert 2001:758)
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the research design and methodology that was used to investigate the information seeking patterns of distance learners who use the ZOU Library and Information Services.

4.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was planned to gather and analyse data pertaining to the information seeking patterns of distance learners enrolled with the Zimbabwe Open University. The study was initiated in order to identify and understand the possible under-utilisation of the ZOU LIS, which was put in place to support the teaching, learning and research activities of the distance learners. It is in the context of this problem that the purpose of the study is to enable the LIS management to plan and adopt requisite strategies to either sustain or refocus and re-engineer the library and information service provision in distance education environments.

According to Saunders et al (2000:85) and Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:34), the study preferred to use both the positivist and the interpretive research paradigms to investigate the experiences of and patterns followed by distance learners as they seek for information. The study planned to collect qualitative and quantitative data by surveying the distance learners registered with the ZOU. It sought to determine how often and how much use is made of the LIS, what information is required by distance learners, where do they go to get it, how do they get it, what problems do they face in getting the information and whether the distance learners have the requisite library use skills.

The investigation asked questions pertaining to the peculiar characteristics, circumstances and problems that affect the search for information by distance learners. It also attempted to understand whether the characteristics of distance learners influences them to seek information elsewhere instead of using the university’s library and information service that has been specifically put in place to support their learning experiences.
The study therefore adopted the systematic random survey research methodology (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999) as its principal research design to investigate the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the ZOU. These are the same students who would be expected to use the university's LIS. The systematic random survey method was preferred to other research strategies precisely because it is largely regarded as the most authoritative method used in the social, business and management research (Saunders et al. 2000). Ordinary people can readily understand this method and it allows the investigator to have much control over the research process (Saunders, et. al. 2000:94).

The randomised survey method is predominantly descriptive and it is widely used in studies that need to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from a random sample population. As aptly noted by Terre Blanche and Durrheim, the research design adopted by the study is therefore "...coherent because the techniques of sampling, data collection and interpretation as well as the context of the study 'fit' within the logic of the interpretive paradigm and with the purpose of the research." (1999:35)

The research methodology also refers to the procedures and steps that this researcher took to locate and collect data, which addresses the identified research problem in accordance with the research design.

The systematic random survey method was appropriate in obtaining data, which was amenable to descriptive analysis and the presentation of a broader overview of a representative population that was selected through systematic random sampling. There was need to collect qualitative data from a sample population of the distance learners registered with the ZOU. Since this study investigated ZOU distance learners, this method was found to be the most suitable as the student population studied is quite large. The study proved the viability and suitability of the survey method with such large populations. Saunders et al (2000:94) thus correctly noted the suitability of the survey methodologies when they observed that "They allow the collection of a large amount of
data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way. ... (they are considered) authoritative by people in general.”

The survey methodology was preferred as it allows the researcher to work independently in one’s own time, decide on what appropriate survey instrument to use and the ability for the researcher to be more in control over the research process, that is to say, the ability to decide when to design, pilot test and administer the survey instruments. The methodology was also preferred for its affordability and less time consuming in a distance learning environment where there is a large number of students who are invariably scattered over a large geographical area.

4.2. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The survey method preferred to use the questionnaire instrument only to gather data mainly because of the nature of distance education and the characteristics of distance learners. Structured interview protocols, personal interviews, telephone interviews and participant and non-participant observation techniques that were used in other studies (Aitchison 1989; Kaniki 1989; Chen and Hernon 1982) were not preferred in this study because of the large expenses associated with these survey instruments in distance learning environments or where the survey population is widely scattered over wide geographical areas. The ZOU distance learners are engaged in work activities or other social commitments and are far removed and widely scattered throughout the country.

Added to the above advantages, questionnaires also enable respondents to feel much at ease to answer questions even of a personal nature and they can afford to be more open and honest. Mailed questionnaires can remove or limit the element of bias, as observed by Monette et al, which can occur “...when an interviewer influences a person’s response to a question through what the interviewer says, his or her tone of voice or demeanour.” (1990:181)
Hoinville and Jowell (1978) also noted the inexpensiveness of using the questionnaire survey instrument compared to interviews when it was pointed that "It normally costs no more than a third of what a comparable interview survey costs." As conceded by Monette et al. (1990) the mailed or postal questionnaires save on the need to hire interviewers and the payment of travelling and subsistence costs.

Hence the questionnaire was seen to be the most convenient method of contacting distance learners. Because of their unique characteristics identified in subsection 3.2 of Chapter 3, the distance learners are remotely located further away from this researcher and most of them are gainfully employed in various work situations or have other social commitments elsewhere. The advantages of the questionnaire survey instrument in a typical distance-learning environment were succinctly summed when it was pointed out that they are able to:

reach isolated areas and those members of the population whom interviews find it difficult to catch at home; they remove the problems of sending interviewers to outlying areas (or rural areas), of having them work in the evenings in inner city areas and of making numerous abortive visits to the homes of those people who are rarely in between 9.00am and 9.00pm. (Hoinville and Jowell 1978:124)

Monette et al. (1990:181), share the same view when they noted that postal questionnaires also "...enable one to collect data from a sample that is geographically dispersed."

As a popular research tool, the questionnaire was used to solicit information from distance learners who were required to provide answers to the same set of questions (Saunders et.al. 2000:278). The questions reflected the research objectives and research questions of this investigation. Data on the major research areas as determined by the research questions and the research objectives were collected.
Firstly, the questionnaire was used to collect data regarding the extent and frequency of use of the LIS and any other neighbouring information resource centre(s). Secondly, it sought to determine where else the distance learners go to seek for information and whether they get the information that they seek. Thirdly, the questionnaire had to establish how far the distance learners live and have to travel to and from the ZOU LIS and any other information provider(s). Fourthly, the study investigated the information seeking situations that compel distance learners to seek for information.

This approach was borrowed from the methodology extant in the study of information seeking patterns of library users (Kaniki 1989; Chen and Hernon 1982). The approach used by Chen and Hernon who investigated the “...context of the circumstances of the situation in which the individual was forced to recognise and take steps to alleviate an information need” (1982:16), was used for this study.

The questionnaire asked the respondents questions in a step-by-step procedure in order to determine the specific situations in the past month or so, from the time they were responding to the questionnaire, when they needed information to solve a problem, to carry out a task or to find an answer to a question. This is what Radford (1996:127) called the critical incident technique which seeks to “…gather and analyse the most memorable experiences, not necessarily the most recent….” It depends on whether the respondents are able to recall totally those specific incidences that would have occurred some time ago. Stilwell (2002:67) also employed the qualitative critical incident approach to assess the information behaviour of sex workers in determining their information needs and use of information channels or information sources and information providers in the Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi area of the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. In this study, after identifying the situations that caused their information needs, the respondents were asked to state the specific question that they needed to answer, why they needed to answer the particular question and where they had to go to seek for that information.

The critical incident technique was employed to gather qualitative data and make inferences about the information seeking patterns, as a behaviour mode that the distance
learners exhibit based on past experiences in seeking for information that addresses particular needs. Such information seeking patterns occur when the respondents cannot readily get that piece of information required, that is to say, the data collected was used to determine whether distance learners registered with the ZOU resorted to seek for information elsewhere other than the ZOU LIS.

According to Shirey (1971:286) “the application of the critical incident technique to user-orientated, information flow studies can serve to erase the label “opinion polls” from user need studies and to introduce psychometric rigour into the research methods.” Hence by investigating the context of the circumstances that led the respondents to need a piece of information, the study attempted to identify an adequate sample of behaviour among distance learners that could be used to make inferences for the whole group of distance learners.

Fifth, the questionnaire also investigated whether the distance learners used any of the information sources listed in the questionnaire to address an information need that they felt in the past month or so. Sixth, the questionnaire considered whether the respondents accessed other information providers. This was necessary to determine the value placed on these by the distance learners, vis a vis, the ZOU LIS. Seven, the questionnaire solicited the opinions of the respondents on whether they thought the ZOU should concentrate on providing comprehensive learning kits instead of providing library resources and services.

Other relevant data such as age, gender, marital status, education levels and professional education qualifications and socio-economic activities that the distance learners are involved in, were collected and analysed to establish the peculiar characteristics of distance learners that impact on their information seeking patterns. These characteristics were identified and discussed in the preceding section 3.2 of Chapter 3.
4.3 THE STUDY POPULATION

The target population was the distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University. At the time of carrying out the survey, these numbered a total of 18,223 students as shown in the automated records of the Academic Registry office of the university. This student population formed the survey population. Using guidelines from Saunders et al. (2000:155) and R.V. Krejcie and D.W. Morgan’s model (cited in Leedy 1997:211) for determining appropriate sample sizes in given population sizes, this study adopted the nearest recommended sample size of 377 for a population of 20,000 students (Krejcie and Morgan 1977:211). Sampling to this smaller population was a necessary process that was used to select cases that were included in the study. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:274) concur that “All empirical research is conducted on a sample of cases, which may be individuals, groups, organisations or archive documents.”

Furthermore, sampling allowed this researcher to make use of a small but representative group, which was easy and less expensive to manage compared to studying a large population. Sarantokas (1998:139) advocates, “…sampling enables the researcher to study a relatively small number of units in place of the target population, and to obtain data that are representative of the whole target population…. (sampling is therefore) the process of choosing the units of the target population which are to be included in the study.”

4.4. SELECTION OF CASES IN SAMPLE SIZE

Systematic random sampling was employed in order to select the individual cases within the stratified sample size (Saunders et al 2000). This method was used to enforce strict probability rules in the selection process and to ensure that every unit of the population had an equal, calculable and non-zero probability of being selected for inclusion in the sample size. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:276) “In probability sampling, (authors’ highlight) every element in the target population must have a known chance of being selected into the sample.”
Although the disadvantages with this procedure are said to be high costs, time consuming, requiring a large sample size and units being widely scattered, these worked well for this study of distance learners who are distantly located and widely scattered over a wide geographical area. Moreover systematic sampling is a widely acknowledged and accepted technique in social research because of what is succinctly seen by Sarantokas as “...its high reliability, degree of representativeness and high generalisability of results.” (1998:141)

In order to ensure that all the distance learners had an equal opportunity of being included in the sample size, that is to say probability or random sampling of the distance learners, this researcher had to create sampling frames first. The frames, which were lists of all distance learners who were registered with the ZOU at the time of undertaking the survey, were computer generated from the student records held in the Academic Registry of the ZOU. The assistance of the Information Technology (IT) service unit was sought as there were problems relating to missing or omitted records as a result of the shortfalls with the database management software in use at the time of the survey.

The student records also needed to be sorted out using fields that this researcher preferred to be included in the sampling frames. These fields included the student’s name with the surname appearing first; the student’s address; the region where the student is enrolled; and the enrolment details listed by programme, level and year of study. The name and address enabled the selection of identifiable subjects and the address was needed to send the questionnaire by post and also for following up purposes. Related to the address were the Regional Centre details where each student was enrolled. The programme details were meant to ensure that all the programmes offered in the university at the various levels and year offered were comprehensively covered.

In order to ensure that each distance learner registered with the ZOU at that time had an equal opportunity or a known probability of selection into the sample, a unique number was generated in the computer as the student lists were generated and assigned to each student in a numerical sequence arranged in an ascending order starting from the number 112.
one (1) to n (where n is the 18 223rd student). Using the sample size of 377 students suggested in the sampling conventions suggested by Krejcie and Morgan’s model in Leedy (1997) as mentioned above, these were then selected from the sampling frame.

The selection of 377 cases within the population size was done through the establishment of a sampling fraction, which according to Saunders (2000:162), “...is the proportion of the total population that you need to select...” This was achieved by dividing the sample size of 377 with the total student population of 18 223 (Saunders et al 2000). This gave sample fraction of 1/48.33, that is to say, an interval ratio of 1:48.33. The interval ratio was rounded off to 48 since it is not possible to get a fraction of an individual. This meant that every 48th student was selected from the sample frame until all the 377 cases were selected. In order to ensure a random selection of the cases, the first case from which to begin the selection was done through the random selection of any number between 1 and 48. The number was picked on the sampling frame when the researcher was not looking at the frames with the assistance of a colleague. All the 377 cases were picked after the 48th count from the randomly selected number (Saunders 2000).

4.5. PRE-TESTING OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

With the expert advice of this researcher’s supervisor and the contributions from lecturers in the Programme of Information Studies in the School of Human and Social Sciences at the University of Pietermaritzburg, who critiqued the survey instrument, the researcher was able to develop and refine the instrument before it could be pre-tested. The questionnaire was also peer-reviewed and critiqued by colleagues in the Programme who were at various levels of undertaking research in their own topics. Their professional advice also contributed to the development of the survey instrument.

The questionnaire was pre-tested during the first week of September 2002 in order to ensure that the respondents would not find it difficult to answer the questions and record their responses. Appendix B shows the pre-tested questionnaire. The pre-test also enabled this researcher to assess the validity of the questions and whether the data collected
would be reliable. The data so collected in the pilot test were analysed to ensure that the
data presented by the respondents was indeed being sought by the questions in the
investigations.

A total of 50 questionnaires were distributed in the pre test. The number for the pre test
was determined at 50 to enable the pilot test to cover the five levels of study at each of
the ten regional centres. The questionnaires were therefore 12.1 more than the 37.9 (10%)
of the sample size that is generally recommended for purposes of pilot testing (Aitchison
1998).

The pre testing was conducted within a period of one week. This time period was stated
in the introductory letter that was attached to the pre-test questionnaire. The introduction
letter is supplied on Appendix A. The questionnaires were given to regional centre LAs
who were attending a CDS/ISIS workshop that was organised by this researcher on 09
September 2002. The questionnaires were subsequently returned, by courier mail service,
to this researcher during the week of 16 September 2002. The limited time period was
meant to evaluate the speed with which subjects would take to complete and return the
questionnaire.

The LAs were requested to consciously select the respondents in the above stated
categories at each regional centre. This conscious selection was meant to ensure that as
much feedback as was feasibly possible on the questionnaire was acquired from all the
representative subjects in each stratum. It was hoped that the effect of being known
through the conscious selection would also influence the quick return of the completed
questionnaire in much the same way the subjects would be identified in the systematic
random stratified sampling from the sample frames.

As in all pre tests, the following critical issues noted in Saunders (2000) were tested:

- The clarity of the questions;
- Whether the layout of the questionnaire was clear and attractive;
- The correct spelling, wording and numbering of the questions;
• Detecting unclear and ambiguous questions;
• Omission of relevant questions that ought to be asked;
• Whether there were any questions the respondents were uneasy to answer; and
• Any other comments that the respondents noted.

The questionnaire was duly amended after the pre-test. Appendix C gives the amended survey questionnaire after the pre-test.

4.6. DATA COLLECTION

The survey method was supported by the use of self-administered questionnaires that were send by ordinary mail to distance learners. In cases where the subjects were within easy reach of any of the regional centres, the questionnaires were hand delivered by the researcher with the assistance of regional centre Library Assistants (LAs) and tutors. The LAs were instructed to hand-deliver the questionnaires to the subjects when they visited the regions for fortnightly weekend tutorials, to write in-class tests and examinations, to collect or deliver assignments and to make use of the library. Most of the questionnaires were sent by post to the distance learners using the addresses obtained from the computer-generated student lists of the Academic Registry.

Self-addressed envelopes with postage stamps attached were enclosed in the outgoing mail. This was done in order to ensure a high rate of return since it had become quite expensive to most people to send ordinary mail. The researcher had wanted to use the self-addressed envelope with postage paid as an incentive to the distance learners to return the questionnaires. The addresses on the sampling frame were also used to track down on questionnaires not returned by the date stipulated in the accompanying introductory letter attached to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed throughout the ten regional centres as determined by the systematic selection done of all the cases. As the survey results will show, systematic sampling enabled a fair representation of all the regions in the cases that were selected.
This wide coverage enabled the study to embrace the wide variation of situations, both urban and rural, the socio-economic status, education and the varying opportunities that the distance learners have in accessing information sources (Chen and Hemon 1982). By embracing the varied contextual circumstances, the study determined if such variations had any effect on the information seeking patterns of distance learners who come from areas without public or academic libraries and those from urban centres that have a whole range of public, college and university libraries.

4.7. RESPONSE RATE

In survey research, it is generally accepted that it is important to gain the people's cooperation so that they can provide the data that is required for purposes of meeting the requirements of the study (Monette et al 1990). Adequate data collected would enable the researcher to make meaningful generalisations about the group of people being studied. Yet Hoinville and Jowell (1978:130) observed that “The most daunting problem in a postal survey is to ensure that the response level will be high enough to give confidence that the respondents are reasonably representative of the total population sampled.”

Of the 377 questionnaires that were sent, a total of 183 were returned making this a 48.5% response rate. It is noted in the literature that high response rates of 70% can be achieved in postal surveys (Hoinville and Jowell 1978). It is also acknowledged by the same authors that it is possible for the response rate to drop to as much as 50%. On the other hand, Owen and Jones in Saunders (2000:158) observe that response rate in postal surveys can even be much lower than 40% when they commented that for “…postal surveys a response rate of approximately 30 percent is reasonable.” Monette et al (1990:174) also acknowledge that response rates with questionnaires can drop to as “…an unacceptably low 20 percent to levels that rivals those of interviews (which can be as much as 90%)” Rowland and Rubbert (2001:748) managed to get a 48% response rate from the questionnaires distributed in their evaluation of the information needs and practices of part-time and distance-learning students.
Hence it is generally accepted that postal surveys do not largely guarantee a high response rate. In the case of this study, several major factors contributed to the low response rate. The first major reason had to do with the period in the year when the survey was conducted. The first batch of questionnaires was sent out to distance learners during the first week of October. The last quarter of the year is a crucial period for the distance learners registered with the ZOU. This is the time when students would be preparing to write their end of semester and hence end of year examinations. Hence the questionnaire could have been left aside as the students concentrated on revising and studying for the examinations and in-class tests that were due in November and December 2002.

Indeed this researcher had to follow up on questionnaires that were not returned mostly by students who lived in and around the greater Harare city and were registered with the Harare Regional Centre. The following up was done at the examination halls where in-class tests and year-end examinations were being written.

As noted by Hoinville and Jowell, non- and late-respondents are more likely to be “…elderly, disengaged or withdrawn live in urban, rather than suburban or rural areas (who) feel that they may be judged by the responses that they make...”. The researcher noted this assertion when questionnaires were being returned. It was interesting to note that the respondents in most of the outlying regional centres compared to the Harare region returned about 50% of the questionnaires. Yet in his investigation of the library services offered by the ZOU to its distance learners, Chikono (2000) managed to get an 88% response rate from a total of 118 questionnaires distributed in the Harare region.

Another reason was the limited time that was available in which to ensure a high rate of return of the questionnaires. The survey was carried out within the month of October and November. The first questionnaires were sent out during the first week of October. Those who were located in the outlying regions and in the rural areas, received the questionnaires after two weeks. It would take another two weeks to return the completed questionnaire. As a result, most of the questionnaires returned were received well after
the first deadline of 30 October 2002. A second batch was sent to those who had not responded with a due date of 22 November 2002. This deadline was given in order for the researcher to be able to return to the University of Natal in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, to analyse and report on the survey results by 30 November 2002. Hence it is possible that more questionnaires could have kept trickling in long after the researcher had left Zimbabwe.

Added to the time factor was the slow mail delivery system that affects the whole country particularly for those outlying rural areas where some of the distance learners are located. Some areas lack mail delivery systems to the doorstep and people have to collect mail from a central district office, school or police post. These centres are often situated great distances from the places of accommodation of most distance learners. These reasons therefore contributed to the slow response and the limited response that was received for the study.

It is therefore acknowledged that an element of bias exists in all response rates that are short of a 100% success rate. Moreover, as the response rate drops below 100%, the sample becomes less and less representative (Saunders et al 2000). It is in view of these arguments that the response rate of 48.5% was accepted by the researcher and the interpretation of the results and the generalisations to the survey population, would be done with caution.

