BARRIERS TO REMOTE RURAL STUDENTS' ACCESS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED BY THE CENTRE FOR EXTERNAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that **BARRIERS TO REMOTE RURAL STUDENTS' ACCESS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED BY THE CENTRE FOR EXTERNAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA** is my own work and that all the sources that I used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references

Signature Date: 13 August 2009

(NR Mbukusa)

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DEDICATION

This piece of writing is dedicated to my children: Manyando, Namasiku, Masiye and Mumbela. They should follow my footsteps and also excel in their educational endeavours.

SUMMARY

This research studies and documents the barriers to remote rural students' access of distance education support services offered by the centre for external studies at the University of Namibia

The intent of the researcher is to investigate the question: *What barriers do remote rural students face when accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM?* The purpose of the study is to promote the growth of open and distance learning in the area of student support for students in the remote areas of Caprivi and Kavango regions in Namibia. The aim of the research is to provide evidence that open and distance learning students in remote rural areas face academic, administrative and logistics, personal and natural disasters as barriers as they study through the Centre for External Studies, University of Namibia.

Six students were interviewed and studied over a period of two months. The students were followed to their places where interviews were held. Several written documents from students registering their grievances with CES-UNAM were requested from the office of the Director and were reviewed and analysed. The results thereof were recorded in thick verbatim as students personally engaged themselves in narrating the barriers that they face each day during their study periods. The results showed that Open and Distance Learning institutions in the world should practise and enhance sound academic, administration and logistics management systems to help students in remote rural areas.

CES-UNAM has a challenge to ensure that students in remote rural areas are adequately supported. The researcher recommends that studies in the area of student support in should focus on their transactional, interactional and social contexts in order to enhance their opportunities to continue with their studies.

***Key words**: access to student support; barriers; academic, administrative and personal/logistics student support; retention rates; attrition rates; remote rural areas; feedback; case study.*

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The universally subscribed goal for 2015 is that “all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality" (Declaration of The World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000). The goal can only be achieved if children can have access to motivated and knowledgeable teachers. They are the resource by excellence. “The books are important, the pencil and the blackboard are important and so are the chairs to sit on, but if there is no motivated teacher in front of the chairs, if there is no teacher to write on the blackboard and to teach reading, math and how to pick up knowledge and values, the goal will never be achieved” (retrieved on 28 December 2009 from ttp://www.teachersfirst.nl/Teaching/TheImportanceofTeachers/tabid/236/Default.aspx)

Teachers are one of the main pillars of a sound and progressive society. They bear the weight and responsibility of teaching, and, apart from parents, are the main source of knowledge and values for children. Unfortunately, not all teachers in Caprivi and Kavango regions have had opportunities to finish their professional training in formal institutions of learning as a result of conflicting priorities in their lives. Teachers who have had problems to continue their professional training in formal institutions of learning can still do it via the distance mode of learning. Distance learning is an excellent method of reaching the adult learner. Because of the competing priorities of work, home, and school, distance education offers desire a high degree of flexibility adult learners. The structure of distance learning gives adults the greatest possible control over the time, place and pace of education; however, it is not without problems. Loss of student motivation due to the lack of face-to-face contact with tutors and peers, potentially prohibitive start-up costs, and lack of student support services are all barriers to successful distance learning. This study explores the barriers that distance education students face as they try to access student support services at the Centre for External Studies, university of Namibia.

1.2 Brief historical context of teacher education in pre-independent Namibia

Before independence in 1990, education system of Namibia was segregated into education for whites, coloureds and blacks in accordance with the South African Apartheid system. Namibia was at that time under the control of the South African government of the Nationalist Party. Schools served the purpose of:

- reproducing the privileges of the ruling class
- reproducing the skills and attitudes required for maintaining a [colonial] society
- serving as an instrument of oppression (Hasley, *et. al.*, 1998).

In other words, the Apartheid policies were designed to separate black and white South Africans, to oppress, dominate and control blacks, and in the same breath to enrich white South Africans at the expense of the oppressed (viewed on 28 December 2009 fromhttp://www.rebirth.co.za/apartheid.htm). In addition, different educational systems and administrations were developed based on race. Whites, blacks and coloureds all had separate schools that were administered by racially based Education Departments. Whites received a superior education, while blacks received the most inferior education. Coloured education was better than that of blacks, but inferior to that of the whites.

The introduction of Bantu (low level or gutter) Education was introduced. It led to a "huge reduction of government aid to the already ailing learning institutions of black African. The National Party now had the power to employ and train teachers as they saw fit. Black teachers' salaries in 1973 were extremely low and resulted in a dramatic drop of trainee teachers". Briefly, education in Namibia was controlled by several acts of parliament. Proclamation 55 of 1921 made education compulsory and free for white children between ages of seven and seventeen while blacks began school at an older age and had to pay for it. Proclamation 16 of 1926 established a separate education system for Coloureds and Proclamation on Representative Authorities, 1980 (AG.8 of 1980) authorised the establishment of Educational Authorities. Other Acts included the National Education Act (Act 30 of 1980); Basters of Rehoboth Education Act, 1972 (Act 85 of 1872); Academy Act, 1985 (Act of 1985); and Children's Act, 1960 (Act 33 of

1960). The Proclamation on Representative Authorities delimited the authority of each territory. According to the Act each Representative Authority had the power within its territory to provide education up to standard 10 (present grade 12), to train teachers for primary schools and to build and run schools, teacher training colleges and other institutions related to education. Postsecondary education was under the authority of central government (Godana and Ashipala, 2006:3)

The past South African Apartheid education system had a serious effect on access to tertiary education in Namibia, especially the remote rural areas. Despite Namibia comprising of a small population during the apartheid time, the educational resources were not properly shared in the country, leaving the remote rural areas very poor. "The Bantu Education system under-funded the northern regions compared to the southern and central regions such that at independence the southern and central regions had better education infra-structures and better qualified teachers" (Godana and Ashipala, 2006:5)

As a result of this situation, "the majority of African teachers were not trained, with about 87% of the teachers in 1976 having no teacher training and no school qualifications beyond Standard 6 (Grade 8 currently). Only about 2% of the total number of black teachers [many of whom were living in very remote and rural areas] had matriculation. Thus, the quality of education provided was different along racial and ethnic lines" (Godana and Ashipala, 2006:12).

Nyambe and Griffiths (nd); supported by Cohen (1994) noted that "already by 1923 the apartheid regime had started its mission to provide inferior education for Namibian teachers. In collaboration with the missionaries, a few teacher training centres were established in Namibia. In the 1970s seven training centres were in operation. However, all these centres were virtually secondary schools with teacher training wings". The entry requirements into teacher education were as low as standard II (grade 4). Four wings of colleges of education were attached to senior secondary schools across the entire country while the whites had their own college resourced to the level of a university in the country or would opt to get free education in South Africa. This

college was later converted into what was known after independence as the University of Namibia.

The educational policies of the system were to allocate less to blacks and other ethnic groups at the advantage of the whites. As an example, the table below shows a summary of the allocation.

Table 1.1 Resource Allocation, 1977/78, 1982

	Blacks	**Coloureds**	**Whites**
Annual Expenditure N$ Million (1977/78)	15.8	6.8	20
No. of pupils	163 638	22 376	22308
Expenditure per head per year N$ (1977/78)	104	221	681
Expenditure per head per year N$ (1982)	232	300	1210
Cost to the pupil per year N$	20-50 (public schools)	80-105 (mission schools)	Free Free

Sources: Tjitendero (1984) and Ellis (1984) in Godana and Ashipala, 2006

By 1985 there were about 10,372 teachers of whom only about 10.7% were professionally and academically qualified. These figures increased to about 12,525 in 1988 with about 12.3% qualified teachers in Kavango and Caprivi regions with 2% of qualified teachers each region (Godana and Ashipala, 2006). In 1993, for example, 1 794 out of 1800 teachers in Kavango had only Education Certificate Primary (ECP) or National Education Certificate (NEC) that were meant for teaching in the primary. They however found themselves teaching in Junior and Senior Secondary Schools. Nearly 700 of the teachers in Kavango at the time had no teaching certificate (The Namibian, 10 March 2000).

Fourteen years after independence, Namibia's 70% of the overall population was still found in remote rural areas with fewer amenities compared to the urban areas of the country (Regional

Poverty Profile Report, 2004). Over 70% of students enrolled for Bachelor of Education and Basic Education Teachers Diploma with the Centre for External Studies, University of Namibia (CES-UNAM) between 2002 and 2006 were still from the remote rural areas in the northeast regions of Namibia (UNAM Statistics, 2002 – 2006). The vastness of the northeast regions, the bad roads, flooding, unavailability of electricity in most parts of the regions, poor and sometimes no radio and television reception in some cases still pose a challenge to students studying in these areas. To make matters worse there are few computers in these areas of the country (Stork, 2005).

In its first five-year development plan (1995-1999), amongst other objectives and goals, CES-UNAM committed itself to addressing educational and social imbalances that existed in the country, especially in regions that were disadvantaged by the past apartheid policies of the South African government. CES-UNAM therefore from the beginning was tasked to help people that found themselves in the work force and needing to continue with studies in order to improve themselves in terms of skills and performance. The other objective was to reach out to communities that found themselves languishing in poverty and redundancy. They also needed to be economically and educationally empowered in order to contribute to the building and development of the nation (UNAM Five Year Strategic Plan, 1995-1999).

CES-UNAM was tasked also with the responsibility of making quality higher education accessible to adult members of communities through the distance education mode. Annually, CES-UNAM received a good number of adult application forms in its various undergraduate and graduate courses. Although many students registered and began with their studies every year, a high percentage of them either dropped out or took long to finish their studies. These individuals cited numerous reasons for dropping out or taking too long a time to complete. Their answers included living far away from the regional centres where maximum student support non-availability is the main setback in their studies (Mbukusa, 2004).

The University of Namibia (UNAM) is one of the African universities that has ventured into delivering education to its masses through a "dual mode", that is, both conventional and distance teaching. All distance education programmes at UNAM are carried out by the Centre for External Studies, herein referred to as CES-UNAM. CES-UNAM has nine regional centres across the country. The regional centres serve as the nearest contact places for the students. This is where students hand in their applications, do their registrations, receive their study materials, access library books and the internet and write their examinations. Regional centres also give students the academic support that they need, such as, face-to-face tutorials and counselling. Each regional centre has an officer known as the Regional Administrative Student Support Officer (RASSO) who deals with all administrative issues, and to some extent, the academic issues. Only three of the regional centres have academic staff members.

Between 2002 and 2006, CES-UNAM recruited about 269 Basic Education Teachers Diploma (BETD) students and 189 Bachelor of Education students both males and females in the northeast regions of Namibia. As noted earlier almost 70 % of these students were in remote rural areas (CES-UNAM Statistics, 2002 – 2006). The BETD programme was supposed to be done within four years of study while the BED takes about six years to complete at a distance mode. Despite a student support system that includes face to face tutorials, vacation schools, video conferencing, teleconferencing and printed materials, about 100 students have failed to complete their programmes. Some took too long (between four and six years for BETD and ten years for the BED) to finish their studies. The regional centres operate Mondays to Fridays between 07h30 and 16h30 each day. Because of the dirt roads, and in some cases, no roads at all except footpaths, it is difficult for students to reach centres in time for their support to be accessed. Students cannot find support during weekends as RASSOs do not work on Saturdays and Sundays.

The post independent socio-economic situation has not changed to favour the remote rural areas. The public roads are still poor. Electricity does not cover all the areas of the country and poor communication are still seen in remote rural areas. The government is taking long to avail such infrastructural facilities to most of the remotest areas of the country. Such political and

economic factors mean that these challenges must be addressed in a context of severe resource constraints where the greater marginal benefits of investment in health, housing and primary education have steadily reduced the government's subsidy to higher education (Stork, 2005).

This study therefore sought to investigate the existing barriers that face distance education students from remote rural areas of Namibia's northeast regions in accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM. When students lack proper academic support services during their studies their academic progress is likely to be negatively affected. With lack of time, difficulties in concentration, family commitments, organisation of time and planning, low levels of motivation, study skills, resources, anxiety and isolation students may not finish their programmes (Murgatroyd & Redmond, 1978; Grace, 2001; Halsne & Gatta, 2002; Levine & Sun, 2002)

1.3 Statement of the problem

The problem therefore that this study sought to answer was: *What barriers do remote rural students face when accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM?*

1.4 Research Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the barriers that face distance education students from remote rural areas (Caprivi and Kavango) in accessing student support services at CES-UNAM. In the process of conducting this study, the following objectives were pursued:

i. Investigate, examine and determine barriers that face distance education students from remote rural areas of Namibia studying with CES-UNAM;
ii. Examine current CES-UNAM student support service for distance education students in remote rural areas
iii. Establish effective and efficient student support services for students in remote rural areas

1.5. Research Questions

The main questions that guided the study included:

i. What barriers face distance education students from remote rural northeast regions of Namibia studying with CES-UNAM?
ii. What are the effects of these barriers on the total lives of the students?
iii. Is the current way of supporting remote rural distance education students at CES-UNAM effective and efficient?
iv. Can this current way of supporting students in remote rural areas be improved to accelerate completion rates?

1.6 Significance of the study

The study is of value to the CES-UNAM as it investigates, examines and determines barriers that face distance education students from remote rural northeast regions of Namibia. It should also provide clear indication of what students think of the existing support system, reinforce good practice and improve parts of the system that need improvement. The researcher trusts that this study is therefore of great value to the University of Namibia through the Centre for External Studies, the SADC providers of open learning and the developing world endeavouring to understand student support services for distance education students in remote rural areas in understanding:

- the barriers that face distance education students from remote rural northeast regions of Namibia;
- effective and efficient strategies that will enhance excellent student academic performance and development within student support services;
- Offer guidelines on how to support distance education students in remote rural areas in institutions that offer open and distance learning in Namibia and the developing world.

1.7 Delimitation of the study

The study covered the Caprivi and Kavango regions that form the northeast parts of Namibia. The regions are quite remote and rural with about 80% of their rural roads being inaccessible.

The roads are sandy during drier seasons and muddy during rain seasons. Respondents were followed depending on the richness of the information that they provided. The depth of the study was determined by the information that respondents provided though the most important factors are that the information was sought until all relevant aspects of the study were covered comprehensibly. Only students who were registered for the Basic Education Teachers Diploma (BETD) a four-year diploma on the distance mode and Bachelor of Education (BED) between 2002 and 2006 were covered as these were the years when CES-UNAM had bigger numbers from remote rural areas.

1.8 Limitations of the study

Ideally, the study should have considered all students who were participating in distance learning in all CES-UNAM centres throughout the country at the time of this study. However, access to all students was impossible because a large number of distance students in Namibia were situated in rural areas, which in most cases are flood stricken or are so remotely located that it is difficult to reach them. As a result two regions were selected out of 13 educational regions for the purpose of conducting an in-depth and thorough study.

Further, useful information could have been obtained if all 458 students who are currently registered for distance education (in all two identified regions) could have been considered to participate in this study. This could have enabled the researcher to generalise the findings or create a representative sample. But due to the fact that this is a qualitative study which searches for information rich subjects, rather than for a representative sample (which is the concern of quantitative research) only six (6) respondents were selected to participate. Covering all students in the targeted programmes would have been highly costly as access was difficult.

Another aspect that could be considered as a limitation is that this study was of a methodological nature. The choice of a sampling technique (telephone interviews) in some of the situations could have compromised the outcome of the research results. Telephonic interviews are not

reliable (Robson, 1993) as the interviewee is not physically seen and it is difficult to control the conversation as is in face to face. There was also no time to probe much as some interviewees hurried through the conversation and might have deliberately not given the required information.

Qualitative research is by nature a labour intensive activity. The researcher constantly collected and analysed data, making numerous decisions on the inclusion and exclusion of data, then collecting and analysing more data to confirm or disconfirm issues under study (Creswell, 1994, p. 153; Krefting, 1996, pp. 214-222 and Vakalisa, *et. al.* 2006). The constant shift between asking questions and note taking was also hectic though it allowed the researcher to propose a theoretical notion and check for verification (Crowl, 1996).

Finally, the amount of data gathered during the study was enormous, and there was no computer programme available to assist with management and analysis of the data. Thus, much of the work was done by hand and this could have affected the analysis of the research results.

1.9 Clarification of the concepts

This section describes operational concepts that were used in this study which are further clarified in detail in Chapter 2

1.9.1 Distance Education

Distance education has had many definitions with each serving its own useful purpose. This study concentrated on the definition of distance education stated below because it showed its purpose, structure, process and characteristics of distance education.

Peters (1971, p. 206), one of the researchers that compared distance education to principles of organisation, states that:

> Distance education is a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes, which is rationalized by the application of division of labour and organizational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning.

Peters saw opportunities in distance education that were close to an industrial business with all the total quality management in place. Seeing distance education less than business could bring barriers to students, academic support and administrative staff.

In Moore's (1973, p. 664) words:

> Distance education may be defined as the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviours are executed apart from the learning behaviours, including those that in a contiguous situation would be performed in the learner's presence, so that communication between the teacher and the learner must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices.

Garrison and Shale (1987, p. 11) state that:

> Distance education implies that the majority of educational communication between (among) teachers and students occurs non-contiguously, must involve two-way communication between (among) teacher and student(s) for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the education process, and use technology to mediated the necessary two-way communication.

Moore (1973) and Garrison and Shale (1987) above advanced and supported seriously the issue of instructional methods that enhance full communication between lecturers/tutors and the students. Such communication keeps students informed about their progress and helps students to feel that they are part of the entire institution especially institutions with fulltime students on campus.

Keegan's (1986, p. 49) defines distance education in the way that this study will always refer to it, i.e. distance education as characterising:

- 'the quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process; this distinguishes it from conventional face-to-face education.

- the influence of an educational organisation both in the planning and preparation of learning materials and in the provision of student support service; this distinguishes it from private study and teach-yourself programmes.
- the use of technical media; print audio, video and computer, to unite teacher and 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 distinguishes it from other uses of technology in education.
- the quasi-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups, with the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialisation purposes'.

Lately, Willis (2001, p. 1) has defined distance education as follows:

> At its most basic level, distance education takes place when a teacher and student(s) are separated by physical distance, and technology (i.e. voice, video, data, and print), often in concert with face-to-face communication, is used to bridge the instructional gap. These types of programmes can provide adults with a second chance at a college education, reach those disadvantaged by limited time, distance or physical disability, and update the knowledge base of workers at their places of employment.

Willis emphasised the issue of distance (transactional) that stands between the tutor and the distance education student. When the gap is not bridged students feel isolated, frustrated and may drop out of programmes.

It was not the purpose of the researcher to go on arguing the differences that exist between open learning definitions and those of distance education. Issues raised in the definitions above such as sound management of student support services, instructional materials, communication between tutor and student, and possible barriers that may inhibit students from reaching their potential are briefly studied in Chapter 3 of this study.

1.9.2 Student support

In distance education, student support refers to meeting the needs that all students have because they are central to high quality learning, i.e. guidance about course choice, preparatory diagnosis, study skills, access to group learning in seminars and tutorials (Thorpe, 2001).

Student support is defined in distance education in terms of its constituents such as activities, strategies and skills. Activities enable students to progress satisfactorily (Bailey and Moore, 1989). Strategies such as cognitive, affective, metacognitive and motivational (Lebel, 1989) and skills such as informing, advising, counselling, assessing, enabling and feeding back (Vowles, 1990) are needed in distance education for maximum progression from one level of study to the next. In the process of learning, students need text devices such as illustrations in learning materials (Martens et al., 1996) technological innovation (Harrison, 1997; Kommers *et al.*, 1998) and provision of information (Johnson, 1999) to support learning. Galusha (1998) found that lack of support services such as academic advisors, faculty, and technical assistance is one of a number of insecurities that beset distance education students, and that this lack of support might affect motivation. Academic support, emotional support and practical support are all types of support needs that Carnwell (2000) strongly recommended for distance education practitioners. The above definition suited the operational framework of this study.

