

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**Learner support in Open Distance Learning at Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal:
A Developmental State perspective**

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Doctor of Administration**

**School of Management, IT and Governance
College of Law and Management Studies**

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DECLARATION

I, Johleen Mouton declare that:

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ABSTRACT

When the African National Congress (ANC) came into power in 1994, it was important to relook at the operations of the Public Administration and governance domain in South Africa. Many sectors in all spheres of government have changed significantly since then, and it was thus equally important that the educational system receives a critical examination to improve education in South Africa. The linkage between Public Administration and the higher education landscape should also be seen within the context of the developmental state perspective of the government-of-the-day to develop important skills and invest in human capital in the country. Efficient public administration policies and effective management principles should be in place to implement government policies to achieve the desired outcomes of sustainable development. This study took place mainly within the higher education field as part of the Public Administration paradigm, with particular reference to distance education and open distance education at the University of South Africa (Unisa). It also explained the role higher education has to play in the acquisition of basic knowledge and intellectual skills and its effect on the development policy of the state. Distance education came a long way since 1994. The South African White Paper on Education and Training of 1995 gave direction to change in the higher education system and an Open Distance Learning (ODL) approach was adopted, which brought advantages for students registering at the University of South Africa (Unisa). Unisa became the largest distance education provider in South Africa and, it was important that new policies be developed within the university to guide the development of ODL. Learner support in an ODL university is one of the key elements in an ODL system. The study aimed to provide an investigation into the learner support initiatives in the Unisa region of KwaZulu-Natal through the use of empirical methodology. One of the key questions in this study is to determine whether the students entering the open distance learning system at Unisa KwaZulu-Natal are ready for this new environment. It was depicted from the data obtained, that students are uncertain, not well prepared for this new environment and that improved learner support services are needed to improve on the learning of students and also on the poor throughput rate in the region. Students and staff were part of the research. Questionnaires, interviews and observation informed the relevant information on the

readiness of the students coming into the ODL university system, and their experience of the learner support initiatives provided to them in the region.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACDE	African Council for Distance Education
ANC	African National Congress
ARCSWiD	Advocacy and Resource Centre for Students with Disabilities
BL	Blended Learning
BRP	Best Reflective Practices
CoL	Commonwealth of Learning
CHE	Council of Higher Education
DE	Distance Education
DESD	Decade of Education for Sustainable Development
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DISS	Directorate for Instructional Support and Services
EFA	Education for All
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ICDE	International Council for Distance Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ICDE	International Council for Distance Education
IOP	Institutional Operational Plan
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MHET	Ministry of Higher Education and Training
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
MoE	Minister of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education

NPM	New Public Management
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODL	Open Distance Learning
ODeL	Open and Distance e-Learning
OER	Open Education Resource
OUT	Open University of Tanzania
PA	Public Administration
RBL	Resource-based Learning
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAIDE	South Africa Institute of Distance Education
SACHED	South African Committee for Higher Education
SAIVCET	South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training
SCOP	Standing Committee of Presidents and Vice-Chancellors
SD	Sustainable Development
TSA	Technikon Southern Africa
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Commission on Environment and Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
UNGC	United Nations Global Compact
UOC	Open University of Catalonia
Unisa	University of South Africa
VUDEC	Vista University Distance Education Campus
WiL	Work-integrated Learning

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The political era in South Africa before 1994 was one of racial discernment and unequal distribution of the services and goods delivered by government. When the African National Congress (ANC) came into power in 1994, it was vital to assess the operations of the Public Administration domain in South Africa. Many sectors in all spheres of government have changed significantly since then, and it was thus equally important that the educational system receives a critical examination to improve education in South Africa. This study will mainly take place within the higher education field as part of the Public Administration domain, with particular reference to distance education and open distance learning at the University of South Africa (Unisa). It will also explain the role higher education has to play in the acquisition of basic knowledge and intellectual skills to have an effect on the development policy of the state with regards to human capital in a developmental state context.

Distance education in South Africa has a long history. Since 1994, the framework of distance education has transformed significantly with a comprehensive report that was compiled by an internal commission that was prepared by SAIDE, *Open Distance Learning in South Africa: Report of an international commission* (Nonyongo & Ngegebule, 1998: 103).

In the South African White Paper on Education and Training of 1995, the Ministry of Education dedicated itself to distance education. In the White Paper distance education methodologies was acknowledged and to be developed and implemented by a large number of institutions and organisations and gave five areas crucial to provide education for all, as put forward by Nonyongo & Ngegebule (1998: 103). The five areas cover the establishment of quality basic education for all children, assistance with Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), a comprehensive Further Education Sector (FET Colleges) to provide a focussed education experience to learners, a financial planning system that should capitalise in research and development on different learning objectives through distance education, and a whole new method to the

provision and facilitation of learning opportunities, in keeping with the above authors' perspective.

Inevitably, this would have caused significant change in the South African Higher Education landscape and environment, and would affect conventional distance education institutions resulting in new distance education advantages, is the view held by these authors Nonyongo & Ngegebule, (1998: 104). Butcher (in Mills & Tait, 1996: 21) also restate the fact that the higher education landscape in South Africa had to change due to a significantly uneven higher education system of the past in South Africa.

Unisa was the largest distance education provider at that time in South Africa. In the current context, Unisa is the largest open distance learning provider in Africa at present. An open learning (OL) approach was adopted through the White Paper on Education and Training of 1995, which enhances the principles of approach towards student centeredness, life-long learning, flexibility of learning provision, the elimination of obstacles to access learning, delivery of learner support, structuring of learning programmes in ways to increase the success of learners and the preservation of rigorous quality assurance over the development of learning materials and provision of support systems (Nonyongo & Ngegebule, 1998: 104).

Although politically and legally the context of higher education and learning in South Africa has changed, a huge number of South Africans are still deprived and under-prepared in obtaining proper education. A considerable number of today's higher education under-prepared students are in developing countries, and as South Africa is a developing country with a goal of becoming a developmental state, a high number of students are also exposed to problems of social disorganisation, low productivity, underdevelopment, poverty and diseases, including HIV/AIDS (UNESCO. 1994, Domatob 1998; Bank. AULA 2002) as cited by Mugabe (2011: 1).

In general, the throughput rate in distance education institutions has been very poor, particularly for African learners. Glennie (in Tait & Mills, 1996: 25) explains the causes for the high failure and attrition rates succinctly as:

'A large number of learners following distance education programmes at secondary and tertiary level do so because of very negative experiences of education. Their schools did not perform well; their educators have often been average. The potential learners are likely to lack many vital learning skills, and, in general, are not prepared well'.

From the preceding quotation, it is evident to a certain extent that many learners in South Africa are still experiencing higher education negatively and are lacking essential skills. In a developmental state, skills development is seen as one of the significant issues that should be addressed to reach economic goals and development. It is therefore extremely important that the education system is in a strong position to address this crucial fragment of development. Efficient public administration policies and effective management principles should be in place to implement these policies to achieve the desired outcomes of sustainable development.

Chapter 10 (section 195) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 stipulates the basic values and principles administering public administration. These principles apply to the administration of every domain of government, structures of the state and public enterprises. There exists consequently under-preparedness for the world of learning in higher education, with specific reference to an open distance learning institution such as Unisa (KwaZulu-Natal).

The question can then be asked: are the learner support initiatives provided to learners sufficient and effective enough to improve the throughput rate, as well as the overall learning experience of the students? These initiatives can include face-to-face tutoring, e-tutoring, teaching assistant support, peer collaborative learning, academic literacy, counselling, and support for students with Work-integrated Learning or experiential learning. These learner support initiatives will be investigated to determine the sufficiency and effectiveness of these initiatives in Unisa (KwaZulu-Natal) as a focal point of the research study.

In the South African context, a higher percentage of learners will find it difficult to perform well if they are admitted to distance education institutions without sufficient or adequate support. This is the result of the insufficient quality of basic education for a large section of the population, which is well recognised by various authors. An open

learning policy without the provision of learner support will be inadequate to address the needs of disadvantaged learners, affirms Paul (in SAIDE: 2000: 17).

Various policies stipulate the importance of learner support and it is generally decided that learner support should be provided in distance education. Learner support should aim to eliminate a variety of difficulties and create best practice conditions for learner success. Owing to the past imbalances in education in South Africa, distance education based on open learning principles has been welcomed as the solution to the educational backlog that faces South Africa (SAIDE, 2000: 17).

The new University of South Africa (Unisa) was formed in January 2004 through a merger between the former Unisa, Technikon Southern Africa (TSA), as well as the distance education section of Vista University (VUDEC). Unisa is now considered as Africa's leading distance learning institution and is seen as a comprehensive, flexible and accessible Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution. It is also the only comprehensive ODL higher education institution in South Africa. Unisa has five regional hubs, of which Unisa KwaZulu-Natal is the second largest, according to the *Information Portal* of Unisa (Unisa: 2013).

The Higher Education Act of 1997 (101 of 1997) clearly promotes and supports quality in higher education through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). It also gives direction in that effective and quality learner support should be provided to students who register at Higher Education institutions. With this information in the background, Unisa established a comprehensive learner support component, the Department of Tutorial Services, Discussion Classes and Work-integrated Learning (TSDL) in 2006. The purpose of this department was to establish and drive learner support initiatives in the different regions.

In July 2011, the Department of Tuition and Facilitation of Learning (DTFL) came into existence and replaced the previous TSDL. Restructuring of management structures was done to give effect to the mandate of the new Vice-Chancellor of Unisa who assumed duty on 1 January 2011. A new portfolio of Academic (Teaching and Learning) was formed, which consists of six colleges and the DTFL (Departmental Operational Plan: 2012-2013).

The DTFL consists of all regional offices, the Directorate Curriculum and Learning Development (DCLD), the Directorate of Instructional Support and Services (DISS) and

the Directorate Counselling and Career Development (DCCD). The DTFL's functions are guided by the Unisa 2015 Strategic Plan (revisited) and all policies and charters of the University. In the spirit of the mission of the University towards the "African University in the service of humanity", the DTFL committed itself to provide quality services through the development of strategies, policies, structures and methods that will support the academic progress of students. A further purpose of the department is to provide students with access to quality higher education through effective teaching interventions and the facilitation of learning using advanced technologies. This will include the use of appropriate ODL pedagogies as outlined in the Departmental Operational Plan (2012-2013).

1.2 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE STUDY AND REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE TOPIC

An extensive survey of related and contemporary literature will be examined to provide a foundation to the research questions of this study. The focus of this study is on Higher Education within the framework of a developmental state in particular, and within the Public Administration archetype in general. The context of the literature focuses on specific reference to efficient and effective learner support and service delivery in an Open Distance Learning University and a higher education institution such as Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal. Over the last decade, interest amongst researchers has grown with regard to the relationship between government and higher education in the discipline and field of Public Administration. The development of the Public Administration perspective on higher education is a typical explanation of why Public Administration is not covered in higher education literature (Van Vught, 1991: 57), and is now gaining momentum in recent years. Tight (in Huisman, 2009: 1) also mentions that in higher education, the "systems policy" is seen as the most popular area for research. The use of contexts to study higher education policy and governance entrenched in public administration and public policy, sociology or political science is not commonly used, but that there are distinguished exceptions. It must be remembered that government is responsible for effective management governance of public institutions, with the Department of Higher Education in South Africa as a point of emphasis.

The historical development of ODL and learner support (LS) and the expedition to its current status within the University of South Africa is discussed in this chapter. The purpose of this discussion is to examine changes that took place in South Africa in the

field of distance education as conceptualised and contextualised within the notion of a developmental state, and what impact this is having on students' learning potential and learning experiences, as well as the development of basic knowledge and intellectual skills development. This should directly influence the development of human capital within the development policies of the state to transform to a required developmental state.

The concept of quality in learner support and the role it plays in an effective Open Distance Learning environment is explored, and the influence it should eventually have on an effective economy. This discussion focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of the learner support initiatives. It further elaborates on the students' experience within this environment.

The importance of learner support in Work-integrated Learning/experiential learning and skills development is briefly explained and its role in skills development. Unisa as a higher education institution and comprehensive University have the responsibility to facilitate and enhance skills development in South Africa. This is seen as one of the key elements of effective governance in the public service, and will make an impact on economic development ultimately contributing towards a developmental state.

The legal framework for Higher Education Governance in South Africa, other relevant government policies and various relevant policies of Unisa are used to locate the study, as well as the theoretical framework of the study within a Public Administration and Governance dimension. The White Paper for Post School Education and Training of 2013 is also discussed. It explains the importance of higher education and the role it plays in development in a developmental state and the influence on the public administration environment.

1.2.1 Correspondence University *versus* Open Distance Learning University

In the sources consulted, there are different terms for learning at a distance, distance learning, distance education (DE) and correspondence learning. For the purpose of this study, the terms distance education and ODL is used in the study domain.

In distance learning or distance education, the emphasis falls on the word 'distance', which means that the learning is taking place at a distance or remotely. This distance between the teacher and the learner normally occurs under the sponsorship of an

educational institution, like Unisa in this case. The learning materials, for example, the study guides, prescribed textbooks and tutorial letters, are normally the most pertinent two-way communication media between the teacher and the learner (Talbot, 2003: 159). According to Talbot (2003: xiii), distance education may have developed during the earlier days of correspondence schools with limited learning providers who provided for students who, for one reason or another, did not want to or did not have the necessary resources to attend 'conventional' face-to-face education or established training facilities.

Unisa has been a distance education institution since 1946. In its original status, Unisa was a correspondence-based university and very limited learner support was available to students. The traditional or normative approach to teaching was that students had to submit a certain number of assignments and had to obtain a specific mark to be submitted to the examination. This was the same with students who studied through the former Technikon South Africa.

Lockwood (1995: 108) states that teaching at a distance is more modern, in relation with 150 years back during the improvement of technology linked with the Industrial Revolution, with specific reference to transport and communications. It is characterised by the distance between the teacher and the learner, and the learner and the learning group. In other words, the traditional type face-to-face education made space for communication via technology. Vigorous advances during the electronic developments in the 1980s have for the first time in history made it likely to teach 'face-to-face' at a distance. A virtual classroom was generated by connecting students and teachers at different venues *via* cable and satellite. A virtual classroom is an electronic classroom that is equipped with special electronic equipment to make contact possible from a distance.

Baggaley (2008: 42) stipulates that historically, contemporary DE is simply the final result of a comprehensive development process. Whereas the 'pre-modern' provision of educational approaches of the eleventh to twentieth centuries highlighted continuous interaction between students and teachers, nonetheless, latest DE delivery methodologies have disregarded that significance. They have denoted indirect, asynchronous communication methods as the best possibilities available for distance-based teacher-student interaction. Moore & Kearsley (in Baggaley, 2008: 40) describe that since the 1960s, modern DE has used a sequence of delivery modes with

progressively refined practices for teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction. It shifted from the correspondence model using the telephone and postal services to the modern-day online conferencing methods.

South Africa has a history of distance education that has evolved over time, but the first in-depth report on distance education in South Africa was compiled in 1994 by an international commission organised by Saide. The report was entitled *Open and distance learning in South Africa: Report of an international commission*. Since this investigation and compiled report, distance education in South Africa has changed significantly. This affected some of the distance education institutions within the field of the higher education, especially the University of South Africa (Unisa) and the Technikon of Southern Africa. These two institutions merged and the new Unisa came into existence in 2005. As the merger between these two institutions developed, Unisa embarked on a character as an Open Distance Learning mega-university with the goal to promote open access to higher learning (Subotzky & Prinsloo, 2011: 177). The focus was tuition to include technology and multimedia interaction. In 2008, Unisa introduced an Open and Distance Learning Policy (Ferreira & Venter, 2011: 80).

Open Learning has been increasingly used since the 1980s, but it did not attract the interest of researchers until fairly recently. Open Learning explored the support companies had given to their employees during their journey in learning (Lockwood, 1995: 242). Since ODL in Unisa became important in 2008, the role of learner support became increasingly important for the institution. Learner support is a vital aspect of ODL and in many cases did not receive the attention that was needed to assist students in distance education.

Du Plessis (2011: 263) states that open learning (OL), together with flexible learning (FL) and distance learning (DL) seems to be the basis of the concept of ODL. Maxwell (in Du Plessis, 2011: 263) distinguishes between ODL and DE by saying that;

“ODL is a student-centred method to education that eliminates the barriers to access while providing a strong degree of learner structure while distance education is a mode of delivering a course of study in which most of communication between teachers and students occur noncontiguously ...Distance education may or may not be grounded on open-learning ideals.”

Further to this quotation, Maxwell also indicated that OL indicates that the education perspective provide students with as much choice and control as possible over content and learning methodologies, while DE refers to a mode of delivery (Du Plessis, 2011: 263). From various sources accessed, it is clear that ODL wants to provide an ‘openness’ and learner-centred way of educational approach.

Lentell (2006: 113) stresses that there are numerous advantages and possibilities of ODL for sustainable learning and development, as important determinants for a developmental state, as emphasised in this research study as:

- *Flexible*: ODL can create flexible learning by combining traditional methods to learning. For example, study materials should enable teachers to manage large classes and enable them to provide asynchronous communication between learners living far from one another.
- *Adaptable*: In ODL different forms of suitable media and technologies, including radio, teleconferencing, video, audio and computers are tools that can be used to deliver information and communication between groups of learners and learners and their teachers. For example, Unisa is using video conferencing as a tutoring facility, and is currently moving towards a focus on e-tutoring as well.
- *Reach*: Through ODL remote groups who have been left without entrance to education and training because of their remoteness to locations of study or through universal lack of delivery because of economic or social disadvantage, or political disruption, can be reached. Millions of people have access to higher education where there had been inadequate provision of these facilities because of the development of open universities. This is especially the case in KwaZulu-Natal. Many of our students are in various rural areas, for example, Mbizana and Nkandla. These areas will also be researched in this study to identify the needs of the students and to make suggestions on how this can be addressed and improved.
- *Quality and scale*: In ODL limited human resources are used efficiently. Tutors, who are not specialists in a specific field of study, can assist with the teaching function. Teachers, as we generally understand, do not necessarily need to have all the knowledge, skills and means associated with teaching before they can support learning. Tutors appointed by Unisa are practically in the professions of the subjects they tutor. In other words, they should have the practical experience and should be able to link the theory in the study material with their practical

experience and translate that to their learners. With ODL, the tasks teachers carry out are fragmented into their important parts and given to specialists – knowledge experts, curriculum designers, course writers, media experts, designers, editors, and facilitators of learning. Lecturers in higher education institutions should fulfil this role. Only a few specialists who need study materials are more likely to be scrutinised by subject specialists, their value is more solid than the teaching that takes place in the seclusion of a classroom.

1.2.2 Open Distance Learning for sustainable progress

Open distance learning is a promising and practical method to address the task of broadening access for the developing world, thus increasing involvement in higher education, which is part of the public sector. It has progressively been seen as an educational delivery model over the past few years, which is cost-effective and without sacrificing quality. On the African continent where resources are limited and higher education provision is poor, ODL has been accepted as a reasonable, cost-effective means of increasing provision without costly outlay in infrastructure, proclaims Pityana (2009: 7).

According to Daniels (as quoted by Du Plessis, 2011: 265), for ODL to be sustainable, it has to address the requirements of the present generation without conceding the ability of future generations to meet their needs. In support of this point, Daniels identifies the following six factors for success and sustainability for enhanced learning:

- *Clarity of purpose and intention:* The purpose and objective to enter and implement the ODL concept must be stated clearly.
- *Economic structure:* If an ODL institution is economically viable, it depends less on government intervention.
- *Institutional structure:* Institutions needs to be autonomous. In other words, they should be able to govern themselves without being controlled by anyone else.
- *Leadership:* Good and strong leadership is very important during the change as it can revitalise and re-energise the institution.
- *An effective and balanced teaching and learning system:* High quality education should satisfy the aspirations of students in such a way that students feel that they want to come back to the institution for further studies. Students should also feel proud of their institution and recommend it to others.

- *Intellectual excitement:* If students find their studies intellectually or practically exciting, they will enjoy studying at their institutions. From the afore-going factors, it can be seen that the ODL approach to learning is more acceptable in higher education environments, flexibility of delivery and awareness to social, cultural and economic requirements of learners and broader society. This is viewed as an integral focus of ODL *vis-à-vis* a developmental state, as conceived in the current South African public service and is explored in the research study. ODL methodology puts the learner and their learning requirements and circumstances at the centre of ODL practice. This emphasis on the learner is what makes ODL methodology potentially transformative affirms Lentell (2006: 114). The quality of open and distance learning varies like any other form of education. Its quality can be the result of a variety of factors, such as the levels of skills and expertise of staff, available resources, weak or strong leadership, effectiveness of administration structures, and the communication infrastructure in a country (Du Plessis, 2011: 263).

The policy documents of Unisa clearly states that the Open Distance Learning notion aims to bridge the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication distance between students and institution, students and academics, students and courseware, as well as students and peers (Olivier, 2012: 178). ODL distillates on removing barriers to access learning, flexibility of learning provision, student-centredness, student support and creating learning programmes with the confidence that students can succeed (Olivier, 2012: 179). Therefore, institutions of higher learning are becoming the ‘reservoirs’ and ‘tools’ to assist government in reaching its goals as a developmental state.

Education practitioners and educators in most parts of Africa and worldwide are advocating the use of Open and Distance Education. This is to enable Africa to expand and to improve quality of education towards development. If we are to realise the millennium goals on quality of education for all, it is extremely important for educators in Africa to change approaches and strategies beginning at teacher education level. Open and distance learning is seen as a significant structure of future education and training. Furthermore, it is important to note that there is a need to also develop flexible learning, academic organizations and delivery structures to satisfy the needs of students (Chisefu, 2010: 6).

During the stage of transforming to a developmental state in South Africa, ODL is a significant medium for sustainable development in the information age of advanced learning, which is an interesting focal point for higher education in the current South African context. Unisa as an ODL University will play an important role within the new higher education landscape and can provide quality education with the possibility to sustainable development of learning for learners, job seekers and the South African society as a whole. Unisa is in the advantaged position to also provide effective learning to people in the rural areas of South Africa.

1.2.3 Learner support

The development of Learner Support in distance education began many years ago. Nonyongo and Ngengebule (1998: xi) explain what this service does. It helps learners to reduce their isolation, it facilitates effective learning, it reduces attrition rates and increases success rates, and in general it improves the quality of distance education. Thorpe (in Lockwood, 1995: 223) explains that there are various definitions of learner support. It has been described as the components of an open learning system capable of acting to an individual learner. Keegen affirms that learner support embraces all the support provided by a distance education or e-learning system which are the same or match the facilities provided by a face-to-face system to enhance students' success in the institution.

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:aznwo7G5i0UJ:learning.ericsson.net/socrates/doc/conf/keegan.doc+&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=za>

Some of the goals in the Departmental Operational Plan 2012-2013 as referred to in earlier discussions, also mention the provision of effective teaching interventions, a positive student experience and facilitating the learning of students through the use of 'cutting edge' technologies. These are typical elements of learner support in an ODL institution. Lockwood (1995: 223) went further and summarised the components of Learner Support; the elements of the system, the configuration of these elements and the interaction between the elements and the learners. These elements are the interaction between learners and support agents, peer learning facilitators and study groups; feedback to learners on their activities; access to libraries, laboratories and equipment and communication networks.

1.2.4 Quality assurance

Higher education has a very significant part to play in contributing to the reconstruction and development in all spheres of the South African Society. Again through good governance and the implementation of sound policies it is the responsibility of the government to guide this very important sphere in the South African society to help in reaching the goals of a developmental state. Through the Council on Higher Education (CHE) established by the Higher Education Act of 1997, the CHE has a mission to contribute to the development of the higher education system in South Africa. The CHE through the Higher Education Quality Committee will address quality issues within the environment of higher education. This quality assurance system is monitoring and evaluating different matters within higher education. On 27 February 2014, the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) has been launched. This project will focus on (i) student success and will define students who graduate with qualities that are personally, professionally and socially valuable, (ii) on higher education institutions concurrently; and (iii) diverse practises that will be used at different points in the project. Expected outputs will also include codes of good practice.

http://www.che.ac.za/focus_areas/quality_enhancement_project/overview

Quality assurance in learner support is of vital importance to ensure that the impact of learner support has the desired effect to assist learners to enhance their learning and in the development of their skills in the duration of their studies. Andrea Hope (as cited in Perraton & Lentell, 2004: 168) is of the opinion that *“the structures that protect quality within frontiers do not necessarily work beyond them. Approaches to the maintenance and monitoring of quality that are appropriate for conventional institution and teaching face-to-face will always need some adaptation if they are to be appropriate for a new style of teaching and learning.”* The products and services organisations offer are the reflections of the quality they offer (Du Plessis, 2011: 266).

1.2.5 Skills development

The Skills Development Act, 97 of 1998 has been implemented to *amongst others*;

- Offer an institutional framework to develop and implement national, sector and workplace strategies;
- Develop and improve the skills of the South African work force. In a developmental state, the development of skills plays an active role in economic

development. This also links to sustainable development by *amongst others*, building the skills of a country's work force;

- Incorporate those strategies within the National Qualifications Framework contemplated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995; and
- Provide for learnerships that lead to accredited occupational qualifications.

In addition to this Act, the Skills Development Amendment Act 37 of 2008 has been developed to further strengthen the development of skills amongst the workforce of South Africa.

The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2013) clearly stipulates how important it is for close cooperation between education, training providers and employers. Where the curriculum includes practical training, for example in Agricultural Management, it is important that the student get linked with the workplace to gain practical experience in the working environment and equip the student with practical experience and valuable skills.

The whole idea to incorporate subjects with a WiL component by institutions is to further strengthen the skills development issue in South Africa with the support from higher education institutions. Skills development for students through WiL is to place them in the real world of work under supervision of a qualified mentor to guide them in acquiring the necessary skills in their field of study. Work-integrated Learning as one of the support initiatives at Unisa and will be evaluated in this study.

The White Paper for Post-School Education in South Africa also clearly stipulates what is expected of the education system in South Africa with regard to the vision the government has for the higher educational system to add value to the enhancement of the developmental state.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES: KEY QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED

Relevant resources were consulted to assist with the aim of this study to answer the following research questions:

- What is the role of the relevant Unisa policies for the implementation of effective learner support activities in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal and how do these policies fit into the higher education landscape in the Public Administration domain?

- Are the students coming into the system of Open Distance Learning in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal ready for this new environment, and how do they experience the ODL environment with regard to their levels of readiness and exposure to these new initiatives?
- Is the quality of the learner support initiatives effective to support and enhance learning of students in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal?
- How is the quality of support for students with regard to Experiential Learning and required skills development when they are exposed to the relevant work environment?
- Do these learner support initiatives contribute to the throughput rate of students in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal?

1.4 THEORIES UPON WHICH THE RESEARCH STUDY WILL BE CONSTRUCTED

The following discussion locates the research study within a theoretical framework:

1.4.1 Public Administration paradigm

Over the past few decades, Public Administration went through a few paradigmatic changes. It started as early as 1887-1926 and was known as the principles of administration, 1927-1937 was the era of challenge. The identity crisis was from the period 1948-1970. Semantic shifts are to be noted when Public Administration moved to Public Management during 1970 to early 1990. During 1990-2008 it was the era from Public Management to Governance and then to the New Public Governance debate since 2010. Public Administration scholarship of the 21st Century has the tendency to concentrate more on the latest archetypes of New Public Management (NPM), and its descendant paradigm of governance, while largely disregarding the strong basis of century-old paradigms of Public Administration, asserts Basheka, (2012: 25). Governance is currently seen as a “new player” within the Public Administration paradigm and is generally described as the actions by a government.

Public Administration is regarded as the scientific study of public administration. The upper case in ‘Public Administration’ is used to indicate the subject, and ‘public administration’ in lower case signifies what the subject of Public Administration is investigating (Wessels, Pauw & Thani, 2014: 7).

1.4.2 Public Administration

Public administration refers to the administrative processes which must be carried out and which are inseparably connected with the functional activities of public institutions (Cloete in Thornhill & Hanekom, 1995: 19).

Public Administration relates to the functions or phenomena practised in a political environment and aims at satisfying the needs of society (Thornhill & van Dijk, 2010: 101). A Public Administration system was established in South Africa according to Chapter 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. Public Administration will sometimes focus on the system as a whole. Schwella,*et al.*, expresses the public administration domain as a societal system (Schwella, Burger, Fox & Müller, 1996: 5). Public administration includes the following:

- *It is a system of structures and processes.* The ODL structures of Unisa aim to provide a positive learning experience to students. ODL further also provide access to students to the systems and processes of the university. This in itself link to effective service delivery and access to services as discussed in the Batho Pele – “*People First*” in chapter two of this discussion. The Department of Tuition and Facilitation of Learning (DTFL) consists of Directorates such as Student Counselling and Career Development (DCCD), Instructional Support and Services (DISS) and the regions which are spread in all the provinces of South Africa. DTFL therefore provides a range of support activities to both the academics and students in terms of curriculum development, learning development and facilitation of learning.
- *It operates within a particular society as environment.* The specific society as an environment will be the composition of the students and the staff of Unisa as a higher education institution.
- *It has the objective to facilitate the formulation of appropriate, legal and legitimate governmental policies.* The purpose of public policies is to guide public officials to achieve specific goals (Thornhill & Hanekom, 1995: 102). The Higher Education Act of South Africa, a public policy, influenced Unisa to formulate ODL related policies within the framework of the institution.
- *With effective, efficient and productive execution* of the formulated policies.

Thornhill & Van Dijk (2014: 26) indicate that public administration entails the conversion of politics, taking cognisance of the economy, societal necessities, the management, coordination and execution of government policy and programmes by public officials in the public sector in an ethical, effective, efficient and economic way that benefits the citizens within a state. From the above discussion, it can be said that the areas of the landscape of a developmental state; especially with regard to political, economic and social dimensions are of significance in service delivery provision.

Stewart (in Wessels *et al.*, 2014: 67) made limited observations on public administration and the new struggle for development. The author explains that the environment of development influences the public service and that new demands and pressures created by development often lead to the falling-off or demolition of existing institutions and social patterns. This clearly happened in the public service in South Africa in the public administration environment. Development in all spheres of government is essential to move towards a democratic developmental state.

1.4.3 From Public Administration to Public Governance

Good governance is more regularly used within the background of public administration and more predominantly in development management. Within the new public management paradigm it has been viewed as a phase of the new Paradigm in Public Administration (Agere, 2000: 1). According to Agere (2000: 3), the World Bank provided some insights in which the various contexts of the term governance were being used. In the first report on governance and development, governance was defined as a way in which power is used in the management of economic and social resources of a country, especially with a vision of development. It comprised the following three effects in governance:

- Type of political regime;
- Processes by which authority is exercised in the management of economic and social resources, with a view to development; and
- Capacity of governments to formulate policies and have them effectively implemented.

Following on from the preceding discussion, Wissink (in Van der Waldt & Du Toit, 1997: 14) states that public management is part of public administration, and is in

general seen as the ability to transform resources such as material, labour, capital and information into services and products to fulfil the requirements and needs of society, and also to achieve the aims and objectives of the public sector. Thornhill & Van Dijk (2014: 15) describe public management as the active fragment of the field of Public Administration which deals with planning, programming, leadership, motivation, training, counselling, monitoring and evaluation, assessing performance and reporting. These functions are the dynamic part that public officials carry out in an administrative or management position in a public institutional setting.

1.4.4 Developmental State perspective

At the 52nd African National Congress (ANC) conference the issue on building human capacity in the South African public service was raised. There is a close synergy between Public Administration theory and discipline within a developmental state context. Public Administration education can play an important role in building human capacity, skills and knowledge in the South Africa system of government (Van Jaarsveldt, 2009: 257). To explain ODL in a developmental state, it is important to look at the elements of a developmental state in the context of this study.

Cai (2010: 2) explains the developmental state as ‘strong in ambition to develop. Economic growth is the major priority of the national interest. The developmental state has a solid and resilient central government.’ According to Gumede (2009: 5), developmental states have ‘active development strategies, in particular industrial policies.’ The author further argues that a skilled and educated labour force is needed, and this includes training in the civil service and in technology at tertiary levels.

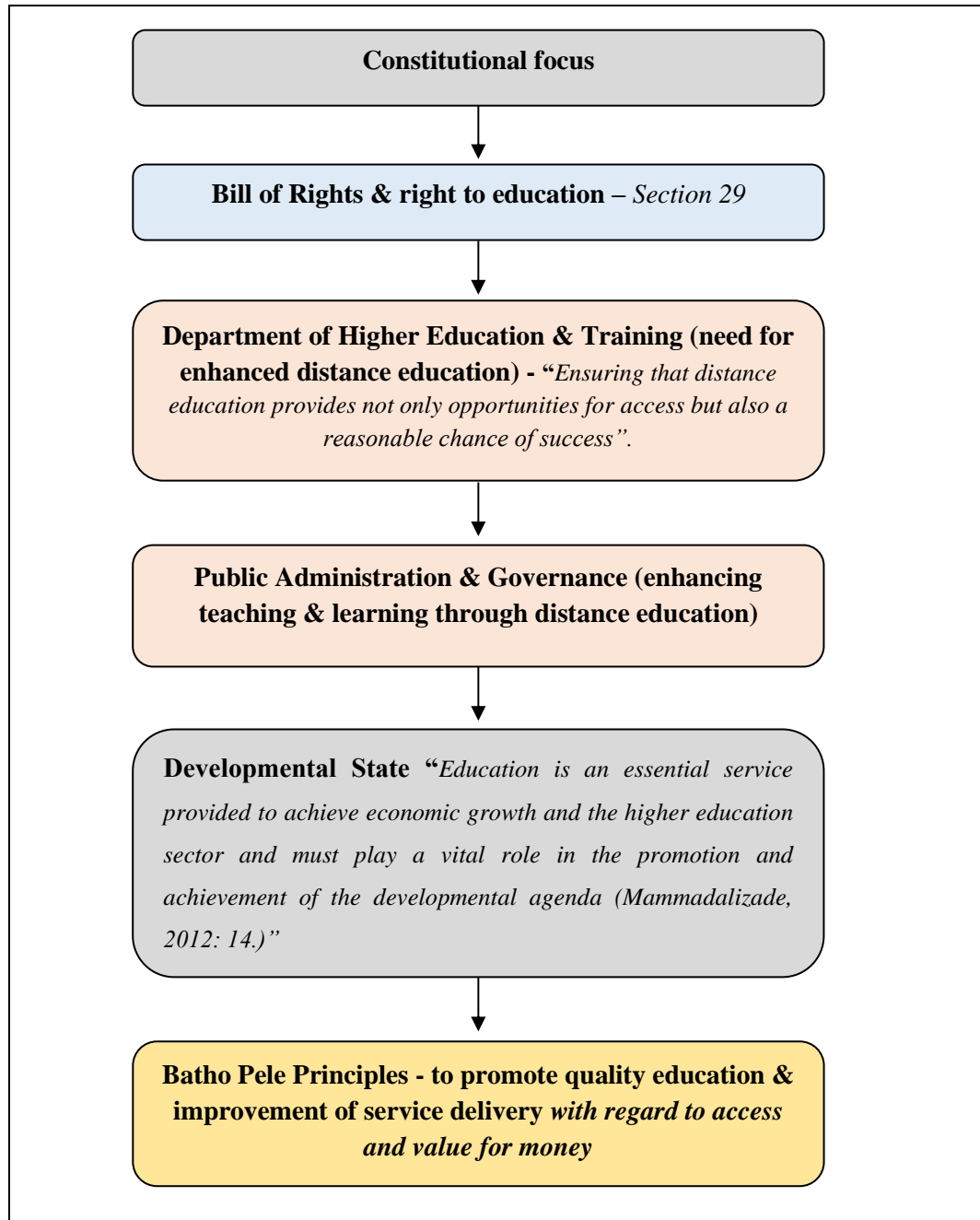
In a developmental state, the available resources in the country are used to improve economic development and meet the needs of the people. It is of vital importance that growth in the economy and social development take place through state intervention to eliminate poverty and to expand economic opportunities. Government, labour and business as well as other citizen organisations should work together to reach the overall goals of economic development.

Nagy & Robb (in Barac & Marx, 2012: 352) elucidate that this is where higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa have to play an important role to ensure advancement, development and application of knowledge. Society is increasingly

demanding, funding available from government for tertiary education is decreasing and the greater complications in higher education demands flexible teaching and learning.

Hall, Symes & Luescher (in Barac & Marx, 2012: 352) elaborate further that these complexities caused that currently governments have pursued to give responsibility and control over higher education by entrusting HEIs with more authority over their inputs and resource use, while challenging institutional accountability for outputs and performance. This has resulted in the change in universities to become more and more public corporations that are subject to centralised laws and regulations from government within the public administration domain. These laws and regulations govern budgets, facilities and personnel in the HEIs. Following on the explanation of the Public Administration framework, it is important to look at the legislative framework governing the research study. The diagram that follows illustrates the Constitutional focus and the impact of the educational system on the developmental state objective. *Figure 1.3* demonstrates the impact of the educational system on the developmental state in the following illustration.

Figure 1.1: Impact of the educational system on the developmental state



Source: Author’s perspective

The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* is superior to all other acts and policies of the country and these acts and policies should be developed and implemented with the Constitution as the most important guidance. The right to education is included in Section 29 of *The Bill of Rights*, chapter two of The Constitution, and stipulates evidently that distance education should provide opportunity for access, as well as reasonable chance of success. Therefore learner support can be regarded as a very important factor in ensuring success for students in higher education and with specific reference to open distance learning. The Department of Higher Education & Training focuses on the need to enhanced distance education which is encapsulated in the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training of 2013*. Open distance learning as a mode for education delivery is very strongly proposed in this document. The Department of Higher Education & Training falls in the Public Administration domain and therefore higher education institutions have an important task to educate for development of the country. In a *developmental state* education is thus a key element of development with regard to skills which in turn will have a positive influence on economic growth in the country. *Batho Pele* promotes quality services in all government departments and for the purpose of this study with specific reference to the field of higher education. Citizens pay for services to be delivered, therefore everybody should have access to services and value for money with regard to these services, of which education should be easy accessible.

From the preceding discussion and illustration, it can be said that the role of education and skills development is crucial to accelerate and sustain high levels of social and economic growth in a developmental state. It is thus important to develop and manage human capital to achieve the goals of a developmental state and higher education is one of the prominent pillars to support this goal.

1.4.5 Education systems in developing countries

The Department of Higher Education falls in the public sector domain. It is therefore, important that the educational system in South Africa, as a developing country and a developmental state, should be emphasised in this study.

Kember (2007: 62) reasons that most developing countries struggle to build up their education systems to maintain significant levels of university education, because they cannot afford it. To fund universities requires considerable prior investment in school-

level education. He also argues that students who enter university levels should be well educated at school level to be able to benefit from a university education.

The author further illuminates that many developing countries have turned to open-entry institutions to meet the demand for post-secondary education which their conventional university systems have been unable to satisfy. Universities offering open entry courses in developing countries are a mix of single- and dual-mode institutions, with the latter pre-dominating.

1.5 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK GOVERNING HIGHER EDUCATION AND OPEN LEARNING

Some of the pertinent legislation (in context to the study) is put forward in the following discussion.

1.5.1 Policy Framework for Education and Training in 1994

The African National Congress documented *A Policy Framework for Education and Training in 1994*. This document outlined a well-designed and quality distance education system based on the values of open learning. The idea behind this document was that it would add new value to education in South Africa (African National Congress, 1994: 78).

1.5.2 The White Paper on Education and Training

The *White Paper on Education and Training* of 1995 committed the newly elected ANC government to address the serious and vast educational imbalances of the country. It addressed the Constitutional and basic right of all people to be entitled to basic education (Department of Education, 1995: 28).

1.5.3 Higher Education Act of 1997

The *Higher Education Act of 1997* allocates responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in South Africa to the Council on Higher Education (CHE). This responsibility is fulfilled through its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The mandate of the HEQC includes quality promotion, institutional audit and programme accreditation. As part of the task of building an effective national quality assurance system, the HEQC has also included capacity

development and training as a vital component of its programme of activities (HEQC, 2004: 1).

1.5.4 Higher Education Qualifications Framework

The *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (HEQF), Department of Education Government Notice No 928, gazetted (NO. 33053) 5 October 2007 as policy in terms of the Higher Education Act states on page 9 that some qualifications will be designed to incorporate periods of required work that integrate with classroom study. It further stipulates that where Work-integrated Learning (WiL)/Experiential Learning (EL) is a structured fragment of a qualification the volume of learning allocated in WiL should be applicable to the purpose of the qualification and to the cognitive demands of the learning outcome and assessment criteria enclosed in the appropriate level descriptors. It also clearly states that it is the obligation of institutions, which offer programmes requiring WiL credits to place students into WiL programmes (Unisa 2012).

1.5.5 White Paper for Post School Education and Training

The *White Paper for Post School Education and Training* of 2013 focuses on the vision of government for the post-school system education in South Africa. It forms part of the National Development Plan of 2030. This document is made up of a diverse range of the educational institutions of South Africa to cater for the millions of adults that will come into the system. These documents focus strongly on the product that will be acceptable for society in South Africa and are employable.

1.5.6 Batho Pele - “People First”

The term Batho Pele means “People First”. Eight Batho Pele Principles were developed at national level to serve as an acceptable policy and legislative framework regarding service delivery in the public service. The Provincial Government of KwaZulu-Natal established 11 Batho Pele Principles, which are in line with the eight principles on national level. The following selected Batho Pele Principles only will be discussed (with relevant emphasis and context) for the purpose of this study:

- **Consultation (in relation to teaching and learning)**

The internal customers (staff) as well as the external customers (the students) of the university should be consulted on a regular basis to determine what is expected from the university.

- **Service Standards (for Quality Assurance in Education)**

The students should be told of the levels of services that will be delivered to them. The students should be given a choice of the services they want. The set standards by the university should be monitored to measure performance and the availability of the resources of the university.

- **Access (provision of reasonable access to students in ODL)**

Easy access to these available services should be made available to both staff and students. This will improve performance of students, as well as staff.

- **Value-for-Money (best possible service with available resources)**

The available resources of the University should be used in the best way possible to satisfy the need of its clients, the students. Ways should be found to improve services on every level in the university. These identified principles will be discussed in detail in the study to explain how it would fit in with learner support and service delivery with particular reference to Unisa.

These Principles are also linked with the following Constitutional ideals and the service delivery agenda of:

- Providing service impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias;
- Utilising resources efficiently and effectively; and
- Rendering an accountable, transparent, and development-oriented public administration (South Africa: 2011).

Removing the barriers to access of learning, flexibility of learning provision, student-centeredness, supporting students and constructing learning programmes with the anticipation that students can succeed will be investigated in the context of the National Development Plan, Vision 2030 of Government with the focus on improving the quality of public service delivery.

1.5.7 National Development Plan, Vision 2030

Education, training and innovation are crucial to the long-term growth of South Africa. These components are very important to eradicate poverty and lessening inequality, and the fundamentals of an equal society. Chapter nine of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 of Government aims to have a post-school system that provides quality-learning opportunities to young people and adults who want to change careers or upgrade skills. It should also contribute towards quality teaching and learning and raise education and training levels to produce highly skilled professionals (National Development Plan, 2030). The plan further stipulates that the higher education system should make a serious impact on economic and social progress. As the system develops at a moderate pace, continuous quality enhancement is needed.

The poor school education is a major challenge and it increases cost in creating graduates. This is seen as the main reason why only a small number of black students graduate from universities. More support will be given to universities to increase graduation rates. Courses should be combined with bridging courses. A further emphasis is placed on research & development to improve the quality of teaching and the quality of higher education and staff capacity and quality of staff should be addressed to bring about knowledge production and innovation. This will directly have an impact on better student development as well. Emanating from the NDP in the context of learning, the models in open and distance learning used at Unisa are explored.

1.5.8 Unisa policies

Unisa, as an institution operates under the Higher Education Act of South Africa, it is important to locate the policies of the institution for the research. All the policy documents of Unisa clearly indicate and disseminate the concept of Open Distance Learning as a tool to bridge time, economic, social, education and communication distance between the student and the institution, and the student and academics. These policies include the Open Distance Learning Policy of 2008, the Institutional Operational Plan, the Learner Support Policy and the 2015 Strategic Plan. One of the strategic objectives in this plan is to *“Position Unisa as a leading provider of quality distance education programmes through an academic product range that expands on its*

comprehensive character.” The Unisa policies focus on the Strategic Plan and its strategic objectives.

1.6 MODELS IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

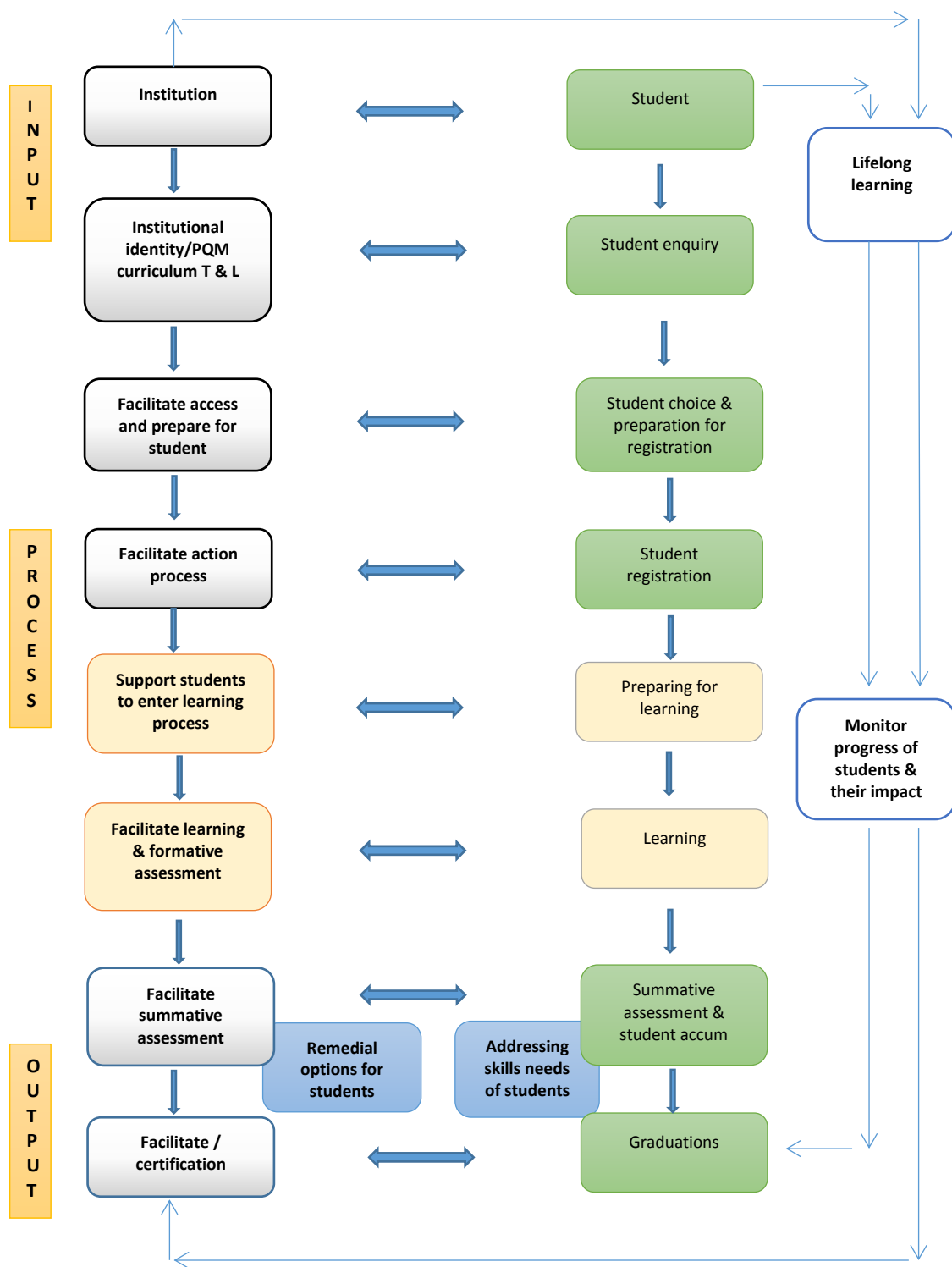
A discussion of the models in distance learning is discussed with relevance and context to the study.

1.6.1 Unisa’s Open Distance Learning Model

This has been developed in the ODL Policy to guide to demonstrate the implementation of the policy. It gives a clear indication of the relationship between the institution and the student during the student’s learning experience while with the institution.

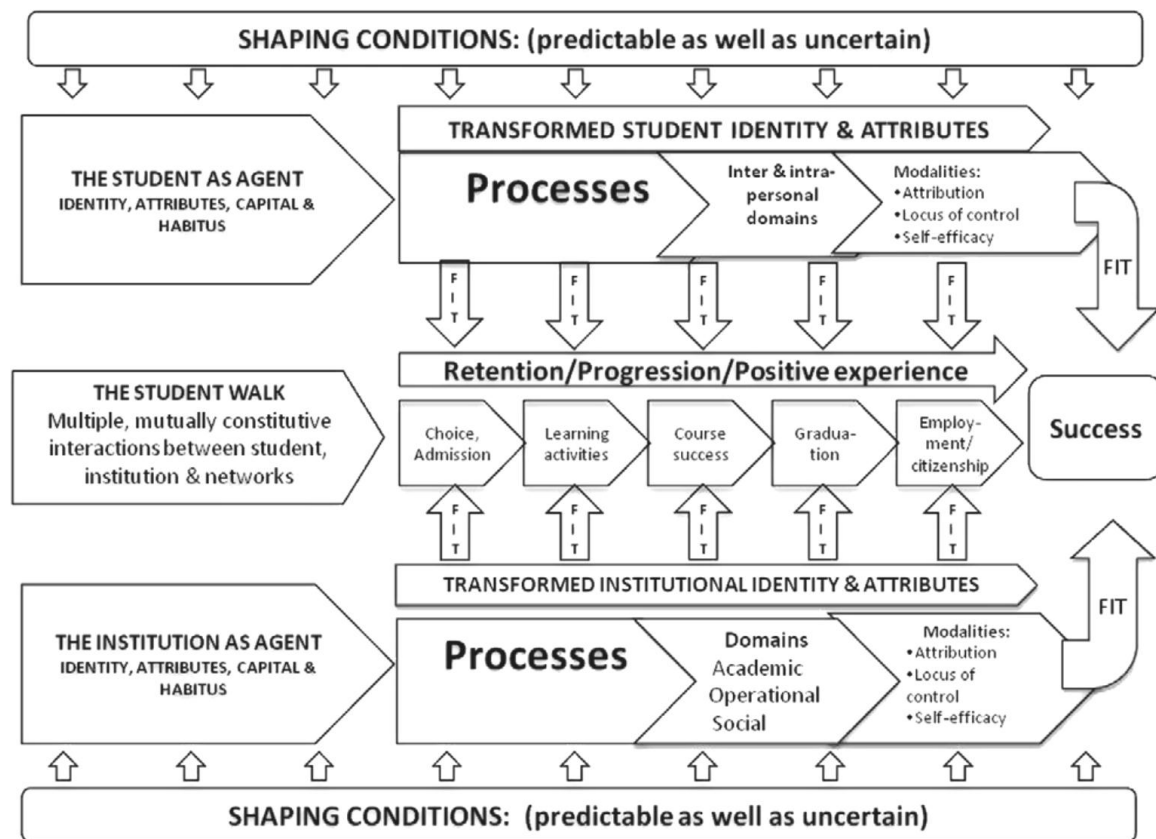
In *Figure 1.1* that follows, learner support services includes support to students to enter the learning process, preparing for learning, facilitating learning during the formative processes and assisting with learning matters, such as study methods, etc. To monitor the students’ impact on their progress is also of vital importance here. This can be done through monitoring assignment results and examination results. Furthermore, the frequency of students attending tutorial classes should be monitored in conjunction with assignment results and examination results. This will enable learner support services to identify weak links in the facilitation processes. During all the processes of the Unisa ODL model, the student should be the centre of development in the facilitation of the learning processes. The needs of the students should be taken into consideration at all times.

Figure 1.2: Unisa's Open Distance Learning model



Source: Unisa, (2008: 11)

Figure 1.3: Unisa's socio-critical model for explaining, predicting, and enhancing student success



Source: Subotzky & Prinsloo, (2011: 184)

The model in *Figure 1.2* illustrates three key concepts as factors which support success in the South African ODL context. These concepts are discussed briefly.

- Student as agent.** In this concept the student is the main role-player. Processes will be affected by inter & intra personal domains of the student as well as the modalities such as acknowledgement, locus of control and self-efficacy. This is, in other words, the role the student fulfils towards his/her success in the learning journey. Learner support services should be acknowledged by students and their attitudes will determine how successful they use these services that are provided by the university. The whole idea of an ODL system is also to inspire students to study independently. Subotzky & Prinsloo (2011: 184) also emphasise that the characteristics and behaviours of students are intensely formed by their historical, environmental, socio-economic, and cultural experiences and circumstances. However, they still enjoy the freedom within these conceptions to advance, grow and transform their qualities in the journey to succeed.