4.8. DATA ANALYSIS

The questionnaire was used to gather quantitative and qualitative data. This data was used to meet the research objectives and to answer the research questions. Quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques were employed to establish statistical relationships between variables (Saunders 2000:326). Hence tables and bar graphs were used to show the frequency of occurrence of variables and to determine their relationships.
4.8.1. Coding of data

The coding was done after the data was collected. The data was checked and cleaned of any errors before it was recorded in matrix tables using the statistical software package, SPSS, which is popularly used to analyse statistical data in the social sciences. Most of the data were recorded using numerical values such as 1 and 2. Saunders et al. (2000:334) correctly notes that “Each variable for each case in [the] data set should have a code.” These codes were assigned to closed questions that required a ‘No’ or ‘Yes’ answer as well as for multiple response questions. Numerical values at each of the variables were assigned in a numerical sequence according to the way they were arranged in the questionnaire.

For instance, in a multiple response question such as question 24 in the questionnaire where respondents were asked to indicate as many sources as possible that they had consulted for information to answer the questions they had in their particular situations, each source, that is, books or journals, consult a friend, own experiences, the ZOU LIS, colleagues at the work place, another library, own tutor, and reading newspapers and magazines, were coded as individual variables in the matrix and the selection of any of the sources was coded as a ‘No’ or ‘Yes’ response and values of 1 and 2 respectively were assigned at each variable. A total count of the frequency of occurrence at each variable was made to determine the frequency of use of each source and compared with the next variable or information source.

Qualitative data was obtained from open-ended questions. The analysis of qualitative data was also done after the data was collected. A database with all possible answers to the question was created in SPSS. A computer print out was made of each open-ended question with the answers. These were manually analysed and similar responses were grouped together to facilitate the counting of the frequency of occurrence of the similar responses. Tables and graphs were also used to establish relationships between variables that had this qualitative data.
4.8.2. Coding of missing data

Where there was missing data, the default missing data code in SPSS was used. The data was considered missing if an answer to a question was not required and respondents were instructed to go to or skip another section of the same question or to a succeeding question through a process known as filtering (de Vaus cited in Saunders 2000:334). In some instances, there were non-responses since the respondents did not have any opinions and left the question blank.

4.9. EVALUATION OF THE METHODOLOGY

This section outlines how the survey methodology was assured of getting credible research findings. As pointed out by Saunders (2000:100), it is difficult to know with certainty that the answers given by respondents in a survey represent the actual behaviour or feeling and opinions of the respondents. Given this possibility of not getting the whole truth about an issue under investigation, it is acknowledged in the literature that “All you can do is to reduce the possibility of getting the answers wrong.” It is recommended that this can be done through paying particular attention to the reliability and validity of the research findings.

4.9.1. Reliability

Reliability refers to how well the survey instrument can be used to generate similar results in different situations. This is what Chikono (2000:15) considered as consistency of performance of the research instrument. Saunders et al (2000:100) called it the deductive approach which is meant to determine whether “…the measure yield the same results on different occasions?” The inductive approach (Saunders 2000:100) can also be used to determine whether it is possible for different researchers to employ the same survey method to gather similar observations obtaining in the study.
The preference for using the questionnaire survey technique, as pointed out in the preceding section 4.2, was done in order to minimise on some of the known critical issues (Saunders 2000:101) that threaten reliability such as subject bias, observer bias and observer error. These issues are associated with survey methods such as interviews and participatory and non-participatory observation. Monette et al (1990) noted that mailed questionnaires remove or limit the possibility of influencing a person’s responses through an interviewer presence in interviews and in observation surveys. People may not feel free to provide answers to certain question that may be regarded as sensitive from a personal point of view, socially, politically or economically. People may experience the ‘Hawthorne effect’ and may want to behave in a particular way either to please, or otherwise, the interviewer or observer. Hence the questionnaire was selected in order to limit the possible compromise on reliability of the research findings.

The questionnaire survey was also chosen because, as pointed out in subsection 4.2, it was seen to be the most inexpensive considering the distribution of the distance learners over great distances hence the associated high costs of travel, subsistence and manpower required if interviews were used.

4.9.2. Validity

Validity refers to how well the research instrument measures what it is supposed to measure and whether the findings “…are really about what they appear to be about” (Saunders 2000:101). The study employs in the main the survey methodology. The questionnaire was designed to establish whether any significant relationship existed between, on one hand, variables of distance learners such as travel time, work commitments, family commitments, age, educational background and learning style and free time available and on the other hand, variables on use of LIS such as the opening times, the adequacy of resources, assistance and responsiveness of library staff and ZOU tutors. It was envisaged that such relationships could reveal some information seeking patterns among distance learners that were to be surveyed (Rowland and Rubbert
2001:758). To this end, the study employed the methodologies extant in the sub-field of information seeking patterns of the generic field of library user studies (Janneh 2001; Rowland and Rubbert 2001; Sprague 1994; Zondi 1991; Kaniki 1989; Krikelas 1983; Chen and Hemon 1982).

Thus the questionnaire instrument asked, among other questions, about the socio-demographic and educational factors that apply to all the distance learners. It sought to establish their socio-economic commitments as they apply to each of the respondents. It sought to identify how the needs for information arose in each of the respondents by asking the respondents to recall incidents or situations in the past month or so when they needed to answer a question, solve a problem or to accomplish a given task. By employing the critical incident technique, the validity of the findings depended on how well the respondents succeeded in recalling totally those particular situations that made them want to solve such questions. The researcher was assured of valid findings as this method was employed in other studies before (Radford 1996; Kaniki 1989; Chen and Hemon 1982; Shirey 1971).

By employing the research methodologies used in other studies as explained above, it was anticipated that the research findings can be replicated to other research settings such as other open learning and distance education institutions (Saunders 2002:102). Hence the emphasis on investigating the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University, assured this generalisability of findings to other distance learning institutions. This way, the external validity (Saunders et al 2000:102) of the survey methodology is assured. The survey instrument was designed to collect data from across the whole spectrum of distance learners registered with the ZOU regardless of programme of study, year of study and regional location of the distance learners. Thus any form of bias was removed through the systematic random sampling technique that was used to select the individual cases in the sample size as already outlined in the preceding section 4.4.
The data collected will be analysed and interpreted in the following chapters five and six in line with the set research problem, the research objectives and research questions that were outlined in chapter one. By doing this, the study will present its findings and conclusions in a coherent manner.

4.10. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER FOUR

Chapter four presented and discussed the research methodology that was followed by this study. The study adopted the systematic random survey methodology as its principal research design to investigate the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the ZOU. The survey method used the postal questionnaire instrument to gather data that was amenable to generalising, with some caution as a result of the low response rate, across the distance learners registered with the ZOU. It was anticipated that the findings of this study could also be replicated to other open learning and distance education institutions. The questionnaire was preferred mainly for its relatively low cost and its internal validity strength compared to interviews and observation techniques. The questionnaire was pre-tested before it was administered to ensure that it would gather the expected data and that it was coherent to the respondents.

The use of the systematic random sampling techniques to select individual cases in the sample size assured a fair chance for any student to be selected for inclusion in the sample size. Although a 48.5% response rate was achieved, it was shown in the literature surveyed that it is common to find such a response rate with postal surveys (Owen and Jones cited in Saunders 2000; Monette et al 1990). This researcher therefore preferred to make cautious generalisations of the survey results in view of this low response.

The data gathered was first cleaned, then coded and analysed using the current statistical package SPSS, Version 11.0 which is commonly used in social science research. The methodology used was evaluated to outline its credibility to assure the reliability and validity of the research findings. The following chapter five therefore provides a report of the survey results.
CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

5.1. BACKGROUND TO THE SURVEY

This Chapter discusses the results of the survey of the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). The survey was carried out using a questionnaire that was sent by post to 377 distance learners who were systematically sampled and selected from a total student population of 18 223 distance learners who were registered with the ZOU at the time of conducting the survey.

The sample size of 377 came from a table of population and sample sizes that was configured by Krejcie and Morgan (in Saunders 2000:211). Chikono (2000:17) also used the same table in his study. The latter recommend in their table a sample size of 377 for a population size of 20 000. As the ZOU student population was near the 20 000 mark, the researcher adapted the same sample size.

Out of a total of 377 questionnaires distributed, a total of 183 questionnaires were returned making this a 48.5% response rate. The preceding subsection 4.5 of Chapter 4 has attempted to give some possible explanation to this rather low response rate. However, given the size of the population investigated, the researcher believed the response rate could, with some caution, be used to make generalisations about the total distance learners registered with the ZOU at the time of conducting the survey.

The data collected was coded, analysed and interpreted using quantitative analysis software, the SPSS version 11.0 for Windows. This largely entailed using "...simple tables or diagrams, which show the frequency of occurrence through establishing statistical relationships between variables..." (Saunders et. al. 2000:326). This chapter analysed and presented the data obtained in the survey. In order for the study to be regarded as ethical, sound and honest, it was based on an objective analysis of the collected data and also gave due acknowledgement to other works used in the study to
explain and support concepts that are not the investigator’s own. The investigator strove to maintain integrity of data as well as give due respect to other people’s works by making proper and standard citations throughout the study.

5.2. RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY

The questionnaire was arranged to cover seven main areas of research as outlined in Chapter 4. The areas covered include the following:

- The demography of the distance learners such as the age, gender, marital status and their area of residence;
- The education levels such as the school, high school, college and university education, professional education, current studies and the year of study;
- The socio-economic activities of the distance learners to determine whether they are engaged in formal or informal employment, what free time they have from their socio-economic commitments for reading purposes or making use of libraries, whether they are able to pay for their own tuition and reading materials;
- The information seeking situations that propel the distance learners to want to look for information materials;
- What sources of information are used by the distance learners;
- Whether they have access to information providers;
- Their use of the ZOU LIS;
- Their use of other libraries besides the ZOU LIS; and
- Establishing how the distance learners perceive the importance of libraries vis a vis their learning materials.

5.2.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of distance learners

As outlined in the preceding chapter three, it is critical to identify the discussed characteristics of distance learners. The questionnaire was used to identify the
characteristics, which have a bearing on the information seeking patterns of distance learners in general and those registered with the ZOU in particular.

5.2.1.1 Age of distance learners

The accompanying Figure 1 illustrates the responses that were given to question one. It is clear that the majority of the respondents were indeed mature students in the 26 to 45 years age group. This finding concurs with Chikono (2001) who also established that 55% of respondents in his study were in the age range of 26 to 40 years. A total of 53 respondents, representing 29.4% of the respondents, were aged between 31-35 years. This is followed by the second largest group of 49 (27.2%) respondents who were in the age range of 36-40 years. The third largest group with 28 respondents (15.6%) were in the 26-30 age group. Only two (1.1%) and one (0.6) of the respondents were in the 15-20 and above 56 years age groups respectively.

FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION BY AGE N = 183

Thus the results of the survey on the age of distance learners, confirm the view established in the literature that distance learners are often mature or adult people of over 25 years of age.
5.2.1.2. Gender

There were more males, 97 or 53.9% of the 183 respondents against 80 or 44.4% who were females. Only three or 1.6% did not respond.

5.2.1.3. Marital status

A large number of the respondents, 154 (85.6%), were married while 20 (11.1%) were single. Only three (1.7%) and one (0.6%) indicated that they were divorced and widowed respectively. There were two (1.1%) who did not respond to this question. This statistic, along with the age statistic, confirmed the maturity of the distance learners as marriage or otherwise almost comes with age.

5.2.1.4. Own children

Out of 183 respondents, 159 (88.3%) indicated that they had children of their own and only 19 (10.6) did not. Of the respondents who had children, 56 (31.1%) had two children, 48 (26.7%) had three and 15 (8.3%) had four children. Two respondents (1.1%) indicated they had seven children and another two (1.1%) indicated they had eight children. Only one (0.6%) had nine children. There were two missing responses on this question. Figure 2 illustrates this survey result.

FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF CHILDREN N =183
5.3.1.5. Members from extended families

The respondents were asked in question 5 whether they lived with any members of their extended families. Figure 3 shows that 41 (22.8%) indicated they lived with one member of their extended families and 37 (20.6%) lived with two members of their extended families. Of the respondents, 14 (7.8%) did not live with any member of their extended families. There were 39 (21.3%) non-responses to this question.

It is common to find many African families, and Zimbabwean families in particular, living with members of their extended families. This practice tends to enlarge the responsibilities and domestic chores of the distance learners, especially those of the women, who are expected to take care of the huge family units. The results of the survey regarding these socio-demographic characteristics of respondents will be interpreted to see how they impacted on the information seeking patterns of the distance learners, particularly those of the women.

FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS  N =183

The age, gender, marital status and size of families of the respondents are critical socio-demographic characteristics of distance learners that were thought to affect the information seeking patterns of distance learners. Chikono (2001) also thought that these characteristics of distance learners registered with the ZOU affected their use of the ZOU
LIS when he noted that "...the majority of the students are most likely to have commitments such as work, families that may deter them from fully utilising the library." This will be demonstrated in the following chapter on the interpretation of the survey results.

5.3.1.6. Area of residence

Figure 4 illustrates that 84 (46.7%) of the respondents were found in the urban areas, 48 (26.7%) in the rural areas and 30 (16.7%) in towns.

FIGURE 4: CURRENT AREA OF RESIDENCE N=183

5.3.1.7. Low- and high-density areas of residence in urban and town centres

Question 7 was a follow up on question 6. It was designed to identify the respondents who resided in low or high-density areas in the urban or town centres. The distribution of populations in urban and rural areas, and likewise in high-density and low-density areas of urban or town centres of developing nations particularly Zimbabwe, has often affected access to amenities such as library and information resources and services. The results of the survey showed that 64 (35%) of the respondents lived in the high-density areas of
urban areas while 50 (27.3%) were found in the low-density areas of urban or town centres.

It is pertinent to note however that 69 (37.7%) did not answer this question. The lack of response on this question was also observed at the questionnaire pre-test stage. It seems to imply therefore that the respondents could have found the question a trifle too sensitive given the origin of the high- and low-density separate areas of residence as it was defined during the colonial era.

5.3.1.8. Highest qualifications attained prior to joining the ZOU

The survey indicated that 47 (26.1%) attained a high school certificate, 27 (15.0%) acquired school certificates and 19 (10.6%) held university degrees before joining the ZOU. A large number, 74 (41.1%), indicated they had other high qualification besides those listed. There were 14 (7.7%) missing responses to this question. The following Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of these educational qualifications.

FIGURE 5: HIGHEST QUALIFICATIONS BEFORE JOINING THE ZOU
N = 183
5.3.1.9. Other high level qualifications

Those who had indicated other high level qualifications were requested to specify these qualifications. The survey results revealed that there were 47 (26.1%) who had National Diploma (ND) and 27 (15%) had National Certificate (NC) qualifications. Only five (2.7%) and one (0.5%) had Higher National (HND) and Post-Graduate Diplomas respectively. It can be seen that the totals of these other qualifications does not add up to the 74 cited above. It is possible that there were respondents who completed this latter part of the question when they did not complete the first part.

The Certificates and Diplomas were acquired in various work-related disciplines such as library and information science, agriculture, education, geo-technology, personnel management, nursing and midwifery, banking, hotel and catering and motor-mechanics.

5.3.1.10. Education attained through distance education

The results to question 9 revealed that 145 (79.7%) of the respondents did not attain their education through the distance teaching and open learning mode of pedagogical instruction and 37 (20.3%) did prior to their joining the ZOU. There was only one who did not respond to this question. The question was meant to establish whether the distance learners had any prior experience with the distance-learning mode of instruction before coming to the ZOU.

5.3.1.11. Qualifications attained through distance education

This was a follow up to the above question 9 in order for the respondents to indicate their highest educational qualifications that they attained through distance education. Table 1 shows that 11 (6.1%) did their high school education through distance education, seven (3.8%) attained first degree qualifications, five (2.7%) acquired their ordinary qualifications through distance education, four (2.2%) and three (1.6%) attained their diploma and national certificates through distance education. One (0.5%) did not indicate
what qualifications were obtained from studies done with the Zimbabwe Association of Accounting Technicians.

Table 1: Highest educational qualifications attained through distance education n = 183

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Level Certificate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary Level Certificate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Technology in Educational Management</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma in Personnel Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Arts in Sociology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate in Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma in Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma in Business Computer Programming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma in Personnel Management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe Association of accounting technicians</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The high school qualifications referred to are Ordinary and Advanced level certificates (‘O’ and ‘A’ Levels). The first degree qualifications attained were the Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, Bachelor of Education in Administration, Planning and Policy Studies and Bachelor of Technology in Educational Management. Diploma qualifications were in Education, Personnel Management and in Business Computer Programming. The Certificate qualifications were in Education and Accounting.

5.3.1.12. Professional qualifications

Question 10 was concerned with the professional qualifications that the respondents had: the majority of the respondents, 104 representing 57.7%, indicated that they had professional qualifications at the certificate level, 75 (41.6%) at diploma level, 15 (8.3%) at Bachelor’s level, 2 (1.1%) at Higher National Diploma and 1 (0.6%) at Master’s level.

However, caution should be exercised concerning the certificate and diploma responses since it was possible to find those with diploma qualifications also indicating that they
had attained the certificate qualifications first. This was shown by the similarity of disciplines in which the certificate and diploma qualifications were attained, for example, the certificates and diplomas in Education; Agriculture; Plastic Technology; Midwifery; and Personnel/Human Resources Management. Furthermore, 49 (27.2%) of the respondents indicated that they had certificates in Education. Similarly, the same number of respondents also indicated that they had the Diploma in Education.

Other certificate qualifications were attained in Secretarial Studies and Typing; Supervisory Management; Bookkeeping and Accounting; Nursing, Midwifery; Banking; Salesmanship; Motor Mechanics; Horticulture; Labour Relations; and Photography.

Diploma qualifications were attained in Marketing Management; Professional Writing and Journalism; Plastic Technology; Community Nursing; and in Business Administration. The Higher National diploma qualifications were acquired in General Nursing and Marketing Management. The Master’s degree qualification was attained in Education.

The Bachelor’s degree qualifications attained were in the field of Business Studies, Educational Administration in Planning and Policy Studies, Geography and Environmental Studies, Geology, Technology, English and Communication Studies and Bachelor of Technology in Educational Management.

5.2.1.13. Professional qualifications attained through distance education

As in the preceding question 9, question 11 also sought to establish whether the distance learners had attained their professional qualifications through distance education prior to their joining the ZOU. The survey results indicated that more than half of the respondents, 129 (76.5%), did not attain their professional qualifications through distance education. Only 37 (20.2%) attained their professional qualifications through distance education. There were 17 (9.3%) non-responses.
Of the qualifications attained through distance education, 12 (6.6%) were certificate qualifications; another 12 (6.6%) were Bachelors' degrees. Only three (1.6%) and two (1.1%) of those who responded to this question attained the Diploma and Master's qualifications respectively through distance education.

The certificate qualifications were obtained in the following disciplines: Personnel Management, Education, Bookkeeping and Accountancy, Banking, Marketing and Salesmanship. The diploma qualifications are in Business Administration, Professional Writing and Journalism and Personnel Management. The Bachelor's degree qualifications were attained in the following: Educational Management; English and Communication Studies; and Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies. The Master's qualifications were attained in Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies.

It should be noted however that the respondents who attained under- and post-graduate qualifications could have attained these through the ZOU since these are disciplines currently being offered in the university. Question 13 illustrated this observation.

5.2.1.13 Programmes currently being undertaken in the ZOU

Question 12 asked the distance learners registered with the ZOU to indicate what programmes they are currently enrolled for in the university. The survey results indicate that 37 of the respondents or 20.2% are currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies (BEAPPS). This is followed by the Bachelor of Arts in English and Communication Studies (BAECS) with 23 (12.7%) of the respondents; the Bachelor of Commerce (B.Comm.) degree suite comprising B.Com. Accounting, B. Comm. Banking and Finance, B.Comm. Finance and B. Comm. Human Resources Management with 16 (8.8%); the Master in Business Administration (MBA) degree program had 17 (9.2%) of the respondents who indicated that they are currently enrolled in the program; Bachelor of Science Special Education (BSCSPED), 13 (7.2%); BSC Geography and Environmental Studies (BSCGES) had 12 (6.6%) respondents and Bachelor of Science Counselling had 11 (6.1%) currently registered in the programme.
5.2.1.14. Levels of study

Question 13 asked the distance learners to indicate their levels of study in their respective programmes. The survey results indicated that 65 (36.1%) were in their second year, 35 (19.4%) in 4th year, and 31 (17.2%) in first year, 27 (15.0%) in third year and 20 (11.1%) were enrolled in post-graduate programmes. Figure 6 clearly illustrates these levels of study of the respondents:

**FIGURE 6: CURRENT LEVELS OF STUDY N=183**

These results show that the study was able to survey fairly well all the levels of study in the university.