1.9.3 Retention and attrition rates in ODL

Attrition in this study refers to the decrease in number of students participating in course activities or a degree program. Retention is the number of students who persist from one level to the next in their degree program while persistence refers to continuing toward an educational goal such as earning a degree or certificate. The issue of student retention and completion rates in distance education have been investigated and vigorously argued over for at least the last seven decades (Berge and Huang, 2004). Some researchers have reported attrition from eLearning as high as 70 - 80% (Flood, 2002; Forrester, 2000, in Dagger & Wade, 2004). Parker (1999) argues that “with the growth of distance education has come the problem of exceedingly high attrition rates”. Citing Carter (1996), she suggests that eLearning student attrition in some

institutions exceeds 40%, while others (Frankola, 2001) and Diaz (2002), put it at between 20 - 50%, and Carr (2000), estimates it to be 10% - 20% higher than for traditional on-campus education.

1.9.4 Barriers

Overcoming barriers to learning in distance education (Iran, *et. al.,* 2000; Berge, 1998; Berge & Muilenberg, 2003; Berge, Muilenberg & Hanegham, 2002) is the issue that is focused on in this section of the study. Defining barriers poses the same difficulties as is in the case of distance education and its related fields of study. Many fields of studies have their own definitions. Barriers to `learning` relate to both the method of teaching and a student's condition (physical and mental) during learning periods. For students, various physical and psychological barriers stand in their way as they attempt to learn. There are also various structural factors influencing the educational process. Barriers are generally defined on *home.earthlink.net/-ddstuhlman/defin1.htm* website as "objects, ideas, practices, structures, systems", etc. that prevent or discourage action. Though sometimes physical barriers are necessary for physical safety; barriers are not good when they discourage especially in the learning processes, *(Retrieved on 4 October 2006).*

After numerous studies, Rezabek (1999) groups the barriers to distance education enrolment into three categories and these are:

- Situational barriers resulting from an individual's general situation or environment, and include such issues as transportation, age, time constraints, and family responsibilities.
- Institutional barriers that are created by an institution's programmes, policies, and procedures, and include problems with admissions, registration, scheduling of courses, financial aid, and support services.
- Dispositional barriers resulting from an individual's personal background, attitude, motivation, learning style, and self-confidence.

Patricia Cross, as far back as 1981 observed numerous barriers that distance education students encounter in their studies. After going through the initial research that was done by Carp, Peterson and Roelfs (1974) she decided to stress the importance of studying barriers that confront distance education students and classified them into three categories and these are:

- Institutional barriers are constructed by educational institutions with or sometimes without their knowledge and include difficulty in registering and paying for classes or a lack of appropriate advice (Bruening, e*t al.*, 2001 and Zirkle, 2004).
- Situational barriers can be derived from personal factors such as job and home responsibilities that inhibit participation which are programme costs, resource availability, lack of equipment and infrastructure, scheduling, instructional concerns and technical assistance.
- Student barriers that include costs and motivators, feedback and teacher contact, alienation and isolation, student support and services, and a lack of experience and/or training (Bruening, *et. al*., 2001).

This study therefore focused on barriers that face distance education students in remote rural areas during their study programmes. An in-depth study on the barriers follows in the literature review section of the study.

1.9.5 Remote rural areas

Remote rural life cannot be adequately understood simply by comparing and contrasting it with the rural life of all countries in the world no wonder researchers such as Whitaker, (1982); Croft, (1984); Blakely, (1984); Deavers & Brown, (1985); Horn, (1985) found it difficult to define remote ruralness. Trying to understand it merely by comparing it with urban life is also a mistake that a researcher can do. Rural remote life can only be understood by visiting a particular country, putting it under intense study and coming out with characteristics that only are unique to the particular country.

At the same time, an assumption that rural remote life will be equal to urban life carries its own mistakes. What is remote in United States of America and Europe, for example could be metropolitan or suburban in Africa. However, for the sake of definition, the researcher felt that showing differences between remote rural areas by way of facilities in Namibia in a way set a definition of it. Table 1.2 below shows urban facilities that may be absent or inadequately provided in remote rural areas in Namibia and a reasonable number of African countries.

Facilities	***Rural***	***Remote areas***
Telecommunications	Few telephone lines	Absence of telephone lines
Radio broadcasts	Few people own radios	Absence of radio waves
Electricity	Few homes electrified	Absence of electricity
Water supplies	Insufficient pipelines of running water	Boreholes, depend on rainfall
Access to good tarred roads	Shortage of good dirt/gravel roads	No state maintained roads – informal footpaths
Good transportation services	Poor transportation services	No state transportation services
Adequate health (clinics, etc.) services	Insufficient clinics/health services	No close health/clinic services
Adequate well resourced schools	Inadequate well resourced schools	Poorly resourced schools far away from communities they serve
Population	Sparse	Very dotted

Table 1.2: Facilities in remote rural areas

For the sake of this study, and in order to understand the developing worlds' remoteness and ruralness, the two have been combined and referred to as the remote rural areas as they are almost intertwined. Some photographs (*see Appendix D, pp. 233-239*) showing remote rural areas in Namibia are attached to this study to elucidate the discussion.

1.9.6 Self Study groups

In some studies, the term self study group is synonymous to self directed learning groups. For this study, these terms are used interchangeably. Moore (1977) defines self directed learning as the learning of the person who is able to establish a learning goal when faced with a problem to be solved, a skill to be acquired, information that is lacking. Sometimes formally, often unconsciously, self-directed learners set their goals and define criteria for their achievement.

Boyd (1966) and Knowles, (1970) describe autonomous learning as especially characteristic of learning in adulthood. Adults have a self concept characterised by independence. In most aspects of their everyday lives they believe in themselves as capable of self-direction and they are generally capable and willing to be self-directed in their learning also. They can study on their own or are self directed compared to some children in formal schools who need teachers or parents to supervise them in their studies. The adult learner approaches subject matter directly without having an adult in a set of intervening roles between the learner and the subject matter. The adults know their own standards and expectations. They no longer need to be told, nor do they require the approval and reward from persons in authority (Boyd, 1966, p. 180) for them to upgrade their studies. This kind of learning is grounded in the constructivism theory of knowing where the basic presumption is that students who are active and who take control of their own learning at any age level of learning can perform better and achieve better results (Zimmerman, 1990).

1.10 Brief review of literature that guides the study

In a distance education setting, the process of student learning is more complex for several reasons. Higher education through distance education faces numerous barriers in delivering educational programmes. Distance education serves many students who find themselves out of formal school as a result of many problems (Zirkle, 2001). Many distance education students are in most cases older than 35, with fulltime jobs that bring conflicts, and families with different times of activities. They must coordinate their families, jobs, spare time, and studies (Sherritt, 1996; Ross & Powell, 1990; Rovai, 2002; Sikora & Carroll, 2002). Their finances may not allow them to take a full load of studies and this delays them in the completion of their studies (Dooley, *et. al.*, 2000; Zirkle, 2001; Flowers, 2001). Isolation and lack of interaction with fellow students may contribute to higher attrition rates (Verduin & Clark, 1991; Galusha, 1998; Zirkle, 2002b). The isolation could be worsened by the unavailability of student support services (Birnbaum, 2001).

Effective advising may also be inadequate (Irani, *et. al*., 2000; Zirkle, 2002b). The students also lack the immediate support of an instructor who is present and able to motivate (Perraton (ed.), 1986) and, if necessary, give attention to actual needs and difficulties that crop up during study. Such absence of lecturers could force students to dropout or take too long to complete their studies. Their study materials therefore should be written in a way that instruction is clear and motivates them to study on their own (Jackman, *et. al*., 1994).

Students could be illiterate in many ways. One may lack techno-literacy or may not have technology at all around. They are often in full-time employment and lack mobility. Their access to mass media and technology is low. They need practical skills for prosperity. They need raise in salaries to cope up with inflation of the day. As they sometimes migrate from rural to urban areas, they are caught up with little appropriate skills and knowledge.

Some academic staff members in higher education institutions, who assist in the teaching and materials production, lack a pedagogy for using the Internet even though they have access to it

(Paloff & Pratt, 1999; Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2003). The inability to use the Internet effectively will slow down individual learning styles of students. With Internet knowledge, academics can develop software to respond to the inherent differences between Internet-based and traditional classroom education. Online studies can help many distance education students in various ways (Willis, 1994; WGDEOL, 2002, 2003 and Williams, 2006). Some faculties are concerned about the effects of distance learning on their careers and workloads and thus create fear of reaching distance students meaningfully. They need to know more about interactive and individualised learning as the quality of learning should be the same as that of their on-campus courses (Murphy & Terry, 1998; Ko & Rossen, 2001; Keegan, 2002).

The labour intensiveness of teaching distance education students threatens some academic staffs also. The language of 'anytime, anyplace learning', '24/7 advising" and "round-the-clock" advising threaten the availability of lecturers. Creating courses, responding to e-mails from students around the clock require more time and energy from faculties than traditional courses (Murphrey & Dooley, 2000; Holt, 1994; Zirkle, 2002b; Primo & Lesage, 2001) This level of services raises potential barriers in terms of staffing, course loads, advising expectations, faculty support, teaching loads and student support services(ACE, 2002). At the end students in remote rural areas are mostly disadvantaged especially when student support services are not strong enough to narrow the gap to their nearest support centres (Galusha, 1998).

Some distance education students find themselves in poor health and inadequate access to health facilities. Lack of sanitary facilities in the village schools is common. Their working environments may be quite far from such facilities. This, in itself, compounds the difficulties that they face as they study. Socio-cultural economic constraints in accessing education facilities are visible. They are isolated from other students doing the same programmes with them Muilenberg & Berge, 2001 and 2005). They are far from library resources and other related student support services that may need during their study time, *(Retrieved from http;//www.fao.org/docrep/005/ac788e/AC788E05.htm).*

The higher numbers in attrition rates and difficulties in retaining students at CES-UNAM was one of the thing that motivated this study. Berger and Lyon (2005), with a concern over student attrition in higher education, defined attrition as students who fail to re-enrol after the initial enrolment. Seidman, (2005) defined the term 'student retention' as the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to graduation. As seen from the two educators, defining attrition has not proven easy be it at full time or distance education as this study attempted. It is important to note that some researchers have reported student attrition in distance education delivery as high as 80 per cent (Diaz, 2002; Flood, 2002). This case is showed later in the latter sections of the study.

The remoteness of the Caprivi and Kavango regions with inadequacies of many amenities pose serious barriers to distance education students studying through the CES-UNAM. This study therefore sought to investigate such barriers and compared them to barriers that were reviewed from literature.

1.11 Research Methodology

This research was guided by the qualitative method. Creswell (1994) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. Qualitative research focuses on understanding a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of people involved (Merriam, 1998). 'The key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives not the researcher's' (p. 6). With a constructivist mind, the researcher built a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. The issue of barriers in distance education for student in remote rural areas is a human problem that was investigated as a case of students studying through the CES-UNAM. The case required a detailed view of the topic under study. The study looked at peoples' words, actions and students' documents (Seale, 2004a). In qualitative research the researcher kept himself away from assuming a role of being an expert because the participants are the experts.

This was a case study of CES-UNAM's distance education students in remote rural areas of the northeast regions of Namibia. A case study strategy was therefore preferred in this research as questions of 'how' or 'why' were posed, when the investigator had little control over events, and when the focus was on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. The case study is especially appropriate when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The case study works well with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin, 2003b). A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2002 and 2003a).

The focus of this case study research was based on seeking to investigate the existing barriers that face distance education students from remote rural areas of Namibia's northeast regions in accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM.

1.11.1 Sampling and Size of sample

1.11.1.1 Population

The two regions had about 269 students doing the BETD programme and about 189 students on the B. Ed (2002 – 2006 CES-UNAM Statistics).

1.11.1.2 Target Group

Out of the total number of 458 both BETD and BED students, six students were selected for interviews while six letters were also selected from a total of 40. The target group for this study were adult students from the Caprivi and Kavango Regions in which the Centre for External Studies regional centres of the University of Namibia are situated. These were students who

dropped out from the subject groups within the two programmes (Basic Education Teachers Diploma and Bachelor of Education) at the CES-UNAM in the academic years 2002 to 2006.

1.11.1.3 Sampling Procedures

Purposeful sampling was the main procedure used in this study. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to select people on the basis of one's belief that they have adequate knowledge on the subject under discussion rather than selecting them on the basis of criteria unilaterally constructed by the researcher prior to interacting with numbers of the target group. The researcher chose cases because they illustrated some features or processes in which there was interest (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Participants were requested to participate in the study after having been recommended by others as potential participants.

1.11.1.4 Research Design and Data Collection Strategies

The main data collection strategy used in the study was interviews supported by the researcher's diaries and students' documents. The reason for using the interviews as supported by diaries and students documents was to try and triangulate all data collected for better analysis. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) observe that the combination of the instruments (interviews supported by diaries and students' documents) helps the researcher (who is also an instrument) to map out, explain more fully, the richness and complexity that is in human behaviour especially when studied from one point of view.

1.11.1.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of the findings immediately followed the presentation. According to Creswell (1994, p. 153) qualitative data analysis is conducted simultaneously with data collection, data interpretation and narration. Constructivism guided the presentation and analysis, (Krefting, 1996, p. 214). Constructivism involves describing events, procedures and philosophies as they occur in natural settings. Interrelations of all statements made by participants were explored.

1.12 The nature of the sites

Much of the eastern part of the Caprivi region is flat and very swampy. It stretches to about 50 km long and approximately 20 km wide, that is, from the border with Zambia in the north and the border with Botswana in the south. It is also very remote. There is no sign of electricity grids, not even dirty roads and no telephone reception. There are about 15 schools that are tremendously affected by this ordeal within February to July each year. The self made roads for accessing these places become muddy in areas that are shallower. The falling of much rain within November to April makes areas that may not be adversely affected by flood becoming difficult to navigate. Flood comes around in the Caprivi Region between February and July of each year. Students suffer during this time of the year. The houses for teachers are made out of sticks, grass and mud. Some houses are partially submerged during flood and cannot be used for studies (*see Appendix D.1- photos, p. 236*). A lot of time is lost by students when they walk on foot to the nearest areas where they could find and use vehicles to go to the nearest regional centre.

People born in this area under study have on their own, through culture, developed coping strategies when floods strike. Swimming is one such a strategy. Using *vuwato* (canoe) as a form of transportation is also a skill that should be acquired and developed by every person born and grown up in the plains *(see Appendix D. 2, p.237)*. When respondent B talked of the fear that surrounded him it was typically a sign of showing that he is not born from the area yet he has found himself within the area as he engaged himself in studies with the CES-UNAM BETD programme. Life is risky in these areas during the flooding periods. There are hippos and crocodiles that could end one's life. Beyond that, water could still take one's life. This is an area where not even a mobile post office is found so that the student could post or receive his assignments. For a student to do that he would need to paddle through to the nearest drier lands (Kabbe or Lusese) and find and use public transport to the regional centre which is also about 48km away.

On the other hand, the Kavango Region is different in that floods come but not as much as it is in the Caprivi Region. The most adverse barrier in the Kavango Region is the distance that students have to travel in order to reach the nearest regional centre. Some of their schools are as far as 160 km away from the nearest centres. The roads that lead to these schools are self made and that makes navigation with vehicles very difficult. They are sandy and require 4 x4 wheel drive vehicles. The buildings of the school and the accommodation for teachers are poor. They do not easily allow a student to study as there could be more than five children living in the same hut. There is no electricity, telephone and radio reception in some schools.

1.13 Issues of Validity and Reliability

This study does not claim reliability in its narrow sense. Validity was addressed in this study in terms of qualitative research tradition. Reliability and validity were therefore briefly discussed as they related to the study. Reliability is the consistency of measurement. Qualitative researchers are not dealing with numerical data (measurement and instruments of measuring), so it is not appropriate to use the traditional procedures for ensuring reliability (Creswell, 2002). Alternate procedures included maintaining very detailed field notes that described in detail everything that occurred during interviews. In the notes, the researcher was careful to distinguish between what actually happened during an event and the researcher's perceptions about it (Smith, 2000; Creswell, 2004). In qualitative research validity and reliability refer to trustworthiness. In other words they refer to the extent to which the researcher says happened can be believed to have happened and not just the figment of his/her imagination. Detailed narrative reporting and direct quotations of respondents help to prove beyond doubt that the researcher did interview the respondents.

It was essential that the researcher established a rapport with participants, so that they felt they could act naturally. Unobtrusive methods for recording data were needed, (Stringer & Dwyer, 2006). Taking one's findings back to the subjects being studied where these people verify one's findings, it is argued, one can be more confident of the validity of the study. This method is known as respondent validation (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Participants in the study were allowed

to review the field notes and final report and provided feedback. This is what Guba & Lincoln, (1981) call 'trustworthiness".

Because qualitative methods results do not use statistically significant tests, findings are more reliable if the data are triangulated (Yin, 1991; Creswell, 2004). Triangulation in this study means that the data came from many sources such as interviews, the researcher's diaries and students' documents. Patterns thereof were noted using the parameters chosen by the researcher supported by major theories and were analysed to validate units of information deemed critical to solving the problem (Yin, 2004).

1.14 Structure of the study

Chapter 1 comprises of the introduction and background to the study. Within this chapter are subsections such as statement of the problem, research objectives of the study, research questions, motivation for the study, delimitation of the study, limitations, definition of key concepts, brief review of literature that guides the study, research methodology, and the summary of the chapter.

Chapter 2 sets out the conceptual and theoretical framework that guided the study and reviews the relevant literature relating to the barriers that face distance education students from remote rural northeast regions of Namibia in accessing student support services offered by the Centre for External Studies of the University of Namibia (CES-UNAM). It discusses student support services offered by CES-UNAM and how these are accessed by distance education students in remote rural areas.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed account of the research design. It includes the methods and procedures used in sampling, collection of data and analysis of collected data. Ethical considerations regarding the use of human beings are discussed.

Chapter 4 presents the data and the detailed discussion of the findings from the collected data.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the entire study, draws pertinent conclusions on research questions and problem, makes recommendations and identifies areas for future research.

1.15 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has examined the background information to the problem of barriers that face distance education students from remote rural areas of Namibia's northeast regions in accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM. The next chapter will briefly look at the literature review that underpins the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL THEORETICAL FRAMEORK FOR THE STUDY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter has two sections: the first section focused on the conceptual theoretical framework of distance education as the field of study within which the research problem of this study is located**;** the second section focused on student support services as an integral part of distance education and how well the CES-UNAM efforts to satisfy this requirement succeed.

2.2 Distance education and student support services

A framework is simply the structure of the idea or concept and how it is put together. A theoretical framework, then, *is an essay that interrelates the theories involved in the question.* A conceptual framework must explain the relationship among concepts used in a study. A conceptual framework is used in research to outline possible courses of action or to present a preferred approach to an idea or thought and to connect it to all aspects of inquiry (viewed from *cbdd.wsu.edu/edev/NetTOM_ToT/Resources/.../page35.htm).* The conceptual framework of this study is therefore based on concepts related to the question under study: *What barriers do remote rural students face when accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM?* In order to understand concepts that built this study, the researcher employed narration, concept maps, tables and matrices to provide reference points back to the literature in order to assist the researcher to make meaning of the data collected and provide a structured approach to communicating the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The field of distance education is a dynamic field that calls for construction of new knowledge as students narrate barriers that beset them when accessing student support services. In the quest of understanding student support services, the field of distance education raises many questions that encompass the spectrum of human and technological questions of interest to the practitioners of various forms of distance education.

In order to understand fully the research question raised for this study, the researcher believed that within the context of formal education offered through distance education, students learn by engaging in guided teaching and learning situations supported by their tutors. The students need to express their ideas, and then the tutors guide the student in elaborating, correcting, or redirecting those ideas. Proper and timely feedback is essential characteristics of communication and learning. Guided learning promotes a personal relationship between the tutor and the student, thus creating greater motivation in the student and increased learning outcomes. The need to test assumptions and hypotheses about how and under what conditions individuals learn best, leads to research questions about learning, teaching, course design and the role of technology in the educational process.

With this framework in mind, as the study developed, the researcher needed to understand that "What seems to be needed is an unclouded understanding of distance education. This includes the audience, setting, and delivery methodologies" (Ely (1992) p. 43). Throughout the history of distance education, a wider range of conceptual theoretical notions have provided a richer understanding of the learner at a distance. Four such conceptual theories are: transactional distance, interaction, learner control and social presence. The other recent concept has been that of computer mediated communication technologies. These five concepts have been used as a theoretical framework of delving and understanding the research problem under study.

As distance education students in remote rural areas embark on studies with CES-UNAM, they face several barriers that eventually affect their retention and attrition rates. Some students dropout because they cannot easily use the facilities that could help them finish their programmes. Therefore the conceptual framework of this study draws on theory and research related to distance education and student support services. In order to investigate, examine and understand the barriers, the researcher constantly referred to the theoretical framework mentioned above.

In the research methodologies, data presentation and analysis, the researcher interrogated the constructivist approach to think about building a student support story through social interaction and communication.

Constructivist researchers, with roots in symbolic interactionism, are more interested in the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and researched and thus discuss bias in relation to the situatedness of all interviewer/interviewee situations. Knowledge that emerges from interviews with research participants is at least in part created, not discovered, by the researcher. Knowledge and interpretation in a constructivist research design is thus the result of a collective, not an individual, process (Glasner, 2002). Therefore, researchers must attend to three things when writing up the final report:

1. the assumptions researchers bring to the subject of inquiry, and to the research situation;

2. the socially constructed meanings that occur in the context of a particular interview;

3. the socially constructed meanings that existed prior to, and shape or limit, the meanings that may emerge in a specific interview context (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Von Glasersfeld (1995) indicates in relation to the concept of reality that: "It is made up of the network of things and relationships that we rely on in our living, and on which, we believe, others rely on, too" (p.7). The knower interprets and constructs a reality based on his experiences and interactions with his environment.

Constructivists assume that there are many possible interpretations of the same data, all of which are potentially meaningful. Constructions are therefore not separate from those who make the constructions; they "are not part of some 'objective' world that exists apart from their constructors," as Guba and Lincoln (1989:143) writes. Guba and Lincoln further argue that a "malconstruction" would be an analysis that is "incomplete, simplistic, uninformed, internally inconsistent, or derived by an inadequate methodology." (1989:143). Rather than relying upon a one-time survey or experiment with a representative sample, constructivist researchers have the benefit of returning to their site of study several times, adjusting their interview instrument as

they learn and develop their own theories. In simple terms, while quantitative researchers begin with a hypothesis, qualitative researchers (including constructionists) are more likely to end their study with a working hypothesis (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

2.3 A theoretical conceptual framework for distance education

To understand the nature of the concept of distance education, this section looks at the theoretical discourse on distance education and the principles that guide its practice. Theoretical foundations of any field describe and inform the practice and provide the primary means to guide future developments in that given field. Theory also guides the complex practice of a rational process such as teaching and learning at a distance. It is theory, as reflected in related literature that provides a coherent ordering of relevant variables and relationships to guide both practitioners and researchers (Sumner, 2000 and Farmer & Rojewski, 2001). In this study theory refers to "an explanation, a systematic account of relationships among phenomena" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1984, p. 11). In other words, theory is a coherent and systematic ordering of ideas, concepts, and models with the purpose of constructing meaning to explain, interpret and shape practice. A conceptual theoretical framework therefore represents a broad paradigmatic set of assumptions that provides the elements of the theory but without the detail and completeness. It is this broad perspective that this section endeavours to frame and set boundaries within which the study was confined. For example this study did not attempt to discuss student support services offered by UNAM to its students who received education through the *contact* or *face-to-face* mode of delivery.

Although there is scanty literature on theoretical foundations that guide research in distance education, there have been a number of important studies, which have examined the theories involved in the nature of distance education. Moore (1983) and later Saba (1998) are among the few theorists in this area who have argued that the theory of transactional distance builds a case for the very nature of distance education. This section of the study draws on that knowledge and briefly shows how transactional distance, interaction, computer mediated communication technologies, social context and locus of control affect distance education students. The study

focuses on the separation from both peers and lecturers that students feel during their study period.

Garrison, (1990) and Hayes, (1990) describe distance education as no more than a hodgepodge (number of things mixed together without any particular order or reason) of ideas and practices taken from traditional classroom settings and imposed on students who just happen to be separated physically from an instructor. Because of the very nature of distance education as student-centred instruction, distance educators must move ahead to investigate how the student and the instructor collaborate to generate knowledge using modern technology. It may look to be but modern research have showed that it is not (Tait, 2002; Tait & Mills, 2003). As distance education struggles to identify appropriate theoretical foundations, implementation issues add to the complexity of distance education and demand attention. These issues revolve around the student, the instructor and the technology.

The theories below, therefore, provided the framework within which the research was conducted and its results were discussed. The theories were used to guide the interviews and the review of students' written documents and to present and discuss the research findings

2.3.1 Transactional distance theory

The term is used to indicate the distance that students encounter as a pedagogical issue not merely a geographical issue. Distance is not confined geographically, but by the variety of transactions that occur between the learner and teacher. This continuum challenges the idea of traditional versus distance education. Martindale (2002, p. 4) observe that teaching-learning situations with different transactional distances require different or specialised instructional techniques. The theory is based on three major variables: clusters of dialogue, structure and learner autonomy. Structure according to Martindale (2002) referred to the actual design of the course, the organisation of the instruction and the use of various media of communications. It is essential that when designing distance education courses, the lecturers anticipate that the future learners may never meet the instructor face to face. The explanations and instructions in the

course should therefore be made clearer and brief (Rowntree, 1997). Saba and Shearer (1994) concluded that as dialogue increases, transactional distance decreases. It is not location that determines the effect of instruction; rather it is the interaction between student and instructor. It is a concept that signifies the interplay among the environment, people involved and the patterns of behaviour in the situation. This would imply that each time there is a teacher, student and a means of communication, transactional distance exists (Moore, 1990; Saba and Shearer, 1994 and More & Kearsley, 1996). On the other hand, structure as a cluster deals with the rigidity or flexibility of elements in the instruction (Moore and Kearsley, 1996).

One should not forget that distance education has had its own arguments embedded in the separation of teacher and student during the instruction/learning period (Keegan, 1983). These arguments are likely to influence a distance education student in a positive or negative way during one's period of studies especially when separation is an issue at stake. For example, contact education forces the student to move to a place close to the education provider (institution/instructor) whereas the nature of distance education is that there is always a distance between the instructor and the learner. Adult learners who are bread-winners in their families might abandon their job thereby losing the needed income. The negative aspect of distance education revolves around access to resources including the instructor, but still positively students may improve their academic status while holding on to their jobs.

According to Holmberg (1978), it is this separation that differentiates distance education from all other forms of traditional instruction worldwide. "This separation can occur through a number of methods, which has, in turn, led to a number of terms to describe the process of education in which the teacher and learner are separated, among them distance education, distance teaching, distance learning, open learning, distributed learning, asynchronous learning, telelearning, and flexible learning" (Picciano, 2001). This separation coupled with the distance has recently proved to be a barrier to students in remote areas. New technological innovations, has developed E-learning and describes distance education as "applications and processes, such as Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration. It includes the delivery of content via Internet, intranet/extranet (LAN/WAN), audio- and videotape, satellite

broadcast, interactive TV, and CD-ROM" Kaplan-Leiserson, 2000). Other definitions of distance education mention bridging the physical separation though the use of some technical medium (Holmberg, 1981; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Ragothaman & Hoadley, 1997; Simonson, et al., 2003).

To understand this situation properly, distance educators have sought strategies to deal with the situation by paying more attention to the teaching behaviour associated with dialogue and structure as clusters. Moore and Kearsley (1996, p. 201) define dialogue as "a term that helps us focus on the interplay of words, actions and ideas and any other interactions between the teacher and the student when one gives instruction and the other responds". Dialogue in this case has different forms (two-way, real time communication and internal dialogue within a student). Distance education deals more with the internal dialogue within a student as face to face is rare. Dialogue is influenced by the size of the learning group, the educational philosophy of designer of the instructional materials, and the personalities of teacher and student. This kind of theory includes internal didactic conversation as proposed by Holmberg (1987) where learning materials should stimulate the student and afford them a dialogue (Martindale, 2002) in the absence of the instructor.

Learner autonomy is essential in this theory because students depend on own sense of personal responsibility and self-directness. This has an influence on the student on whether to depend more on the instructor and other learners or continue to dialogue with the content. Theories such as transactional distance are "invaluable in guiding the complex practice of rational process such as teaching and learning at a distance" (Garrison, 2000, p. 3). The clearer the dialogue in the materials designed the better for distance education students who need to 'talk' with the materials in the absence of the instructor.

One of the highest challenges of distance education is to find the 'right' combination of dialogue and structure as programmes are being designed especially when it comes to course learning activities. CES-UNAM has found this challenge difficult and should also endeavour by all

means to understand this transactional challenge and also find ways on how to minimise it. These are some of the issues that drive away a good number of fulltime lecturing staff from writing materials and teaching distance education students including offering academic support such as giving meaningful feedback and monitoring the progress of the students.

2.3.2 Interaction

Research in distance education has also taken tremendous amount of time looking at interaction. Seaton (1993) and Kearsley (1995) demonstrate that interaction influences student success in a bigger way be it in a traditional teaching environment or in distance education. Moore (1989) defines three types of interaction in distance education. He describes them as relational in distance education. They are briefly stated below:

- Student-instructor (dialogue between the student and the teacher). Garrison (1990) observes similarly that students who interact regularly with their lecturers and other students are highly motivated and perform better during their studies.
- Student-content (how students obtain intellectual information from the text). For learning to occur, either alone, or in a group, the student must interact with, and process, the content of the course. This is supported by Bower and Hilgard (1981) that the content cannot merely pass before their senses but must be cognitively processed.
- Student-student (how students exchange ideas among themselves)

Hillman, *et al.,* (1994) observe student-media as another form of interaction. They noted that proper and useful interaction between students and technology influences the success rate of distance education students. The importance of interpersonal interaction in learning is well documented (Fulford and Zhang, 1993). When students have the opportunity to interact with one another and their lecturers about the content, they have the opportunity to build within themselves, and to communicate, a shared meaning, to "make sense" of what they are learning. Much of learning inevitably takes place within a social context, and the process includes a mutual construction of understanding (Bruner, 1971). Interpersonal interaction offers the opportunity for the student to gain the motivational support of fellow students and lecturers,

develop critical judgment, participate in problem-solving, and often have the potential for other incidental learning (Chacon, 1992).

Lately, Sutton (2000, p. 8) suggests the fifth level of interaction called the *vicarious interaction*. This occurs when "a student actively observes and processes both sides of a direct interaction between two other students or between another student and the instructor". This is essential for distance education students as well for it maximises all opportunities available for their meaningful learning especially where a peer doing the same programme is nearby in the same vicinity to help a peer.

The above theory is augmented by the world of constructivism. Constructivism is a theory of learning and knowledge that suggests human beings are active learners who construct their knowledge both from personal experiences and their efforts to give meaning to these experiences. According to this approach, the learning environments should enable students to construct their knowledge through active learning of trial and error methods.

Briefly, constructivism suggests that learners learn concepts or construct meaning about ideas through their interaction with others, with their world, and through interpretations of that world by actively constructing meaning. This theory applies more to distance education students. They cannot do this by passively absorbing knowledge imparted by lecturers, who in this case are far away from the students. Distance education students in this case relate new knowledge to their previous knowledge and experience. A constructivist model of teaching has five characteristic features: active engagement, use and application of knowledge, multiple representations, use of learning communities, and authentic tasks (Krajcik, *et al.*, 1999).

Lecturers' task, according to this approach, is to tutor students and teach them how to learn. Lecturers are not mere 'purveyor of knowledge' or 'provider of facts', but are, rather, mentors, facilitators, helpers and mediators for learning. The lecturers must create learning environments that will allow the students to construct their own knowledge by experiencing and interacting

with the environment (Hill, 1997). Distance education materials with such learning strategies, if designed correctly, may provide precisely such learning environments.

Many researchers testify to the efficiency of active learning. For example, Hake (1998) examined 6542 students who participated in physics courses. He found that the conceptual understanding and the problem solving ability of students who applied interactive-engagement methods in their studies was significantly higher than students who studied in traditional methods.

2.3.3 Social context

This is a theory that discusses the social context where the learning takes place and how the social environment affects motivation, attitudes, teaching, and learning (McIsaac, 1993). What matters most in distance education is the social context such as flooded plains and hinterlands with inadequate student support services where the learning takes place. The environments around distance education students have an effect on motivation, attitude, teaching and learning. Students in remote rural areas are not exception to these effects. They could be adversely affected.

Short, *et al.,* (1976); Feenberg and Bellmann, (1990) and McIssac (1993) widely believe that whereas technology could be culturally neutral; the printed materials, services and media could be inappropriate in certain cultural settings. Culturally, the people of the flood plains of the Caprivi region would be affected by technology as a result of the absence of infrastructure. The design of the materials should therefore bear the different social contexts in which learning takes place.

2.3.4 Locus of control

This theory refers to an individual's generalised expectations concerning where control over subsequent events resides. In other words, the theory refers to who or what is responsible for what happens in learning. Rotter (1966), as also supported by Neil (2005), believes that behaviour is greatly guided by the use of reinforcements. He proposes that people feel the control of their lives rests in their own hands (internal) or outside themselves (external). This

theory relates to the idea on how students view their roles in learning. It is an idea that the student has an internal locus of control or an internal locus. Altmann & Arambasich, (1982) added a dimension of locus control to the theoretical framework. They concluded that students who see their success rate as a result of personal accomplishments have a stronger inner drive of locus control. Such students have opportunities of continuing with their studies. This drive could come from the fact that students see a reward at the end of their studies either for salary increase or on job promotion. It is a distance education student in remote rural areas that seriously need the internal drive in order to complete one's studies.

The externally controlled students will always drop out of their courses or programmes because they always expect an external force to control their lives. It is the case of dropouts that distance educators would not want to see their programmes and research will always be conducted to find solutions or strategies that will help. Baynton (1992) developed a model she thought would define the concept of control. She noted that control goes beyond independence, competence and support. For the students to do well in their studies, they need all these factors in place with an accurate examination of all the interactions of the concepts. This is supported by Coggins (1988); Laube (1992) and Dille & Mezack (1999).

Eaton (1996) carried out studies that focused on distinguishing between learner and programme control. Learner control allows the learner to choose content while programme is predetermined. This is not easy to put into practice for distance education students but balance is needed so that all groups of learners go through with minimal barriers. The framework for this study is grounded in the work of Patricia Cross (1981), who discussed the reasons why adults participate, and perhaps more importantly, why adults do not participate in learning activities.

As briefly showed in Table 3.1 of this Chapter 3, on page 63 of this study, distance education has different variables that influence learning (Zirkle, 2003). Dan Coldeway of South Dakota State University also talked of the two variables (time and place) that influence learning in distance education. He described synchronous learning as same-time, same-place (ST-SP) with different-time, same-place education (DT-SP) while the asynchronous learning involves same-time,

different-place education (ST-DP) with different-time, different-place education (DT-DP) (Miller & Webster, 1997; Sumner, 2000; Tait & Mills, 2003). Distance education course designers and the academic support staffs should understand that students benefit well when they are understood to be learning asynchronously. Distance education materials should 'talk' to students in the absence of the lecturers regardless of where students find themselves during their study period.

2.3.5 Computer mediated communication technologies

Johnson (1997, p.120) once remarked that "there is no alternative but to face the inevitability of a profound impact of new technology on teaching and learning and to work to establish a rich educational environment within that framework…"

The Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) framework also provides guidance in selecting educational technologies to complement the instructional strategies despite meant to provide a framework for designing and implementing distance learning environments. CMC has roused interest amongst researchers because it is one type of educational technology that reaches students synchronously and asynchronously (Salmon, 2000). CMC can allow distance education courses to become increasingly interactive as they foster learning environment that could surpass most classroom settings for supporting student participation and interactions (Coombs, 1989). CMC facilitates effective communication and allows lecturers to have more control over their distance teaching methods, receive more assistance and guidance and participate more in the planning of courses than the traditional classroom lecturers (Rogers and Willis, 1997). CMC allows time and place independence and enhances interaction among groups and individuals (Berge and Collins, 1995). Students and lecturers do not have to be online at the same time to benefit from their interaction. When this facility is accessible to students in remote rural areas; it surely benefits them as the distance from resources is narrowed.

Data and video options such as Internet-based courses and two-way video are the leading technologies for distance delivery (Waits & Lewis, 2003; Ley, 2003). With the virtually universal access of the Internet, it is likely that this technology will continue to be the preferred choice for

offering courses at a distance especially in areas that are far removed from regional centres. Lebaron and Miller (2005) have advocated that more and more of online designs will engulf distance education in the near future. It is only unfortunate that Africa has not fully benefited from the electronic evolution that is heating the global village (WGDEOL, 2002 and 2003) as a result radio and television will still have a major role to play in countries that cannot join the electronic world.

Waits & Lewis, (2003) found out that data and video options such as Internet-based courses and two-way video are technologies that are leading in distance education. Unfortunately, this lead is only possible in developed countries where technology is far better than in the under and developing world. Advantages of synchronous systems are that students and teachers can gain immediate feedback on all aspects of the distance environment. Students can ask questions and teachers can perform "on the spot" assessment of student understanding. Students interact within multiple paths of learning (Bruce, *et. al.,* 2005). Asynchronous communication systems, where communication activities do not place in real time, include e-mail, listservers, threaded discussion boards, and newsgroups. Asynchronous communication systems have many advantages such as self-pacing, time for reflection before contributing to discussions, and allowing typically silent students to have a voice in discussions (Tait & Mills, 2003).

The growing interest in IRI has contributed to increased regional cooperation and collaboration as countries share experiences and resources. Since IRI focuses on a relatively modest, low-cost use of technology, it can have broad coverage and impact. It is especially useful in resource-learning environments and in settings where access to fundamental quality education in isolated areas is a problem. A particular benefit of IRI is its ability to improve classroom practices by exposing teachers, many of them untrained or undertrained in distance education, to the principles of learner-centred, child-peerly education. IRI also helps build capacity within education communities to enable them to embrace new approaches, innovations, and pedagogical thinking. (Retrieved on 10 September 2008 from *http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/EXTAFRREGTOPE*

DUCATION/EXTAFRREGTOPDISEDU/0,,contentMDK:20618845~menuPK:1568672~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:732264,00.html).

The ability to learn at virtually "any time and any place" is a major attraction of distance education around the world. Time-bound or place-bound students are able to access distance education courses and programmes largely on their own schedules, rather than the institutions'. Although easily seen as eliminating the access barriers experienced by traditional or full time students, distance education has its own set of constraints, or barriers for students like all educational options (Zirkle, 2003). These barriers will shortly be visited and discussed later in this chapter.

2.4 Significance of student support in distance education and how CES-UNAM addresses it

There are debates in the world on identifying barriers, challenges and difficulties that affect distance education students as they struggle to study under different programmes through distance modes (Hillesheim, 1998; Wright and Thompson, 2002; Zirkle, 2003). Barriers in this study are defined in terms of what other researchers have accepted and adopted. The terms barriers, challenges, obstacles, constraints and difficulties in this study are used interchangeably. The same applies to learners and students.

Tait, (2000, pp. 289-90) defines student support programmes in distance education as 'the range of services both for individuals and for students in groups *which complement the course materials* or learning resources that are uniform for all learners, and which are often perceived as the major offering of institutions using ODL'. Nunan, *et al.*, (2000, p. 92); Dillon, *et. al.*, (1992) Simpson (2000:6); Rumble, (2000, pp. 232-3); King, (2001, p. 57) and Tait & Mills, (2003, pp. 59-60) argue that student support is central and integral to learning. The presence of academic lecturers who pay attention to students' work helps students feel that they are supported by their institutions of learning. This results in lecturers bearing the responsibility of paying attention to their work and that of students (Jackson, 2001 and Thompson, 2003). Meeting the needs of students is essential in distance education (Steyn, 2001).

These may be human or non-human resources that guide and facilitate educational transactions (Garrison, 1989, p. 29). Amongst others, these are: various media, library facilities, software programmes, communities and the lecturers. Dillon, *et. al.*, (1992) observes that students at Pennsylvania State University rated their lecturers as the highest in support services. As much as lecturers are the most important aid in studies; it can equally be the highest barrier as well because when students do not get proper guidance from their lecturers, they could equally drop out. Feelings of isolation develop easily (Bernard, *et. al.*, 2000).

By contrast to distance education, learner support in ODL refers to the meeting of needs that *all* learners have because they are central to high quality learning - guidance about course choice, preparatory diagnosis, study skills, access to group learning in seminars and tutorials, and so on. These are the elements in systems of learner support that many practitioners see as essential for effective provision of ODL (Ryan, 2001 and Roman, 2001).

Every distance learning institution extends support to its learners, which comprises of a cluster of facilities and activities that are intended to make the teaching - learning process easier and more interesting for the learners. All these activities beyond the production and delivery of course material assist in the progress of students in terms of learning, interacting and effective communication (Simpson, 2000; Roman, 2001 and Ryan, 2001). Therefore, the support system may range from study centre counselling/tutorial support to administrative problem solving (Rumble, 1992; Ngengebule, *et. al*., 2000; Mays, 2000; Moore, 2000; Moore (ed.), 2007 and Mackintosh, 2000).

The trend of spending on materials development, administration and auxiliary services in distance education has been uneven over the years. Technical systems have received higher budgets at the expense of student support services. Gunawardena (1996, p. 271) notes that equal investments should be given to student support systems for a successful distance education enterprise to take place.

Dillon and Blanchard (1991) describe four types of support systems:

- Student support and student needs
- Student support and content
- Student support related to the context of the institution
- Student support and technology

This study focused on these four types of support systems in its discussion. The study did not intend to unpack all the intricacies that surround the debates of student support services. Garrison and Baynton (1987, p. 7) define student support as all the necessary resources accessible to students during their learning processes. An area that demands a precise analysis in distance education is physical and temporal distance that separates the instructor from learner. Distance education students need clarifications, discussions and feedback all the time in course areas with which they do not cope up well (Gunawardena, 1988). They therefore need a student support service system that is effective and efficient. An ongoing evaluation of student support systems needs to be in place so that effectiveness and efficiency is constantly measured (Hodgson, 1986.56). Such systems need to help students become 'competent and self-confident in learning, social interactions and self-evaluation' (Rae, 1989).

Over the past two decades, Anadolu University in Turkey has moved from delivering distance education through mass mailings to broadcasting lectures on radio and television, as well as distributing them on videocassettes. More recently, the university has experimented with teleconferencing. No matter how the lectures are delivered, urban students in some courses meet in person with local adjunct professors (McWilliams, 2000).

Studies conducted in Turkey and India (Sharma, 2002) have showed that students need information that relates to students' first day of registration with all the necessary documents to be attached; any test to be written prior to admission; the importance of attending new student

orientation programme; payment of tuition and other fees; how to get studying materials, use library and computer facilities; main events of the institution including recreational. Efficient record keeping and administration with pre-admission counselling is needed; tutoring and mentoring information during study periods; proper use of face-to-face classes and regional centres; availability of electronic communication technologies such as phones, radio, audio tapes, video, television, internet and other related materials. There should be a clear system that relates to academic and administrative support services. Molefi (2002) observed that academic support should include packages as tutorials, advising and counselling services while administrative programme should take care of enrolments, admission and registration; record keeping; information provision and delivery of study materials. A good example of sound administration system is the modern Personal Information Management System (PIMS) developed by University of Otago in New Zealand (Retrieved on 1 September 2008 from *http://www.otago.ac.nz/courses/distance_study/pdf/student_admin_support.pdf).*

Distance education students create a sense of belonging when effective and efficient support services are in place (Gordon, 2001). They do not need to resort to peers near them to help them feel secured because the system is not supportive enough (Bertram, 2000a and 2000b). Martin, *et al.*, (1997); Boettcher and Cartwright (1997) and Kovel (1997) argue that effective student support systems are essential for positive welfare and success of students. Westbrook and Moon (1997) argue that with the advent of technologies, successful delivery of programmes in distance education needs special advice and student orientation programmes. As students need other special services, (Speer, 1996) seek partnerships with the business world for extra information surrounding their studies, (Froke, 1995) they need a strong technology support services.

Undoubtedly, student support services (SSS) play major roles in imparting quality education to distance learners though probably the most difficult task is to manage it (Power *et al*., 2000; Ngengebule, 2000 and Robertshaw, 2000).

2.5 Student support programmes that distance education institutions may provide

The goal of student support programmes is to increase retention and graduation rates of distance education students and help students make the transition from one level of higher education to the next. It is essential that distance education students receive all the support that they need during their studies. This section of the study briefly discusses the different support programmes as seen around the world in institutions delivering education to masses via the distance mode.

Simpson (2000, p .6) outlines student support programmes as consisting of academic and non-academic support. Academic support consists of defining of course territory through tutorial letters sent to students, explaining concepts to students and exploring the course. Both informal and formal assessment feedback should be provided to students as they develop learning skills, numeracy and literacy. There is also a need to follow up students' progress through the course so that students are enriched through the extension of the boundaries of the course resulting in sharing the excitement of learning

The non-academic support consists of giving information, exploring problems and suggesting directions to students. This acts as assessment for students where feedback to the individual on non-academic aptitudes and skills is given. Students also receive practical help to promote study. They are given opportunities to make out cases for funding and writing references. The institutions of learning promote changes to benefit students and keep on organising student support activities.

2.5.1 Student support programmes from the perspective of developed countries

The Centre for Independent Learning in the United States of America provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with basic college requirements, and serves to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education.

Some institutions provide instruction in basic study skills; tutorial services; academic, financial, or personal counselling; assistance in securing admission and financial aid for enrolment;…guidance on career options; mentoring and special services for students with limited English proficiency (LEP); and college scholarships. (Retrieved on 11 March 2008 from http://www.ed.gov/programs/triostudsupp/index.html)

The Student Transitional Education Program at Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College in the USA provides supportive services to students in an attempt to:

- Increase retention rates
- Increase graduation rates
- Foster a climate of institutional support and facilitate the rate of transfer to four-year institutions of students who choose to earn a bachelor's degree (Retrieved on 15 March 2008 from http://www.octech.edu/octech/surstudents/step.asp*)*

Student support has many forms such as face-to-face, teaching, computer mediated communication, counselling, workshops, telephone tutorial, lecturership support, etc (Choudhry, *et. al*., 2008). When the SSS is weak, distance education students are dissatisfied, frustrated, confused and drop out easily out of the system (Sharma, 1998).

The British Open University (BOU) model of SSS has spread around Europe, Germany, Japan, South Africa, Asia and the Southern Hemisphere (Choudhry, *et. al*., 2008). The Fern University in Hagan, for example, has set up a system similar to the BOU. The Fern University has study centres and mentors. The main responsibility of the study centres (which are regional) is to control smaller local centres. Regional student support services of BOU conduct tutorials. It has established a national system of tutorial support, assessment and counselling that allows interaction between students and lecturers (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997). Both Australia and New Zealand use the study centres as a support system in distance education (Rashid, 1998). The major learning centres in Albany, New York, Long Island, Rochester Sufferm and Buffalor, have each a dean, administrative support staff, and a

faculty of full time 'mentors'. A mentor usually supports students with their academic work. Pakistan (Allama Iqbal Open University - AIOU) has also modelled the BOU. This model has spread to India, Sri Lanka, China, Canada, Korea, Bangladesh, Japan, Thailand and many (Choudhry, *et. al.*, 2008, p. 99). The AIOU has regional centres responsible for:

i) Establishing sub-regional coordinating offices in remote areas,

ii) Training of newly recruited offices,

iii) Establishment of libraries in regional offices,

iv) Appointment of senior lecturers with particular reference to monitoring of lecturers performance,

v) Improvements in model study centres,

vi) Consolidation of physical facilities in regional and construction of regional campuses,

vii) Strengthening of regional centres to provide better services,

viii) Computerized the regional centres for better record keeping and solving student problems at local levels,

ix) To network regional centre with the computer centre of the main campus using internal or provide e-mail or fax to expedite transfer of student data to the regional centres and fast communication (AIOU Report, 1997-99:7). The AIOU regional centres are run by regional directors. The regional directors identify the experts in the region in all disciplines. They appoint lecturers from the experts for a group of students. The director also arrange collaboration with other sister institutions and register them as study centres. The regional directors organise workshops and practical training in the region. Tutorials are also held in regional centres (AIOU Report, 1999-2000:109).

UKOU on the other hand has about 13 regional centres and over 290 study centres across the United Kingdom and other countries. Regional centres provide:

i) guidance and information about local tuition;

ii) examination and residential school arrangements as well as more general help with study problems that student may encounter.

These are teams of academic, administrative, advisory and clerical and secretarial staff (UKOU Regional Structure in the South, 2000).

iii) publicise the university's courses;

iv) collect fees;

v) maintain student data;

vi) planning for students and assist them in solving study problems, monitoring student progress;

vii) provide learning skill support and educational guidance;

viii) appoint and supervise the part-time staff;

ix) arrange summer schools and weekend schools;

x) organise examinations and award ceremonies (Choudhry, 2008, p. 103)

2.5.2 Student support programmes from the perspective of developing countries

Distance education has played a major role in South African higher education since first pioneered in 1946 at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Following a "correspondence" model (Davies, *et. al*., (2002), retrieved on 2 April 2008 from www.ldt.stanford.edu/-lmalcolm/samplepages/pdfs/) from its inception, "students receive lecture notes by mail and turn in their written responses in the same manner". Because of the overhauling of distance education, UNISA has changed to the "new model that incorporates the provision of learner support through a variety of mechanisms, including centres with audio-visual and computer-assisted support" (Department of Education, 2001). Students recently study through the Internet based "Students On-line" service. With this service students who have access to Internet can

communicate with their lecturers and fellow students via e-mail. Such students can also access their student records and the library.

The Open University of Tanzania (a single-mode institution) offers numerous degree courses on a distance. The institution is run by 35 academic staff and 50 administrative staff and technical staff at the headquarters and at the regional centres. It operates in about 21 regional centres to support students. Students have established an additional 56 local study centres on their own initiative. Regional centres are used for such activities as face-to-face sessions, laboratory and field work, time-tests, and for final examinations.

Zimbabwe Open University delivers its services through the National Centre in Harare. The institution has about ten Regional Centres and 55 District Study Centres in all the Provinces of Zimbabwe. District Study Centres have administrative support system which embraces the admission procedures, the registration process, accessing information from records, distribution of learning materials, submission of assignments for marking, arrangements for weekend school venues and the starting times for tutorials. Guidance and counselling also take place in all its centres (Retrieved on 3 April 2008 from www.col.org/forum/PCFpapers/benza.pdf*)*

The success of such systems has sent a strong message to distance education institutions that proper planning and budgeting is the key to success (Fahy, 2003; Dearnley, 2003 and Ludwig, Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). The failure of planning and stringent budgeting results in utter failure in distance education. Unfortunately, this is what has crushed most of the distance education systems in the developing world.

2.6 Student support programmes offered by CES-UNAM

CES-UNAM, like other institutions around the world, provides numerous student support services at its regional centres to its students**.** Distance education institutions around the world have created systems or procedures in student support services that have proved to be worth

trying, and these include: a) administrative, b) academic, and, c) collection of information. The following services are noticeable at all nine regional centres of CES-UNAM:

2.6.1 Academic

There are two departments within the academic section of CES-UNAM, i.e. Student Support and Materials Development. Generally, the departments are tasked to run the following:

i) Introduction-cum-orientation programme

An introduction-cum-orientation programme is conducted by the Department of Student Support Services (DSSS) in the beginning of each academic programme. Guidance is also provided to the candidates after enquiring about the subject combinations and graduation levels. This type of orientation and guidance given at the time of admission make the students aware of the system, CES-UNAM programmes and make an assessment of their difficulties. This kind of support is also supported by Zieger & Pulichino (2004).

ii) Personal support/counselling

Close personal support to each student by the DSSS is provided. Every departmental member has been assigned a specific programme to monitor its progress and that of the students in the programme. Tutorial letters are sent to students at the beginning of each course with instructions on what is expected from each student. In most cases, the tutorial letters are sent to the regional centres by electronic mail. RASSOs are expected to print them out and send them to students via post or given to students when they visit the regional centres. Students can also call their lecturers for guidance.

iii) Preparation of guidelines and instructions

The DSSS at main campus prepares guidelines and instructions for all the diplomas and degree programmes. These are provided to all the local co-ordinators and regional administrative student

support officers (RASSOs) in regional centres as well as to the applicants so as to apprise them of the procedures of admission to different programmes and to keep uniformity in standards.

iv) Preparation of calendar of academic activities

A calendar of academic activities for the year is made available to the distance learners in the beginning of the courses. The calendar shows amongst others when students will have to submit their assignments, attend vacation schools and practical sessions in the sciences.

v) Preparation of study material

The Department of Materials Development (DMD) has a well-established course team. The course-team approach is used for preparation of study material by main campus. Self Instructional Module (SIM) is prepared in accordance with the scheme of examination and syllabus duly approved by the Academic Council of the University.

vi) Provision of library facilities

Library facilities at main campus and regional centres help the students in preparation of their assignments. In case of necessity, students are allowed to borrow books from the main library and other centres through an inter-library loaning system.

vii) Tutoring

There are two types of tutors at CES-UNAM. The regional centres recruit tutors who help students with their studies. The tutors in the regions only assist/guide students in consultation (sometimes) with the lecturers. The main campus recruits lecturers who help students with the writing of study materials. Some of these lecturers go on to tutor students during vacation schools, set and mark assignments and examinations.

Tutoring is done at CES-UNAM in different ways: There is limited but organised interactive face to face tutoring in small groups of students. There are provisions for students to do face to

face in all their regional centres 2 hours each month. Students visit the regional centres for face to face contacts at a time appointed and agreed with their regional lecturers. There are two vacation schools conducted in two areas across the country. Students from Caprivi region (the farthest in the north east) and Luderitz (farthest in the south) can travel close to 1300 km either to Oshakati or Windhoek to attend vacation school. Accommodation is arranged for them though they need to pay for it. The two places (Windhoek main campus and Oshakati) are the only regions that have videoconference facilities. Attendance in all contacts is not compulsory except for courses that require students to do practical work in laboratories. The laboratories are only found in Windhoek.

There are no marked times for videoconferencing and teleconferencing tutorials. They are only used when the need arrives. For example, the lecturers could be in Windhoek and have some students in Oshakati that needs their attention at the same time. This is when videoconferencing is used. It is arranged either by the students or the lecturers. E-learning is non-existence for distance students. The audiotapes and videotapes are scarcely distributed to students. Radio and television is not used as a mode of instruction.

viii) Provision of facilities to perform practical tasks

In few courses where laboratories are needed, the main campus study centre arranges practical subjects in the University main campus as there are no laboratories in regional centres (CES Procedures Manual, 2006). Unlike face to face and vacation schools, it is compulsory that all students attend practical sessions in Windhoek.

2.6.2 Administrative

i) Publicising and Promoting CES-UNAM Programmes

Admission to various programmes is done by giving advertisement in the National newspapers and other media forms suitable for the listeners. Detailed information is given in the advertisement e.g. regarding distance education programmes, duration of each course, fees structure, list of regional centres, last date of submission of application forms, date of

commencement of sessions and availability of information brochures/prospectus along with its cost.

Included in the information brochure are important instructions and schedule of face to face (f2f) counselling in personal contact programmes, submission of assignments and term-end examination.

ii) Creation of Regional Centres

The CES-UNAM has established regional centres situated across the country. These regional centres are equipped with library facilities and reading rooms and are monitored closely. Study materials, tutorial letters, assignments and other relevant learning materials are distributed to students from the centres.

iii) Registration of Students

Registrations are done at the regional centres with students in the city (Windhoek) registering at the main campus. The main campus maintains the student record. Every student is registered with CES-UNAM with a particular registration number. Every distance student is asked to do every correspondence with the CES-UNAM by quoting his or her enrolment number. In this way, the student profile is created.

iv) Looking after the admission activities

The Department of Student Administration at the main campus plays a major role in admission procedures. The department prepares all the information brochures in collaboration with faculties. Besides this, committees are formed to look into the different activities i.e. preparation of application-cum-examination forms, preparation of guidelines for running ODL programmes smoothly and efficiently, preparation of norms for creating regional centres.

v) Distribution of Study material

Study materials are provided to distance education students in all programmes that are offered. Distribution of study materials to regional centres where students will collect them is done at main campus either by hand or by post. Students are informed during registration on the availability of study materials.

vi) Personal Database

The CES-UNAM main campus centre maintains a personal database for each distance student in which records of assignments submitted and teaching practice completed is maintained. The portfolios for various courses and any document needed for the progress of the student is kept for future assessment.

vii) Enquiry-cum-Reception Centre

Since distance education students have to make a lot of queries about the admission, the examination, the assignments, internal tests, the Teaching Practice etc, all regional centres, including the main campus serve as an enquiry-cum-reception centre. Students can either phone in or travel to regional centres to make enquiries about their programmes during the course of studies.

viii) Development of Student Profile:

Student profiles are kept and at the main campus in Windhoek. Whenever students want any information from the CES-UNAM main campus, it is provided immediately by the administrative staff members. Students are also able to view their profiles in every regional centre.

ix) Meeting of RASSOs

Meeting of RASSOs of regional centres are held at main campus so as to know their difficulties and to create a better liaison between main campus and regional centres in student support

services. Since the RASSOs are not purely academic officers, this is an opportunity where they are supported by DSSS on how to handle academic issues as they come from students in regional centres. They are also advised on how to channel them to proper academic officers for further action and support. There are only four academic officers covering only the regions where they are leaving the other regions without direct academic support.

2.7 Students' retention and attrition rates in distance education

Attrition in this study refers to decrease in number of students participating in course activities or a degree program. Retention is the number of students who persist from one level to the next in their degree program while persistence refers to continuing toward an educational goal such as earning a degree or certificate. The issue of student retention and completion rates in distance education have been investigated and vigorously argued over for at least the last seven decades (Berge and Huang, 2004). Some researchers have reported attrition from eLearning as high as 70 - 80% (Flood, 2002; Forrester 2000, in Dagger & Wade, 2004). Parker (1999) argues that "with the growth of distance education has come the problem of exceedingly high attrition rates". Citing Carter (1996), she suggests that eLearning student attrition in some institutions exceeds 40%, while others Frankola, 2001) and Diaz (2002), put it at between 20 - 50%, and Carr (2000), estimates it to be 10% - 20% higher than for traditional on-campus education.

Berge and Huang (2004) acknowledge that the reasons for attrition are many and complex and that there are no simple solutions. While a growing body of research is seeking to address the issue (Parker 1999; Frankola, 2001; Diaz, 2002, McEwen and Gueldenzoph, 2003, Marthinez, 2003; Wang, *et al.*, 2003; Rossett and Schaefer, 2003; Berge and Huang, 2004; Simpson, 2004), little of this research considers the learner's experiences or point of view (Rossett and Schafer, 2003). Little has been showed when it comes to the virtual form of distance education delivery.

Industry standards or accurate statistics on attrition are difficult to locate or non-existent (McEwen and Gueldenzoph, 2003; Marthinez, 2003; Wang, *et. al.*, 2003; Rossett and Schaefer, 2003; Berge and Huang, 2004; Simpson, 2004; Carr, 2000.A39). This however does not mean

that attrition cannot be measured totally. Recent studies have found that attrition rates in Internet based course was 20% while the correspondence course was 16%, both which were comparable to Open University undergraduates (Carswell, *et al.*, 2000.36).

A study conducted in Illinois Virtual Campus (IVC) showed that their attrition rate is greater than 20% when compared to traditional classrooms. The Elgin Community College had 64% of distance education compared to 83% who completed traditional classroom courses and the Moraine Community College reported an attrition rate as high as 70% in distance education (Breslin, 2000).

The above research suggests that higher education attrition rates for distance education courses are common, but the majority of the researchers do not provide conclusive reasons for the higher attrition rates. Furthermore, student characteristics such as 1) being a self-starter; 2) being self-disciplined; 3) being knowledgeable of the technology requirements of the specific format; 4) being able to meet other students and faculty in a virtual environment; and 5) wanting more control over learning environment (Roblyer, 1999 and Wade, 1999). Some of the above characteristics could be seen in students that complete their programmes.

Questions about the validity of much of this reporting have been raised as it is argued that statistics on retention and drop outs are, at best, fragmented, do not compare like with like, and are either unreliable and/or misleading (Hall, 2001; Wang, *et. al.*, 2003). However, it is interesting to note that in traditional classroom-based teaching, the overall dropout rates for undergraduates in US higher education is reported at between 40 and 45%. This has been fairly consistent for most of the last century (Tinto, 1982 in Berge & Huang, 2004). When this case is found to be difficult in all cases, it is more difficult to measure in students that are in remote rural areas.

2.7.1 Causes of attrition in distance education

Even though more students are choosing distance education, the literature shows that attrition rates are higher in online courses than in face-to-face courses (Taylor, 1986; Carr, 2000; Martinez, 2003; Moody, 2004). Several educators conducted studies in other distance education programmes and have also found higher attrition rates continue to report course drop out and failure rates among distance learners that are significantly higher than those for traditional, campus-based students (Carnevale, 2000b; Scalese, 2001; Tresman, 2002; Rovai, 2002; Schifter, 2000; Pierrakeas, *et. al.*, 2004; Simpson, 2004; Wojciechowski & Palmer, 2005).

Terry (2001) studied business courses at West Texas A&M University. Accounting, economics, computer information systems, marketing, and management had online attrition rates comparable to their face-to-face counterparts. Business statistics and finance courses had online attrition rates between 33% and 48% while face-to-face classes had attrition rates between 13% and 23%. While detailed comparisons are scarce, there is evidence from some research conducted to support the existence of higher withdrawal rates among these non-traditional students (Garrison, 1987; Frew & Weber, 1995; Grayson, 1997; Morgan & Tam, 1999; Nelson, 1999; Pugliese, 1994; Chyung, 2001). Distance learners typically attend higher institutions part time, and many never intend to complete an entire programme of study (Bååth, 1984; Kember, 1989; Holmberg, 1995; Grayson, 1997; Yorke, 2004). For this reason, research on drop out in distance education has often focused on individual course completion rates rather than a programme or institutional attrition (Kemp, 2002). But, with this focus, individual course characteristics could play a greater role in withdrawal decisions. The decision for a distance education student to complete a course depends on interrelated factors such as age, marital status, educational level and gender (Morgan & Tam, 1999). Other factors that may play a role include the number of courses being done at the same time and source of finances (Parker, 1999).

Kember (1989), revisiting Tinto's (1975, 1987), influential *"Longitudinal Model of Individual Departure"*, proposes a conceptual model of attrition for distance education. It indicated a complex interaction of family context and background, personal motivation, abilities and depth

of commitment to completion; previous educational experiences and achievement; and institutional support.

Nevertheless, other researchers have questioned the validity of Tinto's model when applied to non-traditional learners and some have offered alternative models (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Taylor, 1986; Kember, 1989; Scalese, 2001; Rovai, 2003; Yorke, 2004). Distance learning students are typically older, attend school part-time, and often juggle a full-time job along with family responsibilities (Fjortoft, 1995; Holmberg, 1995; Garland, 1993a; Galusha, 1997; McGivney, 2004). This can serve to increase the importance of factors *external* to the academic environment. In fact, Ostman and Wagner (1987) found “lack of time” to be the single most commonly cited reason for dropping out offered by distance learners. But Garland (1993b), using personal interviews, also found “deeper” reasons for withdrawal, such as poor direction and feedback on assignments, problems with time management, and students trying to accomplish too much. Other factors found to explain distance education student attrition include general higher education preparation, lack of guidance and information prior to enrolment, perceived lack of support from faculty, and difficulties in contacting them (Cookson, 1989; Brown, 1996; Frew & Weber, 1995; Tresman, 2002; Pierrakeas, *et. al.*, 2004). Other researchers have found that student characteristics such as computer literacy and confidence, reading ability, and time management skills play a role in successful course completion (Powell, *et al.*, 1990; Osborn, 2001; Miller, *et al.*, 2003; Rovai, 2003).

Some educators report that students may take distance education courses because they think these courses will be easier (Carnevale, 2000b). This expectation could explain the attrition of first-time distance learners when they realize these classes require the same amount of work demanded by traditional courses. Yorke (2002) and Boyles (2000), cited in Dagger & Wade, (2004); Haddad & Jurich, (2002) took this analysis a step further by developing a model that specifically addressed retention in eLearning. They identified three sets of variables related to perseverance or withdrawal. These variables are identified as (1) defining variables related to the learner’s background, which include the learner’s maturity, personal circumstances and previous experience, (2) environmental variables, such as family, social and work commitments and (3)

academic variables, which include the learner's previous academic track record and the fit between the learner and the subject being studied. These sets of variables are allied to other individual variables such as academic self-confidence, academic outcomes and ease of integration with the institution, along with institutional size, social integration abilities and the learner's psychological make-up.

Berge and Huang (2004), recognising the complexity of the attrition issue, claim that previous models of attrition and retention are rarely effective and tend to be too difficult and/or complex to apply. They proposed a refinement of Boyles' model in which they clustered the range of variables into three primary groups:

(1) Personal variables such as age, ethnicity, gender, income, previous academic experience and personal attributes like self-efficacy for learning, personal organisation and motivation;

(2) Institutional variables such as institutional attitude, values and beliefs, academic characteristics like structural systems and processes, learner support and degree of congruence between the needs of individual students and the philosophical stance of the institution;

(3) Circumstantial variables which include the nature and quality of the institution's interaction with the student; academic interactions, course design and facilitation, as well as the interactions that are specific to the learner's life, work, family, responsibility and satisfaction. While these studies are no doubt important, how one might use them to deal with drop outs from eLearning courses and programmes is hard to fathom. Worth still, is how this could be used in situations where institutions of distance education do not have the software to detect the dropout rates across various subjects and later, programmes.

In a survey of students who enrolled in correspondence business courses, Bernard and Amundsen (1989) tested Tinto's model with Sweet's adaptation, but added variables regarding individual courses and communication with peers. Their model explained a larger percentage of total variance between completers and noncompleters (between 40 and 58%, depending on the course). Other significant factors included prior experience with distance learning and reasons

for taking the course. Tinto's model has been used to inform institutional retention strategies and predict attrition rates. It suggests that institutions should focus on the degree to which the learner is able to be socially and academically integrated with peers and the institution, as a way of ensuring retention. While Tinto's model is significant, Sweet (1986) and Kember (1989) point out that his studies were carried out with campus-based students under the age of 25. Tinto suggested that student social interaction and successful integration into the institution's academic culture were features of the learner's experience that contributed significantly to a student's likely persistence in their studies. Being on campus, of course, makes this much more likely to happen than in a distance delivered course.

Kember's model suggests that learners engaged in distance education were more likely to be mature adults with families than are students attending college. The situation of these mature learners introduces other factors, such as the learner's ability to "..integrate the demands of part-time off-campus study with family, work and social commitments." (Kember, 1989, p. 294), circumstances that are far less common among college undergraduates. According to Kember, family circumstances such as the number and age of dependents, housing conditions and the pressures of responsibilities such as earning an income to support the family, can all have a significant impact on a distance learner's decision to quit his/her course. This could be adverse with students found in remote rural areas. Kember also identifies levels of income, gender and geographic distance from the institution as contributing to attrition.

On the other hand, strategies for improving attrition need to be put in place to facilitate continuity in student engagement and integration. Students "integrated" into the university setting both academically and socially are more likely to persist (Tinto, 1975). The methods for integration include amongst others faculty-initiated contact via phone calls to students (Towles, *et al.*, 1993), supplemental tutoring (Castles, 2004), pre-course orientations (Wojciechowski & Palmer, 2005), informal online chats (Carnevale, 2000a) and online student services (Boehler, 1999).

In conclusion several other reasons have been given for higher attrition rates in distance education programmes. These include: time management, assignments too difficult, directions for assignments are unclear, personal reasons, technology background, confusion, anxiety, and frustration due to lack of prompt feedback from instructor and feelings of being isolated (Hara & Kling, 2001; Martinez, 2004; Moody, 2004; Ludwig, *et. al.*, 2003; McKracken, 2004 and Nash, 2005).

2.7.2 Attrition in African distance education institutions

Because no agency compiles systematic data on university dropout rates across Africa, we must rely on student surveys and individual country studies. These suggest that dropout rates vary widely between countries. Across the African continent, some students described steep attrition in their departments or universities: 85% loss from mathematics in Madagascar, more than 95% loss from mathematics in the Central African Republic, 75% in Niger, 60% in Uganda. These losses may not be fully representative, and some part of them may be due to students switching to less challenging fields (as happens in U.S. universities. Nevertheless they suggest high dropout rates in many countries. (Retrieved on 15 March 2008 from http://www.arp.harvard.edu/AfricaHigherEducation/Data.html).

Nigeria, the most populous African country has a 10% tertiary enrolment rate in distance education programmes. Students from Nigeria describe dropout rates there as low: one estimated 5%, others wrote that rates were "low" or that "most students tend to graduate". The next-most significant sub-Saharan country for tertiary education is South Africa, with about 500,000 students. South Africa has a 50% dropout rate (Reported by the education minister, Naledi Pandor in 2006). Ethiopia, the second-most populous African country, contributes another 150,000 tertiary students. Students from Ethiopia diverge in their opinions, with one describing "overwhelming" dropout rates but another writing "for Ethiopian students getting a chance to go to university is a golden chance. Once they get the chance no one wants to drop out unless it is a medical or academic case." A third Ethiopian student gives a 35% figure for his department. (Retrieved from on 23 March 2008 http://www.arp.harvard.edu/AfricaHigherEducation/Data.html*)*

It appears that in the three countries representing more than half of sub-Saharan university students, at least half of university students graduate. If we take the 35% figure for Ethiopia and assume a conservative 20% for Nigeria then the weighted average dropout rate for these countries becomes 30%. This relatively high graduation success for Nigeria/South Africa/Ethiopia means that the continental average dropout rates are better than the first examples cited would suggest. Even if all university students in all other sub-Saharan countries dropped out (obviously and unreasonable case), the average dropout rate would be close to 60%. A more reasonable (but still upper bound) estimate that 75% of students outside Nigeria/South Africa/Ethiopia leave without graduating gives an average sub-Saharan dropout rate of 50%. When this is compared to the developed world universities, one finds that the dropout rate for tertiary students in Africa is higher than what is seen in the United States, for example, is 46% (from a 2006 study by William Bowen, president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation). The mean dropout rate in the United Kingdom is 16% (reported by the BBC News, 2001) while dropout rates in 1999 were 28% in Germany and 45% in France (BBC News study). (Retrieved on 23 March 2008 from http://www.arp.harvard.edu/AfricaHigherEducation/Data.html-*15km).*

2.7.3 Attrition at CES-UNAM

The dropout rate for CES-UNAM is difficult to measure. For example, the 2006 statistics show that about 40% of students who registered for the BETD and BED in the study years 2004 -2006 dropped out. About 25% of the total numbers dropped out as a result of switching from one course to the other. These are students who had no background for Mathematics and this was a subject not thoroughly taught prior to independence (CES-UNAM 2006 Statistics). Preliminary studies carried out on students that dropped at the end of the four period of study showed that they lacked finances to continue as the programmes appeared to be more expensive than what they could afford. The other reason is that they were too far in the remote rural areas from other students and the regional centres for support (Mbukusa, 2004).

2.8 The nature of distance education

The general term "distance education" is one of the many terms used to describe any educational endeavour where the instructor and the students are separated by a physical distance (Christopher, 2004). The idea of distance education is not new, and has evolved with technology from written correspondence courses, to the use of television and radio, to computer technology. Today this term is almost exclusively used to describe the transmission of instruction from one location to multiple locations via telecommunication technology that is either synchronous (real time) or asynchronous (time delay) (Burgess, 2003; Smallwood & Zargari, 2000; Zirkle, 2003). As reflected in Table 2, below this telecommunication technology has many forms.

Technological Category	***Time Mode***	
	Synchronous	**Asynchronous**
Voice	Telephone and audio conferencing	Audiotapes and radio Video
Video	Real-time moving images with audio conferencing (one-way/two-way video with two-way audio)	Still images (slides), preproduced moving images (e.g., film, videotape)
Data (Computer Applications)	Electronic mail, fax, real-time computer conferencing, World-Wide Web applications, Internet relay chats (IRC)	Computer-managed instruction (CMI)
Print	Not applicable	Textbooks, study guides, workbooks, course syllabi, and case studies

Table 2: (University of Idaho College of Engineering, 2006)

Additionally, Keegan (2002) supported by Bernath, (2001) argues that the next generation of distance education will utilise mobile technology such as wireless laptops, mobile telephones,

personal digital assistant (PDA) - a handheld computer, also known as palmtops as means of transmitting instruction.

In order to justify the importance of this non-traditional kind of education, early theoretical approaches attempted to define the important and unique attributes of distance education. Keegan (1986) identifies three historical approaches to the development of a theory of distance education. Theories of autonomy and independence from the 1960's and 1970's, argued by Moore (1973) and Wedemeyer (1977), reflect the essential component of the independence of the student. Peters (1971) worked on a theory of industrialisation in the 1960's reflected the attempt to view the field of distance education as an industrialised form of teaching and learning. The third approach integrated theories of interaction and communication formulated by Daniel & Marquis (1979); Baath (1982) and Sewart (1987). Using the post-industrial model, Keegan (1986) presents these three approaches to the study and development of the academic discipline of distance education. It is this concept of industrialised, open, non-traditional learning which, Keegan (1986) says, will change the practice of education. There is an inclination towards seeing students as consumers with the need to always changing the product (distance education) to maximally benefit the consumers (students) (Tait, 2002).

Wedemeyer (1981) identifies essential elements of independent learning as greater student responsibility, widely available instruction, effective mix of media and methods, adaptation to individual differences, and a wide variety of start, stop and learn times. Holmberg (1989) calls for foundations of theory construction around the concepts of independence, learning, and teaching. "Meaningful learning, which anchors new learning matter in the cognitive structures, not rote learning, is the centre of interest. Teaching is taken to mean facilitation of learning, individualisation of teaching and learning, encouragement of critical thinking, and far-reaching student autonomy are integrated with this view of learning and teaching" (Holmberg, 1989, p. 161).

2.9 The nature of a distance education student

Distance education students are defined as students who are physically separated from the teacher, (Rumble, 1986 and 1989), they have planned and guided learning experiences (Holmberg, 1986), and participate in a two-way structured form of distance education which is distinct from the traditional form of classroom instruction (Keegan, 1988).

In a distance education setting, the process of student learning is more complex for several reasons (Schuemer, 1993):

- Many distance-education students are in most cases older than 35, have jobs, and families. They must coordinate their families, jobs, spare time, and studies. This is supported by research done by Ross & Powell, 1990; Halsne & Gatta, 2002; Rovai, 2002 and Sikora & Carroll, 2002.
- In distance education, the student is usually isolated. The student also lacks the immediate support of an instructor who is present and able to motivate and, if necessary, give attention to actual needs and difficulties that crop up during study. Students could be illiterate in many ways. One may lack techno-literacy or may not have technology at all around.
- They are sometimes overburdened with work and lack of mobility. Their access to mass media and technology is low. Most of distance education students are within 35 to 50 years of age especially when the country is dominated by older citizens. They are aging as opportunities were not available during their youthful years.
- They need practical skills for prosperity. They need raise in salaries to cope up with inflation of the day. As they migrate from rural to urban, they are caught up with lack of appropriate skills and knowledge.
- A large number of distance education students find themselves in poor health and inadequate access to health facilities. Lack of sanitary facilities in the village schools is common. Their working environments may be quite far from such facilities.
- Socio-cultural economic constraints in accessing education facilities are visible. They are isolated from other students doing the same programmes with them. They are even

isolated from library resources and other related student support services (Retrieved from http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/ac788e/AC788E05.htm*).*

Studies conducted by Thompson, *et al.,* (2000) show that gender related challenges affect most distance learning programmes in North America where distance learning students are predominately female. Between 60% and 77% of students are female and outnumber males in distance education. American studies indicate that more than half of distance learning students (both males and females) hold full-time jobs outside of the home, with some programmes reporting as many as 90% of their students being employed full-time. Various studies indicate that more than half of distance learning students are married with dependents. This means that they are often juggling a family and a job with their coursework.

Traditionally distance learning programmes have attracted students whose geographic distance from a college campus prevented their enrolment in campus-based classes. They want to obtain a junior or senior degree in their areas of work or interest. They want studies that should help them get promotion on job with a good salary package to follow. Some students may be very active in politics (unionism) in order to address the social and economic evils that surround them (Freire, 1996).

2.10 The importance of effective tutoring in distance education

Successful tutoring is a difficult task. Gibbs and Durbridge (1976) identify the following characteristics of good lecturers at the British Open University:

- excellent subject matter knowledge
- good general teaching skills
- good communication and social skills
- well organized, flexible, patient
- able to motivate/encourage students
- commitment to students and programme.

Lecturers must also be knowledgeable and proficient with the media used in the programme (i.e., writing, audio, video, and computer). Most institutions that use lecturers extensively have some kind of orientation workshop and printed manuals that outline responsibilities and provide guidelines for effective tutoring. Good institutions monitor the work of their lecturers closely and provide continuing in-service professional training.

Holmberg (1983) believes that within the context of formal education, students learn by deeply engaging themselves in guided didactic conversation with their lecturers. The students express their ideas while the lecturers guide the students by elaborating, correcting or redirecting the ideas. This kind of academic support is highly essential in distance education as it promotes a personal relationship between the instructor and the students, thus creating greater motivation and increased learning outcomes despite the distance that stands between the instructor and the student.

Holmberg summarises his theoretical approach by stating that, "Distance education is a concept that covers the learning-teaching activities in the cognitive and/or psycho-motor and affective domains of an individual student and a supporting organisation. It is characterised by non-contiguous communication and can be carried out anywhere and at any time, which makes it attractive to adults with professional and social commitments" (Holmberg, 1989, p. 168). Garrison and Shale (1987) include in their essential criteria for formulation of a distance education theory, the elements of non contiguous communication, two-way interactive communication, and the use of technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication. It is these characteristics that make distance education differ from the traditional systems.

Learning at a distance is a difficult undertaking that requires considerable self-discipline and determination. Distance education is different from traditional on-campus study as students must take more responsibility for finding the resources needed for learning. Students need to identify local libraries, individuals, and facilities which are good sources for the literature, materials or equipment needed for courses. They also need to know that there is a student support officer nearby who could be contacted for help in times of need.

2.11 The importance of meaningful feedback in distance education

Feedback is an important component of learning and teaching (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Juwah, *et. al.,* 2004; Hughes, 2005; Hyatt, 2005; Weaver, 2006 and Lizzio & Wilson, 2008). However, in studies conducted, students have expressed dissatisfaction with the helpfulness of lecturers' feedback. Some students have even doubted the relevance of feedback in their studies (Hounsell *et al.,* 2008) and (Higgins et al., 2001). Students expect feedback to serve as a guide to their learning (Duffield and Spencer, 2002). For feedback to be effective in guiding learning, it should focus on 'growth rather than grading' (Sadler, 1983, p. 60). Feedback will not advance learning if misunderstandings exist between students and lecturers especially if students do not make sense of feedback that they receive from their lecturers (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). Chanock, (2000); Gibbs and Simpson, (2004); Hounsell, (2004) and Poulus, *et. al.,* (2007) argue that these misunderstandings may be attributed to lecturers failing to recognise the student's perspective. The misunderstandings could be created by lecturers who do not listen to the student voice. The lecturers may want to follow the traditional way of teaching students at convectional modes forgetting that distance education students are unique (Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006; Weaver, 2006). The lecturers may have their own way of understanding what feedback should entail and forget how it should help students.

As observed by Lea and Street (2000) where lecturers' feedback is not helpful to students, feedback may not help students to understand its effectiveness in their studies. Lecturers have a role to help students use written feedback effectively and therefore should continue encouraging students to use feedback (Swithenby, *et. al.,* 2005; Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006).

There is a clear need from various studies that feedback needs to be investigated and be encouraged in learning (Carless, 2006; Higgins *et al.,* 2002; Mutch, 2003;Weaver, 2006).This should be done in order to gain a deeper understanding of the student perspective and allow the formulation of a framework that will help distance education students as well. It is important that distance education practitioners begin to listen to students and explore their opinions on written feedback and find out how useful students find (Whitington, *et. al., 2004*; Gibbs and Simpson, 2004; Walker, 2006).

2.12 Physical nature of remote rural areas in Namibia

Results from the Caprivi Regional Participatory Poverty Assessment study conducted in 2004/5, the region looked as follows:

The region is 14 528 square km total with a population of 40 749 females against 39 077 males. 72% of the population lived in rural areas while 28% were urban. Rainfall falls within October and April at 100%. This rainfall contributes greatly to inaccessibility of the larger parts of region in the absence of roads. At the same time, it has an influence on flooding of the Zambezi River between March and April of each year. About 40 square km of the eastern part of region is under water between April and July in some of the years. On the other hand, the rest of the region is subjected to difficult situations when the man-made roads are also flooded with rain water. In most cases, only four-wheel drive vehicles are able to access roads that have shallow water.

There are about 29 schools that are affected by these floods almost each year. A good number of these schools are built traditionally, that is, in wood and mud. Almost 95% of teachers in these schools are also living in traditional dwellings with no electricity, and depending on candles and lanterns for light for study. Up to four children share a textbook in remote rural schools in the Caprivi region. Schools lack modern equipment such as science laboratories, computers and electricity. Most of these schools are in dilapidation (Regional Poverty Profile Report, 2004).

According to Mendelsohn and Obeid (2003), Kavango region received about 80% of all rain during four months from December to March. The driest years had recorded less than 300 millimetres of rain while the wettest had gone up to 1 000 millimetres. Where such rain would be a barrier to students in the Caprivi region, it does not cause so much hustles in Kavango. It actually makes man-made sandy roads to be harder and well-used during rainy seasons. Such roads turns are inaccessible during the winter or drier seasons of the year as it becomes difficult to access sandy roads.

Though floods may be a big issue in the Caprivi region, it is a different situation in the Kavango region. The land is higher from the Kavango River that tends to cause flood. Floods affect very little part of the Kavango region. It is the size of the Kavango (three times that of the Caprivi) that disturbs students as they find themselves far away from the nearest regional centre. The most distant student is likely to be 300 kilometres from the nearest regional centre with roads that are inaccessible or in some situations only footpaths are visible over longer distances as well.

2.12.1 Social economic conditions of students in north-eastern regions of Namibia

The Namibia E-Access & Usage Index Survey 2004 sampled and studied 854 households out of 346 253 households in the country of which 209 386 were in remote rural areas. About 33% of Namibia's population of 1.8 million lives in the urban while 67% is in the remote rural areas. Only 4.6% of households in Namibia have a working computer or laptop and only 1.66% of the households have a working Internet connection at home, all of them in urban areas (Population and Housing Census of Namibia report, 2001).

Even though the country is well endowed with mineral deposits of uranium, diamonds and other minerals as well as rich fishing grounds, income distribution has its own disparities. Its per capita income in 1998 was U$2, 000 but this is not monitored among the richest (10%) of society who received about 65% of income leaving only 35% going to the poor 90%. The ratio of per capita income between the top 5% and the bottom 50% was about 50:1 (UNDP, 1998).

Furthermore, the UNDP (1998) report showed that in major urban areas, 5.93% of the households had a working Internet connection and 3.61% in other urban areas. 77% of households in Namibia had a working radio at home, much less, namely 43.3%, had an audio cassette player at home. The survey also showed that 31.1% of households had television sets, 21.9% CD player, 11.5% VCR and 5.9% DVD.

According to Stork (2005), 34% of Namibian households were connected to the electricity grid. Electrification varied considerably throughout Namibia. In major urban areas 94.6% of the households were connected to the electricity grid while in other urban areas it was less with 72.3% and in rural areas even only 6.1%. With this level of connectivity, chances are that the remote rural areas of the country will take long to get connected. It is this electricity that is needed to give power to ITC hopefuls should this be the trend in reaching out such areas.

2.12.1.1 Socio-economics of Caprivi at a glance

When the Regional Poverty Profile Report was compiled in 2004, almost 86% of the population had access to safe water. This water was either through drilled boreholes, annual flowing rivers or pipelines. Numerous depressions of wells formed sources of water in schools that were in drier and higher lands of the region. Unfortunately, despite access to water, 83% of the population had no access to toilet facilities. About 85% had access to radio. Most people lived in traditional dwellings (73.5%) and 89% of the population used wood/charcoal to cook. Area per health facilities such as clinics or hospitals was 625 square kilometres. Population per nurse was 1437 and per doctor was 12 454 (Regional Poverty Profile Report, 2004).

The report cited above defines rural and remote areas as places by merely looking at the absence of basic human services such clean treated water, electricity, roads, health facilities, sewage, commercial and financing services and other modern systems such as radio and television coverage. More than the above lack of amenities, remote rural areas of the region are ravaged by poverty.

2.12.1.2 Socio-economics of Kavango at a glance

The results from the Namibian 2001 National Census report of the region look bleak. The region is 48 463 square kilometres with a population of 202 694 of which 106 176 was females and 96 515 were males. The urban areas kept about 28% while the rural areas stood at 72%. Rainfall fell during October and April of each year. About 62% of the population had safe water while

81% had no toilet facilities. About 79% of the population had access to radio. The region was characterised by 11% of population with access to electricity and as a result 89% used wood/charcoal for cooking. Most people lived in rural areas in traditional dwellings (64.1%).

2.13 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter we have seen the importance of conceptual and theoretical frameworks in distance education. They serve as a guide in the formulation of research question, the objectives and the research design and strategies that the researcher uses in collecting data for presentation and discussion.

A review of the literature has showed that barriers exist for distance education students around the world. It was found from an international perspective that both developed and developing countries have barriers that are related in distance education. They may only differ on the extent to which students are affected.

The aim of this chapter was to show how good practices in student support services can help overcome barriers for slow students in distance education, especially in remote rural areas. In order to overcome the barriers, effective student support programmes in distance education institutions need to be put in place for both distance education students in urban and remote rural areas. Effective student support services help increase the retention rates and thus reduce attrition rates in distance education programmes.

The next chapter considers the research design relating to the instruments and procedures employed for sampling, gathering and analysing the data.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research framework that guided the study hinged on the research philosophies subscribed to constructivism and hermeneutics; the research strategy used (case study) with its research instruments used (interviews and documents) in pursuit of the research objectives, and the quest for finding a solution(s) to the problem (barriers to accessing support services that are encountered by distance education students from remote rural areas of Namibia's northeast regions in programmes offered by the CES-UNAM); using the research question (What barriers have you encountered in accessing support services as a distance education student from remote rural northeast regions of Namibia studying with CES-UNAM?)

The researcher outlined the main question and research objectives in Chapter 1 of this study. The purpose of this chapter is therefore briefly to:

- describe how the researcher applied the philosophies the researcher subscribes to in conducting this study;
- discuss the rationale for the research methodologies chosen for this study;
- introduce the research design of this study;
- describe the research instruments that were utilised in the pursuit of the goals of the research;
- discuss data collection methods and data analysis procedures that were used in this research;
- explain how issues of reliability and validity were addressed in conducting this study.

3.2 Quantitative versus qualitative research design

Two broad research designs are advanced in research. They are quantitative and qualitative designs. Each design has its own predispositions as a mode of inquiry. Table 4.1 below briefly shows predispositions of quantitative and qualitative modes of inquiry

Quantitative Mode	**Qualitative mode**
Assumptions • Social facts have an objective reality • Primacy of method • Variables can be identified and relationships measured • Etic (outside's point of view)	***Assumptions*** • Reality is socially constructed • Primacy of subject matter • Variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure • Emic (insider's point of view)
Purpose • Generalisability • Prediction • Causal explanations	***Purpose*** • Contextualisation • Interpretation • Understanding actors' perspectives
Approach • Begins with hypotheses and theories • Manipulation and control • Uses formal instruments • Experimentation • Deductive • Component analysis • Seeks consensus, the norm • Reduces data to numerical indices • Abstract language in write-up	***Approach*** • Ends with hypotheses and grounded theory • Emergence and portrayal • Researcher as instrument • Naturalistic • Inductive • Searches for patterns • Seeks pluralism, complexity • Makes minor use of numerical indices • Descriptive write-up
Researcher Role • Detachment and impartiality • Objective portrayal	***Researcher Role*** • Personal involvement and partiality • Empathic understanding

Table 3.1 Predispositions of quantitative and qualitative modes of inquiry (Source: Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

> Because the positivist and the interpretivist paradigms rest on different assumptions about the nature of the world, they require different instruments and procedures to find the type of data desired. This does not mean, however, that the positivist never uses interviews nor that the interpretivist never uses a survey. They may, but such methods are supplementary, not dominant....Different approaches allow us to know and understand

> different things about the world....Nonetheless, people tend to adhere to the methodology that is most consonant with their socialized worldview. (Glesne, & Peshkin, 1992, p. 9)

As the researcher studied the assumptions, purpose, approaches and researcher's role in the quantitative paradigm and found that they were not suited for the phenomenon under study, the researcher inclined towards the qualitative research's characteristics. Within the above predispositions of both designs are beliefs and assumptions that are summarized below in table form.

Axioms About	***Positivist Paradigm (Quantitative)***	***Naturalist Paradigm (Qualitative)***
The nature of reality	Reality is single, tangible, and fragmentable.	Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic.
The relationship of knower to the known	Knower and known are independent, a dualism.	Knower and known are interactive, inseparable.
The possibility of generalization	Time- and context-free generalizations (nomothetic statements) are possible.	Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses (idiographic statements) are possible.
The possibility of causal linkages	There are real causes, temporally precedent to or simultaneous with their effects.	All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects.
The role of values	Inquiry is value-free	Inquiry is value-bound

Table 3.2 Beliefs and assumptions of research designs (Source: Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

The beliefs and assumptions of the qualitative paradigm favoured the phenomenon under study. Seeing that human behaviour is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs; the researcher opted to adopt a qualitative design that was constructive in nature in order to study that behaviour in real situations. "The physical setting - e.g., schedules, space, pay, and reward - and the internalized notions of norms, traditions, roles, and values are crucial contextual variables. Research must be conducted in the setting where all the contextual variables are operating" (Marshall, & Rossman, (1980).

The researcher therefore sought to understand human behaviour by understanding the framework within which subjects had to interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Field study research can explore the processes and meanings of events (Marshall, & Rossman, 1980).

3.2. 1 Rationale for using qualitative approach for this study

Qualitative research is a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as "real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2001, p. 39). Broadly defined, qualitative research means "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Instead, it is the kind of research that produces findings arrived from real-world settings where the "phenomenon of interest unfold naturally" (Patton, 2001, p. 39). While quantitative researchers seek causal determination, prediction, and generalisation of findings, qualitative researchers seek instead illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997).

Qualitative research is characterized by an emphasis on describing, understanding, and explaining complex phenomena - on studying, for example, the relationships, patterns and configurations among factors; or the context in which activities occur. The focus is on understanding the full multi-dimensional, dynamic picture of the subject of study. Its approaches contrast with quantitative methods that aim to divide phenomena into manageable, clearly defined pieces, or variables. Quantification is good for separating phenomena into distinct and workable elements of a well-defined conceptual framework. But when we focus research on what we already know how to quantify, (e.g., the number of dropouts from a programme), we may miss factors that are key to a real understanding of the phenomena being studied, e.g. dropping out of study a programme. The downside of quantification is that it does not always support (as well as qualitative methods) understanding of complex, dynamic, and multi-dimensional wholes (Creswell, 1998). For this study qualitative research was used to gain insight into people’s attitudes, concerns, motivations and aspirations towards academic support that they obtained during their study periods (Shank, 2002; Yin, 2002; 2003b).

The foundational question in this case study research was based on barriers that face distance education students from remote rural areas of Namibia's northeast regions in accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM. The final report provided a rich (i.e., vivid and detailed) and holistic (i.e., describing the whole and its parts) description of the case and its context.

The ability of qualitative data to more fully describe a phenomenon is an important consideration not only from the researcher's perspective, but from the reader's perspective as well. "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them [with the] information in the form in which they usually experience it"(Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 120). Qualitative research reports, typically rich with details and insights into participants' experiences of the world, "may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience" (Stake, 1978, p. 5) and thus more meaningful.

The researcher chose qualitative inquiry because it was the best approach for the nature of the problem that was identified. Qualitative research places emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people's words, actions and records. The quantitative approach to research looks past these words, actions and records to their mathematical significance. The traditional approach to research (quantifies) the results of these observations (Seale, 2004a). In contrast qualitative research examines the patterns of meaning which emerge from the data and these are often presented in the participants' own words. The task of the qualitative researcher is to find patterns within those words (and actions) and to present those patterns for others to inspect while at the same time staying as close to the construction of the world as the participants originally experienced it (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative methods are useful, not only in providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena, but in constructing or developing theories or conceptual frameworks, and in generating hypotheses to explain those phenomena.

Creswell (1994) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The

researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. This is what the researcher attempted to do in order to understand the patterns of data that emanated from students' natural environments. Data collection involved going to and out of the settings for about a month, gaining access, and gathering. If participants were removed from their setting, it would lead to contrived findings that would be out of context. Qualitative research offered the researcher many hours in the field, collecting extensive data, and labouring over field issues of trying to gain access, rapport, and be an "insider" perspective.

Walliman & Baiche (2001) Seale (2004b) and Weinberg (2002) observe that conducting qualitative research is challenging, especially because the database consists of complex texts and images. Though challenging, the researcher incorporated quotes from the texts of students' documents to provide participants' perspectives. In this respect Creswell (1994) advises researchers to deal with numerous questions that surround the *how* or *what* of the study in order to focus the researcher to describe what is going on. This is in contrast to quantitative questions that ask *why* and look for a comparison of groups (e.g., Is Group 1 better at something than Group 2) or a relationship between variables, with the intent of establishing an association, relationship, or cause and effect (e.g., Did Variable *X* explain what happened in Variable *Y).*

The second reason why the researcher chose qualitative research is that the study or the topic needed to be explored. The third is that there was a need to present a detailed view of the topic. The side angle lens of the distant panoramic shot would not suffice to present answers to the problem, or the close-up view.

Lastly, the researcher had an interest in *writing* in a literary style; the researcher engaged a storytelling form of presenting findings. Finally, the researcher employed a qualitative approach to emphasise his role as an *active learner* who could tell the story from the participants' view rather than as an "expert" who passes judgment on participants. (Retrieved on 13 August 2007 from http://www.compapp.dcu.ie/~hruskin/RM2.htm)

3.2.2 The role of the researcher in a qualitative study

The role of the researcher in qualitative research had a significant impact on the entire research and on the purpose why the methods have been used and the actual methods through which the conclusion thereof were drawn. Qualitative research methods acknowledge that social phenomena are complex and interactive. There is no single number or groups of numbers that can account for the variability of social interactions. These assumptions help qualitative researchers to construct reality through their own perceptions. The perceptions thereof are not subject to simple appraisals and numeric summary.

Since the researcher is an instrument in qualitative research in gathering the data, the researcher ensured that those reading the report needed to know that relevant aspects of self, own biases and assumptions, expectations and relevant history were described (*see Appendix C, pp. 229-232*). The researcher also kept track of personal reactions and insights into self in a separate journal personal notes *(see Appendix F, pp 252-255)* for a copy from the journal), (Seale (2004b).

3.3 Research Strategy

Just as there are various philosophical perspectives which can inform qualitative research, so there are also various designs of qualitative research. A research method is a strategy of inquiry which develops from the underlying philosophical assumptions to research design and data collection. The choice of research method influences the way in which the researcher collects data. How the research method was chosen influenced the way the researcher collected data. In qualitative research common research methods include action research, ethnography, grounded theory and cases study research approaches. This study focused on case study research.

While the natural sciences have as their goal scientific explanation, the goal of qualitative research is the grasping of understanding, or the "meaning" (Verstehen) of social phenomena. Qualitative researchers seek not just to observe and describe, but to offer, in anthropologist terms a "thick description" of how people as actors understand and ascribe meaning to their own

actions and situations (Geertz's, 1973). A large number of research methodologies have been identified, Galliers (1991) for example listed fourteen, while Alavi and Carlson (1992), reports in Pervan (1994), use a hierarchical taxonomy with three levels and eighteen categories. These methodologies are not discussed in this study. Therefore the research strategy that guided this study is the case study.

3.3.1 Case Study Research

Case studies involve an attempt to describe relationships that exist in reality, very often in a single organisation. Case studies may be positivist or interpretivist in nature, depending on the approach of the researcher, the data collected and the analytical techniques employed. This case study followed the interpretive nature as guided by the research question and its objectives. Various sources define case study research in many ways (Stone, 1978; Benbasat, 1984; Yin, 1984; Bonoma, 1985). Kaplan (1985) in Benbasat *et. al.*, (1987, p. 370) defines a case study as one that:

> ... examines a phenomenon in its natural setting, employing multiple methods of data collection to gather information from one or a few entities (people, groups or organizations). The boundaries of the phenomenon are not clearly evident at the outset of the research and no experimental control or manipulation is used.

This is the definition within which this study was conducted. This was so as the investigator had little control over events, and when the focus was on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2002 and 2003a). The term "case study" has multiple meanings in research. It can be used to describe a unit of analysis (e.g. a case study of a particular organisation like CES-UNAM) or to describe a research method. The discussion here concerned the use of the case study as a research method. Although there are numerous definitions, the definition offered by Yin (2002) guided the study. Clearly, the case study research method was particularly well-suited to barriers that face distance education students from remote

rural northeast regions of Namibia in accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM.

There were a number of factors that were considered on whether to use the case study approach or not. There was a need to focus on contemporary events or phenomena in a natural setting. The same was also true as there was no strong theoretical base for the research, i.e. it was a theory building research project not a theory testing research. "A rich and natural setting can be fertile ground for generating theories" (Benbasat *et al.*, 1987, p. 370). The need related to the nature of the problem rather than the ability or inability of the researcher to undertake research with a particular methodology as within the case study approach there are a numerous variations.

As has already been indicated, in paragraphs above, case studies require multiple data collection methods, whose results hopefully converge, in order to establish construct validity. Yin (1984.78) identifies these methods as including:

- direct observation of activities and phenomena and their environment;
- indirect observation or measurement of process related phenomena;
- interviews - structured or unstructured;
- documentation, such as written, printed or electronic information about the company and its operations; also newspaper cuttings;
- records and charts about previous use of technology relevant to the case.

Of these, the third and fourth, i.e. semi-structured interviews and documentation, such as written letters from students to CES-UNAM, were the methods used in this study.

Case study research can be positivist, interpretive, or critical, depending upon the underlying philosophical assumptions of the researcher. The interest of the researcher therefore was within the interpretive in-depth case study as advocated by Walsham (1993). The case study approach

can involve a single event or multiple cases and can be short or long term. Rather than immersing oneself totally into the setting or culture, sampling of sites, experiences and/or informants is typical. Data collection was more structured using key informant interviews. The collection and content analysis of relevant documents such as letters that were written by students in order to help establish the facts, the assumptions, values and priorities illuminated differences in perceptions, (Yin, 2004).

A "case study has the capability of uncovering causal paths and mechanisms, and through richness of detail, identifying causal influences and interaction effects which might not be treated as operationalised variables in a statistical study, As such it may be particularly helpful in generating hypotheses and theories in developing fields of inquire" (retrieved on 3 April 2008 from http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/pa765/cases.htm). Few hypotheses and theories were generated from the data collected (see page)The case for barriers that face distance education students from remote rural areas of Namibia's northeast regions in accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM required strong commitment and demanded time and resources.

3.4. Sample and sampling procedures

The two regions had a population of about 269 students doing the BETD programme and about 189 students on the B. Ed (2002 – 2006 CES-UNAM Statistics). About 201 BETD and 124 B. Ed. students were from Kavango Region while 68 BETD and 65 B. Ed. students were from the Caprivi Region. They were non-traditional entrants to higher education, all undertaking a distance education 'top-up' diploma and degree. They had experiences on the barriers of accessing student support services offered by CES-UNAM. Barbour (2005) recommends that participants who are already in naturally occurring groups are best placed to inform on a particular phenomenon.

Out of the total number of 458 for both BETD and BED students, six students were selected for interviews while six letters were also selected from a total of 40. The main reasons for choosing

only six from the total number of 40 are listed in *paragraph 1.11.2* of Chapter 1, page 21 of this study. Further to that, purposeful sampling guided the procedure used in selecting the sample. Purposive sampling was utilised to allow the selection of participants who were able to offer information about the phenomenon being investigated (Speziale and Carpenter, 2007). Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to select people on the basis of one's belief that they have adequate knowledge on the subject under discussion rather than selecting them on the basis of criteria unilaterally constructed by the researcher prior to interacting with members of the target group. This approach allowed the researcher to work within known and repetitive behaviour and where those being observed were likely to be cooperative and knowledgeable about the human experience that is being studied (LeCompte, *eds* 1992). It also allowed the researcher to choose a case because it illustrated some feature or process in which there was interest (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

Purposive sampling demanded that the researcher should think critically about the parameters of the population he was interested in and choose the sample carefully on this basis (Silverman 2001, p. 250). Despite the apparent flexibility in purposeful sampling the researcher was aware of three types of sampling errors that could arise in qualitative research where Patton (1990) advises researchers to beware of distortions caused by insufficient breadth in sampling and distortions introduced by changes over time; and the third being that which is caused by lack of depth in data collection at each site. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to select people on the basis of the belief that they could contribute to and expand his database rather than selecting them on the basis of predetermined criteria (Saba, 2000).

Having selected participants, it was important to establish rapport. Participants who trust a researcher are more likely to be candid and honest and respond to interviews freely. The researcher had to call the prospective interviewees by telephone and send radio messages to help them become aware that they would be visited for the purpose of research. Participants confirmed to the researcher that they would be available for the study. The researcher tried at all times to become familiar with and follow any rules governing social interaction. In the process the researcher concentrated on a few subjects that emerged as key informants, that is, people who

were the main sources of information. The researcher focused exclusively on six key persons until enough and meaningful data was collected for the study.

Life in remote rural areas is tough and challenging. It demanded the researcher to prepare spending enough time in settings so that he would be able to see, hear and experience their subjects' daily life (Marshall & Rossman, 1994). For example, the researcher would spend almost a day at sites that were visited. The researcher took almost two months with the participants before completely getting out of the sites. Such immersion allowed the researcher opportunities to describe in detail the expected and unexpected activities of the settings (Wolcott, 1988). The researcher facilitated interview discussions. Eighteen interviews were conducted in the end with more via the telephone for students in flooded areas. Field notes were taken, which were dated and filed for later analysis (Crowl, 1996), (*see Appendic C, pp. 229-232*for a copy of such notes).

3.4.1 Target population

The researcher retrieved the names of 458 students from the CES-UNAM Annual Reports of 2004 to 2006 who had dropped out for a while or completely from their programmes. Annually CES-UNAM compiled reports that were intended to help academic support staff members in their responsibilities. Since the researcher knew the regions from which students came very well, the researcher identified about 20 students that were known to be in rural areas to form a pilot group. These were students that were reachable all year round despite floods or drier times of the year. The purpose of this preliminary study was to try out the instruments and ask students to suggest students who would be rich in information and finding out where these students were teaching. This also allowed the researcher to consider whether the questions flowed, were clear and easily answered by the participants. Following the pilot the questions required minor adjustment. This process is recognised as a useful strategy (Krueger and Casey, 2000; McLafferty, 2004).

3.4.2 Sample and how it was selected

The sample comprised three adult students from the Caprivi and three from Kavango Regions in which the Centre for External Studies regional centres under study of the University of Namibia are situated. From the six respondents, three were enrolled for the Basic Education Teachers Diploma and the other three were doing the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) through the CES-UNAM, in the academic years 2002 and possibly were to graduate in 2006 or 2008 for B.Ed.). The BETD was a four year diploma on distance mode while the B.Ed. degree was a six year programme.

The 6 students were selected for the in-depth interviews. All the interviews were recorded and eventually transcribed. They were labelled Respondents A to F. Respondents C, D and F were repeatedly interviewed as they were always available for interviews via telephone. Respondents A, B and E were twice face to face interviewed. Letters written by students with their possible responses were requested to be anonymously used in the study. About 40 letters were retrieved from the office of the director of CES-UNAM. Only one response was found among the letters *(see Appendix B, pp. 225-228)*. Six letters written by students were selected on the basis that they were rich in information and addressed the research question. The letters reviewed by the researcher were not written by the interviewed students. The purpose of using different sources was to strengthen confidence in the research findings if the same patterns/themes were obtained using different sources thus increasing the scope and depth of the study.

Once the six students were identified to comprise the sample, the researcher invited them to join the study. The researcher explained the significance of the study to them, their colleagues, CES-UNAM, the community at large and the knowledge body of distance education. The researcher shared with them the ethics that surrounded their selection. This required informing the targets about the overall purpose of the research and its main features, as well as of the risks and benefits of participation. Consent was requested to be given in written form or verbally. All the six agreed verbally to be part of the study. One of the safest ways of ensuring anonymity was not

to record the names of the participants at all on the transcriptions though their names appeared in the journal of the researcher.

3.5 Research design and data collection strategies

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline a few general steps in the process of designing a naturalistic enquiry and these include:

i. establishing a boundary for the study that may be altered as the need arises,

ii. comparing the characteristics of the qualitative paradigm with the goals set in the research,

iii. determining where and from whom data will be collected,

iv. determining what additional instruments may be used beyond the researcher as the human and chief instrument,

v. planning data collection,

vi. recording modes and analysis procedures that will be used,

vii. planning the logistics of data collection including scheduling, and

viii. budgeting and determining techniques that will be used to determine trustworthiness.

The main strategy that guided the study is the interviews supported by students' documents (*see Appendix B, pp. 225-228*) and the researcher's diaries (*see Appendix C, pp 232-235*). The reason for using the interview as the main data collection strategy with students' documents was to triangulate all data collected for better analysis. Cohen, *et al.*, (2000) observe that the combination of data collection methods (interviews and observations) helps the researcher to map out, explain more fully, the richness and complexity that is in human behaviour especially when studied from one point of view.

3.5.1 Interviews as data collection tools

The interview was the major source of data collection, though it was also one of the most difficult ones to get right. In qualitative research the interview is a form of a discourse (Creswell, 2004 and Sproull (2004)). According to Mischler (1986) its particular features reflect the distinctive structure and aims of interviewing, namely, that it is discourse shaped and organised by asking and answering questions. An interview is a *joint product* of what interviewees and interviewers talk about together and how they talk with each other. The record of an interview that qualitative researchers make and then use in the work of data analysis and interpretation is a representation of that talk.

The researcher had a semi structured interview guide prepared and made ready for use (*see Appendix A, pp. 222-224*). This was a list of questions or general topics that the interviewer wanted to explore during each interview. Although it was prepared to insure that basically the same information was obtained from each person, there were no predetermined responses. The first phase of interviews featured open-ended data collection, while successive phases were more focused comprising of interview probes.

The general interview guide approach is intended to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting the information from the interviewee (Kvale, 1996; Warren & Karner, 2005).

The interview guide consisted of semi-structured questions. In semi-structured interviews the interviewer is free to probe and explore within these predetermined inquiry areas. Interview guides ensure good use of limited interview time; they make interviewing multiple subjects more systematic and comprehensive; and they help to keep interactions focused. In keeping with the flexible nature of qualitative research designs, the interview guides were modified over time to focus attention on areas of particular importance. Sometimes they were used to exclude questions the researcher found to be unproductive for the goals of the research (Lofland and Lofland, 1984).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate data gathering technique. This is because the research strategy required information concerning interviewee's personal beliefs, considered opinions and insights. These were to be difficult to obtain through structured interviews where rigid questioning would prevent opportunities to pursue an interesting angle or call for elaboration. The semi-structured interview technique builds into questioning, sufficient flexibility to capture insights that may otherwise be lost to the imposition of the 'next' structured question, (Retrieved on 23 July 2008 from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR6-4/connell.html).

Semi-structured interviews may yield voluminous data and may make it too difficult to summarise or evaluate. They have few restrictions as respondents may ask for a rephrasing of questions and eventually answer comfortably. Such levels of questioning only allowed me to penetrate behind initial answer.

The interview schedule was established around a number of key themes informed by the literature. The interviews were recorded and notes were taken. Interview data was collected, coded and analysed and potential 'regularities, patterns and explanations' were flagged and placed into relevant categories that were conceptually linked to the thematic guides. Semi-structured interview provided greater scope for discussion and learning about the problem, opinions and views of the respondents (Retrieved on 29 August 2007 from http://www.cemca.org/books/chap10.htm).

While there were some fairly specific questions (closed questions) in the interview schedule, each of which may be probed or prompted, there was a lot more questions that were completely open-ended. Semi-structured interview method is less formal and is a better way of catching the point of view of the people, and getting inside information. The researcher used this advantage to revise questions, when needed, during the process of data collection, especially when dealing with the question of challenges that distance education students in remote rural areas face.

Considerations in conducting the interviews were always kept in mind. These included a selection of settings that provided privacy for participants and places where there were no distractions. These were places that made it is easy to hear respondents speak, comfortable locations and non-threatening environments. These were locations that were easily accessible for respondents with no telephone or visitor interruptions. The classrooms suited the interview guide.

Five students were interviewed at their schools while the sixth was interviewed via telephone in the first round. Respondents A, D, and F were repeatedly interviewed. One student was interviewed twice via telephone and this was recorded as it came through a teleconferencing setup.

Telephone interviews enable a researcher to gather information rapidly. Like personal interviews, they allow for some personal contact between the interviewer and the respondent. He was on one occasion interviewed face to face. People's words and actions represent the data of qualitative inquiry and this required methods that allow the researcher to capture what interviewees said.

3.5.1.1 Interview probes

One of the key techniques in good interviewing is the use of probes. Patton (1990) identifies three types of probes:

- detail-oriented probes
- elaboration probes,
- clarification probes.

Detail-oriented probes. In natural conversations the researcher asks questions to get more detail. These types of follow-up questions are designed to fill out the picture of whatever it is the researcher will be trying to understand. Questions that were asked included:

- What kinds of academic support systems have you known during your studies?
- Which types of academic support systems did you find helpful in your studies?
- What made the system effective or helpful?
- How have the academic support officers contributed to the pace of your success rate?
- What do you think CES-UNAM needs to do to address the challenges you have faced? (Weinberg, 2002)

Elaboration probes. This is another type of probe that is designed to encourage the interviewee to tell researchers more. It is the desire of the researcher to know more by such things as gently nodding of the head as the person talks, softly voicing 'un-huh' every so often, and sometimes by just remaining silent but attentive. The researcher could also ask for the interviewee to simply continue talking. In these settings, one question leads to the next based on the responses given to the previous one. Probes such as these were asked on the questions above:

- Tell me more about that.
- Can you give me an example of what you are talking about?

Clarification probes. There were times in an interview when the interviewer was unsure of what the interviewee was talking about, what she or he meant. In these situations the interviewees were gently asked for clarification, making sure to communicate that it was the interviewer's difficulty in understanding and not the fault of the interviewee. The questions raised in this category were built around an already prepared interview schedule (*see Appendix A, pp 222-224*). For example: In this case, the researcher was investigating, examining and determining the administrative barriers that face distance education students from remote rural northeast regions of Namibia in accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM. The researcher asked the questions as they appeared in the interview guide, and also recorded the responses (see *Contact Summary Form in Appendix E, pp. 240-249).* The researcher was, however, expected to provide explanations, wherever necessary, to clarify the questions. The researcher also probed and asked the respondents to explain the answers. For example, questions of this nature were asked:

- I am not sure I understand what you mean by ‘aging'. Can you help me understand what that means?
- I am having trouble understanding the problem of the programme you've described as being expensive. Can you talk a little more about that?
- I want to make sure I understand what you mean by lost marks. Would you describe it for me again?
- I am sorry. I don't quite understand what you are saying. Tell me again, would you?

3.5.1.2 In-depth interview

An in-depth interviewing technique was used. In-depth interviews encouraged the capturing of respondents’ perceptions in their own words. This allowed the researcher to present the meaningfulness of the experience from the respondent’s perspective. In-depth interviews were characterised by open-ended questions followed by probing. The discussions centred on *‘how’* and *‘what’*. The researcher employed the dynamics of interviewing as to that of a guided conversation. The researcher in all cases and at all times became an attentive listener who shaped the process into a familiar and comfortable form of social engagement. Tempting as it might have been, the researcher at all times refrained from putting forth his opinions, perceptions or feelings (Patton, 1990).

In-depth interview became a vital technique in situations where the researcher intended to collect complex information, containing a high proportion of opinions, attitudes and personal experiences of the respondents. The technique was chosen because of the nature of the study under investigation (Marshall & Rossman, 1994) (Retrieved on 29 August 2007 from http://www.cemca.org/books/chap10.htm). In-depth interviews offered the advantage of providing the researcher with a large amount of information quickly (Marshall & Rossman, 1994).

For an in-depth interview, the sample was kept small. Only a few purposively selected people were subjected to a detailed interview. For example, the researcher focused on six people and wanted to know how students use their regional academic staff and how much support they get from the centre. It was profitable also to find out whether students knew how they could make use of this support. The researcher probed more on the benefits and problems students have encountered when accessing this form of academic support in order to accelerate and shorten the period of their studies. These were big questions. Putting these questions to a large number of students would not be necessary. Instead, all the researcher did was to ask only a few thoughtful and experienced students a set of specific questions about their life long experience in student support services.

In-depth interviews with students provided the researcher an insight into the whole picture and also informed the researcher what could be done to improve the situation. There was greater need for the researcher to repeatedly come back to the point, keeping the discussions moving in the direction consistent with the original purpose of collecting information and recording the information in an objective and logical manner. Over enthusiasm and less caution can generate enormous data, which may be later difficult to organize and analyse (Retrieved on 29 August 2007 from http://www.cemca.org/books/chap10.htm). However, great sensitivity and skill was required , it was important that the researcher did not introduce bias, and influence quality and content of information as a result of his close interaction with the respondents, nor was the researcher diverted from the original purpose of collecting information (Yin, 2004)

On occasion, however, the researcher conducted structured interviews in forms of probes on specific topics *(see Appendix A, pp 222-224)* to give comparable data across different subjects. Interviews posed the advantage of face-to-face with interviewees in order to obtain reliable and valid measures. The researcher's roles and that of the respondents thus changed continually. As previously demonstrated, questions were clarified in the process and respondents had opportunities to respond in any manner they felt fit. Questions were used with readiness to modify them on the basis of subjects' responses (Stainback & Stainback, 1988).

Each time questions were formulated as suggested by Kvale, 1996. The questions followed his suggested protocol of asking questions:

a. *Introducing questions:* "Can you tell me about….?", "Do you remember an occasion when…?" "What happened in the episode mentioned?",…
b. *Follow-up questions:* Direct questioning of what has just been said, nodding, "mm", repeating significant words, ….
c. *Probing questions:* "Could you say something more about that?", "Can you give a more detailed description of what happened?", "Do you have further examples of this?",…
d. *Specifying questions:* "What did you think then?" What did you actually do when you felt a mounting anxiety?", "How did your body react?",…
e. *Direct questions:* "Have you ever received good grades?
f. *Indirect questions:* Projective questions such as 'How do you believe other pupils regard the competition of grades?"
g. *Structuring questions*: indicating when a theme is exhausted by breaking off long irrelevant answers: "I would now like to introduce another topic:…"
h. *Silence*: By allowing pauses the interviewees have ample time to associate and reflect and break the silence themselves. With significant information.
i. *Interpreting questions*: "You then mean that….?" "Is it correct that you feel that…?"Does the expression…. Cover what you have just expressed?" (Kvale, 1996 pp. 133-135)

3.5.1.4 Strengths of interviews

Interviews have much strength which the researcher always kept in mind and not just let them flow without proper guidelines in place. For example, interviews made it possible for the researcher to collect complete information from the different categories of a sample. Assuming that sampling was done properly, this could ensure a fair degree of validity of information. It was also possible for the researcher to collect more complex information with greater depth and understanding, particularly when in-depth interviews were used. The researcher had more control over the flow and sequence of questions. It was therefore important to ask a particular question after some other questions have been answered. The researcher was in a position to

introduce necessary changes in the interview schedule after the initial results (Retrieved on 29 August 2007 from http://www.cemca.org/books/chap10.htm).

3.5.1.5 Limitations of interviews

While observing the above advantages, the researcher always remembered that it was rather difficult to analyse data obtained through interviews, especially when there is more qualitative data in response to open-ended questions. Interviewing similar people repeatedly became a tiring experience. Because of fatigue, and also because of the tendency of becoming too personally involved with the interviewees, there was a risk of introducing bias in the results. As a result, the researcher designed the interview schedule carefully with regard to the flow and sequence of questions. The early questions were made easy to answer and aimed to put the respondent at ease as in the case of interview probes around academic support systems at CES-UNAM. The introductory statement conveyed the purpose of study in such a way that it encouraged the respondents to co-operate. At all times, the researcher maintained neutrality and objectivity during the interview. The researcher guarded himself from being carried away by the interview process. What is eminently important is for the researcher to know that this is not an exchange of information, but obtaining information (Retrieved on 29 August 2007 from http://www.cemca.org/books/chap10.htm).

Interviews had their own disadvantages though as they are expensive and time-consuming. They may distort information through recall error, selective perceptions and desire to please the interviewer. Flexibility can result in inconsistencies across interviews. The volume of information was too large and became difficult to transcribe and reduce to useful data.

3.6 Research Sites

3.6.1 Entering the site

It was important to always think about building relationships. This implied putting oneself in the shoes of the people the researcher was studying and to think about what their concerns might have been. A good rapport with the targets was always sought because many questions were made to them during the study. The researcher kept in mind that not everybody would allow him into their world, and they had the right to refuse. It was essential that from the beginning the researcher established a relationship that was defined by goals, what the researcher was doing, why and how the researcher treated the information the researcher gathered.

An informant to schools or places where students lived is the person who allowed the researcher access to the places, people, events or documents that the researcher wished to study. If the researcher was less honest with people about what it was the researcher was doing and why, they would be less hesitant to let the researcher in. As Bodgan (1972) notes, “there is often temptation on the part of the new researcher to misrepresent himself because he doesn’t feel comfortable in the role of participant observe” (p.15).

The researcher identified key persons whose permission and assistance the researcher needed in order to visit students who were still registered. Examples included the principal of the school where the teachers took place. The school board community leaders in three sites in the neighbourhood who connected the researcher with the participants the researcher wanted to interview were also necessary. In qualitative research, these people are referred to as informants (Agar, 1980) or gatekeepers (Bodgan, 1972).

Creswell (1998:115-6) indicates that the participants should fill in a consent form that will include:

- Their right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time.

- The central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection.
- Comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents.
- A statement about known risks associated with participation in the study.
- The expected benefits to accrue to the participants in the study.
- A place for them to sign and date the form (a place for the researcher to sign and date also may be offered).

The researcher explained to the respondents that data collection would be done at the beginning, midpoint and at the end of the study. At any time, the respondent had the right to withdraw without jeopardising one's relationship with me or anyone. The researcher informed the respondents that he would use the interviews that would be recorded and write field notes during the interviews. When respondents had any correspondence with CES-UNAM that they have written, he requested them to avail them as part of the study. Unfortunately, none of the six had such documents in possession. Respondents D and F indicated that they had written several letters to the Director of the Centre but received no answers. Hoepfl (1994) noted that other sources may include journal entries and memos written by participants (if any). The researcher ensured that the respondents understood that they were free to ask questions during the study and that all information at the end of the study would be showed to them for their perusal (Creswell, 1998; 2003). When the permission was granted, the researcher went to the details of how he would collect the data and whom he would be interviewing. At the back of the researcher's mind, at all times, he remembered that he had entered the site with wonder, to learn, explore and discover.

3.6.2 Contextual background of where interviews were conducted

It is very difficult for students who are far away from electricity and telephone contacts (as seen in Chapter 3 on pages 68-70 of this study) to create a desire to read or study during the night. The researcher could see from the environments of most respondents that it was utterly difficult

in some cases to set out for studies in the evenings. Some places showed that even tables or chairs conducive to studying were not in place. Some respondents taught under trees as their classrooms. There were no desks and they only used logs in some cases as chairs for the children.

The researcher found, in some places where interviews were conducted, only a few tables and chairs that were shared by the rest of the teaching staff. This in itself revealed a lot of difficulties to the researcher. The huts were not also conducive to an environment that allowed studying. They were only shelters meant to keep the individual from cold and heat. They were made out of sticks, grass and mud and, in most cases meant only for one person. This situation had always forced students who were closer to towns travel away from their schools every Friday and be back on Sunday. As a result, there was no time for students to have time for reading, listen to few audiotapes and videotapes supplied (if any, and if they have power generated). They reached their families and found more challenging situations that could not allow them to study.

3.6.3 Historical context of the documents

Most of the writers demonstrated their feelings through texts in the period of 2002 to 2008 when they were still being followed by the researcher. They either wrote letters when they encountered difficulties in their studies or when they realised that their studies were no longer coming to completion as initially planned.

It is possible that all six respondents wrote letters from the same places as those that were interviewed by the researcher. The writers from remote rural areas sat on the rough desks and chairs while others wrote under trees with less shade. They addressed different issues with the desire to share their frustrations, seek guidance, call on the attention of their tutors, examiners and the administrative staff who took care of their files, assignments and study materials. They wrote letters also to share with CES-UNAM the kinds of barriers that had made them progress slowly or even drop out of various programmes (see Appendic B, pp. 225-228). Some of the

barriers that were captured by the researcher after re-reading numerous documents with multiple barriers are listed in the table below. Some perceptions as to who could cause the barriers have also been captured for analysis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research

Cava (1977) describes ethics as "a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth. Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature" (1977, p. 10).

As seen in paragraphs above, the researcher needed to do the following in order to ensure that the participants felt that their human dignity was not violated:

- Participants were informed of their right to privacy and anonymity.
- Participants' consent was sought in all aspects of the research. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. This required informing participants about the overall purpose of the research and its main features, as well as of the risks and benefits of participation. They were also informed that all interviews will be recorded. Consent was given verbally and audio-taped.
- The names of the writers of documents were removed by the Director of the Centre before availing them to the researcher.

Arrangements to guarantee confidentiality with respect to data and the role of feedback and the dissemination of findings were put in place. The researchers' responsibility to the participants included issues such as ensuring confidentiality, avoidance of harm, reciprocity and feedback of results. Participants received feedback on research results, because this is a form of recognition and gratitude to participants for their participation (Retrieved on 8 November 2007 from http://www.sahealthinfo.org/ethics/ethicsqualitative.htm). Participants were informed that at no time would their data be "revealed publicly in such a way as to cause embarrassment, anxiety, or perhaps suffering to the subject or participant disclosing the information." (Cohen, *et. al.*, 1998,

p. 63). The participants were not to be exposed to unduly painful, stressful or embarrassing experiences, without their knowledge of what was going on. The removal of identifiers such as names and the places where they teach ensured that data may be accessed without identifying the sources.

Arguably, the most important ethical requirement when conducting research involving human participants is informed consent. This deceptively simple idea subsumes a number of related behavioural standards. These include truthfulness and openness, confidentiality and fidelity (Fowler and Fry, 1998; Beauchamp and Childress, 1994)

The absolutist stance, which addresses four areas of ethical concern, namely: protection of participants from harm (physical and psychological), prevention of deception, protection of privacy and informed consent, will be employed in this study. The absolutist stance holds that social scientists have no right to invade the privacy of others. Knowing that the invasion of privacy may cause harm, only those behaviours and experiences that occur in the public sphere should be studied. The other stance that was used in this study is the contextualist or holistic stance. In qualitative research, it refers to the description and understanding events, actions, and processes in the natural context in which they occur. No attempt was made to generalise to a larger population. Sampling purposefully included those data sources that were the richest sources of information in a specific context (Retrieved on 4 April 2008 from http://www.sahealthinfo.org/ethics/ethicsqualitative.htm).

3.8 Data collection procedures

Qualitative research use techniques ranging from interviews, observational techniques such as participant observation and fieldwork, through to archival research. There could be written data sources that include published and unpublished documents, company reports, memos, letters, reports, email messages, faxes, newspaper articles and so forth.

This case study research used interviews and documentary materials. The distinguishing feature of a case study meant that the researcher spent a significant amount of time in the field. The preliminary research that was more of informal conversational discussions took about 15 days, the study around the six informants took twenty days and the follow up took almost a month. The researcher had 10 face to face interview sessions with respondents A, B, C, E, and F with each having multiple telephonic interviews. Respondent D had two telephonic interviews with one face to face. The fieldwork notes became an important data gathering technique that was used. The researcher had opportunities to do pre- and post-interview reflections *(see Appendix F, pp. 250-253).*

3.8.1 Field notes

The primary recording method that the researcher used during data collection was the field notes. Field notes are running descriptions of settings, people, activities and sounds. They included photographs especially where the researcher needed to show huts of teachers, the type of terrain of their roads and other related exhibitions *(see Appendix D, pp. 233-239).*

Qualitative analysis of data involves the non-numerical organisation of data in order to discover patterns, themes, forms and qualities found in field notes, interviews, transcripts, open-ended discussions and diaries. Complete field notes were descriptive and analytic. They were descriptive because they included basic information such as the date, time, and place, and a description of the physical setting (Passi & Mishra 2004). The field notes were analytic in that they included any reactions, confusions, hunches, insights, or interpretations that the researcher might had. The researcher endeavoured to include detailed information about everything that occurred and included direct quotes. Condensed field notes were taken on site by recording abbreviations and key words and phrases in a loose-leaf notebook (*see Appendix C, pp. 229-232*). Written records of what the researcher heard during interviews, and one's thoughts or reactions to them were written in detail. In the margins, the researcher's thoughts or reactions were written for further reflections. Daily, the researcher used the margin condensed notes to develop

more detailed field notes as captured. The more time that elapsed between making condensed notes and writing field notes, the more important details were likely to be forgotten.

Glesne and Peshkin (1991) recommend a series of guidelines to follow when writing field notes and they are summarized as:

1. Only writing on one side of the paper. It is less confusing if they are to be photocopied or cut up to rearrange.

2. Using big margins on both sides fo*r* coding and afterthoughts.

3. Developing own shorthand system.

4. Not discussing own observations until after one has written own field notes. Such conversations can alter one's perceptions.

5. After completing one's notes, read through them to fill in and clarify (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992).

Towards the end of the visits opportunities were provided to participants to review the notes or final report in order to provide feedback (Creswell, 2004). The researcher always remembered to be more than an onlooker where the researcher came to the scene with a set of target concepts, definitions, and criteria for describing events. Students had clear instructions that were intended to help them feel free to respond to items.

3.8.2 Document analysis

Another source of information that was invaluable to the analysis of the data was documents written to CES-UNAM by students during their study time. Data consisted of excerpts from documents captured in a way that records and preserves context (Patton (2002, p. 4). The letters were written when students sought clarification on matters relating to: 1) delayed study materials, 2) deferment of examinations due to delayed materials, 3) academic support that was inadequate and seeking face to face tutorials on weekends, 4) assignment feedback that were

unclear, 5) returning assignment feedback late, even after exams. No response from the institution to any student's enquiry was made available to the researcher.

Documents reveal what people do and what they value. This behaviour occurs in a natural setting, so the data are strongly valid. They are 'constructed in particular contexts, by particular people, with particular purposes, and with consequences – intended and unintended', (Mason, 2002: 110). Bodgan and Biklen (1992, p. 132) use the phrase 'personal documents' to refer to any first-person narrative that describes an individual's actions, experiences and beliefs. Bodgan and Biklen (1992) state that the criterion for calling written material 'personal documents' is that they should be self revealing of a persons' view of experiences. According to Streubert and Carpenter (1995, p. 25) and Burns and Grove (2003), written narratives permit participants to think about what they wish to share. These are documents existing that are relevant to the research questions of the study, (retrieved from http://people.uncw.edu/pricej/teaching/methods/interviewing.pdf). The researcher investigated why the documents were prepared, who prepared them and under what conditions they were prepared (Mason, 2002).

Document analysis yields excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from records, correspondence, official reports and open-ended surveys. In this study, quotations were sought from students' correspondence with CES-UNAM student support department. Understanding and meaning emerged from in-depth analysis of detailed descriptions and verbatim quotations. Direct quotations were a basic source of raw data. They revealed the respondent's level of emotion, their thoughts, their experiences, their basic perceptions (Labuschagne, 2003).

3.8.3 Audiotapes as tools

As was mentioned earlier, a technological device such as a tape recorder was used to assist with data collection. Permission to record all interviews was sought from the respondents. The respondents agreed to be recorded. This device offered distinct advantages. First, it reduced the

need to take complete field notes on site. Second, it could be reviewed later and used as a guide for constructing extensive field notes. Third, it was particularly useful in assembling exact quotes and gathering information about characteristics such as tone of voice (Simon & Francis, 2004). Fourth, it provided for a more comprehensive description of events. Finally, with careful use, technology contributed to the reliability of results because it is a permanent product. The date and time of the observation were recorded, and everything that the observer believed to be worth noting was written in the researcher's journal. No information was trusted to future recall as this might have been lost in the process.

3.8.4 Exiting the research site

The criteria for when to stop data collection included: 1) exhaustion of resources; 2) emergence of regularities; and 3) overextension or going too far beyond the boundaries of the research (Guba, 1978). The researcher exited each site when the resources were exhausted in line with the research objectives and the research question. This was a time when the data analyses began to reveal repetition and redundancy, when new data tended to confirm the existing findings rather than expand on them.

The need to achieve depth through triangulation of data sources, and the possibility of greater breadth through examination of a variety of data collection also guided exit from research sites.

3.9 Data analysis procedures

Bearing in mind that the findings needed to be interpreted, newly constructed and hermeneutically understood in each interview contact, the researcher sought answers to questions asked following the order/sequence of interview questions. Guiding questions such as "What were the main concepts, themes, issues and questions that the researcher saw during this contact?" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 51) were always kept in mind. The researcher reviewed the written-up field notes against each research question briefly to develop an overall summary

of the main points in each interview contact (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 51). Some of the possible questions included:

- What people, events or situations were involved?
- What were the main themes or issues in the interview contact?
- Which research questions and which variables in the initial framework did the interview contact bear on most centrally?
- What new theories, speculations, or hunches about the field situations were suggested by the interview contact?
- Where should the researcher place most energy during the next interview contact, and what kinds of questions need be asked?

In summary form, the presentation and data analysis followed the interaction between display and analytic text framework as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 101) below:

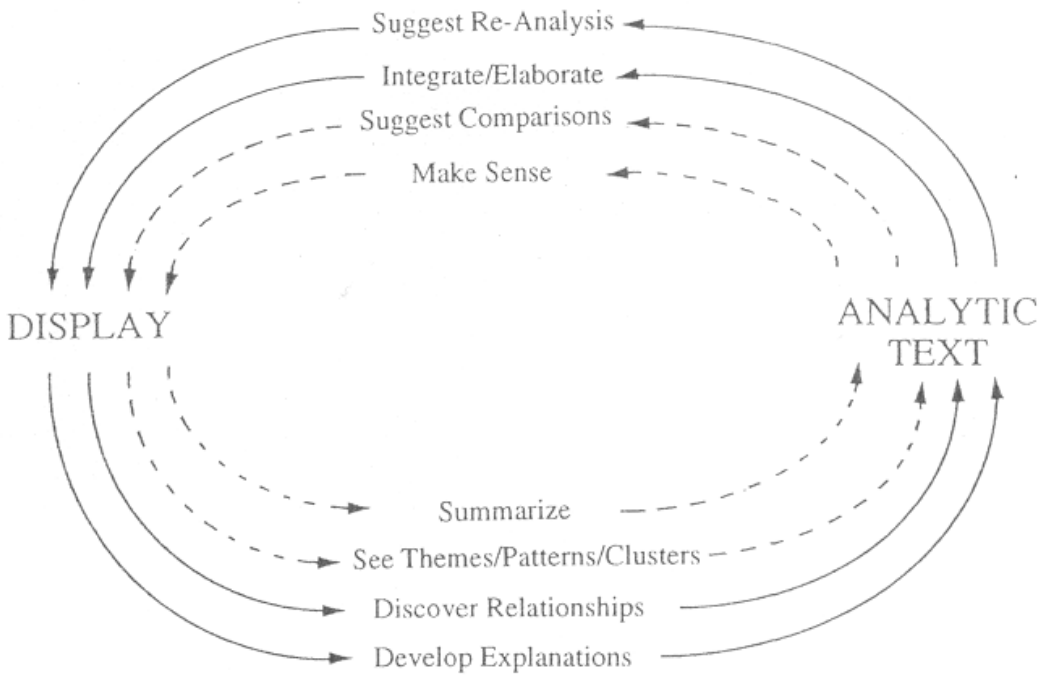

Diagram 3: Display and analytic text framework as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994)

The display and analysis was interwoven in a way as to feed into each other when either display or analysis was taking place. For example, after capturing the data from each interview it was important that it should be summarised to make sense. The summary would then be analysed to display possible issues that would emerge and develop into subthemes and categories. After reanalysis, elaborations would follow with suggested comparisons where relationships and patterns would be made. It is from these relationships and patterns that theory would inductively develop for further explanations and confirmation of themes. A further example is that from the data collected from the investigations on administration at CES-UNAM as a barrier to distance education students, a pattern of lost assignments and marks emerged to suggest an association with slow completion rates or higher drop outs. From this the researcher may build a theory about the relationship between slow completion rates and lost assignments and marks. This procedure happened with the presentation and analysis of the student's letters as well. In the end the researcher independently worked with the transcripts from interviews and the letters by highlightening excerpts of narrative which appeared to describe the participants' perceptions on all themes. These were noted in the margin as key words and/or phrases that seemed to capture the student perspectives (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Data collection and analysis processes tended to be concurrent, with new analytic steps informing the process of additional data collection and new data informing the analytic processes.

3.9.1 Data reduction

Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 10) describe the first stage in the presentation of qualitative data analysis as data reduction. "Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written up field notes or transcriptions." Not only did the data need to be condensed for the sake of manageability, they had to be transformed so that meaning could come out in line with what was being discussed. The researcher examined the themes and categories from transcriptions, letters of students and personal journals and distilled them into patterns and relationships from where explanations would eventually come. This helped the researcher to extract a description of what interviewees said on the variables being investigated.

3.9.2 Data display

Data display is the second element or level in Miles and Huberman's (1994, p. 11) model of qualitative data analysis. Data display goes a step beyond data reduction to provide "an organised, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing..." A display can be an extended piece of text or a diagram, chart, or matrix that provides a way of arranging and thinking about the more textually embedded data. Data displays, whether in word or diagrammatic form, allow the analyst to extrapolate from the data enough to begin to discern systematic patterns and interrelationships. At the display stage, additional, higher order categories or themes may emerge from the data that go beyond those first discovered during the initial process of data reduction. Checklists and matrices were used more than the other displays mentioned by Miles and Huberman, (1994) as it was difficult finding an appropriate computer software to analyse the data. More so, the researcher found it easier to analyse without the computer software.

The research was highly characterised by 'exploration' and description' especially that the researcher knew relatively little about the subjects' challenges under investigation (Singleton, R. *et al.,* 1988, p. 296). Thus the field notes were analysed in a journalistic (impressionistic) style. Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p. 145) define qualitative analysis as "working with data, organising it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesising it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others". The researcher used the inductive analysis of data, that is, allowing the critical themes to emerge out of the data during the study (Patton, 1990). The researcher followed a pattern where the raw data was organised into logical, meaningful categories; examined them in a holistic fashion; and finding a way to communicate this interpretation to others through the study.

3.10 Issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research

Although the term 'reliability' is a concept used for testing or evaluating quantitative research, the idea is most often used in all kinds of research. If we see the idea of testing as a way of information elicitation then the most important test of any qualitative study is its quality. A good

qualitative study can help us “understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). Stenbacka, (2001, p. 551) stated that quality concept in qualitative study has a “purpose of generating understanding”. It is this understanding that the researcher always looked for in this study.

Patton (2001) stated that validity and reliability should be the foundation to the design, analysis of results and judgement of quality of the study in qualitative research. This corresponds to the question that was raised by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290), “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 290). To answer to this question, Healy and Perry (2000) assert that the quality of a study in each paradigm should be judged by its own paradigm's terms. For example, while the terms reliability and validity are essential criteria for quality in quantitative paradigms, in qualitative paradigms the terms credibility, neutrality or confirmability, consistency or dependability and applicability or transferability are to be the essential criteria for quality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 300) used “dependability” in qualitative research in the place of “reliability” as used in quantitative research. They further emphasised “inquiry audit” (p. 317) as one measure which might enhance the dependability of qualitative research. Inquiry audit can be used to examine both the process and the product of the research for consistency (Hoepfl, 1997). This understanding of dependability is endorsed by Clont (1992) and Seale (1999).

To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial. Seale (1999), states that in qualitative research, the “trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability” (p. 266). This helps to establish good quality studies through reliability and validity in qualitative research. When judging or testing quality in a study, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that the "usual canons of ‘good science’…require redefinition in order to fit the realities of qualitative research" (p. 250).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that: "since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability;]" (p. 316). Patton (2001) with regards to the researcher's ability and skill in any qualitative research also stated that reliability is a consequence of the validity in a study.

The concept of validity is described by a wide range of terms in qualitative studies. This concept is not a single, fixed or universal concept, but “rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects” (Winter, 2000, p. 1). Although some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research, but at the same time, they have realised the need for some kind of qualifying check or measure for their research. For example, