

LEARNER
SUPPORT
SERVICES:



Case studies of DEASA member institutions

E P Nonyongo
A T Ngengebule
EDITORS

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UNISA

Contents

LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA, PRETORIA

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Preface

This publication is one example of resource mobilisation by members of the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (Deasa) in producing and sharing knowledge and experience among professional colleagues in Africa and elsewhere in the world. It is a practical demonstration of a high degree of professionalism and commitment to distance education and open learning systems as viable and effective strategies for human resource development.

As the oldest distance education regional association, Deasa has provided exemplary leadership to several national and regional associations on the continent, and has continued to share knowledge and expertise over the years. This book of case studies is but one of the ways of creating and sharing knowledge and experience in an ever-growing field of open and flexible learning. It should be a valuable resource for all learners and practitioners in the field. It is also a 'good practice' model that could be replicated in other specialised aspects of open learning and distance education such as learner assessment, quality assurance and accountability, and Deasa should endeavour to tackle these hard topics with the same enthusiasm and diligence.

We look forward to witnessing in the near future an expanded stock of home-grown resource materials and publications from Deasa and other professional associations in Africa. It should be the aim of every professional association worth its name to produce at least one major publication each year as a contribution to new knowledge. The challenge lies with you, dear reader.

Peter E Kinyanjui
Vancouver, Canada
March 1998

Introduction

WHY THIS CASE STUDY BOOK?

This book of case studies of selected distance education organisations is a product of a workshop organised by the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (Deasa) for learner support staff of its member organisations. The workshop was organised in June 1995 as part of Deasa's staff development and training strategy. Deasa had noted the increasing use of distance education in the southern Africa region and the limited training available for distance education staff, particularly in the area of learner support which, though central to quality distance education, was often not the major focus of most organisations' staff development and training strategies. To address this problem Deasa decided that during the three-year period 1995–1997 its training strategy will focus on learner support staff. The plan adopted was three-pronged. It began with in-country assessment of learner support services provided by Deasa member institutions. This was followed by a five-day workshop for learner-support staff. From this workshop two products were developed: a handbook for trainers and this book of case studies.

There is a dire shortage of materials and examples of distance education provision in southern Africa. It is hoped that these case studies will contribute to the literature on learner support services in our region, at the same time providing Deasa member organisations, other providers and practitioners with examples of various types of tried and tested support services, lessons from our region and some of the pitfalls to avoid in the introduction of new ideas for improving learner support services.

SELECTION OF CASE STUDIES

All members of Deasa were asked to participate in the training strategy mentioned above and in the development of case studies. Because of pressing institutional commitments not all members were able to participate. The case studies contained in this book are of organisations that were able to participate in the workshop and meet the deadlines for the submission of the final drafts. The processes for development of the case studies included an assessment of organisational and country learner support services by individuals identified by Deasa members as participants for a workshop on learner support and development of first drafts. The first drafts were discussed and

suggestions for improvement were made at the workshop. After the workshop participants reworked their drafts with the assistance of other members from their organisations. The final drafts were then submitted for comment by an editing team consisting of representatives from four of the Deasa member countries.

Every effort has been made to ensure that each of the five Deasa member countries is represented. Botswana case studies cover three of the four Deasa members in that country, that is the Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE), the Institute of Health Sciences and the University of Botswana Distance Education Unit. The Department of Adult Education indicated that their learner support services were conducted through the DNFE services. The Lesotho case studies represent all the major distance education providers in the country. The overview also gives an indication of distance education strategies adopted by other organisations that are not represented through case studies. South Africa is represented by one major provider, the University of South Africa (Unisa) and a non-governmental organisation, Sached, including one of its learner-support programmes, Dusspro. The second non-governmental programme from South Africa, the South African Institute for Distance Education, is not a provider, but as an active member of the workshop its contribution to the book is the country overview of distance education which appears as part of the South African section of the book. The Open Learning Systems Education Trust (Olset) took part in the workshop but did not develop an organisational case study. The other two South African Deasa members, the University of Fort Hare Adult Basic Education Programme and Technikon South Africa, were unable to participate in the workshop and the subsequent processes of developing the case studies. Namibia and Swaziland are represented by one organisation each, the Centre for External Studies of the University of Namibia and the Emlaladini Development Centre of Swaziland. Representatives from the second Namibian organisation, the Namibia College (Namcol) attended the workshop but did not meet the submission deadlines, while the other two Swaziland member institutions, the Department of Extra-Mural Services and the Institute for Distance Education, did not attend the workshop.

Though the total number of organisations per country is uneven, the case studies represent a wide spectrum and interesting examples of learner support services in the sub-region. The tertiary education sector is covered by the case studies from Unisa, Dusspro, the Sached learner support programme, the Centre for External Studies of the University of Namibia, the University of Botswana's Distance Education Unit, the Institutes of Extra Mural Studies and of Labour Studies of the University of Lesotho and the Institute for Health Sciences of Botswana. The secondary education sector is represented in the case studies from DNFE, LDTC and EDC. These case studies contain elements of both formal and non-formal education provision. While the great majority of organisations described in these case studies are part of government education provision, the non-governmental sector is represented by at least three case studies: two from South Africa (Sached and Saide) and one from Lesotho, Lanfe. The range in

organisational size is another interesting feature of these case studies. Unisa, a distance education mega-university, enrolls over 100 000 students per year and smaller organisations like EDC and Sached have student populations of 1 000 or fewer. The role of facilitation and advocacy of distance and non-formal education is represented by two organisations in this book, Saide and Lanfe, who are not providers. For this reason there is no specific Saide case study. Saide's mission is described as helping to increase democratic access to knowledge and skills through the adoption of open learning principles and distance education strategies (Saide 1997:1). As part of their work they have produced the overview of distance education in South Africa which is included in this book. Lanfe's work is covered in the brief description included in the Lesotho section. You will notice from Lanfe's stated objective the similarity to Saide's mission.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK AND CASE STUDIES

The case studies are grouped according to institutions and southern African countries which participate in Deasa. Where available, the country sections begin with an overview of distance education in the country under discussion. This provides the background against which readers of this book can assess the organisation's provision of learner support services in terms of its country's educational policy and stated objectives and priorities.

The case studies themselves include some background information on the organisation or programme, the nature of learner support services provided, problems, successes and future projection of how services will be or could be improved. Some of the case studies are quite detailed, while others tend to be rather brief in their description and analysis of problems and solutions. The reasons for this are related largely to organisational resources and views on the role and importance of learner support in their distance education system. But as an attempt at documenting provision in the regions from the learner-support practitioners' point of view, the case studies are an important first step which can be improved later as the need arises.

SOME OF THE ISSUES OF LEARNER SUPPORT

Distance education is widely regarded as a crucial mechanism for opening up learning opportunities and thus widening access to education and training. Learner support services play an important role in reducing the difficulties experienced by learners in this mode of education. These services do this, for example, by helping to reduce the isolation of learners, facilitating effective learning, reducing attrition rates and increasing success rates, and generally improving the quality of distance education. For learner support services to achieve the potential of greatly enhancing the quality of distance education, the issues facing their delivery should be seriously tackled.

Some of the central issues of learner support services in distance education include the underlying philosophy governing organisations' provision of these services, access, centralisation and/or decentralisation, role and responsibilities of learners, nature and role of technology, gender, collaboration and staff development. The case studies cover these issues in varying degrees of emphasis and detail.

With regard to the underlying philosophy governing institutional provision of learner support for example, some of the organisations have explicitly described their philosophy of learner support. The following excerpts from some of the case studies help to describe some ideas about the philosophy of some of the organisations regarding learner support.

- DNFE regards learner support as an integral part of a successful distance education programme. The institution is learner centred, hence the need for strengthening the support services.
- IHS states that distance education is a new mode of education and delivery for nurses in Botswana. Therefore the entrants into the programme need support to help them cope with the demands that this mode of delivery exposes them to.
- DEU believes it is important to establish learner support services to complement learning and teaching.
- Dusspro's view on learner support has always been that successful learning through the distance mode requires integrated and multifaceted learner support services that include face-to-face support.
- Unisa has to acknowledge that the time has come for it to move away from being a purely correspondence institution and gradually become a well-functioning distance education institution which ensures that all its students receive effective and efficient support.

Other organisations have provided no explicit description of their philosophies. But from the activities and services described in the case studies you can glean aspects of institutional philosophies. We trust that as you read through the case studies you will not only identify institutional philosophies but will also assess the extent to which each organisation addresses the other issues mentioned above.

Access to learner support services is a very thorny issue. In the past some distance education providers have rejected some forms of learner support, for example the provision of face-to-face support, because they claim they are not accessible to all their learners. What organisations need to realise is that some of the key strengths of distance education provision are that it offers learners the flexibility to take responsibility for their learning and for making decisions about the type of support they require and for determining when they wish to get such support. Usage of services should thus be

determined by learners' needs and in most instances learners' resources play an important role in accessing the services. As practitioners of learner support services one principle that we need to constantly aim at achieving is the development of a broad range of support services from which learners can choose according to their needs and the resources available.

While face-to-face support is always under scrutiny by organisations, the introduction of high-level technology is often not questioned and resources are quickly made available because organisations claim that they cannot afford to be left behind as the technology and information highway unfolds and virtual institutions become a reality. The issue of access to this technology by the majority of institutions learners is often not seriously considered. In the southern African context this is a serious issue because high technology still remains the preserve of the few who can afford it. Interestingly enough, the southern African experience as represented in the case studies shows very little usage of high technology in learner support; this is used more for efficient administration than for actual presentation. The Unisa case study is the only exception, which shows the introduction of some forms of new technology in its use of Students-on-line (SOL) system.

Related to the issue of access is that of centralisation and/or decentralisation. This covers the role of learning centres in making support services accessible to a greater number of learners, particularly those in rural areas who often have limited resources, and lack basics like electricity and equipment.

The relevance of support services is an issue that organisations need to take into serious consideration. Relevance includes aspects of context and the needs of the learner. The case studies in this book provide an indication of the organisations' assessment of their learners' needs and in most cases show how their support services address these needs. This is undoubtedly one way of tackling the issue of relevance of support services.

The notion of learner-centredness has implications not only for organisations but for learners as well. It means that while organisations have to consciously aim at addressing the needs of learners, the learners themselves have to play an important role, which includes responsibilities in the learning context. Responsibilities in teaching and learning activities are often very well addressed by learners and organisations. It is, however, in the areas of institutional governance and meaningful learner participation in the organisations' decision-making structures and process that distance education presents a major challenge. Some of the case studies have presented examples of how their organisations have grappled with this difficult but important issue.

These are but a few of the issues that we wished to highlight in this introduction. We hope that as you read through the case studies you will identify other issues and include for yourselves those that we have omitted.

As we conclude the compilation of this book of case studies, we are aware that some of the contributing organisations may have undergone quite a lot of changes which have

affected the philosophy and nature of learner support provision. As the historical barriers of geographical boundaries, political and socio-economic divisions are gradually breaking down, the region is growing into a global village, thus highlighting a greater need for cooperation and collaboration to tackle common problems. We envisage that the information contained in this book can be used as a stepping stone towards assisting the regions and other providers to widen learner support networks and strengthen the effort of finding solutions that will lead to more effective and efficient support for our learners.

Editors

Evelyn Pulane Nonyongo
Alice Thandiwe Ngengebule

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Overview of distance education development and programmes in Botswana

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DISTANCE EDUCATION IN BOTSWANA: EARLY EXPERIENCES

Distance education in Botswana is generally defined as formal education that is delivered through the use of printed materials, audio and video recordings, and other communication technologies, and is a process of learning that is not dependent on the physical presence of the learner and the teacher.

BOTSWANA

Distance education in Botswana is a relatively new phenomenon.

The Botswana Foundation

In the early 1970s, when Botswana was still a British protectorate, the Botswana Foundation was established. The foundation was created to provide a means of continuing education for the people of Botswana. The foundation was initially a non-profit organization that provided a range of educational services, including the provision of distance education. The foundation was established as the Botswana Foundation for the Promotion of Education in Botswana in 1971. The foundation was initially a non-profit organization that provided a range of educational services, including the provision of distance education. The foundation was established as the Botswana Foundation for the Promotion of Education in Botswana in 1971.

The Foundation Project

The foundation project involved the development of a range of educational services, including the provision of distance education. The foundation was initially a non-profit organization that provided a range of educational services, including the provision of distance education. The foundation was established as the Botswana Foundation for the Promotion of Education in Botswana in 1971. The foundation was initially a non-profit organization that provided a range of educational services, including the provision of distance education. The foundation was established as the Botswana Foundation for the Promotion of Education in Botswana in 1971.

Overview of distance education development and programmes in Botswana

O Mphinyane & O S Selepeng-Tau

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN BOTSWANA: EARLY EXPERIENCES

Historically, Botswana's involvement in distance education has been at two levels: first as a consumer of distance education programmes (correspondence courses), and as a provider. As consumers, Botswana have been studying for many years through correspondence courses provided mainly by private correspondence institutions in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Britain.

The following are examples of such experiences.

The Salisbury Experiment

In the early sixties, before Independence, some Botswana teachers received training through the Salisbury Correspondence College in Zimbabwe. Learners received study materials from the college and their assignments were marked there and returned to them by post. The practical part of the programme was done locally at the Lobatse Teacher Training College. The teachers were awarded the Elementary Teachers' Certificate by the Ministry of Education in Mafikeng in South Africa. The scheme operated between 1960 and 1965 (Jones 1981).

The Francistown Project

The Francistown project arose out of an identified need for trained teachers. A study carried out in 1965 revealed that about 48% of teachers were untrained at Independence (Jones 1981) and that the existing two teacher training colleges in Serowe and Lobatse could not cope with the demand. To alleviate the problem, the Francistown Project was launched in 1968. This marked Botswana's first involvement in the provision of distance education, a shift from being a mere consumer. The project ran from 1968 to 1973. It involved the upgrading of some 700 untrained teachers and achieved a success rate of

88%. Though this project was not replicated, it served as a good indicator that teachers could actually be upgraded *through unconventional means* inside Botswana.

Botswana Extension College

The success of the Francistown project led to the establishment of the Botswana Extension College (BEC) in 1973, bringing distance education home.

In 1978 the Department of Non-Formal Education was established in the Ministry of Education. BEC was absorbed into the new department only as a unit responsible for the work of the former college.

The University of Botswana

The University of Botswana was the second institution to offer distance education programmes in the country. The university's early experience with the distance education mode centred mainly on the use of radio as a medium for facilitating learning. Radio campaigns on national current issues were launched in 1971, 1973, 1976 and 1979. These were an alternative to face-to-face teaching and were intended as an alternative extension method which could reach very many people, about 50 000 at a time (Jones 1981).

One of the most popular radio campaigns was *Lesedi la Puso*, a radio learning campaign in 1979, which was concerned with civics education aimed at familiarising people with the operations of government and how they could participate in the decision-making process. The campaign was used as an alternative to face-to-face teaching because the population was scattered. There was no personnel available who had knowledge of the subject matter, and the campaign did not require all the participants to have literacy skills.

The university's offer of formal credited programmes by the distance education mode dates back to 1979 with the Diploma in Theology and to 1983 when the Certificate in Adult Education was offered.

Government policy on distance education

The First National Commission on Education of 1977 came about 10 years after the independence of Botswana. It made this important observation among others: 'Most emphasis at present is given to full-time education in schools, with too few opportunities for people to continue their learning outside the formal education system. There are large numbers of people who need such opportunities.'

This observation was taken to be very important. The White Paper which followed the Commission's Report stated that the government would give high priority to developing opportunities for people to learn out of school, and that there should not be a sharp dividing line between study in school and continuing learning out of school.

There should be many more opportunities for people to learn through formal and non-formal education.

However, since it was argued that this was not fully fledged policy, it was expected that a White Paper articulating a clear policy on non-formal education would be formulated. In the meantime, it was deemed necessary to set up a new unit in the Ministry of Education to take care of non-formal education. This became the Department of Non-Formal Education, established in 1978.

The Second National Commission on Education (1993) recommended the strengthening and upgrading of the Distance Education Division of the Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) to the status of a semi-autonomous college established by legislation, namely the Botswana Distance Education College. The college will continue with the present programmes of the Division and have additional ones, mostly at pre-tertiary level.

The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) has observed that the expected White Paper was never produced. The commission therefore came out strongly in support of distance education. It recognised distance education as an integral part of the education system, with the ability to make part-time learning opportunities available to a wide range of children, young people and adults. The expansion and diversification of the distance mode of delivery is essential for future educational development. Thus the government is committed to providing education in order to create a learning society in which every individual should be provided with a learning opportunity outside the conventional system. The RNPE makes the following recommendations for the improvement of distance education in Botswana.

Recommendation 77 that the Ministry of Education enunciate a policy stating there should be shared use of all educational facilities in order to optimise their utilisation and promote out-of-school education.

Recommendation 79 With respect to junior secondary education for out-of school children, the Commission recommends the establishment of a nation-wide distance education study centre system of junior secondary level study.

Recommendation 83 With respect to junior secondary school for adults, the Commission recommends that the proposed Botswana Distance Education College offer the junior certificate programme with a support system to meet the needs of adults.

Recommendation 85 With respect to out-of-school education at senior secondary level, the Commission recommends that:

- a) the proposed Botswana Distance Education College offer a comprehensive and extensive O-level programme.

Recommendation 87 In order to extend the scope of distance education, the commission recommends;

- a) the establishment of the Botswana Distance Education College and
b) the provision of appropriate resources to develop the Distance Education Unit of the Centre for Continuing Education of the University of Botswana.

Recommendation 97 With respect to adult rehabilitation, the Commission recommends that:

- a) The proposed Botswana Distance Education College should modify its programmes, where relevant, for the disabled.

The 1993 National Education Commission identified a dire need for a distance education coordinating machinery. The major function of the machinery would be to bring together the various providers and undertake some strategic planning for the development of the system. This would probably help avoid duplications as well as repeating mistakes of the past. The machinery would also identify providers of various programmes at various levels, communities, private sector, parastatals and non-governmental organisations. It would further ensure some evenness in the programme scope and quality as well as some increase in allocation of resources. It would enable improvements in cost effectiveness and broaden the base of financing the system. It has been recommended that while the proposed college implements and coordinates programmes at pre-tertiary level, the Centre for Continuing Education should do the same at tertiary level.

The commission identified four major client categories whose educational and training needs could be serviced through distance education, under the umbrella of the above operational framework.

• **Category 1 Out-of-school secondary education for young people.**

This group is at present being serviced by the Department of Non-Formal Education. These people are mostly of school-going age and have not been able to complete the course. This category has two sub-groups:

- those who would like to get the Junior Certificate using distance education. The Commission recommended expanded support facilities for this group;
- secondary school O-level seekers who cannot get a place in a senior secondary school or vocational training. The commission recommended expanded programmes for this sub-group. These programmes would include commercial and technical subjects as well as academic ones.

● Category 2

The commission recommended that pre-tertiary vocational, professional and management in-service courses be offered through distance education. The courses would be aimed primarily at working adults, with a view to improving their work skills and career prospects. Such courses have never been offered before in Botswana. Like the first category, this category has two sub-groups:

- people who require academic and job-related upgrading for career advancement. These are people who in most cases need to upgrade their professional skills but lack the required academic entry qualifications;
- middle and junior management and secretarial cadres in government, the private sector and self-employed seeking skills training while combining learning with work.

● Category 3 Post literacy and extension programmes

These courses will play an important role in the development of a literate environment. Such courses could be useful to new literates who may wish to use their skills to satisfy an immediate need without necessarily seeking qualifications. These could include skills and information related to income-generating activities as well as public information.

● Category 4 University level courses

These will be for those people who require degrees and diplomas and are not able to go to university for various reasons. These would need to update their qualifications to meet modern challenges. DNFE (and later the Distance Education College) will provide distance education programmes for the first three categories as outlined above and DEU (Distance Education Unit) will cater for the fourth category.

INSTITUTIONS OFFERING DISTANCE EDUCATION IN BOTSWANA: THE CURRENT SITUATION

So far there are two major providers of distance education programmes in Botswana. DNFE is mandated to offer pre-tertiary programmes. The Distance Education Division of DNFE currently offers Junior Certificate and Senior Certificate courses at a distance.

The second institution is the University of Botswana (UB). Through its DEU, the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) is mandated to offer tertiary level programmes through the distance education mode. So far the DEU offers only one programme, the Certificate in Adult Education. The unit is in the process of developing a Diploma in Primary Education, which will be launched in August 1998. This programme is for upgrading primary school teachers and improving the quality of primary education. A Master of Education will follow thereafter.

The commission identified these two institutions (UB and DNFE) as major providers of distance education in the country. Their area of concentration, as indicated earlier, is pre-tertiary for DNFE and tertiary for DEU. They complement one another, as CCE takes over from where DNFE leaves off.

Although the DNFE and the CCE have been identified as the major providers of distance education, new extensive projects such as that of the Ministry of Health are pending. As a result of the Second National Commission on Education, Botswana is experiencing a paradigm shift in education and this includes the Ministry of Health.

However, the Ministry has to explore ways of solving problems encountered by learners who have a minimum education background, which limits their understanding of the new concepts of nursing education.

The Commission on Education also concluded that distance education in Botswana to-day is highly restricted and has thus not matched the vision laid out in the Report of the 1977 National Commission on Education. It has also remained a highly underdeveloped mode of teaching and learning in the country.

For this reason the Revised National Policy on Education (of 1994) aims at ensuring that the learning needs of the various client groups can be met through distance education. This will involve *resource re-arrangement* to meet the challenge and was the aim of Recommendation 77 of the RNPE.

Proposed institutional framework

Other efforts to provide distance education programmes have been made by various providers with various goals and objectives. However, these seem to have failed to achieve their intended objectives. Probably the programmes were launched without proper planning and may also have lacked a clearly articulated conceptual, theoretical policy framework to guide and provide a clear vision of distance education in Botswana. The government, through the RNPE, has seen the need for a coordinating machinery as well as the development of an institutional framework.

The CCE and the Distance Education Division of the DNFE have both been given the responsibility to establish such a framework. The CCE will provide and coordinate all programmes at tertiary level, while the Distance Education Division, which is to be upgraded to the status of a college, will provide pre-tertiary programmes and be responsible for their coordination.

Strengths and weakness of distance education

Strengths

First, in Botswana distance education has been recognised as having the potential to meet the educational and training needs of varied groups over the next twenty years. It has the advantages of bringing educational programmes closer to the people. Thus

Botswana, with a small population of about one million people scattered over a large geographical area, stands to benefit from distance education since it transcends geographical barriers. Second, a cursory survey of the provision of continuing education programme shows that the distance education potential has not been sufficiently exploited. The feasibility study for the establishment of the Botswana Distance Education College and the findings of the RNFE have also confirmed that there is a genuine need for opportunities for education and training through other means than the conventional system. So distance education has strong potential to fulfil this gap.

Problems and weakness

The greatest weakness, which led to several of the problems encountered here, stemmed from the lack of a clear policy on out-of-school education. Since distance education is one mode that can be used to address the needs of the out-of-school population, a clear policy statement would give direction to the development of distance education in the country. But the absence of the White Paper and consequently policy statement which was recommended by the 1977 Commission has led to lack of direction and coherence. These crucial ingredients are the key to the development of strong out-of-school education programmes.

Other problems stem from the severe lack of resources for DNFE's distance education programme.

Emerging future projections for Botswana

As already stated, distance education is ear-marked to satisfy the educational needs of the following clientele in Botswana in the next twenty years, to take us into the twenty-first century.

- Out of school secondary education for young people.
 - Junior Certificate seekers,
 - Senior Secondary O-level seekers.

These two categories are currently being provided for by the Department of Non-Formal Education.

- Pre-tertiary vocational professional and management in-service upgrading courses. So far no institution offers courses at this level through distance education in Botswana. When launched, such courses would target working adults, who wish to improve their work skills and career prospects. This target group falls into two categories:
 - people who require academic and job-related upgrading to advance in their careers or enrol for further training.

- junior management and secretarial cadres in government, the private sector and self-employed people seeking skill training.

Distance education would offer this category of people an opportunity to combine learning with working.

- Post-literacy and extension programmes. Some post-literacy participants who wish to expand their knowledge in certain areas could benefit from distance learning packages on topics such as bookkeeping, and income generating activities if these were available. National information campaigns on topics such as Aids could also benefit from distance education materials on prevention and/or management of this disease.
- University level courses. There are many people who wish to study for certificate, diploma or degree programmes but cannot enrol in conventional university programmes for one reason or other. The DEU of the CCE, University of Botswana, has embarked on developing certificate, diploma and degree programmes to address this gap.

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The Distance Education Division of the Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE)

F Molefi & O Mphinyane

OVERVIEW OF THE DNFE'S DISTANCE EDUCATION MODEL

The Botswana Extension College (BEC) was established in 1973 with the help of the International Extension College. The college was set up as a teaching institution dealing with both formal and non-formal education. Its main purpose was to offer Junior Certificate (JC) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) courses and various upgrading, retraining and information non-examination courses.

The programme targeted people older than 19 years of age who are presumably mature enough to endure the isolation of studying by themselves. The BEC was incorporated into the DNFE in 1978 and continued to function as a separate unit. This unit has now been upgraded into a division. Since then, the department has continued to offer secondary education at junior and senior secondary level. Non-formal courses are also offered currently by the Literacy and Home Economics programme to enhance knowledge, attitudes and skills development. These non-formal education programmes are taught through conventional methods.

NATURE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION PROVISION AT DNFE

The Distance Education Programme of the Department of Non-Formal Education is a nationwide programme. The average annual enrolment is about 2 000 learners, which could rise to about 5 000 when added to the previously enrolled students.

Table 1 Enrolment statistics for the Distance Education (DNFE) Programme from 1989 to 1994

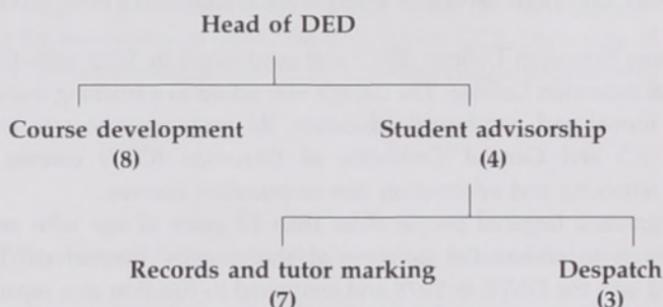
Year	JC	GCE	Total JC & GCE
1989	2 259	262	2 521
1990	2 535	1 529	4 064

Year	JC	GCE	Total JC & GCE
1991	6 317	3 159	9 476
1992	2 286	1 837	4 123
1993	3 220	2 980	6 200
1994	2 631	2 913	5 544

From the table, we notice a clear growth pattern from 1989, where the total number of learners was 2 521, to 1994, where the total enrolment was 5 544.

The following sub-systems and staff serve the entire learner population:

Table 2 The organisational structure and number of staff employed in 1994



Temporary staff may be employed at peak times or when the need arises.

Other service divisions are:

– Editorial and production staff	26	
– Field staff	185	
– Media, research and evaluation	<u>7</u>	
Total	<u>241</u>	(including staff of DED)

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Cooperation and collaborative relationships exist between the CCE, Department of Adult Education and Institute of Health Sciences. These include workshops and resource personnel exchange. There is also cooperation with other departments of the Ministry of Education, non-governmental organisations and parastatal organisations.

DNFE'S VIEW ON THE ROLE OF LEARNER SUPPORT

The DNFE regards learner support as an integral part of a successful distance education programme. The institution is learner centred, hence the need for strengthening the support services. This includes decentralising marking and distribution of print materials so that feedback is improved and the study lifespan becomes shorter and much more enjoyable.

NATURE OF LEARNER SUPPORT AT DNFE

Learner profile

In 1995 the age of learners ranged from 14 to 67 years. Learners can be categorised into two main groups:

- younger and unemployed learners, the majority (80%) of whom are female. This group is aged between 14 and 17 years and is of school-going age. They are Form 2 school leavers, less independent and less self-disciplined and thus need more guidance.
- older and mature learners, mostly employed, and 25 years and over. For these learners the programme serves as a catalyst in their immediate needs, for example working towards promotion at work or simply wanting to improve their standard of education for self-actualisation.

The following statistics reflect the 1992–1995 learner profile and give a detailed description in terms of age, majority age range, gender, educational background, geographical location, subjects enrolled for, marital and employment status and occupations:

Table 3 Learner Profile

	Age range	Majority age range	Gender	
			(M)	(F)
JC	14–54	17–32	700 (30 %)	1640 (70 %)
COSC	16–53	17–34	729 (33 %)	1496 (67 %)

Educational background

JC PSLE or old Standard 6, which was the school-leaving point in the 1960s
JC upgraders and failures

COSC JC holders
PL (Primary Lower Teachers Certificate)
PH (Primary Higher Teachers Certificate)
PTC (Primary Teacher's Certificate)
Enrolled nurses
COSC upgraders
Military
Police Force
Prisons
and others

Geographical spread

1 224 (27 %) of the total learner body are in Gaborone, the capital city. 367 (30 %) are Junior Certificate (JC) learners in Gaborone.

294 (24 %) are Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) learners in Gaborone.

The rest of the learner body are spread out over other towns and villages.

Employed/unemployed

1 328 (29%) JC and COSC are employed.

2 720 (60%) JC and COSC are unemployed.

517 (11%) did not indicate any engagement.

Prison inmates

2% are inmates. Some of these students had enrolled previously, whereas others enrolled while in prison.

A very small percentage are physically challenged visually.

Table 4 Range of learner occupational patterns

Teachers	Typists
Nurses	Electricians
Secretaries	Technicians
Police	Shop assistants
Defence	Miners
Security	Administration officers
Prison	Factory workers etc.

Marital status

DNFE has learners who are single, single parents, married, divorced, separated or widowed.

The majority of the learner body are single.

International learners

A small fraction (0,1 %) of the learner body come from countries outside Botswana.

Learners enrol for any three subjects at a given time at a distance.

What are the learners' needs?

The DNFE was established by the government to cater for people who could not continue their post-primary education through the formal school system for various reasons. It was also established to increase educational opportunities for all age groups and to reduce inequalities in access to education. The learners who enrol with it, though they may have various needs, have a common and very important goal, which is to fulfil the academic need for secondary level education which was interrupted. In addition, they also feel a need to improve their academic qualifications.

Given this scenario, students find that the only institution available to them at an affordable price and without age restriction is the DNFE distance education programme.

In pursuance of this, the learners' need for support arise from the isolation inflicted upon them by the nature of the distance teaching mode. The learners need to conquer the separation between them and the institution, other learners and their educators. The learner need can then be categorised as follows:

- *Environmental:* Learners feel isolated physically and emotionally due to the nature of the programme. A facility such as a study centre is needed to mitigate the distance element which gives rise to abandonment of the courses being pursued.
- *Academic:* Learners demand a curriculum and teaching approaches that are a replica of the formal school system because it is what they are used to, and thus feel they can only learn when a teacher is teaching them.

However, what they need is reassurance that what they learn through distance education is as good as learning through the formal school system. They need help in choosing their courses and planning their study periods. They also need help in understanding what the institution expects of them, for instance how to do their assignments, being responsible for their own learning situations, preparing for examinations and performing better to achieve their ultimate goals.

- *Skills development:* Learners need to acquire skills that can turn them into independent learners. Obtaining appropriate study skills is therefore very important.

Table 5 Learner enrolment in 1995 according to districts, gender and JC subjects

District	English		Maths		Setswana		BKC		S Studies		P Agric		HSB	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Gaborone	149	85	144	67	87	32	44	19	33	27	37	16	40	20
Kanye	61	19	61	17	26	17	8	2	18	10	6	6	29	5
Kgaladi	14	7	5	61	1	26	8	2	18	10	6	6	29	5
Molepolole	55	7	41	6	33	4	8	0	25	3	18	2	20	0
Bobonong	5	2	43	14	4	1	1	1	10	4	2	0	3	2
Mochudi	46	19	5	0	36	9	8	2	3	0	6	1	7	2
Iwaneng	24	12	22	9	8	2	1	0	12	5	1	2	4	3
Masunga	9	4	9	4	4	0	9	2	3	1	2	1	2	0
Kasane	29	5	22	4	17	3	5	0	8	1	3	4	4	0
Serowe	29	5	28	6	22	1	2	3	6	1	2	1	8	1
Gantsi	18	10	15	11	10	2	1	0	3	4	3	3	3	1
Lobatse	63	35	58	30	25	16	8	2	28	13	14	8	18	11
Francistown	16	16	14	15	5	6	2	7	2	3	0	5	4	5
Selibe-Phikwe	13	12	13	10	4	4	2	3	5	3	1	2	6	5
Ramotswa	29	6	23	4	19	1	10	2	14	3	5	1	9	2
Mahalapye	34	5	27	4	17	1	7	0	9	2	0	1	5	2
Maun	27	12	24	9	10	7	8	3	2	2	2	5	4	6
Tutume	20	3	18	2	11	1	0	1	3	1	4	1	7	0
Lethakane	25	9	25	6	10	3	9	3	1	4	2	2	11	2
Sub Total	666	273	597	279	349	136	132	52	203	97	114	67	213	72
Total	939		876		485		184		300		181		285	

Subject key:

BKC Book-keeping and commerce
 P Agric Private agriculture

S Studies
 HSB

Social studies
 Human and social biology

Table 6 Learner enrolment in 1995 according to districts, gender and subject at GCE level

DISTRICT	English		Maths		Geography		P/Acc		Commerce		HSB	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Gaborone	163	88	119	67	33	27	41	21	60	48	59	28
Kanye	47	15	42	15	6	5	5	3	12	3	25	5
Kgaladi	4	5	1	5	0	0	1	2	1	3	0	0
Molepolole	38	7	26	6	15	3	5	3	1	5	29	2
Bobonong	14	3	12	5	17	17	0	6	2	0	7	3
Mochudi	78	38	73	30	0	3	6	1	27	7	47	1
Jwaneng	15	13	13	8	3	3	3	1	4	2	5	8
Masunga	8	6	6	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	6	4
Kasane	15	5	9	5	1	2	2	3	1	2	7	3
Serowe	44	14	34	12	6	3	9	1	7	2	24	6
Gantsi	7	7	5	5	1	2	2	2	2	0	2	2
Lobatse	27	12	32	7	9	3	7	1	12	4	17	6
Francistown	35	9	27	5	5	1	7	2	7	2	16	6
Selibe-Phikwe	43	11	38	11	11	5	37	4	16	4	10	1
Ramotswa	11	4	10	3	3	2	1	1	9	3	8	2
Mahalapye	33	18	36	15	6	5	5	1	16	9	36	9
Maun	51	19	38	13	1	2	2	3	1	2	7	3
Tutume	18	9	19	8	1	1	2	1	3	1	14	8
Lethlakane	33	11	19	6	6	2	8	2	10	3	22	5
Sub Total	684	294	559	232	127	86	143	58	201	100	341	102
Total	978		791		213		201		301		443	

Subject key:

P/Acc Principles of accountancy
 HSB Human and social biology

- *Administrative needs:* Learners need responsive recorders, markers, counsellors, tutors and administrators. They also need writers who are sensitive to their learning styles.
- *Career guidance needs:* Learners, particularly those of school-going age, critically need help in this area. They need to know what careers are available in the job market; the skills and abilities needed to perform these jobs; and the alternatives that are open to them.

How is the DNFE meeting these needs?

A student support service system is in place.

Up to April 1995 the advising and counselling service was operated centrally by a full-time learner advisor based at headquarters, Gaborone. However, four more staff members have joined to extend this service. The learner advisors are responsible for running the support services that are in operation. Support is provided for both the urban and rural learner population of DNFE. The new officers have been strategically placed to strengthen the Kgalagadi (Kang), North East (Francistown), North West (Maun) and Gaborone areas. The three former areas offer services that have been decentralised in an attempt to take services closer to the learners. The services include enrolment, materials distribution, payment of course fees, marking and learner advising and counselling.

These various elements of learner support are available:

- *Tutor-marking*

Tutors are required to provide subject content guidance when they mark the learners scripts. They are encouraged to engage in a dialogue when marking the scripts and impart study skills to the many learners whom they may never see so that they all get as much help as possible. In order to meet this requirement, tutors workshops, meetings and orientations on marking are conducted.

- *Tutorials at study centres*

Study centres are usually secondary school classrooms where learners come together to receive face-to-face help from part-time tutors. The tutors are trained secondary school teachers from the Ministry of Education who are employed temporarily by the department, except in rare cases where personnel from the private sector are engaged for subjects such as book-keeping and commerce, principles of accountancy and commerce. These subjects are not common in the formal school sector, hence the lack of trained teaching personnel.

Centres open from any time between 5:30 pm and 8:30 pm, three or four days a week. Tutoring is available in each subject for two hours a week.

The tutorial session entails tutors being approached by the students, requesting them to explain areas of difficulty in the workbook being studied. Tutors are

expected to conduct mini-teaching sessions if the area under discussion is perceived as a common problem area.

Each centre is run by a supervisor chosen from among the tutors. The supervisor ensures that the study centre is comfortable for every learner and that a conducive studying atmosphere prevails.

At the end of 1994 DNFE had 27 study centres and 122 tutors countrywide. In June 1996 24 study centres were in operation.

Table 7 The location, number and name of DNFE study centres in 1996

Place	No	Name of study centre
Gaborone	2	Gaborone and Maru-A-Pula Secondary Schools
Mochudi	2	Molefi Secondary School Isang Primary School
Mmathubudukwane	1	Madiwe CJSS
Lobatse	2	Letsopa and Ipelegeng CJSSs
Ramotswa	1	St. Conrads Primary School
Selibe-Phikwe	1	Education Centre
Tutume	1	Tutume MacConnel College
Molepolole	1	NFE office
Thamaga	1	Thamaga CJSS
Serowe	1	Central Primary School
Kang	1	Matsha Non-Formal Centre
Hukuntsi	1	Lehutshelo CJSS
Maun	1	NFE Office
Francistown	1	Selolwe CJSS
Kanye	1	Kanye Library
Jwaneng	1	Teemane Primary School
Kasane	1	Chobe CJSS
Gantsi	1	Itekeng CJSS
Mahalapye	1	Education Centre
Machaneng	1	Mosikare CJSS
Masung	1	Maruje CJSS
TOTAL	24	

Key: CJSS: Community Junior Secondary School

- *Teaching at weekend courses*

These are full teaching sessions as opposed to mini-tutorials. They are arranged on selected weekends by various officers of DNFE at their study centres. The sessions are additional non-residential weekend programmes. They are meant to augment the normal distance education programme. Ideally, each office should conduct four

weekend courses annually, but individual offices can arrange to have more, depending on their finances and tutor availability.

In addition to these tasks, tutors are duty-bound to provide additional support to the learners they tutor or mark for. This includes professional guidance, information about the institution and general academic performance. Tutors are often called upon to offer counselling services.

To prepare the tutors for these multiple roles, they are oriented through short but intensive workshops. The areas covered on such occasions include the concepts of distance education, the role of the DNFE and the basics of counselling services.

- *Learner advice*

This service is provided by the advisors at various levels. The service includes provision of pre-enrolment, on-course and after-course counselling. The topics include enrolment procedures, and when, how and where to register for examinations. They also deal with problems of study materials such as availability or unavailability, sequence, and marking of worksheets.

The advisors, three of whom are based in the decentralised areas, are also liaison officers between the tutors and the learners, course writers and the institution at large.

In addition, the learner advisors, based at Head Office, deal with incoming calls from students and the general public seeking assistance either about enrolment or more general concerns. They also attend to referral cases from the other advisors and re-route queries to appropriate officers or professionals to take action. The advisors also maintain accurate records of all contact with learners and the action taken. They are also liaison officers with outside departments and institutions.

- *Radio counselling*

The learner advisors are responsible for this area with the help of the radio producers, who provide technical help. Programmes cover study hints and skills development. Programmes on students and/or tutors' experiences are also made to share with peers and colleagues.

- *Counselling through letters*

Assisting students by counselling through letters on matters involving general study skills is also prevalent. Subject-specific problems are redirected to the relevant officers.

- *Telephone counselling*

This arrangement is based on individual needs. Those learners who are able to communicate by telephone take advantage of the facility. The office also contacts them when necessary. Issues discussed are of general concern and study hints. Specific issues are directed to the relevant officers.

- *Radio teaching*

Course development officers produce and present subject radio programmes in collaboration with the radio producers of the department. Each course development officer produces four teaching programmes and one on examination hints. The choice of radio lesson is based on the officer's knowledge of areas needing emphasis. The examination hints come at the end of the year when learners are preparing to sit their final examinations.

One programme lasts fifteen minutes and the four programmes are broadcast in blocks of one hour per week.

- *Audio tapes*

These are recorded tapes of the above programmes. Learners are encouraged to acquire any of the programmes they feel will enhance their studies. They buy their own cassette tapes and send them to the department for dubbing.

- *District visits*

These are occasional and undertaken by staff of the Head Office to the various districts and study centres to lend support to learners, tutors and district staff as well as assess the impact and progress of the programme. Face-to-face meetings are held with groups or individual tutors and learners.

At appropriate times during the visits the communities are also sensitised to the existence of the Distance Education Programme and the role of the department.

AN ANALYSIS OF DNFE'S LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

The problems affecting the Distance Education Programme of DNFE seem to emanate from the non-existence of a clear demarcation between providing a service with all its components and providing support. Furthermore, being able to achieve a balance between flexibility and a good structured programme seems to be hard but it is of crucial importance.

Gaps exist in the following areas:

Tutoring

- Tutor-marked worksheets are affected by the absence of tutors when they are on vacation.
- Diverse groups during tutoring sessions and weekend courses present problems during interactions.

Counselling

- Establishing boundaries in the student support services and providing a sustainable service also present problems in that, though this is an old programme, in terms of establishment, its development and progress lag behind.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

This is a very highly centralised area. The Department nominates trainees to feed the Ministry's training plan which in turn feeds the Government's Department of Public Service Management. The process is extremely slow and demotivating. Thus, the learner support area, like all other areas of the Department, does not have a clear staff development strategy that can be relied upon.

MAJOR PROBLEMS AND CONSTRAINTS

The problems and constraints encountered are sometimes seen as overwhelming due to the time it takes to resolve them. Constraints go on unresolved for rather too long. But the need for a sensitive programme cannot be overemphasised in distance teaching. However, the department has expanded since inception. This was in response to the increasing demand for education which cannot be met by the formal sector. Regional offices have so far expanded to five.

Some of the constraints and measures taken to improve them are the following:

- *Material availability*

This is going to be affected by the transition that is being effected as a result of the recommendations of the National Education Policy of 1994. The two-year Junior Certificate programme is being phased out in favour of the three-year JC programme. The current enrollees of DNFE are studying the latter but they have been started with the two-year JC programme materials. Preparations are under way to produce additional materials which would cover what the former materials would have left out.

Furthermore, materials production in terms of volumes typed, typeface and layout have improved with the acquisition of computers and other equipment. The technical staff have also been given in-service training in order to improve output.

- *Learner administration*

Since 1992 services such as enrolment, distribution of materials and marking have been decentralised to three areas. Management of support services, in particular learner advising and counselling, is also in the process of being decentralised. Assistant learner advisors have been placed in these decentralised areas.

These are to take care of problems of poor attendance at the study centres by both learners and tutors, learners' impatience to complete courses, delays in marking learners worksheets, losses and delays when materials are sent to and from the department by post.

Learners are discouraged by these problems, which consequently lead to irregular operation of the study centres and drop-out.

The tutors are at times affected by the load of work from their respective schools of employment and the diversity of the learners to be tutored.

- *Shortage of resources*

Shortage of personnel at all levels of the programme, such as in-course writing, due to vacancies that remain unfilled for too long, and inadequate staff for the counselling service, coupled with lack of relevant training, are all problems the service has to contend with.

Inadequate facilities, such as transport and office space in general and especially at the printing workshop, also affect the effectiveness of the programme.

To further improve the distance education programme, it has been proposed that subjects taught at both junior and senior secondary level should have separate course development officers.

In conclusion, though an improved organisational structure is in place to offer stronger and more efficient programmes, a lot still remains to be done in the area of training officers and providing policy guidelines which could influence operation in the various levels of the programme. Of utmost importance is the need to translate the experiences gained during training sessions into action so as to realise greater efficiency and effectiveness.

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Institute of Health Sciences (IHS)

A G Moesi & O G Mmolawa

BACKGROUND

The Institute of Health Sciences (IHS) in Serowe, which operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Health, is involved in a distance education programme for nurses.

The government of Botswana adopted the programme Primary Health Care as the most appropriate strategy for achieving Health for All by the year 2000. Following this strategy, the Ministry concerned made significant progress in the development of health services. This rapid development has made giant strides towards addressing the need for a constant supply of skilled human resources. The Ministry of Health (MOH) and the University of Botswana (UB) submitted a joint request to the Kellogg Foundation to support the strengthening of the development of human resources in the field of health.

This led to the restructuring of nursing education in Botswana to meet the increasing demands of the population. Although various developments took place in various nursing institutions in Botswana, of major interest is the birth of the distance education programme in 1994 to upgrade enrolled nursing cadre into registered nursing.

The primary health care approach focuses on the community. It seeks to enable communities and individuals to take responsibility for improving their health by participating in the identification of health problems, setting priorities for action and planning, organising and managing health care programmes.

The effectiveness of primary health care services in Botswana depends to a large extent on the quality of the preparation of nurses who provide the bulk of health promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services in a variety of settings.

Because of this background, and after several consultations, the recommendation to phase out the training of enrolled nurses and upgrade current enrolled nurses to the general nursing cadre was accepted and active strategies were put into place towards the achievement of the latter.

The Serowe Institute of Health Sciences was designated as the campus responsible for

upgrading all enrolled nurses to general nursing level. Their entry point is year two of the general nursing programme.

The upgrading programme is offered in two approaches; a one-year residential (full-time) programme and a two-year part-time (distance education) programme.

The target population to be upgraded is approximately 1 600. These are actively practising nurses, employed either by government missions or the private sector.

These nurses are placed at various levels in the enrolled nursing cadre through promotion and some through post-basic training. The following breakdown shows the various ranks on levels of the nursing cadres.

- 40% enrolled nurses
- 25% senior enrolled nurses
- 20% principal enrolled nurses
- 10% midwives
- 5% ophthalmic nurses

THE MOH DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The programme started in August 1994, with 80 learners enrolled as part-time learners.

Learner profile

These are older and mature learners whose age ranges from 29 to 55 +.

Table 8 gives a detailed description in terms of age distribution, gender and educational background.

Table 8 Learner profile of MOH Distance Education Programme

Educational background	Age range	Majority age range	Gender
Primary level and JC (Unsuccessful)	45 – 55 +	50 – 55	100% (F)
JC	35 – 55	35 – 45	97% (F) 3% (M)
COSC Unsuccessful	29 – 45	30 – 45	98% (F) 2% (M)
COSC	29 – 35	29 – 35	98% (F) 2% (M)

Learners enrol for the following courses in first year.

First year

Semester I (August – December) 20 weeks	Theory	Practice
GN 111 Health assessment	40 hrs	40 hrs
GN 211 Primary health care	100 hrs	80 hrs
GN 216 Professional development	125 hrs	50 hrs
Semester (January – May) 16 weeks		
GN 311 (I) Primary health care (MCH)	48 hrs	32 hrs
GN 311 (II) Primary health care	40 hrs	80 hrs
Year II – 3rd Year Nursing Semesters I and II		
GN 312 Adult Health Nursing		
GN 215 Nursing Leadership and Management	48 hrs	

LEARNERS' NEEDS

During the planning for the programme several activities were undertaken in order to ascertain the needs of the potential learners. A countrywide visit was conducted by Ministry of Health personnel to sensitise enrolled nurses to the programme. This activity was followed by a general survey which was aimed at ascertaining the resourcefulness of the distance learner's environment. This included the workplace.

ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS

Following the general survey, some areas were identified as being suitable for learners to study at a distance. These areas are termed satellites. They are located more to the eastern part of the country where transport and communication means are readily available. Potential learners outside the identified areas are given first preference for the full-time programme.

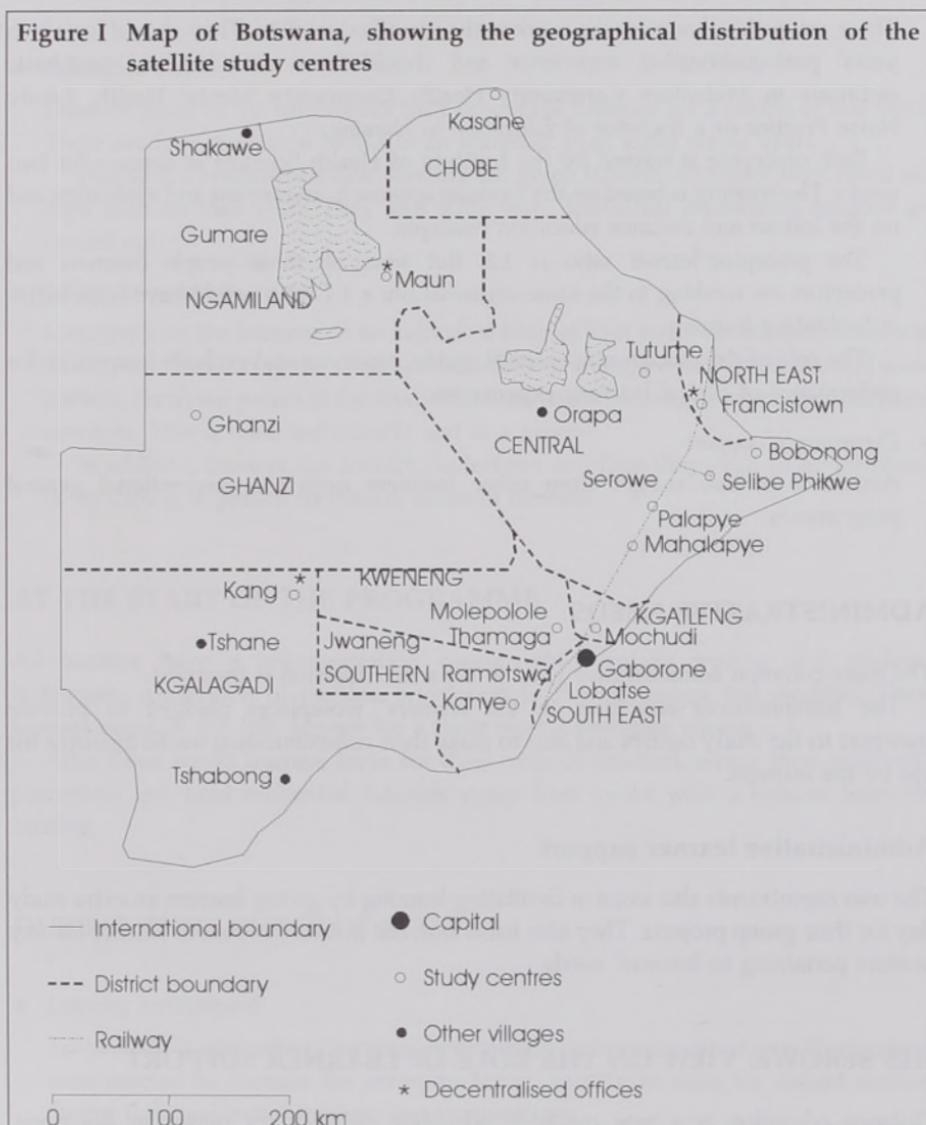
Satellites (study centres) are institutions attached to training hospitals which were identified in the catchment areas to service the distance education learners. These were identified because of existing teaching/learning resources such as libraries, classrooms, and qualified personnel to facilitate the learning process.

The satellites are in:

- Serowe
- Francistown
- Gaborone

- Lobatse
- Molepolole
- Selibe-Phikwe
- Ramotswa
- Kanye
- Mochudi

Figure I Map of Botswana, showing the geographical distribution of the satellite study centres



Personnel who offer support in satellites

- *Lecturers*

Ideally, each satellite should have a lecturer but because of the shortage of personnel some lecturers are responsible for more than one satellite.

- *Preceptors*

These are qualified nurses who work in the identified satellite. They should have two years' post-qualification experience and should have an additional post-basic certificate in Midwifery Community Health, Community Mental Health, Family Nurse Practice or a Bachelor of Education in Nursing.

Each preceptor is trained by the Institute of Health Sciences in Serowe for two weeks. The training is based on the modular approach, assessment and evaluation and on the learner and distance education concepts.

The preceptor/learner ratio is 1:3. But since all these people (learners and preceptor) are working in the same organisation, a 1:1 ratio would have been better in facilitating learning.

The role of the preceptor is to assist, guide, supervise and evaluate learners in the performance of clinical learning experiences.

- *Departmental support*

Assistance is also sought from other lecturers from the conventional general programmes.

ADMINISTRATIVE NEEDS

The most common administrative need in distance education is transport.

The administrative structures in the learners' workplaces pledged to provide transport to the study centres and also to make their communication media available for use by the learners.

Administrative learner support

The user departments also assist in facilitating learning by giving learners an extra study day for their group projects. They also liaise with the Institute of Health Science for any matters pertaining to learners' needs.

IHS SEROWE: VIEW ON THE ROLE OF LEARNER SUPPORT

Distance education is a new mode of education delivery for nurses in Botswana.

Therefore entrants into the programme need support to help them to cope with the demands that this mode of delivery exposes them to.

The Institute regards all personnel in the learners' environment as support staff and can only do so if given adequate training and orientation into the programme.

NATURE OF LEARNER SUPPORT IN SATELLITES

- *Residential blocks*

Learners come to the satellite for their residential tutorials for a period of one week. There are four residential blocks in an academic year, eight weeks apart.

During the residential block, learners are given lectures on topics they could not cope with on their own. They also write tests. Individual counselling sessions are carried out.

- *Follow-up contracts*

Lecturers visit the learners on an individual basis at least twice before each residential block. Activities during the visitation include counselling on both academic and social matters, clarifying points in the study materials and answering learners' questions and concerns. This is done individually and in a group.

In addition, learners can contact the lecturer any time they need to by telephone or by calling in person to discuss issues of concern.

AT THE START OF THE PROGRAMME

All learners have a pre-registration course which entails reading and studying techniques, completion of profiles, orientation to the curriculum and modules. These learners come to the IHS Serowe for a three-week orientation course.

After three weeks learners leave for their areas of function, where they work with preceptors and hold residential tutorials every four weeks with a lecturer from the satellite.

DURING THE COURSE OF STUDY

- *Learning environment*

To provide a supportive learning environment temporary structures (Portacabins) were erected to increase the accommodation capacity to cater for distant learners during their residential sessions and examinations.

- *Learning materials*

Print is the main medium of instruction. The learning materials (modules) are self-directed study packages developed by the faculty involved in the upgrading programme.

Learners are also issued with prescribed textbooks/appendices to support information covered in the study materials.

- *Supportive learning resources*

There are two photocopiers, one with a collator, but they are too small for the type of production involved. As a result they break easily and take time to be repaired.

One officer is employed as a material production officer. Module production requires at least five members, therefore lecturers cooperate to ensure that the learning materials are produced.

The Department of Manpower in the MOH assists by photocopying some of the learning material but the Institute staff still compile and bind modules for learners.

There is a television monitor and a video cassette recorder for learners to use. Video information is related to the content in the modules. This equipment is available in the satellites. Learners and preceptors have access to it.

- *Libraries*

Each satellite centre has library facilities which have reference materials related to modules. Learners plan time to visit these libraries which are open on weekdays and at weekends. Plans are being made for learners to borrow reserved books on public holidays. Library hours are extended to 9 pm for learners.

- *Transport*

Three vehicles were provided by the MOH to assist in transporting lecturers to satellites from Serowe IHS during residential courses, and learner contacts for guidance and discussion of issues relevant to their learning. Other institutions provide transport for satellite staff.

- *Staff preparation*

Orientation workshops/seminars were held to orient lecturers to the curriculum, modules and planning teaching sessions.

Lecturers attended a workshop for writers and editors of distance learning materials. An orientation workshop for preceptors was held at Serowe IHS. Representatives from the user departments attended an orientation workshop. One lecturer was sent for training to specialise in distance education.

DURING EXAMINATIONS

- Prior to the examinations learners are helped with preparation.
- The examinations venue is organised.
- Learners receive details of examinations timeously.
- Counselling and giving examination tips is done.
- Learners are given a reading week.

POST-EXAMINATION

The respective lecturers are responsible for counselling learners who failed.

POST-QUALIFICATION

On completion of training learners are issued with diploma certificates as registered nurses. They are also oriented to their new roles by their respective user departments.

OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE

- *Human resources*

The Serowe Centre of the MOH has the following personnel:

Principal	1
Head of department	1
Programme coordinator	1
Lecturers	5
Academic register	1
Material production officer	1

Clerks

Administrators

Typists

These personnel have different roles to play in providing support for the learners.

- *Learner counselling*

Learners are provided with counselling services during learner contacts. These services may be academic or social.

- *Self-help groups*

Learners have formed study groups which enable them to assist and support one another in matters of common interest.

- *Record of learners' progress*

Lecturers keep records of learners' progress throughout the course.

On completion of the course, learner grades are computed to come up with a final continuous assessment grade that is carried forward to the final examinations.

CONCLUSION

The learner support services offered in this programme are inadequate, hence the need for some improvement:

- *Libraries*

Some libraries have limited study rooms/reading space, and also an inadequate collection of up-to-date books on health and health-related information.

- *Preceptors*

Some preceptors are demotivated hence do not support learners effectively. Some even withdraw because of lack of incentives.

- *Faculty*

There is a shortage of staff. This hinders proper and adequate guidance and supervision of learners. Teachers are also limited in terms of distance education concepts.

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