5.2.2. Socio-economic commitments of distance learners registered with the ZOU

This section presents the findings on the socio-economic commitments of the distance learners. The questions were meant to establish whether the distance learners were gainfully employed in formal or informal socio-economic activities and whether they had ample time to make use of library and information services given such commitments.
5.2.2.1. Formal employment

Question 14 asked the distance learners to indicate whether they were in formal employment. More than three quarters of the respondents, 173 (94.5%), indicated that they were formally employed. Only 10 (5.4%) indicated that they were not.

Those who had indicated that they were not in formal employment were asked to indicate what they did to earn a living. The results showed that the remaining 5.4% consisted of; a student who was still at university in fourth year; a new farmer through Zimbabwe’s land reform programme; a self employed business person; and one who is still being taken care of by the parents.

5.2.2.2. Free time available

Question 15 asked the distance learners to state how much free time they had in hours on average at the end of each day. It was envisaged this would provide some guidance regarding the extent of their socio-economic engagements vis a vis time to seek for information as will be demonstrated in the interpretation of the survey results. The survey results showed that 39 (21.3%) of the respondents had two hours free time, 34 (18.5%) had four hours, 29 (15.8%) had three hours, 21 (11.4%) had five hours and 11 (6.0%) had six hours of free time at the end of their workdays. The following Table 2 illustrates the amounts of time available to the respondents:
### Table 2: Amount of free time available to distance learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Free Time Available (Hours)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.2.2.3 Time off work for studies

The distance learners were further asked if they were allowed any time off work to attend to their studies. Respondents were allowed to indicate as many options as possible. The majority of the respondents, 149 (81.4%) indicated that they were allowed time to write examinations; 50 (27.8%) were allowed examination study time; 15 (8.1%) were not allowed any time at all; nine (4.9%) indicated they were allowed other arrangements; and eight (4.3%) were allowed study leave for the whole duration of the programme. The latter is quite rare in a distance-learning environment especially when considered that the distance learning programmes are specifically designed to accommodate people who, because of their socio-economic commitments, are not able to undertake full-time degree programmes. Those who indicated that they were allowed to make other arrangements indicated the following options to being allowed specific time off work to study:

- Adjusting workload to accommodate study time;
- Being allowed exam time once a year;
- Management does not allow time for what are considered ‘study dodges’;
Doing assignments during work time;
Depends on what I want;
Taking Occasional Leave days for study purposes; and
Allowed time to attend lessons over the weekend.

5.2.2.4. Tuition fees

Question 17 was designed to establish whether distance learners paid for their tuition fees and whether they were able to purchase information resources. The following Figure 16 illustrates that 170 or 92.7% of the respondents paid for their tuition fees while only eight (4.4%) do not. There were five (2.7%) who did not respond to this question.

Those who indicated that they do not pay for their own tuition were asked to state where they obtained their tuition fees. Only three (1.7%) indicated they had a bank loan. Others indicated sources such as the Commonwealth grant, their employer, government sponsorship or their fathers.

5.2.3.5. Ability to buy own reading materials

Question 19 asked the respondents whether they were able to buy their own reading materials. The following Figure 17 shows that 106 (58.9%) are not able to buy their reading materials from their tuition fees while 69 (38.4%) are able to buy the same.

5.2.3. Information seeking situations

This section of the questionnaire was designed to make the distance learners recall situations in the past month or so when they needed to solve a particular problem, to carry out a particular task or to find an answer to a question. Bearing in mind that it was going to be problematic to get a total recall, an example of what these situations could have been was given on question 20 and 21 to help the respondents to have a clear understanding of the task that was at hand. These questions therefore employed the
critical incident technique as already explained in the preceding section 4.3 of chapter four.

Responses to question 20 were therefore quite many and varied. However, a rigorous analysis of the content of the various answers was employed. Similar responses were identified and grouped together before they were counted to establish their frequency of occurrence. Through this content analysis, it was established that just under half of the 183 respondents, 81 (44.2%), recalled situations when they needed information in order to answer assignment-related questions in their studies. The following are other situations cited by the respondents:

- 36 (19.6%), cited situations when they required information to carry out research.
- Eight (4.3%) recalled situations when they needed information on certain topics such as on worldviews, statistics and information technology areas.
- Four (2.1%) needed to draw maps to scale during fieldtrips.
- The same number of four (2.1%) hunted for material on teacher education from their former teacher training colleges.
- Three (1.6%) had to coordinate the preparation of budgets for 2003.
- Two (1.0%) in each of the following situations indicated when they needed information to: counsel abused school children, solve an accounting problem, needed to get statutory instruments and policy documents, growing stringless mangoes in Zimbabwe, on information technologies, counselling HIV/AIDS patients and for strategic planning purposes.
- Other individual situations included inter alia, the need to access bank loans, to compare models of evaluation, needed to read about the behaviour of people in organisations, had problems of getting modules to write assignments, faced problems in having to share limited reading materials among many fellow students and problems of accessing other university libraries.

In question 21, the responses to question 20 were further elaborated on. The distance learners were required to state the specific questions that they needed to answer in their particular information seeking situations. It was found out that invariably all of the
questions that the respondents listed had something to do with their assignments or research topics in their studies. The following are some of the topics that were listed by at least more than two respondents:

- Questions pertaining to research methodology were stated by 53 (28.9%) of the respondents. However, caution need be exercised on this statistic since the researcher used research related problems and research questions as examples to explain to distance learners what was required on this question.
- Questions related to statistical analysis methods such as how to calculate the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, mean, mode and meridian were listed down by 13 (7.1%) of the respondents.
- Questions on communication theories were raised by 8 (4.3%) of the respondents.
- Another 8 (4.3%) had questions on computer-related issues, for example, how management should monitor the implementation of automated systems, how to use spreadsheets and the Microsoft Office application package.
- At least 3 (1.6%) respondents had questions in each of the following areas; curriculum design, environmental impact assessment; livestock feeds; and HIV/AIDS related questions.

A total of 160 respondents out of the 183 total respondents answered this question. Of these 160 respondents, 127 (77.9%) conceded that they did try to answer the questions, 23 (12.6%) did not and 13 (8.0%) were still working on the question.

The 23 (12.6%) who did not try to answer question 22 were asked in question 23 why they did not do so and nearly everyone who responded to this question had a different reason. Only 6 or 26.0% of the 23 indicated that they had difficulty in obtaining the relevant information to address the questions. Other reasons that were given include some of the following:

- Wanted to find out from authorities who have dealt with the similar problem before;
- Information in modules was too shallow;
- Stopped studies; and
5.2.4. Use of information sources

In question 24, the distance learners were presented with a list of possible sources of information from which they were required to indicate those they consulted in trying to solve the problems or answer the questions they had in their particular situations. The survey results in Table 4 below show that more than half of the respondents, 113 (61.7%), indicated that they consulted books and journals to answer their questions; 110 (60.1%) consulted a friend, and 104 (56.8%) relied on their own experiences. Table 3 shows the full responses given in the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books or journals</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult a friend</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own experiences</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ZOU LIS</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues at work place</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another library(ies)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own tutor</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading newspapers and magazines</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that the frequency does not add up to the total responses of 183 because each respondent was requested to give more than one response. The respondents who indicated that they consulted other sources besides the listed ones indicated a large variety of sources. Below are some of the quoted other sources that were consulted:

- Used ex-ZOU students' project reports and theses;

13 Libraries are regarded as information providers in this study but have also been listed among information sources that are used by distance learners.
- Consulted students in other intakes in the same discipline, for example Geography;
- Enrolled for extra tutorials with a private tutor;
- Used modules to answer the question;
- Used notes from previous teacher education files;
- Visited a former Teachers' Training College lecturer for assistance;
- Carried out research using questionnaires and interviews; and
- Got solutions from students interviewed.

The respondents were further asked to rate, on a 1 - 5 scale, the usefulness of the same information sources that they consulted in question 24. The following figure 7 indicates the ratings given on the usefulness of books or magazines, reading newspapers and magazines, colleagues at the work place, consulting with a friend, their own experiences. Considering the sources that had the highest number of respondents who rated the usefulness of each source, the following trend can be observed from the graphic illustration of the survey results:

- Books and journals were rated very useful by the largest number of 71 (38.8%) of the respondents, n = 183;
- Own experience was indicated by 49 (26.8%) as fairly useful;
- Of the sources found useful, consult a friend was selected by 41 (22.4%) of the respondents;
- It was revealed that of the least useful sources, radio and television were selected by 40 (21.9%) of the respondents; and
- Of not very useful sources, consult a friend was nominated by 23 (12.6%) of the respondents.
The respondents were also requested to indicate if there were any other sources they consulted besides the ones provided on question 25. The following is a list of those other sources that were used to answer their questions or to solve their problems:

- Former students were used as sources of information;
- Handouts from friends;
- Modules;
- One indicated a husband was used to answer questions;
- Notes from Teacher education files;
- Reading others’ research works and projects.
Question 26a sought to find out why the respondents went to the sources they found very useful. Was it because they were referred to them, they had used them before, they were nearby and easy to access or there were other reasons? Out of 163 respondents who answered this question, more than half, 117 (71.8%) were not referred to these very useful sources and 46 (28.2%) said they were referred to them.

The 46 (28.2%) who said they were referred to the very useful sources were asked to list those who had referred them to the very useful sources. Twelve of these indicated that a friend outside the university had referred them to the very useful sources; ten were referred to the very useful sources by their tutors; nine were referred by ZOU college mates; and five were referred by colleagues at the workplace. Others said they were referred by their former school headmaster, husband, University of Zimbabwe student, the ZOU tutorial letter and by references that were in the ZOU modules. It appears from these survey results that the libraries were not playing much of a role in referring and advising for very useful sources of information, a role which is central to reference and referral services in libraries.

Question 26b was meant to find out if the respondents had gone to the very useful sources because they had used them before. It was found out that 129 (78.2%) out of 165 who answered this question, had used the sources before and 36 (21.8%) had not.

Question 26c asked whether the distance learners went to the very useful sources because the sources were nearby and easy to get to. Of the 165 respondents who answered this question, 95 (57.6%) indicated they went to consult the very useful sources because they were close to them while 70 (42.4%) did not go to these sources because they were not close and it was not easy to get to them. Question 26d asked whether the distance learners
had other reasons that made them consult the very useful sources. A variety of reasons were given among which are the following:

- The sources were found by 37 (20.2%) of the respondents to have more relevant and reliable information in their areas of study.
- They were the only available and accessible source for 13 (7.1%) of the respondents.
- They were used for writing and passing assignments by 6 (3.2%) of the respondents.
- Four (2.1%) others said that it was easier for them since they had a study group.
- Three (1.6%) found the sources in line with their research expectations and the same number found that they had a variety of reading materials respectively.

Other reasons given by at least one respondent include the following:

- They were cheaper and reliable;
- The ZOU LIS does not allow materials out of the library;
- Had a computer and Internet at home; and
- Had a good library at his/her workplace, i.e. the UZ Library.

The survey results showed that most of the respondents, 129 (78.2%) had used the very useful sources before and 117 (71.8%) did not have to be referred to them by anyone. The sources were found by 95 (57.6%) to be close to the respondents hence it was easy to go and use them. The information sources or information providers were found to contain relevant and reliable information concerning their areas of study. Other respondents found the sources very useful for writing examinations and passing assignments.

Question 27 asked if the respondents had anything else that they did not like about the very useful sources consulted. A total of 107 (65.2%) out of 164 who answered this question did not have anything else that they did not like while 57 (34.8%) did. The latter were required in question 27 to explain further what it was they did not like about the very useful sources of information.
The majority of the respondents to this question, 27 (14.7%), indicated that at times they did not get the most needed books. Five (2.7%) said that some of the materials are not suitable. Another three (1.6%) said that the sources were not easily accessible. Several individuals listed down other reasons as follows:

- The costs that were needed to access the information were prohibitive;
- Information was too complex;
- There was no catalogue;
- Some of the sources were well equipped but very far;
- The way library staff handled students;
- It was time consuming and expensive to access the very useful sources;
- They were biased and inflexible;
- The libraries as sources of information, gave short borrowing period; and
- Were not allowed to take books out of the library.

The respondents were asked in question 28 if the very useful sources referred them to other helpful sources. Slightly more than half of the respondents, 84 (51.5%) indicated they were referred to other helpful sources while 79 (48.5%) indicated that they were not. The former were asked in the same question to state where else they were referred. A variety of other useful sources were given among which are the following indicated by most of the respondents:

- 27 (14.7%) said they were referred to other books for further reading.
- 13 (7.1%) were referred to other larger libraries such as the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and British Council libraries.
- Five (2.7%) were referred to the Internet.
- Three (1.6%) said they were referred to journals.
- The same number was referred to their tutor, e.g. in the Linguistics department.
- Others were referred to Embassy libraries; newspapers; study packs; to a University of South Africa (UNISA) student; and to authorities in the field of education.
Hence it was shown that about half of the respondents, 84 (51.5%) were referred to other helpful source while 79 (48.5%) were not. This little variance could be explained by the fact that a sizeable number of the respondent, 78.2%, had already indicated their satisfaction with the sources that they had used in the past. Of those who were referred, 27 (14.7%) were referred to further reading books and journals, 13 (7.1%) to other libraries such as the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) library, the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) library and the British Council library.

The respondents were asked in question 29 if they went to the places they were referred to by the very useful sources. Out of 90 respondents who answered this question, 63 (70.0%) indicated that they went to the referred sources and 27 (30%) did not.

The respondents who went to the referred sources were further asked in question 30 to indicate their level of satisfaction with the sources to which they were referred. Figure 8 illustrates the levels of satisfaction with the referred sources. Out of a total of only 66 who answered this question, 38 (57.6%) found the referred sources satisfactory, 23 (34.8%) found them very satisfactory and only 2 (3.0%) were very dissatisfied.

**FIGURE 8: LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH REFERRED SOURCES N =66**
Question 31 asked the distance learners if they consulted the sources of information that they had indicated were least useful. Question 31a therefore inquired whether the distance learners were referred to the least useful sources. Out of 150 respondents who answered this question, 124 (82.7%) indicated that they were not referred to the least useful sources while 26 (17.3%) indicated that they were referred to the least useful sources.

The respondents, who indicated that they were referred to the least useful sources, were further requested to indicate who referred them to these least useful sources. The following Table 4 shows the referrals as listed by respondents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referrals</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues at Workplace</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classmates</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modules</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarians</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 31b asked the distance learners whether they had consulted the least useful sources because they had used them before. More than half of the 142 respondents who answered this question, and these were 81 (57.0%), indicated that they had used the least useful sources before and 61 (43.0%) had not.

Question 31c asked if the distance learners had consulted the least useful sources because they are nearby and easy to access. Out of 141 respondents who answered the question,
89 (63.1%) conceded that they consulted the least useful sources because they are near and easy to access and 52 (36.9%) said they did not.

On question 31d respondents were requested to give any other reasons that might have led them to consult the least useful sources. The following Table 5 illustrates the reasons given by most of the respondents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could not find needed information anywhere else</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just seeking information</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every little bit of information useful even from least useful sources</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books are scarce</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulted those already practising in the field</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve database related issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed current information</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked workmates their experience on the topic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to responses that were given to very useful sources, the majority of the respondents, 124 (82.7%), indicated that they were not referred to the least useful sources and that 81 (57.0%) had used them before. The 89 (63.1%) of the respondents said they were close and easy to get to the least useful sources. Among the reasons that were give for consulting the least useful sources, it was interesting to note that the respondents were very willing to access every little bit of information even if it meant getting it from the least useful sources. This showed how desperate for information the respondents were.

Question 32 further asked the respondents whether the least useful sources of information referred them to other helpful sources. Out of a total of 154 respondents who answered the question, 107 (69.5%) indicated that they were not referred to other helpful sources while 47 (30.5%) indicated they were referred to other helpful sources. The latter were further requested to indicate the other helpful sources to which they were referred. Most, 19 (10.3%) indicated that they were referred to other libraries. Others, 6 (3.2%) were
referred to search the Internet and the WWW and 5 (2.7%) were referred to use the ZOU LIS.

Question 33 asked these respondents who were referred to other sources whether they actually went to these sources and 47 (58.8%) of the 163 respondents to this question indicated that they did while 33 (41.3%) did not.

The respondents who indicated that they went to consult the referred sources were further asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the sources to which they were referred. Only 50 respondents were able to answer this question. Out of these, more than half, 32 (64%) indicated that they were satisfied with the sources and 15 (30%) were very satisfied. The following figure 9 shows this level of satisfaction.

**FIGURE 9: LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH SOURCES REFERRED BY LEAST USEFUL SOURCES N = 50**

It is curious to note the graphic similarity of responses to question 30 and those given to question 34. It appears even the least useful sources were able to refer the respondents to equally useful and very useful sources.
The respondents were asked in question 35 if there was anything about the least useful information sources that they did not like. Out of 153 who answered this question, 78 (51.0%) did not have anything while 75 (49.0%) did have something they did not like. These were further asked to explain briefly what it is that they did not like about the least useful sources. Several reasons were given among which were the following:

- Of the respondents, 22 (12.9%) said there were few books.
- The information was found to be outdated, generalised and lacking depth in coverage by 11 (6.0%) of the respondents.
- Six (3.2%) did not think the least useful sources had any relevant information.
- Five (2.7%) pointed out the negative attitude members of staff of the least useful sources.
- Three (1.6%) of the respondents noted that the sources were not easily accessible where they were located.

As shown in the case of very useful sources, there was little variance between the 78 (51.0%) who did not have anything else they did not like about the least useful sources and the 75 (49.0%) of the respondents who had. The latter were not happy about the few books that were found at the least useful sources, the information was found not relevant and lacking depth of coverage.

5.2.5. Factors affecting the accessing of information providers

In order to determine the factors that influence the accessing of information providers by distance learners, question 36 was posed to enable the distance learners to indicate those factors that have a particular bearing on them. Of the 173 respondents who answered this question, 74 (42.8%) indicated that all of the four factors cited in question 36 were considered in the decision to go to information providers. Sixty-nine (39.9%) viewed the accuracy, understandability, relevance and accuracy of the information they were likely to get as the critical factors in their decision-making. Others, 22 (12.7%) considered the cost factor in their decisions.
The following Figure 10 illustrates this survey result.

**FIGURE 10: INFORMATION PROVIDERS AND IMPORTANT FACTORS N=173**

[Bar chart showing frequency of factors]

There was only one respondent (0.5%) who indicated the need to study with a friend as an important factor in deciding to go to information providers.

5.2.6. Use of ZOU Library and Information Service (LIS) System

In question 37, distance learners were required to indicate whether in their choice of very useful information sources they had indicated the ZOU LIS as one such a source. More than half of the respondents who answered this question, 115 (67.6%), indicated that they selected the ZOU LIS as one of the information sources while 55 (32.4%) did not select as such. This finding concurs with Chikono’s (2001:21) who also established in his survey that 71% of respondents had used the ZOU LIS while 39% had not. His survey, however was limited to only one of the regional centres of the university, the Harare Regional Centre.

The respondents were requested to indicate how often they made use of the ZOU LIS in question 38. The following Figure 11 shows that 44 (40.0%) of the 110 respondents who answered this question made use of the ZOU LIS at least once a month. Nineteen (17.3%) used it once every two weeks and 18 (16.4%) once a week. Only two (1.8%)
used the library once a day. The other 20 (17.9%) indicated that they had other times besides the ones listed on question 36.

**FIGURE 11: RATE OF USE OF THE ZOU LIS N=110**

The use of the ZOU LIS once a month was inadequate considering that the distance learners attend weekend tutorials at least twice a month. Also the distance learners visit the regional centres occasionally to drop and collect their assignments. The latter times were indicated in the ‘Other times’ option. Other factors such as the distance from the ZOU LIS and the costs involved to make more trips, warranted that the distance learner limit the use of the ZOU LIS.
The following Table 6 shows a summary of the other times when the distance learners were able to make use of the libraries in the ZOU LIS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Frequency Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I need to write assignments</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a Semester</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anytime I get to town</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I am not at work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When there is need</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the holidays</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I am writing exams</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I do not have home commitments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When my books do not have enough information</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 39 asked the distance learners whether there were any reasons that might have prevented from getting the information that they need from the ZOU LIS. The respondents were permitted to select from a list of reasons that were provided on the question all those that applied to their situations. Most of the respondents, 68 (37.1%) indicated that the ZOU LIS was located far from where they live. Another 65 (35.5%) indicated that they do not have the time since they are engaged in work activities all day. Forty (21.8%) said that the ZOU LIS is inconveniently located while 33 (18.0%) selected the reason that the LIS had inconvenient opening times.
The following table 7 clearly illustrates these results.

### Table 7: Reasons preventing distance learners from getting information they need from the ZOU LIS n = 183

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The LIS is located far from where I live</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have the time since I work all day</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The LIS is inconveniently located</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient opening times</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household chores and looking after the family takes too much of my time</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is unsafe to use the LIS after hours</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient parking space</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is pertinent to observe that the frequency does not add up to the total 183 respondents but more than that because respondents were permitted to give more than one response on the list of reasons that were supplied on the question.

The graphic illustration shows that the distance from the LIS, lack of time, the inconvenient location of the LIS and inconvenient opening times chiefly affected the respondents. It was observed that the household chores and looking after the family which were suspected to influence the information seeking patterns of distance learners, was not, after all such a major factor that prevented the respondents from getting the information that they needed from the ZOU LIS.

The distance learners were asked to indicate how far they lived from the ZOU LIS on question 40. The results of the survey show that 78 (44.2%) of the respondents out of a total of 175 who answered this question lived more than 51 kilometres from the ZOU LIS and 44 (25.1%) lived within the 0-10 km distance from the LIS.
The rest of the results are shown in the accompanying Figure 12.

FIGURE 12: DISTANCE FROM THE ZOU LIS N=175

The urban-rural distribution of the respondents was equally demonstrated here where most of the respondents are located. Those living in urban and town centres were therefore located close to the ZOU LIS which is at regional centres in towns and cities while those in the rural areas are located farther away from the LIS.

5.2.7. Use of information seeking tools

On question 41a and 41b, the distance learners were asked if they were able to use any information seeking tools such as the library catalogues, indexes and abstracts. On question 41a, more than half of the respondents, 115 (68.0%) indicated they were able to use library catalogues while 24 (14.2%) were not and 30 (17.8%) were uncertain. In question 41b, 89 (55.6%) of the 158 who answered this question were able to use indexes and abstracts, 31 (19.4%) were not and a large group of 40 or (25.3%) of the respondents were uncertain.
These results are well displayed in the accompanying figures 13.

**FIGURE 13: USE OF INFORMATION SEEKING TOOLS.**  \(N = 183\)

Question 42 asked the distance learners to indicate from a list supplied, the reasons that could have made them find the LIS useful. The respondents were required to list as many reasons as possible that applied to them. It can be seen from the results of the survey that 108 or 59% selected the reason that they were able to identify, locate and get the information that they need, 61 (33.8%) indicated that the LIS usually had the information that they needed, 56 said that the LIS had current and relevant information and 53 (28.9%) indicated that the LIS staff always helped them find what they needed.
The following Table 8 shows a summary of these responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can identify, locate and get information that I need</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The LIS usually has the information that I need</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Library has current and relevant information</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIS Staff always help me find what I need</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's nearest to where I live</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's close to my workplace</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should also be noted that the frequency count does not add up to the total number of respondents because each respondent might have selected more than one reason.

On analysing the other reasons that the respondents had cited for finding the LIS useful, the researcher established that the reasons cited were largely not intended for this question but instead would have been meant for a section on whether the distance learners found the LIS useful at all. As such, those reasons are not reported in this section but would be reviewed at the appropriate section in question 43.

Question 43 therefore asked the distance learners if there were any reasons why they were not able to get the information that they needed from the ZOU LIS. Respondents were required to tick as many reasons as possible from the list supplied. The results of the survey show that 95 or 51.9% of the respondents who answered this question indicated that what they needed was usually out with someone, 84 (45.9%) found that the ZOU LIS did not have what they needed.
The following Table 9 illustrates these findings.

Table 9 Reasons why the distance learners are not able to get what they need from the ZOU LIS n = 183

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I need is usually out with someone</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ZOU LIS frequently hasn't got what I need</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIS Staff does not provide a satisfactory service</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have the student ID which is required to use the LIS</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have the borrowers' pockets required for me to</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>borrow materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIS staff are unfriendly</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted also that the frequency count does not add up to the total number of respondents in the survey because each respondent was permitted to select more than one reason that were applicable to their situation. The 28 respondents who indicated there were other reasons besides those provided in the question, gave a large and varied number of reasons as shown in the accompanying Table 10. Included are also other reasons that were given by respondents in question 42 but which as the survey results showed, were more on the negative side and therefore befitting to be included in this section.

Table 10: Other reasons why distance learners are not able to get the information they need from the ZOU LIS n = 183

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books are few, library is small and often congested</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing period is too short for those who live outside cities and towns</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found it useless</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It takes too long to locate materials</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favouritism in lending materials</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library not fully equipped</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library should train students on how to use the library</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The shortage of books and the size of the libraries indicated by the respondents was one of the reasons why the respondents adopted information seeking paths that led them to
other better-resourced libraries. Shorter borrowing periods were a factor of limited resources. Those who indicated that they found the LIS useless were most probably reacting to the limited resources, distance from the LIS and the general lack of time to access and make optimum use of the LIS.

5.2.8. Use of another library(ies)

Question 44 asked the distance learners if they used other libraries to access materials for study. Almost three-quarters of the respondents, 131 (73.2%), who answered this question indicated that they did use another library(ies) and 48 (26.8%) did not. Only four (2.2%) did not answer this question.

The distance learners were asked on question 45 how often they made use of these other libraries. As in the preceding question 38, the results of the survey show that 38 (30.2%) of those who answered the question used other libraries at least once a month while 20 (15.9%) used them once a week. A large number, 30 (23.8%) indicated other times when they used the other libraries.
The following graph on figure 14 illustrates vividly this survey result.

**FIGURE 14: RATE OF USE OF ANOTHER LIBRARY(IES) N = 183**

Those who selected the other times option in the question indicated the following frequencies they made use of another(ies) libraries in Table 11.

**Table 11: Other frequency of use of another library(ies) n=30**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Times</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally as required</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every time I have an assignment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I have free time from work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least twice a week</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in 2–3 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in 3 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice per semester</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I fail to get information from the ZOU LIS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I visit town</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the holiday</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just towards exams</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 46 requested the respondents to list down the names of another library(ies) that they used. The respondents listed a total of 84 other libraries. These included all types of libraries such as university libraries, public and municipal libraries, school libraries, technical and teachers college libraries and special libraries in Government Ministries and departments, rural libraries of the Rural Libraries and Resources Centre Programme (RLRDP) and those set up by the National Library and Documentation Service (NLDS), resource centre libraries at the rural district level that were also set up by a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ). The most used libraries include the following:

- The BSPZ libraries throughout the country which were listed by 21 (11.4%) of the respondents;
- The Bulawayo National Free Library listed by 19 (10.3%);
- The British Council Library (in both Harare and Bulawayo albeit predominantly in the latter since the Harare branch was closed at the time of carrying out the survey). This was listed by 14 (7.6%) respondents;
- The University of Zimbabwe Library system listed also by 14 (7.6%) of the respondents;
- Harare city library was listed by 7 (3.8%) of the respondents;
- Africa University, Gweru Technical College, Midlands State University, Mutare Teachers' College and the National University of Science and Technology libraries were each listed by 4 (2.1%) of the respondents; and
- The Edward Memorial Library in Gwanda, the Gwanda ZINTEC Library and the UNESCO Sub-Regional Centre Library were each listed by 3 (1.6%) of the respondents.

The remaining other libraries were listed by either two or one (1.0 and 0.5%) of the respondents respectively. Generally the respondents made use of the another library(ies) whenever the opportunity arose. This is evidenced by the varying frequency of use of the LIS shown in the survey results. It was difficult to establish a more regular and specific period to make use of the LIS because of the limiting factors pointed out by the
respondents in the preceding sections such as distance, lack of time, cost of travelling to and from the LIS.

In question 47, the distance learners were asked to describe other methods that they used to locate and obtain study materials. Most of the respondents who answered this question, 66 (36.0%) indicated that used their friends to locate and obtain study materials. Others, 17 (9.2%) used the Internet, 10 (5.4%) used subject shelf guides, catalogues, indexes and bibliographies; 6 (3.2%) used other ZOU students and 5 (2.7%) indicated they relied on discussion groups.

As in question 39 on the use of the ZOU LIS, question 48 asked distance learners if there were any reasons that might have prevented them from getting the information that they needed from another library(ies). They were also requested to select from a list of reasons supplied on this question. The results of the survey showed that the majority of the respondents, 78 (42.6%) who answered this question indicated that another library(ies) were located far from where they lived; 75 (40.9%) indicated that they did not have the time since they work all day; 40 (21.8%) indicated that the inconvenient opening times at another library(ies) and 31 (16.9%) indicated they had other reasons. The following Table 12 illustrates the responses given to this question.

Table 12: Reasons that prevented distance learners from getting the information they needed from another library(ies) n=183

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Another library(ies) is/are located far from where I live</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't have the time since I work all day</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another library(ies) is/are inconveniently located</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient opening times</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household chores and looking after the family takes too much of my time</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is unsafe to use another library(ies) after hours</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient parking space</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following are common reasons that were cited by the 16.9% of the respondents who indicated they had other reasons other than the reasons provided on the question:

- 12 (6.5%) of the respondents indicated that they could not afford the exorbitant membership fees required at another library(ies);
- Five (2.7%) indicated that another library(ies) had inadequate materials;
- Three (1.6%) indicated that the cost of travelling from one library to another was unaffordable;
- Two (1.0%) indicated that another library(ies) did not have relevant materials for the programme;
- Two (1.0)% indicated that another library(ies) did not permit ZOU students to use their facilities; and
- Two (1.0%) indicated that the use of another library(ies) was through membership only.

As in the case of the ZOU LIS similar factors were indicated to have affected the use of another library(ies). These factors include the long distances involved, the lack of time due to work commitments, and the cost of travelling to and from the other libraries. Other factors that were pointed out by the respondents included the high subscriptions that were required by the other libraries, which tended to make them shun from using the libraries. The other libraries were reported to have few resources. Where resources were available, these were regarded as not relevant to their programme needs.
The distance learners were asked to indicate how far they lived from the other libraries. Figure 15 shows that most of the respondents, 61 (34.1%) lived within 0-10 km from another library(ies); 58 (32.4%) lived more than 51 km from another library(ies) and 36 (20.1%) live within 11-20 km range from the other libraries.

**FIGURE 15:** DISTANCE FROM ANOTHER LIBRARY(IES) N=183

It can be clearly seen that the distance learners lived either close or too far from another library(ies). It is also clear that for those who lived close to the libraries, those in the 0-10 and 11-20 kilometre range from the LIS, distance was not a major limiting factor. Whereas it was a major hinderance to those who lived further away from the other libraries as will be discussed in the succeeding chapter six.

5.2.9. Importance of libraries as information providers

In Question 50, the distance learners were asked whether they viewed libraries as important information providers in meeting their information needs. The results of the survey indicated that 103 (57.9%) of the respondents who answered the question regarded libraries as such, while 49 (27.5%) regarded libraries as important information
providers in their lives. Only three (1.7%) regarded libraries as not very important. This response is well illustrated in the accompanying Figure 16.

FIGURE 16: IMPORTANCE OF LIBRARIES IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS N = 183

Yet despite this assertion of the important role of libraries to the distance learners, most believed however, in answer to question 51, that the university should concentrate in providing them with self-help learning kits rather than library services. This is shown by the 113 (63.8%) of the respondents who answered this question against the 64 (36.2%) who did not think so.

Question 52 sought explanation for the ‘yes’ answer given and the following is a summary of some of the many popular explanations that were proffered to this answer.

- 32 (17.4%) indicated that the comprehensive self-learning kits would be relevant, easy to read and would enable the distance learners to save on the little time that they had for study purposes.

- 21 (11.4%) thought that the kits would be helpful since library books were inadequate and could not go around all the distance learners.

- 13 (7.1%) said that the kits would be preferred because the ZOU libraries were distantly located.
Nine (4.9%) posited that the kits would be helpful since they did not have time to go to the library due to pressure of work.

Eight (4.3%) pointed out that it was too expensive to travel to the ZOU libraries and therefore comprehensive study pack would be preferred in such a case.

Seven (3.8%) thought that the comprehensive learning kits would be able to guide the distance learners in their studies and hence make life easy for them.

Other explanations, which though not given by many respondents but worth noting include the following:

- Study kits would enable us to carry out studies at night;
- Some students took all the relevant materials from the LIS and kept them for themselves;
- Libraries were expensive to maintain and books get outdated;
- It would solve problems associated with poor library staff service;
- Because the ZOU Libraries were too small and got easily cramped and congested with only a few students; and
- It would be easy to update and amend comprehensive self-study kits as new programmes emerge.

It appeared the preference for comprehensive learning self-help kits was seen as a rescuing measure to solve the many problems that were befalling the ZOU LIS, that is to say, the inability to satisfactorily serve the needs of the distance learners. For instance it was hoped that the study kit would be self-containing and would help the distance learners to get all the information that they required to address their needs, some kind of a one-stop-shop for them. The study kits would allow the distance learners to study wherever they are located at whatever time and whenever they feel like it. They would generally make life easy for the distance learners as they indicated in the survey results.

A major draw back however is that the learners would not learn to engage with searching for information and making optimum use of libraries which is seen as part of the educative experience. This observation is supported by Reich's symbolic-analytic skills theory cited in Rowland and Rubbert (2001:756), which states that “…students value self-initiative to find relevant information materials and recognise it as part of the
learning process.” Thus the self-initiative to seek for information would be lost if the one-stop-shop comprehensive self-study packs are introduced.

5.3.10. The ZOU LIS and meeting specific needs of distance learners

Question 53 therefore asked the respondents what they thought the ZOU LIS should do in order to address their specific information needs as distance students registered with the ZOU. Several possible courses of action were given among which are the following suggestions that were most popular.

- It was said by 83 (45.3%) of the respondents that the LIS should add more relevant and subject specific books, e.g. on Counselling, Special Education, Psychology and Law.
- Some 22 (12.0%) respondents advocated the decentralisation and expansion of the libraries to the districts and rural areas of the country.
- Another 14 (7.6%) wanted the lending period of books to be increased.
- Others, 13 (7.1%) of the respondents, thought that the LIS should put in place an efficient and effective circulation system that would control and monitor the borrowing of books by the distance learners since some students are overstaying with the books.
- 12 (6.5%) advocated for the expansion of the library facilities to enable them to accommodate more distance learners and alleviate on the current overcrowding in the small libraries.
- A further 11 (6.0%) suggested that the opening and closing times must be adjusted especially on weekends, public holidays and in the evenings.
- 10 (5.4%) wanted the LIS to photocopy journal articles, newspaper cuttings and create handouts that would be distributed to the distance learners.
- A similar number of respondents suggested the improvement of the content and standards of the current self-help study materials, the modules.
- Nine (4.9%) wanted to see the Internet access brought to the ZOU LIS.
- Five (2.7%) suggested that correspondence study materials should be distributed by post to the distance learners.

Other suggestions that were not given by many respondents but of substance and worth noting included the following:

- Employ duty conscious, efficient and friendly LIS staff;
- Tutors must be readily available and easy to contact, e.g. as noted by one respondent who had to travel a great distance to Bulawayo to be supervised on his/her project but only to miss the tutor at the Regional Centre;
- The ZOU should conduct lectures through the press;
- The ZOU LIS must be adequately marketed and promoted for all distance learners to know;
- The ZOU LIS needs a big overhaul as it is not currently serving all the distance learners
- The LIS should put in place a mobile library service;
- The ZOU LIS should enter into strategic alliance with open learning universities as well as local university libraries such as the UZ and NUST libraries;
- The LIS should be computerised to speed up the information search process;
- The LIS should have a catalogue; and
- Gather information from distance learners regarding what materials are required for the library.
5.2.11. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER FIVE

The above chapter provided a detailed report of the survey results obtained by this researcher on investigating the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University. It has been demonstrated that the survey succeeded in gathering the relevant data that was needed to determine the information seeking patterns of the distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University.

Data was collected on the socio-demographic and academic characteristics of the distance learners to determine whether these characteristics impacted on the way the distance learners sought for information. Data was also collected on the socio-economic characteristics to determine what commitments the distance learners had and how these affected on their use of information sources and information providers.

The survey also collected qualitative data regarding the critical incidents of the information seeking situations of distance learners which is critical for determining how their information needs arose, where they went to seek for information to address their information needs, what information providers they consulted and the use of the ZOU LIS. Data on factors that affected the use of libraries such as distance from libraries and cost in terms of time and money to get to these information providers was collected.

The survey also sought the views of the respondents regarding the important role of libraries and what they thought the LIS should do in order to develop systems and services that best address their needs in a distance learning environment.
CHAPTER SIX: INTERPRETATION OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

6.1. BACKGROUND TO THE SURVEY RESULTS

The findings of the study regarding the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University were analysed and interpreted in line with the research problem, the research objectives, research questions and the literature reviewed throughout the study. For purposes of accurately interpreting the survey results therefore, this section restates the problem statement, the purpose for carrying out the study, the objectives and research questions for the study.

Having been put in place to expressly serve the needs of the distance learners, it was discovered that the ZOU LIS had been under-utilised by the users it was intended to serve. There was therefore a growing concern among the LIS management as to the possible causes for this under-utilization. Was it, for instance, a result of the socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the distance learners? Was it the near traditional set-up of the LIS such as the opening times from 8.00 am till 6.00 pm which failed to cater for the distance learners who are pre-occupied for the better part of the day? Were the distance learners aware of what library services were available to them? Were the distance learners using other information sources and services or was it just a case of their being not too concerned about the LIS despite being aware of its existence?

The purpose of the study was to investigate the information seeking patterns of the distance learners with a view to developing library and information resources and services that responded to the characteristics and needs of the distance learners. The study was conducted and as the interpretation of the survey results will show, it achieved the following stated objectives:

- The study established the information seeking patterns of distance learners of the ZOU
The study evaluated the extent and frequency of use of the LIS and any other neighbouring information resource centre(s).

The study established other places the distance learners went to seek for information and managed to locate the information that addressed their needs.

It investigated whether the distance learners possessed the relevant information searching and retrieval skills such as the use of library catalogues, indexing and abstracting tools.

It investigated the distances and problems faced by distance learners as they travelled to and from the ZOU LIS and any other information resource centre(s).

The study established the necessity for the university to just provide comprehensive learning materials instead of providing library resources and services to distance learners.

The study identified and made recommendations for the possible planning strategies that the ZOU LIS ought to put in place in order to come up with a suitable information service system capable of addressing the information seeking patterns of distance learners.

The survey answered the following research questions:

- What were the information seeking patterns that were adopted by the ZOU distance learners as they sought for information?
- How much and how often did the distance learners make use of the LIS and any other neighbouring information resource centre(s)?
- Where else did the distance learners go to seek for information and did they manage to get the information they looked for?
- Did the distance learners possess the relevant information searching and retrieval skills such as the use of library catalogues, indexes and abstracts?
- How far did the ZOU distance learners live from the LIS and what were the problems they faced in travelling to and from the LIS and any other information resource centre(s)?
- Should the university provide the distance learners with adequate learning materials instead of library resources and services?
What library and information resources and services should the LIS management put in place that addresses the information seeking patterns of distance learners?

It was in the light of the forgoing research problem, objectives, research questions and the literature reviewed that the survey results were analysed and interpreted.

The research objectives and research questions were not addressed in this chapter in the order in which they have been discussed above. The interpretation started with an analysis of the socio-demographic and academic characteristics of distance learners. It then considered the socio-economic commitments in which the distance learners were engaged.

It was the intention of the survey to understand how the socio-demographic and academic characteristics influenced the information seeking patterns of the distance learners. It was argued in the literature reviewed in the study that distance learners have peculiar characteristics that are influenced by age, gender, marital status, family commitments, place of residence and educational qualifications (Raymond 2001; Perraton and Creed 2000; Aitchison 1998; Peters 1998; Holowachuk 1997; Berge 1996; Goodson 1996; Heery 1996; Heller-Ross 1996; Perry and Rumble in Hogson 1993; Kaye in Hogson 1993; Paine in Hogson 1993; Lewis and Spencer in Hogson 1993; Holt and Bonnici in Hogson 1993; Verduin and Clark 1991; Harris 1987). It was argued in the same sources that these characteristics made distance learners a different student group from on-campus students and this factor has a particular bearing on how they seek and make use of information resources and services.

It was also noted in chapter four that out of a sample size of 377 that was randomly selected through systematic sampling, only 183 questionnaires were returned making it a 48.5% response rate. An explanation was given for this low return of questionnaires in chapter four but suffice to point out here that the interpretation of the survey results and hence their generalization of the survey results to the larger distance learning students registered with the ZOU, were therefore done with caution in view of the limited responses.
The chapter analyses and interprets the survey results on the information seeking situations with a view to understanding how the information needs of distance learners arose. The survey results on the use made of information sources to which the distance learners went to seek information and the problems faced by the respondents in accessing the information sources are interpreted. Other sections of the chapter include: the extent and frequency of use of the ZOU LIS and other information providers; the existence of relevant information searching and retrieval skills; distance from the ZOU and other libraries and the problems faced in seeking information; the provision of adequate learning materials instead of library resources and services; and the type of library and information resources and services that the LIS management should put in place to address the information seeking patterns of distance learners all determined the order of interpreting the survey results in order to meet the research objectives and answer the research questions.

6.2. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC AND ACADEMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISTANCE LEARNERS

The survey results on the socio-demographic and academic characteristics will be considered in relation to other factors observed in the study such as how these characteristics impacted on the use of information sources and the problems that distance learners faced in accessing information sources and information providers. It was critical for the study to investigate and understand these characteristics since they were seen as part of the research problem, that is to say, it was assumed they contributed to the low or non-use of the ZOU LIS by its distance learners which it was intended to serve.

The survey results established that the age of the respondents ranged from 26 to 45 years. This finding clearly confirms the view in the literature surveyed that the majority of distance learners are invariably mature or adult people of above 25 years (Chikono 2001; Raymond Ill 2001; Perraton and Creed 2000; Peters
The ZOU, as an open learning university, embraced the educational process that admits a broad spectrum of students, which encompasses adult learners, who because of their age previously could not attain tertiary education in conventional universities. By admitting such mature students, the ZOU embraced the democratic tenet of open learning by making accessible tertiary education to all. Open learning and distance education assures equity in access to tertiary education and removes the barriers associated with the age of learners, which to some extent, is also associated with conventional institutions (Mhasvi 2000: W9)

It was also discussed in the literature that as mature people, distance learners have the ability to determine when they want to learn, what they want to learn, how they will learn and what methods they will employ towards the attainment of their objectives (Perraton and Creed 2000; Paine in Hogson 1993). These learners were also said to have the ability to relate what they learn in class to their experiences in real life thus integrating theory with practice (Rowland and Rubbert 2001; Hill Committee Report 1995; Williams Commission Report 1989). The study sought to establish whether this independence in conducting their business also enabled the distance learners to rely on their own experiences in seeking for information as noted in sections 1.4.2 and 3.3. of chapter one and three respectively.

Hence in the survey on the use of information sources, it was established that out of the 183 respondents who responded to the survey, 61.7% relied on books and journals to answer their questions, 60.1% consulted a friend and 56.8% relied on their own experiences. The results showed that the ZOU LIS was rated fourth, by 48.0% of the respondents, among these sources of information that were indicated as major sources of information. In this regard, it is clear therefore that the distance learners do rely on their own experiences, as mature learners, to determine what, how, when, and where to look for information sources. Reich (cited in Rowlands and Rubbert 2001:756) supports this interpretation in the statement made that distance learners “...value self-initiative to find relevant information materials and recognise it as part of the learning process.” Among
other characteristics that will be discussed below, the maturity of distance learners, as
determined by the survey results, and with some caution in generalizing for the whole
distance learners registered with the ZOU because of the little response rate to the survey,
could partly explain why the ZOU LIS was therefore under-utilized.

6.2.2. Gender of the distance learners

From the sample surveyed, it was possible to survey through systematic sampling, a fair
representation of both males and females. Although the males were a slightly larger
group representing 53.9% compared to 44.4% of the 183 respondents, the results show
that both males and females are attaining further tertiary education through distance
education. These statistics confirm the notion that open learning and distance education
provide equal opportunity to all to attain their educational aspirations as established in the
literature reviewed. In Australia, for example, it was seen that the Australian government
put in place a de jure policy that opened up educational opportunities to the women
among other disadvantaged groups.

In conventional education systems, it is possible to find more males pursuing further
education than females since the latter often have to break their studies to get married and
care for families. Distance education empowers the female gender to pursue their
educational endeavours even when they are married. The Williams Report (1989) noted
for instance that open learning and distance education is meant to be beneficial to
women, who because of their responsibilities at the home front and the domestic chores
that they have to contend with, had always been unable to attend full-time studies.
Results of the survey showed that regardless of such commitments at the home front or
taking care of large families, more women are actually enrolled for further studies with
the ZOU since open learning permits them to determine when to learn, how to learn, what
to learn and where to learn.
Similarly, the survey results also revealed that the respondents did not regard the gender and family commitments as a barrier to the use of the ZOU LIS and other information sources to any large extent. For instance, among the reasons that prevent distance learners from getting information they needed from the ZOU LIS, the reason that household chores and looking after the family took up much of their time, was selected by 9.8% of the respondents, making this reason the fifth among the seven major reasons cited in the survey. Thus contrary to Chikono’s (2001:20) assumption, family commitments did not deter, to any large extent, the ZOU distance learners from using the ZOU LIS.

6.2.3. Marital status and family size

Further to the above interpretation, the survey results thus revealed that out of the 183 respondents, the majority of 85.6% were married and that 88.3% had children of their own. It was also established that 22.8% of the respondents lived with one member of their extended families and 20.6% lived with two members of their extended families. On average it was possible to find family sizes of between 4-6 including the extended families.

The marital status and family size statistics were meant to determine the extent to which household commitments affected the information seeking patterns of the distance learners. As with the gender characteristic, the results of the survey established that household chores and looking after the family was rated fifth on the list of reasons that were pre-listed in the questionnaire. Thus although being married and looking after a family can to some extent affect information accessing, it has been shown that it was not a major reason in this study.

6.2.4. Area of residence

The survey results revealed that out of the 183 respondents, 46.7% lived in urban areas and 26.7% in the rural areas. It was established in the literature surveyed that education in
Zimbabwe has been concentrated in the urban areas since the colonial era. (Made 2000; Gatawa 1990) It was only after independence that this anomaly was addressed. Through the statistics on area of residence the researcher hoped to show the flexibility of distance education programmes where even those in remote areas can access tertiary education.

Yet despite this flexibility, the results of the survey illustrate that tertiary education still remained concentrated in the urban and town centres. The distribution of library and information resources and services was still affected by patterns established during colonial rule. Such facilities remained largely concentrated in schools located in the urban areas, particularly in the low-density areas that were the preserve of the colonial rulers. Most library and information centres are largely found at these institutions of higher learning. Therefore the unequal distribution of tertiary institutions in urban centres also entailed the location of these facilities in urban and town centres.

The ZOU was meant to bring education to the doorstep of all capable people throughout the country. Although the university is decentralised throughout the country’s ten regions, it is still located in urban and town centres thus failing to reach out to the rural population. It can be inferred from some of the survey results that the rural-based distance learners would like to see the further decentralisation of the ZOU LIS to the rural areas.

The further analysis of area of residence according to high- and low-density suburbs in both the urban and town centres showed that the majority of the respondents, 35.0%, were in the high-density areas compared to 27.3% in the low-density areas. Similarly as in the urban-rural area dichotomy and as a result of the colonial legacy, the provision of better social amenities such as schools and well-stocked libraries was concentrated in the low-density areas, which were former ‘whites’ only areas of residence. The survey results, however, have shown that there was not a major variance in the distribution of the respondents in the two areas, a factor that could be attributed to the attainment of independence and the movement of ‘black’ Zimbabweans to the former ‘whites’ only areas of residence. Hence fair access to public libraries in both low- and high-density
areas was assured. Yet the same cannot be said of the rural areas where a large gap in information service provision still exists to this day. In cities and towns, respondents therefore had more or less equal access to public library facilities in these areas.

The significance of the rural-urban characteristics of the respondents demonstrates how the information seeking patterns are affected by the unequal access to information sources and information providers. This is demonstrated in the characteristics by the fact that distance learners in the rural areas are located at a distance from tertiary institutions and their library resources.

6.2.5. Academic characteristics

Similarly, the accessibility of education to all Zimbabweans was reflected in the survey result in which the majority of the respondents, 41.1% had attained high educational qualifications prior to joining the university. The results revealed that 26.1% attained high school certificates, 15.0% had Ordinary level school certificates and 10.6% had attained university degrees prior to their joining the ZOU. The result, together with the age of the respondents, reinforces the maturity level of the distance learners as well as the fact that most had long since left formal education in the conventional school system. It also demonstrates how open learning and distance education allows people of various academic qualifications entry into the tertiary education programmes unlike the high entry requirements of mostly ‘A’ levels in conventional institutions. It was revealed that distance learners form a group of students that was previously disadvantaged by high entry requirements from participating in formal tertiary education at conventional institutions.

It had been assumed that this long absence from the formal education might have contributed to the low usage of the ZOU LIS since the distance learners would have forgotten how to seek and access information sources in libraries. The survey results on the ability of respondents to use information seeking tools, tended to refute this
assumption where it was revealed that more than half of the respondents, 68.0%, were able to use library catalogues and 55.6% were able to use indexes and abstracts. Other writers, however, contend that it is from their maturity that distance learners are resourceful and rely on their experiences in seeking information with minimum assistance (Peters 1998). These arguments would be demonstrated with clear survey results in the ensuing relevant sections of this chapter six.

Besides school, high school and university qualifications attained prior to joining the university, the survey results also established that the respondents had other high qualifications where 26.1% had diploma and 15.0% had certificate qualifications. It is clear that these qualifications were attained in their work-related fields for personal growth and social advancement long after they had left formal education.

It was interesting to note that the majority of the respondents, 78.9% (145) did not attain their education through distance education while 20.6% (37) did. Of the latter group, it was seen that 6.1% (11) of the respondents attained high school certificates through distance education, 2.7% or five attained Ordinary school certificates, 2.2% or four and 1.6% or three attained diploma and certificate qualifications respectively through distance education.

Similarly with professional qualifications, the majority of the respondents, 57.7% attained professional qualifications at the certificate level, 41.6% at diploma and 8.3% at first degree levels. Yet more than half of the respondents, 70.0% did not attain these professional qualifications through distance education.

These survey results on the education attained prior to joining the ZOU clearly show that few of the respondents had any prior experience with the distance education mode of learning. The ZOU therefore provided the respondents with their first hand experience of having to learn and fend for themselves in seeking for information that addressed their needs.
6.2.6. Current levels of study and programme choices in the ZOU

Through systematic random sampling, the survey attempted to maintain and preserve the representativity of the study sample. The need for this representativeness was also observed in Rowland and Rubbert’s (2001:747) study in which they evaluated the information needs and practices of part-time and distance-learning students. They observed that “As [their] project anticipated a general exploration of the lifelong learning environment, a representative distribution of respondents across modes of study, subject areas and the level of qualification had to be achieved.” As such in this study, it was possible to survey all the different levels of study in the university. Hence, although the percentage of respondents that were in their second year was the highest at 36.1%, other levels of study were more or less the same with 19.4% in 4th year, 17.2% in 1st year, 15.0% in third year and 11.1% (20) at the postgraduate level.

Similarly the survey attempted to be representative in its survey of the programmes offered in the university. The results of the survey showed that 37 (20.2%) of respondents studied the Bachelor of Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies (BEDEAPPS) degree program which was the flagship degree of the university; 23 (12.7%) were in the Bachelor of Arts, English and Communication program; 16 (8.8%) in the Bachelor of Commerce degree suite; 17 (9.2%) in the Management of Business Administration (MBA) program, 13 (7.2%) in Bachelor of Science in Special Education (BSc.SPED), 12 (6.6%) in Bachelor of Science Geography and Environmental Studies (BSc.GES) and 11 (6.1%) in Bachelor of Science in Counselling degree program.

The programmes surveyed include the four major programmes that were recommended by the Hill Committee report (1995) in the initial setting up of the ZOU. The Bachelor of Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies including the Master’s level equivalent, continue to be the flagship of the university to this day although it was started to offer further degree training to teachers and headmasters (Hill Report 1995) and as equally noted by Chikono (2001:23) “...when the Centre for Distance learning was
established, it was offering degree programmes mostly for teachers through distance teaching.’

The survey therefore assured a comprehensive coverage of the distance learners at various levels of study throughout the university in the regions and their information seeking patterns were not differentiated at these levels or by the programme that was studied at the time of carrying out the study. There will be need though, in future studies, to determine whether the information seeking patterns of distance learners vary between different levels of study and by programme. Chikono’s (2000) study, however, was limited to a particular region, that is, the Harare Region, with a view to draw conclusions and generalisations for the whole university.

6.3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMMITMENTS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

The survey results revealed that 95.5% of the respondents were in formal employment and only 5.4% were not. This finding therefore concurs with the evidence in the literature reviewed (Aitchison 1998; Peters 1998; Hogson 1993; Harris 1989) that the majority of distance learners are invariably engaged in various socio-economic activities. Such engagements impacted on the amount of free time that was available to the respondents for accessing information sources. It was found that the respondents had very little free time for seeking information. The results revealed that 21.3% or 39 of the respondents, 18.5% (34), 15.8% (29) and 11.4% (21) had free time of 2 hours, 4 hours, 3 hours and 5 hours respectively at the end of each day. Lack of time thus affects the use of libraries and other information sources.

These findings concur with those made by Rowland and Rubbert (2002:749) who found that “The biggest barriers to using the university libraries for all students were time and geographical constraints.” Chikono equally “…found out that time and distance were the main limitations from using the (ZOU) library
Further to the work commitments, the study revealed that the majority of the respondents, 81.4% were not able to get time off from their work to attend to their studies and to look for information. They were only allowed time for writing examinations. This meant that the only time they could have used the libraries was when they were not at work, that is, mostly in the evenings and over the weekends. Necessarily therefore, by failing to provide services at these particular times indicated in the survey, and by choosing to open and provide library services according to the traditional system in the on-campus library service as explained in the introduction in Chapter 1 and as established by Chikono (2000), the ZOU LIS failed to meet the needs of the distance learners.

Since the majority of the respondents were in full-time employment, three-quarters of the respondents, representing 92.7% (170), indicated they were able to pay for their own tuition fees. Despite paying for their tuition fees, 58.9% were not able to buy their own reading materials. This meant that the majority of the distance learners relied on the use of libraries and other sources for reading materials. On the other hand, 38.4% indicated that they were able to buy their own reading materials.

However, whether the latter group was able to buy all the reading materials that they needed for the courses enrolled, it remains to be established through a separate investigation. It would be reasonable to assume, from the above survey results, that this could be one of the reasons why the LIS was little used since some of the distance learners were able to buy their own reading materials. Indeed it is common to hear some distance learners remarking that they do not rely on the ZOU LIS as they have their own collections in their homes.

6.4. WHERE DO DISTANCE LEARNERS GO TO SEEK FOR INFORMATION AND WHY?

In order for the study to be able to identify where the distance learners went to seek for information, it was necessary to understand the information seeking situations of the
distance learners that caused them to want to seek for information. It was critical for the study to determine what Chen and Hemon (1982) regarded as the context of the circumstances in which the need for information arose among the distance learners. The intention of defining these information-seeking situations was to determine what was referred to by Kaniki (1989) as the existence of an information need in distance learners, which propelled them to follow particular paths and seek for information that addressed their needs. The study sought to determine whether traces of information needs emanated from the context of particular situations. Thus the respondents were required to recall particular situations in the past month or so from the time the study was carried out, in which they needed to solve a problem, carry out a task or to find an answer to a question. This qualitative critical incident approach of making users recall past behaviour situations that could have propelled them to seek information was employed in the literature reviewed (Stilwell 2002; Radford 1996; Shirey 1971).

Understanding the problems associated with trying to recall totally certain incidents that would have taken place sometime in the past, the researcher provided the respondents with an example of situations that the researcher had experienced in the past. It was hoped this would help the respondents to correctly articulate those particular situations in which the distance learners needed information.

The survey results revealed that just under half of the 183 respondents, 44.2%, recalled situations when they needed to answer assignment-related questions in their studies. Another 19.6% recalled situations to do with their research. The results also showed that although there were other situations defined by the respondents, they were invariably related to these two situations.

As was to be expected, the context of the circumstances leading to a need for information are all related to the studies the respondents were enrolled with the ZOU. The question itself and the example given on the question, could have given the respondents adequate leads to this situation, itself being study-related. These situations were closely related to
the studies that the respondents were undertaking and indeed that is so since they are students pursuing further studies at university level.

The study situations such as research and assignment writing were also revealed in the questions that the respondents needed to answer in the situations that they recalled. Various assignment and research related topics were given as the questions that needed to be answered in their particular situations.

The study shed light on the information needs of the respondents existing in the context of their studies. From the survey results, the information needs could be traced to the research and assignment writing circumstances. The majority of the respondents, 77.9%, answered the questions that were related to the situations they described. The answers in the form of assignments and research projects were required to contribute towards the successful completion of their studies. There were 12.6% (23) who did not answer the questions that arose in their situations. These indicated they had either dropped out of the programmes, found the information limited in their study modules or others had not started answering the questions. A smaller group of 8.0% (13) however indicated that they were still trying to answer the questions.

6.5. USE OF CERTAIN TYPES INFORMATION SOURCES

It was important for the study to establish how much and how often the distance learners made use of information sources. Having determined the information seeking situations of the respondents, the survey presented to the distance learners a list of information sources to which they could have gone to seek for information that helped them to answer their questions, to solve their problems or to carry out a given task. The respondents were asked to tick as many sources as possible that they had used. They were also asked to indicate and rank the sources that they thought were least useful, not very useful, fairly useful and very useful.
The results of the survey indicated that from the eight sources listed in the survey, the following top five were selected and ranked according to the number of respondents who selected the sources:

- Books or journals were selected by 61.7% of the total respondents (n=183) as the main sources of information;
- Consult a friend, 60.1%;
- Rely on own experience, 56.8%;
- The ZOU LIS, 48.0%; and
- Colleagues at the workplace, 45.5%.

These sources were further ranked on a scale according to the least useful, not very useful, fairly useful, useful and very useful. The survey results showed that the majority of the respondents, 26.8% regarded the reliance on their own experience as fairly useful. Consulting a friend was considered useful by 22.4% of the respondents and fairly useful by 21.9% of the respondents. The use of the radio and television as sources of information was considered least useful by 21.9% of the respondents.

The use of books and journals as information sources was regarded very useful by 38.8% of the respondents. The books and journals were not necessarily obtained from the ZOU LIS in that this institution was seen by about half of this number of respondents (20.2%) to be very useful. Thirdly, the reliance on their experience was viewed as very useful by 16.1% of the respondents.

It can be seen that by bringing together these sources of information in six generic groups, the most commonly used sources of information were the interpersonal relationships, such as consulting with a friend and colleagues at the workplace which had 60.0% (110) and 45.5% (83) of the respondents respectively. This was followed by academic sources such as books and journals and own tutor, which had 61.7% (113) and 69% (37.7%) respectively. Libraries were the third most preferred with the ZOU LIS, 48.0% (88) and another library(ies) at 39.3% (72) respectively. Reading newspapers and reliance on one’s experience were treated separately in this interpretation.
These findings differed quite significantly from Chikono (2000:21) who found, from his study of library services offered to distance learners who were registered at the Harare Region, that 71% of respondents in his survey had indicated they had used the library. It is this researcher’s assumption that the survey of one region by Chikono (2000) could have impacted on the usage statistics received given that the region had the largest number of enrolments compared to other regions and that Chikono (2000) got a response rate of 88%.

According to Stilwell (2002:74) it seems to be the trend in studies on information seekers that most of the occupational groups rely on personal contacts for information. There is a general tendency for information seekers to seek information from the information sources and information providers that they are familiar with and outside the educational institutions. An example is provided by Stilwell (2002:74) citing Forbes (1999) where “…the most heavily used information source was also personal communication with relatives, friends, employers, co-workers, and the police serving as sources.” The same observation therefore was noted in this study.

Being far removed from the university and other institutions of higher learning, distance learners are left to fend for themselves and would most likely turn to the people that they know and are close to, other than their own experiences, for solutions to any problems that they might have. This finding is equally acknowledged in the Dearing Report (cited in Rowland and Rubbert 2001: 745-746), which showed that “…the educational experience of part-time and mature students is formed by a complex network of information flows that has many nodes outside the educational institutions, but contributes substantially towards the learning experience of the individual.” Whether these interpersonal sources are adequate and reliable is the question, however, as Stilwell (2002:74) points out. Responses reflected in Table 7 suggest the limitations of the interpersonal (non-tutor) sources.
Overall, these survey results seem to indicate a certain path that was taken by the distance learners to locate information sources that are required to meet their needs. The distance learners tend to consult books and journals more, consult a friend, use their own experiences, use the ZOU LIS, rely on colleagues at the work place, use another library(ies), go to their own tutor(s) and lastly read newspapers and magazines.

Although the majority of the respondents did not select the ZOU LIS as a source that they readily consulted for information, it was however found, after books and journals, to be a very useful source in meeting their information needs. The distance learners would readily use other books and journals, consult a friend and rely on their experiences first for reasons that are outlined in the succeeding sections. This finding is collaborated by similar findings made by Rowland and Rubbert (2001:750) who, in their evaluation of the information needs and practices of part-time and distance-learning students, established that “Even though the respondents were critical about libraries, books and journals still emerged clearly as the information sources most frequently used.”

It is in the light of these findings that this study seeks to recommend that although “…the universities and their libraries represented physical knowledge centres, which individuals would have to visit to receive the information they needed” (Rowland and Rubbert 2001:746; Mulvaney 1999), the ZOU LIS would need to refocus its remit and adjust services and resources as a typical library sans frontiere to suite the special information seeking patterns of its distance users.

The survey results further established that of the very useful sources that were consulted by the respondents, the majority, 78.2% (129) had gone to them because they had used them before and 57.6% (95) went to them because they were close to the sources and easy to get to. Hence this further outlines the paths taken by the distance learners in seeking for information. It is not surprising that books and journals would therefore be popular since these are sources that distance learners would have used before and were within easy reach of them. So too would be their reliance on their own experiences, but
again there are limitations as reflected in Table 7 where this source scores low on very useful sources.

Useful insights were gained into the information seeking patterns of the distance learners regarding their reasons for using particular sources and the referral patterns that led them there. The survey established that the distance learners were referred by the very useful sources to other helpful sources of information. For instance it was revealed in the survey that 51.5% of the respondents were referred to other helpful sources such as other books for further reading and to other university libraries. Out of the 90 respondents who were asked whether they went to the other helpful sources, 70.0% (63) indicated that they did. As the results on the levels of satisfaction with the referred sources indicated, 57.6% of the 66 respondents who answered the question indicated that they were satisfied with these referred sources.

A similar path of information seeking was also followed with the sources of information that were regarded as least useful. It was established the majority of the respondents, 82.7% (124) out of the 150 respondents who answered the question, were not referred to these least useful sources. Only 17.3% were referred by friends, tutors, and colleagues at the work place or by references in books and modules. Most of the respondents, 57.0% of the 142 respondents who answered the question used the least useful sources because they had used them before and 63.1% (89) out of 141 respondents had no choice since these sources were close to them and easy to get to.

Interestingly, the survey results revealed that libraries, particularly the ZOU LIS, did not play their critical role in referring distance learners to other useful information sources. This is a significant omission on the part of libraries since reference and referral services are some of the core services that should be offered to library users anywhere, bearing in mind the altruistic truth that no one library is an island unto itself and therefore cannot stock every other information for all users.
It was curious to note, however, that the levels of satisfaction with the referrals from the least useful sources of information were similar to the levels of satisfaction with the very useful sources as indicated by the graphic representation of the survey results. It can be concluded that even the least useful sources of information were able to refer the respondents to equally very useful sources.

The survey results indicate definite paths taken by the respondents in looking for information. Relying on the books that they use and from their own experiences and interpersonal relations, with friends and colleagues at the work place, it can be cautiously concluded that the distance learners move from the sources that they know best “...whether or not these were the best source of information.” (Kiondo cited in Stilwell 2001:74) and have used before. They proceed to other useful sources they are referred and hence from these to others, in a definite pattern, until they locate the information that addresses their needs.

6.6. EXTENT AND FREQUENCY OF USE OF THE ZOU LIS AND OTHER INFORMATION SOURCES/PROVIDERS

This section interprets the survey results obtained regarding the use of the ZOU LIS and other information sources or information providers. Although the libraries had been included among information sources, they are essentially regarded as information providers.

6.6.1. Use of the ZOU LIS

Further to the information sources that were consulted by the respondents to address their information needs, the ZOU LIS was viewed by 67.6% of the respondents as a useful source of information. The survey results indicated the reasons that were given by the respondents as to why they found the LIS useful. It was established that 59.0% of the respondents were able to identify, locate, and get information that they needed. This
finding revealed that more students actually had library use skills than was assumed by Chikono’s (2000:32) in his recommendations when he noted that, “Students vary in their experiences of using higher education libraries, some have no prior experience of library use and some have poorly developed skills....”

Thirty-three percent indicated that the LIS usually had what they needed while 30.6% and 28.9% attributed the usefulness to the current and relevant information and the help they got from the LIS staff respectively. Chikono (2000) also found out in his study that 79% of respondents had found library staff to be very helpful. It was also established that the ZOU LIS was mostly used once a month by 40.0% (44) of the 110 respondents to the question. This finding concurred with that made by Rowland and Rubbert (2001:749) in which they found that 34% of the respondents in their study “…visited a university library only between one and three times per month”

The low use of the ZOU LIS was partly due to the fact that the ZOU LIS was at a distance from some of the respondents. Yet it was also revealed that others lived close to the ZOU LIS hence distance was not much of a barrier to such students. Thus the survey results had indicated that 44.2% of the respondents lived more than 51 kilometres from the LIS while 25.1% lived within the 0-10 kilometre range.

Others, 35.5%, indicated that they do not have the time to make use of the LIS as they are engaged in work activities for the better part of the day when the LIS is open. This finding also concurred with that made by Rowland and Rubbert (2001:749) who found that, “More than three-quarters of the part-time students found that the opening hours of their university library were not tailored to their needs…” A further 21.9% and 18.0% indicated that the LIS was inconveniently located for them to use it and that it had inconvenient opening times. These barriers to using the ZOU LIS were articulated in Rowland and Rubbert (2000:749) when they observed from their survey results that:

The biggest barriers to using the university libraries for all students were time and geographical constraints. Over one-third of the respondents have never entered their own or any other university library during their course of study. More than
three-quarters of the part-time students found that the opening times of their university library were not tailored to their needs.

Chikono (2000) also found that time and distance were a major barrier to the use of the ZOU LIS when he reported that "...almost all respondents, 97% felt that library opening hours should be extended and some even went further to suggest that this should be done especially during weekends."

Other high-ranking factors influencing the non-use of the ZOU LIS that were given by the respondents included the elusiveness of urgently required resources. The resources were found to be always out with someone else as indicated by 51.9% of the respondents. This is not surprising in view of the paucity of the LIS stock as indicated in chapter one. It was also established that the library was too small and often congested, it offered short borrowing periods, it took too long to locate material and that the LIS needed to train students on how to use the library.

Interestingly, the survey results revealed that the socio-demographic characteristics of distance learners such as the marital status and family size, which the researcher thought would impact on the information seeking patterns of distance learners, were not indicated as a major barrier in the survey results. Only 9.8% of the respondents indicated that household chores and looking after the family took up most of their time. This was in comparison to 37.1%, 35.5%, 21.8% and 18.0% who regarded the distant location of the LIS, lack of time due to work commitments, the inconvenient location and inconvenient opening times respectively as major reasons that prevented them from getting the information they needed from the ZOU LIS.

6.6.2. Use of another library(ies) as information providers

As indicated in the information seeking patterns discussed above, it was revealed that 73.2%, nearly three quarters of the respondents, made use of other libraries to access
materials for study. In this case, and similarly with the use of the ZOU LIS, respondents also indicated that they accessed other libraries at least once month. The types of libraries varied from other university libraries such as the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) and National University of Science and Technology (NUST) libraries, public libraries in urban and town areas, rural libraries such as those set up by the Better Schools Programme Zimbabwe (BSPZ), the National Library and Documentation Services (NLDS) and Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme (RLRDP) and special libraries in government ministries and departments.

This tendency to rely on other libraries by part-time students was also noted by Aitchison (1998) in her Masters in Information Studies thesis on *Access to books and journals by post-graduate students on a coursework Master's programme in information studies at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg*.

It would be critical for the LIS to establish cooperative agreements and synergy with unaffiliated libraries, as discussed in chapter three, in order to provide adequate and reasonably unfettered access to a wide variety of information resources available in other libraries. This way, the LIS would be able to reach out to the distance learners wherever they are located.

In addition to the lack of use of the ZOU LIS, the survey results established that 42.8% of the respondents indicated that the accessing of other information providers was affected by the monetary costs involved in getting to these information providers; the time it took for them to get there; and the accuracy, understandability, relevance and currency or recency of the information they were likely to get. Other factors that were given relate to the exorbitant membership fees that were levied on the distance learners by the unaffiliated libraries, lack of relevant materials and the cost of travelling to and from other libraries. There is a need for the LIS management to negotiate for reasonable membership fees, as they establish mutual agreements and synergy with unaffiliated libraries and at appropriate fora such as the newly established Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC).
It appeared from these survey results that all the characteristics about open learning and distance education seemed to affect the use of the LIS and other unaffiliated libraries. They were found to be distantly located from the users who are in the main distance learners. The libraries provided services for the larger part of the day, that was from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm, when yet the distance learners were gainfully engaged in other socio-economic activities elsewhere as pointed out earlier in section 6.1. Although some on-campus libraries provided services until midnight, these were found to be inaccessible due to distance and inconvenient location from the distance learners.

As pointed out in the literature, there is every need for the ZOU LIS to change its remit and consider distance learners as their core business (Bremner 2001). The study revealed the characteristics of distance learners, which ought to be addressed if the LIS is to remain relevant and credible to the distance learners. Some guidelines on how best libraries should address the specific characteristics of distance learners have been proffered in the literature reviewed in chapter three (Guidelines for Library Support of Distance Learning in Canada 2000; ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services 1998; Kascus and Aguiler 1998; Guidelines for Library Services to External Students, Australia 1982).

Fundamental to these guidelines is the need to assess and understand the needs, behaviour and information seeking patterns in order to identify, develop, coordinate, and assess valuable, effective and appropriate library service provision in distance learning environments. It is the intention of this study to consider these guidelines and make appropriate recommendations in line with the findings of the study as well as recommendations from the respondents on what the LIS should do to improve its remit in a distance learning environment.
6.7. RESPONDENTS' RELEVANT INFORMATION SEARCHING AND RETRIEVAL SKILLS

The survey results established that the respondents did possess the relevant information searching and retrieval skills. More than half of the respondents, 68.0% or 115 out of 183 respondents, indicated that they were able to use the library catalogues and 55.6% out of 158 who answered this question could use indexes and abstracts. This survey result therefore shows that a sizeable number of respondents could make use of library catalogues, indexes and abstracts contrary to Chikono's (2000:32) finding that "Students vary in their experience of using higher education libraries, some have no prior experience of library use and some have poorly developed skills therefore all students need to have personal contact with the library."

The use of information seeking tools had a bearing on the ability of respondents to identify, locate, retrieve and use information in the LIS and other libraries. Although a manual catalogue was not in place at the time of conducting the survey since an electronic online public access catalogue (OPAC) was being developed, the respondents made use of library catalogues in other libraries that they used. Hence among the recommendations that were submitted by the respondents on what the LIS should do to improve its services to distance learners, it was pointed out that the LIS should put in place such a catalogue.

6.8. DISTANCE FROM ZOU LIS AND OTHER INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTRES

It has been established in some of the preceding sections that the ZOU LIS was found to be distantly located from some of the users who are in the main distance learners. While the majority of respondents, 44.2% or 78 out of 175 that responded to the question, lived more than 51 kilometres from the ZOU LIS, 32.4% (58) lived more than 51 kilometres from other unaffiliated libraries. Also where 25.1% lived within the 0-10 kilometre range
of the LIS, 34.1% (61) lived within the 0-10 kilometre range from other unaffiliated libraries.

An analysis of the two graphic illustrations in the survey results shows the similarity in the distribution of distance from both groups of libraries. It appeared there are two extreme cases of respondents living either near or too far away from the libraries. This can be explained by the fact that most tertiary institutions, to which the libraries are attached, including the ZOU LIS, are located in urban and town centres as interpreted in the preceding section 6.1. While the ZOU is a distance learning university and is decentralized throughout the country’s ten regions, the university still remains located in urban and town centres. The findings therefore indicated that distance was not much of a barrier to those respondents who lived in urban and town centres since they were closely located to the libraries. It was however a barrier to the respondents who lived more than 51 kilometres from the libraries.

On the other hand, nearly each urban area also has a conventional on-campus university. Thus where the distribution of the distance learners in urban and rural areas indicated 46.7% in urban areas and 26.7% in the rural areas, access to libraries due to distance would also nearly reflect this urban-rural distribution of the distance learners since the rural areas are invariably located more than 51 kilometres from the urban areas. This great distance from the libraries thus affected these respondents.

Hence the geographic dispersion of the respondents over a wide area reflects the characteristic of most distance learners. The absence of libraries in remote areas impacts on their information seeking patterns where they had to travel over great distances to seek for information. Moreover, commensurate with travelling great distances were the increased costs of travel and the long time it took them to get to the information resource centres. It became inevitable for the respondents to weigh the cost-benefit of seeking for information over such distances. Added to the equation was the need to consider the possibility of finding or not finding the required information at the information providers.
These factors therefore did contribute to the low use of the ZOU LIS and other libraries by the distantly located library users.

6.9. THE PROVISION OF ADEQUATE LEARNING MATERIALS IN ADDITION TO LIBRARY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

The survey results indicated that most respondents, 57.9% or 103 who had answered the question on whether in their view they considered libraries as important information providers regarded libraries as such while 27.5% regarded libraries as very important information providers in their lives. In Chikono's (2000:22) survey of the library services offered by the ZOU to its distance learners, it was found that the majority of the respondents, 73%, had rated the ZOU LIS collection as good. This analysis serves to explain this researcher's own finding on the importance of libraries as information providers.

However, notwithstanding this importance, it was revealed in the survey results that more than half of the respondents, 63.8% decided that it was better for the university to provide the distance learners with adequate and comprehensive self-help learning materials instead of libraries and information services. This survey result was not very surprising considering the discussion of results in the preceding sections. It was believed by the respondents, for instance, that such comprehensive learning kits would be ideal in that they would be relevant, easy to read and would enable distance learners to save on the little time they had for study purposes. The respondents had in mind a one-stop-shop or all-in-one kind of learning materials that would enable them to solve all their needs and remove the necessity of travelling great distances to and from libraries and information resource centres. There is the obvious drawback however of learners not learning to engage with the rigours and rewards of information searching in tertiary education libraries as part of their academic development as succinctly observed by Cuthbertson (1992:6)
As indicated in the preceding sections, the distance from libraries and the university itself, the costs involved in travelling to and from accessing information providers or sources, the time it took to travel, the inadequate resources that were in the ZOU LIS and the possibility for getting to the LIS and not be able to get what they needed, either because the information would not be there or would be out with someone, possibly became factors that were considered by the distance learners. Hence they resolved that it was better for the university to concentrate on providing them with comprehensive self-help learning kits rather than library and information services.

Nevertheless, despite selecting the option for comprehensive self-help and interactive learning materials in the place of libraries, it is this researcher’s contention that a complete replacement of libraries because of the above-mentioned barriers to the effective and efficient use of the ZOU LIS would be a premature alternative. It is fervently believed, as succinctly put by Rowland and Rubbert (2001:755) that it is because of:

the physical touch of books and the spatial attributes of the traditional libraries that they (are) considered as beneficial for their educational experience...libraries represent a sense of completeness of knowledge, because they appear as closed entities, representing the authority of the writer. Hence a feeling of universal access is represented in the library building.”.

On the other hand, the comprehensive self-study kits were preferred because the current basic learning materials are being seen as hardly meeting the requirements of the distance learners. Well-prepared and structured self-help learning kits with back-up materials are being developed today in order for them to be more meaningful to the distance learners.

However, the concerns of the respondents noted in their preference for such comprehensive materials in the place of library and information services need not be overlooked. The ZOU LIS management have a formidable task to design and put in place library services that can best address the peculiar characteristics of the distance learners such as decentralizing to the district areas, postal and mobile services and generally
increasing access to increased resources as noted in the guidelines to library services for distance learners if the ZOU LIS is to remain credible to the users it is meant to serve.

It will be recommended that the LIS management should seriously consider planning and designing an effective LIS that addresses, what this researcher has acronymed CCAUSAL factors from Kaniki's (1989) factors, such as the Cost, both time and money-wise to get to the LIS; Currency or recency of the information resources; Accessibility so that the distance learners find it easy to get to the LIS; Usability in order for the LIS to be easily used by the distance learners; and the Locatibility of the LIS where it can be readily accessed by the distance learners.

6.10. LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RESOURCES AND SERVICES

THE LIS MANAGEMENT SHOULD PUT IN PLACE

The survey results indicated several suggestions that were offered by the distance learners regarding what the LIS management ought to do to address their specific information needs and information-seeking patterns as distance students registered with the ZOU. For instance, 45.3% of the respondents required that more books be added to the LIS system of libraries in specific subject areas. This recommendation was made against a backdrop of the current small collection, which hardly affords a book per each distant user. Twelve percent advocated the decentralization of the LIS to the district level. Currently decentralization was limited to the regional centres in urban and town centres as discussed in the introductory Chapter One. Others recommended an increased lending period and tighter controls on the circulation of resources. Today the LIS offers limited circulation due to the limited resources. It is possible to find certain privileges being extended to some distance learners and not to the generality of the user group. Management ought to eradicate such misplaced preferential treatment and favouritism alleged against some LIS members of staff. The expansion of library facilities to enable the accommodation of more users as opposed to the current cramped up and rented facilities as noted in the introductory Chapter One, was seen as a matter of urgency.
These recommendations suggested in the survey would be considered in line with the other services that were suggested in the literature surveyed (ACRL Guidelines...1998; Kascus and Aguilier 1998) such as the need to put in place specifically designated distance education librarians and to train the current Library Assistants in distance learning mode of instruction and information accessing. These would provide access to and the delivery of information resources to distance learners at sites that are close to the distance learners. The LIS should be decentralized further to the district levels and set up study centres at grassroots levels. More of these services that are designed to address the distance learners will be offered in the recommendations made in the study.

6.11. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER SIX

It can be seen from the interpretation of results that the study was able to accomplish the objectives that it set out to achieve and answered the research question that were raised in the study. The study has managed to demonstrate how the characteristics of distance learners, such as the socio-demographic, academic and socio-economic commitments, impacted on their information seeking patterns. The study was able to identify the paths that were taken by the individual respondents as they sought for information. It is pertinent to reiterate here the observation that was made by Chen and Hemon (1982:6) in chapter three, section 3.1.3, that central to investigating the information seeking patterns is the individual seeker and that “Any attempt to depict general trends and tendencies in information seeking must admit the human individual as the centre of the phenomenon, consider his or her view, need, options and prejudices as significant and influential elements deserving investigation.”

This was done in the study through the identification of information needs of the respondents as revealed by the context of the circumstances that led the respondents to seek for information and prefer certain sources of information to others. Once the information needs were identified, the survey established the information sources and information providers that were used to seek information to address these needs. Most of these sources, it was established, were known from their own experiences, were
established from their interpersonal relationships with friends and colleagues at the work place and also from the ZOU LIS. The respondents were further referred to other useful and helpful sources of information thus establishing a definite information seeking pattern that was followed by the respondents to search, identify locate, retrieve and use information to answer their questions or to solve particular problems. This information-seeking pattern, with caution thrown to the wind due to the low response rate, can be identified in distance learners registered with the ZOU.

The study also identified the problems faced by the respondents to access and use information resource centres and the LIS such as the long distances from information providers, lack of time, inconvenient location of information providers, inconvenient opening times of most information providers and lack of adequate resources. It revealed the extent and frequency of use of the LIS and other information providers due to these factors. It investigated whether the respondents possessed the skills to search and locate information using catalogues and indexes and abstracts. The survey also sought recommendations from the respondents on what the LIS should do to improve its remit in the provision of information resources and services that best meets their needs.

On the whole, the study was therefore able to answer its research question and accomplish the objectives it had set out to achieve.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. CONCLUSION

The study was undertaken to investigate the information seeking patterns of distance learners who were registered with the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). It was conducted with a view to determine the possible causes for the low usage of the Library and Information Service system that had been put in place to expressly serve the needs of the distance learners. The LIS management had been concerned about this low usage and the reasons for it. The factors that the management pondered on as possible causes for the observed low usage included the following:

- Lack of use could have been caused by the meagre information resources that were found in the ZOU LIS at the time of conducting the survey;
- The characteristics of the distance learners possibly led the distance learners to follow information seeking paths that tended to take them away from the direction of the LIS;
- The traditional set up of the ZOU LIS - which having developed from the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) itself a conventional institution with traditional library services to on-campus students - offered services from 8.00 am up to 6.00 pm. Hence the LIS was possibly failing to meet the needs of distance learners who were engaged in other socio-economic activities for the better part of the day when the LIS was open;
- Whether the distance learners were making use of other libraries and information providers other than the LIS;
- Whether the distance learners were sufficiently aware of the resources and services available to them from the LIS; and
- Whether the distance learners were just not concerned about the LIS despite being aware of it.

Recognition of the potential role of these factors therefore led this researcher, being part of the ZOU LIS management team, to investigate the problem of this low usage and
establish the actual reasons for it. The purpose of investigating the probable causes of this low usage was therefore to assist LIS management to come to grips with the real situation regarding the provision of library and information services in a distance-learning environment and understand the needs for the distance learners. It was hoped this way, the LIS management would be in a better position to plan and coordinate library services that are best suited to the distance learning mode of pedagogical instruction. The management would be able to implement a paradigm shift in the planning for a new look library and information services that is geared to function and serve the interests of distance learners. It was suspected that a library in a traditional setting was therefore failing to live up to the expectations of the distance learners, hence its low use by the same.

It was against this backdrop that the problem statement was formulated, the objectives of the study outlined and the questions that had to be answered by the study were asked and stated.

In its chapter one, an introduction to the study was given. It provided a general background to the problem as stated above, identified and clearly articulated the problem being faced by the ZOU LIS, that is, the observed low usage of the library services notwithstanding the important role of libraries as essential information support systems in the teaching, learning and research activities in tertiary institutions. Added to this problem is the increasingly large numbers of distance learners enrolled with the ZOU that would warrant an equally heavy use of the LIS.

The chapter also stated the specific objectives of the study, outlined the research questions that the study sought to answer and incorporated the purpose of the study, its justification, assumptions and limitations thereof. The terms, concepts and definitions used in the study were also explained in this chapter.

In chapter two, it was seen that open learning and distance education at tertiary levels took quite a long time to be established in Zimbabwe. It appears this extended time taken
to introduce distance education at tertiary levels had to do more with the novelty of the concept in the country rather than with complacency. If anything, the time span taken is characteristic of the process of formulating, designing and finally implementing major policy issues.

Moreover, distance education in Zimbabwe represented a new teaching and learning paradigm never before experienced in the country among the educationists themselves and the ordinary masses in general. Indeed even globally, the concept is relatively new having started growing in the mid-twentieth century. Thus Zimbabwe benefited from experiences encountered in countries such as the UK, Scotland, Australia, from South Africa who were Africa’s first with the University of South Africa (UNISA) and other African countries that were forerunners in implementing this mode of instruction.

An almost serious omission this researcher noted in the study was the disregard to the development of ‘open’ library and information services as critical support systems in distance education in general (Bremner 2001; Kascus and Aguiler 1988) and in Zimbabwe in particular. Most of the investigations and feasibility studies conducted by various Task Groups, Commissions and Committee of inquiries did not set out to investigate and recommend the development of what Bremner (2001) in the literature reviewed called ‘open’ library systems alongside the open learning and distance education pedagogical approach.

Being a new paradigm in the teaching and learning profession, which must be supported by libraries, distance education certainly had implications for the type, functions and services that any library established in this environment was likely to experience. This was all the more reason why the study was conducted. It was revealed in the interpretation of the survey results that there is an urgent need to design more ‘open’ library systems that function well in the distance education environment where the users are separated from the libraries in space and time. Therefore, there was a big gap in the development of open learning and distance education in general and at university levels in particular in the early introduction of this mode of learning in Zimbabwe. This gap, it
was observed in the study, was a result of the failure to include among their eminent members during the investigations to set up distance education at tertiary levels, local or overseas LIS experts who had experience with library developments in distance learning environments.

It became the intention of the study therefore to fill that gap by investigating the information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the ZOU with a view to assist with the strategic development of ‘open’ library systems that serve the needs of distance learning. The findings of the study showed the parameters within which to plan, design, implement, monitor and evaluate the provision of effective library and information services in distance learning environments.

The study analysed in its literature review the growing importance of open learning and distance education in tertiary institutions globally and in particular in the ZOU. It was seen that this mode of instruction is offering equal and seamless opportunities to all peoples to access education at all levels, and in tertiary institutions in particular. The results of the survey indicated that the ZOU had made tremendous strides in this direction where it was offering the opportunity to the previously neglected adult population, the women and those separated from tertiary education by distance, time and work commitments.

In its literature review, the study also demonstrated that the open learning and distance education environment is being transformed tremendously by the increasing use of ICTs in the tertiary education sector. The ZOU LIS needs to adapt and make optimum use of these ICTs, which make, as correctly pointed out by Rowland and Rubbert (2001:758), “…information gathering easier for part-time and distance learning students…”

It was also of importance to understand the characteristics of distance learners such as age, gender, family commitments, work commitments and their areas of residence to establish how they influenced their information seeking patterns. As the results of the survey showed, being mature people, the respondents were able to rely largely on their
interpersonal relationships with friends and colleagues at the workplace, as well as on their own experiences to seek for information resources and services where these were found inadequate within the ZOU system of libraries. Supported by findings in the literature regarding the use of interpersonal linkages to seek for information (Stilwell 2002), the findings in this study could with some caution also be extended to the whole distance learners of registered with the ZOU and likewise, to other open learning and distance education institutions.

It was also shown that family commitments did not have a significant impact on the information seeking habits of the distance learners surveyed, which with some caution could be concluded to apply to the generality of the distance learners registered with the ZOU. It was mostly the factors to do with distance, lack of time due to socio-economic engagements elsewhere and inadequate resources which influenced the way the distance learners sought for information.

An analysis of global trends in the provision of library and information services in distance learning environments provided the study with insight on how to develop strategic plans and initiatives in the provision of appropriate services to the ZOU distance learners based on frameworks and guidelines established on the international arena. Guidelines on appropriate distance education library service provision such as those promulgated in the ACRL (1998) guidelines, The 2000 Canadian guidelines, the Kascus and Aguiler (1988) model and Brophy’s (in Gibson et al. 1999) template of distance education library services, provided concrete examples of practical library service provision to distance learners and academe. The following section will recommend the adoption and implementation by the ZOU LIS of some of the appropriate guidelines from the international scene.

It was evident throughout the literature that libraries in distance education institutions play a critical role in maintaining high standards in the teaching, learning and research activities of these institutions. Similarly as observed by Cuthbertson (1992) libraries ought to be involved in the academic development of students, especially through user
education or library use instruction programmes. To this end, there is therefore the urgent need for libraries in the distance education institutions in general and for the ZOU LIS in particular, to provide equitable services to distance learners similar to those offered to users of on-campus libraries. These would need to be offered bearing in mind the special characteristics of the distance learners, which make them distinct from on-campus students.

The need for cooperation with other unaffiliated university and college libraries in this endeavour cannot be over-emphasized. This is particularly so since no one library can adequately serve all the needs of its users, particularly in the case if serving an extensive and widely disbursed user population in distance education.

The researcher therefore concludes that the study succeeded in identifying unique information seeking patterns of distance learners registered with the Zimbabwe Open University. This can be illustrated by employing Briggs’s (cited in Rowland and Rubbert 2001:758) framework for evaluating the barriers and opportunities that affect the use of library and information services. The framework suggested evaluated, according to Briggs:

the potential use of information services by comparing student-centred constraints (travel time, work, family, age...free time and learning style) with institutional attractions (location, opening times, resources, learning technology, guidance from staff, responsiveness of staff...”

It was through employing such a framework as well as frameworks for identifying information seeking patterns proffered by Chen and Hernon (1982) and Kaniki (1989) that a unique information seeking pattern of distance learners registered with the ZOU was discerned.
7.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section establishes the way forward in the development and improvement of the current ZOU LIS in a distance-learning environment. The study has shown that besides developing a traditional LIS that is well stocked with subject specific and a general collection of relevant and appropriate books and journals, there is every need for the LIS to include what Mulvaney (1999) in the literature called a 'hybrid’ of resources and services that respond to the characteristics of the distance learners. There is need for the LIS to ‘metamorphosize’, so to say, and adapt itself to the open learning and distance education mode of instruction. There is also need to constantly vary and change, like a chameleon, the services offered in order to constantly adapt to the needs of the distance learners wherever they are situated throughout the country and address the CCAUSAL factors, as mentioned in the preceding chapter six and as identified by Kaniki (1989) in chapter three and confirmed in the study. The LIS must consider the adoption and implementation of the following critical recommendations, some of which came from the students themselves, if a library sans frontier is to be put in place:

- There is need to have a central or home library, as stated in the guidelines to setting up distance library services in the literature reviewed (Kascus and Aguiler 1988). This would be complemented by site or regional and district centre libraries throughout Zimbabwe. Such a central library used to exist at the national centre of the university but had to be removed to create space for other university officers with the temporary relocation of the university at the same premises where the LIS was located in the central business district of downtown Harare. There would be need to re-establish this National Centre library.

- Although the LIS is currently decentralised in every region of the country, it is mostly located in urban and town areas. There is an urgent need to further decentralise the LIS to the district centres in both the urban and rural areas where study centres ought to be set up close to the students. It is interesting to note that the students themselves made this recommendation. Moreover, it is line with the recommendations that were made earlier on in section 2.5 of chapter two by the
Hill Report (1995:43) which called for the further decentralisation of the ZOU at the district level, where the majority of the students are found.

- This may require putting up structures in new places, but in most areas, it means making use of existing structures such as schools, colleges and public facilities like community centres. It also entails establishing cooperative relationships and synergy with existing information resource centres at the grassroots levels such as the rural library service of the NLDS, the rural ‘cluster’ library system that was set up by the RLRDP and the BSPZ as well as making use of the mobile information dissemination unit of the Ministry of Information as well as the extension service units of the Ministries of Health and Agriculture. Currently the Government is planning to set up district-based community information centres that the LIS management should include in this decentralisation strategy.

- The regional and district-based libraries would need to be staffed by specifically designated distance education librarians. Since the LIS already has Library Assistance (LAs) employed in the regional centre libraries, these do not have any specific training in distance education. Therefore it is recommended as a matter of urgency to educate and train these in distance education so that they know what this mode of instruction entails. This way, they would be able to design systems and implement the ‘open’ and distance education library systems being recommended in this study.

- Mobile LIS services should be considered in the strategic plans for the ‘open’ LIS. These would enable the circulation of books, journals, audio-visuals materials and electronic resource files amongst the district information resource centres. Book-boxes and book mobile vans can be used to deliver resources to and circulate them among information resource centres at the district levels.

- Related to decentralisation in order to reach out to most of the distance learners at the grassroots level, is the need for the ZOU LIS to consider as a matter of urgency, extending the library opening times and flexible borrowing periods for resources in order to cater for the distance learners who spent a large part of their time at the workplace. The LIS management should consider providing services up to midnight throughout the week or on particular days as was suggested by
part-time students in Rowland and Rubbert (2001:757) who requested “...special library opening hours for part-time students (e.g. two 'long' evenings per week, also operated during vacation periods)…”

- The National Centre Library would be the national clearing-house for the acquisition, processing and distribution of resources throughout the ‘open’ libraries. It should offer other services such as toll-free and dedicated telephone and facsimile (fax) lines for use by the distance learners who need to phone and fax in their requests for information resources and services; reference and information services similar to those offered in on-campus libraries; online database searching through online public access catalogues; circulation of books, journals, audio-visual materials and electronic resource files among distance learners - it was observed in the study that the current limited circulation due to limited resources was preventing maximum use of the ZOU LIS; inter-library lending and document delivery services that should be used to augment on the meagre information resources; and the photocopying of relevant articles for wider distribution to distance learners.

- The ‘Open’ libraries in the regional and district centres must replicate services at the national centre and in addition offer services such as liaising with all regional and district programme coordinators; the preparation of subject specific bibliographies; compilation and distribution of information packages including electronic resource files; orienting, marketing and promoting the services available to the academe and distance learners; sound public relations with distance learners; evaluating the effectiveness of library and information services.

- The LIS management ought to establish formal and informal cooperative agreements with unaffiliated libraries throughout the country. This way, other libraries would be extended to the ZOU distance learners. Management should be able to broker on behalf of the ZOU distance learners services such as reciprocal borrowing privileges, reference and information services, access to reserved reading collection, access to bibliographic tools, bibliographic instruction such as the use of manual and online public access catalogues (OPACs), indexes and abstracts. Although the survey results indicated that 59% were able to use these
tools, it is still important to train the other 41% who did not indicate they had these skills.

- It was recommended by the distance learners surveyed that the LIS must add more relevant and subject specific books and journals. Multimedia materials and electronic resources that are increasingly available on the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW) are new media formats that can easily reach the distance learners. The LIS must put in place ICT strategies to ensure that distance learners have access to these new media formats.

- Photocopying services should be provided in the ZOU LIS in order to provide the distance learners with copies of articles that they may request. The service invaluable in distance learning environment if optimum circulation of relevant articles at the district levels is to be achieved.

- The current library structures require urgent expansion in terms of space available for users to read, research and study within the libraries as noted by the respondents to the survey.

- The LIS Management should put in place an efficient and effective circulation system, which should make it easy to chase up borrowed materials and avoid overdue borrowing.

- Management should ensure that LIS staff that are dedicated and duty conscious to serve distance learners equitably without bias or favour. Continuous education of staff on good public relations and customer care should be included within the education and training programmes of the LIS.

- The LIS should put in place flexible opening times that can accommodate the special characteristics of the distance learners as observed in the study, for example, there is need to extend opening times to midnight where safety and security issues are improved.

- The LIS Management, regional and district librarians must be involved in continuous user studies to evaluate the effectiveness of the 'open' and distance education libraries.

- The LIS Management must put in place effective reference and referral services. It was revealed in the study that the LIS and other libraries offered very limited
referrals services to other information sources yet this is a critical service in the reference function of libraries. For instance, the LIS should ought to be able to refer distance learners to other very useful sources of information either from within the libraries or from course outlines, tutorial letters and from modules.

Further to the last recommendation, the study noted areas for further research such as determining whether the use of library and information resources vary by level of study and by specific disciplines. Due to the limited time that was available to employ detailed statistical analysis of the data collected, it is the researcher’s strong recommendation that further statistical models should be used to discern more relationships between variables such as determining the use of information seeking patterns between male and female students and amongst various age groups.

Although this study was concerned with the information seeking patterns of the generic user group of distance learners registered with the ZOU without targeting any specific levels of study or particular programmes, it is this researcher’s conviction that there could be significant variances in the use of the ZOU libraries by discipline and by level of study as would probably be determined by the demands of each programme. Such ongoing investigations could build on the current study’s base to ensure that the ZOU LIS reaches its full potential as an ‘open’ library and information service system in Zimbabwe.
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RESOURCES for distance learning library services.


APPENDIX A: Pre-test Questionnaire Introduction letter

TO: THE RESPONDENT

FROM: J. L. MAENZANISE

DATE: 01 SEPTEMBER 2002


I am conducting a study on the “Information Seeking Patterns of Distance Learners Registered with the ZOU”. This is in partial fulfilment for the award of the Master’s degree in Library and Information Studies from the Information Studies Program of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus.

I would like to pre-test the questionnaire I am going to use in conducting this study. You have been randomly selected as one of the distance learners that are going to be surveyed in the study. Therefore you are qualified to thoroughly review this questionnaire in all its aspects and you should be free to suggest any amendments that you think should be made to the questionnaire so that it captures the intended purposes.

The purpose of the survey is to determine why, how, and where do you identify, access and retrieve relevant information that meets your specific needs either within the ZOU Library and Information Service (LIS) system or from other information providers.

It is hoped that the results of the survey will place LIS management in a better position to appreciate and understand the specific needs of the ZOU distance learners and therefore be able to strategically plan, design and implement information service systems that address their needs.

Allow me this opportunity therefore to reassure you that your answers will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous at all cost.

I would appreciate it very much if you could hand in the completed questionnaire to the Regional Centre Library Assistant, the Regional Coordinator, any tutor or to me if you prefer within the week of receipt of the questionnaire.

Thank you for accepting to participate in this pre-test survey.

Yours faithfully

J. L. Maenzanise
APPENDIX B

Pre-test Questionnaire

Please complete the following questions by marking in the appropriate box(es) or by filling out required information in the space(s) provided. Your answers will be treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality they deserve.

A. PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Age

Please indicate in which age group you belong

- [ ] 15 - 20 years
- [ ] 21 - 25 years
- [ ] 26 - 30 years
- [ ] 31 - 35 years
- [ ] 36 - 40 years
- [ ] 41 - 45 years
- [ ] 46 - 50 years
- [ ] 51 - 55 years
- [ ] Above 56 years

2. Gender

Please tick your gender

- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female

3. Marital Status

Indicate your marital status

- [ ] Married
- [ ] Single
- [ ] Divorced

4. If you have children, how many do you have?

5. How many other members of your extended family do you take care of? (Please indicate)

6. Area of Residence

Which of the following areas of residence closely describe the place you are currently living in now? Please tick one.

- [ ] Urban City (e.g. Mutare)
- [ ] Town (e.g. Marondera)
- [ ] On a farm near Urban or Town centres
- [ ] On a farm in the Rural Areas
- [ ] In the Rural Areas (e.g. Gandanzara, Gokwe, Nkayi, Naunetsi, etc.)

7. If you live in urban or town centres, please indicate whether you live in the low- or high-density suburbs

- [ ] Low-density area
- [ ] High-density area
B. EDUCATION

8. Please indicate your highest educational qualification before joining the ZOU.

☐ School Certificate
☐ High School Certificate
☐ University Degree
☐ Other (Please specify e.g. National Diploma)

9. Did you attain your education through distance education?

☐ No
☐ Yes

If Yes, please indicate in the space provided the professional qualification(s) listed in question 9 that you attained through distance education.

10. Professional qualifications

Please list the professional qualifications you have (e.g. Chartered Institute of Secretaries [C.I.S]).

a.) ..................................................

b.) ..................................................

c.) ..................................................

11. Did you attain your professional qualifications through distance education?

☐ No
☐ Yes

12. Current Studies with ZOU

In the space provided, please indicate what degree programme you are currently undertaking with the ZOU.

13. Please indicate your level of study

☐ Undergraduate
☐ Post-Graduate (Please go to question 14)

14. If you indicated that you are an undergraduate, please indicate in what year you are.

☐ 1st Year
☐ 2nd Year
☐ 3rd Year
☐ 4th Year

C. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

15. Formal Employment

Are you in formal employment?

☐ No
☐ Yes
16. If your answer was no to question 15, what do you do to earn a living? (Please state briefly)

17. Free Time Available in Your Day

Please state approximately how much free time, in hours, you have available in your day on average.

18. If you are in formal employment, indicate whether you are permitted any time off work for your studies. You may tick more than one.

- Study leave for the whole duration of the programme
- Exam study time
- Exam writing time
- No time given at all
- Other (Please specify)

19. Tuition fees

Do you pay for your tuition Fees?

- No
- Yes (Go to question 21)

20. If your answer to question 19 was no, please indicate where you get your tuition fees.

- Government Loan/Grant
- Bank Loan
- Other Source (Please specify)

21. Are you able to buy your own reading materials?

- No
- Yes

D INFORMATION SEEKING SITUATIONS

22. In your studies in the past month or so can you recall a situation when you needed to solve a problem, carry out a task or find an answer to a question? Can you please describe the situation that comes to mind in the space provided.

- No time given at all
- Other (Please specify)

23. In the situation like the one just described in question 21, can you state in the space provided the specific question(s) you needed to answer.

24. Did you try to answer the question?

- No (go to question 25)
- Yes (go to question 26)
- Still working on the question (go to question 26)
25. Why did you not try to answer the question? Please state briefly.

27. Of the following sources please tick the correct number column those sources you think were; 1 = least useful; 2 = not very useful; 3 = fairly useful; 4 = useful; and 5 = very useful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tr>
<td>own experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>consult a friend</td>
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<td>colleagues at work place</td>
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<td>reading newspapers or magazines</td>
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<td>radio or television</td>
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<td>the ZOU Library &amp; Information Service system</td>
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<td>another library(ies)</td>
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<tr>
<td>own tutor</td>
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<tr>
<td>other, please specify</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

E USE OF INFORMATION SOURCES

26. Did you try to answer the question from one of the following sources? PLEASE TICK AS MANY AS ARE APPROPRIATE:

- own experiences
- consult a friend
- colleagues at work place
- reading newspapers or magazines
- books or journals
- the Internet
- radio or television
- the ZOU Library & Information Service system
- another library(ies)
- own tutor
- other, please specify
28. Of the Very Useful sources, did you go to them because:
   
a) You were referred to them?
   
   [ ] No
   [ ] Yes

   If Yes, who referred you to them?
   .................................................................
   .................................................................

   b) You had used them before?
   
   [ ] No
   [ ] Yes

   c) The source(s) are nearby you and easy to get to?
   
   [ ] No
   [ ] Yes

   d) Any other reasons why you consulted the very useful sources? Please state briefly.
   .................................................................
   .................................................................
   .................................................................
   .................................................................

29. Is there anything about the very useful sources of information that you did not like?
   
   [ ] No
   [ ] Yes

   If Yes, please explain briefly what it is
   .................................................................
   .................................................................

30. Did the very useful sources of information refer you to other helpful sources?
   
   [ ] No
   [ ] Yes

   If Yes, where did they refer you?
   .................................................................
   .................................................................
   .................................................................

31. Did you go to these places that you were referred to?
   
   [ ] No (please go to question 33)
   [ ] Yes

32. If your answer is yes in question 31, please indicate your level of satisfaction with the referred sources?
   
   [ ] Very dissatisfied
   [ ] Somewhat dissatisfied
   [ ] Satisfied
   [ ] Very satisfied
   [ ] Don't know
33. Of the least useful sources, did you go to them because:

a) You were referred to them?
   - No
   - Yes

If yes, who referred you to them?

b) You had used them before?
   - No
   - Yes

c) The sources are nearby you and easy to get to?
   - No
   - Yes

d) Any other reason why you consulted why you consulted the least useful source? Please state briefly

34. Did the least useful sources of information refer you to other helpful sources?
   - No (Please go to question 35)
   - Yes

If yes where did they refer you to?

35. Did you go to these places that you were referred to?
   - No (Please go to question 37)
   - Yes

36. If your answer to question 35 is yes, please indicate your level of satisfaction with the sources for services?
   - Very dissatisfied
   - Somewhat dissatisfied
   - Satisfied
   - Very Satisfied
   - Don't know
37. Is there anything about the least useful information sources that you do not like?

☐ No
☐ Yes

If your answer is Yes, please explain briefly

E. ACCESSING INFORMATION PROVIDERS

38. In your decision to go to information providers, what factors did you consider most important to you? (Please tick only one)

☐ The cost involved money-wise getting there
☐ The time it takes to get there
☐ The accuracy, understandability, relevance, and currency of the information you are likely to get.
☐ All of them
☐ Other (Please specify)

39. In your answer to question 25, did you choose the ZOU LIS as one of the information sources you use?

☐ No (go to question 41)
☐ Yes (go to question 40)

40. Please indicate how often you make use of the LIS. At least,

☐ Once a day
☐ Once a week
☐ Once every two weeks
☐ Once every three weeks
☐ Once a month
☐ Other, please specify

41. Are there any reason(s) that might be preventing you from getting the information you need from the library? You may tick all those that apply to you.

☐ I don’t have the time since I work all day
☐ Household chores and looking after the family takes too much of my time
☐ The LIS is inconveniently located
☐ The LIS is located far from where I live
☐ Inconvenient parking space
☐ It is unsafe to use the LIS after hours
☐ Inconvenient opening times
42. Please indicate how far you live from the ZOU LIS.

☐ 0 - 10 km
☐ 11 - 20 km
☐ 21 - 30 km
☐ 31 - 40 km
☐ 41 - 50 km
☐ More than 51 km

43. Can you use the following information seeking tools?

a) Library catalogues

☐ No
☐ Yes
☐ Uncertain

b) Indexes and abstracts

☐ No
☐ Yes
☐ Uncertain

44. Are there any reasons relating to the ZOU LIS why you are unable to get the information you need? You may tick all those that apply to you.

☐ The ZOU LIS frequently hasn’t got what I need
☐ What I need is usually out with someone
☐ Library staff members are unfriendly
☐ Library staff does not provide a satisfactory service

☐ Do not have the student ID which is required to use the LIS
☐ Do not have the borrower’s pockets required for me to borrow materials
☐ Other reasons (please specify)

45. If you found the LIS useful, is it because of any of the following reasons? You may tick all those that apply to you.

☐ I can identify, locate and get the information that I need
☐ The LIS usually has the information that I need
☐ It’s nearest to where I live
☐ It’s close to my work place
☐ LIS staff always help me find what I need
☐ Library has current and relevant information
☐ Other reasons (please specify)

46. Do you use another library(ies) to access materials for study?

☐ No (go to question 48)
☐ Yes (go to question 47)
47. Please indicate how often you make use of another library(ies).
- [ ] Once a day
- [ ] Once a week
- [ ] Once every two weeks
- [ ] Once every three weeks
- [ ] Once a month
- [ ] Other, please specify

50. Are there any reason(s) that might be preventing you from getting the information you need from another library(ies)? You may tick all those that apply to you.
- [ ] I don't have the time since I work all day
- [ ] Household chores and looking after the family takes too much of my time
- [ ] Another library(ies) is/are inconveniently located
- [ ] Another library(ies) is/are located far from where I live
- [ ] Inconvenient parking space
- [ ] It is unsafe to use another library(ies) after hours
- [ ] Inconvenient opening times

48. If you use another library(ies) to obtain study materials, state the names of the library(ies) that you use.

51. Please indicate how far you live from another library(ies).
- [ ] 0-10 km
- [ ] 11-20 km
- [ ] 21-30 km
- [ ] 31-40 km
- [ ] 41-50 km
- [ ] More than 51 km

49. Please describe any other methods that you use to locate and obtain study materials.

52. In your opinion, do you think libraries in general as information providers are important in meeting your information needs?
- [ ] Not very important
- [ ] Fairly important
- [ ] Very important
- [ ] Most important information provider in my life

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J. THE ZOU AND LIBRARY SERVICE PROVISION

53. In your opinion, do you think the Zimbabwe Open University should concentrate on providing you with comprehensive self-help learning kits and study packs rather than provide you with library resources and services?

☐ No (go to question 55)

☐ Yes (go to question 54)

54. If yes, please explain briefly in the space provided.

..................................................................................
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..................................................................................
Thank you for completing the questionnaire. You are requested to return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed stamped envelope or hand it over as soon as possible to your tutor, regional coordinator or library assistant at your regional centre during your next weekend tutorial/residential sessions or return it to me in person if that is convenient to you.

J. L. Maenzanise  
Zimbabwe Open University  
P.O. Box MP 1119  
Mt. Pleasant  
Harare  
Zimbabwe  
Tel: (263)(4) 791980  
Cell phone: (263)(4) 011 414 298  
Fax: (263)(4) 791980  
Email: zoulib@mweb.co.zw  
jasperleela@avu.org  
201504649@nu.ac.za
APPENDIX C

Survey Introduction letter

TO: THE RESPONDENT

FROM: J. L. MAENZANISE

DATE: 01 OCTOBER 2002


I am conducting a study on the “Information Seeking Patterns of Distance Learners Registered with the ZOU”. This is in partial fulfilment for the award of the Master’s degree in Library and Information Studies from the Information Studies Program of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus. I would like to ask you a few questions for a survey I am conducting for this study. You have been selected in a systematic random sample of all the distance learners currently registered with the ZOU.

The purpose of this survey is to determine why, how, and where do you identify, access and retrieve relevant information that meets your specific needs either within the ZOU Library and Information Service (LIS) system or from other information providers.

It is hoped that the results of the survey will place LIS management in a better position to appreciate and understand the specific needs of the ZOU distance learners and therefore be able to strategically plan, design and implement information service systems that address their needs.

Allow me this opportunity therefore to reassure you that your answers will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous at all cost.

Thank you for accepting to participate in this survey.

Yours faithfully

J. L. Maenzanise
APPENDIX D

Survey Questionnaire

Please complete the following questions by either placing a tick (✓) in the appropriate box(es) or by filling out required information in the space(s) provided. The use of Not Applicable (N/A) is not catered for in the questionnaire and should be avoided as much as possible. Your answers will be treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality they deserve.

A. PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Age
   Please indicate in which age group you belong
   [ ] 15 - 20 years
   [ ] 21 - 25 years
   [ ] 26 - 30 years
   [ ] 31 - 35 years
   [ ] 36 - 40 years
   [ ] 41 - 45 years
   [ ] 46 - 50 years
   [ ] 51 - 55 years
   [ ] Above 56 years

2. Gender
   Please tick your gender
   [ ] Male
   [ ] Female

3. Marital Status
   Indicate your marital status
   [ ] Married
   [ ] Single
   [ ] Divorced

4. Do you have your own children
   [ ] No
   [ ] Yes
   If yes please state how many
   ..........................................................

5. How many other members of your extended family do you live with? (Please state)
   ..........................................................
   ..........................................................
   ..........................................................
6. Area of Residence

Which of the following areas of residence closely describe the place you are currently living in now? Please tick one.

- [ ] Urban City (e.g. Mutare)
- [ ] Town (e.g. Marondera)
- [ ] On a farm near Urban or Town centres (go to question 8)
- [ ] On a farm in the Rural Areas (go to question 8)
- [ ] In the Rural Areas (e.g. Gandanzara) (go to question 8)

7. If you live in urban or town centres, please indicate whether you live in the low- or high-density suburbs

- [ ] Low-density area
- [ ] High-density area

9. Did you attain your education through distance education?

- [ ] No
- [ ] Yes

If Yes, please indicate in the space provided the qualifications listed in question 8 that you attained through distance education.

..................................................
..................................................
..................................................

10. Professional qualifications

Please list the professional qualifications you have (e.g. Chartered Institute of Secretaries [C.I.S]).

a.)..............................................
b.)..............................................
c.)..............................................
d.)..............................................

None...........................................

11. Did you attain your professional qualifications through distance education?

- [ ] No
- [ ] Yes

If Yes, please indicate in the space provided the professional qualification(s) listed in question 10 that you attained through distance education.

..................................................
..................................................
..................................................
12. Current Studies with ZOU

In the space provided, please indicate what degree programme you are currently undertaking with the ZOU.

13. Please indicate your level of study

- [ ] 1st Year
- [ ] 2nd Year
- [ ] 3rd Year
- [ ] 4th Year
- [ ] Post-Graduate

16. If you are in formal employment, indicate whether you are permitted any time off work for your studies. You may tick more than one.

- [ ] Study leave for the whole duration of the programme
- [ ] Exam study time
- [ ] Exam writing time
- [ ] No time given at all
- [ ] Other (Please specify)

17. Tuition Fees

Do you pay for your tuition Fees?

- [ ] No
- [ ] Yes (Go to question 21)

18. If your answer to question 19 was no, please indicate where you get your tuition fees.

- [ ] Government Loan/Grant
- [ ] Bank Loan
- [ ] Other Source (Please specify)

19. Are you able to buy your own reading materials?

- [ ] No
- [ ] Yes

C. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

14. Formal Employment

Are you in formal employment?

- [ ] No
- [ ] Yes

If no what do you do to earn a living? (Please state briefly)

- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]

15. Free Time Available in Your Day

Please state approximately how much free time, in hours, you have available in your day on average

- [ ]
D. INFORMATION SEEKING SITUATIONS

20. In your studies in the past month or so can you recall a situation when you needed to solve a problem, carry out a task or find an answer to a question? Can you please describe the situation that comes to mind in the space provided...

21. In the situation like the one just described in question 20, can you state in the space provided the specific question(s) you needed to answer...

22. Did you try to answer the question?

☐ No (go to question 23)

☐ Yes (go to question 24)

☐ Still working on the question (go to question 24)

23. Why did you not try to answer the question? Please state briefly...

E. USE OF INFORMATION SOURCES

24. Did you try to answer the question from one of the following sources? PLEASE TICK AS MANY AS ARE APPROPRIATE

☐ own experiences

☐ consult a friend

☐ colleagues at work place

☐ reading newspapers or magazines.

☐ books or journals

☐ the Internet

☐ radio or television

☐ the ZOU Library and Information Service system

☐ another library(ies)

☐ own tutor

☐ other, please specify

----------------------------------------
25. Of the following sources please tick the correct number column those sources you think were; 1 = least useful; 2 = not very useful; 3 = fairly useful; 4 = useful; and 5 = very useful

- Own experiences
- Consult a friend
- Colleagues at workplace
- Reading newspapers or magazines
- Books or journals
- The Internet
- Radio or television
- The ZOU Library & Information Service system
- Another library(ies)
- Own tutor
- Other, please specify and indicate how useful in the correct column

26. Of the Very Useful sources, did you go to them because:

a) You were referred to them?
   - [ ] No
   - [ ] Yes
   If Yes, who referred you to them?

b) You had used them before?
   - [ ] No
   - [ ] Yes

c) The source(s) are nearby you and easy to get to?
   - [ ] No
   - [ ] Yes

d) Any other reasons why you consulted the very useful sources? Please state briefly.

27. Is there anything about the very useful sources of information that you did not like?
   - [ ] No
   - [ ] Yes
   If Yes, please explain briefly what it is.
28. Did the very useful sources of information refer you to other helpful sources?

☐ No (go to question 31)

☐ Yes

If Yes, where did they refer you?

31. Of the least useful sources, did you go to them because:

c) You were referred to them?

☐ No

☐ Yes

If yes, who referred you to them?

f) You had used them before?

☐ No

☐ Yes

30. If your answer is yes in question 29, please indicate your level of satisfaction with the referred sources?

☐ Very dissatisfied

☐ Somewhat dissatisfied

☐ Satisfied

☐ Very satisfied

☐ Don’t know

32. Did the least useful sources of information refer you to other helpful sources?

☐ No (Please go to question 35)

☐ Yes

If yes where did they refer you?
F. ACCESSING INFORMATION PROVIDERS

33. Did you go to these places that you were referred to?
   [ ] No (Please go to question 35)
   [ ] Yes

34. If your answer to question 33 is yes, please indicate your level of satisfaction with the sources for services?
   [ ] Very dissatisfied
   [ ] Somewhat dissatisfied
   [ ] Satisfied
   [ ] Very Satisfied
   [ ] Don't know

35. Is there anything about the least useful information sources that you do not like?
   [ ] No
   [ ] Yes

   If your answer is Yes, please explain briefly
   ........................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................

36. In your decision to go to information providers, what factors did you consider most important to you? (Please tick only one)
   [ ] The cost involved money-wise getting there
   [ ] The time it takes to get there
   [ ] The accuracy, understandability, relevance, and currency of the information you are likely to get.
   [ ] All of them
   [ ] Other (Please specify)
   ........................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................

G. USE OF ZOU LIBRARY & INFORMATION SERVICE (LIS) SYSTEM

37. In your answer to question 24, did you choose the ZOU LIS as one of the information sources you use?
   [ ] No (go to question 40)
   [ ] Yes (go to question 38)
38. Please indicate how often you make use of the LIS. At least,

- [ ] Once a day
- [ ] Once a week
- [ ] Once every two weeks
- [ ] Once every three weeks
- [ ] Once a month
- [ ] Other, please specify

39. Are there any reason(s) that might be preventing you from getting the information you need from the library? You may tick all those that apply to you.

- [ ] I don’t have the time since I work all day
- [ ] Household chores and looking after the family takes too much of my time
- [ ] The LIS is inconveniently located
- [ ] The LIS is located far from where I live
- [ ] Inconvenient parking space
- [ ] It is unsafe to use the LIS after hours
- [ ] Inconvenient opening times

40. Please indicate how far you live from the ZOU LIS.

- [ ] 0-10 km
- [ ] 11-20 km
- [ ] 21-30 km
- [ ] 31-40 km
- [ ] 41-50 km
- [ ] More than 51 km

41. Can you use the following information seeking tools?

a) Library catalogues

- [ ] No
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] Uncertain

b) Indexes and abstracts

- [ ] No
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] Uncertain
42. Are there any reasons relating to the ZOU LIS why you are unable to get the information you need? You may tick all those that apply to you.

☐ The ZOU LIS frequently hasn't got what I need
☐ What I need is usually out with someone
☐ Library staff members are unfriendly
☐ Library staff does not provide a satisfactory service
☐ Do not have the student ID which is required to use the LIS
☐ Do not have the borrower's pockets required for me to borrow materials
☐ Other reasons (please specify)

44. Do you use another library(ies) to access materials for study?

☐ No (go to question 47)
☐ Yes (go to question 45)

45. Please indicate how often you make use of another library(ies).

☐ Once a day
☐ Once a week
☐ Once every two weeks
☐ Once every three weeks
☐ Once a month
☐ Other, please specify

46. If you use another library(ies) to obtain study materials, state the names of the library(ies) that you use.

47. Please describe any other methods that you use to locate and obtain study materials.

☐ Other reasons (please specify)
50. In your opinion, do you think libraries in general as information providers are important in meeting your information needs?

☐ Not very important
☐ Fairly important
☐ Very important
☐ Most important information provider in my life

51. In your opinion, do you think the Zimbabwe Open University should concentrate on providing you with comprehensive self-help learning kits and study packs rather than provide you with library resources and services?

☐ No (go to question 53)
☐ Yes (go to question 52)

52. If yes, please explain briefly in the space provided.

53. What do you think the ZOU LIS should do in order to address your specific information needs as a distance learner?

Please explain briefly.
Thank you for completing the questionnaire. You are requested to return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed stamped envelope or hand it over as soon as possible to your tutor, regional coordinator or library assistant at your regional centre during your next weekend tutorial/residential sessions or return it to me in person if that is convenient to you.

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