- ***The student walk.*** At the centre of the model lies the student walk and it is a crucial part of the model. The student walk illustrates the collaboration between the student and the university during the learning journey of the student. It starts with the pre-registration activities and continues through every phase of common engagement: application process, registration process, teaching and learning processes, assessments through assignments and examinations, learner support services provided by the university, graduation and finally the ensuing contribution in the community and the labour market.
- ***The institution as agent.*** The role of the institution/university in these processes is of utmost importance for the success of the student. Academic processes, as well as administrative processes should be student friendly and should contribute to the development of the students and their success. The engagement between the institution and students are enhanced through the provision of capital with regard to financial capital which include cultural, intellectual, organisational and additional forms of capital. This will ultimately add to success and the habitus of both the institution and students in the end, proclaims Subotzky & Prinsloo (2011: 184).

1.6.2 The Bates Model

The Actions Model of Bates (1995: 1) is based on methodology to assess learning technologies. The author suggests that decision-making in educational institutions should be based on an analysis of questions that each institution needs to ask, and grouped in the model as depicted in *Table 1.2*.

Table 1.1: The Bates model

ACTIONS						
ACCESS	COST	TEACHING & LEARNING	INTERACTIVE & USER-FRIENDLY	ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES	NOVELTY	SPEED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How accessible is a particular technology for learners. - How flexible is it for a particular target group? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the cost structure for each technology? - What is the unit cost per learner? The resources available should be used cost effective optimized and in a way that students and staff benefit from it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What kinds of learning are needed? - What instructional approaches will meet these needs? - What are the best teaching technologies for supporting this teaching and learning? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What kind of interaction does this technology enable? How easy is it to use? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the organisational requirements? What are the barriers that should be removed before the technology can be used successfully? What changes in the organisation should be made? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How new is this technology? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How quickly can courses be mounted with this new technology? How quickly can materials be changed and updated?
This also links closely to one of the Batho Pele Principles of “Access to basic services and needs.”	This links closely to one of the Batho Pele Principles of “value for money.” Student numbers and facilities available will make a significant impact on the use of technologies.	Wide consultation with all role players in this area should take place. Lecturers, support staff and students. It must also be kept in mind that media to be used will be different in their way of presentation.	The access and the interactivity with technology should be used as a developmental tool to provide an effective and easy option for students and staff to use. The interaction between students should also be made possible.	Is the technology synchronous or asynchronous?	OERs can be used effectively here.	The speed of technology should enable swift change when necessary. The stance of government on ICT involvement should be adhered to. This will be discussed in detail in the study.

Source: Bates, (1995: 1-12)

This model also highlights significant actions that should be taken into account when consideration is given to use technology in the ODL system and whether the students are ready for this mode of education. Learner support and service delivery in the environment of Unisa as a public institution should add value to the development and progress of its students as clients. The green highlighted columns in *Table 1.1* depicts this statement.

The higher education environment in South Africa has changed dramatically since 1994. In a developmental state, the government strives through development strategies to bring about economic and social prosperity in the country. Through the Department of Higher Education as part of the public service and the public administration domain, the government will develop knowledge and much needed skills as part of one of its development strategies. Therefore, all three models are relevant and important for this study.

The ODL model and the student walk demonstrate how the student will start the journey in the higher education environment until the final successful stage. The Bates Model shows the important role access, cost effectiveness and teaching and learning methods should play during this journey of attainment of knowledge and developing skills for the student. It also touches on the Principles of Batho Pele which serves as an acceptable policy and legislative framework for service delivery in the Public Service, as part of the public administration domain.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology focusses on the research process and the kind of tools and procedures to be used. Specific tasks are undertaken, for example, data collection and sampling used in the study (Mouton, 2001: 56).

1.7.1 Interviews

Through the medium of individual interviews with staff in learner support units, as well as focus group interviews information has been gathered for the study. For the qualitative phase, interviews with staff involved in learner support activities and tutors, are conducted to obtain relevant data.

1.7.1.1 Structured in-depth interviews

Structured in-depth interviews have been used to collect the relevant data regarding the experience of the participants (students) and also to determine how they feel and think about their different experiences. In other words, the study explored the phenomenon or person (Vogt, Gardner & Haefelle, 2012: 31). In this study the effectiveness of learner support in the region of Unisa KwaZulu-Natal was investigated. A discussion or conversation in which you want to learn what the other person thinks is the basic

building block of the interview (Vogt *et al.*, 2012: 31). The questions asked were open-ended questions to allow space for examining the answers further.

According to Wilkinson (2004: 47), it is appropriate to use interviews when in-depth information is required; where the subject matter is potentially sensitive; and the issues under examination would benefit from development or clarification.

1.7.1.2 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews were also conducted with the two groups (eight in each group) of Agricultural students who have been placed in the region for their Work-Integrated Learning/Experiential learning. Focus group interviews are not widely used by social researchers, but they seem to have considerable potential and are appropriate when the topic of the research deals with interaction in groups (Vogt *et al.*, 2012: 41). The authors further stipulated that focus groups seem especially good at addressing questions that are targeted or focused – hence the name. The first group of Agricultural students were placed at the research stations of CEDARA – the Department of Agriculture in KwaZulu-Natal, while the second group were placed at Zakhe Agricultural College. Wilkinson (2004: 50) indicates that focus group interviews should be done:

- To gain information about how people think;
- To explain perceptions of an event, idea or experience;
- When there is a desire for more understanding of the human experience; and
- When seeking the understanding of the client (in this case the student).

1.7.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were distributed to students in Durban, Newcastle, Pietermaritzburg, Richards Bay and the Wild Coast areas. These are the regional agencies of Unisa in KwaZulu-Natal. Staff involved in learner support initiatives will also be interviewed to get a more comprehensive picture of the learner support functions in the region.

Structured questionnaires were used in this study to obtain data from the students. This can be a large sample and therefore the questionnaire should be structured. Cohen *et al.*, (2000: 247) explained that when your sample is large, it is better to use structured questionnaires. Closed questions will be used to generate frequencies of response to do a statistical analysis. Questionnaires are valuable tools to collect data from a large

number of participants (Wilkinson, 2004: 42). In this case, there are a large number of participants in the rural areas around Newcastle and Nkandla as well as in the other regional offices, Wild Coast, Pietermaritzburg, Richards Bay and Durban.

The questionnaire is the most important tool in this study to collect the relevant data in the first phase of the study. Distribution was by hand to students who attended tutorial classes during the second semester of the 2014 academic year at the different regional offices in KwaZulu-Natal. The collected data is analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 22.0. The results are presented through descriptive statistics in the form of graphs, cross-tabulations and other figures in the analysis of the qualitative data. Chi-Square test values are used by using the p-values. The analysed data is described in chapter 5.3.

1.7.3 Observation

Observational data collection will also be used in this study. Observational data gives the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations. This gives the researcher an opportunity to understand the context of what is researched and to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed (Cohen *et al.*, 2000: 305). The researcher will use this method to observe the behaviour of the students and the tutors during the tutorial classes (students' participation during the classes and the tutor's method of facilitation). During this observation, Unisa's formative evaluation form as well as the summative evaluation form is used. Observation is also used during the use of other learner support initiatives, such as counselling, computer labs, academic literacy sessions, discussion classes and library support. All these initiatives form a very important part of Open Distance Learning.

These data collection methods are used to support the reliability of the findings in the study.

1.7.4 Sampling

The population of this study will be the distance education students and staff of Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal who are enrolled for the tutorial programme, as well as the signature and e-learning modules. The reason for choosing this population is due to the fact that they are the most significant people to reveal essential information with regard to distance learning and open distance learning, as well as their experiences as students in

this environment. A simple random sample method was used. In this method of sampling every person or element in the population has the same chance of being included in the sample (Weiers, 2011: 120).

The sample size was selected from the tutorial classes offered at the different offices in the region. Tutorial classes are offered according to certain modules in all six colleges of Unisa. Not all modules are offered in each college as the classes are offered where there is a demand. One module of those modules offered was randomly selected from each college. In each of the modules offered, students were selected randomly to participate. Staff was also randomly selected for interviews with regard to other learner support initiatives in the region.

1.7.5 Distribution of students per College and staff

Neuman (in De Vos, *et al.*, 2007: 194) specifies that the issue of the minimum size of a sample is repeatedly addressed in the literature. It is commonly stated that the larger the population, the smaller the percentage of the population the sample needs to be and *vice versa*. In the sampling for this study, the correct numbers of students who will register for the modules to be offered can only be determined once they have registered for tutorial classes. Updated information is included in *Table 1.2*.

Table 1.2: Distribution table of questionnaires to students

COLLEGE	OFFICE IN REGION	MODULE	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
College of Law	Durban {30 modules to be offered}	CMP2601	10
		CMY3701	20
		CMP3701	5
		SCL1501	19
College of Human Sciences	Durban {11 modules to be offered}	ENG1501	6
		ENG1502	10
		PUB1501	5
		PYC1501	22
College of Education	Durban {6 modules to be offered}	ETH102L	19
	Newcastle {6 modules to be offered}	ECS1501	10
		ENN103F	14
		SCL1501	6
	Richards Bay {6 modules to be offered}	ETH102L	11
		ENN1501	13
	Wild Coast	ENN103F	13
	Pietermaritzburg	FAC1502	12
		PST131J	13
College of Sciences	Durban {30 modules to be offered}	CHE1501	5
		MAT1511	10
		PHY1501	5
		MAT1510 (YM)	14
		COS1501	6
College of Management and Economic Sciences	Durban {66 modules to be offered}	AUE1501	5
		FAC1501	15
		FAC1601	10
		ECS1501	11
		ECS1601	10
		Student workers	4
Social work students	Block session		10
TOTAL	143 modules were offered	27	313

From the preceding table, the number of participants informing the study in various areas differs as it reflects the number of students registered for the specific modules.

Table 1.3: *Distribution size of staff per learner support units*

UNIT OF SUPPORT STAFF	DESIGNATION	NUMBER INTERVIEWED
Tutorial services	Head Facilitation of Learning	1
	Regional Academic Coordinators	3
	Tutors	9
Student Counselling	Manager	1
	Student Counselling Officers	1
Library	Manager	1
	Library Officers	2
Academic Literacies	Facilitators	1
TOTAL		19

Therefore, from the preceding discussion, 300 students and 19 support staff formed part of the survey, with a distinction between the various categories of staff to establish statistical significance and variance of opinions in their response to distance learning and open distance learning.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

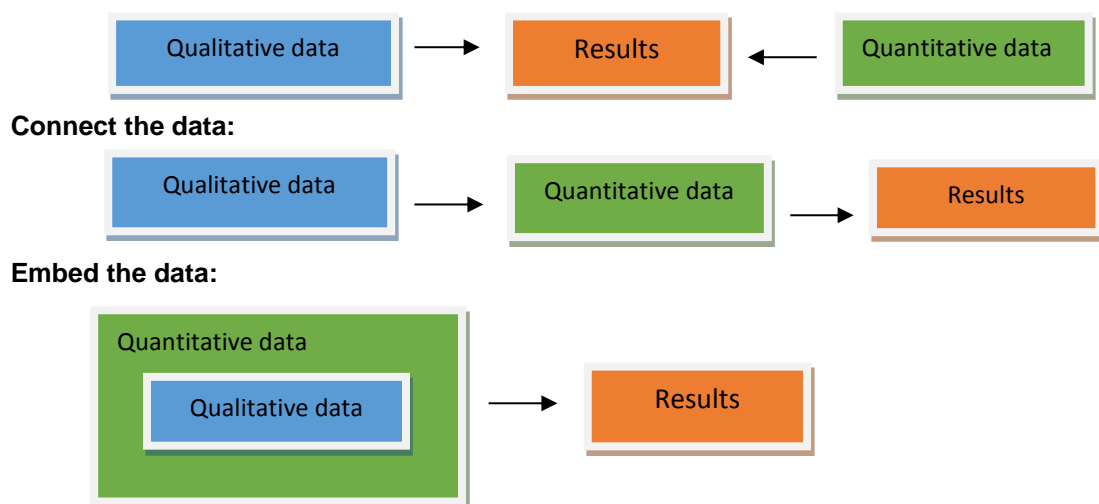
The research design emphasises the type of study that was undertaken in order to provide acceptable answers to the research questions (Mouton, 2001: 49). The research design determines the planning of a scientific inquiry and designing a strategy for finding out something, as emphasized by Babbie & Mouton, (2006: 72). The research design is the plan to be used to get the relevant data: the what, how and where? According to Yin (in De Beer, 1999: 24), a research design is an action plan where an initial set of questions have to be answered by a set of conclusions (answers) about these questions. To get the end result, a number of key steps may be found which include the collection and analysis of data. The research design designates the nature that the research project will follow to ultimately successfully address the research problem.

This study took place at the regional hub in Durban, as well as the regional agencies in Newcastle, Richards Bay and Wild Coast (Mbizana). Nkandla could not be used in this study as no students have registered for tutorial classes. The efficiency and effectiveness of the learner support initiatives were thus tested through the examination results as well. The learner support initiatives were evaluated to determine if they have

any influence on the experience of students. To do this, the study also explored the experience of those students who were exposed only to limited or no learner support initiatives. This study was conducted in a mixed method research paradigm. A qualitative, as well as a quantitative approach have been used. Creswell (2006: 6) describes mixed methods research as both collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data includes closed-ended information, for example, attitude, behaviour or performance instruments. In the case of this study, examination results were also taken into account. Qualitative data consists of open-ended information that the researcher gathers through interviews with participants. It is important that these two datasets be mixed. They must be merged where one will build on the other, as held by Creswell (2006: 6).

Figure 1.4 demonstrates three ways of integrating quantitative and qualitative data.

Figure 1.4: Integration of quantitative and qualitative data into the study



Source: Creswell, (2006:7)

1.9 CONTRIBUTION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE

Unisa is in the process of transforming from a distance education university to an open distance learning university. The study was done with the objective to determine the gaps in this implementation process within the regional hub of the University in the region of KwaZulu-Natal. The intention was to find measures to improve on identified gaps and making suggestions on addressing these gaps for enhancing teaching and learning in an open distance learning university such as Unisa. This study further added knowledge to the field of learner support in an open distance learning university which

is operating in a higher education environment, as part of the public administration domain in a developmental state. This was the first type of study of this nature that was conducted in the region of Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal with the view to improve on current learner support initiatives, and to bring stronger academic support to the region, in particular, at its centre of gravity. The findings of the study further serves as useful information for the future of teaching and learning in distance education in Unisa in particular, and KwaZulu-Natal in general. Open distance learning is seen as an innovative method of teaching globally, but it has to be carefully developed and implemented in South Africa as an altering to a developmental state. There are two important questions, amongst others that should be asked: Are the students ready for this new model and mode of teaching and learning, and is the institution ready to implement and accommodate this new form of teaching and learning? Quality assurance in this whole transitional process is a further aspect that should be considered with utmost importance to ensure that constructive and meaningful learning is actually taking place. It is therefore crucial that quality learner support mechanisms should be implemented to new learners who come into the system. Resilient learner support services to new learners, entering the ODL system, should also positively contribute to addressing the poor throughput rates in higher education in South Africa with specific reference to Unisa KwaZulu-Natal.

1.10 LIMITATION TO THE STUDY

Limitation in this study emerged from the fact that students in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences were difficult to reach because of the geographical placement of students in the rural areas of Richards Bay and Newcastle. They were contacted *via* Short Message Service (sms) text messages on the importance of the completion of the questionnaire, but no responses were received from students in this group.

1.11 DELINEATION OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One provides a prologue to the study and provides an overall orientation to the research. The chapter includes a brief discussion on the role of higher education and ODL within a public administration paradigm in a new democratic South Africa.

Chapter Two includes the discussion of the theoretical and conceptual framework of ODL *vis-à-vis* Public Management. An overview is given of distance education and

ODL modes of education. The importance of the functions of higher education in the public administration domain and the support to sustainable development in a society to enable the government-of-the-day to develop and sustainment of high levels of social and economic growth.

Chapter Three focuses on learner support within ODL to enhance learning and skills development in a developmental state context.

Chapter Four locates the research design and methodology that was used to conduct the study. It further includes the discussion of the mixed methods mode of research paradigm, which consists of a quantitative and qualitative approach that was followed to collect and present the data.

Chapter Five presents the results and discusses the findings obtained from the questionnaires, as well as interviews conducted with staff, tutors and students.

Chapter Six discusses the findings and recommendations based on the findings of the study. Conclusions are drawn from the findings of the study.

1.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter gives a concise background and introduction to this study. It includes the history of the new higher education environment and the inclusion of ODL as a mode of education in South Africa. A summary of the preliminary literature study, the reasons for choosing this topic and the theories upon which the research study is constructed is also incorporated. It encapsulates the higher education landscape within the Public Administration environment. The chapter also covers the legislative framework governing higher education and open learning as well as the policies of Unisa that guides the implementation and purpose of ODL in the institution. The research methodology that was followed and delineation of the various chapters have also been reflected upon.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING *VIS-À-VIS* PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

With the establishment of a democracy in South Africa in 1994, it undoubtedly had the prospective to take the country on a path of significant change. During the unfolding of this democracy, a huge task was placed on all public institutions to embrace this change and to improve the lives of all citizens in South Africa. To achieve this, it was necessary to have an innovative and different look at all the current acts and policies in place at the time. This would have certainly influenced all sectors in the public administrative domain. Education and specifically the higher education sphere was a very important area to bring about change and to eliminate the inconsistencies of the past. This chapter will focus on the development of distance education in the broad theoretical framework of higher education and open distance learning (ODL) within Public Management and Governance in South Africa.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Learning is a need for development and accomplishment. In a constantly changing world, increasingly knowledge is developed. This will evidently require more changes in learning and the tools and means used in learning.

All over the world, higher education or post-school organisations have been challenged with more cost-effective delivery methods in higher education. Therefore, distance education has evolved over the years to try and minimise the absence of direct contact between students and their teachers. ODL emerged and with the development of new technology it became easier to aim to narrow the distance between the institution and students.

2.2.1 Definition of Distance Education

Numerous definitions have been developed for Distance Education (DE) over a period of time. At the most simple level, DE happens when the educational provider and the learner are parted by physical distance. Technology is used as an instrument of

communication and attempts to link the provider and learner. Moore and Kearsley (1996: 2) define distance education as:

“Planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, and special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements.”

This definition emphasises the “distance” in distance education as well as the special techniques that should be used to narrow the gap of the distance between the student and the lecturer, student and institution and students and fellow students.

Burke (quoted by Manshor & Ibrahim, [s.a.]: 2) explains distance education as education in which the students and the instructor are physically separated, but are academically connected *via* different forms of technology, such as CD rom, web-based materials, e-mails, teleconferencing and other forms of audio and video streaming.

Distance education can be seen as an educational process in which all or most of the instruction is conducted by someone distant in space and/or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through a non-natural medium, either electronic or print. By definition, in distance education the typical or main means of communication is primarily through technology, advanced by UNESCO, (2002: 22).

DE is defined as institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunication systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors (Schlosser & Simonson, 2006: 1).

In this context, Unisa’s definition of distance education (Unisa, 2008: 1) *“is a set of methods or processes for teaching a diverse range of students located at different places and physically separated from the learning institution, their tutor/teachers as well as other students.”* This definition, as many other definitions, also focuses on the *physical separation* between teachers and other learners.

A different definition of distance education is given by Winkelmanns, Anderson & Barbour (2010: 12). In British Columbia, distance education is also referred to as distributed learning and is defined as *“a method of instruction that relies primarily on indirect communication between students and teachers, including internet or other*

electronic based delivery, teleconferencing or correspondence". The word "distributed" gives an idea of "learning anywhere" when it is convenient for the student.

2.2.2 Fundamentals and characteristics of Distance Education

Keegan (quoted by Kember, 2007: 5) was most probably quoted most frequently in the earlier literature where the author lists the main elements of DE as:

- The near-permanent separation of the teacher/lecturer and the learner during the extent of the learning process;
- The influence of the educational institution during the planning and preparation of study materials and in the setting up of learner support services. This is not the same as private study and teach-yourself/self-study programmes;
- The use of technical media – print, audio, video or computer – to unite the teacher and the learner and carry the content of the course;
- The provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue. This makes it different from other uses of technology in education; and
- The near-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals and not groups, with the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes.

From the discussion above, on the fundamentals and characteristics of distance education, it can be said that these foundational issues by Keegan are still researched and discussed. Distance education came with challenges to administrators, lecturers and students, but as electronic communication developed, so did the delivery of distance education. The most evident factors remain the same: separation between the learner and the teacher and the learner and other learners and the university, the role the institution plays during the development of study materials and provision of learner support to ensure more interactive learning, and the use of relevant technology to bring them closer to each other. A further challenge is also to create and maintain quality in distance education.

Garrison (in Farajollahi & Zarifsanaee, 2012: 2) summarises the characteristics of Distance Education as follows:

- In DE most of the communication between the teacher/lecturer is from a distance;
- DE must involve two-way communication between the teacher/lecturer and the student with the purpose of assisting with the learning process; and
- Technology is used to facilitate the vital two-way communication between the teacher/lecturer. This required technology can include e-mail, teleconferencing, audio and video streams/video conferencing, short message service (SMS), satellite conferencing web-based communication and podcasting.

Eminent in the discussion above is the distance, two-way communication and technology to communicate.

2.2.3 Historical overview of Distance Education

Distance education has been in existence for a very long period of time and specifically made notable progress over the last decades. Most of the literature consulted stipulated that the history of distance education is well documented, especially in the 20th century. Freire in (Sumner, 2000: 267) explain that;

“It is impossible to deny, except intentionally or by innocence, the political aspect of education.”

In general, the history of distance education is no exception to the history of education. Distance education is ‘torn’ between the powers of life-world (structure produced by communicative action) and the demands of the system it is functioning in (Sumner, 2000: 273). In this regard, Fozdar & Kumar (2007: 3) identified five generations in the development of distance education. The actual development from one generation to another is critical for the success of a specific service delivery system.

Table 2.1: Generations of distance education

GENERATION	MODEL	DELIVERY TECHNOLOGIES
First generation	Correspondence model	Print
Second generation	Multimedia model	Print, audio tapes, video tapes, computer-based learning, interactive video
Third generation	Tele-learning model	Audio teleconferencing, video conferencing, audio-graphic communication, broadcast TV/radio
Fourth generation	Flexible learning model	Interactive multimedia (IMM) online, Internet via www, computer-mediated communications
Fifth generation	Intelligent flexible model	Interactive multimedia (IMM) online, Internet via www, computer-mediated communications, using automated response systems, campus portal access to institutional process and resources

Source: Fozdar & Kumar (2007: 3)

The table clearly indicates how distance education evolved with the development of new technology to enhance learning of students by saving time through the use of more cost effective modes of learning. Although there is reluctance in using more effective technologies, it should be accepted that the use of developing technologies is here to stay.

Baggaley (2008: 40) supports this, and argues that the newly developed distance education methods have accomplished a level of cost-effectiveness that offers students and teachers a wider selection of methods for overcoming the hurdles of time, place, and pace while also engaging one another in direct contact.

2.2.4 Distance Education in South Africa

South Africa has a long history of distance education. From its initiation in the Eighteenth Century, stake holders from the public and private sector were involved in this mode of education. Distance education through correspondence with limited learner support had a tendency to dominate in South Africa. The Higher Education Amendment Act from 1946 resulted in the establishment of the University of South Africa (UNISA) and it was recognized as a fully dedicated correspondence university and a university for the people. In 1980, a second public education institution was established, namely Technikon Southern Africa (TSA). Moore (2000: iii) described TSA as a unique institution in the South African higher education system. TSA encountered some very special challenges in providing Technikon-type education and provided more vocational type of courses.

In 1982, the Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC) started operations after it came into effect in terms of Act 106 of 1981. This institution was established within a contact university and focused on teacher qualifications through distance education. Of these three institutions, UNISA, TSA and VUDEC, UNISA was seen as the most inclusive as its medium of instruction was both English and Afrikaans and it catered for all students irrespective of race (Ngengebule, 2004: 03).

According to Ngengebule (2004: 04), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED), established in 1959, also played an important role in the development of higher and distance education in the apartheid era. The first programme that gave entry to degree studies was done through

London University, but later changed to UNISA, because increasingly more black students started to study through UNISA.

In the development of policies in post-apartheid South Africa, attempts were made to transform distance education and ensure meaningful access to and success in education through distance education. These policies also tried to fit distance education into the whole education structure and present it as part of a reconstructed higher education system (Ngegebule, 2004: 12). These policies include *A Policy Framework for Education and Training*, the *White paper in Education and training*, the Higher Education Act 1997 and the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE). In 1995, the SAIDE report suggested that a well-functioning distance education system should be established to enable institutions to set up systems of services that will help learners for the most of the time they are studying (SAIDE, 1995: 64). The NPHE stimulated the development of an open learning mode of delivery in higher education.

2.3 OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

Open Distance Learning (ODL) has an important role to play within the higher education sphere of South Africa with regard to addressing the challenges within this arena. It should address the challenges of intensifying access, diversifying the body of learners and improving quality with the limited resources available.

2.3.1 Definition of open distance learning

Moore & Kearsley (1996: 06) describe ODL as the delivery of learning material to students who are distant from their lecturers with regard to their geographical placement, as well as separation in time.

According to the Open Distance Learning policy of Unisa (2008: 2), open distance learning is a concept targeting to bridge time, geographical, economic, social and communication distance between:

- *Students and institution, student and academics, students and courseware and students and peers, and*
ODL focuses on;
- *Removing barriers to access learning, flexibility of learning provision, student-centredness, supporting students and constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed.*

This definition demonstrates and highlights a combination of the characteristics of distance education, as a method of education provision, and the approach of open learning into open distance learning.

Following on the above definition, Bates (2008: 1) argues that the elimination of barriers to learning is an important characteristic of open distance learning. The author further stipulates that this means that no past qualifications are needed to study and for students with disabilities, it is a secure effort to deliver education in an appropriate form that overcomes the disability, for example, the use of audio tapes for students who are visually impaired. Nobody should be deprived of access to an open learning programme. Therefore, open learning should be flexible and easy to move in to. This has the implication that technology should be available to everyone and no-one is to be denied access these technologies.

It is clear from the above exposition on ODL, that it embraces *flexibility*, *accessibility* and a choice of *multiple modes* to education and knowledge acquisition, as follows:

- **Flexibility** of choices for learning undertakings anywhere, anytime and at any rate;
- **Accessibility** to opportunities that is available to everybody and free of time and place constraints; and
- **Multiple modes** in using diverse and various learning systems and learning resources.

The notion of flexibility and accessibility is encapsulated in the Draft Policy Framework for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities (DHET, 2012: 5) implies a very broad definition for ODL:

“Open distance learning is an approach which combines the principles of learner centredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems.”

Learner centredness, as well as life-long learning are two additional crucial elements of these definitions, because in ODL the focus moves away from the study material as the best product, but to the learner as the customer.

2.3.2 Characteristics of Open Distance Learning

Various authors reiterate that open learning is an approach rather than a system or technique. It is more based on the needs of individual learners and not on the interests of the lecturer or the institution. It should aim to give students as much as possible control over the “when”, “what”, “where” and “how” during their learning process. Owing to change in the scope of offering education in the most effective and efficient ways, it is only evident that institutions will differ in their nature of openness and their implementation of open distance learning. The Commonwealth of Learning (1999: 1-3), reasons that the features of ODL therefore can include the following:

- *Separation of teacher and learner* in time or place, or in both time and place;
- *Institutional accreditation*; that is, learning is accredited or certified by some institution or agency. This type of learning is distinct from learning through your own effort without the official recognition of a learning institution;
- *Use of mixed-media courseware*, including print, radio, and television broadcasts, video and audio cassettes, computer-based learning, and telecommunications. Courseware tends to be pre-tested and validated before use. Different media can be used to facilitate the learning process;
- *Two-way communication* allows learners and tutors to interact as distinguished from the passive receipt of broadcast signals. Communication can be synchronous or asynchronous;
- *Possibility of face-to-face meetings* for tutorials, learner–learner interaction, library study, and laboratory or practice sessions; and
- *Use of industrialised processes*; that is, in large-scale open and distance learning operations, labour is divided and tasks are assigned to various staff who work together in course development teams. This can also take place on the basis of project-based development in course development.

2.3.3 Key principles of Open Distance Learning

ODL increases self-determination and self-sufficiency in the learning process, because students take charge of their learning and manage their involvement in the process. They empower themselves in their learning journey. Marland (1997: 70) mentioned the following principles in ODL:

- *Learner centredness.* This implies that the learner should be the focus and center of the educational process. They should build their own lifelong career of learning. In learner centredness the focus moves away from ways of instruction where the lecturer is the centre of the learning. Again, it focus on the needs of the customer who in this case is the learner. It is important that the learner achieves the learning outcomes of the study programme;
- *Lifelong Learning.* Learning should take place throughout life. In an ongoing changing world and rapid worldwide technological developments, learners should stay knowledgeable about these changes in the world they live in;
- *Flexibility in learning.* This is also referred to as flexible learning. The requirements and needs of learners should be reflected by making learning more flexible to accommodate the diverse types of learners; and
- *Removing barriers obstructing accessibility for learners.* Educational approaches should be developed to improve accessibility to learning and skills. This should be applicable to learners with disabilities too.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that ODL does not adversely affect the choices of learners, but rather highlights the advanced learning options. A historical discussion of ODL in the South African context follows.

2.3.4 The history of Open Distance Learning in South Africa

In contrast with the long history of distance education, ODL is a new phenomenon in the educational arena. ODL supported the shifting of the educational paradigm from provision of education to a learner-centered thinking where the focus is on flexibility and the choice of learning processes by the student.

The term “open” in open distance learning was first used by the Open University in the United Kingdom and this university was also the first Open University. This university was an example of many additional open universities globally that have different focusses on the openness of these respective universities.

In 2005, the new Unisa adopted a new vision after which the university launched its open distance learning initiatives. In 2007, further ODL initiatives followed and necessary efforts went into optimising and implementing a wide range of technologies to support and advance the ODL character Unisa has adopted.

In 2008, the ODL policy of Unisa was populated and Unisa became the first mega and comprehensive ODL University with current student numbers more than 400 000 students in South Africa.

2.3.5 Distance Education *versus* Open Distance Learning

Kember (2007: 8) made it clear in his argument that he agrees with other authors that distance learning and open learning are not identical. Kember, (2007: 7), noted that the term “open distance learning” was announced and introduced by the European Commission and other followed and used the term “open and distance learning”. This different interpretations and use of the term caused a “theoretical fuzziness” in the field of ODL. Caliskan (2012: 1) explains “open learning” as learning situations where students have the flexibility to choose from a range of options in relation to the time, place, instructional methods, different types of access, and other factors relating to their learning process. This results in the understanding that a learning situation or process should be open to everyone, under any circumstances, at any place and at any time. From time to time, open learning is also referred to as e-learning, flexible learning and distance learning.

Kember (2007: 9) further outlines open learning as a number of aspects of openness and clarify the following as the most important points:

- Open entry. Open entry in general means that students don’t need formal qualifications to register at a higher education institution.
- Study anywhere;
- Choice to study at the time that is most comfortable and appropriate for the student within a specified semester; and
- A high degree of openness over the choice of courses to make up a degree or diploma.

With regards to distance education, the author is of the opinion that it focuses more on the degree of separation between the teacher and the students.

Kember & Murphy (quoted by Caliskan, 2012: 2) who observed that open learning as a delivery mode involves distance learning, resource-based learning, correspondence course, self-paced learning, student-centred learning and flexible learning.

Bates (2008: 1) states that distance education does not actually include a philosophical approach and is more a method of education. It focuses more on the choice of the time and place by the student. In other words distance education is characterised by the *physical distance and time*.

Open Distance Learning (ODL) focus more on the *removal of barriers to the learning process* of the student. The open-ness in Open and Distance Learning emphasise the *use of available and appropriate technology* to provide and improve learning. ODL includes more flexibility to the learner in the learning process.

The Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) states that open and distance learning has evolved in recent years with the arrival of new and intelligent technologies and summarises the embracement of ODL as any or all of the following:

- *Open learning* – this consists of policies and practices that allow entry to learning with no or very limited barriers with regard to age, gender, or time restrictions. Open learning also recognizes prior learning or also known as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). CoL are also indicating that it is important that these policies form part of a distance education system but need to be complimentary to it as well;
- *Distance education* – provides learning or training to those who are separated by time and space from lecturers/teachers. This is done through the use of different facilitation processes to transmit content, deliver tuition and do assessment or quantify outcomes;
- *Flexible learning* – provides learning opportunities that can be accessed at any place and time. This form of learning relates more to the scheduling of activities than to any particular mode of delivery;
- *Online learning and e-learning* – this form of communication technologies was used to enhance distance education, implement open learning policies, make learning activities flexible and to allocate these learning actions among many learning settings;
- *Virtual education* - both online and e-learning is included here, but take it a bit further. Although it is largely web-centred it does not binds itself to learners outside the traditional classroom. Multimedia is used and content is delivered and supports a high level of interaction between learners, content, teachers, peers and the administration both blended and non-blended way.

This mode of education has been *amongst others* adopted by the Open University of Catalonia (UOC) in Spain. The responsibility of the UOC from the beginning of its existence was to make sure that one and the same access to higher education and knowledge takes place for all areas of society by using information and communication technology. The UOC is making use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as an essential tool in democratising education in the knowledge society.

The ODL policy of Unisa highlights these differences between distance education and open distance learning. This policy is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

2.4 ROLE OF OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela (2003)

Delgado Garcia & Cuello (2010: 1) articulate that *“education is definitely one of the pillars in which a Welfare State is effectively based on in order to achieve an equitable distribution of wealth. In contemporary society, knowledge and education are among the most appreciated goods, and everyone should have the right to acquire them, without distinction of gender, race, age, health or religion.”*

Education is essentially a developmental process. With education people empower themselves and take control of their environment and their circumstances. Through education, human capacity and capability is developed, therefore education stimulates development. Through development of human capacity, the economic development of a country will grow. The view of the Commonwealth of Learning is that learning is part of a process as well as the means of implementing sustainable development (SD), because learning enables people to take control of their lives. The more people are involved in learning, the more developed their country will become (Lentell, 2006: 113).

2.4.1 Framework of sustainable development

What does sustainable development really mean? This is a question that was asked often all over the world by people. Leal Filho, *et al.* (2009: 150), indicated that there are a number of different meanings which include the following:

- The systematic, long-term use of natural resources, to ensure that they are available for future generations. This is according to the Brundtland report of 1987, which defined sustainable development as that which “*meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”;
- The modality of development that enables countries to progress, economically and socially, without destroying their environmental resources. This refers to the policies of a country and national policies;
- The type of development that is socially just, morally acceptable, ethically fair and economically comprehensive. This refers to the social difficulties of development; and
- The type of development where environmental pointers are as significant as economic indicators. This refers to the close connection it allows for growth in the economy.

Despite different meanings ascribed to sustainable development, there are commonalities that can be acknowledged in these various meanings. Sustainability in general:

- Refers to continuing projections with environmental, political, economic and societal effects;
- Is an active process, whose execution depends on due deliberations of social processes of which individual commitment and participation are essential elements; and
- Depends on rigorous efforts and cannot be based on action by a few countries or local actors if it is to be executed on a global level.

Palthe (2013: 117) indicates that sustainability has three very discrete but interrelated dimensions: economic, environmental and social. These dimensions are used to make the term more understandable for students and teachers.

- *Environmental dimensions* deals with the environment we live in. It includes issues such as waste management, substitute energy production, efforts to recycle, reuse and conserve, etc.
- *Economic dimensions* cover matters such as efforts to maintain institutional effectiveness and efficiency. This will include promotion of fair trade and financial successes for long-time survival.

- *Social dimensions* represents benevolent viewpoints and can include the promotion of diversity, protect human rights, eliminate poverty, improve workplace equity and social justice, disease support, i.e. HIV and malaria, clean drinking water, housing etc. Education is very important in this dimension, because it is of vital importance for maintaining sustainable development and the wealth of a country.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) emphasised that sustainable education should include and address all these three dimensions mentioned above (UNESCO, 2005: 14). This is to ensure that students develop the essential knowledge, understanding and skills in all three these areas.

In 2000, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through the UN Millennium Declaration. The MDGs materialised to establish and analyse the antipoverty norm that exists globally and was signed by 189 countries. It also included 145 heads of states or government who committed themselves to the key goal to end poverty along with peace, human rights and democracy. The MDGs consist of eight goals with eighteen targets and forty-eight indicators. Although these goals are significant as individual norms, they are seen as strategic components of the broader super-norm to eradicate dehumanizing poverty. The MDGs are summarised as interconnected normative and influential means, because each one is an important and essential part of human dignity and they reflect findings of research that was done during the 1980s, indicating the synergies among them, for example, through education child mortalities and that better health contributes to improved productivity of workers. Through the development thinking during the 1990s, an essential conceptual advance reflected in academic literature and in policies of major institutions. It was the opinion that poverty is multi-dimensional and to end poverty and that the different degrees of poverty should be addressed at the same time. Since the 1990s a series of initiatives were developed and at the core of these initiatives was the number of UN summits that were held to eliminate poverty and support equality. Eradicating poverty was addressed as a super-norm and a global responsibility. Through education for sustainable development, people will be empowered to develop and provide for themselves and in the end poverty will be limited. The more people are involved in education, the more developed and economically successful a country will become.

2.4.2 Education for Sustainable Development

Sustainable education operates with the goal to integrate disciplines of environmentalism with those from economics, sociology and politics through different methods to teaching and learning. This results in conserving the environment, achieving social justice and proper democratic values and moving towards a vision and mission of individual and community change (Evans, Whitehouse & Gooch, 2012: 121).

Environmental education developed from a general notion with the declining environmental state of the world. This emerged from a report of the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1987 that the present needs of generations should be met without ruining the needs for the future generations.

In October 2007 the first European Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was held. ESD was since then and are still the most generally used words in the field of education and sustainable development with specific reference to the scientific field as a whole and the environmental science in particular (Leal Filho, Manolas & Pace, 2009: 149).

According to UNESCO (s.a.), Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. ESD means including crucial sustainable development issues into teaching and learning, for example, reduction of poverty, climate change, etc. ESD also involves hands-on teaching and learning approaches that will motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour to accomplish sustainable development in all spheres of society.

The importance of education for development was emphasised by The United Nations General Assembly in the 10 year “Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)”. According to the Draft Implementation Scheme of 2005 of the DESD (UNESCO 2005: 5) the inclusive goal of the DESD is to incorporate the values essential in sustainable development into all aspects of learning and to instigate changes in behaviour that permit for a more sustainable and just society for all.

The vision of the DESD creates an environment where every person has the opportunity to gain from education and to learn values, behaviour and lifestyles that are essential for

a sustainable future and for a positive transformation in society. This results in the five objectives of the DESD:

- Give an enhanced profile to the central role of education and learning in the common pursuit of sustainable development;
- Facilitate links and networking, exchange and interaction among stakeholders in ESD;
- Provide a space and opportunity for refining and promoting the vision of, and transition to sustainable development – through all forms of learning and public awareness;
- Foster increased quality of teaching and learning in education for sustainable development; and
- Develop strategies at every level to strengthen capacity in ESD.

Further to this document, Education for Sustainable Development is primarily about values, with respect at the centre: *respect for others, including those present and future generations, for difference and diversity, for the environment, for resources of the planet we live on* (UNESCO, 2005: 5). The DESD summarises it as follows:

“the values, diversity, knowledge, languages and worldviews associated with culture strongly influence the way issues of education for sustainability development are dealt with in specific national contexts. In this sense, culture is just a collection of particular manifestations (song, dance, dress...), but a way of being, relating, behaving, believing and acting through which people live out their lives and that is in a constant process of change.”

This is evidently a statement that will affect all forms of learning and education. The act of being in this world is complex as a whole and certainly this will also apply in each specified and established society as well. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it is very important to identify and take into consideration, the profile of students in the area of Unisa KwaZulu-Natal. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

How should the DESD be implemented globally?

- *Improving quality education should be promoted.* During basic education, the emphasis should be on sharing knowledge, skills, values and views throughout a

lifetime of learning in such a way that it inspires and enhances sustainable livelihoods and supports populations to live sustainable lives.

- *Reorienting educational programmes.* All forms of education, from nursery school until university entrance should include clear guidance on knowledge development, skills development, perspectives and principles. All of these should relate to sustainable development for current and future societies.
- *Public understanding and awareness should be built.* Widespread community education should take place to achieve the goals of sustainable development.
- *Practical training should be provided.* The workforce should include all sectors of the community, local, regional and national. Therefore business and industry should be involved and should be the significant locations for vocational and professional training to empower the workforce to contribute to sustainable development (UNESCO, [s.a.]: np). This again is highlighted in the *The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training*. Work-integrated Learning (WiL) and the placement of students into the working environment to acquire the relevant skills are problematic as the business sectors are reluctant to place students. This will be discussed in Chapter Three of this study.

2.4.3 Role of Higher Education in Education for Sustainable Development

During various summits and conferences on sustainable development across the globe it is the general observation and conclusion of attendees and presenters that education empowers people and allows them to have specific roles in society. Therefore, it is very important that sustainable development should be promoted by the global community. This is why higher education in particular occupies an extremely important role in shaping current and future generations to understand and to deal with the complexities of social development globally. Universities are the performers in a society and are an important connection between the generation and transfer of knowledge to society. This is done in two ways:

- Universities prepare decision-makers of the future in a society for their entry into the labour market. This includes the preparation of teachers who are important in providing the education in all levels of society.
- Universities make a valuable contribute to the development of society through outreach and service delivery to the society (UNESCO [s.a.]: 1).

Through the rapid change of technological, economic, social and cultural environments, society acquires processes, disseminates and applies knowledge in a larger capacity. This is where universities are important and concentrate on research and learning. They should focus on appropriate knowledge and skills to stimulate sustainable development. They are also expected to add to innovation, reflection on values, ethics and transformation to a sustainable society. To do this, the following issues should be focused on by universities:

- Growing the relevance of teaching and research for the societal processes which will lead to more sustainable forms of life and also discourage unsustainable ways of life;
- Quality and efficiency of teaching and research should be improved;
- Bridging the gap between science and education and traditional knowledge and education;
- Forming relations with role-players outside the university, specifically with the local communities and business sectors; and
- Presenting decentralised and flexible management ideas.

It is important that institutions in higher education should create rich learning environments that will prepare learners for their roles in the society and to enable them to add value to the society and the communities they live in. These learning environments should include:

- Access to quality scientific knowledge;
- Empowering students to attain the skills they will need to work together in a multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural groups in sharing developments, and
- Bringing the global element into individual learning environments.

This will ensure that universities focus on lifelong learning experiences through critical reflection on learning environments and learning practices (UNESCO [s.a.]: 2).

What makes up a sustainable university? Clugston & Calder (1999: 4) identified the critical dimensions of sustainability as follows:

- The mission and vision statements of academic institutions and its different units direct their values and commitments towards society.

The mission and vision statements of Unisa KwaZulu-Natal are as follows:

- **Mission:** *“To deliver integrated and decentralized teaching and facilitation of learning that provides multiple teaching and learning opportunities supported by flexible, administrative and effective technologically-driven systems to enhance access and success of all students.”*
- **Vision:** *“A world class provider of quality decentralized teaching and facilitation of learning that is responsive to the African context in an ODL environment.”*

These statements clearly stipulate the values and the commitments of the Unisa region of KwaZulu-Natal in an open distance learning scenario.

- Concepts of sustainability are included in the academic disciplines, professional education requirements as well as in faculty and student research of the institution.
- A change from the current academic pattern is directed by mindful reflection of the role of the institution in its social and environmental systems. This results in the student to learn values and practices from the institution.
- Research and teaching are the essential purposes of academic institutions; therefore knowledge of sustainability is a critical concern when it comes to hiring, occupation and promotion systems. This means that the institution should reward staff of faculties who contribute to sustainability in scholarships, teaching as well as campus and community activities. *The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* clearly encourages community engagement and specifies that it should be included in academic programmes and research programmes of the higher education institutions. This document will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
- The institution should focus on a “green footprint” and its production and consumption should follow sustainable policies and practices. For example, the institution should have sustainable building structures and renovations; purchasing as well as investments should focus on environmentally and socially responsible products. The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) on a large scale encourages academic institutions to also serve as architects of sustainable leadership. Institutions should take on the challenge to encourage citizens and communities to live as responsible corporate citizens. Unisa is a member of the UNGC and committed itself to a spirited contribution to the sustainable development agenda within the context of education.

- Institutional support and campus student life services that emphasize certain practices such as student orientation for new students, scholarships, Work–integrated Learning and counseling to community service, sustainability and/or justice issues. Prominent student and staff celebrations of sustainability on campus should also take place, for example, HIV day on 1 December each year.
- The institution should reach out and form partnerships locally, as well as globally to enhance sustainability. The institution should support sustainable communities in the surroundings and in its region.

In a study conducted by Dr Andy Johnston with various Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK, it was clear that some challenges were specific to the issue of sustainable development. The most frequently challenges that emanated from this study were summarised as (i) lack of strategic leadership, (ii) low demand from internal and external stakeholders, including students and employers, (iii) Academic and professional silos which inhibit cooperative efforts across disciplines and institutions and (iv) Poor communication within the HEI regarding the meaning and concept of sustainable development and how it applies (OECD, 2006: 44).

Challenges of this nature are also visible in HEIs in South Africa. These challenges should be used to create innovative and creative opportunities to enhance and implement sustainable development. HEIs should focus through research programmes to establish sustainable development. Internal and external role-players should be included and partnerships should be formed to learn from each other and implement sustainable development plans.

Klavins & Pelnena (2010: 265) emphasise that universities as trans-disciplinary agents should encourage and develop engagement between individuals and institutions in order to conduct the relevant real-world research and teach students the necessary skills of integration, synthesis and systems-thinking to empower them to deal with difficult and complex sustainability challenges. The authors also refer to The Tallories Declaration which describes a sustainable university as an institution:

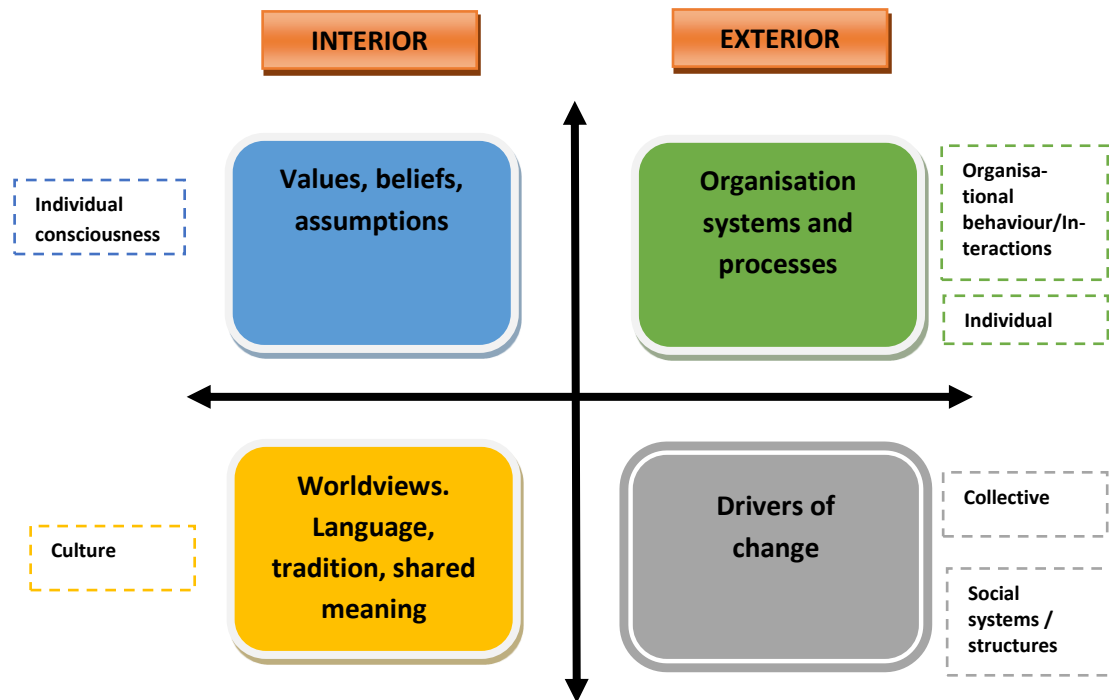
- Who take part in education, research, policy-making and exchange of information on inhabitants and the environment as well as development towards a sustainable future;

- Who institute programmes to produce skilled individuals in environmental management, sustainable economic development, population and related and relevant fields in order to ensure that all university graduates are ecologically knowledgeable and accountable citizens; and
- Setting an example of environmental accountability by instituting the programmes of resource conservation, recycling and waste reduction at universities (Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future, 1990).

In 2007, Unisa undersigned to the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) which confirmed Unisa's voluntary obligation to align the operations and strategies of the university with the ten collectively accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour practices, environment and anti-corruption and also emphasized Unisa's commitment to support and promote these principles throughout its sphere and influence. This will also include teaching, research and community engagement as part of the operations and strategies of the university.

Conway (2012: 35) discussed the approach to sustainable futures by universities. He based this discussion on the Integral Theory from Wilber and Slaughter. Universities, as well as the planet, are facing serious survival challenges. Sustainability of universities in the future eventually depends on the future sustainability of the planet. This will be done by actions from universities as a system that will influence and shapes the planet. This in itself will depend on the individual principles and beliefs of the staff working at the universities, because they shape the development of the university and *vice-versa*. The interrelationship between the staff of the university and the university itself in the society is operational and should be recognised in all discussions on sustainable future. Personal and individual change will be crucial for change in the university and society. A framework is provided by the Integral Theory for this interrelationship which is based on the combination of different ways of understanding social issues and occurrences in the sense of accepting that every way of knowing has value and is important. Cacioppe & Edwards (2005: 232) give a very simple illustration of this theory below:

Figure 2.1: Wilber's (1997) Integral Four Quadrant Model



Source: Cacioppe & Edwards, (2005: 232)

This illustration shows the four different levels of both real development and potential development in each of the quadrants. Wilber (1997: 72) calls these quadrants the four quadrants of existence: intentional, behavioural, cultural and social.

Cacioppe & Edwards (2005: 233) refer to these levels as the growing capacity that all organisations possess for incorporation, systemic thinking and cultural difficulty and differences that are included in all the quadrants. For the purpose of this study, the four quadrants will be applied in the discussions from a developing and changing perspective within the institution.

Upper Left Quadrant – the different views on sustainable futures is supported by assumptions and beliefs about the future of the institution in general. This will have a definite influence on future development within the institution.

Lower Left Quadrant – this is where shared meaning takes place amongst individuals within the university culture and the way things are being done. This referred to “university culture” determines the rules of the game for people working in the institution.

Upper Right Quadrant – here processes in the organisation bring individuals together to think through sustainable futures. This includes current developments in the university

to empower students to absorb and learn about sustainable development and relevant research programmes on development issues for sustainability in the future. Wilber (1997: 73) emphasises that this quadrant is possibly the most prevalent.

Lower Right Quadrant – this is where change is directed and the drivers of change influence the profile of the university. These should include global changes, for example, different modes of education such as ODL and the use of information and communications technology.

2.4.4 Open Distance Learning for sustainable development in Africa and South Africa

Open distance learning has the capacity to provide resources to address some of the huge learning challenges faced globally. Sir John Daniel articulated that sustainability is a fundamental goal that has to be achieved, whatever the format adopted because ODL can involve very large numbers of people (Hope & Guiton, 2006: 188). Therefore, the more numbers of people can be reached through ODL, the more knowledge transformation will take place on sustainable development issues.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is the only global high-level agency with the obligation to enhance open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies to increase the possibilities and strengths of learning (Lentell, 2006: 1). The advantages of the potential of ODL for sustainable development are posited by Lentell (2006: 113) as follows:

- *Flexible*: ODL can create flexible learning by joining traditional methods to learning. For example, study materials should enable teachers to manage large classes and enable them to provide asynchronous communication between learners living far from each other.
- *Adaptable*: In ODL different forms of suitable media and technologies, including radio, teleconferencing, video, audio and computers can be used to allow information delivery and communication between groups of learners and learners and their teachers. For example, Unisa is using video conferencing as a tutoring facility and is currently moving towards a focus on e-tutoring as well.
- *Reach*: ODL can reach remote groups who have been left without access to education and training either through their remoteness to locations of study or

through general absence of delivery because of economic or social disadvantage, or political disruption. Millions of people have access to higher education where there had been inadequate provision of these facilities because of the development of open universities. This is especially the case in KwaZulu-Natal. Many of our students are in various rural areas, for example, Wild Coast region. This area will also be researched in this study to identify the needs of the students and to make suggestions on how this can be addressed and improved.

- *Quality and scale:* In ODL limited human resources are used efficiently. Tutors, who are not specialists in a specific field of study, can assist with the teaching function. Teachers, as we usually understand, do not need to have all the knowledge, skills and resources related with teaching before they can support learning. Tutors appointed by Unisa are practically in the professions of the subjects they tutor. In other words, they should have the practical experience and should be able to link the theory in the study material with their practical experience and translate that to their learners. With ODL, the functions teachers perform are broken down into their essential parts and given to specialists – knowledge experts, curriculum designers, course writers, media experts, designers, editors, and facilitators of learning. Lecturers in higher education institutions should fulfil this role. Only a few specialists who need study materials are more likely to be scrutinised by subject specialists, their quality is more solid than the teaching that takes place in the privacy of a classroom.

The acknowledgement of ODL over time as a reasonable and inexpensive means of providing higher education has developed into a creator of economic development and growth. The World Bank's report (quoted by Botha, 2011: 97) affirms that:

"Distance learning has great potential in the developing world, offering a powerful channel for bringing education to groups that have previously been excluded. In the future it is almost certain to take place increasingly across borders. Already over 12 percent of the United Kingdom's Open University students are resident outside the country. It is also easy to conceive of high-quality developing country institutions offering educational programs and degrees in other parts of the developing world. While a desirable development, this would create a variety of problems relating to quality control and other forms of supervision."

Botha (2011: 97) further argues that the truth and validity of this statement should not be underrated. Not only in terms of the potential of ODL, but also in terms of the

challenges with regard to the ODL mode of education provision in the global, continental and national environments. This includes the socio-economic and political circumstances in the developing world.

It is important that, as much as possible, inhabitants of a country have access to some form of education. Therefore in developing countries distance education as mode of delivery of education can be regarded as most suitable. Not only because of the sometimes vast distances between rural areas and the more developed areas in these countries, but it also opens up opportunities to receive education from outside the borders of these countries. Sometimes a specific qualification is not offered at the HEIs of a specific country and then the opportunities elsewhere can be used to obtain that specific training. Open distance learning opens up these opportunities.

It should also be kept in mind that because ODL can reach large numbers of people, it is possibly regarded as the most viable and affordable means of educating the masses. Unisa currently has more than 400 000 registered students and it can then be adopted as the most appropriate and sustainable mode of education. This form of education has been adopted by a number of countries on the African continent already and it is still growing and developing.

A new solution for education delivery, Open and Distance e-Learning (ODeL) has been introduced for developing countries. This mode of education delivery is still very new and the same challenges that ODL experience with e-learning surfaced in ODeL. ODeL is seen as a more viable mode of delivery, but not many successes have been recorded. Unisa has adopted the ODeL Business Model which will be expounded in this chapter.

2.4.5 The development of Open Distance Learning in the African region

With ODL currently widely acknowledged on the African continent, it is important to illustrate how it started and how it developed since it became a newly adopted mode of education on the continent (Botha, 2011: 99).

In 2002, the Education Ministers of Africa of UNESCO African member (MINEDAF VIII) met in Durban, South Africa. During this meeting all the Ministers decided that the first ODL conference of its kind in Africa should be held.

In 2004, the All African Ministers Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education took place in Cape Town. This was a very significant boost for ODL

development in Africa and resulted in the *Cape Town Declaration*. This declaration suggested cooperation and partnerships between providers of distance education and those who are involved in public policy and higher education in government with specific reference to public servants, experts in this field, legislators and the Ministers of Education.

During the Standing Committee of Presidents and Vice-Chancellors (SCOP) at the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) which was held at Unisa in 2002, the idea of the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) was put to table, and in 2004 the ACDE came into existence. This was done to further develop the objectives of providing ODL in Africa, which at the time did not have an own association of distance education providers in Africa to drive ODL initiatives. The commitment of the ACDE was to increase access to quality education and learning through ODL.

During the second Conference of African Ministers of Education in April 2005, the *Algiers Declaration* was adopted and The Second Decade for Education in Africa after the first Decade of Education (1996-2006) was reviewed and assessed. In the Second Decade, the Ministers committed to increased financial allocation and other resources to education and the development of an action plan for Africa. This plan was to mobilise support and strengthen the communities of the region, as well as other African institutions involved in education. It also insisted on the increase of the use of ICT, particularly bandwidth issues and connectivity in Africa. Suitable monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were put in place to support these decisions.

In August 2005, the first Conference of the African Council for Distance Education was hosted by Unisa. During this conference the ACDE established itself with the secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya and was supported by the Kenyan Government. This was the coordinating center and was networking with all providers to guarantee expertise in policy and training for the Africa governments and institutions involved in education. Scholarly activities through the suggested network were planned and to be provided through the African Journal of Distance Education as well as regular ODL conferences across Africa.

The Second Decade of Education for Africa: Revised Plan of Action of 2006 highlighted amongst others, education management information management systems, teacher development tertiary education, technical and vocational education and training,

curriculum development, quality management and gender and culture issues. The implementation of this plan supported the goal to:

- Bring in political support at all levels;
- Focus on the implementation of strategic issues that will make a significant difference at regional level and member states;
- Enhance mutual assistance;
- Improve the national implementation mechanisms as well as the capacities of economic communities in the region;
- Strong and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms;
- Make the most of current structures, rather than creating new structures;
- Exchange documentation, sharing and celebrating positive experiences and suggest initiative among member states; and
- Institutionalise and bring about mutual support and collaboration among countries to avoid duplication.

Following on from this plan, the 2nd ACDE Conference was held in Lagos at the Open University of Nigeria in July 2006. The purpose was to give prominence to the commitment to ODL and to reflect on the logic and the practicality as well as similarity with African thinking on the educational priorities of the continent.

The conference focused on six sub-themes:

- ODL and Teacher Development;
- How to meet the challenges of the Millennium Development goals with regard to the role, potential and impact of ODL;
- Building capacity in ODL;
- Quality assurance in ODL;
- Cooperation and partnerships in ODL; and
- The challenges and visions of e-learning and ODL in developing countries.

Since July 2011 some of these issues were addressed at the 3rd ACDE Conference and General Assembly which was held in Dar-es-Salaam and was hosted by The Open University of Tanzania (OUT). The theme that was explored was “*Bridging the development gap in Africa through Open and Distance Learning.*” Five sub-themes were identified.

- Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Education;
- E-learning and Open Educational Resources (OERs);
- Capacity Building and Partnership;
- Professional Training and Development through ODL; and
- ODL for Special and Vulnerable Groups. (ACDE, 2011: n.p.).

These sub-themes are currently very prominent in the operations of Unisa. Quality assurance in the regions is also done through Best Reflective Practices (BRP). BRP templates have been developed and are used by the different regions not only to assess each other, but also to share good practices with each other. This as well as OERs and e-learning will be discussed in more detail later in this study.

All Africans are in consensus that quality education is crucial for development and the role of the ACDE is preeminent in driving to develop open and distance education on the African continent. And it has to do it under very difficult circumstances. It is clear from the progress of ODL on the African continent in the discussion above that it is a slow process and that the implementation of it is not without challenges.

2.4.6 Barriers to Open Distance Learning

Although there is a growing acceptance of ODL there are challenges in advancing ODL as one of the resolutions to the higher education crisis worldwide. During the International Council for Open Distance Education (ICDE) Policy Forum in September 2010, barriers to the commitment of ODL were discussed (ICDE, 2010: 1).

- *Insufficient political goodwill.* This is caused by a lack in political awareness and consistency in encouragement and support. It appears as if policy for ODL is not in place and where it is in place it is nonoperational and outdated. There are also negative attitudes present and this make it extremely difficult to gain the necessary support. In my opinion ODL should be seen as “change management” and that causes the skepticism towards the worth of ODL from policy makers who received training in the traditional education mode face-to face teaching and learning.
- *Financial constraints.* ODL budget allocations are low, because there is a common understanding of some policy creators that it is cheap, but to start up with the implementation of the online side of ODL, costs are very high. According to the ICDE report expenditure on education often follows the agenda of development

partners and often a small amount or no money is invested towards ODL. It is important that appropriate resources are available for lecturers as well as students when ODL is implemented.

- *Failure to engage partners.* Because of the lack of support or sponsorship from organisational leaders it has a major impact on the advancement of ODL. It appears as if there is a reticence in UNESCO to promote the opportunities afforded by ODL. It was also voiced that Education for All (EFA) is almost never addressed in terms of ODL or the efficient use of information communication technologies (ICT).
- *Institutional challenges.* There is also a concern that substantial obstacles to advance ODL also exists within higher education institutions. Sometimes the organisational culture within the institutions is a serious barrier. If only a small number of the staff believes in ODL, then it will be difficult to implement and use ODL effectively.
- *Professional deficiency.* Sometimes ODL is perceived as a threat rather than an opportunity by members of staff in faculties within institutions where face-to-face offering is primarily done. This results in resistance, because it is seen that their power will be taken away in how they lecture their courses. In some instances there is a fear of job loss. Again, the researcher is of the opinion that change management should be seriously taken into account to make the change as smooth as possible. For example, staff should be properly trained and effective communication should take place throughout the institution.
- *Learner issues.* Learners experience difficulty in obtaining sufficient financial support to study through ODL. Learners may have totally wrong perceptions of the whole mode of ODL and might think it is easy. It also happens that learners often don't have enough computer and technology literacy to embark on online learning as one of the legs of ODL. Learners should also receive enough communication exposure to what ODL entails.
- *Technological barriers.* The lack of national technological infrastructure, the high cost of bandwidth, problematic internet connections and shortages of power, especially in developing countries, is the reason behind many of these uncertainties and resistance. Tony Bates (2010: 1) summarised this document and asked the

question “*Is their analysis correct?*” He commented and is of the opinion that open learning does not grow as fast as online distance learning is growing. A question to ask: “*is the guidance and technical support we are giving our students at Unisa enough and efficient to ensure that learning does take place?*”

The ICDE 26th World Conference was hosted by Unisa from 14-16 October 2015 with the theme “*Growing capacities for sustainable distance e-learning provision.*”

The discussion that follows focuses on blended learning in combination with traditional approaches to learning.

2.5 BLENDED LEARNING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

It will not be practical or cost-effective to run full-scale online educational programmes in Africa because of the poor and inadequate ICT infrastructure (Boitshwarelo, 2009: 2). The ICDE Policy Forum from September 2010 and various authors mentioned that low internet bandwidths throughout Africa and the lack of people who cannot afford computer ownership is a serious problem across the continent. This impedes access to ODL education.

The question then should be asked: how we can address this problem or what can we put in place to support ODL and online learning? Because of these challenges and also other challenges that will be discussed later in this study, blended learning (BL) approaches have been proposed. Boitshwarelo, (2009: 2) stated that workable blended learning programmes could be developed and implemented quite efficiently in combination with the traditional approaches of education.

It is an important aim of most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on the African continent to provide positive, effective, flexible, suitable and accessible learning experiences through ODL to a target market of learners who are more digital-oriented. Blended learning materialised as a solution to address these needs (Tshabalala, Ndeya & Van der Merwe, 2014: 101).

Most of the literature consulted identified blended learning as a combined or mixed balance of face-to-face and online teaching and learning. Blended Learning is used as an inclusive term for a certain approach to be followed in teaching and learning. This approach to learning and teaching is one that will basically enhance and extend the learning opportunities for learners of this century. Blended learning combines and

aligns learning undertaken in face-to-face sessions with learning opportunities created online. Unisa's ODL policy gives a very comprehensive explanation of blended learning:

"Blended learning is accomplished by using multiple teaching and learning strategies, a range of technologies in combination with face-to-face interaction and the deployment of both physical and virtual resources" (Unisa, 2008: 1).

Debande & Ottersten (in Boitshwarelo, 2009: 2) supports this definition by saying that:

"blended learning refers to designing and delivering the right content in the right format using the right mix of media."

Ocak (2010: 197) recognized that research on blended learning shows that it is divided into three groupings: students, educators and institutions. This makes perfect sense, because these three factors make up what blended learning should consist of, as the one cannot do without the other. Furthermore, all three of them should support each other almost perfectly to make sure that teaching and learning take place according to the learning outcomes of a specific course. It is important that institutions across South Africa should take cognisance of the profile of the learners they serve in their journey to provide the right opportunities of teaching and learning.

As already argued above, education, and subsequently, service delivery of higher education is of vital importance for the development of a country. Higher education forms part of the systems of public administration and for the purpose of this study, the discussion to follow will locate open distance learning and higher education within the Public Administration domain.

2.6 CONTEXTUALISING OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING WITHIN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PARADIGM

Over the past few decades, Public Administration went through a few paradigmatic changes. It started as early as 1887-1926 and was known as the principles of administration, and during the period 1927-1937 it was the era of challenge. The identity crisis was from the period 1948-1970. This was when Public Administration moved to Public Management during 1970 to early 1990. During 1990-2008 it was the era from Public Management to Governance and then to the New Public Governance debate since 2010. Public Administration scholarship of the 21st Century has tended to

focus more on recent paradigms of New Public Management (NPM), and its successor paradigm of governance, while largely ignoring the strong foundation of century-old paradigms of Public Administration, asserts Basheka, (2012: 25). Governance is currently seen as a new player within the Public Administration paradigm, and is generally described as the actions by a government.

Public Administration is regarded as the scientific study of public administration. The upper case in 'Public Administration' is used to indicate the subject and discipline, and 'public administration' in lower case signifies what the subject of Public Administration is investigating in practice (Wessels, Pauw & Thani, 2014: 7). This discussion holds significance for governance issues relating to ODL and the broader educational landscape of higher education in the country.

2.6.1 Public Administration

Public administration has been summarised and known as many things in the past. Public administration can be seen as a management function by government in all levels of government. Cloete (in Thornhill & Hanekom, 1995: 16) is of the opinion that the environment of public administration influences the administration of public matters because of the role of the state in it. The state in turn receives its authority from the people in the society. The administration of public matters derives from activities in the political arena and is part of governmental life and includes all areas of societal life. According to a previous argument of Thornhill & Hanekom (1995: 16), the location of public administration is molded by the present role of the state in the same nature and extent of government actions that should be combined with the development of the state.

The administration is defined as the organisation and direction of human and material resources to achieve the desired aims. Basu (2004: 3) emphasises that the two requisites in administrations are (i) supportive effort, and (ii) quest of shared goals. Therefore public administration is different kinds of administration within governmental administration. The administration in private enterprises is thus private administration.

What then makes public administration distinct? The origins of public administration can be traced to the guidelines of public administration and the role of the state in it. In other words, the role and identity of the state is a fixed influence in the environment of public administration.

Stewart in (Wessels *et al.*, 2014: 67) explains that the environment of development influences the public service and that new demands and pressures created by development often lead to the falling-off or demolition of existing institutions and social patterns. This clearly happened in the public service in South Africa in the public administration environment. Development in all spheres of government is essential to move towards a democratic developmental state.

Naidoo (2009: 66) argued that public administration is an action proposed at serving the public and converting policy into action. It must always be accepted that the operations of the public sector are deeply influenced by political influence and further they also have to act in a very limited financial environment.

Over the years public administration has developed to new needs of transition from the old traditional model of public administration which included strong bureaucratic and strong regulated structures, to a much needed up to date system which, included more present-day needs of society, and is called the New Public Management (NPM) (Petrescu, Popescu, Barbu & Dinescu, 2010: 408).

2.6.2 Public Management vs the New Public Management (NPM)

Wissink (in Van der Waldt & Du Toit, 1997: 14) states that public management is part of public administration, and is in general seen as the skill to convert resources such as material, labour, capital and information into services and products to satisfy the needs and desires of society, and also to achieve the aims and objectives of the public sector.

Public management is seen as an integral part of public administration. The functions of public management are simply continuation practices of public administration (Hughes, 2003: 45). Du Toit (2002: 5) is also in favour of the opinion that public management is an important component of public administration.

Thornhill & Van Dijk (2014: 419) assert that Public Management is the operational domain of the study and includes the study of issues such as planning, programming, leadership, motivation, training, counselling, monitoring and evaluation. These functions are assessing performance in the public sector and are typical of managerial positions.

Public Management emerged from the development of new methods of command and relations with public organisations. The many definitions of public management

resulted from the difficulty of the public domain. The function of public management is an important part of public administration, because public management is leading by leadership and management to empower public employees to ensure the administrative functions. In other words, it is the duty of public servants to implement policies from government. During the implementation of these policies it continuously affects the delivery of efficient and effective services to residents.

Petrescu *et al.*, (2010: 410) emphasised three elements in the definition of public management:

- *Efficient and effective* use of all different resources with the aim to put all public policies into practice (the efficient and effective implementation of government policies with the resources available, for example, the *White Paper on Education and Training* (1995) announced the idea of open learning);
- *Increase the performance* of public policies as well as their flexibility to the needs of society (after the *White Paper on Education and Training* (1995), various additional policies have been introduced to support the White Paper and increase performance in the arena of post school education, for example the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2013), and
- *Create a space for reflection and action* for the public performers and to empower them to engage in starting to build harmony.

Public management needs to ensure that change or transformation takes place where it is needed and that the change that takes place is maintained in a balanced way in society. It is thus clear that the purpose of public management does not include the administration of all the areas in the public domain, but in the efficient and effective use of definite management tools and practices.

New Public Management (NPM) is a new concept that has been developed and conducted from 1970-1990s) in the more advanced countries and is seen as a explicit governance model that is totally different from the more customary public administration states Nel (2015: 94). The author further states that NPM put pressure on governments' activities to increase efficiency and to reach goals with the focus on sustainable development and therefore NPM concentrates on forming a relationship between government and the markets and is a more practical tactic, with the focus to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The purpose of NPM is also to be market-

friendly and to be cost effective and accountable. The idea of NPM is to address the limitations of the Classic public administration model, which mostly emphasises control and organisational design. Aucoin (2012: 178) stipulates that the management performance of the public service is challenged by NPM.

2.6.3 Theories in Public Administration and Open Distance Learning

Only two theories have been successful to enact paradigms to influence public administration. One of the theories is the bureaucratic system of Max Weber and represents the traditional public management system and the second one is the New Public Management which has been developed at the end of the 70s and was introduced to most of the OECD countries (Petrescu *et al.*, 2010: 410).

The traditional public management system is constructed on the following fundamental characteristics:

- Administration forms a mechanism of the executive power;
- The rules are formulated and edited in a way that they are known and clear to the public they express a clear legal framework;
- The advantages of occupying a certain position are related to the job itself and not to the person that has the respective job; and
- The behaviour of the officials are standardised by relating to the rules. This is an important manner to guarantee discipline.

In the traditional public management system, the public officials don't own technical or financial resources of administration, and they have to make use of the resources available to them.

The NPM is seen as a corpus of managerial thinking or as a system based on ideas generated in the private sector. Peete & Turner (in Naidoo, 2009: 70) summarised NPM as:

- Outcomes-based and civilian-oriented, with its emphasis on enabling leadership, while holding them responsible. The White Paper (1995) includes a comprehensive set of educational goals, values and principles and state clearly that the over-arching goal of the policy is that individuals must have access to and succeed in lifelong learning and good quality training. Education and management processes therefore, must put the learner first. It must recognise and build on their knowledge and skills

and react to their needs. Glennie (Mills & Tait, 1996: 21) supports the further commitment of the policy that educational inequalities should be addressed and resources should be deployed to encourage independent critical thought. Open distance learning was introduced by this policy and has a very strong emphasis on learner centredness and supporting the learner as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The South Africa Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) view learner-centredness as a key principle of any open learning approach.

- The focus in NPM is placed on performance appraisal and sets unequivocal standards and measurements for performance as well as efficiency in the public service. A huge emphasis is placed on the control of productivity and disaggregation of units. This brings the public service closer to the communities they serve. In the context of NPM, open distance learning aims at “access for success”, therefore the outcomes of ODL is to focus on lowering the entry requirements and then support students to reach their desired success. In other words, the ODL systems intend to focus on the performance and success of the learner.

NPM concentrates on a combination of values, such as efficiency, effectiveness, affordability and quality and the importance falls on rationalising in search of excellence and proper service delivery to the public (Ferlie, 1996: 10). This also accentuates the fundamental values of public administration as discussed above. It further also has the goal to form partnership practices, fight corruption and promote community involvement in public matters. The nuances of NPM can be very closely linked to the purpose and intent of ODL.

2.6.4 Governance

Good governance is more regularly used within the background of public administration and more predominantly in development management. Within the new public management paradigm it has been viewed as a phase of the new Paradigm in Public Administration (Agere, 2000: 1). According to Agere (2000: 3), the World Bank provided some suggestions in which the various contexts of the term governance was being used. In their first report on governance and development, governance was defined as a way in which power is used in the management of economic and social

resources of a country, especially with a vision of development. It comprised the following three effects in governance:

- Type of political regime;
- Processes by which authority is exercised in the management of economic and social resources, with a view to development; and
- Capacity of governments to formulate policies and have them effectively implemented.

Governance in general terms, concerns the organisation of a group of people, community or a society by public authority. The impetus of governance is to maintain law and order, protection from external forces and to advance and develop the welfare of this group, community, society and the state (Van Niekerk, Van der Waldt & Jonker, 2002: 64). These authors also discuss a number of features of a good governance system in all sections of government in South Africa. These features are:

- *Openness and transparency.* This includes community involvement and consultation. The openness in ODL refers to the access procedure, in other words open access to the university.
- *Adherence to the principles of the Bill of Rights* according to Chapter 2 of the Constitution. Amongst other rights listed in this chapter of the constitution, the right that everyone has the right to education is certainly the most important for the purpose of this study.
- *Deliberation and consultation.* The true needs and desires of the people are identified and addressed in an appropriate manner.
- *Capacity to act and deliver.* The governmental structures should be developed in such a way that it seriously addresses the services needed by the people. This includes education and the provision of a cost effective education system such as open distance learning.
- *Efficiency and effectiveness.* Owing to limited resources it is important that it be used appropriately to address the needs of the people. For the development of the country socially, economically and culturally to support equality, it is important that the education system of the country attends to the needs of the people to enable them to contribute to society. A cost effective and efficient education system with open learning principles will assist the government to provide the services according to the needs of its people.

- *Answerability and accountability.* In terms of the Constitution accountability structures should be created to ensure answerability.
- *Co-operative government.* All spheres of government should cooperate with one another and engage in mutual dependency and connect to make sure that duplication don't take place.
- *Distribution of state authority and autonomy.* Authority and power in all spheres of government should be decentralised by government to make sure that the policy implementation and activities are being dealt with in an effective manner.
- *Constructive resolution of problems by government engagement with business through different forms of action.* Communities should be capacitated and empowered to embark on a course of reconstruction. Education and specifically the movement of ODL play a crucial role in providing the masses in the country with the milieu to improve their knowledge and skills to contribute to reconstruction.
- *Influence the manner politicians address basic needs.* NGOs and community-based-organisations should be involved here to achieve this. Resources provided by NGOs can play an important role in education needs, by addressing some needs of students with disabilities in providing their needs.
- *Monitor government activities in ensuring accountability* according to Chapter 9 of the Constitution.

Enhanced service delivery is an essential focus of good governance and in the context of higher education it cannot be over-emphasised. In relation to teaching and learning, this will result in circumstances of empowered citizens to also provide for themselves. This actually supports the new public management paradigm through the Batho Pele Principles ("People First") which will be discussed later within the context of this chapter.

There is a renewed focus on governance in more recent developments and operations of the public sector. The changing environment of requirements by society and the interdependence of role-players in the provision of public services is the eminence of governance, postulate Thornhill and van Dijk (2014: 21).

2.7 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK GOVERNING HIGHER EDUCATION AND OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

The right to education in South Africa is included in various documents of government. This includes basic education as well as adult basic education. To sketch the framework within which higher education functions within the public administration sphere in South Africa, it is important to highlight some of these legislative policies.

2.7.1 The Constitutional Framework

Section 2 of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) introduces the Constitution as the highest law of the Republic of South Africa. It constructs a solid foundation and guides the activities of public services in the country (Van Niekerk, *et al.*, 2002: 60). In The Bill of Rights in Chapter Two of the Constitution, Section 29, it clearly states that everyone has the right to basic education, including adult basic education and to further education, which the state through reasonable measures has to make progressively available and accessible. All reasonable educational alternatives should be considered by the state taking into account equity and practicability (South Africa, 1996: sec 29).

2.7.2 Policy Framework for Education and Training

The African National Congress documented *A Policy Framework for Education and Training in 1994*. This document outlined a well-designed and quality distance education system based on the values of open learning. The idea behind this document was that it would add new value to education in South Africa as well as opportunities to redress the imbalances of the past (African National Congress, 1994: 78). This framework for education and training was crucial at the time, because of the uneven, unequal and undemocratic nature of the education system that was in place and the profound influence it had on the development of the country and society. One of the goals of this policy states “*The pursuit of national reconstruction and development, transforming the institutions of society (i.e. higher education institutions) in the interest of all, and enabling the social cultural, economic and political empowerment of all citizens.*” Higher education needed reconstruction and redevelopment with regard to staff capacity, resources and financial support for students. The policy supports adult learning as well as life-long learning.

2.7.3 White Paper on Education and Training

The *White Paper on Education and Training* (1995) committed the newly elected ANC government to address the serious and vast educational imbalances of the country. It addressed the Constitutional and basic rights of all people to be entitled to basic education (DoE, 1995: 28). The *White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* follows in 1997, supporting the ideas of the White Paper and emphasises that distance education and on-campus resources based learning have an important role to play in attending to the challenges of expanding access, to diversify the learners in the system, include the needs of students who are already employed to improve their qualifications and, finally, improve quality with the available limited resources (DoE: 26). The term open learning was introduced and was understood as follows:

“Open learning is an approach which combines the principles of learner centredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems.”

Furthermore, the White Paper 3 elaborates that higher education has a threefold role to play in a knowledge production world:

- Human resource development. The full utilisation of human talent and potential through lifelong learning to contribute to the social, economic, cultural and intellectual life of a fast changing society
- High-level skills training. The provision and development of high-level trained and professional staff to strengthen the delivery of services and to improve infrastructure in the country. Skills development of people with the same level of skills than their equivalents worldwide. This will result in strong contribution by the work force to the national development initiatives.
- Production, acquisition and application of new knowledge. Research and development systems should be developed to drive knowledge production and to support national growth and continuous technological developments and improvement (White Paper. 1997: 12).

South Africa has the advantage that it is able to learn from worldwide experiences on the development of innovative educational methods. Clear policy documents on distance education and the quality thereof was since then introduced.

2.7.4 Higher Education Act of 1997

The *Higher Education Act 101 of 1997* created a legal framework for a single national higher education system in South Africa. This document lays the foundation for restructuring and transforming institutions and the programmes they offer to deliver a service that will address the challenges South Africa faced in the higher education arena. The preamble of this act is to:

- **Establish** a single coordinated higher education system which promotes co-operative governance and provides for programme-based higher education;
- **Restructure and Transform** programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs of the Republic;
- **Redress** past discrimination and ensure representivity and equal access;
- **Provide** optimal opportunities for learning and the creation of knowledge;
- **Promote** the values which underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom;
- **Respect** freedom of religion, belief and opinion;
- **Respect** and encourage democracy, academic freedom, freedom of speech and expression, creativity, scholarship and research;
- **Pursue** excellence, promote the full realisation of the potential of every student and employee, tolerance of ideas and appreciation of diversity;
- **Respond** to the needs of the Republic and of the communities served by the institutions;
- **Contribute** to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, in keeping with international standards of academic quality; and
- **And whereas it is desirable** for higher education institutions to enjoy freedom and autonomy in their relationship with the state within the context of public accountability and the national need for advanced skills and scientific knowledge;

The Act also allocates responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in South Africa to the Council on Higher Education (CHE). This responsibility is fulfilled

through its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) (South Africa, 1997: 2).

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) has its genesis from the *Higher Education Act 1997*, and is, amongst others, responsible for (i) guiding the Minister proactively on all policy aspects related to higher education, (ii) assuming executive responsibility for quality assurance within higher education and training – including programme accreditation, institutional audits, programme evaluation, quality promotion and capacity building, (iii) monitoring and evaluating whether, how, to what extent and with what consequences the vision, policy goals and objectives for higher education are being realized, including reporting on the state of South African higher education, (iv) contributing to developing higher education – taking the initiative in providing direction on key national and systemic issues, producing publications and holding conferences and conducting research to sensitise government and stakeholders to immediate and long-term challenges of higher education; and (v) consulting with stakeholders on matters of higher education (South Africa, 1997: 10).

2.7.5 Higher Education quality Committee

The HEQC has the mandate to promote quality, audit institutions and provide programme accreditation. The inclusive task of the HEQC is to build an effective national quality assurance system and should develop evaluative tools for HEQC audits and accreditation activities. It is therefore important that the tasks of this committee includes capacity development and training as a crucial part of its programme activities. (CHE, 2004: 1).

2.7.6 National Plan for Higher Education 2001

The *National Plan for Higher Education* (NPHE) (2001) provides the framework and mechanisms to restructure the higher education system of South Africa with the aim to achieve the vision and goals of transformation of the higher education system outlined in the *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (1997). The NPHE was developed to:

- Promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities;

- Meet, through well-planned and coordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs, including the high-skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment;
- Support a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights through educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, non-racist and nonsexist social order;
- Contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and in particular address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, southern African and African contexts, and uphold rigorous standards of academic quality.”
(South Africa, 2001: 11).

It is clear that the South African government focus on massification of the higher education system in the country, as well as lifelong learning as a national trend. Another aim behind this plan is to develop learners to be independent and mature learners and strengthen the knowledge production through higher education institutions.

2.7.7 Higher Education Qualifications Framework

This policy offers the foundation for incorporating all higher qualification into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF should create structures for standard generation and quality assurance. This will result in improving the unity of the higher education system. It will further simplify the articulation of qualifications and improve the flexibility of the system which in turn will allow students to move more efficiently over time from one programme to another. It is important that the public have confidence in and understand the academic standards of higher education institutions and the achievements exemplified by higher education (South Africa, 1997: 3).

2.7.8 White Paper for Post School Education and Training

The *White Paper for Post School Education and Training* of 2013 focuses on the vision of government for the post-school system education in South Africa. It forms part of the National Development Plan of 2030. This document is made up of a diverse range of the educational institutions of South Africa to cater for the millions of adults that will come into the system. These documents focus strongly on the product that will be acceptable for society in South Africa and are employable.

2.7.9 National Development Plan, Vision 2030

The *National Development Plan* (NDP) 2030 of Government aims to have a post-school system that provides quality-learning opportunities to young people and adults who want to change careers or upgrade skills. It should also contribute towards quality teaching and learning and raise education and training levels to produce highly skilled professionals (NDP 2030, 2013: 316).

Chapter Nine of the NDP deals with “improving education, training and innovation”. Education and training are vital elements for the long-term development of South Africa. It will assist in eliminating poverty and reducing inequality and will support the development of an equal society. The role of the post-school sector is, amongst others, to contribute towards quality in teaching and learning, attend to the skills need in South Africa and raise education levels to produce highly skilled professionals and technicians and. The NDP also emphasises that the quality levels in the post-school system needs drastic attention to support these roles (NDP 2030, 2013: 316).

The NDP is based on governmental intervention in the production of goods and services, such as education, with specific reference to higher education as mentioned by Thornhill & van Dijk (2014: 79). Learner support services are therefore important to support success pass rates amongst students in higher education, and to eventually achieve a transformed economy as a developmental state.

2.7.10 The National Development Plan, Vision 2030 vs The Development State

South Africa as a state is facing a number of socioeconomic challenges such as high youth unemployment, slow economic growth, growing financial corruption within government spheres, poor education outcomes and poor local government service delivery Statistics South Africa 2011 (in Poole, 2015: 3). The NDP has been developed to vigorously address the affliction of poverty and exclusion, and also to support economic growth. The idea behind the NDP is to create a virtuous cycle of expanding opportunities and involve communities in their own development. At the same time, in a developmental state the government of the day is very well involved in vigorous economic planning to enable the economy to grow. Marwala (2006: 1) postulates that developmental states in general focus on technical education and the development of numerical competence and computer skills to build capacity in government structures. The other important characteristic of developmental states is to illuminate poverty and

focus on strong economic development to create access for all inhabitants to services in the country. This is where the NDP plays a very important role in the developmental state in South Africa.

2.7.11 Draft Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities

This is the first policy document from the Ministry of Higher Education and Training (MHET) which entirely devoted the use of distance education in higher education programmes. The Ministry sees distance education as an integral part of the post school system and more specifically in higher education. The idea behind this document was to resolve many areas of ambiguity and to provide solid support for the progressive development of South African distance education and an essential and fundamental element of the higher education system.

A need for a specific policy on distance education is indicated in three contextual factors:

- Distance education in higher education has grown significantly in large numbers;
- If the set targets in the policy are to be met, it is important that the higher education system needs to grow generally; and
- Growing flexibility of ICTs has unlocked new opportunities for quality development of teaching and learning (DHET, 2012: 8).

The policy specifies that distance education proceeds from the belief that learning can be nurtured without necessarily requiring teacher and learners to be in the same place at the same time and that the resource-based nature of distance education allows for the possibility to achieve economies of scale. In other words the policy is seen as a more cost effective way of education for the large numbers of students in higher education in South Africa. The challenge still remains to turn access into success, therefore the government will have to invest considerably into curriculum design, issues of structure, meaningful assessment and also substantial investment in a decentralised student support system (DHET, 2012: 9).

2.7.12 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training

The aim of the White Paper is to outline a framework that defines the focus and priorities of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and that it shapes its strategies and plans of the future. DHET strive to improve the capacity of the post-school education and training system and to meet the standards of the country. This policy also strongly supports open distance learning through various different modes of delivery. It further also addresses challenges in the following arenas:

- The college system, which includes Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), community colleges and the South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAIVCET), Private education providers;
- Universities;
- Training for people with disabilities; and
- Open learning through diverse modes of provision;
- Linking education and the workplace (also known as Work-integrated Learning); and
- The NQF and the Quality Councils.

The policy strongly expresses the need for a mixed-mode programme delivery. In other words, it will be determined by the needs of the learners and the curriculum requirements. As e-learning has also become more accessible in South Africa, it will be important to include this tool into different modes of delivery. The challenge with this might be the cost effectiveness of the internet for a large number of learners. Furthermore, there is a fast increase in the use of open learning principles in the diverse ways of educational provision (DHET, 2013: 49). The question remains, “are our learners ready and on the other hand, are our higher education institutions ready?

The vision of the White Paper is to transform the post-school system which is an important part of the South African Government’s policies to develop the country and to improve the economic, social and cultural life of its people (DHET, 2013: xi-xvii).

2.7.13 Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System

The need for this specific policy on distance education is indicated in the following four contextual factors:

- *Importance of distance education in the university sub-system.* This refers to the college system, for example TVET and private education providers, etc. In other words those institutions that do not form part of the university system in South Africa;
- *Technological needs and opportunities.* In the last few years technology developed extensively and the availability and affordability of ICT in has grown enormously. Therefore there is currently a massive opportunity to use these technologies for teaching and learning and to improve the quality of distance education delivery;
- *Need for further expansion.* Because of the growing demand for university education and global evidence that distance education can under certain conditions provide high quality educational opportunity more cost- efficiently and cost-effectively than the traditional face-to-face delivery, it is rational to increase and develop distance education in an orderly manner; and
- *Quality matters.* The DHET distinguishes the following key quality issues in the provision of distance education: (1) the need for investment in programme design specifically for distance education; (2) appropriate learning resources to support independent learning; (3) development of staff to empower them and to enable effective teaching and learning through distance education; (4) continuous proactive decentralised assessment strategies with a strong accent on constructive feedback to boost active engagement and retention.

The need, assessment and quality assurance for experiential learning or work-integrated learning also need to be clearly stipulated.

2.7.14 Batho Pele Principles in context of Open Distance Learning

The term Batho Pele means “People First”. Eight Batho Pele Principles were developed on national level to serve as an acceptable policy and legislative framework regarding service delivery in the public service. The Provincial Government of KwaZulu-Natal established 11 Batho Pele principles, which are in line with the eight principles on national level. The following Batho Pele Principles only will be discussed (with emphasis and context) for the purpose of this study:

- **Consultation**

The internal customers (staff) as well as the external customers (the students) of the university should be consulted on a regular basis to determine what is expected from the university.

- **Service Standards**

The students should be told of the levels of services that will be delivered to them. The students should be given a choice of the services they want. The set standards by the university should be monitored to measure performance and the availability of the resources of the university.

- **Access**

Easy access to these services should be made available to both staff and students. Access to education is also stipulated in Section 29 of The Bill of Rights. One of the characteristics of ODL is to provide access to students and remove barriers to education. This will improve performance of students, as well as staff.

- **Value-for-Money**

The available resources of the University should be used in the best way possible to satisfy the need of its clients, the students. Ways should be found to improve services on every level in the university.

These identified principles will be discussed in detail in the study to explain how it would fit in with learner support and service delivery with particular reference to Unisa.

These Principles are also linked with the following Constitutional ideals and the service delivery agenda of:

- Providing service impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias;
- Utilising resources efficiently and effectively; and
- Rendering an accountable, transparent, and development-oriented public administration (South Africa: 2011).

Removing the barriers to access of learning, flexibility of learning provision, student-centeredness, supporting students and constructing learning programmes with the anticipation that students can succeed will be investigated in the context of the National

Development Plan, 2030 of Government with the focus on improving the quality of public service delivery.

2.8 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK OF UNISA AS OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTION

As Unisa is a higher education institution that operates under the Higher Education Act of South Africa, it is therefore important to locate the policies of the institution for the research in this study. All the policy documents of Unisa clearly indicate and disseminate the concept of Open Distance Learning as a tool to bridge time, economic, social, educational and communication, distance between the student and the institution and the student and academics. These policies include the Open Distance Learning Policy of 2008, the Institutional Operational Plan, the Learner Support Policy and the 2015 Strategic Plan.

2.8.1 Unisa 2015: an Agenda for Transformation

The Unisa Strategic Plan of 2015 should be seen as an agenda for transformation. The plan has the following strategic objectives and key strategies:

- Effects a seamless transition to harmonized and coherent structures, policies, systems and practices for the merged institution;
- Position Unisa as a leading provider of quality distance education programmes through an academic product range that expands on its comprehensive character;
- Promote research, increased capacity and productivity aligned with national priorities for knowledge development;
- Utilise the resources and capacities of the University in community development initiatives and collaborative partnerships;
- Establish service oriented, technology enhanced learner support to increase retention and throughput;
- Create a nurturing environment to promote students well-being, to foster a sense of belonging to Unisa, and to mobilise alumni in the service of the University;
- Establish quality governance, planning, administrative and management systems led by best practices;
- Manage financial, human and infrastructural resources rationally to monitor expenditure, optimise value, manage risks and ensure financial sustainability;

- Foster a healthy, secure and stimulating environment for staff, students and visitors and protect the assets of the university; and
- Establish a performance oriented approach to management, promote quality assurance, and assess outcomes and reward productivity and excellence.

In the context of this discussion the restructuring of the higher education system brings into existence the new Unisa. Unisa is unique in the sense that it is the only dedicated distance education institution in South Africa. With the combined resources and capacities at the disposal of the University, it finds itself in a favourable position to make an important contribution to the development in Southern Africa as well as beyond the borders of the country on the African continent.

Unisa in the development of this plan, recognises that the business model of the university should enhance learner support methodologies, processes and facilities. This should be strongly supported by quality staff to ensure quality outputs. All of these should strongly focus on a service- oriented culture within the university Unisa.

Table 2.2 includes the revised 2015 Strategic Plan follows below.

Table 2.2: Goals and Strategies of the Unisa 2015 Strategic Plan

Goals	Strategies
Revitalise the PQM, teaching and learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simplify and streamline PQM. 2. Review/develop relevant curricula to promote innovation, and renew ‘graduateness.’ 3. Develop an integrated student support Model. 4. Revise assessment processes for greater balance between formative and summative assessment. 5. Conceptualise and implement an ODL teaching and learning model.
Increase innovative research and research capacity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inculcate Multidisciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary (MIT) research, epistemologies, methods and programmes. 2. Cultivate ODL research. 3. Sustain a supportive, enabling research environment.
Grow community engagement initiatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Redefine the scope and extent of community engagement in the context of ODL. 2. Build an enabling environment for community engagement.
Position Unisa as a leading ODL institution	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advance ODL on the African continent and internationally. 2. Position the IODL at the cutting edge in ODL research and training. 3. Leverage strategic partnerships to increase staff capacity.

Source: **Unisa. Revised Strategic Plan 2015**

Five years into the implementation of the 2015 strategy of Unisa – *Unisa 2015: an Agenda for Transformation*, it was necessary for the university to reflect on the progress, to reprioritise, and if needed, reformulate aspects of its strategic plan in the light of the continuous change in the higher education environment. It is important that the university keep track with changes and demands from higher education as a resource to support economic development, nationally as well as internationally. These changes might necessitate change in planning strategies, therefore, to stay in line with these changes, planning strategies should be revised.

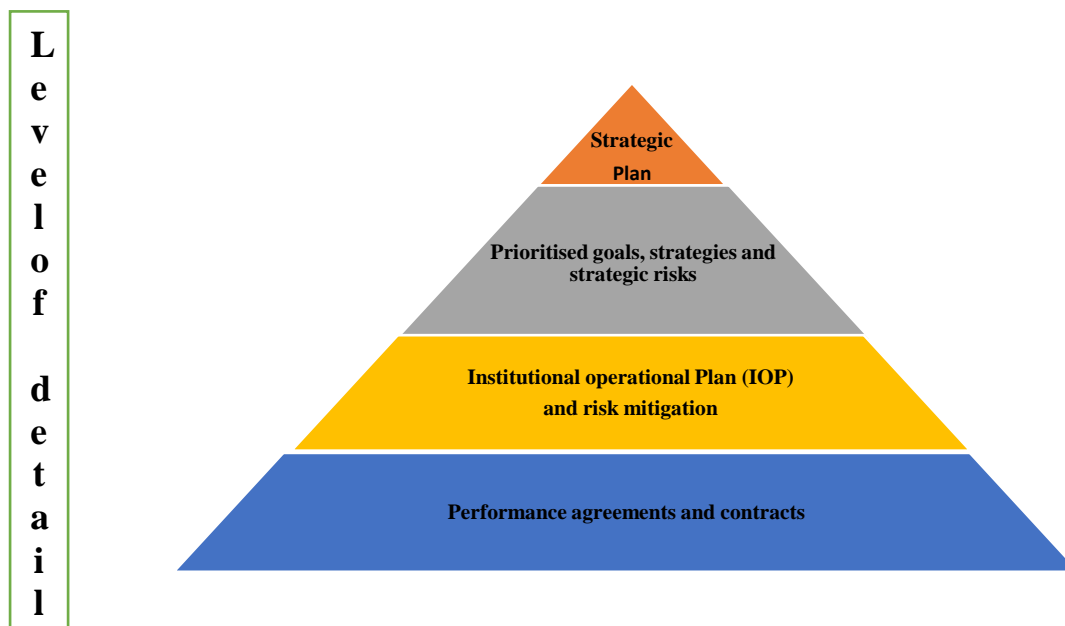
2.8.2 Institutional Operational Plan

The Institutional Operational Plan converts Unisa's Integrated Planning Framework into operational planning outcomes and targets. The operative implementation of this plan depends on an organised process of constant monitoring, evaluation and reporting to ensure streamline performance and greater agility. The plan covers five areas:

- Academic;
- Corporate Governance and Sustainability;
- Service;
- People; and
- Co-operative Governance and External Stakeholder Relations.

Figure 2.2 that follows, demonstrates how the planning framework illustrates the 2015 Strategic Plan of Unisa.

Figure 2.2. Illustration of the 2015 Strategic Plan of Unisa



Source: **Unisa. Institutional Operational Plan 2015**

The prioritizing of goals, operational plan and the performance agreements is taking place on regional level as well. The region of KwaZulu-Natal also prioritises goals for the region, compiles the regional operational plan (ROP) and draws up individual performance contracts and agreements (IPMS). All of this is done within the framework of and in line with the institutional operational plan (IOP).

2.8.3 Draft Student Support Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide a broad framework within which student support is conceptualised in terms of the student experience of all services at Unisa from pre-registration to graduation and as an alumnus/ alumna. The main focus of this policy is on student centeredness.

“In the wider context of student support, student centredness must also relate to activity, choice and equitable power relations between the university departments that supply services and the students. The University cannot submit to unrealistic demands and expectations given our distance education nature and funding or the organization will not be sustainable. At another level, the Commonwealth of Learning (2003) highlights that student centredness means enabling the students to pursue their studies in a way that is appropriate for their circumstances, learning goals and learning styles.” (Unisa, 2014: 2).

2.8.4 Open Distance Learning Policy

The Open Distance Learning (ODL) policy has been approved by the Council of the university in October 2008. The purpose of this policy is:

- To position UNISA as a leading provider of higher education opportunities through open distance learning (ODL) nationally, on the African continent and internationally;
- To commit UNISA to the guidelines for cross-border provision developed by the national Department of Education; and
- To commit UNISA to an ongoing, responsive interaction with current and emerging national and international imperatives and developments with relevance to quality ODL provision.

As the only comprehensive dedicated distance education university, the commitment of Unisa is to advance social justice within an emphasis on redress, equity and empowerment of previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa.

The policy further deals, amongst others, with effective counselling and guidance, responsible open admission procedures, teaching and learning methods, learning material, delivery channels (*print media, technologies with limited interaction, multimedia*), student support, tutors and assessment. The regional infrastructure of the

university offers the stage for the delivery of a variety of student support and administrative structures.

The University further commits itself as a comprehensive open distance learning institution according to the following principles in the policy:

- Increase the participation of students and access to post-registration student support services,
- Diversify the body of students for the purpose of providing opportunities for social advancement for historically and socially disadvantaged social groups such as students in rural areas, small towns or those who do not have convenient access to higher education institutions,
- Provide quality education in an affordable and cost-effective way,
- Encourage and support temporarily inactive students, monitor retention and throughput and implement the necessary interventions for improvement,
- Develop its capacity in distance education delivery through reflective practice, including staff development processes,
- Engage in research and development of open distance practices and contribute extensively to national debate in this area,
- Start the teaching process with the development of curriculum long before the students register. This will enable better pre-registration decision-making for students as well as the development of more coherent programmes by academics; and
- Offer the full range of qualifications listed in the new HEQF and its PQM and provides articulation pathways to allow maximum portability and progression between qualifications as befits a comprehensive university.

The curriculum will:

- Have academic integrity and be responsive to the vision and mission of UNISA, national educational imperatives, and societal and employment needs;
- Be aligned with the student profiles;
- Articulate clear exit level outcomes; and
- Design teaching, learning and assessment strategies to meet these outcomes.

The curriculum development process will be conducted by a team involving academics, curriculum and course designers, student support specialists, student counsellors,

language specialists, tutors, relevant external stakeholders and, where possible, representatives of current and past students.

The student is placed at the centre of the entire learning process from the moment the student intends registering through to graduation, and continuing on through to its alumni who play a vital role in evaluating impact and as ambassadors for the institution. Evaluation strategies will assure the quality of the learning process and will suggest improvements. Particular emphasis will be placed on student feedback. UNISA will ensure that it supports the student throughout his/her study (Unisa, 2008: 3).

2.8.5 The Open Distance and e-Learning Business Model

This Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) model realises a whole shift to open, distance and e-learning at Unisa with equivalent consequences for all processes and systems in the university. It is indicated clearly in the policy that this model should not be seen as “online” learning. There is a clear economic and educational imperative to digitise the services and systems of Unisa, but it is still important for the probable future to ensure that students with limited means are not unfairly excluded from learning opportunities (Unisa, 201:356).

The new business model is seen as facilitating constant communication between the institution and its students, with the aim to enhance student success, completing a meaningful qualification and an enriching studying experience. There is a need for Unisa to think and plan more holistically in terms of the “student walk” through the institution. This model gives identity to the university’s full commitment to proactively make sure that all students are provided the access they require, to affordable connectivity and devices, to enable them to participate effectively in the digital age of university education (Glennie, 2013: 21). The implications that this model will have on the Unisa operations is that the some services will be handled electronically, for example, student application and registration data and teaching materials will be provided to students electronically.

Kelly & Mills (2007: 155) maintain that institutions who offer ODeL provision have an obligation to ensure that academic and administrative provisions are flexible and recognise the needs of adult learners. The main reason why learners study part-time in an ODeL mode is because the flexibility allows them to study while maintaining and

upholding other commitments in life. The goals of ODeL institutions are often established to direct their focus on curriculum, teaching and support.

2.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the development of open distance learning on the African continent, and the contextualisation of open distance learning within the public administration paradigm in South Africa. The excellent role of higher education in sustainable development is emphasised to support skills development which is eminent in the public administration environment.

Chapter Three will focus on the role of learner support in enhancing learning and skills development in an open distance learning environment within a developmental state context.

CHAPTER THREE

LEARNER SUPPORT TO ENHANCE LEARNING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING: A DEVELOPMENTAL STATE CONTEXT

There is a familiar circle to be squared: a poor country cannot afford health and education, but without them, it cannot even develop such economic resources as it has.

Macmillan (1938)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As already discussed in Chapter two of this study, distance education went through enormous changes since the introduction of new technological developments. Distance education is seen as a more cost-effective mode of educational delivery and higher education institutions will adopt this mode of delivery, because of these new developing technologies. This will have the consequence that distance education institutions all over the world were confronted to “renovate” their policies and procedures to accommodate the continuous growing number of learners. This resulted in more pressure placed on distance education institutions to provide more effective and efficient services to students. Essential to these services, is provision of effective and efficient learner support (LS).

The throughput rates and student success is a major challenge for higher education institutions in South Africa as well as institutions globally. This is specifically a challenge for distance learning educational institutions. It is therefore important for these institutions to focus on student success with the upkeep of highly efficient and effective learner support initiatives and operations.

The transformational agenda of Unisa as a comprehensive institution guides the institution from product-centred to a student-centred model for ODL through the growing use of educational approaches where the crucial significance of student support becomes more and more ostensible.

This will transpire in the belief that quality teaching and learning is the primary business of the university.

In literature on distance education, the term “learner support” is used commonly as “student support”. In this study the word “learner” will be equivalent to “student” and *vice-versa*, for the purpose of simplification.

3.2 LEARNER SUPPORT IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

It is expected of distance education programmes to return the same outcomes and have the same standards as the traditional-campus programmes. Kelly & Mills (2007: 152) suggested that programmes offered by open and distance learning universities need to be of an equivalent standard of those with traditional residential universities, even though some of the students will enter with a wide range of prior knowledge. According to them, the challenge that will then surface is to merge open entry, the mode of teaching and the inevitable diversity of student backgrounds that will enter the system. All of this should happen without conceding quality or at the cost of high drop-out rates. When you implement learner support systems, a variety of ethical issues ascends in the tutoring context and the role of the tutor, additional support for individual students who might have different needs and the use of ICTs (Kelly & Mills, 2007: 153).

Distance education providers are no longer judged by the quality of their learning material, but more prominence is given to their learner support services (Aluko & Hendrikz, 2012: 69). Usun (2004: 1) also stipulates that it is unfortunate that in many distance education systems more resources are spent on the technical system and machinery to the expense of the provision of quality and effective learner support structures. If the distance education institution wants to be successful, the same or more resources should be made available to the learner support system.

Technological developments give institutions the opportunity to remodel the support services because it effects into cost reductions. Rumble (2000: 220) also expressed that there is still a resistance to changes in learner support and the belief from some educators that support services lack consistency. This is because of the commonly unfortunate lack of knowledge about the effectiveness of learner support. The author summarised the following research findings on this issue:

- Advice given during recruitment and registration at the institution has an influence on later success or failure. It is important that students feel “safe” with the choices they made during this phase.

- Learners who make contact with the institution seem to value it and regard it as beneficial. Support is more needed in the first year of registration.
- Student performance is affected by various factors. Completion rates of courses seems be high and correlate with the course of pacing, continuous assessment, tutors who remind the student to complete their work, early first assignment submission, turn-around time for the completed assignment and feedback is short, supplementary audio-tapes and telephone guidance, students have access to satisfactory environments to study in.
- Learners who did not make use of student support are likely to delay completion or completely drop-out.
- The most notable causes of drop-out are personal circumstances and insufficient time. Financial implications are also a reason for keeping students out of the system. It happens in universities in South Africa that students who are in arrears with their study fees get blocked on the administration system and cannot continue with their studies unless they have paid the arrears. They also don't get their exam results or certificate if they have completed the diploma or degree.
- Institutions have different views on how to express learner support and also the amount of resources to put into it. This will make comparative studies on this issue in institutions very problematic.

Rumble (2000: 216) articulates that the tendency is to refer to student services and that distance education institutions increasingly have a “consumer” relationship with their students. Students see themselves “buyers” of a higher education product. The author further expresses the notion that distance education institutions are both “industrial” organisations, because they producing study material as a physical product and “service” organisations because of the services they provide to produce a student experience.

3.2.1 What is learner support?

The core business of a distance education institution is teaching and learning. Learner support strives to bring together curriculum, assessment and learner support decision making in an incorporated way.

The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) describes learner support as;

“efforts made to address academic, social/personal and informational counselling and support needs of learners, as groups and as individuals, for the entire learning journey from marketing and pre-registration, through teaching assessment, to graduation and the student’s continuing role as alumnus.”

Nonyongo and Ngengebule (1998: xi) explain what learner support service does. It helps learners to ease their isolation, it facilitates effective learning, it decreases attrition rates and increase success rates, and in general it enhances the quality of distance education.

Garrison and Baynton (in Usun, 2004: 1) define learner support as;

“the resources that learners can access in order to carry out the learning process. Support further include a variety of human and non-human resources to guide and facilitate the educational journey of the student, such as, library facilities, various media and software programs, financial aid, etc.”

The authors further perceive strongly that the teacher/lecturer is the most important form of support to a student, because through guidance and direction they assist the student to achieve his/her goals and to develop control of the educational process in the educational journey.

During the learning journey of the student, learner support should aim to enhance learner-learner, learner-staff, learner-institution, learner-community and learner-curriculum relationship and commitment. This should be done to promote growing levels of independent learning in an organised way.

Open distance learning resources and practices are designed and developed for a specific student population and constructed on general trends in the profile of the student. Learner support should also be apprehensive with how different students as well as a particular group of students relate with the learning process and the teaching environment.

Student support has many different forms, but in general it is directed at improving the dialogue between the student and the lecturer and it is further structured as follows:

- Through the commitment of the institution to analytically understand and to deliver for the different life-worlds of the students. In other words, the mixture of the learner population should be taken into account right from the beginning and structures should be built into the study materials, the environment and into the

- system to allow a wide-ranging number of learners to access teaching and learning at the university;
- Students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their choices and to recognise the effect of their choices and commitments;
- Learning capabilities should be integrated with materials and the effective use of various and applicable technologies and resources;
- Further strategically scheduled and targeted interventions should have the purpose of constructive development and demonstration of skills. Different stakeholders should be optimally aligned and integrated in these interventions. It should be designed for maximum effect on individual students' learning journeys at specific stages and where possible, groups of students';
- Numerous supplementary support services should be made available for students to enter at their own convenience (Unisa, 2010: 7).

All available support services should be communicated thoroughly and in detail to students before they engage with the learning process at an institution. This in itself will direct students in making the choices of what they want for their learning experience on the path of lifelong learning.

From these discussions, it is evident that the learner support system in a distance education system drives the success of a course and eventually the development of the students in this system. It supports the student to become competent and to develop self-confidence in the learning journey.

3.2.2 Primary functions of learner support

Tait (2000: 289) suggests that there are three primary functions of learner support:

- Cognitive – supporting and developing learning through the mediation of the standard and uniform elements of course materials and learning resources for individual students. Cognitive learning outcomes in learner support are reached where the teaching is facilitated through courseware. Therefore the support should be embodied during the design and development of the content of the course. The opinion of the author is that this cognitive function of learner support is often less recognised. This includes tutoring and assessment.
- Affective – providing an environment which supports students, creates commitment and enhances self-esteem; and

- Systemic – establishing administrative processes and information management systems which are effective, transparent and overall student-friendly.

The functions mentioned above are essential and interdependent functions. It seems as if learner support is mainly seen as to do with administrative processes and often from the perspective of efficiency. This is actually relating to function 3 above. Where this view is central to the institution, function 2 will decline. Thus the commitment and comfortableness of the learner with the institution will not diminish and this can have a major influence on the experience of the learner and the success of the learner as well as.

3.2.3 Learner centredness in learner support

Flexibility and a more learner-centred approach allow learners to study at more appropriate settings, and more suitable times. This is why the general belief is that distance education opens up more educational opportunities for learners who could previously not be reached.

Learner-centredness requires that learners are seen as the centre of the educational process and they are supported to take substantial responsibility for their learning and research. The education employed should:

- Enable successful learning through rich environments for active learning,
- Establish links between students' current meanings and contexts and new knowledge to be constructed, and
- Encourage independent and critical thinking (Unisa, 2008: 2).

In this notion of learner-centredness the responsibility is not only on the institution to ensure that the learners' needs being addressed, but the learner also have to take responsibility to in the learning environment, therefore meaningful learner participation is equally important in distance education (Nonyongo & Ngengebule, 1998: xiii). At the core of the learning environment are learner responsibility and action.

Pulist (2001: 1) posits that there is a new concept of learner-centredness and it has opposed the traditional teacher-centredness, which was an authoritative style of teaching. The author further stipulates that LC is more a shift in paradigm where learners take control of their learning. Makoe (2011: 6) argues that in a teacher-centred approach, lecturers dispense knowledge to students who have to respond to the given

knowledge in contrast with a learner-centred approach where the learners are active participants who bring with them a rich collection of prior experiences, knowledge and beliefs as they develop and build knowledge and understanding.

It is important that lecturers in distance learning know the different types of experiences that learners bring into the learning context. This will enable them to support distance learners effectively. To facilitate the learning process, it is important that lecturers know their learners, where they are coming from and what type of support their learners will need. Once this is known, it is easier to look at various support mechanisms to support learners. It is important that this support is learner-centred to address the needs of the learners and ensure quality design and development of study material (Makoe, 2011: 5). To address the needs of a large learner body in mega universities, a blended learning approach can be used to satisfy the needs of learners. Blended learning is a significant building block in the latest educational environments which offers students flexibility and convenience, especially for working adults (Rovai & Jordan, 2004: 3) and is strongly advocated as one of the approaches to effective teaching and learning. A discussion on blended learning (in context) follows.

3.2.4 Learner support and a blended learning approach

Higher education institutions, as well as their staff have this continuous concern to improve the learning outcomes of their students. Lei (in Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, Rodriguez-Ariza & Argente-Linares, 2013: 625) argues that change in ideal teaching methodologies should address this concern. These changes could relate to the use of new ICTs, often as a complement to conventional classes. ICTs complement traditional forms and means of education and can achieve a more effective and efficient means of learning. A way to introduce this technology into teaching is through the concept of blended learning which is a mixture of classroom and online learning which includes the conveniences of online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact (Rovai & Jordan, 2004: 1).

Huan, *et al.*, (in Lopez-Perez *et al.*, 2013: 626) further stipulate that these technologies are widely used in universities courses with large numbers of students and especially in those courses typically taken during first year undergraduate studies. This is an important period in determining the commitment of students to learning.

In a blended learning approach, differentiation takes place by presenting the content of the study material in various ways, for example, viewing a video, reviewing responses from others or reading a case study for application purposes. Learners come to the learning environment with different amounts of prior knowledge and skills. There are different strategies to assist learners acquire multifaceted knowledge and skills and one of them is the prior knowledge of the learner. If the learner does not have enough prior knowledge and skills to understand the content given to them, different means can be used, for example, a video clip, etc. (McDonough, 2012: 117).

Sethy (2008: 32) proposes that blended learning is dedicated to the performance of the learner and identified the following features:

- *It promotes connections and conversations.* Because of the availability of various ICTs, teacher-learner, learner-learner and learner and institution can communicate easier with one another on teaching and learning issues;
- *It guides, directs and tracks.* Learners receive various directions on how to approach learning challenges, for example, assignments, examinations and difficult and complex challenges in the study material. Through the use of ICTs, the progress of the learner can be followed;
- *It nurtures a world-class and worldwide workforce.* In distance learning and for that matter blended learning the different approaches are used for educational provision and learners can study anywhere they are in the world. This creates and develops a global workforce;
- *It provides consistent and updated messages;*
- *It tries to utilise the technologies in a better and fruitful way;*
- *It fosters independent habits for learning and reference.* In an ODL approach in teaching and learning, the notion is to foster independent learning;
- *It encourages learning at work.* This is a typical characteristic of distance education where learners can earn while they learn; and
- *It improves performance and control costs.*

Brennan (quoted by Sethy, 2008: 32) suggests that factors, such as, conditions (e.g., urgency), availability of resources (time, money, and expertise), target audience, characteristics of the learner, characteristics of the content (different learning objectives), should be considered when a blended learning programme is designed.

Other resources that can be added is the availability of the infrastructure, characteristics of learners and workplace learning environments.

3.3 LEARNER SUPPORT AND ADULT LEARNING

Rumble (2000: 222) studied the critical questions that have been asked over the years on learner support and the three most prominent questions of them are; (i) where is the starting point when considering learner support? (ii) what kind or type of learner support services should be provided? and (iii) how should these services be provided? Typical in any marketing analysis, is that one starts with the needs of client or customer. In this case, it is the needs of the student.

Learner support in ODL was considered by Tait (2000: 290) and the author identified six components in developing a framework for learner support and gives it as: (i) characteristics of the learner, (ii) technological infrastructure, (iii) scale of the programme, (iv) geographical environment, (v) program demands, and (vi) management requirements. The author is also of the opinion that there is no definite design for creating a student support system. It is important that each ODL environment should be well thought-out separately.

3.3.1 Learner Characteristics in Open Distance Learning

There are various characteristics of students and you have to ask yourself what they need and what you have to know about their needs to enable you to provide them with the support they need during their learning journey. This should be considered as the most fundamental element when a student support system is developed. Tait (2000: 290) also feels very strong that it is important to incorporate elements of client- or customer-centredness in the approaches to learners. According to him gender, age, employment, unemployment, educational background, geographical situation, special needs (i.e. disability), language, cultural individualities, ICT connectedness are important factors.

3.3.1.1 Adult learners

Malcolm Shepherd Knowles was an educator in America and well known for his work on andragogy (Kember, 2007: 84). Andragogy is the same as adult education. Knowles described andragogy as the art and science of adult learning; therefore it refers to any

form of adult learning. Knowles made five assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners:

- *Self-concept*. As people grow up and mature, they are seen as responsible persons and capable of self-direction.
- *Adult learner experience*. The knowledge and prior skills of a grown up person is a rich and significant learning reserve.
- *Readiness to learn*. As an adult he/she decides what they want to study and when they want to study it.
- *Orientation to learning*. Learning is seen as an important requirement to perform tasks or problem solving in everyday life.
- *Motivation*. As an individual develops, the motivation to learn becomes internal (Kember, 2007: 85).

It is imperative to realise that the previous experiences of learning by adults may have a negative or a positive impact. Previous learning journeys of adults might have manifested from minimal success, exclusion and frustration and therefore when they start with a new environment of studying, it might be an intimidating experience. The following aspects can impact on adult learners in how they approach their studies: past and previous learning, access to other learners, access to resources at the workplace or/and at home, prior training, sense of failure, motivation, fear, preconception/prejudice and time (CoL, 1999: 2). These aspects can influence the success or dropout of a learner. If past experiences were not good experiences for a learner, it can cause fear of failure and the learner might have no motivation to let real learning taking place through his/her learning journey.

3.3.1.2 Demographic aspects of the learner

Demography generally talks about a way to search the nature and effects of demographic differences in the biological and social context. The quality of performances by students in higher education systems remains a very high concern for educators. Variables contributing effectively for the quality of performances by students have been explored for a long term by educators. These variables can be outside or inside the university. These factors may be labelled as student factors, family factors, university factors and peer factors (Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq & Berhanu, 2011, 2). The forces of demography on higher education systems have been enormous. The intense development of the student population, increased mixture in the student

population, difference by age, ability and skills and interest have all changed the academic setting. It is important for higher education institutions to take demographic factors into account when planning for learner support;

The role of these demographic factors is rooted back in the 17th century and general factors such as age, gender, geographical, belongingness, ethnicity, marital status, socioeconomic status (SES) parents, educational level, parental profession, language, income and religion were included. Socioeconomic status is the most researched and debated factor because the most prevalent argument is that the socioeconomic status of learners affects the quality of their academic performance. The basic needs of the student stays unfulfilled and then they don't have a high performance, hence the negative effect on their academic performance. Low socioeconomic position causes a low self-esteem in students. (Adams in Farooq, *et al.*, 2011: 2).

3.3.1.3 Motivation for learners

Motivation has been considered for a while now as an important and critical contributor to educational success. Set goals by a learner often concentrate on the acquisition of knowledge and when these goals have been achieved with success it serves as an element of motivation. It is more probable for students to participate in learning when they feel motivated. Motivation comes from within the learner (Fendel, [s.a]: np). The following can be regarded as possible motivational factors.

- Why are they learning? They should see the value in what they are learning.
- The programme relates to their everyday lives and work environment.
- They want specific outcomes from the programme. They believe that getting involved in specific actions will bring about a desired outcome.
- It is important that they perceive the learning environment as supportive.
- Students should believe that they can be successful. Success also serves as a motivational factor, because a successful student is also a motivated one (Cvitkovic & Sakamoto 2008: 2).

Gibbs (in Fendel, [s.a]: np) identified two crucial forms of motivation, (1) *Intrinsic motivation*, that deals with the desire of the learner to learn for self-development and own personal growth, and (2) *extrinsic motivation* concerns the desire to learn for

external reasons , for example, passing the examinations. Both of these motivations should be regarded as important.

3.3.1.4 Learning factors and learning styles

Students have different learning styles and they have different strengths and preferences in the ways they absorb and process information. Some students will learn best by watching and listening, some by reading and some by doing or by a hands-on environment; thus is it important to take learning styles into consideration when developing distant education courses, plan teaching and learning strategies and support systems.

It is further important that lecturers and tutors in open distance learning know about the differences in learning and know how to address the different learning styles. This will enable them to modify the learning material and teaching techniques and strategies in ODL. This will also assist them to ensure that their way of dealing with learners in their educational journey.

Kolb (quoted by Zapalska & Brozik, 2006: 327) defines learning styles as the manner by which the individual take in new information and also how they prepare the information or new skills. Dunn et al., (in Zapalska & Brozik, 2006: 327) define learning styles as a way in which the individual takes in new information and develops new skills. There are different models that can be used to assess the learning styles of learners. And the most popular one that is often used is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Zapalska & Brozik, (2006: 327) also refer to the VARK questionnaire that can be used to determine learning styles of online learners. This instrument is used because it is not possible to observe learners or to do in-depth personal interviews.

Further questions that can be asked in developing a student support system are: what are the learner's belief and commitment towards learning? What learning abilities does the learner have? What open distance learning experience does the learner have?

3.3.1.5 Background of the subject

- How do they feel about the subject of the programme?
- What knowledge and skills do they already have in that subject?
- What misconceptions or inappropriate habits do they have?
- What personal interests and experience might they have that are relevant?

3.3.1.6 Availability of resources

The availability of resources for a learner from the institution is crucial to the support of the learner during his learning journey. Factors that will influence the learner's performance with regard to resources are amongst others;

- *Where, when, and how will they be learning?* Learners should be prepared on the fact that they will not have face-to-face classes like in a traditional residential university. Resources available to support these uncertainties should be covered clearly in all brochures of the university to assist the learners to make informed decisions.
- *Who will be paying their fees or expenses?* Financial implications for many learners are a huge challenge. If the learner does not have some form of finance generation in place, this can cause enormous stress for the learner on his part of learning. The amount the studies will accumulate should be explained to learners beforehand and avenues to obtain financial support by the university or external finance providers should be communicated to learners in detail. The opposite is also true and learners should also be informed what will help if they cannot afford to pay for their studies.
- *How much time will they have available for study?* It is important that the learners be informed on how much time they should approximately spend on their studies.
- *What access will they have to facilities such as study centres?* Will study space be available, will technology be available, and what other immediate resources, (i.e. lecturers, tutors, etc.) are there to assist them with their studies? This already gives a sense of the learners' needs of not being left alone and without tools to embark on this learning journey. Even though this is distance education, these facilities will be necessary for the learners to feel secure in their learning environment.
- *What access will they have to the equipment and media required for the course?* The tools available, for example, computer labs, CD-ROMs, Internet availability, etc. should be made available as well as the training on how to use these tools.
- *What access will they have to human support from tutors, mentors, colleagues?* The importance of communication with and the availability of lecturers, tutors, etc. are very important in learner support for distance education.
- *Other learners?* This involves the interaction with other learners to form the sense of community during their learning journey and also important to learn from each other.

Higher education institutions have to adopt new approaches to teaching and learning because of the increase in numbers in, and the increasing diversity in the learner population, rising costs in books and the inability of libraries to cope with these large numbers. To address these challenges it is appropriate to subsequently briefly discuss resource-based learning (RBL), Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

White Paper 3: A programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997) also elaborate on resource-based learning (RBL). It states that distance education and resource-based learning, based on the principles of open learning have an important role to play in meeting the task to increase access, diversify the body of learners and improve quality, in an environment where there are limited resources.

The NCHE (1996) defines resource-based learning as:

“the increasing use of a variety of media technologies to meet the different needs of students in a rapidly changing higher education situation, with diminishing dependence on face-to-face communication and a growing reliance on well-organised interactive study material, the implementation of computer-based and audiovisual instruments and programmes, and diversification in the manner and location of educational guidance and support offered to learners by lecturers (De Beer & Bezuidenhout, 2006:71).”

The notion of RBL is specifically convenient for students who are already employed or who need to earn a living to enable them to pay for their study costs.

Resource-based learning offers learners the capability to depend less on face-to-face teaching and more on available materials, which is the case in other forms of learning systems (Rowntree, 1997: 1). Different forms of materials are responsible for knowledge communication and not the face-to-face way of transforming knowledge. RBL requires that learners engage vigorously with numerous resources with a well-developed educational resolution.

Gibbs, Pollard & Farrell (quoted by Armatas, Holt & Rice, 2003: 144), on the other hand, highlight the fact that this type of learning environment does not exclude group interactions in the classroom and/or mediated through some computer-based communication. These electronic online resources can also stimulate and develop information and IT literacy skills. This would be the ideal situation to develop learners in these skills. In the region of KwaZulu-Natal, we have vast rural areas and learners

don't have readily available access to these type of resources on a daily basis, and it will take time to develop these types of resources in the region.

The question then: Are Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) related to resource-based learning?

The movement of Open Educational Resources was introduced by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation during 2001. OER is defined as any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and re-share them. OERs can include textbooks to curricula, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video and animation (UNESCO, [s.a]).

With the development and the growth of the world wide website, various stakeholders started to create and share their resources on various websites. These resources are posted on various websites such as YouTube, Wikibooks, Bookboon, open directories and lately Open Educational Resources.

There are numerous working definitions of OERs and the two most cited definitions are the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation which defines OER “as teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under the intellectual property licence that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. OERs include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and many other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge.

On the other hand, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines OER as “digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students, and self-learners to use and re-use for teaching, learning, and research. OER includes learning content, software tools to develop, use, and distribute content, and implementation resources such as open licences” (Unisa, 2014: 3). It is thus clear that the development of OER is still very new development.

There are various benefits for governments, institutions and educators, but there are also barriers in OER studies.

Governments can serve citizens through:

- Widening participation in higher education by expanding access to learning and reaching non-traditional learners;
- Promoting lifelong learning; and
- Bridging the gap between formal, informal and non-formal learning.

Institutions may benefit in a number of ways:

- Sharing knowledge is congruent with the academic tradition;
- Taxpayer's money is leveraged through the free sharing of resources;
- The cost of content development can be reduced and quality may be improved;
- The public image of the institution may be enhanced and new students attracted; and
- With increasing competition, institutions need to identify new cost-recovery models.

Educators also stand to benefit:

Sharing is an academic value; personal gain through increased reputation; and gaining publicity or reaching the market more quickly may result in an economic advantage.

These potential benefits are not without barriers in OER studies which include the following:

- Technical, such as lack of broadband access;
- Economic, such as inadequate resources to invest in the necessary software and hardware;
- Social, such as a lack of the skills needed to use technology;
- Policy-oriented, such as the lack of academic recognition of the development of OER by teaching staff;
- Legal, such as time and expense associated with gaining permission to use third party owned copyright materials or its removal from material (Antoni, 2014: 6).

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) emerged in 2012. According to Christensen (quoted by Anderson, 2013: 1), the year of 2012 was the year of the MOOC. The author further stipulates that MOOCs are fast becoming the type of disruptive technology as cheaper, smaller, initially less fully featured and attracting a new set of consumers into an existing market.

The four words included in the MOOC acronym is defined by Anderson as:

- *Massive* – to try and define the size of a course to permit a description of “massive” can be a challenging task. The massiveness of a MOOC is determined by the number of students who register for a specific course and is continuously busy with the set activities in the course until the final examinations (Anderson, 2013: 1). For a course to be massive, it must not only be open to a significant number of students, but it also have to balance materials, projects, assessments and outcomes in a way that all the registered students receive the same course experience (Moe, 2014: 14).
- *Open* – like all forms of distance education, the main driver of MOOCs is to increase access to learners. Secondly the openness also refers to academic freedom and free speech. Thirdly, open is used in the sense of learning content having no restrictions on revision, re-use, sale and enhancement as the term is used in open source software and open educational resources (Anderson, 2013: 2). Open refers to the opportunity for students to enroll in the course at no monetary cost (Moe, 2014: 15).
- *Online* - online education and online educational resources have expanded to encompass all forms of media - from text, to video, from sound recordings to immersive worlds; thus the term in the acronym does not define or preclude any type of mediated interaction (Anderson, 2013: 2). Online deals with the mode and method of course access and activity. MOOCs encourage learners to form online study groups (Moe, 2014: 15).
- *Course* - is a “coherent academic engagement with a defined set of learning outcomes” (Anderson, 2013: 3). Course denotes the registration and association with an affiliated instructional group, as well as the existence of the course in space and time (Moe, 2014: 15). MOOCs are a very new phenomenon and a lot more development is expected in the years to come. How effective OERs and MOOCs in the success of learners are needs to be more researched with the crucial question: Is learning taking place?

3.3.1.7 Possible problems learners might experience

As already mentioned previously, distance education is regarded as an excellent mode of educational delivery and the one big advantage is that the learner can be reached through other means as face-to-face teaching. Because of problems such as family pressures, work pressures, financial pressures, lack of access to the relevant books and libraries, inefficient study space, isolation, transport problems to get to tutorials, lack of

confidence, not enough study time, low levels of reading ability, distance learners need a lot of flexibility. The distance education structure provides the maximum probable control over the shortcomings and challenges a learner might experience, but it is not without challenges. Attri, (2012: 43) elaborate on challenges in distance education such as nature of the study material, absence of multi-media instruction, uncertainties about learning, nonexistent or very limited feedback or contact with the lecturer, poor support services, lack of social interaction with other students in the same field of study, lack of student training, absence of the lecturer, low status of distance education institutes, misunderstanding of the role of distance education departments and poor support by the faculty. He further mentions the fact that the student is not exposed to face-to-face contact with lecturers and other students, in theory make startup cost expensive and further the lack of support from the faculty can all be seen as hurdles to successful distance learning.

3.3.1.8 Needs of distance learners

When student support systems are developed, it is of vital importance that the needs of the learners should be determined. In other words, who are the learners? It is clear from the discussions thus far in this study that distance education is learner centred and very involved with meeting the needs of its adult learners.

Distance education will support and motivate students and it will stimulate learning effectively if offered in such a way that the learner's needs are suitably addressed. Sampson (2003: 105) emphasises that one of the challenges in many distance education environments, is the lack of effective communication between the learner and the lecturer. To enable a learner to associate with and check on his/her own learning, communication between the learner and other students is very important. Different authors, Kirkup and Jones (1996) and Chen (1997) agree with this statement (quoted in Sampson, 2004: 105). Dialogue between the learner and the lecturer also enables learners to form community of practice with peers and furthermore a sense of "belonging". This can be regarded as a counter measure for the separation and distance that learners in distance education experience. Sampson (2003: 106) further stresses that face-to-face meetings is undeniably important for the distance learners. Sometimes, it is more about the degree of interactivity that is important for the learner, because interaction with other learners does have an influence on the performance of the learner in situations of control regarding the location that learning takes place.

3.4 PRACTICES OF LEARNER SUPPORT

In the support cycle of institutions in distance education, there are basically two paths of support: administrative support and academic support. Simpson (2002: 7) suggests that learner support have two broad areas; (i) *Non-academic support* (administrative) and (ii) *academic (or tutorial) support*.

Administrative support primarily focuses on effective and efficient organisational matters to support students. Administrative support includes essential services to ensure that learners in distance education have adequate facilities and resources for learning. It includes student registration, fees payment, sending sms's to inform students (i.e. registration periods), sending e-mails (i.e. ask for additional registration information), sending materials by mail or courier, learning centres, call centres, counselling services and then eventually all activities to prepare for the graduation of the student. Sampson (2002: 8) also includes direct student support issues, such as advising, administering, advocating, and assessing academic activities.

Academic support includes the provision of intellectual and cognitive knowledge to students which they will need in the different courses they study. It is important that a conducive academic environment for learning be created to enhance the learning of the learner. This can include tutor support (face-to-face), support from peers, workshops, telephonic support / discussions, group discussions / discussion classes and technological support (i.e. computer laboratories, video conferencing).

Simpson (2007: 7) also emphasises that academic support also maintain the structure of the course material, concept explanation, academic feedback and developing and improvement of skills.

In the 2015 Strategic Plan of Unisa, Learner Support activities comprise of:

“tutoring and teaching, counselling and advising including such services as orientation, teaching and study skills assistance, academic advising, and career and personal counselling, and administrative activities such as admission and registration, library and information systems, and infrastructure support for activities such as peer tutoring and alumni organisation.”

Brindley, Walti & Zawacki-Richter (2008:11) maintain that learner support involves all of *“those activities and services in education intended to support and facilitate the learning process. This includes tutoring and teaching, counselling and advising and related services, and administrative activities in service to learners such as admission*

and registration.” The authors further include that learner support has become crucially important because of the separation between the learner and the educational institution.

Tait (2000: 289) lists the learner support activities as:

- Enquiry, admission and pre-study advisory services;
- Tutoring, guidance and counselling services;
- Assessment of prior learning and credit transfer;
- Study and examination centers;
- Residential schools and library services;
- Individualised correspondence teaching, including in some cases continuous assessment;
- Record keeping, information management, and other administrative systems;
- Differentiated services for students with special needs of one sort or another, e.g. disability, geographical remoteness, prisoners; and
- Materials which support the development of study skills, programme planning or career development.

With these different views on activities in learner in the background, learner support activities in place at Unisa will be discussed briefly.

3.4.1 Academic and Quantitative Literacies

Academic literacies include reading and writing skills. The staff in this section of the unit also assists students with the academic format for the writing up of assignments. Reading and the writing and production of text will always be the key structure of knowledge in the University. Writing is integral to the induction of the students into the academic environment and it is the most important way of developing their knowledge and skills during the journey of learning. It is important that students have a strong cognitive and writing ability to acquire the knowledge they need to progress in their studies. These support activities are still predominantly on a face-to-face basis. *Quantitative Literacies* deals with numeracy-based subjects, such as accounting, mathematics and statistics.

Online implementation for both academic and quantitative literacies is in the process of being developed.

3.4.2 Computer Labs and Telecentres

Technology is used as a resource to bridge the distance between the students and their lecturers, peers, study material and the institution. It is required of students to communicate with their fellow students, tutors and lecturers through the use of MyUnisa. Students can also use this medium to submit their assignments online. Not all students have access to personal computers to use this medium effectively, therefore Unisa established Computer Laboratories, as well as Telecentres as platforms throughout the country to assist students and to make computers available for them to access MyUnisa and other online activities.

Computer labs are established at each learning centre of Unisa. In the KZN region all the centres have Computer Laboratories to provide computer facilities to students. Students have to make appointments for time slots to use the computers in the Computer Lab.

Telecentres are developed and funded by governments as well as different community organisations with the intention to bring internet and online services closer to communities. These Telecentres are located in the different provinces in South Africa and have facilities such as computers connected to internet, printers, photocopiers, scanners, fax machines and telephones. The Telecentres have been established to bring online facilities closer to rural communities as well as remote students. To make sure that the Telecentres are managed and maintained effectively and efficiently, administrators have been employed to run these facilities. Workshops with these administrators and managers of Telecentres have been done via video conferencing by the Directorate for Instructional Support and Services (DISS) to keep in touch with the operations at these centres. The managers and administrators have been equipped with relevant information on Unisa as an ODL institution and to assist Unisa students. This pool of resources has been expanded with FET Colleges as well as NGOs (Unisa, 2014: [s.a.]).

3.4.3 MyUnisa

This is a very helpful ICT resource and study tool developed by Unisa. MyUnisa can be used by staff as well as students. It is the primary link with the university. Lecturers use this site to communicate with students on assignment feedback as well as guidance to students. Once students have created passwords to log on to myUnisa, they can get

access to different information sites, such as accessibility, student affairs, learner support, bursaries & loans, jobs and scholarships, prescribed books, assignments, examinations, graduations, e-Bookshop, forgotten student number, STC & students associations, Unisa radio and e-solutions. Below is an illustration of the site and all its functions to assist the students.

Figure 3.1 myUnisa Web Page



Source: <https://my.unisa.ac.za/portal>

From the site, students can *amongst others*, do the following on myUnisa:

- *Download study material, tutorial letters and study guides.* This service is very effective when students did not receive their printed study material or as with the problem with the South African Postal services on strike.
- *Submit and track assignments.* Students can use this to see where their assignments are in the process.
- *Receive assignment results.* The results of the assignment mark are on the system before the marked assignment with the feedback reaching the student. Sometimes

assignments don't reach the student after they were marked, but subsequently proof exists on the system that the assignment was received by Unisa and marked.

- *Join discussion forums.* These forums help to close the gap in the distance in distant learning. This refers to the social communication between students and other students as well as their lecturers and tutors.
- *Contact lecturers.* Lecturers can use myUnisa to regularly post additional material and communicate with students on issues in the study material or problems experienced in the assignments.
- *Read materials posted by lecturers.* Again this refers to communication between lecturer and students and also between lecturer and tutors.
- *Pay fees.* This is a very convenient way of paying fees to the university and also saves the student the effort to go to a bank or to physically go to the university. Some students stay in rural areas.
- *Update personal details.* Another convenient way to organise administrative functions at the university.
- *Register for additional modules.* Sometimes students don't have enough finances at hand when they originally register at the university. This option allows them then to add modules at a later stage to their registration portfolio.
- *Find e-resources.* More affordable 3G connection is made available by the university to students.
- *Check and change exam venue, etc.*

Unisa is changing and transforming to open distance learning, therefore this can be seen as a very effective tool developed to support students.

3.4.4 myLife – student email system

Unisa acknowledged the growing need for and dependence on electronic communication by its students. Therefore Unisa has developed this portal as a student email system. This is a free service for students registered at Unisa and they can keep this email address for life, even after they have completed their studies. Important information, notices and updates are sent exclusively to this account; therefore students are encouraged to regularly check their emails. myLife is used for an official instrument for communication between students and the college faculty and staff. This is also an additional tool students can use to communicate with the university and *vice versa*.

3.4.5 Discussion classes

These are face-to-face classes generally conducted by the lecturers in the different subjects. Lecturers schedule these classes where there is high risk factor in the subject and also to further give content support to students. These classes are done in the regions as well. Lecturers try to reach students in both semesters. Some of these subjects also don't have tutors appointed in the regions; therefore some face-to-face contact with the students is necessary. Not all subjects offer discussion classes. Discussion classes have already been limited by the management of the university to step up the process of online learning.

3.4.6 Face-to-face tutoring

Face-to-face tutoring is provided to students as an opportunity for group study and interaction with the tutor and other students in the tutorial class. This is a contact-based form of tutoring. Experienced tutors, focusing on the discussions, focus on problem areas identified by the students in the class and also facilitate key issues and themes in the content of the study material. Face-to face tutoring is currently only provided in the high risk modules, in other words those modules where the failure rate of students are very high. Face-to-face tutoring creates personal interaction with the tutor as well as with other students in the same subject. The Commonwealth of Learning (CoL, [s.a]: 2) gives the following different forms of tutoring:

- Individual or group tutoring
- Tutor or peer facilitated tutorials
- Short, but frequent sessions (i.e. during school holidays)

When students-tutors and students-students interact with one another on a face-to-face basis, learning takes place. Students should learn how to argue purposefully in a language of their discipline, have the opportunity to reflect and critically evaluate knowledge received from others. They also should learn how to think critically and with self-confidence together with other students and build on the knowledge they have received and present their ideas analytically and logically.

Tutorials emphasise collaborative learning, such as group work, amongst learners. This can be seen as social integration, especially at the first-year level. Simpson argues that HEIs should be proactive and engage learners in activities that will encourage and motivate them. These actions can contribute to reduce dropout and more towards

success. Tutoring can thus be used to make sure that learners are actively involved in learning and early warning signs can inform the institution where there is little or no activity from students (Unisa, 2012: 5).

3.4.7 E-tutoring

E-tutoring, also referred to as online tutoring, is a form of media-based tutoring which means that the internet is used as a media to support students. Berge, based on a thorough literature review (in McPherson and Nunes, 2004: 2), developed four main e-tutor roles:

- *Pedagogical or intellectual roles.* These roles are seen as the most important roles for the e-learning process. It is important that the tutor uses probing questions that will put the focus on discussions of critical concepts, principles and skills. The tutor should then open discussions and focus on the applicable content. Furthermore focus should be placed on intervening in discussions and guiding and maintaining the involvement of students in discussions.
- *Social roles.* These roles create friendly and comfortable social environments and give the student the feeling that it is possible to learn in this environment. Social roles have a very important function, because the tutor should open discussions and make it possible for students to introduce themselves in these online discussion forums consider cultural and ethnic backgrounds by minimizing disruptive and offensive behaviour and should this occur, the tutor should remind participants about the etiquette on the net.
- *Managerial and organisational roles.* This involves setting the learning objectives, establishing learning agendas for learning activities, timetable activities and tasks, establishing the ground rules, etc. This can also include encouraging participants to be responding and clear and follow the flow of the conversation.
- *Technical roles.* Students need to get familiar, comfortable and competent with the ICT systems and software of the e-learning environment. Therefore the tutor will have to support the students and provide technical guidance to the participants to get competent and comfortable with this environment of learning.

E-tutors should have a range of skills in technology and communication. Some of the more important skills an online tutor should have are;

- Subject matter expertise and traditional academic training;

- Planning and organising delivery by clearly specifying learning objectives and outcomes;
- Set learning programs and providing leadership and support in learning activities;
- Embrace a variety of learning outcomes;
- Adapt supporting styles to the needs of individual learners;
- Form an integral part of providing advice on different levels of access to learning;
- Create an atmosphere of collaborative learning;
- Be competent to deal with and to resolve possible online conferencing conflicts and difficult behaviours;
- Encourage active construction of knowledge and be actively involved in discussions;
- Develop and implement methods for feedback to learners and support; and
- Offer advice and support through appropriate paces to avoid overload of information and anxiety (McPherson & Nunes, 2004:4).

Unisa is changing to a fully-fledged ODL university. Most of the face-to-face tutors are now e-tutors who will communicate with students exclusively via the internet. The e-tutors are there to give advice, explain difficult concepts and to enrich the Unisa experience.

3.4.8 Financial support

Students can apply for a loan or a bursary at the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). This scheme is funded by the South African National Department of Education and Training and it provides study loans to students who are academically able, but are financially needy students. NSFAS offices were established all over South Africa at higher education institutions. It is compulsory for students to study through one of the public higher education institutions in South Africa. When a student applies for a loan through NSFAS the loan has to be paid back with interest. A part of this loan can be converted to a bursary based on the academic performance of the student.

In line with the funding policy of Unisa, postgraduate students can also apply for funding. This funding is provided on academic merit. Different forms of NSFAS bursaries are also available. These bursaries are awarded to students on certain criteria and students have to apply for these bursaries. These bursaries don't have to be paid back. If a student does not adhere to the conditions of the bursary, the bursary is reverted into a loan with interest and must be paid back by the student.

3.4.9 Library

The library is one of the crucial resources for students at Unisa. It is important for students to know how it works and how to use it, because it is fundamental to the successful Unisa student experience. The library at Unisa is the largest in Africa and has more than 2.7 million printed items, including books, reference resources, e-books, e-newspapers and e-journals. Collections include journal collections, audiovisual collections and archives and special collections.

Free training sessions are provided to students and staff. The training covers library procedures, how to search for material using catalogues, etc. A DVD is also included in the *myStudies@unisa* package. The library can be accessed both physically and electronically via the Unisa website or on myUnisa.

3.4.10 Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the principle and process through which previous knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purpose of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development (SAQA, 2013: 5). RPL is a procedure through assessment and gives credit to prior learning that has already been learned in various ways, for example, life experience.

Unisa has an RPL policy and procedure in place and a dedicated RPL coordinator in each of the colleges. All the academics are involved with RPL and they are trained in this field. The RPL processes at Unisa are based on adult learning and the RPL policy places the student at the centre which makes it a student-centred process. These processes can be done by undergraduate students, as well as masters and doctoral students.

As already mentioned, adult learners come into the system with already developed skill and knowledge. Therefore, the system for recognition of prior learning has been developed to assist students to prove their previous skills and knowledge in a specific subject. Students are required to compile a portfolio that should include a variety of evidence as proof of prior learning skills and knowledge. These portfolios are then assessed by lecturers in the relevant subject.

3.4.11 Admissions and registration

This department advises and registers students, and is involved in registration control and follow up actions, administers special university admissions on behalf of students, provides an administrative service to students, engages with qualification control and the issue of certificates, advises academic decision makers in terms of rules and regulations, provides regional registrations, concerned also with quality assurance, in addition compilation of undergraduate and postgraduate lists of prescribed books, and compilation and provision of calendars.

It is very important that admission policies are as flexible as possible and within the legislative considerations of the institution. Students who are admitted to the institution must have a fair chance of success if they work persistently. During this process of admission, students who might be at risk should be identified and a preparation programme should be in place to give them the opportunity to demonstrate their ability. These students should receive academic and career counselling. This preparation programme should prepare students to the nature and demands of distance education and improve their language skills, quantitative literacy and academic literacy and the self-management and study skills (Unisa, n.d.: 9)

3.4.12 Counselling services

This unit provides career, academic and personal counselling to both prospective and registered students. This is done in person, by telephone or e-mail and through various other publications and brochures.

- *Academic counselling* helps students to focus on time management, motivation and study skills. It also helps them to schedule their time and teaches them to effective note-taking.
- *Career counselling* guides students and helps them to simplify their career vision and how to link this vision to a qualification which will lead to a viable career option.
- *Personal counselling* helps a student to develop an understanding of “yourself”. If students experience personal difficulties, then the counsellors will help them with these difficulties and how to resolve conflicts that may arise. All discussions are confidentially maintained and upheld.

3.4.13 Work-integrated Learning

Unisa recognise the value of practical experience in the academic learning process. Certain modules have a practical component built into the curriculum. This gives students the opportunity to work in their chosen fields, on site and in a real work environment.

The *Higher Education Qualifications Framework*, Department of Education Government Notice No 928, gazetted (NO. 33053) 5 October 2007 as policy in terms of the Higher Education Act states on page 9 that some qualifications will be designed to incorporate periods of required work that integrate with classroom study. It further stipulates that where Work-integrated Learning (WiL) / Experiential Learning (EL) is a structured fragment of a qualification the volume of learning allocated in WiL should be applicable to the purpose of the qualification and to the cognitive demands of the learning outcome and assessment criteria enclosed in the appropriate level descriptors. It also clearly states that it is the obligation of institutions, which offer programmes requiring WiL credits to place students into WiL programmes (Unisa 2012). The White paper for Post-School education and Training stipulates that South Africa as a nation is facing serious skills challenges. Therefore it is important that education is linked to the workplace and the WiL programme is ideal to achieve this goal. To find sufficient institutions or private businesses is still a huge barrier to the placement of students.

3.4.14 Students with disabilities

These students should be assisted by the university with their study and career ambitions. These services are facilitated by the Advocacy and Resource Center for Students with Disabilities (ARCSWiD) who are committed to providing solutions specifically tailored to each student with special needs. They assist as follows:

- Providing study material in alternative formats, including Braille, large print, electronic, audio and DAISY;
- Requesting electronic copies of prescribed books from publishers on behalf of students;
- Providing academic administration support interventions after registration;
- Transcribing assignments and examination scripts;
- Providing Sign Language Interpretation Services for students attending tutorials or discussion classes;
- Providing basic training in orientation and mobility to blind and partially-sighted students;

- Implementing institution-wide advocacy and awareness-raising programmes on the needs of students with disabilities; and
- Implementing train-the-trainer programmes in the regions.

3.5 LEARNER SUPPORT AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

It is impossible to separate the curriculum from the ways in which learners are supported in their learning journey. Learning materials are an essential component of an open distance learning system. When materials are inclusive and well-designed, it stimulates self-directed learning and has an impact on the quality of ODL. The design, development and the production of the learning materials are thus crucial in the cognitive function of learner support.

In an ODL environment the learning materials take the place of the lecturer. Therefore, the development of the materials has to be carefully designed. The design of the materials is a systematic process to translate the needs and goals of the learners into successful learning (Lentell, 2007: 68). The author further claims that the development of study materials and the delivery of courses in an ODL environment has always been driven by the needs of the learners. It is learner support that customizes ODL and be familiar with the particular needs of learners as individuals. It is further the responsibility of the ODL tutor to facilitate the learning process of each of their learners. Teaching in ODL is therefore delivered by the study materials and by the tutor (Lentell, 2007: 69).

Moore (in Tait & Mills, 2003: 108) makes it very clear that curriculum development should not be a pre-determined curriculum for the student, but should be designed and developed around the real needs of the student. The author argues further that adult learners who work at real needs are highly motivated, don't drop out and seldom fail.

It is important that the materials in ODL support the development of study skills, time management, career development and computer skills.

3.6 LEARNER SUPPORT *versus* SERVICE DELIVERY

Jacklin & Le Riche (2009: 736) explain the concepts of learner support. The author reason that the learner who is "in need of support" and may require assistance with descriptors such as learner support, financial support, etc. It seems as if there are many ways in which the notion support is understood. Another view of understanding

“learner support” has concentrated more on services and functions (Sewart, 1993: 6). Here the author has an industrial approach to learner support as a “service industry”. Tait (2000: 289) argued that support needs to be understood in terms of a range of services and functions. The author also argues that another dimension of change of ICT in the ODL environment and was termed the marketization of education and where the student in the ODL environment was referred to as a “customer”. This derived from the fact that institutions were pressured to down their costs and find ways to out-compete each other and wide-spread changes in consumer culture lead to a requirement for services (Tait, 2000: 288).

Learner support *renders support as a service* to bring together curriculum, assessment and learner support decision made in an incorporated way. Service delivery can be described as the interaction between providers and customers, where the *provider offers a service*, whether it is information or a task, *and the client gains value or loses value* in the process.

Efficient service deliver has become important in South Africa and the Batho Pele – “People First” has been introduced to improve the quality and accessibility of government services by improving efficiency and accountability to the recipients of public goods and service. The purpose of it is to provide a policy framework and practical implementation strategy for the transformation of service delivery in the public service in South Africa. The higher education sector forms part of the public service environment and therefor the services in higher education institutions are also infused by the Batho Pele – “People First” principles (Naidoo, 2009: 93).

Learner support as a service in higher education should then also adhere to these principles and should be of a high standard to enhance learning and skills development of the learners

3.7 PERSPECTIVES WITHIN THE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

During the 52nd Elective conference of the ANC in December 2007, the agenda for South Africa as a developmental state became evident. During this conference the issue on building human capacity in the South African public service was raised. According to the *National General Council Discussion Document: Transformation of State and Governance* of the ANC in 2010, some of the main characteristics to the South African development state were, people-centred and people driven change, sustainable

development driven based on high growth rates, reform OF the economy and socio-economic inclusion, proper training, orientation and leadership of the public service and acquiring and retaining skilled staff (Mahada, 2011: 3).

There is a synergy between Public Administration theory and the discipline within the context of a developmental state as was alluded TO in the preceding chapter. Public Administration education can play an important role in building human capacity, skills and knowledge in the South Africa system of government (Van Jaarsveldt, 2009: 257). To explain ODL and its contribution to skills development in a developmental state it is important to look at various explanations of a developmental state:

Cai (2010: 2) explains the developmental state as “strong in ambition to develop”. Economic growth is the major priority of the national interest. The developmental state has a solid and resilient central government. According to Gumede (2009: 5) developmental states have ‘active development strategies, in particular industrial policies.’ The author further argues that a skilled and educated labour force is needed, and this includes training in the civil service and in technology at tertiary levels. Education is the core of economic development and with specific reference to the enormous need of education and shortage of skills in South Africa and the limited resources, open distance learning can play an effective role in this environment.

In a developmental state, the available resources in the country are used to improve economic development and meet the needs of the people. It is of vital importance that growth in the economy and social development take place through state involvement to eliminate poverty and to expand economic opportunities. Government, labour and business as well as other community organisations should work together to reach the overall goals of economic development. Levin (quoted in Mahada, 2011: 3) concedes that in a developmental state, the government makes a determined effort for economic growth, ensuring the effective and efficient utilisation of national resources towards developmental goals. To achieve these developmental goals in South Africa the country needs a well-educated and skilled society. This can be provided by the higher education sector. However, it is important that the government also supports the higher education sector to enable it to provide for the much needed knowledge and skills to achieve the set developmental goals.

Nagy & Robb (in Barac & Marx, 2012: 352) elucidate that higher education institutions in South Africa have to play an important role to ensure advancement, development and

application of knowledge. Society is increasingly demanding state assistance while, funding available from government for tertiary education is decreasing and the greater complications in higher education demands flexible teaching and learning.

Hall, Symes & Luescher (in Barac & Marx, 2012: 352) elaborate further that these intricacies lead to governments in recent years seeking to align accountability and control over higher education by delegating to HEIs increased authority over their inputs and resource use, while demanding institutional accountability for outputs and performance. This has resulted in the change in universities to become more and more public corporations that are subject to centralised laws and regulations from government and in the public administration domain. These laws and regulations govern budgets, facilities and personnel in the HEIs. Furthermore, it also places the responsibility on higher education to deliver a proper service in educational needs and demands of society. The National Development Plan also states that higher education is the main driver of generating knowledge and skills towards economic development.

According to Schoonraad & Radebe (in Subban & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2014: 501), Thabo Mbeki, the former President of South Africa was also concerned about the available capacity of skills in the country to achieve the development goals. The author highlighted the need for skilled labour in the country that will support the government to realise the development agenda of South Africa. According to Southall (quoted by Mammadalizade, 2012: 54) the President emphasised that all domains of government must have professional and skilled human resources to assist the state to achieve the developmental responsibilities of the country. Following on this brief explanation of where higher education and HEIs fit into the context of a developmental state it is important to look deeper into the functions of skills development to support a strong developmental state.

3.8 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN SUPPORT OF A DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

The Skills Development Act (SDA) and the Skills Development Levies Act were passed in 1998 and 1999 respectively. According to these two Acts, the Minister of Labour had to prepare a National Skills Development Strategy under advice of the National Skills Authority (NSA), which was established in 1999. In 2000 the *Sector Education and Training Authorities* (SETAS) came into existence. This made provision for the 1% payroll levy which intended to fund the new skills development implementation

framework. This was done to provide grants and to encourage employers to invest in training as well as the development of their staff.

The National Skills Development Strategy I (NSDS I) 2001-2005: The accent was placed on equality and the need for lifelong learning in the workplace environment. The demand was needs-driven based according to the needs of employees in the public sector as well as the private sector.

The National Skills Development Strategy II (NSDS II) 2005-2010: This strategy addressed equity, quality training and skills development in the workplace. The need for employability was identified as well as the need for assisting designated groups to gain knowledge and skills in the workplace in order to gain critical skills. The quality of provision was identified and to address this challenge improvement was needed.

National Skills Development Strategy III (NSDS III): This is the strategy currently in place and shifted to institutional learning through occupationally directed programmes. It promotes the FET Colleges (now TVET) in order to address the national skills needs. It is expected that the Department of Higher Education and the SETAS will enter into tight service level agreements to support workplace learning and in the process develop urgently needed skills. The public sector improved service delivery is a very important focus here.

Subban & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2014: 1) mention that as a developmental state, South Africa suffers from a lack of management capacity in the public sector. To build a cohort of qualified and skilled public servants, a national imperative, addressing talent management, was created. The importance of having qualified and skilled public servants cannot be emphasised enough as that will support efficient service delivery in the public administration environment of which higher education forms an integral part.

The role of higher education and subsequently, higher education institutions will seriously be involved in creating the skills needed. Therefore the curriculums and programmes in higher education have to be developed in such a way that it supports the skills development drive for development in the country as a developmental state. This is a daunting task taking into account the unequal past in education in the country. This is where effective and efficient learner support in open distance learning in South Africa will play an important role to develop knowledge and skills in the society.

3.9 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN LEARNER SUPPORT

Quality assurance in learner support is of vital importance to ensure that the impact of learner support has the desired effect to assist learners to enhance their learning and in the development of their skills in the duration of their studies. Simpson (2002: 192) shares his opinion and mentions that there is no point in providing learner support services of poor quality. It is important that the quality in learner support is of high quality and effectively supportive to be valued by students.

Andrea Hope (in Perraton & Lentell, 2004: 168) is of the opinion that *“the structures that protect quality within frontiers do not necessarily work beyond them. Approaches to the maintenance and monitoring of quality that are appropriate for conventional institution and teaching face-to-face will always need some adaptation if they are to be appropriate for a new style of teaching and learning.”* The products and services organisations offer are the characteristics of quality (Du Plessis, 2011: 266). To determine whether learner support initiatives are supporting students in enhancing their learning during their learning journey at the institution, it is important that these initiatives are evaluated regularly by using comments and ideas from students and tutors to improve them to the learning advantages of the students.

3.10 CONCLUSION

Chapter Three primarily dealt with learner support in open distance learning to enhance learning and the development of skills. The importance of different learner support innovations and the diversity of technologies used as well as other developing global resources, for example MOOCs and OERs, in higher education and the prominent role education should play in the developmental state context are brought under focus. In higher education, support provided to students including access to teaching and learning contributes to the developmental state initiatives. This inevitably empowers society in a developmental state to support itself to reach the ultimate development goals as set out by government in its strategic growth path. Chapter Four will discuss the research methodology and analysis used in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Research is using different methods and procedures to obtain relevant data and knowledge which relates to the problem you want to investigate. This chapter will document the research design and methodology that were used to conduct this study. It will include a theoretical discussion of the methods that was used to collect, present and analyse the data. Methods to obtain the data, such as, interviews, questionnaires, sampling and observation will be discussed. The study is conducted in a mixed methods mode of the research paradigm. A qualitative as well as a quantitative approach will be used. It is important to explain the difference between research design and research methodology, because it is two very different dimensions of research.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN vs RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Babbie & Mouton (2006: 75) describe research design as a plan or blueprint which explains how you will conduct your research, while research methodology deals with the process and the tools that will be used to conduct the research and to obtain the data.

Rubin & Babbie (in De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2011: 143) identify two connotations to research design. One refers to alternative logical arrangements from which one or more can be selected. Examples are experimental research designs and correlation research designs. The second term covers the act of designing the study in its broadest sense. This refers to the decisions a researcher makes to plan the study and decisions on what design should be used in the study.

Mouton (2001, 56) used a table to summarise the differences between research design and research methodology.

RESEARCH DESIGN	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Focuses on the end product. What kind of study is to be planned and what is the result aimed at.	Focuses on the research process and the kind of tools and procedures that will be used.
Point of departure = research problem or question.	Point of departure = specific tasks (data collection or sampling) at hand.
Focuses on the logic of the research: What kind of evidence is required to address the research question adequately?	Focuses on the individual (not linear) steps in the research process and the most “objective” (unbiased) procedures to be employed.

Source: **Mouton, (2001: 26)**

Hofstee (2006: 108) also points out that there is a lot of confusion between “research design” and “method”. The author argues that the word “method” is generally used to refer to: a way of considering the thesis statement, or the general technique/s that one uses to examine your thesis statement, for example, interviews, a case study, content analysis or an experiment, etc. It thus refers to the methods and tools one will use to obtain the relevant data that will support the thesis statement and the research questions under investigation.

The author further explains that “research design” can also have two meanings: the way one chooses to design a study, for example, how one went about coming to a conclusion about ones thesis or the general technique/s themselves. Here one can again refer to interviews, content analysis or an experiment, etc. The research techniques don’t focus on any specific problem, but it can also be applied to many different problems.

Research designs are tailored to address different kind of questions. Mouton (2001: 57) argues that when researchers classify different kinds of studies, different types of design, they do so according to the kind of questions they are able to answer. The different types of studies are empirical studies (i.e. surveys, content analysis, etc.) and non-empirical studies (i.e. conceptual analysis, and literature reviews).

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design emphasises the type of study that will be undertaken in order to provide acceptable answers to the research questions (Mouton, 2001: 49). Research design determines the planning of a scientific inquiry – designing a strategy for finding

out something (Babbie & Mouton, 2006: 72). The research design is the plan to be used to get the relevant data: the what, how and where? According to Yin (in De Beer, 1999: 24), a research design is an action plan where an initial set of questions have to be answered by a set of conclusions (answers) about these questions. To get the end result, a number of key steps may be found which includes the collection and analysis of data. The research design designates the nature that the research project will follow to successfully address the research problem further.

Yin (in De Beer: 1999: 24) points out further that:

A research design is an action plan for getting from here to there, where “here” may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and “there” is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions. Between “here” and “there” may be found a number of major steps, including and analysis of relevant data. Yin also describes a “blueprint” for research dealing with at least four key problems, which include: what questions to study, what data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyse the results. Denzin and Lincoln (as quoted by De Vos., *et al.* 2011: 200) suggest four questions when the design is structured as follows:

- How will the design connect to the paradigm being used?
- Who or what will be studied?
- What strategies of enquiry will be used?
- What methods or research tools will be used for collecting and analysing empirical materials?

The preceding discussion was useful to set out the research problem and design for the study.

A qualitative approach as well as a quantitative approach will be used, which will contribute to the mixed methods research design that will be used to conduct the study. The rationale for using a mixed method design is that data has been obtained through conducting surveys (quantitative) as well as conducting in depth interviews (qualitative).

Survey research provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Cresswell, 2014: 13). Questionnaires was used to determine biographical data as well as profile information about the students in tutorial services, to determine the knowledge of students of the ODL environment and their readiness on the exposure to this environment, and to

determine the quality of the learner support initiatives and if these initiatives contribute to the throughput rate of students. Furthermore, the population consists of large numbers of participants.

Interviews were done with permanent staff, tutors and student workers to complement the survey done with students in the tutorial programme, which made up the qualitative part of the design.

4.3.1 Qualitative research approach

It is important to probe a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Data was collected and examined from various dimensions to build a meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation (Leedy, 2010: 135). The author highlighted two common things in all qualitative approaches. *Firstly*, they focus on phenomena that occur in natural settings, which mean it is in the “real world”. *Secondly*, involving the study of the phenomena. This emphasises that qualitative researchers are aware of the fact that the issue they are studying has many different dimensions and layers, and interpret the issues in its complex forms is important. This implies that there is not necessarily one single, definitive truth to be discovered, but there might be numerous interpretations held by different individuals, where each of these interpretations having the same validity or truth.

Creswell (2014: 185) explains this further, and also argues that there is some common agreement about the core characteristics that describe qualitative research and summarises it as follows:

- *Natural setting.* The data is collected in the field and in the site where the participants experience the issue or problem that is under investigation. Participants are not brought into a lab, nor do they send out instruments for participants to complete. In a natural setting, the participants and the researcher have numerous face-to-face interactions over a period of time.
- *Researcher as the key instrument.* Data is collected by the qualitative researcher through the examination of documents, observing behaviour or interviewing participants. Protocol must be used, an instrument for collecting data, but the researchers are the ones who actually collect the relevant information. The questionnaires or instruments are usually not developed by other researchers.

- *Multiple sources of data.* Different and numerous forms of data, such as interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual information are typically gathered by qualitative researchers and they don't rely on a single data source. All the data is reviewed to make sense of it. The data should be organised into categories or themes that cut across all of the data sources.
- *Inductive and deductive data analysis.* Patterns, categories, and themes are built from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. The inductive process illustrates the working back and forth between the identified themes until a comprehensive set of themes has been established. After the inductive process, the deductive process starts where the researchers look back at all the data from the themes to determine if more evidence can support the themes or if additional information should be gathered. As the analysis moves forward, the deductive process plays an important role, even though the process starts inductively. Leedy (2010: 152) states that the researcher starts with a bulky collection of information and must, through inductive reasoning sort and categorise it and gradually boil down and reduce it to a small set of abstract, underlying themes.
- *Participants' meanings.* During the qualitative research process, the researcher focuses on learning and understanding the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue under investigation. It is not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or that other authors express in the relevant literature.
- *Emergent design.* The qualitative research process has developing nature, therefore the initial plan for the research cannot be firmly prescribed and sometimes some of the phases may shift, or all the phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data. For example, questions may change and the forms of data collection may shift. The individuals studied and the sites visited may also be modified. The main idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from the participants and to address the research to gather and obtain that information.
- *Reflexivity.* The inquirer in the qualitative process reflects about their role in the study. Their personal background, culture, and experiences is reflected upon and hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the

meaning they give to the data. This will also influence and shape the direction of the study.

- *Holistic account.* The qualitative researchers attempt to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under investigation. This includes multiple perspectives and identifying the many factors involved in a specific situation, and in general, sketching the bigger picture that emerges during the research process.

For the purpose of this study, it was important to discuss these characteristics of qualitative research and to highlight the background in which this study took place. The study took place in the natural setting of a learner support environment of an ODL university. The researcher tries to make sense of the real world of the participants, which are the students in learners' support, and also to determine the views and opinions of staff operating daily within this learner support environment.

4.3.2 Quantitative research approach

Quantitative research designs are made up by experimental designs, as well as non-experimental designs. According to numerous authors in Creswell (2014; 12) experimental designs include the following:

- *True experimental designs*, which are rigorous experiments. Here the random assignment of subjects is allocated to treatment conditions. According to De Vos, *et al.*, (2011: 151) the true experimental designs are at the highest level of the experimental continuum, have the most rigid requirements, and are the most able to produce results that can be generalized to a specific population.
- *Quasi-experimental designs*, which are less rigorous experiments. Non-randomised assignments are used in these types of research. This form of designs is at the midpoint on the experimental continuum and has some but not all the requirements for a "perfect" experiment (De Vos, *et al.*, 2011: 148).
- *Applied behavioural design or single-subject experimental design.* This takes place when an experimental treatment is administered over time to a single individual or a small number of individuals.

Experimental research regulates if a specific treatment influences a result (Creswell, 2014: 13).

Non-experimental designs include the following:

- *Casual-comparative research* where the researcher compares two or more groups in terms of the independent variable.
- *Correlation design*. Here correlation statistics are used to describe and measure the relationship between two or more variables or sets of scores.
- *Survey research* is also a form of non-experimental research. Survey research offers a quantitative or numeric explanation of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2014: 13).

Vogt *et al.*, (2012: 16) emphasise that survey designs are popular because they are resourceful and provide researchers with a large amount of evidence at a relatively small monetary cost. But they also give emphasis to the fact that it is of utmost importance that gathering evidence using a survey should be relevant to the research questions and that the evidence gathered should be appropriate in answering your research questions. In surveys research, data is collected from large samples of people and all surveys present participants with a series of questions to be answered. These questions may seek to find information of matters of fact, attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, preferences or opinions (De Vos *et al.*, 2011: 156). The authors further emphasise that it is important that the researcher take control over the survey environment. In this study, the quantitative research design is illustrated by survey research, where a random sample of students was used from all the students in the region of KwaZulu-Natal.

Non-experimental designs are mainly used in descriptive studies in which the units that have been selected to take part in the research are measured on all relevant variables at a specific time. No manipulation of variables takes place and it does not include an experimental or a control group (De Vos *et al.*, 2011: 156).

4.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM

There are different understandings of what research is and how research relates to the kind of knowledge being developed. Paradigms in research are ultimately a guide on how to make decisions and to do research. Hennink, Hutter & Bailey (2011: 11) describe paradigms as “perspectives or ways of looking at reality, and they are the frames of reference we use to organise our observations and reasoning”.

Guba (in Creswell 2014: 6) describe the research paradigm as “a basic set of beliefs that guides action”. Johnson & Christensen (2012: 31) also refer to Guba who helped introduced the paradigm dialogue. Guba referred to ontology – what is the nature of the knowable epistemology – what is the relationship between the inquirer and the knowable and methodology – how should the inquirer go about finding the information or knowledge (Johnson & Christensen 2012: 31).

Creswell (2014: 6) also refers to research paradigms as world views and discusses four world views. These are: post positivism world view which includes determination, reductionism, empirical observation and theory verification. De Vos *et.al.*, (2011: 7) states that post positivism is a reality out there to be studied, captured and understood. The authors also mention that post positivists are of the opinion that reality can never be apprehended fully, only approximated.

Constructivism as world view describes understanding, multiple participation meanings, social and historical construction and theory generation. In other words, people create their own truth, therefore there are numerous understandings.

Transformative world view refers to political, power and justice-oriented, collaborative and change-oriented perspectives. Mertens (in Cresswell, 2014: 9) explains that this means that the research inquiries need to be interweaved with politics and a political change agenda to challenge social domination at whatever levels it transpires.

Pragmatism world view talks about consequences of actions, problem-centred, pluralistic and real-world practice-oriented dimensions. Johnson and Christensen (2012: 32) state that pragmatism is a “philosophical position that what works is what is important or valid”. The authors further argue that both qualitative and quantitative research are very important and often should be thoughtfully mixed in single research studies, as was the case in this study undertaken. In the context of this discussion, the mixed methods approach was used and is described hereunder.

4.4.1 Mixed methods research approach

Mixed methods research is an approach to investigate the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data and using distinct designs that may involve rational assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The main and most important assumption of this form of investigation is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods provides a

more inclusive understanding of the research problem than each of these approaches alone (Creswell, 2014: 4).

Mixed methods research is a method that involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a series of studies that investigates the same underlying phenomenon. To answer the research questions, this is done with the view of drawing on interpretations using both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Du Plessis & Majam, 2010: 466). Greene and Caracelli (in Du Plessis, 2010: 468) reasoned that mixed methods research is a triangulation where qualitative and quantitative methods are combined to study the same phenomenon in order to gain convergence and increase validity. The strengths of each method are used to overcome the weaknesses of the other in order to enrich the study of a phenomenon and thus to obtain a more complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Du Plessis & Majam (2010: 469) compare qualitative and quantitative research in the following table and argue that mixed methods research can narrow the divide between qualitative and quantitative research.

Qualitative research and quantitative research are different from each other in the sense that qualitative research meaning develops from the viewpoint of the participant; it aims to understand the meanings of people with regard to everyday life; apprehends and discovers meaning; emerging themes are formed, and qualitative research aims to comprehend the phenomena. In Quantitative research, on the other hand, meaning is determined by the researcher; aims to accurately measure the social world; hypothesis results from existing literature; concepts in the form of abstract, distinct variable derived from the literature and quantitative research aims to control the phenomena as proposed by Du Plessis & Majam (2010: 469).

During the qualitative research in this study, the aim was to understand the phenomena that were researched. Emerging themes were identified to give meaning to the respondents' viewpoints and the way they expressed themselves. This was also done by observation during the interviews to enrich understanding. For the purpose of the quantitative research, the data was collected through the use of questionnaires and this was analysed by means of standardised statistical procedure.

According to Creswell & Plano Clark (in De Vos *et al.*, 2011: 435), the major elements of the definition of mixed method research are as follows:

- Mixed methods research involves both collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data, in other words the researcher collects numeric and text information.
- A unique element of mixed methods research is the mixing of the data. It will thus not be enough to just collect and analyse the quantitative and qualitative data, but it also needs to be “mixed” in a way that together it will form a complete and more comprehensive picture of the problem under investigation. The collecting and analysing of quantitative and qualitative data in mixed methods research can occur in a single study or within multiple studies under investigation.

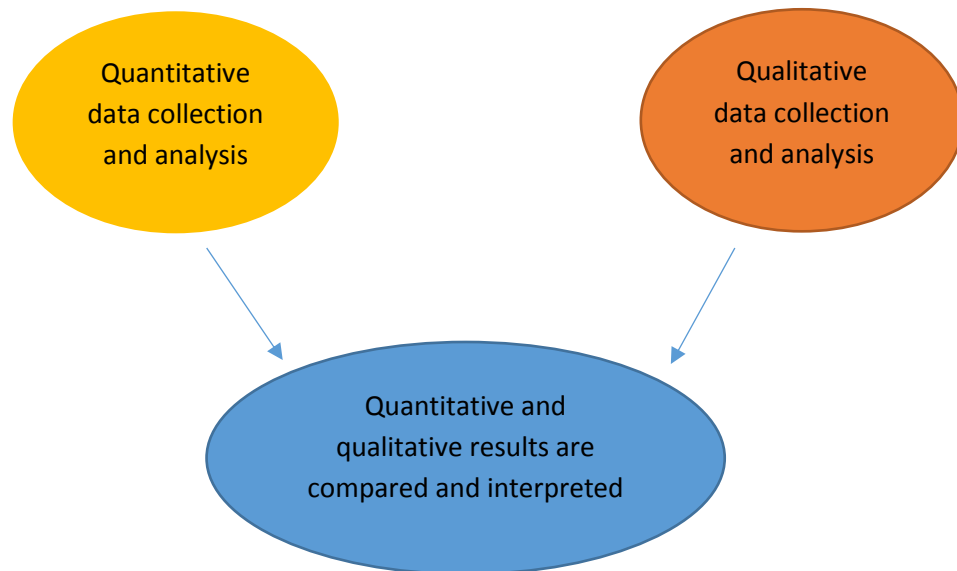
In this study, the quantitative data obtained from the surveys and the qualitative data from the interviews with staff involved in learner support were integrated to answer the research questions of the study.

This design involved the concurrent, but separate, collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data in order to compare and contrast the different findings to determine the extent to which they do or do not agree with each other. This method supported the study towards validated conclusions.

Creswell (2003: 217) refers to this approach as a concurrent triangulation strategy, and it is selected as the model when the researcher uses two different research methods (quantitative & qualitative) in an effort to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within a single study. These two methods are thus used as a way to compensate for the weaknesses characterized within the one method with the strengths of the other method.

De Vos *et al.*, (2011: 442) illustrates this design in a very simple and understandable way as follows:

Figure 4.1: Triangulation mixed methods design



Source: **De Vos et al., (2011: 442)**

The advantage of the triangulation mixed methods design is that it takes less time to complete than the sequential mixed methods designs. For this reason, when the expertise required is to analyse two sets of separate data concurrently, researchers may sometimes find that the two sets of results of the data don't agree, and additional data is then required (Creswell, 2014: 217).

4.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As already discussed in paragraph 4.2 above, Babbie and Mouton (2006: 75) postulate that research methodology focuses on the process of the research, as well as the different kinds of tools that will be used, data collection or sampling, and the most objective procedures to be employed during the research investigation to obtain the relevant data. Hofstee (2006: 115) suggests that this is the "basics" of the matter. Hofstee (2006: 115) suggested that the methodology section can generally be divided into three major sub-sections:

- Research instruments – this is mainly anything that you can use to get the data you are going to analyse. It can range from questionnaires to laboratory equipment to psychological tests;
- Data – You have to discuss the data you have obtained and the strengths and weaknesses of the obtained data should be discussed; and
- Analysis – .the data obtained should be analysed and it should be explained to the readers to enable them to understand how the conclusions have been made.

The data collection instruments used in this study will be discussed to support the reliability of the findings of the study. Research is constructed through rigorous, systematic inquiry and the research instruments are the tools used to gather and organize the data to transform it into valuable information. The following instruments were used to obtain relevant data for the study.

4.5.1 Quantitative phase

Quantitative research methodology was used for this phase of this research. The data was collected by distributing questionnaires amongst the students who were registered and attended tutorial sessions in the Unisa region of KwaZulu-Natal. This research methodology was used to obtain data to identify possible gaps in the learner support system, and to gain the necessary knowledge on how to improve learner support in the region.

4.5.1.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are convenient tools to use to obtain and collect relevant data for a research study, especially where the data has to be collected from a large number of respondents (Wilkinson, 2000: 42). Wilkinson indicates further where questionnaires might appropriately be used:

- Where information is required from large numbers of respondents over a large geographical area;
- The information wanted is not complex;
- Where the information needed is about facts from the present or past;
- Where particular groups or people in a specific problem area because the researcher wants to generalize about them, makes comparisons with other groups or uses the responses and comparisons for development;

- If the researcher is convinced that a questionnaire will produce the type of information he/she needs; and
- Where the researcher is convinced that barriers such as language and literacy do not apply to the population

The elementary objective of a questionnaire is to obtain facts and opinions about a phenomenon from people who are informed on a specific issue or problem (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:186). According to Babbie and Mouton (2006: 232) surveys may be used for descriptive, explanatory and exploratory purposes. Surveys are mainly used in studies that have individual people as the units of analysis. In this study, a structured questionnaire (See Annexure 8.6.1) was used to collect relevant data from students registered students in the tutorial programme who attended the tutorial classes. This was handed out during the tutorial classes that took place in all the regional offices in the region of KwaZulu-Natal. The questionnaires were collected by the researcher after the classes. The literature review, the different policy documents on ODL and learner support, as well as the summative evaluation forms used during the tutorial classes, enabled the researcher to compile the questionnaire. Response scales were designed according to the Lickert scale.

Pre-testing of the questionnaire was also done during tutorial classes to as far as possible to eliminate possible error. Ten students in a tutorial class were asked to voluntarily complete the questionnaire. Babbie & Mouton (2006: 244) stipulate that it does not matter how carefully the questionnaire was designed as a data collection instrument, there is the possibility of error. Therefore, the pre-testing of the questionnaire was done. De Vos *et al.*, (2011: 195) states that the purpose of pilot testing a questionnaire are twofold, *firstly*, it improves the appearance and content validity of the instrument, and *secondly* to get an idea of how long it will take to complete the questionnaire. A pilot test was also conducted on potential respondents to assess the reading levels of respondents and on experts if the emphasis is more on the improvement of the content of the questionnaire.

The decision to use this method as one of the approaches to collect the data was based on the following advantages revealed by Hofstee (2006: 133):

- It offers confidentiality to the respondents, and is easier to analyse quantitative results. In this study, the questionnaires were handed out by the researcher who collected them on completion; and

- It allows for more volume (more people and large geographical area) to raise confidence levels in the sample of the study. In other words, the respondent can complete the questionnaire without interference and is assured of anonymity.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections covering forty questions to which responses were largely limited to options presented on a five-point Likert-type scale. The questionnaire consisted of questions that were indicators of the topic under investigation which is learner support in Open Distance Learning. The following is a summary of each of the sections.

SECTION A: This section consisted of thirteen questions and determined the biographical details of respondents. The questions covered personal details, employment details, and study related details. These details aimed to determine the external support learners receive while they study at the university and the impact it might have on their studies.

SECTION B: Three questions were posed in this section to establish the level of understanding of respondents about Open Distance Learning, distance education, and Open Distance and e-Learning.

SECTION C: The six questions in this section determined whether the respondents understand the ODL university environment and the impact it might have on their studies at the university. Some of the questions also intend to determine how informed the respondents are with regards to relevant learner support mechanisms that may be in place.

SECTION D: This section consisted of eighteen questions and intended to investigate how the respondents experienced the available learner support services they have used during the semester.

4.5.1.2 Population

The population is the group the researcher wants to describe or make a generalisation about (Van Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012: 346). According to Singleton & Straits (2010: 150) when the researcher seeks knowledge or information about a whole class of similar objects or events it is usually called the population. Babbie & Mouton (2006: 100) describe a population as a group (usually of people) about whom the researcher wants to draw conclusions. It is sometimes difficult to study all the members of the

population, therefore it is appropriate to draw a sample from among the data that might be collected and studied. For the purpose of this study, the population is the first year students that are registered for tutorial sessions in the five regional offices of Unisa Kwazulu-Natal. The reason for choosing this population is due to the fact that they are the most significant people to provide the essential information with regards to ODL and distance education, as well as their experience as students in this environment.

4.5.1.3 Sampling

A sample consists of elements or a subset of the selected population and it is studied in an effort to understand the population from which it was drawn. A sample is thus a small portion of the total group under investigation (De Vos *et al.*, 2011: 223). Neuman (2011: 219) describes a sample as a smaller set of cases a researcher selects from a larger pool and generalises to the population. The process of choosing this sample is called sampling. The most important purpose of sampling is to obtain and collect specific cases, events, or actions that can clarify and deepen understanding (Neuman, 2011: 219)

In this study, the researcher used purposive or judgmental non-probability sampling as the most appropriate to select respondents. Purposive sampling is based completely on the judgment of the researcher, because the sample consists of elements that hold the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population that serve the purpose of the study best (De Vos, *et al.*, 2011: 232). In this study the first year students who registered and attended tutorial sessions in different modules were selected. The characteristics of these students and their typical traits will serve the purpose of the study. Tutorial classes are offered according to certain modules in all six colleges of Unisa. It must be noted that not all modules are offered in each college as the classes are offered where there is a demand.

4.5.1.4 The respondents

Respondents included first year students who registered and attended tutorial classes offered by the university as one of the learner support mechanisms. These students register and attend tutorial classes in certain modules (high risk modules) in all five regional offices of Unisa KwaZulu-Natal.

4.5.1.5 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are fundamental issues in all measurement. Perfect validity and reliability are prominent because constructs are often vague, diffuse, and not directly noticeable (Neuman, 2011: 188).

Validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure effectively reflects the real meaning of the concept under investigation (Babbie & Mouton, 2006: 122). Validity can thus be seen as the best estimation to the truth or untruth of a given interpretation or conclusion. Neuman (2011: 192) states that validity is sometimes used to mean “true” or “correct”. In other words how accurate is this truth or correctness? The questionnaire was constructed by making use of the relevant data in the literature review. This in itself will serve as supplementary validation of the findings. The questionnaire was then pre-tested and was given to the researcher’s supervisor and the statistician to review. The necessary amendments were made accordingly.

Reliability means dependability or consistency. It suggests that the same thing is repeated or recurs under the same or very comparable conditions (Neuman, 2011: 188). Babbie and Mouton (2006: 119) stress that reliability is a matter of whether a particular technique, applied frequently to the same object, would produce the same result each time.

4.5.1.6 Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed and interpreted with the assistance of a professional statistician. The data collected from the responses was analysed with SPSS version 22.0. The results are presented through descriptive statistics in the form of graphs, cross tabulations and other figures for the qualitative data that was collected. Inferential techniques include the use of correlations and chi square test values; which are interpreted using the p-values.

Descriptive methods are used to report distributions of a sample or population across a wide range of variables. The aim of these methods is to produce a scope of the characteristics of such distributions through frequencies, measures of central tendency and measure of dispersion (De Vos *et al.*, 2011: 251).

4.5.2 The Qualitative phase

In the next phase of this study, qualitative research methodology was used. The qualitative research was done amongst the staff involved with learner support in the region of Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal to gain a clear understanding of their experiences, perceptions and facts regarding learner support for the students in the region. This phase included semi-structured in-depth interviews with staff members involved with learner support and tutors who facilitated the tutorial classes, focus group interviews with students who formed part of the work-integrated learning project. Observation by the researcher was also done during tutorial classes. This was done to complete formative evaluation forms to evaluate the tutor, as well as to observe the interaction between students and tutors.

4.5.2.1 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Interviews allow the researcher to gain useful information with regard to facts, people's beliefs and perspective about facts, feelings, motives, present and past behaviour and reasons for acting in certain ways (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010: 148). A discussion or conversation in which you want to learn what the other person thinks is the basic building block of the interview (Vogt *et al.*, 2012: 31). Semi-structured interviews were done to obtain data from staff members involved with learner support as well as tutors involved in tutorial classes. The questions asked were open-ended questions to allow space for examining the answers further.

An in-depth interview is a one-on-one method of data collection where the interviewer and the interviewee discuss specific topics in-depth. In-depth interviews are done as a conversation with a purpose. The purpose the researcher has is to gain insight into certain issues using a semi-structured interview guide (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011: 109). The authors further stipulate that if this type of interview is conducted well, it can feel like a conversation for the interviewee. To ensure validity of the questions in the interview, the interview schedule was developed in a semi-structured way to allow the researcher to go more in-depth with certain questions to ensure that the responses support the evidence needed for the study.

According to Wilkinson (2004: 47), it is appropriate to use interviews when:

- In-depth information is required;

- Where the subject matter is potentially sensitive; and
- The issues under examination would benefit from development or clarification.

In-depth interviews are used to seek information on individual, personal experiences from people with regard to a certain issue or topic (Hennink, *et al.*, 2011: 109).

4.5.2.2 Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups are interviews with groups. Focus group interviews is a way of better understanding how people feel or think about a specific issue, product or service. The participants involved have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group (De Vos *et al.*, 2011: 360). Hennink *et al.*, (2011: 136) describe a focus group as an interactive discussion between six to eight pre-selected participants focusing on a specific set of questions.

In this study two focus groups were conducted with students who were placed for Work-integrated Learning (WiL) over a period of 12 months to complete their practical training within the place of work to finalise their diplomas in Agricultural Management. This was done to determine how they experienced learner support from the university within the environment of Work-integrated Learning. The ultimate goal was to understand the reality of this learner support programme in an ODL environment, and whether it has an impact on the success of the students.

4.5.2.3 Observation

Observation is a research method that allows researchers to systematically observe and record people's behaviour, actions and interactions. This method also enabled the researcher to attain a detailed description of the social settings to locate the behaviour of people within their own socio-cultural environment (Hennink *et al.*, 2011: 170). Observation provides a direct and generally unambiguous evidence of unconcealed behaviour, but it is also used to measure individual experiences such as feelings and attitudes (Singleton & Straits, 2010: 123).

Observational data collection was also used in this study. Observational data gives the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations. This gives the researcher an opportunity to understand the context of what is researched and to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed (Cohen *et al.*, 2000: 305). The researcher used this method to observe the behaviour of the students and the tutors

during the tutorial classes (students' participation during the classes and the tutor's method of facilitation). During this observation the Unisa formative evaluation form as, well as the summative evaluation form were to be used. A further purpose of the observation was to identify possible gaps in facilitation during tutorial classes that might have an impact on the success of the student.

4.5.2.4 Sampling

Denzin and Lincoln (quoted by De Vos *et al.*, 2011: 391) argued that qualitative researchers pursue individuals, groups and settings where the specific processes being studied are most likely to be found. De Vos *et al.*, (2011: 391) points out that the overall purpose of the use of relevant sampling techniques in qualitative research is to collect the richest data. Rich data is, ideally, a wide and diverse range of information collected over a relatively lengthy period of time. For the purpose of this study, the researcher made use of purposive or judgmental non-probability sampling.

4.5.2.5 Description of participants

Below in *Table 4.1* an indication is given of the staff that was interviewed.

Table 4.1: Distribution size of staff per learner support units

UNIT OF SUPPORT STAFF	DESIGNATION	NUMBER TO BE INTERVIEWED
Tutorial services	• Head Facilitation of Learning	1
	• Regional Academic Coordinators	3
	• Tutors	6
Student Counselling	• Manager	1
	• Student Counselling Officers	1
Library	• Manager	1
	• Library Officers	2
Academic Literacies	• Facilitators	1
TOTAL		16

4.5.2.6 Analysis of the data

Qualitative data analysis involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting significance information, identifying patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveals. This brings about a process of

order, structure and meaning to the mass of the collected data (De Vos *et al.*, 2011: 391). The process of the data analysis includes three steps: preparing and organizing the data; reducing the data; and visualizing, representing and displaying the data. Data from individual interviews were transcribed and analysed with the field notes of observation.

4.6 ETHICAL PROCEDURES

It is important that qualitative researchers be sensitive to the ethical principles in research, with specific reference to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and privacy and caring. According to Neuman (2011: 129), literature points out that the researcher has a moral professional obligation to be ethical, even when research subjects are not aware or concerned about ethics. De Vos *et al.*, (2011: 113) stipulates that research should be based on mutual trust, acceptance, cooperation, promises and well-accepted conventions and expectations between all parties involved in a research project.

The researcher executed the ethical approaches to field work by avoiding harm, voluntary participation, informed consent, deception of respondents, violation of privacy (De Vos *et al.*, 2011: 115).

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the research design and research methodology that was used to conduct the empirical investigation of this study. The researcher gave an explanation for the preference of the use of the mixed method approach that was used in the study. The exposition on the questionnaire was done, as well as the interviews with staff members involved in learner support and tutors at Unisa KwaZulu-Natal.

Chapter Five will focus on the analysis of the data collected from the questionnaires and the transcribed interviews, as well as data collected with regard to the attendance of tutorial sessions offered in the region and the influence on the exam results of the students.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE PRIMARY DATA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four presented the mixed methods research design which was divided in two parts, *firstly*, the quantitative phase and *secondly*, the qualitative phase. This chapter presents the results and discusses the findings obtained from the questionnaires in this study, as well as interviews conducted with staff, tutors and students. The questionnaire was the primary tool used to collect data in the first phase, and was distributed (*by hand*) to students who attended tutorial classes at Unisa at the various regional offices in KwaZulu-Natal during the second semester in 2014. The data collected from the responses was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 22.0. The results will present the descriptive statistics in the form of graphs, cross tabulations and other figures for the qualitative data that was collected. Inferential techniques include the use of correlations and Chi-Square test values; which are interpreted using the p-values. In the second phase, interviews with staff involved in learner support activities and tutors were conducted to obtain the data in the qualitative phase. The role of data analysis is to bring the data collected together in significant and meaningful ways to enable researchers to interpret and make sense of the data (Wilkinson, 2000: 77). The data should thus reveal the phenomenon under investigation and also establish significant relationships between and amongst key variables.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

The data was collated and the Chi-Square test and correlations was used to include the p-values to determine the significance of the results.

5.2.1 Chi-Square Tests

To test whether experimental data supports a particular hypothesis, the Chi-Square Test is used. Babbie & Mouton (2006: 481) indicate that there is no relationship between the variables in the total population, and it is thus based on a null hypothesis. To determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables, the Chi-Square

Test was used. If the p-value is less than 0.05, it indicates a significant relationship between the variables. If the p-value is more than 0.05, then there is no significant relationship between the variables.

There are two types of Chi-Square tests. One Chi-Square test deals with patterns within a single variable. This show the differences are significant. The second Chi-Square test relationships between variables. In this study the difference in the scorings were tested for significance. This indicates that people have strong opinions on the questions asked in the questionnaire.

To determine whether the differences in the scoring patterns per statements were significant, Chi-Square Tests were done by variables (statements). The null hypothesis tested the claim that there were no differences in the scoring options per statement.

5.2.2 Hypothesis Testing

The traditional approach to reporting a result requires a statement of statistical significance. A **p-value** is generated from a **test statistic**. A significant result is indicated with " $p < 0.05$ ". These values are highlighted with a *.

The Chi-Square Test was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables (rows vs columns). The table summarises the results of the chi square tests.

The null hypothesis states that there is no association between the two. The alternate hypothesis indicates that there is an association.

For example: The p-value between "Venue where this questionnaire was completed?" and "ODL remove barriers to access learning" is 0.045 (which is less than the significance value of 0.05). This means that there is a significant relationship between the variables. In other words, the venue where the questionnaire was completed played a role in terms of how respondents perceive ODL removing barriers to access learning.

For example: The p-value between "Are you employed?" and "ODL remove barriers to access learning" is 0.002. This value is less than the significance value of 0.05, which means that there is a significant relationship between the variables. The status of employment played a role in terms of how the respondents perceive ODL removing barriers to access learning.

Another example is where the p-value between “Can work while I am studying” and “What is your age?” is 0.016 (less than 0.05), which means that there is also a significant relationship between these variables. Therefore, the fact that the respondents can work while they are studying played a role on the age of the respondents. All values without an * (or p-values more than 0.05) do not have a significant relationship.

5.2.3 Correlations

When an actual relationship exists between two variables, one speaks of a correlation. Correlation does not imply causality. De Vos, *et al.*, (2011: 97) mention that correlation has two useful functions. *Firstly*, to predict future events consistent relationship can be used, and *secondly*, it indicates that data are either consistent or inconsistent within a scientific theory.

Bivariate correlation was performed on the (ordinal) data. The results indicated the following patterns. Positive values indicate a directly proportional relationship between the variables and a negative value indicates an inverse relationship. All significant relationships are indicated by a * or **.

For example, the correlation value between “ODL remove barriers to access learning” and “ODL construct learning programmes for students to succeed” is 0.334. This is a directly related proportionality. Respondents agree that the more ODL removes barriers, the greater the likelihood students will succeed, and *vice versa*.

Proportionality exists between “ODL remove barriers to access learning” and ODL bridges the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication between student and university, because the correlation value between the two variables are 0.324. Respondents agree that “ODL remove barriers to access learning”, because ODL bridges the time, geographical, economic, social educational and communication between the student and the university.

5.2.4 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure and Bartlett’s test

The KMO measures the adequacy of the sample and is an index used to examine the appropriateness of factor analysis (Didacticiel – Études de cas, 2013: np) <http://data-mining-tutorials.blogspot.fr/2009/04/principal-component-analysis-pca.html>). The Bartlett’s Test is used to find highly accurate estimates to the critical values for both equal and unequal sizes and is regarded as a test for resemblance or homogeneity.

5.3. ANALYSIS OF ANNEXURE 1: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Part one covered the quantitative analysis which included the analysis of the survey instrument which was done with students who attended the tutorial classes in identified modules in the second semester of 2014. It further included the analysis of the frequency of tutorial attendance, and was compared with their examination results to determine if the tutorials had any impact on their results and throughput rates.

5.3.1 The Sample

In total, 369 questionnaires were despatched and 313 were returned which represents an 84.8% response rate. The response rate needed to be at least 70% to ensure that it is credible and to add value to the study.

5.3.2 The Research Instrument

The research instrument consisted of 40 items, with a level of measurement at a nominal or an ordinal level. The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections which measured various themes as illustrated below:

Table 5.1: *Sections in the survey instrument*

Section A	Biographical data
Section B: [RQ 1]	Open distance learning (ODL), distance education (DE) and Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL)
Section C: [RQ 2]	Readiness and experience of students coming into the ODL environment, their level of readiness and exposure to these initiatives.
Section D: [RQ 3]	Quality and effective learner support initiatives to support and enhance learning of students at Unisa in the Kwazulu-Natal region.

5.3.3 Reliability Statistics

The two most important aspects of precision are **reliability** and **validity**. Reliability is computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered as “acceptable”. The table below reflects the Cronbach’s Alpha score for all the items that constituted the questionnaire.

Table 5.2: Reliability Statistics

Section	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
B1	5	.766
B2	4	.680
C1	3	.441
C2	3	.637
C4	3	.456

Section B1 has an overall reliability score of 0.766 which exceeds the recommended value of 0.700. This indicates a high (overall) degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for this section of the research. Two of the other sections have values that are only slightly lower (B2 and C2), whilst the remaining sections have lower reliability scores. This is mainly due to the construct being newly developed with some of the sections having negative co-variances.

5.3.4 Why is Factor Analysis important?

Factor analysis is a statistical technique whose main goal is data reduction. A typical use of factor analysis is in survey research, where a researcher wishes to represent a number of questions with a small number of hypothetical factors. With reference to the *Table 5.2* above:

- The principle component analysis was used as the extraction method, and the rotation method was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. This is an orthogonal rotation method that minimizes the number of variables that have high loadings on each factor. It simplifies the interpretation of the factors.
- Factor analysis/loading show inter-correlations between variables.
- Items of questions that loaded similarly imply measurement along a similar factor. An examination of the content of items loading at or above 0.5 (and using the higher or highest loading in instances where items cross-loaded at greater than this value) effectively measured along the various components.

For example, as part of a national survey on political opinions, participants may answer three separate questions regarding the ODL policy, reflecting issues at the local, state and national level. Each question, by itself, would be an inadequate measure of attitude towards the ODL policy, but *together* they may provide a better measure of the attitude.

Factor analysis can be used to establish whether the three measures do, in fact, measure the same thing. If so, they can then be combined to create a new variable, a factor score variable that comprehends a score for each respondent on the factor. Factor techniques are applicable to a variation of situations.

It is noted that the variables that constituted each of the sections loaded perfectly along one factor. This means that the statements (variables) that constituted the components perfectly measured the components. In this instance, the component measured what was meant to be measured.

A researcher may want to know if the skills required to be a decathlete are as varied as the ten events, or if a small number of core skills are needed to be successful in a decathlon. You need not believe that factors actually exist in order to perform a factor analysis, but in practice the factors are usually interpreted, given names, and spoken of as real things. To be able to discover patterns amongst the variations in values of several variations, factor analysis is used. This is done in essence, through the generalisation of artificial dimensions (factors) that highly correlate with several of the real variables and that are independent of one another, is the view held by Babbie & Mouton, (2006: 472). De Vos, *et al.*, (2011: 175) describe factor analysis as a procedure to determine the number of underlying factors in a questionnaire. This process regulates which items cluster together to measure a specific construct.

Each matrix table is preceded by a table that reflects the results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's Test. Values between 0.50 and 1.0 (high values) indicate that the factor analysis is appropriate and values below 0.5 show that the factor analysis may not be appropriate.

The requirement is that Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy should be greater than 0.50, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity less than 0.05. In all instances, the conditions are satisfied which allows for the factor analysis procedure. Certain components are divided into finer components. This is explained below in the rotated component matrix.

Section B1 – What is your understanding of an ODL university?

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.764
Bartlett's Test of Approx. Chi-Square	237.789
Sphericity df	10
Sig.	.000

Students' understanding of an ODL university

Component Matrix^a

	Component
	1
ODL bridges the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication between student and university	.738
ODL remove barriers to access learning	.654
ODL is student-centred	.654
ODL provide student support	.764
ODL construct learning programmes for students to succeed.	.777

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

Section B2 – What is your understanding of distance education?

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.624
Bartlett's Test of Approx. Chi-Square	134.774
Sphericity df	6
Sig.	.000

Students' understanding of distance education.

Component Matrix^a

	Component
	1
DE is a method of teaching diverse students	.530
Students are located at different places	.742
Students are physically separated from the University	.772
Students are physically separated from their lecturers and other students	.717

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

Section B3 – What is your understanding of Open Distance and e-Learning?

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.657
Bartlett's Test of Approx. Chi-Square	158.772
Sphericity df	6
Sig.	.000

Component Matrix^a

	Component
	1
OdeL is a model for Open Distance and e-Learning	.522
OdeL will transform Unisa to conduct business via the Internet	.743
OdeL will cause massive reduction in physical facilities (i.e. regional centres)	.781
OdeL means that the learning environment will be fully digitized	.793

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 component extracted.

Section C1 – Provide reasons for studying at Unisa

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.554
Bartlett's Test of Approx. Chi-Square	29.502
Sphericity df	6
Sig.	.000

Component Matrix^a

	Component
	1
Easier than at other Universities	.569
Cheaper than other Universities	.776
Could not get space into another University	.348
Can work while I am studying	.626

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 component extracted.

Section C2 – What did you expect when you registered at Unisa as an open distance Learning University?

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.547
Bartlett's Test of Approx. Chi-Square	103.546
Sphericity df	3
Sig.	.000

Component Matrix^a

	Component
	1
Attend classes every day	.749
More face-to-face tutorial classes	.872
Lecturer is at the regional centre	.661

Section C4 – How did you experience the orientation session(s) you attended?

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.548
Bartlett's Test of Approx. Chi-Square	180.430
Sphericity df	6
Sig.	.000

Component Matrix^a

	Component	
	1	2
Very informative and helpful	-.191	.917
Informative and clear expectations	-.086	.941
Not enough information for continuation	.950	-.057
Waste of time	.914	-.231

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

5.3.5 SECTION A – Biographical data

This section encapsulates the biographical physiognomies of the respondents who completed the questionnaires. The respondents are the students who attended tutorial classes in the region of Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal. This section also introduces the students. Who are Unisa's students? According to Lockwood (1995: 233), this question lies at the centre of the issue and is often ignored. A number of dimensions will answer this question: age, gender, geography, social class, cultural and belief systems, income, ethnic and racial identity, educational background, employment and unemployment, language, housing, access to communications and technology and physical disability.

5.3.5.1 Gender and age of respondents

Table 5.3 on the following page indicates the gender distribution by age of the respondents in the sample.

Table 5.3: Gender and age distribution

			What is your gender?		Total
			Female	Male	
What is your age? (years)	18-20	Count	32	12	44
		% within What is your age?	72.7%	27.3%	100.0%
		% within What is your gender?	14.2%	13.8%	14.1%
		% of Total	10.2%	3.8%	14.1%
	21-25	Count	72	34	106
		% within What is your age?	67.9%	32.1%	100.0%
		% within What is your gender?	31.9%	39.1%	33.9%
		% of Total	23.0%	10.9%	33.9%
	26-30	Count	42	16	58
		% within What is your age?	72.4%	27.6%	100.0%
		% within What is your gender?	18.6%	18.4%	18.5%
		% of Total	13.4%	5.1%	18.5%
	31-35	Count	38	8	46
		% within What is your age?	82.6%	17.4%	100.0%
		% within What is your gender?	16.8%	9.2%	14.7%
		% of Total	12.1%	2.6%	14.7%
	36-40	Count	21	11	32
		% within What is your age?	65.6%	34.4%	100.0%
		% within What is your gender?	9.3%	12.6%	10.2%
		% of Total	6.7%	3.5%	10.2%
	> 40	Count	21	6	27
		% within What is your age?	77.8%	22.2%	100.0%
		% within What is your gender?	9.3%	6.9%	8.6%
		% of Total	6.7%	1.9%	8.6%
Total		Count	226	87	313
		% within What is your age?	72.2%	27.8%	100.0%
		% within What is your gender?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	72.2%	27.8%	100.0%

The ratio of females to males is approximately 3:7 (27.8%: 72.2 %). This is not a new phenomenon in South Africa. In a study that was done in the Caribbean by Dana Peebles (2014: 3), it was reiterated that the key issues associated to ODL are financial and low literacy levels for some groups. This tendency influences the participation of

young men and they are more affected than young women. In all countries at all levels, the participation rate for females in education exceeds that of men. This includes the use of ICTs either as a means of study, or both.

Mills & Tait (1996: 149) stated that during the 20th Century, the participation of women as students and staff in all sectors of education has increased in most countries. This developed from the forerunner of ODL, correspondence education, where this mode of educational delivery has provided women with the only chance to learn, because other educational institutions were not open to them.

The 44 students within the age category of 18-20 years can be seen as school leavers. For any first year student in a university, it is vitally important to be ready for the university environment and the challenges of higher education. To new students in the system, a technology-enhanced environment can be a stumbling block in their learning, because they have not been exposed to it at school level. Students in their first year do struggle with the university environment such as Unisa, because they are faced with the overwhelming multiple roles of acclimatising to the new environment of higher education and to discipline themselves with self-study. No face-to-face classes are provided on a daily basis.

Within the age category of 18 to 20 years, is 14.1% (44 students) and the age category of 21 to 25 years reveals 33.9% (106 students), which brings the total number of respondents between 18 to 25 years to 48% (150 students) within the total sample.

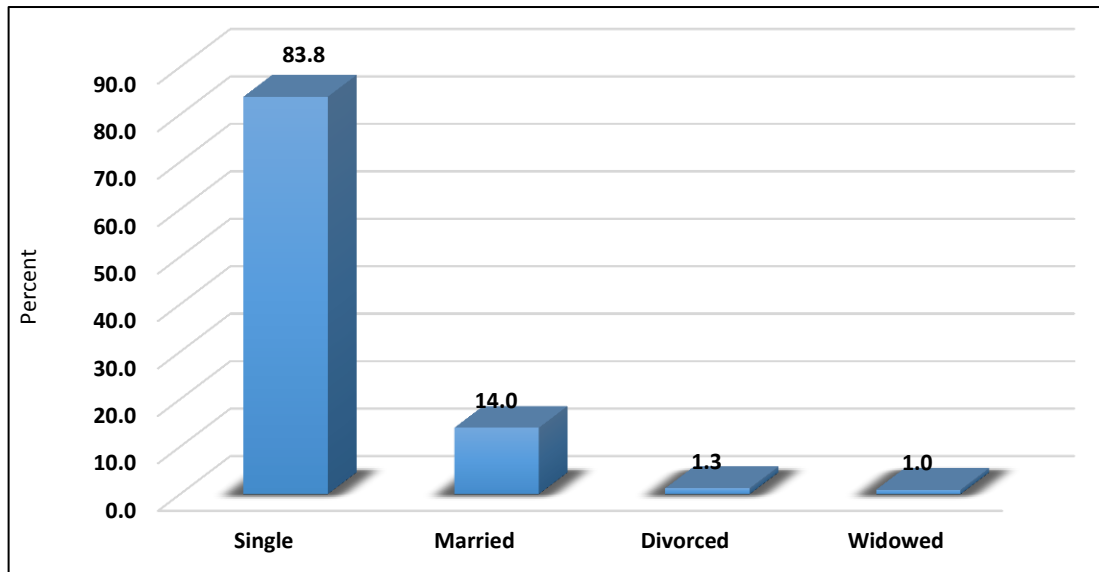
Within the age category of 31 to 35 years, 17.4% were male. Within this category of males (only), 9.2% were between the ages of 31 to 35 years. This category of males between the ages of 31 to 35 years formed 2.6% of the total sample. These students are working students, and Unisa as an open distance university is a perfect choice for them because they can study while they are working and earn money to provide for their families.

The constitution of the sample indicates a mature and experienced grouping of respondents. This is useful and of significant noting as the responses derived would have been from an informed opinion.

5.3.5.2 Marital status of respondents

The figure below indicates the marital status of the respondents in the sample.

Figure 5.1: *Marital status of the respondents*

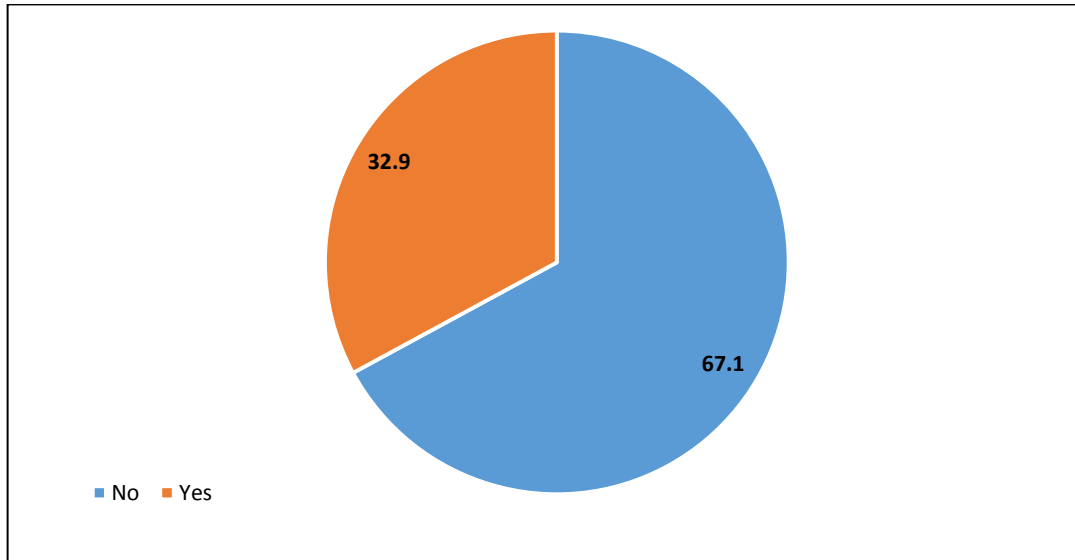


The majority of respondents (83.8%) were single, with widowed forming the smallest grouping (1.0%). The reason for this might be because 48% of the respondents fall in the very young age group of 18-25. This phenomenon has changed dramatically in the history of Unisa as a distance education university. More younger and unemployed students come into the higher education system to obtain a degree or diploma. It seems as if Unisa is a popular choice because students can earn while they study. These opportunities enable students to pay for their own studies. In a study done by Feng in 2001 on factors of achievement of students, the author found that family encouragement for success is an important factor, as quoted by Erdogan, Bayram & Deniz, (2008: 38). In Erdogan, *et al.*, (2008: 38), the authors also refer to the study of Glickman in 2003 where the author confirmed that being single was one of the factors that is influencing student dropout. The range of students that come to study at Unisa have changed and include working students, students whose matric points don't meet the entrance requirements of residential institutions and also because some students find the study fees cost-effective.

5.3.5.3 Employment status of respondents

The figure below indicates the employment status of the respondents.

Figure 5.2: *Employment status of respondents*

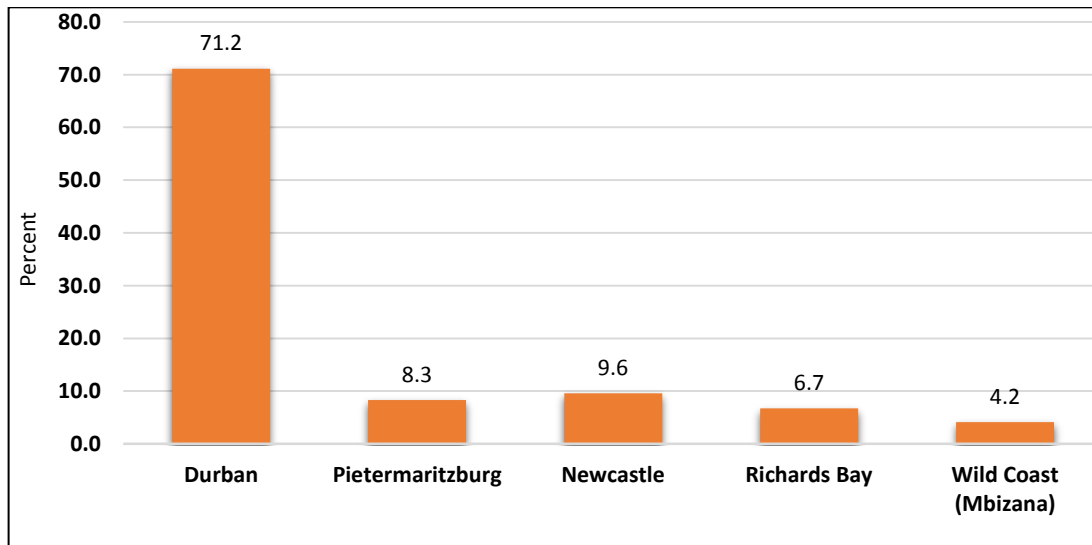


The ratio of not-employed to employed respondents was 2:1. The unemployed students are 67.1% of the respondents who completed the questionnaire. The reason for this might be because of the high number of students that are very young and between the age groups of 18-25. Students with more work experience are more successful than students with less work experience, is the view held by Erdogan, *et al.*, (2008: 40). This might be one of the reasons why first year students have a high dropout rate.

5.3.5.4 Centres where the questionnaire was completed

The centres at which the respondents (students) filled the questionnaires are shown in *Figure 5.3* that follows.

Figure 5.3: Questionnaires completed in each centre in KZN



From this illustration, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents were from the Durban region (71.2%). The Durban office is the largest office in the region and offers more tutorial classes than the other smaller offices in the region. Therefore, more questionnaires have been distributed and filled by respondents in this locality. The implication here was that more reliable results could be attained from more classes offered and a larger number of students who attended tutorial classes make use of the different learner support initiatives. Durban is the hub of the region and also offers the most learner support services. Therefore, the ratio with other offices in the region will be a huge difference. It was nevertheless necessary to distribute the questionnaire to the other offices, because the study takes place in the region of KwaZulu-Natal. This was also necessary to get information from other offices in the region on service levels with regard to learner support. If the sample size was larger, it will enable the researcher to draw a more representative percentage of it and more accurate conclusions can be made. This will result in more accurate predictions than the smaller samples, as emphasised by De Vos, *et al.*, (2011: 224). It must further be taken into account that not all learner support initiatives, for example, Academic Literacies and Student Counselling, are offered at all regional offices in the KwaZulu-Natal region of Unisa.

5.3.5.5 Semester and year when registered at Unisa for the first time

Table 5.4 indicates the semester and year of study of the respondents.

Table 5.4: Semesters and year of study of respondents

			Semester		Total
			First	Second	
Year	2003	Count	1	0	1
		% within Semester	1.6%	0.0%	0.5%
	2004	Count	1	0	1
		% within Semester	1.6%	0.0%	0.5%
	2005	Count	4	0	4
		% within Semester	6.5%	0.0%	1.9%
	2006	Count	2	0	2
		% within Semester	3.2%	0.0%	0.9%
	2007	Count	1	0	1
		% within Semester	1.6%	0.0%	0.5%
	2008	Count	2	2	4
		% within Semester	3.2%	1.3%	1.9%
	2009	Count	5	3	8
		% within Semester	8.1%	1.9%	3.7%
	2010	Count	8	5	13
		% within Semester	12.9%	3.2%	6.0%
	2011	Count	10	13	23
		% within Semester	16.1%	8.4%	10.6%
	2012	Count	9	14	23
		% within Semester	14.5%	9.1%	10.6%
	2013	Count	8	13	21
		% within Semester	12.9%	8.4%	9.7%
	2014	Count	11	103	114
		% within Semester	17.7%	66.9%	52.8%
	2104	Count	0	1	1
		% within Semester	0.0%	0.6%	0.5%
Total		Count	62	154	216
		% within Semester	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

From Table 5.4, most of the students registered during the first semester of each year, except in 2014. Under normal circumstances, this is correct as the first semester of any given year is normally the larger registration semester. In 2003 and 2004, only 1.6% of students registered in the first semester and no students in the second semester. All subjects at Unisa were year modules before the merger with Technikon SA and Vudec.

In 2005, there was an increase in the registration numbers. This was the year of the merger. This could have had an impact on the larger percentage of registrations. During 2005 to 2007, only year modules were offered, therefore no new registrations took place in the second semesters.

It is noted that 66.9% of students registered during the second semester of 2014. This registration figure could be attributed to the NFSAS loans that were only paid and made available to students later in the year owing to a new model that was implemented at the end of 2013.

5.3.5.6 Degree/diploma/certificate respondents are studying

Only the qualifications that mostly appear with 5 or more students are included in *Table 5.5*. Hundred and eighty one students (64.9%) from a total of 279, are registered for these qualifications.

Table 5.5: *Type of degree/diploma/certificate*

	Frequency	Percent
LLB	35	19.3
Bachelor of Education	79	43.6
PGCE (EDU)	10	5.5
Bachelor of Social Work	39	21.5
Bachelor Degree of Senior and Intermediate Phase (EDU)	11	6.1
Higher Certificate in Economic Management Sciences	7	3.7
	181	100.0

It is noted that the education qualification is a total of 100 (79+10+11). This is a true reflection of the students registered at Unisa in various education qualifications. The College of Education is the second largest College in Unisa with 67462 students. Social Work and LLB students registered for degrees are also significant streams. Tutors appointed to offer tutorial classes for these modules are all qualified and are working in the professions as indicated, as these include teachers, social workers and lawyers or attorneys.

5.3.5.7 Accommodation status of respondents while busy with their studies at Unisa

The status of accommodation of students studying at Unisa while they are registered at Unisa is presented in *Table 5.7* below.

Table 5.6: *Status of accommodation during studies*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	168	57.3
No	96	32.8
Sometimes	29	9.9
Total	293	100.0

More than half of the respondents (57.3%) indicated that they had accommodation. A percentage of 32.8 % of students don't have accommodation while they are studying at Unisa and 9.9% are at times able to find some accommodation. This is a disturbing factor as studies have revealed that this can have a direct impact on the throughput rate of students. In an article in the Career Junction on a report that was issued by the Department of Higher Education, it was reiterated how important suitable accommodation is for students to perform effectively in their learning journey. The article discuss the shortage of accommodation for students in general in South Africa and that the shortage of accommodation is one of the major causes of poor student performance and a high dropout rate at some universities and this in turn is having a negative influence on the throughput rate of universities (Career Junction, 2012).

5.3.5.8 Residential area of respondents while busy with studies at Unisa

Most of the students are staying in residential areas around Durban. This question was important to determine whether students are struggling with transport to and from the campus. Students can therefore access the campuses with ease for tutorials or other learner support services. When the semester ends the majority of students return to their homes in the rural areas and when the new semester starts they return to be close to campus so that they can make use of learner support services in place.

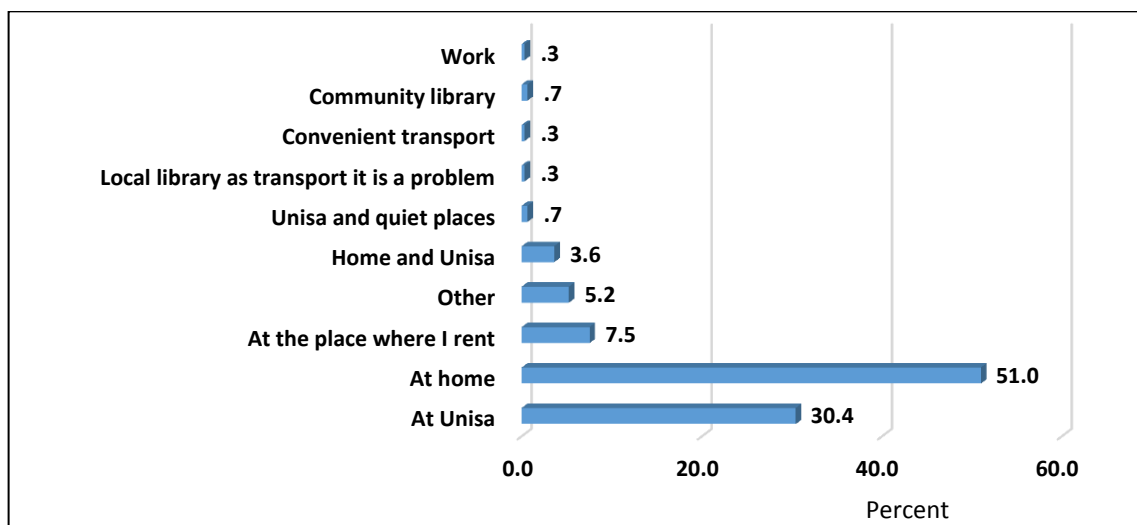
5.3.5.9 Where do you live when you are not studying at Unisa?

A percentage of 20.7% of the students indicated that they live at home when not studying. Students come from their homes as far as the Eastern Cape. If a student's home is not in KwaZulu-Natal or close to the different campuses, they tend to rent in places with friends or family, or stay with a family for the duration of the semesters and return home after their examination.

5.3.5.10 Place where respondents normally study

The places where the respondents normally study are presented in *Figure 5.4* below.

Figure 5.4: *Places where respondents study*



More than half of the respondents (51.0%) elected to study at home and 7.5% at the place where they rent. Approximately a third (30.4%) studied at Unisa. It is noted that the majority of students are studying at home, Unisa or at a library. Although Unisa is a distance learning institution, the provision of quiet study spaces and study spaces where students can form study groups and discuss the content of their studies are provided at the different campuses as an academic support service. The place of study and the comfort ability of the study space should be taken into account here. Students who rent places are at times required to share the accommodation with a number of other students, and this arrangement can impact on the efficiency of space and comfort for effective study. A comment from a student, *"Noise from neighbours, difficult to study"* confirms the difficulties some students face during their studies at the university.

This is the reason why students use the facilities of the university. The availability of the use of recommended books in the libraries, as well as assistance from the library

staff with the obtaining of relevant materials may also be an important contributory factor as to why students study in the library.

A study space is an important factor to consider, because this is where students spend time on their studies. Students who study at home might not have transport or might not be able to afford the transport to reach the campus to study at the University spaces. Some pertinent comments received from students include:

“Would love to use Unisa premises, but it is too far”;

“Money for transport is a problem”.

“Safer there”.

It should also be taken into account that the university is an *open distance learning* university but the circumstances in the region and in South Africa as a whole make it compulsory for the university to provide this facility as one of its learner support initiatives. Although the theory of independent study is one of the important characteristics of ODL, some students might not be ready for this and need to have the personal contact between learners and the support staff at the university. Therefore, this is an important element of learning centres, maintains Lockwood (1995: 224).

In the majority of the interviews that were conducted it was the opinion that our students are not ready for ODL, because a number of them are afraid of the new mode of education that mainly accompanying online learning. It is now expected of the student to buy their own Lap Tops and/or Tablets as well as internet connection, which is very expensive.

“Students don’t have computers and they still have to buy into the system.”

“Students are not computer literate and cannot use a mouse.”

Kember (2007: 77) further mentions that some exceptions in open universities in developing countries transpire. It appears as if they have not yet taken note of the relative lack of need to offer education open to study time and location. A greater need for face-to-face contact exists more in developing countries than in developed countries. The author further argues that another possible reason for not having a solid regional learner support network might be an uneven infrastructure development and the demographics that exist.

The campus in Durban is the only campus where students can study in the Library and use computers where needed. There are fifty computers available for students to book

for two-hour sessions prior to use. The question can now be asked whether there are sufficient computers available for the number of students in Durban who have to use university facilities because many of the students cannot afford to obtain their own computers. This is directly linked to learner support and the provision of tools to assist learning, which is one of the critical elements of this study.

5.3.5.11 Who is paying for your studies?

The table below indicates the persons responsible for the payment of the studies.

Table 5.7: Responsibility of payment for studies

	Frequency	Percent
Parents	121	39.5
Yourself	94	30.7
NSFAS	55	18.0
Other	21	6.9
Employer	3	1.0
Husband	3	1.0
Granny	2	.7
DOE	1	.3
Cousin	1	.3
Parents and Eduloan	1	.3
Bursary	1	.3
Yourself and Eduloan	1	.3
Study loan	1	.3
FUNZA	1	.3
TOTAL	306	100.0

Financial cost to study is a very important element in the success rate of students. In a research report by Nurshaw Associates to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) in the United Kingdom the following key finding derived from the research:

“Students receiving financial support have comparable non-continuation rates with students who do not receive financial support. Yet institutional findings show that students in receipt of financial support report that it has enabled them to stay on course and that they consider withdrawing less than their peers. This may mean that there is a difference between attitude and behaviour.”

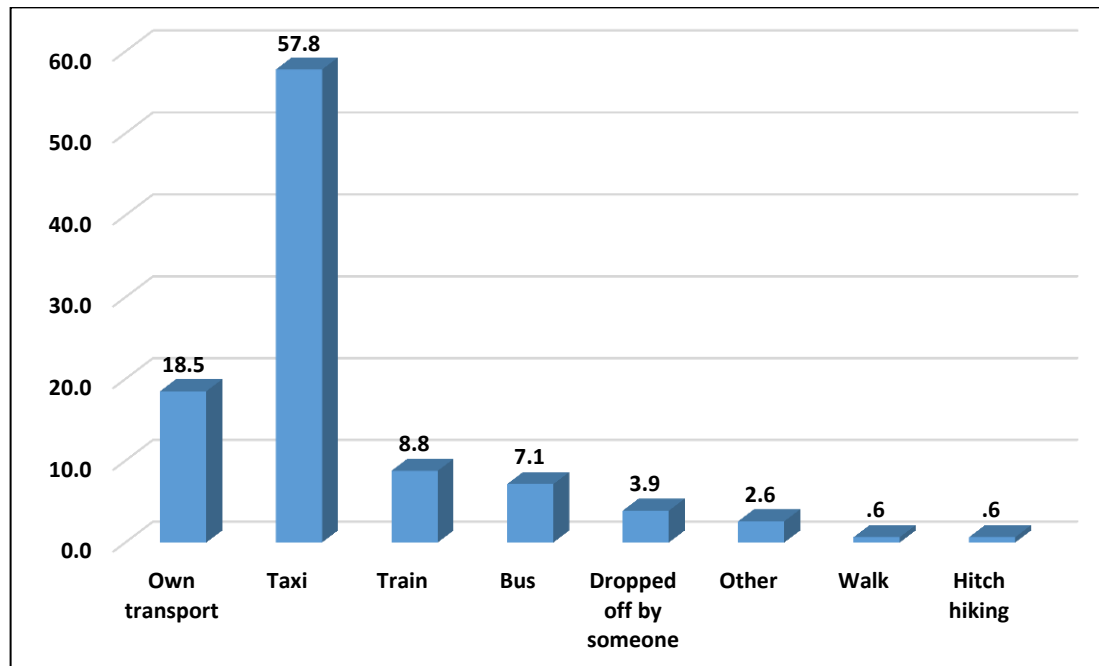
At a conference on *Access to Financial Aid in Further and Higher Education in South African* held at Stellenbosch University it was emphasised by Professor Botman that access to institutions, success and financial support are the elements for student success

at South African higher education institutions. It was argued that it is important that a student's first year of study should be secured, not only financially, but also academically (Botman, 2009: 1).

5.3.5.12 Means of travel to Unisa campuses

The means of travel is indicated in *Figure 5.5* below.

Figure 5.5: *Travel arrangements to Unisa campus by respondents*



The majority of respondents (57.8%) use taxis to get to campus. Nearly three-quarters of respondents use public transport. This sometimes has an effect on students' transport to the University due to taxi strikes and taxi violence and students cannot attend tutorial classes owing to transport problems or any other support services at the campus.

5.3.6 SECTION ANALYSIS

The section that follows analyses the scoring patterns of the respondents per variable per section. Where applicable, levels of disagreement (negative statements) were collapsed to show a single category of "Disagree". A similar procedure was followed for the levels of agreement (positive statements).

The results are first presented using summarised percentages for the variables that constitute each section.

The results are then further analysed according to the importance of the statements.

5.3.6.1 Open distance learning and distance education

This section briefly deals with Open Distance Learning, Distance Education and Open Distance with e-Learning. Different options were given in each of these concepts to determine the students' understanding of ODL, DE and ODeL. It is important for the students registered at an ODL university to understand the processes and ethos of the university during their study journey. They thus have to identify themselves with the mode of education the university is using to be able to take responsibility for their studies and manage it effectively. The ODeL model was discussed in Chapter Two and the policy indicates clearly that this model should not be seen as "online" learning. It further stipulates that students with limited means should not be unfairly excluded from learning opportunities. Therefore, it is important that this information should be communicated to all students.

The first concept investigated the understanding of ODL by the respondents. The summarised scoring patterns are shown below for business transformation.

5.3.6.2 Understanding of an Open Distance Learning (ODL) University

In this section, and in the sections that follow, the last two options are complementary events of the variables, as knowledge of the variables would result in the patterns observed for the last two.

The average level of agreement (for the first 5 statements) is 58.6%. The remaining percentage averages out between the remaining two options. This indicates an overall level of agreement of the respondents as the average range is in the region of 40%.

Table 5.8: *Understanding of Open Distance Learning*

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
ODL bridges the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication between student and university	17.5	23.0	59.5
ODL removes barriers to access learning	19.8	24.0	56.1
ODL is student-centred	17.5	24.2	58.3
ODL provides student support	29.0	18.4	52.5
ODL constructs learning programmes for students to succeed.	16.9	16.9	66.3
None of the above	64.5	22.7	12.7
Not familiar with this word/abbreviation	63.7	20.7	15.6

Figure 5.6: What is Open Distance Learning?

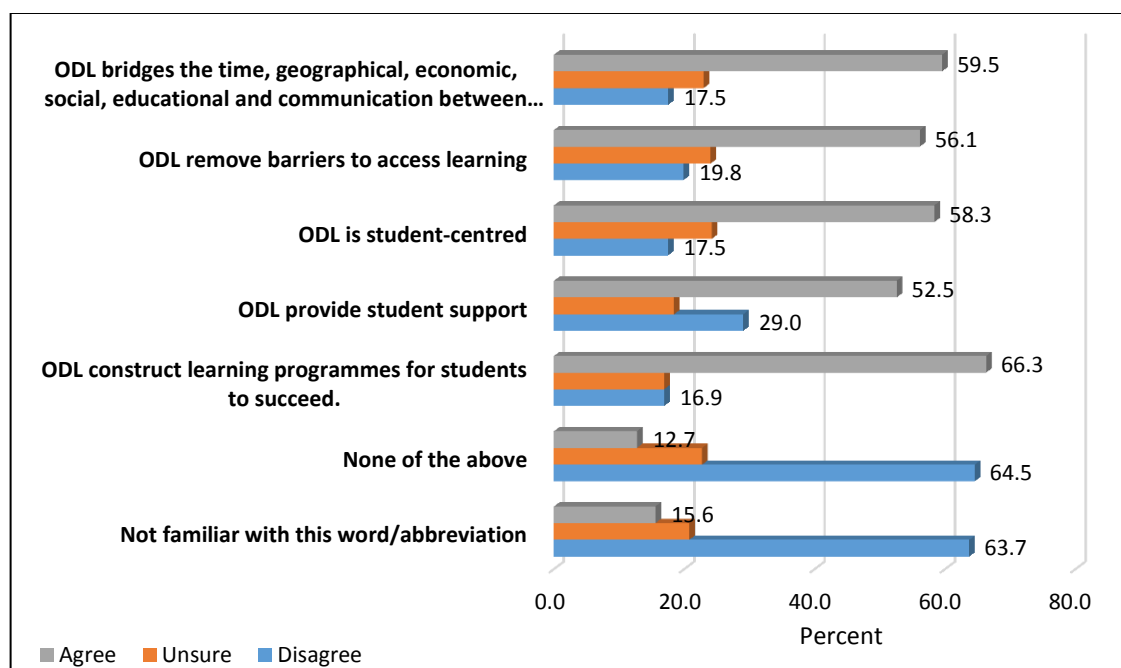


Table 5.8 and Figure 5.6 give an indication of the students' understanding of ODL. The table clearly expresses that students do understand what the purpose of ODL is. It is important that the student understands this environment, and what can be expected in an ODL university to enable progress as informed students. Students should thus realise that there must be certain support mechanisms in place for them to use to enhance their learning and develop the necessary skills they will need for the world of work once they have completed their qualifications.

It therefore shows that the students understand the implications of the distance between them and the open distance learning university environment. Therefore, to bridge this distance, there are learner support tools in place and the students must actively utilise and participate in this processes to overcome the constraints they might experience during their learning journey. This is the purpose of the "open" in ODL, according to Mbatl (2013: 19). The author further quotes the Open University (2011: 1) and states, that through accessibility, ODL wants to address the learning needs of adult learners because of certain limitations they experience. Thus, the emphasis is on removing barriers to access learning and provide students with a positive learning experience through quality support structures and operations.

ODL deals with the use of new information and communication technologies and this in itself creates a unique environment within the university. It is a new environment for first level students and it can create uncertainty with negative learning experiences for

students. Van den Branden and Lambert (1999: 255) argue that with the development of new information and communication technologies, possibilities of teaching and learning have been drastically extended and have endorsed new models for ODL. This creates a changed environment and therefore the students should identify themselves in this changed environment. Students will have more freedom and opportunity, and therefore need to realise that they have to accept the responsibility and manage their own learning. Knowledge of the ‘character’ and functioning of the university through which they study can be seen as one of the variables contributing to the success of the student.

The first five options given in the table above are all true characteristics of ODL. The scores in the “agree” column equals a 58.6% average score and thus indicate that this percentage of students understand what ODL entails. These attributes are also included in the ODL policy of the university. With regard to the last two options, it reveals that students are familiar with the acronym of ODL and that they are aware that Unisa is an open distance learning university.

As already indicated earlier in the chapter, to determine whether the differences in the scoring patterns per statements were significant, Chi-Square Tests were done by variables (statements). The null hypothesis tested the claim that there were no differences in the scoring options per statement. The results are shown in *Table 5.9* below:

Table 5.9: Chi-Square Test Statistics for the understanding of ODL

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
ODL bridges the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication between student and university	80.529	2	.000
ODL removes barriers to access learning	61.84	2	.000
ODL is student-centred	72.595	2	.000
ODL provides student support	46.659	2	.000
ODL constructs learning programmes for students to succeed.	121.518	2	.000
None of the above	49.873	2	.000
Not familiar with this word/abbreviation	56.578	2	.000

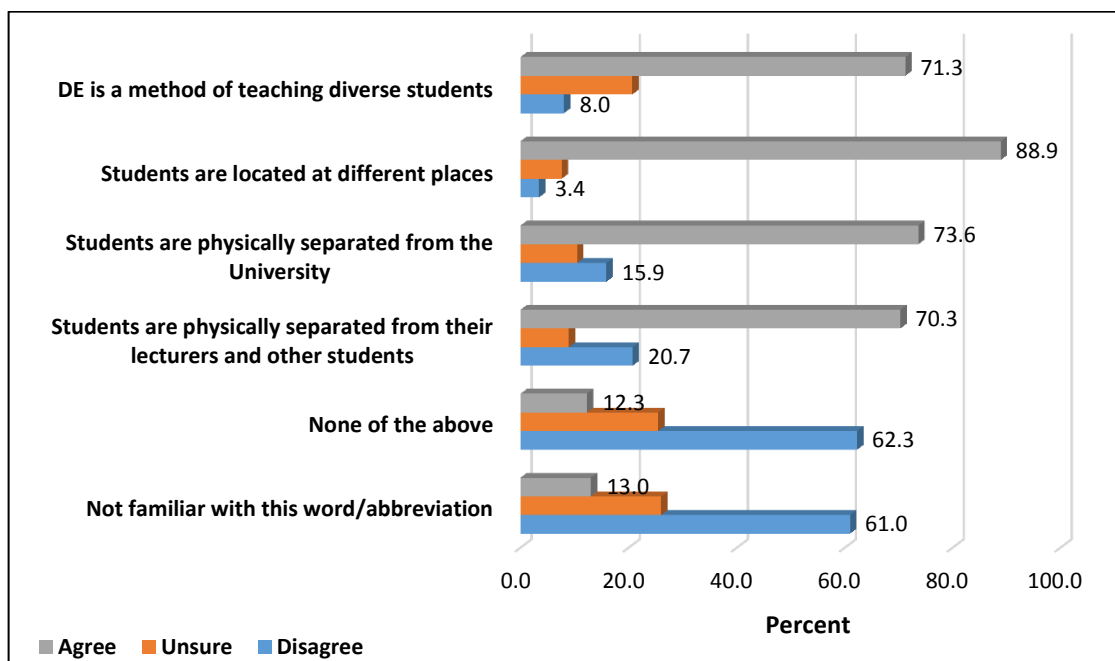
Since all of the significant values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance), it implies that the distributions were not even. This means that the differences between agreement and disagreement were significant. It is noted that the category of “Undecided” also contributes to the p-value. During the interviews conducted on general views, suggestions and challenges, it was the view of the interviewees that the University is not ready to accommodate large numbers of students in ODL. This argument was viewed in the light of the lack of resources available in the region. ODL is also discussed broadly in Chapter Two of the thesis.

5.3.6.3 Understanding of distance education

Table 5.10: What is distance education?

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
DE is a method of teaching diverse students	8.0	20.7	71.3
Students are located at different places	3.4	7.6	88.9
Students are physically separated from the University	15.9	10.5	73.6
Students are physically separated from their lecturers and other students	20.7	8.9	70.3
None of the above	62.3	25.4	12.3
Not familiar with this word/abbreviation	61.0	26.0	13.0

Figure 5.7: Understanding of distance education



The level of agreement for this section (excluding the last 2 statements) is 76.0%. There is a fairly strong level of agreement with the highest being for the locations of the students. Similar levels are observed for the other agreement statements. Respondents identify Distance Education (DE) as being a physical separation of the students from the university environment.

As a dedicated ODL University, Unisa currently enrolls nearly one third of all university students, and is an attractive choice for students with specific needs due to their personal circumstances. Unisa is also regarded as an accessible and affordable institution of higher learning to many students. The majority of the students who access Unisa come from poor or working class homes. These students also need financial aid to access and experience success in their studies.

Adult learners desire a high degree of flexibility because of priorities at work and home. Therefore the arrangement of distance education gives adults more control over time, place and pace in their education journey. In this study, it should be taken into account that most of the students are not employed (see *Figure 5.2*) and most of the students are single and not married (see *Figure 5.1*). Although a number of students might not have responsibilities at home or at work, they registered at Unisa, because the residential universities are full and also because Unisa's study fees are less expensive. Those students who have employment find Unisa as a perfect opportunity and good medium through which they can improve their educational needs and pursue further careers.

Distance education is however not without challenges. Attri (2012: 43) lays down the fact that the lack of face-to-face contact with lecturers, potentially excessive preliminary costs and the lack of support from the institution are all challenges to successful distance education. Where students in residential universities have plentiful facilities available to them, as well as people around them to assist them with academic activities, distance education students are always struggling without face-to-face contact on a daily basis. Although many distant education students enrol for a course out of their own will, they sometimes abandon the course in the middle of their studies because of challenges with the course materials or lack of comprehension through self-study. It should also be taken into account that not all students are suited for this type of learning and not all subjects are best taught *via* this medium (Valentine, 2002: 7). The author further explains that distance education students need to feel that they are part of a community, therefore it is important that online courses and support initiatives be

developed to suit the needs of the students. It is thus evenly important that academics and/or instructors should adapt their methods of teaching to the format of distance learning, is the view held by Valentine (2002: 8).

In a study done by Sherrit (cited by Valentine, 2002: 9), the author mentioned that even though there is strong support for distance education, administrators and distance education institutions sometimes fail to provide suitable and sufficient staff, simple supplies and a reasonable operating budget. This obstacle can trickle down the objectives and advantages of distance education. One must bear in mind that students who come into distance education come from a school-based type of learning where face-to-face teaching and learning is the only mode of education. The effect is that in the beginning the student finds that he/she is studying independently and might not know where to start. This also should make space for a “sense of belonging” by the student. In a study done by Kember (2007: 141), the strongest sense of belonging was the class or the tutorial group. It is important for the students to form relationships with a small number of people to whom the students has access and feels able to approach. In the study, the sequence of association is fellow students, then through the teacher and finally to the university. This separation can influence the study programme of the students negatively. Therefore, the support initiatives from the institution and its staff should address the need for establishing a sense of belonging with students which may lead to students completing their programme of study which could then have a positive impact on student experiences.

This is an indication that students have a fair understanding of what distance education entails. In other words, they are aware that no face-to-face classes will be offered. This can influence their studies and therefore they should be informed of learner support initiatives such as face-to-face tutorial classes and e-tutoring.

The marginally high level of disagreement with “Not familiar with the term” complements the levels of agreements for the other variables.

The Chi Square Test results are shown in *Table 5.11* below.

Table 5.11: *Chi-Square Test Statistics for understanding of distance education*

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
DE is a method of teaching diverse students	175.241	2	.000
Students are located at different places	365.137	2	.000
Students are physically separated from the University	189.791	2	.000
Students are physically separated from their lecturers and other students	156.61	2	.000
None of the above	45.947	2	.000
Not familiar with this word/abbreviation	45.415	2	.000

All of the p-values are significant implying that the scoring patterns are not the same per option per statement.

A non-parametric test, like the Chi-Square Test results provides an estimate of confidence in distance education as a method of teaching diverse students, as is reflected in the score of 175.241 above. The high score in the attribute “students are located at different places” further assents to the statement above that students have a fair understanding of what distance education entails. With distance education the student does not have direct access to the lecturer. The “distance” between the student and the lecturer is one of the key elements of the definition of distance education.

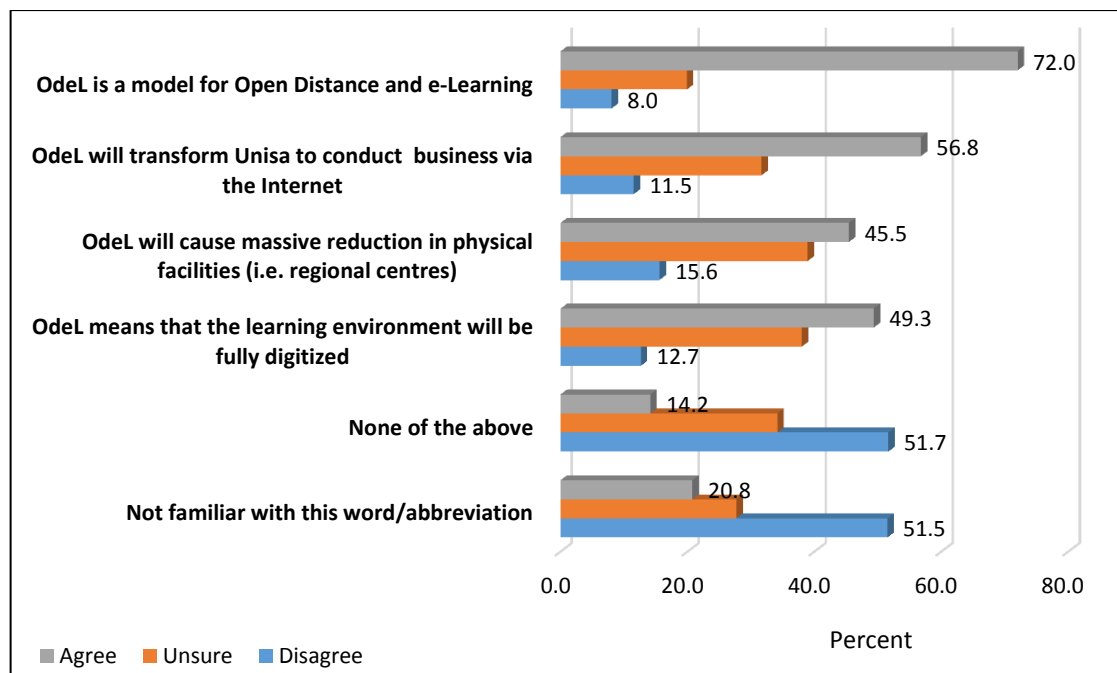
It is critical that universities have a clear vision of preferred results and a clear understanding of perceptions and attitudes of staff and students towards distance education. This is vitally important to successfully implement and drive distance education as a mode of delivery, advised by Owusu-Ansah, Neill & Haralson, (2011: 8). The view of Valentine (2002: 4) is that, with new developments in technology, distance education is seen as an advantageous method of delivering education, because it is cost-effective. It is also advantageous for the student, because students can determine for themselves the time and place when and where they want to study. Distance education is discussed in Chapter Two of the thesis.

5.3.6.4 Understanding of Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) in Unisa

Table 5.12: Understanding of ODeL

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
OdeL is a model for Open Distance and e-Learning	8.0	19.9	72.0
OdeL will transform Unisa to conduct business via the Internet	11.5	31.7	56.8
OdeL will cause massive reduction in physical facilities (i.e. regional centres)	15.6	39.0	45.5
OdeL means that the learning environment will be fully digitized	12.7	38.0	49.3
None of the above	51.7	34.2	14.2
Not familiar with this word/abbreviation	51.5	27.7	20.8

Figure 5.8: What is Open Distance and e-Learning?



The average level of agreement for this section is 55.9%. It is observed that the levels of disagreement are low and constant, but that the levels of uncertainty are much larger. ODeL in Unisa is seen as the digitisation of the transactions of the institution and it enables students to use integrated ICT applications. A percentage of 56.8% of the respondents agreed with the attribute “ODEL will transform Unisa to conduct business via internet”. This is a very satisfactory score given the fact that it is a fairly new model that was implemented at Unisa. Students thus do understand that Unisa is transforming and is in the process of becoming a fully-fledged ODeL university. It is the concern of

staff that was interviewed that students have challenges with use of technology, and a vast majority of our students are still not computer literate; hence they experience learning tussles.

This can have some difficulties for the students from the university and it will be important that students receive support throughout their studies at the university. In Daweti's study (2003: 5), students clearly indicated that they will need the physical support from administrative and academic staff to assist them during their studies at the university. There is a strong push in Unisa for more face-to-face instruction and support, not only in the physical space, but also online as well as offline for those students who do not have access to ICT devices. This speaks much to the level of the sophistication of our students, as well as their innate preference for personal interaction, as maintained by Makhanya, (2014: 8).

Although students are more familiar with the new technologies that came into the ODL environment, it is clear that students' perceptions on support from the university did not change significantly. For students coming new into the ODL University, this might create uncertainty in their learning journey. If there are no adequate facilities, for example, sufficient well trained staff and facilities such as computer labs, etc., available in the regional offices, then the student will struggle to start with the learning journey and to successfully complete it. The question then remains, "is this the right time to move towards the ODeL model?" From this table, it is clear that students are aware of what the understanding of ODeL is and what it entails. For students coming new into the ODL University this might create uncertainty in their learning journey. When students struggle with technology, they would come to staff at the university to assist them with challenges they might experience. Daweti (2003: 2) mentions that support to students includes many forms as follows:

- Tutoring;
- Regular contact lectures at centres at regional centres;
- A network of fellow students with whom the students can interact and discuss possible unclear issues in the module or course; and
- Continued support throughout the year.

In a study conducted by Oosthuizen, Loedolff & Hamman (2010: 201) on students' perceptions of quality learner support in ODL, the perceptions of students with regard to

learner support indicated low levels of satisfaction in certain areas, such as discussion and tutorial classes and administrative support and helpfulness after registration. This is an important aspect for due consideration in this study in particular and for Unisa in general given the context of its current focus. Although students are more familiar with the new technologies that came into the ODL environment, it is clear that students' perceptions on support from the university did not change significantly. A discussion on ODeL appears in Chapter Two.

The Chi-Square Tests is shown in *Table 5.13* below.

Table 5.13: Chi-Square Test Statistics for the understanding of ODeL

	ODeL is a model for Open Distance and e-Learning	ODeL will transform Unisa to conduct business via the Internet	ODeL will cause massive reduction in physical facilities (i.e. regional centres)	ODeL means that the learning environment will be fully digitized	None of the above	Not familiar with this word or abbreviation
Chi-Square	181.402	74.988	34.208	48.454	25.350	20.323
df	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

All of the scoring patterns are significantly different.

5.3.7 SECTION C [RQ 2]

This section deals with the readiness of the students coming into the ODL university environment and their experience within this environment. The reasons for studying at an ODL university as well as the expectations at an ODL university will be determined in the findings that follow.

5.3.7.1 Reasons for studying at Unisa

Table 5.14: *Reasons for studying at Unisa*

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Easier than at other Universities	57.1%	13.3%	29.6%
Cheaper than other Universities	29.2%	15.0%	55.8%
Could not get space into another University	53.3%	9.3%	37.3%
Can work while I am studying	9.3%	3.7%	87.0%
None of the above	71.6%	17.6%	10.8%

It is noted that there is a clear indication that the lesser expensive fees of Unisa did influence the students' decisions to register at Unisa, as well as the fact that a large percentage of students find it important to be able to work while studying. This is convenient as it enables students to pay for their studies while they earn money at the same time. This finding supports the cost issue with regards to ODL, and that ODL is a less expensive option and mode for education delivery.

Cost in a developing country plays a major contributory role. South Africa is progressively developing in a more technologically conscious country, but with barriers such as lack of electricity in certain parts of the country, people who are struggling financially and who often have limited educational opportunities, actual technological advancement can be a problem for a period of time (Ferreira & Venter, 2011: 90). South Africa will thus have to embark on modes of education such as a blended distance learning approaches where print and ICT can support each other. The use of technology in ODL also makes education "less expensive" for the students, although initial costs can be expensive to obtain tools to use the technology.

The chi square test results follow below in *Table 5.14*.

Table 5.15: Chi-Square Test Statistics for reasons studying at Unisa

	Easier than at other Universities	Cheaper than other Universities	Could not get space into another University	Can work while I am studying	None of the above	Not familiar with this word/abbreviation
Chi-Square	66.434	61.900	66.960	351.667	67.824	104.482
df	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

All values are significant. Studying at Unisa is thus convenient for students, because it is cheaper and they can work while they are busy with their studies to improve their qualifications. Students commented on this as follows:

“could have afford to work and study”;

“work and study”;

“Gain independence”.

Open Distance Learning has advanced intensely over the last few decades and radical changes took place in educational needs of individuals and society at large. This brought about the developing need for additional specialisations in learning. More innovative methodologies to working and learning are in demand, asserts Ojo & Olakulehin, (2006: 2).

5.3.7.2 Expectations of respondents when they registered at Unisa as an Open Distance learning University

It is noted that in the first three options in *Table 5.16* an average of 62.6% of the respondents expected more face-to-face contact. Tutorial classes are thus in enormous demand. Some of the comments from the respondents are as follows:

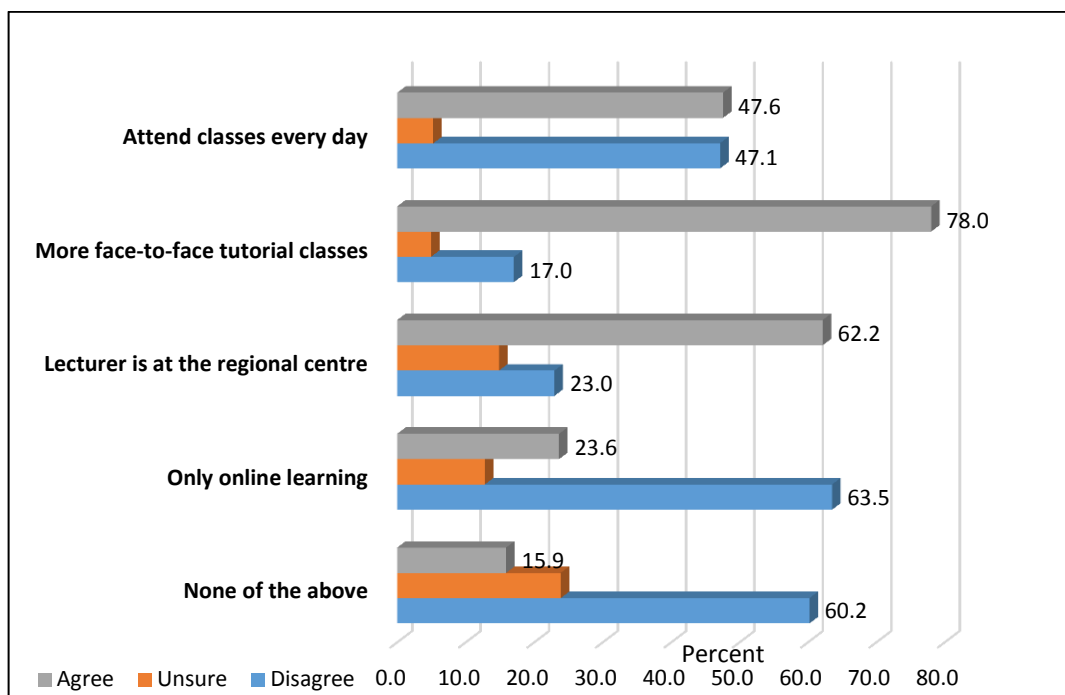
“Attend classes in order to pass”;

“It is important to have a lecturer - face to face or tutors every day”;

“Expect residential provision”.

Table 5.16: Expectations when registered at Unisa

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Attend classes every day	47.1	5.3	47.6
More face-to-face tutorial classes	17.0	4.9	78.0
Lecturer is at the regional centre	23.0	14.9	62.2
Only online learning	63.5	12.8	23.6
None of the above	60.2	23.9	15.9

Figure 5.9: Expectations during duration of studies at Unisa

New students coming into the ODL environment need to be assisted and receive effective support during their initial first year of registration at the institution. In the table above, students strongly indicated that they will need classes or face-to-face contact with tutors and lecturers. It appears as if the students were under the perception that there are lecturers available at the regional centre. Moore & Kearsley (cited by Kassandrinou, Angelaki & Mavroidis, 2014: 2) state that for teaching and learning to be successful, it is important that there is a quality dialogue between tutors and students and students and the institution. Levels of structure as well as appropriate frequency and quality of tutor-student dialogue taking into consideration the autonomy of the student, are important factors influencing success in distance education.

To enhance this point, Moore (in Kassandrinou, *et al.*, 2014: 2) identified three forms of transactional distance:

- Student-tutor interaction;
- Student-student interaction; and
- Student-content interaction

UNISA as an ODL institution uses *interaction* to promote student success and motivation. Previous research indicates that motivation enhances student retention in distance education contexts. *Interaction*, is a central element of the UNISA student support conceptual framework.

Given the fore-going discussion, all modules at UNISA are designed to include:

- Student – content interaction;
- Student – student interaction; and
- Student – instructor/tutor interaction (Unisa, 2012: 5).

It is important that students receive quality student support in the form of effective communication and dialogue between the students and their immediate environment to enable a healthy study environment.

Since 2013, only first year students in pre-identified “high risk modules” will receive tutorial classes during a semester. Currently, students receive a maximum of 15 hours of tutorial sessions per semester per module for mainstream students and 30 hours per semester for Science Foundation modules. Tutors are mostly available on Saturdays to conduct these classes in two-hour sessions which include every Saturday until they reach the 15 hours of tutoring.

The Chi-Square Test results are reflected in *Table 5.17* below:

Table 5.17: *Chi-Square Test Statistics for expectations during studies at Unisa*

	Attend classes every day	More face-to-face classes	face-to-tutorial	Lecturer is at the regional centre	Only online learning	None of the above
Chi-Square	80.361	243.159		85.216	86.966	29.477
df	2	2		2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000

The p-values indicate that the scoring patterns are significantly different.

5.3.7.3 Attendance of orientation sessions by respondents

Table 5. 18: Orientation sessions attended

	Count	Percent
Pre-registration session (before your registration)	62	19.7
Post-registration (after your registration)	110	35.0
Did not attend any orientation sessions offered by Unisa	80	25.5
No orientation sessions were offered	32	10.2
Did not know about the orientation sessions	76	24.2

(Multiple responses were allowed, hence the total is not 100%)

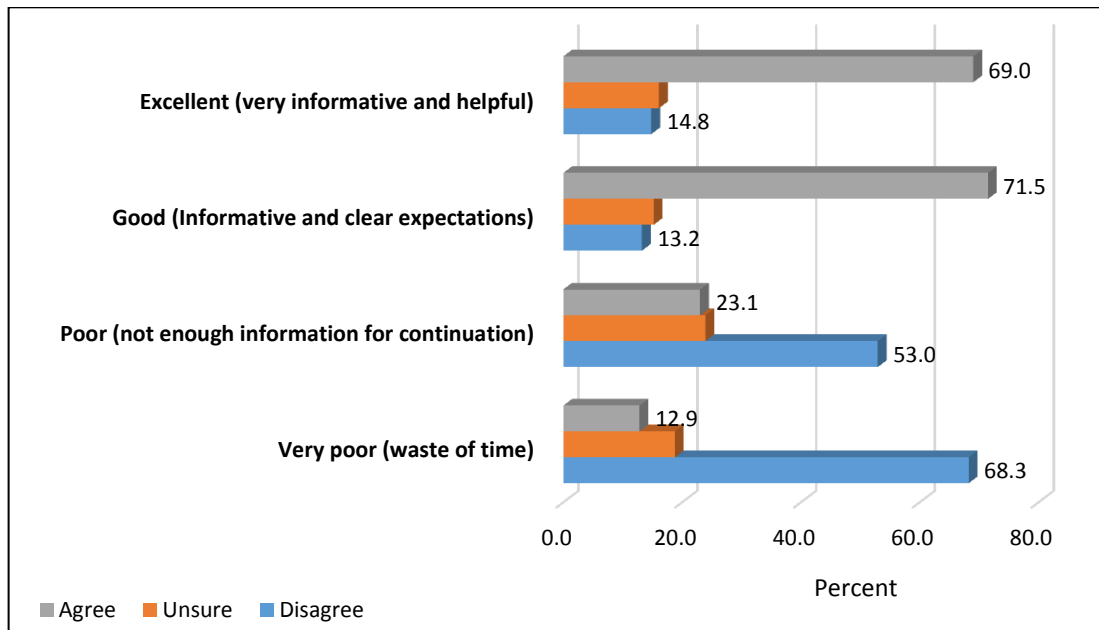
The highest attendance was for post registration. The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that more students are registered on the system after registration than before the end of registration. SMSs are sent to those students for pre-registration whose applications were successful and they had received their student numbers.

5.3.7.4 Experience of the orientation session(s) attended

Table 5.19: Experience of orientation sessions attended

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Very informative and helpful	14.8	16.1	69.0
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	13.2	15.2	71.5
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	53.0	23.9	23.1
Very poor (waste of time)	68.3	18.8	12.9

Figure 5.10: Experience of orientation sessions offered



From the above illustration, the percentages of agree and disagree complements each other well.

The Chi-Square results are as follows:

Table 5.20: Chi-Square Test Statistics for experience of orientation sessions

	Excellent (very informative and helpful)	Good (Informative and clear expectations)	Poor (not enough information for continuation)	Very poor (waste of time)
Chi-Square	88.929	99.192	20.359	56.158
df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000

All of the patterns are significant. According to the scores in *Table 5.20* above, it is clear that the students who attended the orientation sessions found these very informative and helpful. This has been affirmed by comments given by the students below:

“Helpful to attend a session.”

“Very informative.”

5.3.7.5 Indication of the learner support services used

Table 5.21: *Indication of learner support services used*

	Count	Percent
Tutorial classes (face-to-face by tutor in the region)	254	80.9
MyUnisa (online services)	236	75.2
Library services	151	48.1
Discussion classes (classes by the lecturer)	150	47.8
MyLife (own student e-mail address)	137	43.6
Registration support while registering	94	29.9
Computer Laboratories	92	29.3
E-tutoring (online tutoring)	89	28.3
Student Counselling services	76	24.2
Teaching assistant support (TA support)	70	22.3
Financial support	63	20.1
Video conferencing	52	16.6
None of the above	13	4.1

(Multiple responses were allowed, hence the total is not 100%)

Table 5.21 provides an idea as to what learner support services the students use.

It is noted that a large percentage (80.9%) of the students are using tutorial services and the MyUnisa (online services) (75.2%). This is a clear indication that these learner support services are a popular choice with the students. More tutorials are needed by students as they experience difficulties with some of their study materials.

“More tutorials are needed as course is very challenging.”

“Not having tutorials for certain modules.”

“Face to face tutorials on all modules would be beneficial.”

“MyUnisa always have a problem of access.”

“Can’t find the file name for assignment on My Unisa and as a result miss the submission date.”

Face-to-face tutoring is described as a richer support environment with more opportunities for dialogue than any other medium (Simpson, 2002: 78). It is clear that there is a need for this type of support to give them a richer and comfortable learning experience, especially for the first year students.

“No clear understanding of the University as a first year student with no assistance.”

“Tutorials only once a week and the semesters are too short which results in syllabus not being covered.”

Library services is used by 48.1% students, discussion classes by 47.8% students and MyLife by 43.6% students. It is noted that students do experience problems with these services as well.

“Insufficient books in the library.”

“It is difficult to get hold of lecturers when assistance is required.”

MyLife is a free email service provided for students. The reason why the usage of this facility might be marginally low can be attributed to the lack of resources available to students as mentioned above.

Computer laboratories are used by 29.3% only which is very low. The reason for this is that there is insufficient space for all the students to use these facilities and resources. For the large number of students registered in Durban, only three Computer Laboratories with approximately 140 computers are available for students use. These computers have to be booked in advance before students can use it. Only two-hour sessions per students is allowed. Students do experience difficulties with these facilities.

“Computer labs always busy - shortage of computers.”

“Too little time is given in computer labs.”

It is difficult for students to purchase their own Lap Tops or Tablets or other devices to enable them to use online services at the University. Comments by a number of the respondents attest to these concerns raised with a lack of resources:

“Getting into internet since currently studying online and it is expensive.”

“No access to computers or laptops due to financial constraints to do online modules.”

Daniel (in Simpson, 2002: 100) describes the use of technology as important, but it also needs to be treated apprehensively. The author stressed that although it is seen as a powerful medium to support teaching and learning, and if you are serious about enhancing access, it is important to realise this aspect and not lose sight of the fact that students cannot engage in advanced technology-based learning unless they have the advanced technology. Furthermore, students have to feel that they want to use the technology and that it will not just complicate and inconvenience their learning experiences. Some students do experience frustrations in this regard.

“Still not allowed in the “My Lab” to complete assignments for EUP.”

The shortage of computer resources in this regard can be the reason why the use of e-tutoring (online tutoring) is also very low with a percentage of 28.3%.

5.3.7.6 Challenges (difficulties) experienced while studying at Unisa

The respondents listed a number (117) of difficulties they experience while studying at Unisa as an ODL university. Student centredness and student support (learner support) are included in the ODL policy of the university.

The main focus of student centredness is on the educational process and the support to students to take gradual responsibility for their learning and research. The education should therefore:

- Allow effective and successful learning through rich environments for energetic learning;
- Create and establish links between students existing meanings and backgrounds and new knowledge to be built; and
- Stimulate and motivate independent and critical thinking (Unisa, 2008: 2).

Student centredness should be established through strong learner support services to enable students to take responsibility for their learning, and to study independently and think critically.

The Unisa ODL policy (2008: 2) describes student support (learner support) as a term that is applied to a variety of services that is developed by Unisa to assist students to meet their learning objectives, and to gain the knowledge and skills to be successful in their studies. It includes the following key aspects:

- Tuition support in the form of detailed, individualised and timely feedback to formative assessment (assignment and project feedback from lecturers); regional tutorials in a medium (face-to-face, online, telematics, i.e. VCs, etc.) that is accessible to students;
- Further support in the form of remedial interventions such as responsible open admission programmes to help underprepared students achieve success in order to decrease the distance between student and teacher;

- Peer support in the form of institutionally arranged approaches and supported by peer self-help groups;
- In-text support in the form of well-designed well-integrated courseware creating rich environments for active learning with a sensitivity for context, different voices, etc. and promoting dialogue between teacher and student in order to decrease the distance between student and study materials;
- Administrative support in the form of timely, accurate and accessible information from institution to students about all aspects of the learning process, from registration to graduation and; and
- Tutoring in ODL encompasses a broad range of teaching, coaching, mentoring and monitoring activities that guide students through their courses, mediating the packaged learning materials and facilitating the learning process.

Students experience a number of difficulties and uncertainties during their learning journey at the university. If one compares some of the difficulties experienced by the students with the contents of the policy on student centredness and student support, it is clear that definite gaps exists with the implementation of the policy due to a number of factors. A few of the difficulties will be highlighted below.

Tutorials and support from lecturers

“More tutorials are needed as course is very challenging.”

“It is difficult to get hold of lecturers when assistance is required.”

“Have to go to Pretoria campus to get assistance.”

“Not meeting all the lecturers face to face.”

“Need more teaching assistant support.”

“Attend lectures on Saturday only.”

“Do not have the opportunity to get help immediately if problems are experienced from lecturers.”

“Tutorials only once a week and the semesters are too short which results in syllabus not being covered.”

These quotations are discussed further in this chapter with regard to tutorial support and support from lecturers. *Figure 5.12, Figure 5.14, Figure 5.15.*

Peer support

“Difficult to find students doing the same module.”

“No clear understanding of the University as a first year student with no assistance.”

“Challenging to study alone.”

“Study group make it easy to understand.”

Unisa is an open distance learning university and in general for students to study alone and on their own can create challenges for them to understand the study material and to work sufficiently through the study material. This is where tutorial service and other learner support services in the region can make a valuable contribution. Tutorials enable students to meet each other and to communicate with each other on problems in the study material as well as other challenges they might experience.

In-text support in the form of well-designed well-integrated courseware

“Some words in the study guide is difficult to understand and sketchy.”

“Overload of work.”

“Difficult to understand subjects that were never done before.”

“New modules are introduced and students unaware of what is going to be tested.”

It is clear that students struggle with the study material and that there exists an overload of work and it is difficult for students to understand. Learner support services in the region as well as contact with lecturers are very important in this scenario. Although MyUnisa is used for contact with lecturers, more students need to make contact via this teaching medium.

Administrative support

“Faculty members are unpleasant and not helpful.”

“Could find more information if feedback on assignments were given timeously.”

“Study material arrive after examinations have been written which contributes to low exam mark.”

“Assignments and feedback are given after the examinations - difficult to prepare for exams.”

“Study material is not arriving timeously for students to submit assignments.”

There are gaps and lack of effective and sufficient learner support was identified though the data in the completed questionnaires from first year level up to third year level

students. Tutorial support and support from lecturers cannot be over-emphasised. This is the area where the student develops a high level of satisfaction and gets familiar with the contents of the study material. It was indicated that they need more tutorial support because of the challenges they experience with the contents of the study material.

The difficulties the students experience with the contents of the study material emphasises the level of support that is needed by students to be successful. It is therefore important that In-text support in the form of well-designed well-integrated courseware be developed when curriculums are designed.

Administrative support by the university goes hand in hand with academic support. Some administrative functions, such as sending study materials and the marked assignments on time will hamper and have a direct influence on the success rate of students if they receive these learning tools late. Assignments will reach the university late and the feedback in the assignments will be received back too late by students to prepare for the next assignment and the examination.

5.3.8 SECTION D [RQ 3]

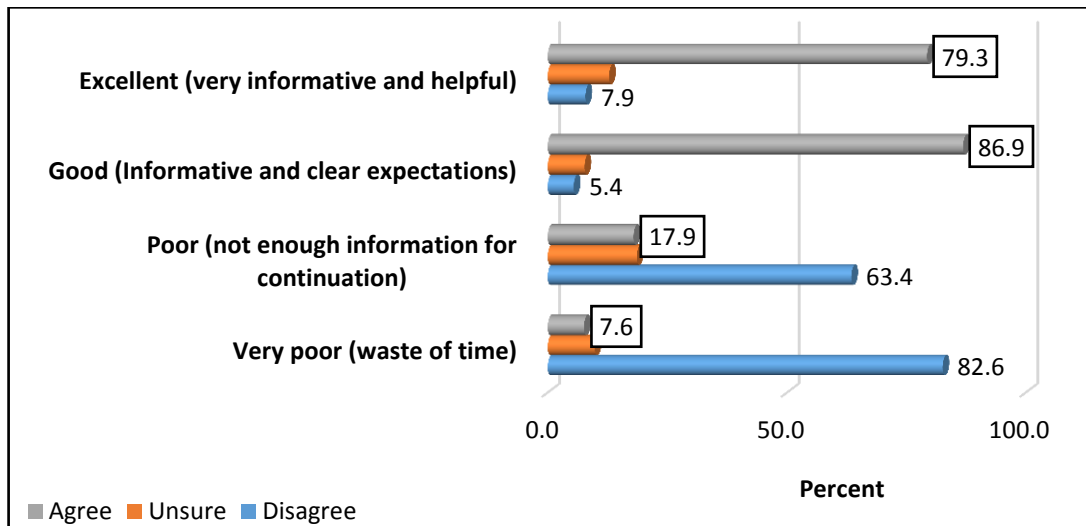
This section provides insight into the quality of the learner support initiatives. It furthermore wants to determine whether these initiatives are effective to support and enhance learning of the students in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal. As Unisa is in the process to transform to an open distance learning university, learner support should be effective and efficient to ensure that the students have a positive learning experience with success as the end result.

5.3.8.1 Rating commitment to your studies

Table 5.22: *Commitment to studies*

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent	7.9	12.8	79.3
Good	5.4	7.7	86.9
Poor	63.4	18.6	17.9
Very poor	82.6	9.8	7.6

Figure 5.11: Commitment of students to studies



Most respondents were committed to their studies (level of agreement = 83.1%).

Table 5.23: Chi-Square Test Statistics on commitment to studies (D1)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	193.842	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	285.294	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	59.186	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	144.136	2	.000

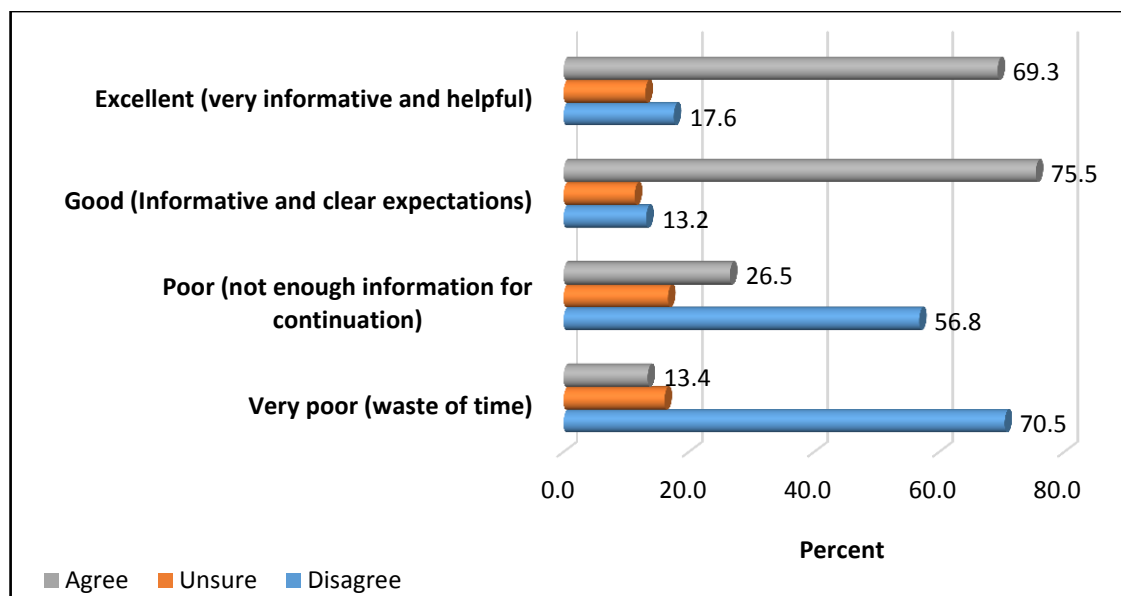
All of the patterns are significant. This is an indication that the level of commitment by the respondents towards their studies. This is where effective and sufficient learner support services can be used to ensure that they have a positive learning experience.

5.3.8.2 Comment on experience and feedback on your assignments and assignment queries to lecturers.

Table 5.24: *Experience of feedback on assignments from lecturers*

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	17.6	13.1	69.3
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	13.2	11.4	75.5
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	56.8	16.7	26.5
Very poor (waste of time)	70.5	16.1	13.4

Figure 5.12: *Experience on feedback in assignments*



Although the level of agreement is fairly high and positive with regards to feedback in assignments, students did voice some concerns that feedback from lecturers are not sufficient in assignments, that assignments are received back late or after the examination or not at all, and that the handwriting of lecturers are not clear.

Hendricks and Quin (in Hyatt 2005: 339) have noted that the way in which lecturers' comments are made can facilitate the process of learning gaining authority in academic writing. This will help students through the process of clarification and focussing. Hunt (as cited by Hyatt, 2005: 340) has emphasised the potentially disastrous damaging effect of ill-conceived and erratic feedback.

Table 5.25: Chi-Square Test Statistics on feedback on assignments (D2)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	116.754	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	175.755	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	106.148	3	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	92.631	2	.000

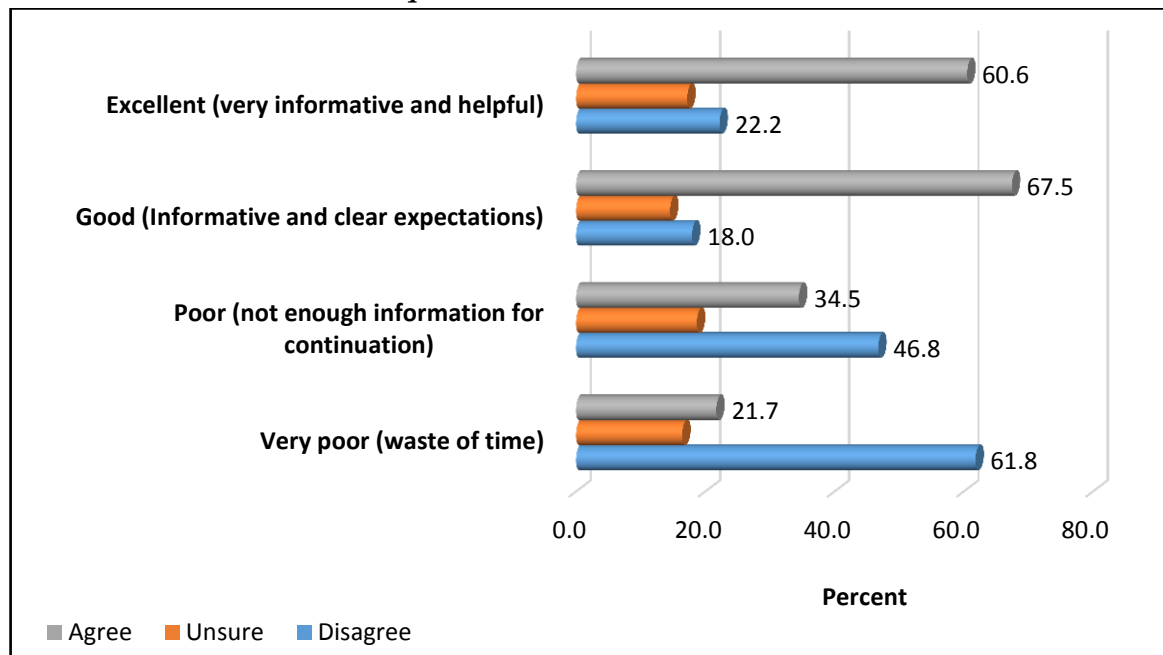
Table 5.25 indicates that all the statements are significant, therefore all the scoring patterns are different.

5.3.8.3 Experience regarding communication and administrative queries between respondents and Unisa

Table 5.26: Experience of general communication on general administrative queries.

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	22.2	17.2	60.6
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	18.0	14.6	67.5
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	46.8	18.7	34.5
Very poor (waste of time)	61.8	16.4	21.7

Figure 5.13: *Experience of communication with the university on general administration queries*



Students find communication with Unisa in general positive, but mention that it is difficult to reach Unisa online as it is too busy. Further and additional comments by students was that staff need more training, and not all study material has been received, whilst Unisa does not reply to queries on time.

Table 5.27: *Chi-Square Test Statistics on Experience of communication with the university on general administration queries (D3)*

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	60.7	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	108.417	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	20.316	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	56.224	2	.000

All the p-values are less than 0.05 and are an indication that the statements are significant. It also then demonstrates that the scoring per statement is different.

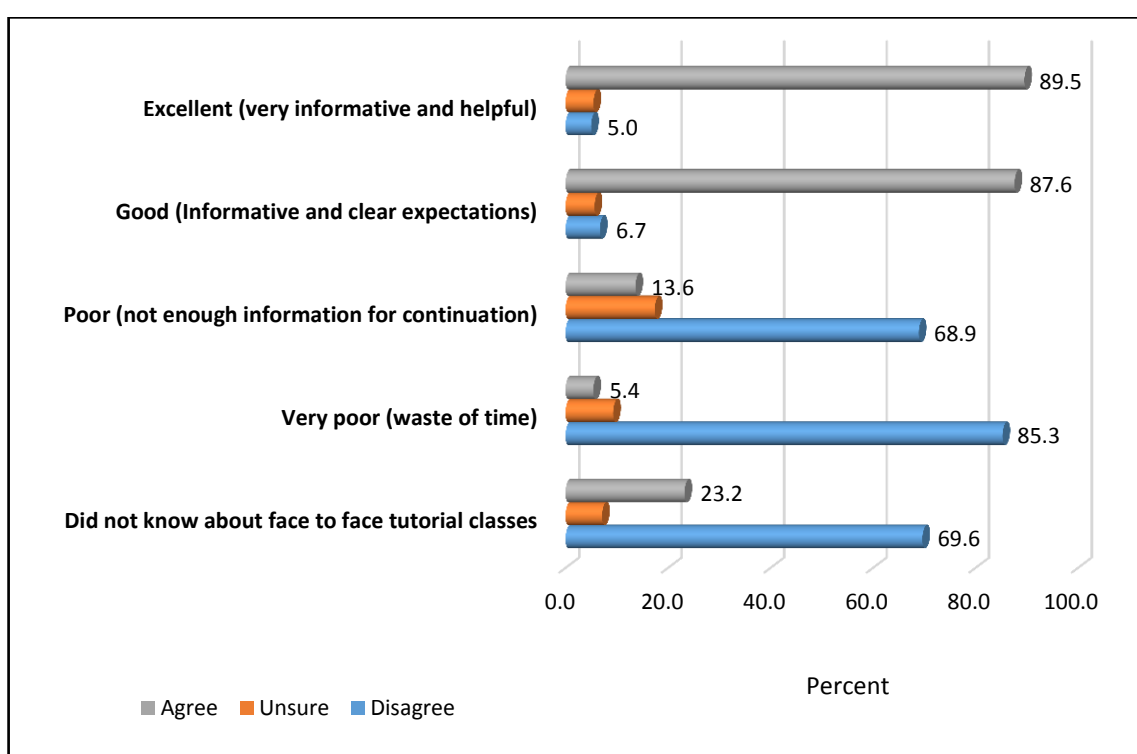
5.3.8.4 Experience of face-to-face tutorial classes at Unisa

A high level of satisfaction of face-to-face tutorial classes is experienced and expressed in *Table 5.28* below, and shows a high demand for this type of learner support.

Table 5.28: Students experience of face-to-face tutorial classes

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	5.0	5.5	89.5
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	6.7	5.7	87.6
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	68.9	17.4	13.6
Very poor (waste of time)	85.3	9.3	5.4
Did not know about face to face tutorial classes	69.6	7.1	23.2

Figure 5.14: Face-to-face tutorial experience by students



Students expressed their need for more tutorial classes owing to the fact that lap tops, computers and the Internet are too expensive to obtain.

“Face to face tutorial is beneficial - more session time.”

“Increase them to 2 hours per day especially FAC and Economics.”

“Very helpful and have knowledge of subject content.”

“Helpful as problems experienced can be addressed immediately.”

“Increase tutorial lessons.”

In Figure 5.17 it is clearly shown that students are in favour of tutorial classes and that there is a huge demand for this form of learner support.

Table 5.29: Chi-Square Test Statistics on Face-to-face tutorial experience by students (D4)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	312.827	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	257.392	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	75.591	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	156.884	2	.000
Did not know about face to face tutorial classes	70.786	2	.000

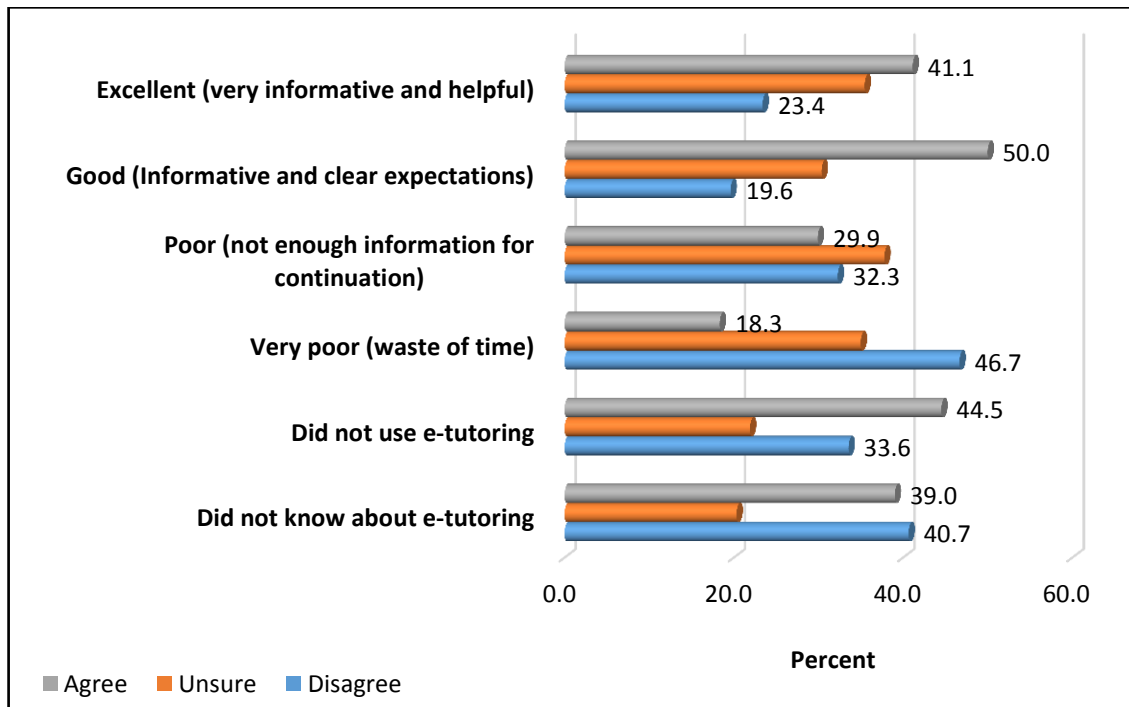
All the p-values are less than 0.05 and is an indication that the statements are significant.

5.3.8.5 Experience of e-tutoring (online tutoring) at Unisa

Table 5.30: Experience of e-tutoring (online tutoring) at Unisa

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	23.4	35.5	41.1
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	19.6	30.4	50.0
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	32.3	37.8	29.9
Very poor (waste of time)	46.7	35.0	18.3
Did not use e-tutoring	33.6	21.9	44.5
Did not know about e-tutoring	40.7	20.3	39.0

Figure 5.15: E-tutoring experience by students



An interesting phenomenon is displayed in *Table 5.30* above. Only an average of 45.55% of the respondents indicated their satisfaction with e-tutoring, while 44.5% did not make use of it and 39% did not know about e-tutoring. Many factors can influence this occurrence as seen in the comments made by the students below.

“No access to computers and internet.”

“More information must be given out about these programmes and was not informed about it.”

“Do not use it and prefer My Unisa.”

“Never tried it.”

“Very poor as students have little knowledge about computers and there is no assistance.”

“E-Tutoring was not a gradual process therefore there are infrastructural challenges.”

“Very confusing to use it.”

“Get the experience on how to use the internet and to communicate online.”

“No online tutoring.”

“E-tutoring does not provide feedback timeously.”

From the above comments made by students, it is clear that the e-tutoring is currently a concern to students and they find it difficult to use this facility.

The availability of technological resources at and ODL University is a very important tool and students should be able to use these resources. Users of these technologies need training and support to be able to use it effectively towards the success of their studies. E-tutors should be properly trained in using e-learning technologies and appropriate feedback should be given on these sites to students to enhance their learning. E-tutoring featured prominently in this study and was extensively discussed in Chapter Three.

Table 5.31: Chi-Square Test Statistics on experience of e-tutoring (D5)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	6.936	2	.031
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	22.494		.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	1.244		.537
Very poor (waste of time)	14.6		.001
Did not use e-tutoring	11.192		.004
Did not know about e-tutoring	9.415		.009

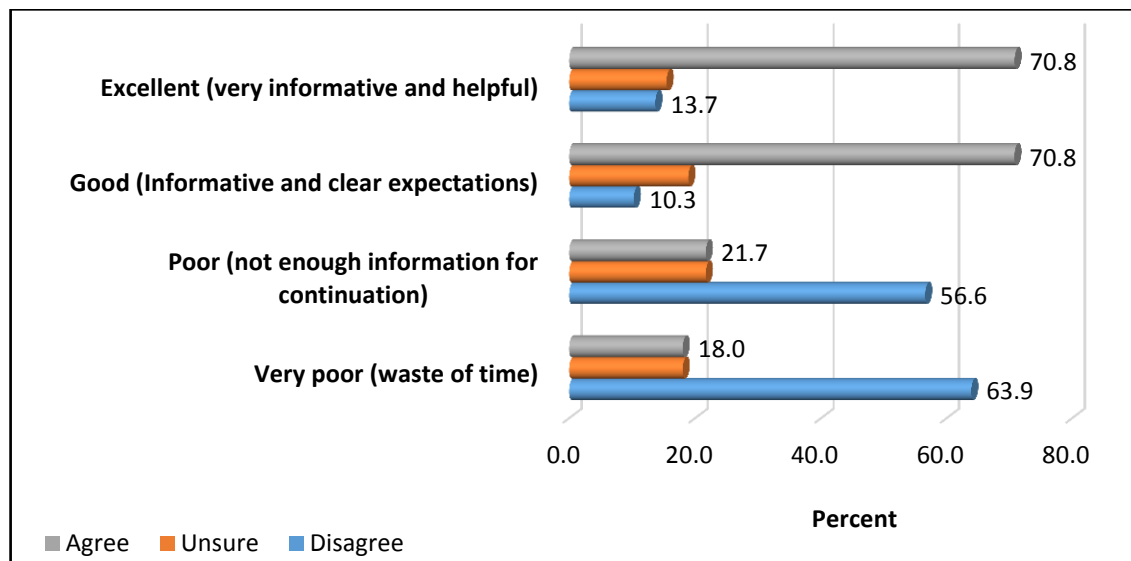
The Chi-Square results in the table above tests the differences per statement and indicates that the statements are significant. The score of .537 is an indication that there is only a 46.3% chance that this statement is true. This finding could be attributed to the fact that students are not given sufficient information or orientation of what E-tutoring entails, and the lack of familiarity or confidence in this learning approach thereof may result in non-participation.

5.3.8.6 Experience of respondents on the library resources

Table 5.32: Experience of Library resources

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	13.7	15.5	70.8
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	10.3	18.9	70.8
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	56.6	21.7	21.7
Very poor (waste of time)	63.9	18.0	18.0

Figure 5.16: Experience with regard to library resources



An average of 70.8% of respondents is of the opinion that the library resources in the library are sufficient. Only the hub in Durban has a library whilst the other offices in the KZN region are without library facilities. Students are requested to order books from the main libraries in Pretoria and Florida, Johannesburg. According to the comments of the respondents, there is a clear demand for library training and some students are of the opinion that facilities are not enough in the region. In the interviews that were conducted with the staff it was mentioned that resources are available but a number of the books are outdated. There is a definite need for more contemporary sources to be made available for students' use.

Table 5.33: Chi-Square Test Statistics on experience of library resources (D6)

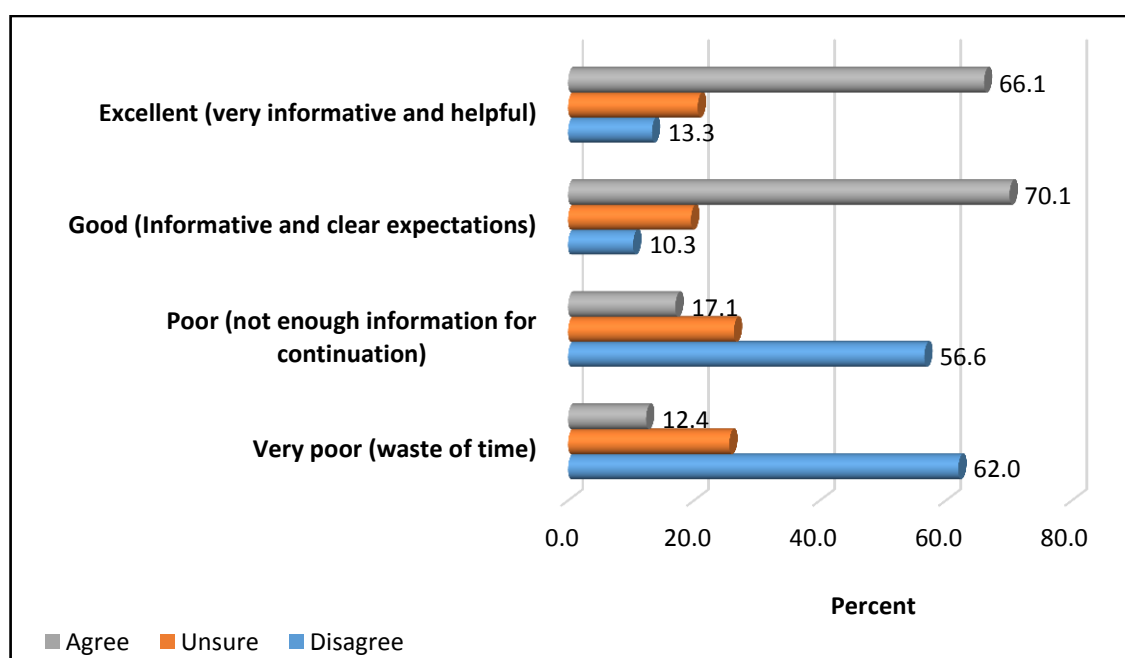
	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	106.393	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	119.005	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	31.395	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	51.41	2	.000

5.3.8.7 Experience of the library services from the staff in the library

Table 5.34: *Experience of library services*

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	13.3	20.6	66.1
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	10.3	19.5	70.1
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	56.6	26.4	17.1
Very poor (waste of time)	62.0	25.6	12.4

Figure 5. 17: *Experience of library services by staff in the library*



An average satisfaction rate of 68.1% with the services rendered by staff is shown in Figure 5.17. Library services available in Unisa KZN have also been outlined in discussion in Chapter Three.

Table 5.35: Chi-Square Test Statistics on library services of staff (D7)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	80.836	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	108.138	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	33.07	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	47.868	2	.000
Did not know about face to face tutorial classes	80.836	2	.000

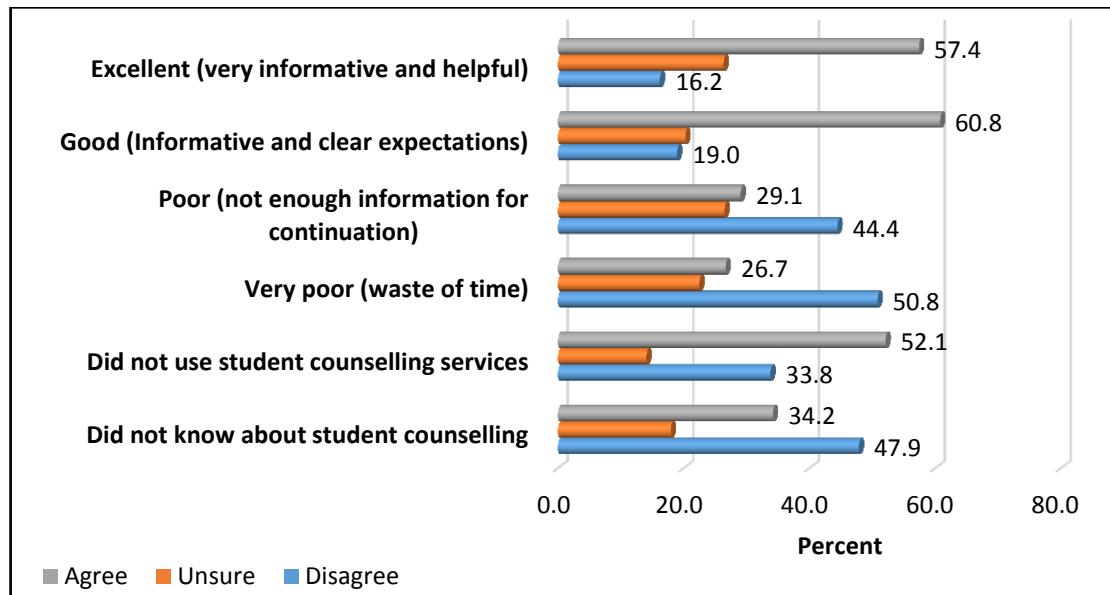
Table 5.35 reveals that all the statements are significant as per the Chi-Square Test.

5.3.8.8 Experience student counselling services rendered by staff at Unisa

Table 5.36: Experience of services by staff in student counselling

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	16.2	26.4	57.4
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	19.0	20.3	60.8
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	44.4	26.5	29.1
Very poor (waste of time)	50.8	22.5	26.7
Did not use student counselling services	33.8	14.1	52.1
Did not know about student counselling	47.9	17.9	34.2

Figure 5.18: Experience of student counselling services by students



An average of 59.1% of the respondents are satisfied with the student counselling services rendered to them. It is interesting thought to note is that 52.1% did not use counselling services, while 34.2% did not know about these services. In their comments, the respondents also voiced their concern that counsellors are not well trained and don't have enough information to assist them with the choice of products (subjects and degrees) at Unisa. This service is only available at the Durban office in the region. An outline of counselling services has been discussed in Chapter Three.

Table 5.37: Chi-Square Test Statistics on student counselling services (D8)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	40.959	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	51.922	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	6.615	2	.037
Very poor (waste of time)	16.85	2	.000
Did not use counselling services	30.817	2	.000
Did not know about student counselling	15.744	2	.000

The Chi-Square Tests reflected in *Table 5.37* above reflects that all the statements are significant. All the p-values are below 0.05 (the level of significance) and thus indicates

that the scoring patterns are different per statement. According to statistical terms, this points out that only five percent of the statements have a chance of not being true.

5.3.8.9 Experience of the Academic Literacy services from staff

Table 5.38: *Experience of Academic Literacy services*

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	8.8	33.8	57.4
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	10.0	26.0	64.0
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	40.0	40.9	19.1
Very poor (waste of time)	44.6	38.4	17.0
Did not use Academic Literacy services	33.8	20.3	45.9
Did not know about Academic Literacy services	36.4	25.6	38.0

Figure 5.19: *Experience of Academic Literacy services*

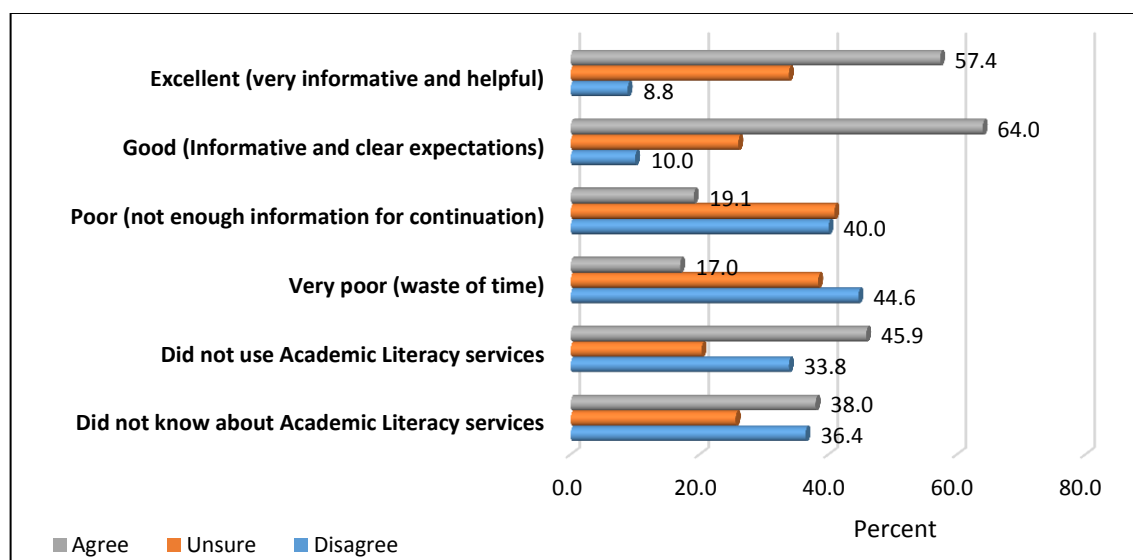


Figure 5.22 indicates an average of 60.7% satisfaction with the service, but 45.9% of the respondents indicated that they have not used the Academic Literacy services. The question can then be asked whether students knew about this service by informing them of the availability of this service. This service is also only available at the Durban hub. It would appear that students also are not clear about what these services entail.

Table 5.39: Chi-Square Test Statistics on Academic Literacy Services (D9)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	48.059	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	69.24	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	10.055	2	.007
Very poor (waste of time)	14.161	2	.001
Did not use Academic Literacy Services	13.053	2	.001
Did not know about Academic Literacy Services	3.535	2	.171

Table 5.39 indicates that the Chi-Square results and tests demonstrates the significance of the differences per option. The highlighted value indicates that this option was not as significant as the other values.

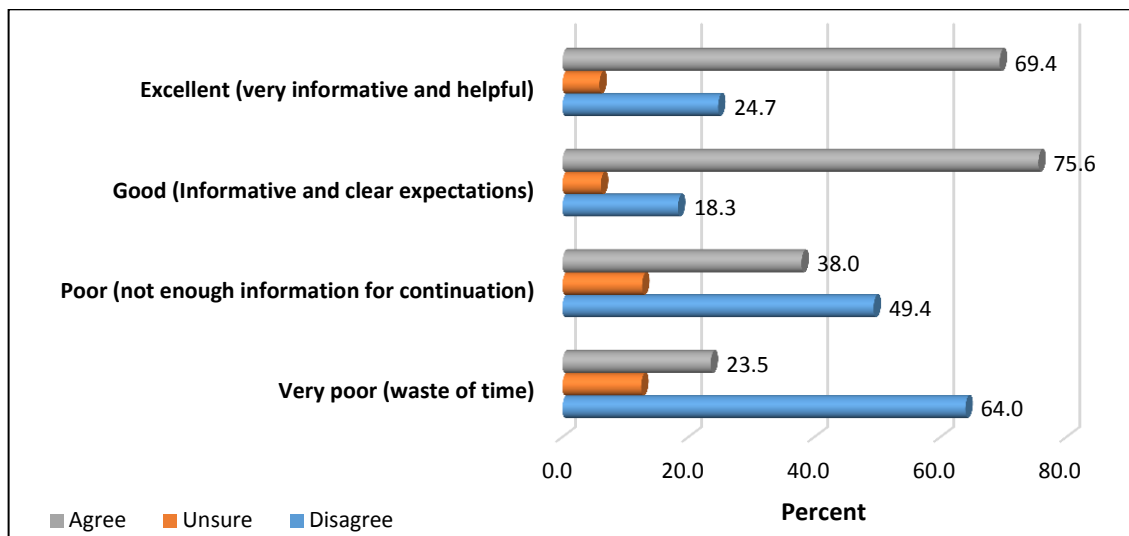
The scores for ‘did not know about academic library services’ reveals .171 which in effect means that a fair number of students are unaware of this significant service available for their academic assistance.

5.3.8.10 Experience of the registration services at Unisa KZN

Table 5.40: Experience of the registration services

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	24.7	5.9	69.4
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	18.3	6.1	75.6
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	49.4	12.7	38.0
Very poor (waste of time)	64.0	12.5	23.5

Figure 5.20: Registration services at Unisa KZN



The respondents indicated (average level of 72.5%) that the registration services are good and satisfactory. Some respondents are of the opinion that it is poor (38%) and this gives an indication that there is room for improvement. This is the first level of entrance into the institution for students. It is therefore of utmost importance to make this process as seamless and simple as possible, whilst all possible errors and mistakes should be kept to the minimum. Some pertinent comments and concerns that were raised in the survey instrument were the following:

“Services must be improved.”

“Need to be more polite.”

“Very poor, they don’t arrange things on time.”

“Very poor - prefer online registration.”

“Extremely long queues.”

“Improve the quality of trained staff.”

When students contact the university to register, decent and effective support should be provided to them to make this process as comfortable and positive as possible. Continuous training should be provided to staff to offer efficient support during these processes.

Table 5.41: Chi-Square Test Statistics on registration services at Unisa KZN (D10)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	108.612	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	148.433	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	35.217	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	59.926	2	.000

All statements are indicated as significant.

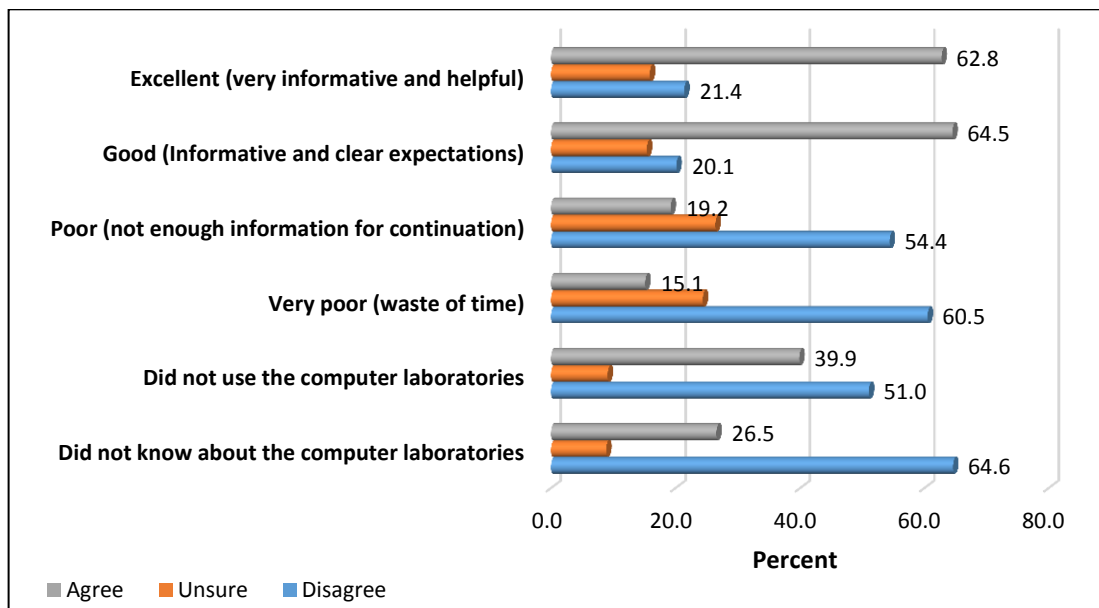
5.3.8.11 Experience of the computer laboratories at Unisa KZN

An average of 63.6% of the respondents was satisfied with this learner support initiative according to Table 5.42 below.

Table 5.42: Experience of the services in the computer laboratories

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	21.4	15.9	62.8
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	20.1	15.4	64.5
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	54.4	26.4	19.2
Very poor (waste of time)	60.5	24.4	15.1
Did not use the computer laboratories	51.0	9.1	39.9
Did not know about the computer laboratories	64.6	8.8	26.5

Figure 5.21: Services at the computer laboratories at Unisa KZN



Students are allowed to book a computer for two hours and it can be assumed that a large number of students also use the Unisa internet facility, as well as the WiFi facility on the campuses where it is available. An average of 39.9% of the respondents indicated that they did not use the computer laboratories. This might be because more students are starting to use their own computers given the insufficiency of this important resource to serve the large number of students' needs, especially on the Durban campus. This is an important service, because Unisa is moving towards an ODeL university. Students raised the following concerns with regard to this support service to them with the following comments:

"A bigger facility is needed with more computers."

"Assistance is poor in the computer lab."

"Computers to student ratio for E-learning is poor."

"More time should be given to use the computers."

"The internet should be ready and fast."

"Shortage of computers."

"Always full use internet café."

"Too long wait."

A brief discussion of the computer laboratories was done in Chapter Three.

Table 5.43: Chi-Square Test Statistics on services at the computer laboratories at Unisa KZN (D11)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	57.159	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	74.426	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	25.936	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	41.059	2	.000
Did not use the computer laboratories at Unisa KZN	40.503	2	.000
Did not know about the computer laboratories	55.027	2	.000

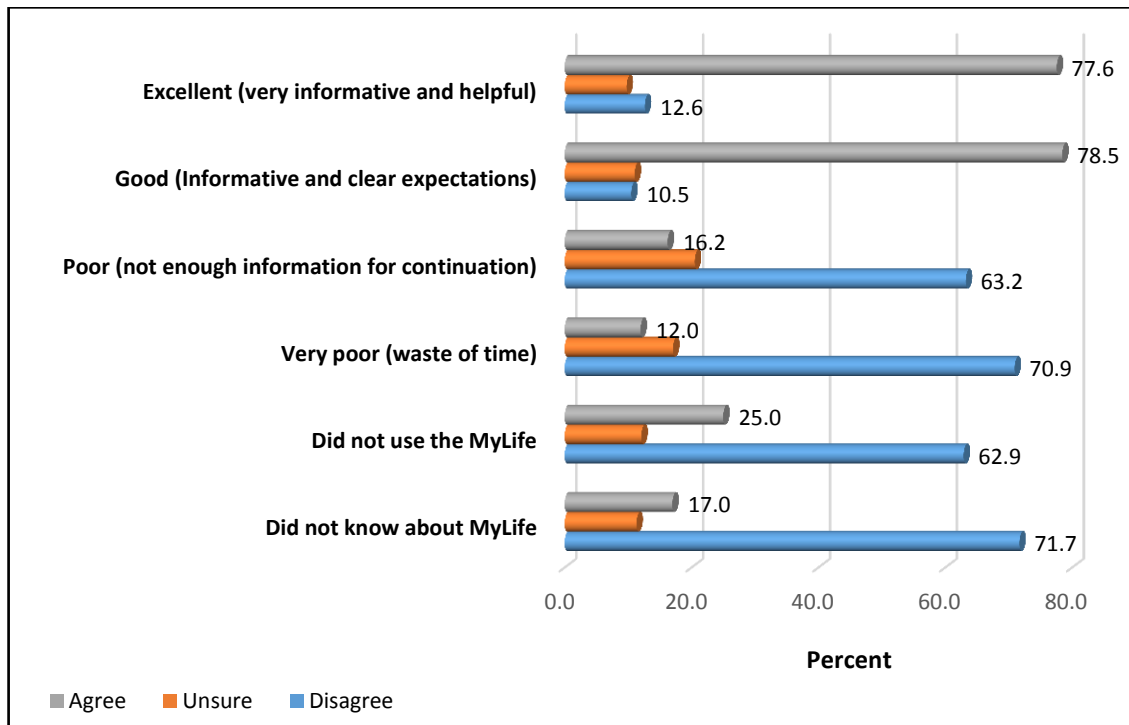
All the scores of the statements are different and indicate that it is significant.

5.3.8.12 Experience the use of *MyLife* free e-mail services

Table 5.44: *MyLife* services at Unisa

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	12.6	9.8	77.6
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	10.5	11.0	78.5
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	63.2	20.5	16.2
Very poor (waste of time)	70.9	17.1	12.0
Did not use the <i>MyLife</i>	62.9	12.1	25.0
Did not know about <i>MyLife</i>	71.7	11.3	17.0

Figure 5.22: *MyLife* services



The average level of 78.05% indicated that a large number of students do make use of this facility and are satisfied with this support service. *MyLife* is a personal free e-mail service which students can use as long as they are registered students at Unisa. It also seems as if students find the MyLife service helpful with regard to additional comments given in the survey instrument.

Table 5.45: *Chi-Square Test Statistics on MyLife services (D12)*

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	153.552	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	165.823	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	47.436	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	74.923	2	.000
Did not use the <i>MyLife</i>	51.887	2	.000
Did not know about <i>MyLife</i>	70.717	2	.000

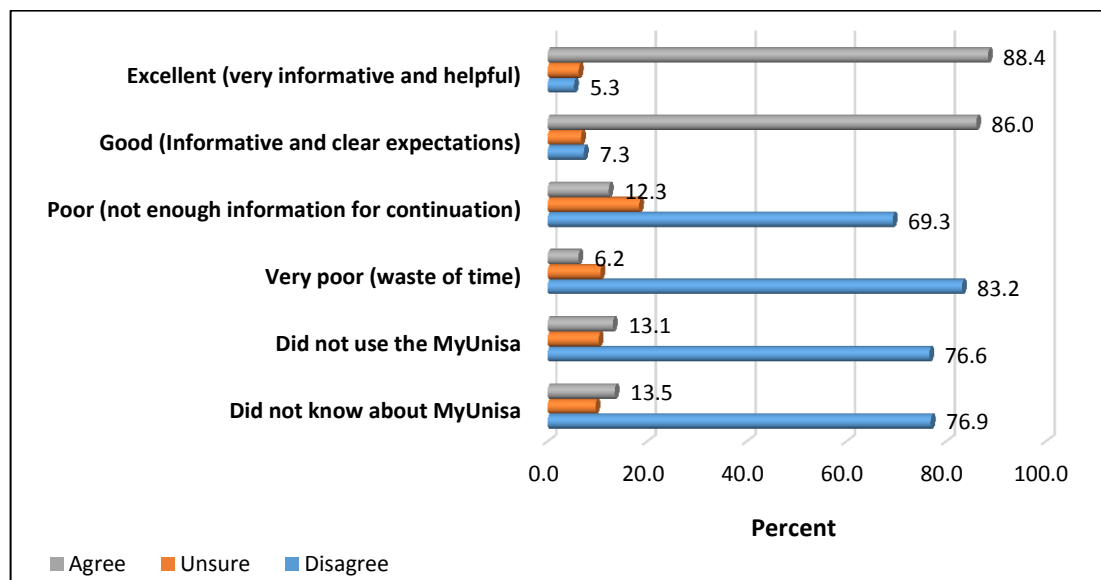
All the above values are significant.

5.3.8.13 Experience of the MyUnisa page of Unisa

Table 5.46: *Experience of MyUnisa*

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	5.3	6.3	88.4
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	7.3	6.7	86.0
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	69.3	18.4	12.3
Very poor (waste of time)	83.2	10.6	6.2
Did not use the MyUnisa	76.6	10.3	13.1
Did not know about MyUnisa	76.9	9.6	13.5

Figure 5.23: *Services of MyUnisa*



The satisfaction level is very high as illustrated in *Figure 5* with an average level of 87.2%. This indicates a clear indication that a large number of students use this facility. The MyUnisa facility is an online information facility where students can get examination results, assignment results, follow-up tutorial letters, etc. Students can also post their assignments online by using the MyUnisa route.

Table 5.47: Chi-Square Test Statistics on Services of MyUnisa (D13)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	282.551	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	223.721	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	67	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	126.708	2	.000
Did not use the <i>MyUnisa</i>	90.411	2	.000
Did not know about <i>MyUnisa</i>	89.154	2	.000

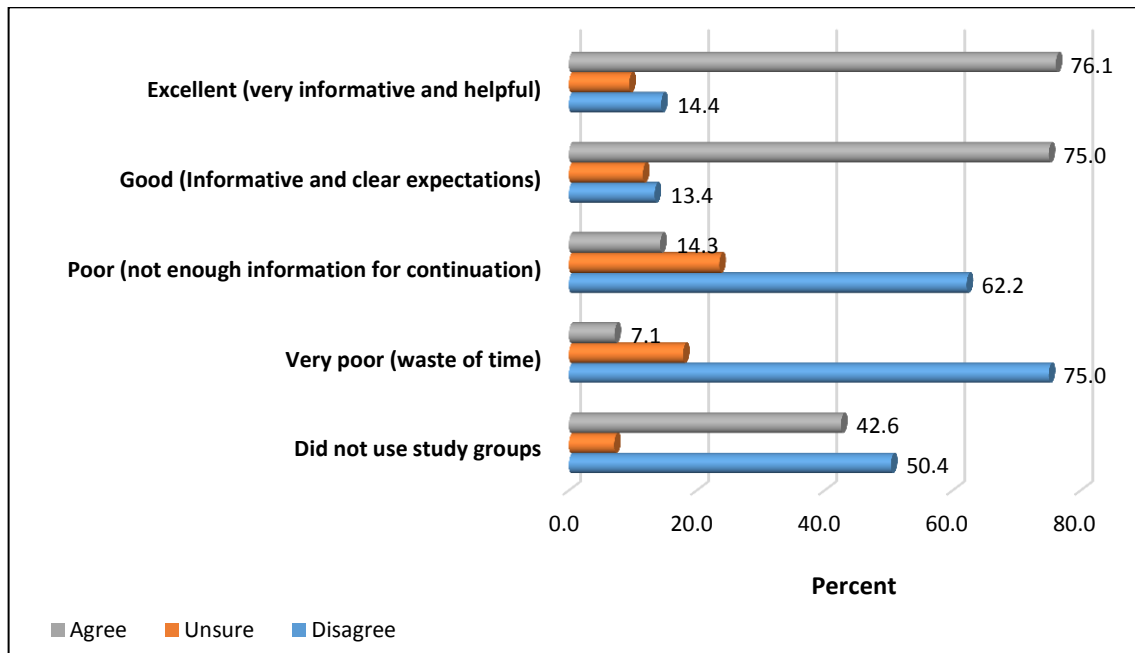
Since all of the sig. values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance), it implies that the distributions were not even. This means that the differences between agreement and disagreement were significant.

5.3.8.14 Experience of study groups (groups with fellow students)

Table 5.48: Experience of study groups

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	14.4	9.4	76.1
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	13.4	11.6	75.0
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	62.2	23.5	14.3
Very poor (waste of time)	75.0	17.9	7.1
Did not use study groups	50.4	7.1	42.6

Figure 5.24: Experience of study groups



With the average level at 75.55%, it gives an indication that students are positive to make use of this avenue to get support from peer learners who are pursuing the same degree or modules. It is further observed that 42.6 % of the students don't make use of this avenue. This is a very important way for students to not feel isolated within the university as a distance education institution. This can have an impact on the success of the students, because the exposure they get through this form of learning will assist them to familiarise themselves with the content of the study material.

Table 5.49: Chi-Square Test Statistics on experience of study groups (D14)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	148.9	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	128.207	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	46.101	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	89.429	2	.000
Did not use the study groups	44.979	2	.000

All of the p-values are significant implying that the scoring patterns are not the same per option per statement.

5.3.8.15 Indication of assignments submitted to obtain entrance to the examination

The submission of assignments by students is an instrument that is used to assist students to systematically work through the syllabus of modules in their degree for which they have registered during a semester or year course.

Table 5.50: *Number of assignments submitted*

	Count	Percent
All the assignments	160	51.0
First assignment	134	42.7
Second assignment	34	10.8
Third assignment	17	5.4
Fourth assignment	10	3.2
Fifth assignment	10	3.2
Sixth assignment	6	1.9
Seventh assignment	5	1.6

It is noted that the submission account for students who have submitted all the assignments is only 51%, which is reflective of the fact that a large complement of students are unable to fulfil their academic obligations timeously. This could be attributed to the volume of the workload for students are challenging and that many of them are unable to cope with the academic demands of distance education. Therefore, the need arises to reinforce learner support systems to help students cope with this mode of study. Some students commented as follows:

“Too much work.”

“Second assignment is too long.”

“Need support in Essay as second assignment.”

Assignment two and the follow-up assignments are longer assignments with essay type questions and from the comments from the students it appears that they struggle with these assignments. This can then be a reason why there is a significant drop in the count of submission in assignment two and the follow-up assignments. It can further be an indication that students don't understand the value of working steadfastly on the assignments throughout the semester or year, and to familiarise themselves with the contents of the study materials.

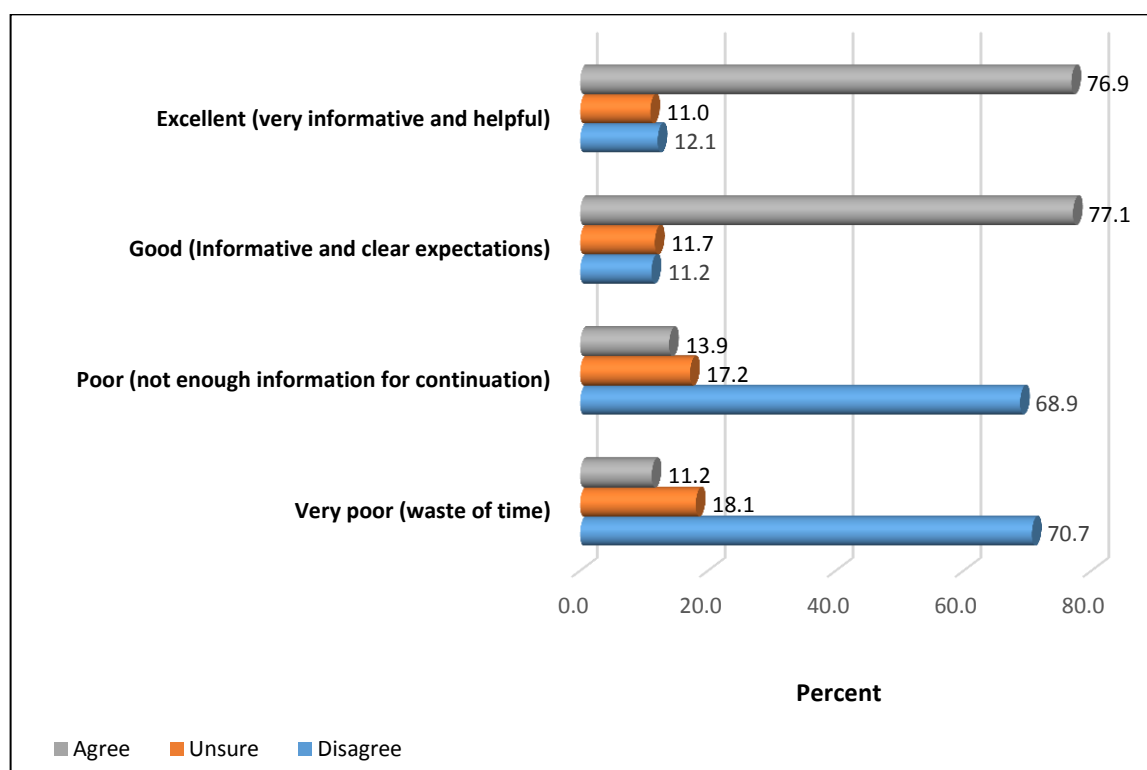
Assignment one is a compulsory assignment for all modules and is as a rule a multi-choice type of assignment. When students have submitted assignment one, they gain automatic entrance to the examination. Therefore, the count for the submission of assignment one in *Table 5.50* above is higher than the submission count for the other assignments. This factor has a direct impact on this study in that it highlights the importance of learner support for students, and that they clearly need support in compiling their assignments to ensure that constructive learning take place.

5.3.8.16 Experience of the feedback on assignments in feedback tutorial letters

Table 5.51: *Feedback in assignments and feedback tutorial letters*

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	12.1	11.0	76.9
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	11.2	11.7	77.1
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	68.9	17.2	13.9
Very poor (waste of time)	70.7	18.1	11.2

Figure 5.25: *Assignment and tutorial letter feedback*



An average level of 77% of the students find the feedback on assignments valuable. Feedback on assignments is a very important tool to guide students and explain to them where they need to improve on the academic requirements for their assignments. This type of feedback is part of the interaction between the lecturer and the students. Tait & Mills (2003: 203) further explain that to address the learning needs of students, interaction is a key factor to all main theories of learner support in distance education. The authors further concede that the interactive process of learner support happens within the institution, as well as the context of the course and teaching. Hattie & Timperley (2007: 81) also emphasise that one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement is feedback. The way feedback is provided and the type of feedback can be differentially effective and can help students to understand how they can develop their learning.

Table 5.52: Chi-Square Test Statistics on Assignment and tutorial letter feedback

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	147.653	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	162.266	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	69.459	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	73.672	2	.000

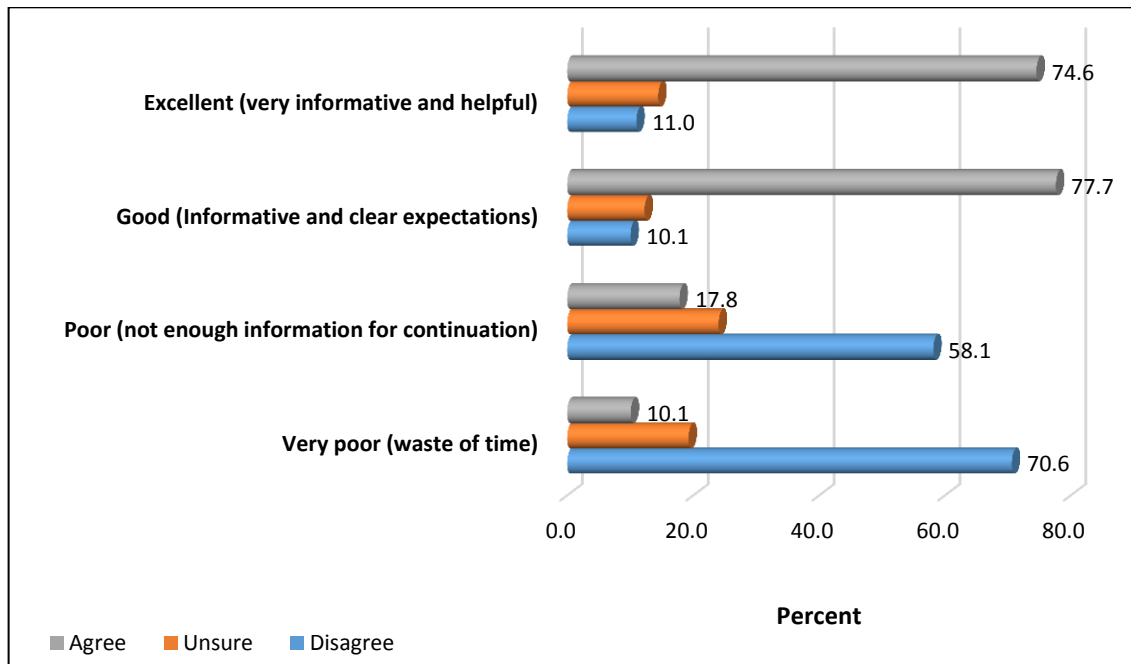
All values are significant. This indicates that the scoring patterns were different per statement.

5.3.8.17 Experience of the examination guidelines in the feedback tutorial letters

Table 5.53: Examination guidelines in feedback tutorial letters

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	11.0	14.5	74.6
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	10.1	12.3	77.7
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	58.1	24.0	17.8
Very poor (waste of time)	70.6	19.3	10.1

Figure 5.26: Examination guidelines in follow-up tutorial letters



The average level of satisfaction is 76.15%. This gives an indication that a large number of students are satisfied with the feedback on examination guidelines provided in the follow-up tutorials. It is noted that an average of 13.95% of the students are of the opinion that the guidance on examinations was poor.

Table 5.54: Chi-Square Test Statistics on examination guidelines in follow-up tutorial letters (D17)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Excellent (very informative and helpful)	132.671	2	.000
Good (Informative and clear expectations)	158.358	2	.000
Poor (not enough information for continuation)	36.465	2	.000
Very poor (waste of time)	69.651	2	.000

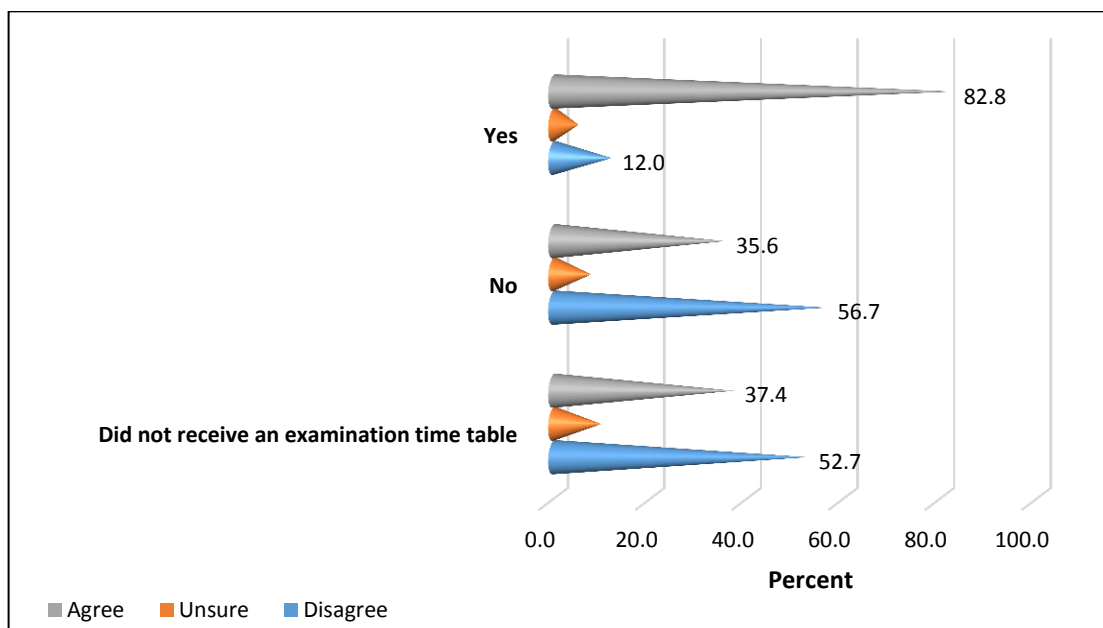
The p-values indicate that the scoring patterns are significantly different.

5.3.8.18 Receipt of the examination timetable in time to write the examinations

Table 5.55: *Receiving of examination time table in time*

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Yes	12.0	5.2	82.8
No	56.7	7.8	35.6
Did not receive an examination time table	52.7	9.9	37.4

Figure 5.27: *Examination time table received in time*



A large number of students (82.8%) are satisfied that they received their examination time table on time. This will curb any stress the students might experience and it gives them the assurance that they gained entrance to the examination.

It is noted that 35.6% did not receive their examination time table on time. This is a factor of great concern and can be a very stressful experience for the students. This forms part of the administrative support and will have a negative influence on student experiences. Comments from student in this regard are highlighted hereunder:

“Had to print own copy on My Unisa.”

“Not yet received.”

Some students, (37.4%) did not receive an examination time table. A reason for this might be that the student did not submit the relevant assignments or they did not submit it on time. Additional comments from students that might have had an influence, as mentioned below:

“Did not write an examination yet”

“Struggle to go to the nearest centre to fetch it.”

Table 5.56: Chi-Square Test Statistics on examination time table in time (D18)

	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Yes	258.549	2	.000
No	32.467	2	.000
Did not receive an examination time table	25.736	2	.000

Table 5.56 indicates the Chi-Square results. It tests the significance of the differences per option.

5.4 THROUGHPUT RATE OF STUDENTS

It is due to the fact that the researcher did not include the student number as an option to fill in on the consent letter a list was drawn up with the names of the respondents from the information provided on the consent letter. The list was sent to Pretoria to the statistics section who traced the names on the system of Unisa. Only hundred and thirty respondents could be traced. This information is illustrated in Annexure 12 at the end of the thesis. It appears that not all the information were captured on the system of Unisa, because all the respondents who completed the questionnaire were in the tutorial classes. A number of students' names did not appear on the system generated attendance register and this could be caused due to the fact that information has not been captured on the system, or it was captured, but it does not reflect on the system. This is a problem that has been identified and has been mentioned at numerous meetings with management in Pretoria.

A total of 25 subjects were involved in the investigation and seventeen subjects could be traced with the names provided to Pretoria. An average of 53% of the respondents passed their examinations and all these respondents attend tutorial classes.

5.5 PART 2 – QUALITATIVE PHASE - INTERVIEWS

This part of the study will discuss the analysis of the data in *Annexures 2* and *Annexure 3*. Interviews were done with staff involved in learner support services as well as face-to-face tutors, e-tutors and teaching assistants who also provide online support in the signature modules. A total of 21 interviews were sought of which 16 interviews were conducted personally, while 3 tutors completed the schedule *via* email. In total, 19 interviews were administered and conducted. This contributed to a 90% response rate. The questions in both the interview schedules for permanent staff and tutors had the same questions to allow for comparisons of responses.

5.5.1 Section A – Biographical data

In this section, the analysis of the biographical data of the respondents is summarised. It includes factors such as race group, gender, occupation, department and designation of the respondents and years of experience.

Table 5.57: *Race groups of the respondents*

RACE	COUNT
Black	8
Indian	10
White	1
Coloured	0

It was important to have an indication of the race groups of respondents in *Table 5.57* above and the gender of respondents in *Table 5.58* below to illustrate that they are representative of our student population. This also strengthens the authenticity of the study.

Table 5. 58: *Gender of respondents*

GENDER	COUNT
Male	9
Female	10

Table 5. 59: Occupational department

DEPARTMENT	COUNT
Tutorial Services (permanent staff)	5
Tutors (three year contracts)	7
Library (permanent staff)	3
Counselling (permanent staff)	2
Academic Literacy Facilitators (Independent contracts)	1
Technology Enhanced Learning (permanent staff)	1

All the respondents are part of the support staff in the region and they are working on a daily basis with students. The department they work (*Table 5.59*) in and the designation of the respondents (*Table 5.60*) give an indication which section of the support services they represent.

Table 5. 60: Designation of Respondents

DESIGNATION	COUNT
Technology Enhanced learning coordinator	1
Tutors / E-tutors /Teaching Assistants	7
Regional Academic Coordinators	3
Counsellors	1
Manager Counselling	1
Head Facilitation of Learning	1
Junior Branch Librarian	2
Acting Head Library	1
Tutorial Officer	1
Academic Literacy Facilitator	1

Table 5.61: Experience in current positions

YEARS	COUNT
1-5	5
6-10	7
11-15	4
16-20	2
21-25	1

The level of experience of respondents has an influence on their responses on the questions in the interview schedule as shown in *Table 5.61* above.

5.5.2 Day-to-day responsibilities of respondents

This section of the interview schedule covered the responsibilities of the respondents. The idea was to accentuate that all the interviewees have some form of face-to-face, telephonic and/or e-mail contact with students in the execution of their daily tasks and responsibilities. All the respondents are directly in contact with the students in the Library, Students Counselling, Tutorial services, Academic Literacy (AcaLit) and Technology Enhanced Learning Coordination (TELCO). In the paragraphs to follow, concurrent themes that emerged during the interviews were discussed.

5.5.3 Policies regarding the Open Distance Learning and Open Distance and e-Learning policies

These policies should serve as guidance to staff on the direction the University is taking with regard to ODL and ODeL. During the interviews with staff the following emerged:

5.5.3.1 Implementation of the policies

The majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the policies in place are very comprehensive policies and that the university is on the right track, but challenges exist with the implementation of the policies. An additional concern was raised by some of the respondents that ODL is merely another policy adopted from Western Countries, and that it will not suit the different circumstances and social issues faced in the higher education landscape in South Africa. The following sub-themes materialised from this statement:

- Shortage of staff and resources. This turned out to be a huge barrier with the implementation of the policies.
“Resources and the infrastructure not in place to accommodate ODL.”
“It appears as if it happens too fast, before we could look at resources it actually happened. Unisa is moving too fast and we leave our students behind.”
“There is not enough resources to help us to achieve what we are supposed to achieve.”
“Resources in terms of staff not sufficient.”
- Orientation and training of staff. A general opinion was that staff were not properly orientated or trained to drive the implementation of the ODL process.
“A big gap is staff training.”

“There is no training and no infrastructure.”

“Staff and students need training.”

- Poor or no communication. A further concern raised by the respondents is that there is no effective and sufficient communication to assist and empower staff to fill the gaps that develop through communication with students.

“Online modules-no feedback from the region required –poor communication. “No communication to help fill the gaps.”

5.5.4 Readiness of students who are entering the ODL system

This study focused on the first year students registered at the university and who attended the tutorial classes.

- Language barrier. The language barrier of the students is a major concern for the respondents, and the majority are of the opinion that the students are poorly equipped to understand literacy discourse required at university level.

“The language barrier a huge problem and students don’t know how to write an essay, because they simply cannot follow instructions and then they plagiarise.”

“Students have massive language problems.”

- Computer literacy. This seems to be a major problem, because a vast majority of students are not efficient using a computer or the internet. Without students acquiring this skill it will make the implementation process difficult or will slow it down immensely.

“E-learning students must know how a computer works and students must adapt to e-learning.”

“Students are not computer literate –they cannot even use a mouse.”

“Computer literacy – students struggle with basic computer skills.”

“Students mentioned that they are not ready for online learning. They need training in computers and internet.”

- Funding. The cost of computers and internet in South Africa is very expensive and a large number of the students just cannot afford it.

“Students don’t have computers and students still have to buy in to the processes and system.”

Although more students are seen with laptops on campus, this still remains a barrier to online learning.

- Resources. Students struggle to get access to the relevant resources to assist them to make the shift to online learning. Apart from the fact that computers and internet are very expensive, they need to get access to computers on campus and there are by far not enough computers on campus to service students. The video conference facilities are also insufficient to accommodate the large number of students. Students in rural areas struggle with computers, library services and cell phone reception.

“There is not enough computers and students struggle with internet access.”

“At some offices in the region, the students are too isolated.”

“There is not enough books in the Library and a large number of them are outdated.”

- Orientation of students with regard to e-learning/online learning. The majority of the respondents felt that the students are not enough orientated to e-learning and that the ODL processes are not marketed enough. This is seen as one of the reasons why students are not ready for what is waiting for them. The poor orientation of students before they start with their studies results in poor or no communication with students. It is also a big concern that only a minimum number of students attend orientations.

“Students don’t stand orientation sessions. %000sms’s have been sent out and only 15 students turn up for the orientations.”

“Students need more orientation in the Library and need lots of help.”

In an international study, *“Strategies needed to widen student access and success”* by Peta Lee (2013: n.p), one of the key findings emphasise that a more co-ordinated style to information, advice and guidance across the lifecycle of the student should be followed.

5.5.5 Quality of learner support services

Simpson (2002: 192) argues that unless the quality of student support services are of a good standard, there is no point in providing these services. The following was highlighted during the interviews with staff and tutors:

- Resources – The facilities in the buildings are in a poor condition. Toilets are not in working condition and the building is dirty. These conditions are not conducive for learning to take place and the resources are not enough. Students also struggle with technology. Students are concerned because the tutorial programme only focuses on high risk modules and not on modules where the demand is high. This will directly cut down on quality of learner support.

“Facilities at the Boland Bank campus is sub-standard and conditions are dirty and it don’t smell good. Also very crowded conditions.”

“E-learning not learner friendly.”

“Students cannot function with current technology, but we want to push them.”

“Online programmes are not learner centered and students struggle on their own.”

- Access to the system and knowing how to get started is difficult. One of the tutors is also a teaching assistant and mentioned that the JRouter is frequently off line and crashing. Then it is difficult to log on. Students have the same problem and the system needs to be updated.
- Staff uninformed. Staff doesn’t feel informed enough on e-learning and changes that takes place. *“Staff is uninformed about new procedures, what is the purpose of the regions then?”* It is a big concern that staff are working in silos and don’t talk to each other. *“Staff should share with each other.”* This directly has an influence on learner support and in the end on the students.
- Best Reflective Practices (BRP). This system was introduced in 2012 and some staff feels that the BRP has helped teaching and learning in the region to reflect on what we are doing. Staff feels that although it is a process that can work, it again has just been dumped on staff in the regions without any prior consultation and communication.
- Lecturers not available. Regional staff and tutors struggle to get hold of the lecturers. It is a general opinion amongst the staff that more academic involvement is needed in the regions. Lecturers come for regional visits after the examinations when the students have gone home.

“Don’t get hold of the lecturer to help them.”

“More academic buy in from academics required.”

“Tutors and academics have not yet bought in completely in ODL.”

“Academics still functions on their own and dictate their own direction and there is no integration from top management.”

It was also mentioned that the students don't know the difference between a lecturer and a tutor, and they expect the lecturers to be in the region. Students are not aware that the lecturer is located in Pretoria at the main campus.

- Course development. This is certainly something that needs to be developed to stimulate learning. During the interviews it was mentioned that “*more needs to be done on course development.*” Students lack skills to properly start with the assignments on their own and need a lot of support in the course material to guide them. Lockwood (1995: 179) clearly advances on the issue of course development and mentions that it should include a more sophisticated notion of teaching, and it will then develop with the improvement of technology in distance education.

5.5.6 General views, suggestions and challenges

During the interviews general comments from the interviewees were also received. Some of these issues will be briefly mentioned below:

- The administrative and support staff are the face of the university in the regions
- Staff is very concerned about their future because of the centralization of certain functions.
- Student counselling is doing very well, but they are totally under resourced and under staffed.
- Staff is not familiar with the policies and only a few of the interviewees have read the policies. None of the tutors were familiar with the policies.
- Academic Literacies should be institutionalised and more staff should be appointed to support students with literacy issues.
- Semesters are too short. It is only four months and not six months.
- There is not enough guidance from top management in the region and there is no support for staff in the region.
- The Deputy Directors don't know how to operate and they don't know what they are supposed to do.
- Learner-centred. There was a general feeling that the university are in a way learner centred, but not to the extent it should be. “*We are dictating to our students and don't take into consideration that our students are failing.*”

- Blended Learning – although not all the interviewees were familiar with the term, it was explained to them by the interviewer. Staff in general feel that this approach made significance in teaching and learning, and it should be factored in engaging with as many students as possible.

5.5.7 Focus group interviews and observation

Focus group interviews were done with the two groups who were placed at CEDARA Agricultural College and ZAKHE College during 2012 to 2014. Students were assisted with their placement at these two venues to enable them to do the required practical training for work-integrated learning (WiL). Information was obtained to determine how effective this form of learner support is in the region as there are many challenges with regard to the placement of students for WiL purposes. The following challenges are experienced in the region:

- Poor economy. Due to the current poor economy in South Africa, companies are having financial constraints to pay the students a stipend to provide for their transport, food and accommodation;
- Curriculum challenges. Some companies experience challenges with the contents of the study material as it is not accommodating the practical skills the companies need in their everyday business.
- Support from the institution. It is difficult for staff responsible for WiL in the region to monitor the development of the placed students. Staff in the region can only attend to administrative support and not academic support. Lecturers also fail to visit students placed for WiL due to their workload.

The application and support in WiL need to be research further to determine the gaps and to fill the gaps in this very important way of developing the skills of students.

Observation was done during tutorial classes to observe the behaviour of the tutor and students. The main purpose was to determine how students participate during the classes and how the tutor facilitates the class. During the formative evaluation of the tutors, done by the Regional Academic Coordinators, it was clear that tutors are very experienced in their different occupational fields. Students completed summative evaluation forms which are sent to Pretoria for further analysis. Analysis of this has not been received back yet. The author strongly suggests that this matter be research separately from this study to determine possible interventions with tutors and to improve facilitation strategies of tutors.

5.5.8 Experiential Learning and Work-integrated Learning

The region forms part of this support service in the form of administrative assistance. Referral letters are provided for walk-in students. A list of host companies that are willing to place work-integrated learning students is also provided when requested by students.

During 2012 to 2014, sixteen students (two groups of 8 each) were placed at CEDARA Agricultural College and ZAKHE College to do their one year of practical training for the three practical WIL modules of the diploma in Agricultural Management. The researcher of this study assisted these students to apply and receive monthly stipends from the Department of Agriculture for the year they were busy with their practical training. These stipends were to be used to provide for accommodation, transport and food. The outcome was very positive at CEDARA College, but not as positive at ZAKHE College.

It appears from the focus group interviews that the students from CEDARA College were much more exposed to all facets of the practical training they needed for the three practical modules of their diploma. This was not the case at ZAKHE College.

During the practical training of students at CEDARA College, the following emerged from the focus group interviews:

- Contact between the coordinator in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal as well as the lecturer were sufficient and successful;
- The workplace at CEDARA was well equipped for the practical training;
- The relationship between the students and their mentor at CEDARA were sufficient and very positive;
- Students made good progress while on practical training and all students were able to complete their diplomas. All of these students are currently busy with their BTech degrees.

During the practical training of students at ZAKHE College, the following emerged from the focus group interviews:

- Contact between the students and the Unisa coordinator in the region was positive, but the lecturer had no contact with them;

- The workplaces at ZAKHE College were not sufficient and nobody provided the students with tools to carry out the practical training;
- There was no relationship between the students and the mentor and nobody assisted them. They had to seek clarity for any uncertainties.
- There was notable progress although not as evident as the first group, but all of the students finished their diploma.

The quality in learner support with regard to WIL did play a role in the development of WIL students. The placement function of WIL students have since been removed from the region and this is now the responsibility of the lecturers.

5.6 CONCLUSION

To illustrate and present the responses of respondents on learner support in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal, quantitative analysis of the questionnaires handed out to the students was done, and a qualitative analysis focused on the interviews with permanent staff and tutors. Trends and patterns emerged from the questionnaires were also presented in a graphical manner to provide a clear picture into the area of investigation. The interviews were also analysed and some of the views and opinions were added to the quantitative data analyses. A brief discussion of the views and opinions of the interviewees was also done after the quantitative data as part of the qualitative data analysis.

While the respondents in both the questionnaires and the interviews were positive on ODL, a number of support issues emerged from the investigation, as well as the implementation of the policies.

The five objectives of this study as stated in Chapter One were successfully explored through the empirical study that was undertaken.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to present the conclusion and recommendations of the research study. The research problems and objectives will be summarised briefly which will be followed by a summary of the chapters. The conclusion will include future research imperatives that have been recommended arising from the research study.

6.2 RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES: KEY QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED IN THE STUDY

The themes and objectives of this study guided the nature of the research was undertaken. These objectives have been met and through the findings of the empirical study, the key questions are answered in what follows:

6.2.1 What is the role of the relevant Unisa policies for the implementation of effective learner support activities in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal, and how do these policies fit into the higher education landscape in the Public Administration domain?

The purpose of this objective was to determine the role of the Open Distance Learning (ODL) policy as well as the Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) policy as guiding instruments on the implementation of learner support activities effectively in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal. The quantitative data that was collected through the questionnaires that was distributed to students who attended face-to-face tutorial classes addressed the knowledge of the students with regard to these policies.

Interviews with permanent staff involved in learner support and tutors were undertaken to obtain qualitative data with regard to these policies.

Significant data derived from these data collection methods, and it was clear that the policies are very well constructed. However, with the improvement of resources in the region, implementation of these policies can be improved. These policies fit well into the higher education landscape and the ODL mode of education delivery has now been opened up for other higher education institutions as well, and Unisa is not the sole

provider of ODL education anymore since the *White Paper for Post School Education and Training* in November 2013.

6.2.2 Are the students coming into the system of Open Distance Learning in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal ready for this new environment, and how do they experience the ODL environment with regard to their levels of readiness and exposure to these new initiatives?

It was important to investigate the readiness of our students in this new ODL mode of education delivery, because of the online nature and new technology that is used. Although the students know what ODL entails, a large number of them still struggle to use the online facilities of e-tutoring. This can be caused by the lack of resources and students experience difficulty to access these resources. Not all students can afford laptops and the internet is for most students is unaffordable. Although there is an improvement in students obtaining laptops and computers, there are still a significant number of students who need to use the resources at the campuses of Unisa.

6.2.3 Is the quality of the learner support initiatives effective to support and enhance learning of students in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal?

The researcher intended to investigate the quality of the learner support activities in the region and also determine if it is effective enough to enhance learning of students. Most of the needed learner support activities and initiatives are in place, but there is much room for improvement in many of these areas. Lack of resources requiring attention and staff also needing to be trained are some of the major issues that derived from the collation of the data. Students, and with specific reference to the first year students, need more intensive orientation in the learner support services available, which is an important aspect for due consideration by Unisa.

6.2.4 How is the quality of support for students with regard to Experiential Learning /Work-integrated Learning and required skills development when they are exposed to the relevant work environment?

Experiential learning / Work-integrated Learning (WIL) also falls under the ensign of learner support. Students who registered for degrees with practical modules as part of the curriculum of a specific diploma or degree need to do practical training in one or more of the modules for the qualification. It is the responsibility of the University to

assist these students with placement in the relevant work environments to enable them to gain the necessary practical experience required. The researcher aimed to determine whether the region do provide quality learner support for these students to get their practical training. Students struggle to get placement and there is little or no assistance from lecturers with whom this responsibility lies at the moment. The region only has an administrative support responsibility, but much is needed to be done here to support students in finding relevant placements, although it comes with enormous difficulties and challenges.

6.2.5 Do these learner support initiatives contribute to the throughput rate of students in Unisa KwaZulu-Natal?

The final objective was to determine if the learner support activities contribute to the throughput rate of students. Many factors can have an influence on the throughput rate. The face-to-face tutorials do definitely contribute to the throughput rate, but one must take into consideration that the students do have a language barrier especially where the language or instruction is at variance with the mother tongue which can influence their throughput rates.

6.3 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS

To place this final chapter into context, it is necessary to elaborate on the six chapters of the study.

6.3.1 Chapter One

In this chapter of the research study, the background to the study was presented with the reasons for choosing the topic, as well as the objectives of the study. It also highlighted learner support and skills development in open distance learning. The main conceptual framework for the study was strengthened within the Public Administration domain from a Developmental State perspective. Learner support was further highlighted under the “*Batho Pele*” Principle as it is closely linked to the mandate for service delivery. The legislative framework governing higher education in South Africa was briefly summarised, as well as the policies which guided this study. The research methodology that was adopted for this study was presented, as well as the framework of the chapters was delineated.

6.3.2 Chapter Two

The theoretical and conceptual framework of Open Distance Learning *vis-à-vis* Public Management was presented in this chapter. An overview and development of distance education, as well as open distance learning was explained. The role of higher education and open distance learning in sustainable development were described, because this contributes to the Public Administration system in South Africa as a developmental state. Open distance learning within the Public Administration environment and good governance was also presented. The legislative documents that govern higher education, as well as the regulatory policies within Unisa that give direction to ODL as a mode of education was discussed in more detail.

6.3.3 Chapter Three

Chapter Three presents learner support and skills development through ODL in a Developmental State context. Learner support in ODL and adult learners were the main focus of discussions in this chapter. It was also important to discuss the different learner support practices as this link directly with the questionnaire that was distributed amongst students who attended tutorial classes. Learner support *versus* service delivery was briefly discussed followed by the developmental state context and the importance of skills development in a developmental state. Learner support should enhance skills development throughout the study journey of students and to prepare them for the world of work as this is of vital importance to strengthen the educational aspects emphasized in the developmental state discussion.

6.3.4 Chapter Four

The research design and methodology encompassed for this research study is discussed in this chapter. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used to discover aspects of the study related to learner support in one of the regions of an ODL university. A questionnaire was used as a research instrument and interviews were conducted with permanent staff members and tutors involved in learner support in the region. A focus group interview was also done with the two groups that undertook work-integrated learning in the region. The research themes were linked to both the questionnaire and the interview schedules.

6.3.5 Chapter Five

The results of the responses from respondents in the questionnaire and the staff that was interviewed in this research study, with the analysis and interpretation of the data, were presented in this chapter. Tables and graphs were used as far as possible to present the results following the analysis. Discussions then followed to show significant patterns and trends in the statistical analysis and correlations amongst variables. Bartlett's test and the Chi-Square were used to illustrate significance of the variables. An analysis and understanding of the final interpretation of the views expressed by the respondents was done in an objective manner.

6.4 CONCLUSION

The findings of a number of the final results could be used to close gaps identified in the learner support structures and operations in the region of Unisa KwaZulu-Natal. The analysis of the results could result in developing new methods and ways of operating within the learner support environment, and positive results could be used to strengthen the weak areas in the learner support system. This is an important contribution to this study.

The actual themes are subsequently presented in a summarised manner in the following discussions.

6.4.1 Biographical data of the respondents

Female students are more than male students. The largest number of respondents falls in the age category of 18-25 years. Out of a total of three hundred and thirteen respondents who completed the questionnaire, hundred and fifty respondents fall in this age category and hundred and four of these respondents are female students. Owing to the young age of these respondents 83% of all the respondents are single and not married. A total percentage (67.1%) of the respondents is also unemployed. A percentage (42.7%) of the students also struggle with accommodation while they study at Unisa. This is a concerning factor and can have a significant influence on retention of students, as well as the throughput rate. Although Unisa is an ODL institution, students come from the rural areas to the campuses to make use of resources available as well as study spaces that are provided.

All the staff and tutors that were interviewed are directly involved in learner support activities, such as tutorial services, student counselling, technology enhanced learning, library and academic literacies. Years of service within these units range between 3-25 years of experience in learner support. Out of a total of 19 interviewees, 9 males and 10 female members were interviewed and the number of interviewees is representative of the student cohort in the region (see *Table 5.57*).

6.4.2 Understanding and role of the relevant policies

It was clear from the respondents in the questionnaire that Open Distance Learning (ODL) bridges the time, geographical, economic, social, education and communication between student and university. The respondents also agreed that ODL constructs learning programmes for students to succeed.

With regard to distance education (DE), the respondents felt strongly that distance education is a method of teaching diverse students located at different places. They also agreed that students are physically separated from the University, lecturers and other students. Although respondents understood the term Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL), the levels of uncertainty amongst the respondents in this case were larger than with the other policies. This gives an indication that there is still uncertainty about this policy which needs to be addressed with students.

During the interviews with staff and tutors on their opinion of these policies, it was explicitly stated that the policies are well constructed, but challenges are experienced with the implementation of these policies due to a lack of resources and sufficiently trained staff to implement them. Staff and students need orientation with regard to these policies and online tutoring.

6.4.3 Readiness and Expectations of Students in Learner Support

In this section of the questionnaire, it was important to obtain data with regard to the readiness of students coming into the ODL environment to study, and also to determine their challenges and expectations. Very positive and negative data were obtained in this section, and it is briefly summarised below.

- Reasons for studying at Unisa emerged from the data, and it appears that the cheaper study fees and the fact that respondents can work while they study were the most important reasons. A number of staff felt that the University is a university of

last choice owing to limited space in residential universities, and also the Matric-scoring of some students.

- Expectations when registered at Unisa. More face-to-face tutorial classes and a need for a lecturer at the regional centre were the two most important expectations. The *third* expectation was to attend classes every day.
- Orientation sessions attended. From the data obtained, the respondents are of the opinion that the orientation sessions are good and informative, but a number of students are unsure and think it is poor. Staff raised their concerns that students are invited to both pre-registration orientations, as well as post-registration orientations via smss, but then only a few students turn up for these important sessions.
- Learner support services used. Most of the respondents (80.9%) used the face-to-face tutorial services while 75.2% use the MyUnisa (online) services. Although a large percentage uses this facility, not a large percentage (28.3%) is using e-tutoring (online tutoring). The general feeling amongst staff is that students are using limited online services owing to a lack of computer literacy.
- Challenges (difficulties) experienced while studying at Unisa. Much support is needed from tutorial services and lecturers. Students struggle to get hold of lecturers and expressed their disappointment of not receiving assistance immediately when needed. Students don't have a clear understanding of the university as a first year with no assistance and find it challenging to study alone. Those who do form part of a study group found it very helpful.

Owing to the language barrier difficulties students find some words in the study material difficult and feel that there is an overload of work. Students further expressed their concern about the unhelpfulness of faculty members and that assignments and study material reached them after the examinations, therefore they find it difficult to prepare for examinations.

During the interviews with staff and tutors with regard to the readiness of the students to come into an ODL university, the majority were of the opinion that the students are not ready, and this is mainly due to a lack of access to resources and the challenges experienced by students with the new technology that is compulsory to use online learning.

6.4.4 Quality of Learner Support Initiatives and the Enhancement of Learning

Although students are committed to their studies, they did experience some challenges with some of the learner support activities. There were also very positive responses on learner support activities in the region. This will be summarised concisely below.

- Feedback from lecturers in assignments. Satisfactory responses have been received here, but students did voice some concerns on the handwriting of lecturers and that in some assignments the feedback is not sufficient to guide them on where they did go wrong in the assignment.
- Experience of general communication on general administrative queries. A general concern by respondents was that the university does not respond to queries in time and that staff need more training. Some staff mentioned that the region has a huge backlog in resources. Some units are understaffed and staff also need training.
- Experience of face-to-face tutorial classes at Unisa. A high level of satisfaction of face-to-face tutorial classes is experienced (89.5%) and shows that there is a high demand for this type of learner support. The respondents expressed a need for more tutorial classes as they found these beneficial. Some tutors raised their concern that the tutorial support is very poorly organised and administered.
- Experience of e-tutoring (online tutoring) at Unisa. Respondents experiences indicate that this type of learner support activity not as good as it should be. A low percentage (45.55%) is making use of this facility, while a percentage of 44.5% is not making use of it and 39% of the respondents did not know about e-tutoring. This can be influenced by the lack of ownership of computers and also because a large number of students are not computer literate yet. The respondents also felt that more information should be given about this facility. Staff is also of the opinion that a strong marketing drive should be done to get students involved in the learner support activities available.
- Experience of respondents on resources and staff services in the library. Students in general feel that the resources in the library are sufficient, but according to staff most of the material in the library is outdated. The online information of the University is excellent and students need to be trained to access the online information.
- Experience student counselling services rendered by staff at Unisa. Not a very high percentage (59.1%) of the students is satisfied with the counselling services in the

region and 52.1% did not make use of these services. Respondents also voiced their concern that counsellors are not very well trained. Staff on the other hand are of the opinion that the counselling department is doing their best to deliver a good service to students, but that the department is totally understaffed.

- Experience of the Academic Literacy services from staff. This service has two components, namely, the reading and writing section and the quantitative literacy component. This is a very important learner support activity as a large number of our students experience challenges with language as well as with statistics, accounting and mathematics. A percentage of 45.9% did not know about these services available to them. Staff also raised their concern about the lack of services like this, and also that it is not institutionalised as yet.
- Experience of the computer laboratories at Unisa KZN. A general opinion of students and staff is that this facility is not sufficient and that a large number of students are also not computer literate. Staff spends a lot of time in assisting students on how to work on the computer. This unit is also understaffed for the large number of students that need assistance.
- Experience of the feedback on assignments and the examination in feedback tutorial letters. In general the students were satisfied with the feedback on assignments and examination guideline in follow-up tutorial letters.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the research, it can be concluded that there are positive outcomes, as well as negative outcomes in the learner support services in the region. This was summarised in Section 6.4 of this chapter. It further focused on the key questions raised in the research study. Recommendations are based on the data obtained from the students (questionnaire) and staff and tutors that were interviewed (interview schedules). The following recommendations can thus be made:

6.5.1 Role and implementation of policies

The ODL and ODeL policies of the university have a crucial role to play in the successful implementation of a robust and workable ODL system. These policies should be discussed in each department of the learner support and facilitation sections of the region to create a strong awareness and buy in to these policies amongst staff as well as students. The factors where the region has the infrastructure in place to improve

a specific service to its full capacity should be highlighted and improved. Members of staff need training with the implementation of these policies. The current infrastructure should be analysed and shortcomings should be addressed as a matter of urgency. Wide consultation and communication should take place and changes should be gradually phased in and not just dumped on staff. This creates uncertainty and a very low morale amongst staff. All levels of the management of the region should play a very prominent and vibrant role in these processes.

In a study done by Möwes (2005: i) on student support services in open distance learning at the university of Namibia, the author found that the policies of an institution and the role of management are critical in the setting up an effective support system to enable the distance learning. In this study it was clear during the interviews with staff that they are uncertain how to implement the institutional policies. Staff was of the opinion that the policies look ideal on paper, but the university lacks the drive to ensure that the new policies are implemented effectively.

6.5.2 Orientation and readiness of students coming into the Open Distance Learning university environment

Orientation of students. Orientation sessions should be implemented over a period and it should be repeated throughout the pre-registration and post registration periods. During the pre-registration and application period, the staff from student administration and funding should be involved in orientation with students where applications were successful and students should be made aware of the learner support functions and activities that are available to them.

Orientation should be done by staff involved in learner support activities. Möwes (2005: i) emphasised that adult students indeed need valuable student support services specifically in services with regard to how to start with their studies. He suggested that effective orientation sessions are needed to communicate the available services to students, for example, face-to-face tutorials at regional offices and the purpose of these sessions.

Face-to face tutorial sessions. This should be offered for first registration students and they should not be forced to immediately make use of online tutoring. This should be gradually phased in during the first year of registration and tutors should be trained to be vibrantly involved in this form of preparation for students during face-to-face tutorial

classes. More hours should be made available to expose students to the new online environment when they start with their second year of studies.

These sessions should not only be offered for high risk modules, but also where there is a demand for students who registered for specific modules where they need face-to-face tutorials. In other words, the student as the client should decide where they need support. Students should be made familiar with technology and the computer during their first year of study. It should also be noted that the current profile of the registered students at the university still highly demand more face-to-face classes. Tutors and academics should work close together as this impacts directly on the students.

With regard to tutor appointments it is recommended that the contractual processes be decentralised to the regions, as well in the same way the tutor claiming process has been decentralised. Tutors should still be approved by the lecturers though. To obtain a contract for tutors sometimes take up to three months, and the semester is often lost. The activation of tutors is also a prolonged process, and it is recommended that tutors be activated electronically *via* e-mail. This makes the administration process for the tutorial staff involved in tutorial classes very stressful, and ultimately impacts on teaching and learning practices.

E-tutoring. This type of tutoring should go hand in hand with limited face-to-face tutoring where there is a demand for face-to-face tutoring.

Students can be introduced to this by writing a small test before they can register for e-tutoring to make sure that they will be able to learn with e-tutoring. Students should be strongly motivated to share on the e-tutoring sites and make sure that learning takes place through relevant and constructive guidance from the e-tutor. This mode of tutoring should be strongly marketed with students to create awareness and to prepare them for online tutoring. The University should further investigate prospective ways to assist students with laptops and/or tablets.

E-tutors should also be trained to mark the assignments of the students allocated to them and should be managed in the same way as the teaching assistants in the signature modules. This will create self-confidence of the students to engage with their online tutor as well as with other students. The success of e-tutoring depends on the participation of the students, and without this participation, it will fail dismally.

Furthermore, the online system should be updated to accommodate the high volume of students and tutors who will work online.

Academic Literacies and Quantitative Literacies. Street (as quoted by Goodfellow, 2011: 131), claims that literacy education has by tradition been concerned with developing the skills in reading and writing that empower participating in society, either in young children or in unschooled adults for whom it is connected with job prospects, societal mobility and personal success. During interviews with staff members it was expressed that students experience a serious language barrier and academic literacies are concerned to assist students with writing their assignments and presentation of portfolios. Students also indicated that they are not familiar with this service provided by the university. Students come across many difficulties when they enter into higher education and one of the difficulties encompasses writing and academic discourse. Students from some linguistic groups may experience challenges to a greater degree than others, proclaims Lea & Street (2010: 370).

This is currently the most needed support by students and it has been disappointingly neglected over the last two years. Challenges with regard to the contracts of staff have been experienced and staff only started late in 2014 again.

This unit is not institutionalised, and it is recommended that it be institutionalised as a matter of urgency. More staff should be employed in this unit in all the offices of the region to effectively support out students. Students have a huge language barrier and students also further struggle with numeracy subjects like accounting, statistics and mathematics.

Library services. Currently, a library only exists in the Durban office. A Library should also be developed in the Pietermaritzburg office and mobile libraries should be developed for the rural areas. The resources in the Library with regard to outdated books, should be replaced with updated books. More vibrant training sessions for students in their first year should take place to obtain information electronically and the necessary tools should be provided to allow them to get familiar to order books online and to research for information electronically. Unisa's database is very well equipped and students should be made aware of this. If assistance is given to students to conduct research in the formative years of their registration and degree, it will eventually prepare them and create a strong foundation for post-graduate studies.

Computer Laboratories. Students in the region are in desperate need to gain access to computers and the number of computers available at the campuses is not sufficient.

Simpson (1999: 89) stresses that when computers are used for students' support then the issues of access, quality and effectiveness are vitally important. The author also mentioned that most of the availability of computers in libraries and computer laboratories are time-limited and this can be unsatisfactory for students who need more time to take full advantage of the computers available.

A further global trend is that access to the internet should be cost-effective and students should be able to afford it. In South Africa, the internet access is very expensive and students struggle with access. Makhanya (2014: 2) emphasises that there is a *“serious deficit in terms of access to the internet in South Africa.”*

This doesn't necessarily create the idea that more computers should be installed, but the university should seriously consider to assist students to obtain laptops and tablets and include the provision into their study fees in their first year.

Student Counselling. Counselling services in any higher education institution are very important for new students coming into the system. It is known that students sometimes are not sure which career they should follow and this is where this service is of utmost importance to assist students to make a career choice and to register for correct qualifications. This will also assist students to progress more accurately and smoothly through the registration processes. Counselling should also assist with personal advice where students experience personal problems like death in the family, etc.

It is recommended that more permanent staff be employed to create a stronger support unit for students and to uphold the standards of counselling to students on all levels of their learning journey. Counsellors should also be appointed in all offices of the region.

Resources and staffing matters. The Unisa KwaZulu-Natal region is the second largest region after the Gauteng region. The region is faced with a serious space issue to accommodate staff and students. A serious shortage of resources exists and this is not managed effectively by the regional management.

The morale of the staff is very low owing to a lack in managerial guidance and support. The current restructuring process is actually making the situation worse, because

members of staff are concerned about their future. Regional staff should be more involved in decision-making processes that directly involve their day-to-day operations. The regional staff has an important role to play in the development of our students and can be seen as the “face” of the institution.

6.6 SUMMARY

In an ODL university, learner support is compulsory and of vital importance, as this is where the role of regions cannot be over-emphasised. Although ODL is seen as a cost-effective mode of education delivery, the initial cost to implement it is considerably high. It is further very important that the profile of the caliber of student dictates the way it is implemented. From the research done, it is clearly evident that members of members of staff in the region are doing their utmost with the resources available to them. There are however, challenges and gaps and this need to be addressed as a matter of priority. Furthermore, the whole learner support drive should be based on the “*Batho Pele Principle – People First.*” This then implies that students are important stakeholders in the service delivery plan and as such, should come first in the principles of learner-centredness and customer focus.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE 8.1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE FROM UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL



22 April 2014

Ms Johleen Mouton 212561615
School of Management, IT & Governance
Westville Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0283/014D
Project title: Learner support in Open Distance Learning at Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal: A Developmental State Perspective

Dear Ms Mouton

Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 11 April 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Dr Mogie Subban
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor B McArthur
cc School Administrator: Ms Angela Pearce

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohung@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

ANNEXURE 8.2: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE FROM UNISA



5 February 2014

Ref: 2014/PARC/001

ETHICAL CLEARANCE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

This is to declare that the Ethics Workgroup of the Professional and Administrative Research Committee (PARC) of the University of South Africa considered and granted ethical clearance to Ms. Johleen Mouton (Tuition and Facilitation of Learning) in respect of the proposed research topic: "Learner support in Open Distance Learning at Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal: A Developmental State Perspective".

Prof A E Kotzé
Convenor: PARC Ethics Workgroup



ANNEXURE 8.3: GATEKEEPER'S LETTER – UNISA



PROF L LABUSCHAGNE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH DEPARTMENT
Tel: +27 12 429 6368 / 2446 **Fax:** +27 12 429 6960
Email: llabus@unisa.ac.za
Address: Theo van Wijk Building, 10th Floor, Office no. 50 (TvW 10-50)

25 February 2014

Ms J Mouton
Student Number: 212561615
Department of Tuition and Facilitation of Learning

Dear Ms Mouton

PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH INVOLVING UNISA STAFF, STUDENTS OR DATA

A study into: 'Learner support in open distance learning at Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal: A developmental state perspective'

Your application regarding permission to conduct research involving Unisa staff, students or data in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Unisa Senate Research and Innovation and Higher Degrees Committee (SRIHDC) on 13 February 2014.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for this study as set out in your application.

We would like to wish you well in your research undertaking.

Kind regards

PROF L LABUSCHAGNE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 429 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

ANNEXURE 8.4: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE PRACTITIONER

Language Practitioner/Specialist: Language in Education

T. Reddy

B.A. ; U.E.D. (Natal); B.A. Hons. (UNISA); M.A. (Linguistics); Cert. in TESOL (Pittsburgh, USA);

Fellow English Speaking Board (Int.) UK

Tel (h) : 031 564 6975

Cell : 083 784 6975

e-mail : tcdreddy@gmail.com

To whom it may concern

Date 25 October 2015

Re : Language Practitioner Report

Johleen Mouton UKZN

Student number 212561615

Topic : Learner Support in Open Distance Learning at UNISA, KwaZulu- Natal :

A Developmental State perspective

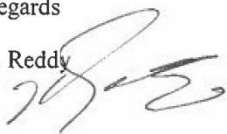
I have had the pleasure of reading the above dissertation submitted for the degree of Dr of Administration , School of Management, Information Technology and Governance in the College of Law and Management Studies and found the language usage fluent and free of any grammatical inaccuracies.

The work has been read for punctuation, fluency, congruency and meets the language and stylistic writing at a postgraduate level.

I deem the dissertation acceptable for final admission.

Regards

T. Reddy



ANNEXURE 8.5: LETTER OF INFORMED CONCENT

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, IT AND GOVERNANCE

Dear Respondent,

Doctor of Public Administration (D.Admin Research Project)

HSSREC RO: Ms P Ximba (031 260 3587)

Researcher: Johleen Mouton (Cell: 082 442 2545)
(031 335 8127)

Student Number: 212561615

Supervisor: Dr Mogie Subban (031 260 7763)

I am Johleen Mouton, a Doctor of Public Administration student, at the **SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, IT AND GOVERNANCE**, of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled, ***LEARNER SUPPORT IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING AT UNISA, KWAZULU-NATAL: A DEVELOPMENTAL STATE PERSPECTIVE***. The aim of this study is to: **Investigate the gaps in the implementation of effective learner support and technology-enhanced learning processes in Unisa, KwaZulu-Natal as an open distance learning, higher education institution in the public administration arena. The research has been given ethical clearance with an EC number: HSS/0283/014D.**

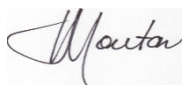
Through your participation, I hope to understand and explore measures to improve on identified gaps and offer suggestions on how to address these gaps. The results of the survey are intended to contribute to enhance teaching and learning in an ODL environment, as well as enhance knowledge in the field of learner support in an institution of higher education.

PLEASE NOTE: In some instances interviews will be recorded with your permission (consent).

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this survey. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the **SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, IT AND GOVERNANCE**, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed above. The survey should take you about fifteen (15) minutes to complete. I hope you will take the time to complete this survey.

Sincerely,



14 October 2014

Investigator’s signature

Date

CONSENT

I, (full names of participant)
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research
project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I agree to have the interview recorded:

YES	
NO	

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

ANNEXURE 8.6: SAMPLE SURVEYS

8.6.1 STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is part of a doctoral study in learner support at Unisa KZN. The information you provide by answering the questions would assist in analysing weaknesses and strengths in the support services provided by Unisa KZN. It will enable the institution to improve on these services, and to provide the student with a positive student experience.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA & PROFILE INFORMATION

INSTRUCTIONS

Indicate your answer/choice with a cross (X) in the blocks of each table. *If you have further comments, write them in the spaces provided.*

1. What is your gender?

Female	
Male	

2. What is your age?

18-20	
21-25	
26-30	
31-35	
36-40	
> 40	

3. What is your marital status?

Single	
Married	
Divorced	
Widowed	

4. Are you employed?

No	
Yes	

5. Venue where this questionnaire was completed?

Durban	
Pietermaritzburg	
Newcastle	
Richards Bay	
Wild Coast (Mbizana)	

6. Indicate the semester and year you registered at Unisa as a student for the first time?

Semester	(i.e. one/two)	
Year	(i.e. 2014)	

7. What is the name of the degree/diploma/certificate you are studying?

8. Do you have accommodation while busy with your studies at Unisa?

1. Yes	
2. No	
3. Sometimes	

9. Where do you live **while studying at Unisa** (residential area)?

10. Where do you live when you are **not studying at Unisa**? (i.e. when you stay with parents or family at your permanent address / home)

11. Where do you normally study?

1. At Unisa	
2. At home	
3. At the place where I rent	
4. Other (i.e. friend's house, community library)	

Comments:

12. Who is paying for your studies?

1. Parents	
2. Yourself	
3. NSFAS	
4. Eduloan	
5. Other (bursary, etc)	

13. How do you travel when you visit Unisa campuses?

1. Own transport	
2. Taxi	
3. Train	
4. Bus	
5. Dropped off by someone	
6. Other	

**SECTION B: [RQ 1] OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING AND
DISTANCE EDUCATION (DE)**

1. What is your understanding of an Open Distance Learning (ODL) university?

<u>TICK ALL THE BOXES</u>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
ODL bridges the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication between student and university					
ODL remove barriers to access learning					
ODL is student-centred					
ODL provide student support					
ODL construct learning programmes for students to succeed.					
None of the above					
Not familiar with this word/abbreviation					

2. What is your understanding of distance education?

<u>TICK ALL THE BOXES</u>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
DE is a method of teaching diverse students					
Students are located at different places					
Students are physically separated from the University					
Students are physically separated from their lecturers and other students					
None of the above					
Not familiar with this word/abbreviation					

3. What is your understanding of Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) in Unisa?

<u>TICK ALL THE BOXES</u>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
OdeL is a model for Open Distance and e-Learning					
OdeL will transform Unisa to conduct business <i>via</i> the Internet					
OdeL will cause massive reduction in physical facilities (i.e. regional centres)					
OdeL means that the learning environment will be fully digitized					
None of the above					
Not familiar with this word/abbreviation					

SECTION C: [RQ 2]

1. Provide reasons for studying at Unisa.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Easier than at other Universities					
Cheaper than other Universities					
Could not get space into another University					
Can work while I am studying					
None of the above					
Not familiar with this word/abbreviation					

Comments: _____

2. What did you expect when you registered at Unisa as an Open Distance Learning University?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Attend classes every day					
More face-to-face tutorial classes					
Lecturer is at the regional centre					
Only online learning					
None of the above					

Comments: _____

3. Which orientation sessions did you attend at Unisa? *Choose those which are applicable to you.*

Pre-registration session (before your registration)	
Post-registration (after your registration)	
Did not attend any orientation sessions offered by Unisa	
No orientation sessions were offered	
Did not know about the orientation sessions	

4. How did you experience the orientation session(s) you attended?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					

Comments: _____

5. Indicate the learner support mechanisms that you make use of? *Indicate as many as applicable to you.*

1. Tutorial classes (face-to-face by tutor in the region)	
2. Library services	
3. Discussion classes (classes by the lecturer)	
4. Student Counselling services	
5. Video conferencing	
6. Financial support	
7. Computer Laboratories	
8. Registration support while registering	
9. MyLife (own student e-mail address)	
10. MyUnisa (online services)	
11. E-tutoring (online tutoring)	
12. Teaching assistant support (TA support)	
13. None of the above	

Comments: _____

6. What challenges (difficulties) do you experience while studying at Unisa?

SECTION D: [RQ 3]

7. How will you rate your commitment to your studies?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					

Comments: _____

8. Comment on your experience and feedback on your assignments and assignment queries to lecturers?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					

Comments: _____

9. What was your experience regarding communication and administrative queries between you and Unisa?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					

Comments: _____

10. How was your experience with the face-to-face tutorial classes at Unisa?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					
Did not know about face to face tutorial classes					

Comments: _____

11. How would you rate your experience in **e-tutoring (online tutoring)** at Unisa?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					
Did not use e-tutoring					
Did not know about e-tutoring					

Comments: _____

12. What was your experience with the library resources?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					

Comments: _____

13. How was the library services from the staff in the library?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					

Comments: _____

14. How was your experience in **student counselling services** rendered by staff at Unisa?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					
Did not use student counselling services					
Did not know about student counselling					

Comments: _____

15. How was your experience with the Academic Literacy services from staff?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					
Did not use Academic Literacy services					
Did not know about Academic Literacy services					

Comments: _____

16. How did you find the registration services at Unisa KZN?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					

Comments: _____

17. How was the experience of utilising the computer laboratories at Unisa KZN?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					
Did not use the computer laboratories					
Did not know about the computer laboratories					

Comments: _____

18. How was your experience with the use of MyLife free e-mail services?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					
Did not use the <i>MyLife</i>					
Did not know about <i>MyLife</i>					

Comments: _____

19. What was your experience with the MyUnisa page of Unisa?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					
Did not use the <i>MyUnisa</i>					
Did not know about <i>MyUnisa</i>					

Comments: _____

20. Did you experience study groups (groups with fellow students)?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					
Did not use study groups					

Comments: _____

21. Indicate which assignments did you submit to obtain entrance to the examination?

1. All the assignments	
2. First assignment	
3. Second assignment	
4. Third assignment	
5. Fourth assignment	
6. Fifth assignment	
7. Sixth assignment	
8. Seventh assignment	

Comments: _____

22. How did you find the feedback on your assignments in your feedback tutorial letters?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					

Comments: _____

23. How did you experience the examination guidelines in your feedback tutorial letters?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Excellent (very informative and helpful)					
Good (Informative and clear expectations)					
Poor (not enough information for continuation)					
Very poor (waste of time)					

Comments: _____

24. Did you receive your examination timetable in time to indicate your permission to write the examinations?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Yes					
No					
Did not receive an examination time table					

Comments: _____

THANK YOU FOR TAKING TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE!

8.6.2 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR UNISA STAFF MEMBERS

INSTRUCTIONS

Indicate your answer/choice with a cross (X) in the blocks of each table. If you have further comments, write them in the spaces provided

1. Please indicate your race.

Black	
Indian	
Coloured	
White	

2. Please indicate your gender.

Female	
Male	

3. Indicate the department you are currently working in.

4. Indicate the current designation (position) you hold.

5. How long have you been on this position

Less than 5 years	
5 to 9 years	
10 to 14 years	
15 to 20 years	
More than 20 years	

6. What are the day-to-day responsibilities of your current position?

7. What is your opinion of the current Unisa policies regarding Open Distance Learning (ODL)?

8. What is your opinion of the ODeL (Open Distance and e-Learning) Business Model of Unisa?

9. What is your opinion on the readiness of the students who are entering the ODL system at Unisa?

10. What is your view, from the position you hold currently, of the quality of the learner support initiatives of Unisa?

11. Are there any other general views, suggestions and challenges that you would like to mention that was not covered in the questions above?

Thank you for your participation.

8.6.3 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TUTORS OF UNISA (KZN)

Please complete the following information (mark with an X).

1. Please indicate your race.

Black	
Indian	
Coloured	
White	

2. Please indicate your gender.

Female	
Male	

3. Please indicate your current position/s you hold at Unisa.

4. Please indicate the subjects / modules you are currently tutoring?

5. How long have you been a tutor for Unisa?

Less than 5 years	
5 to 9 years	
10 to 14 years	

6. What are the responsibilities as a tutor at Unisa?

7. What is your opinion of the current Unisa policies regarding Open Distance Learning (ODL)? [i.e. Tutor policy, ODL policy, ODeL business model, etc.]

8. What is your opinion of the (Open Distance and e-Learning) ODeL Business Model of Unisa?

9. What is your opinion on the readiness of the students who are entering the ODL system at Unisa?

10. What is your view, from the position you currently hold, regarding the quality of learner support initiatives of Unisa?

11. Are there any other general views, suggestions and challenges that you would like to mention that was not covered in the questions above?

Thank you for your participation.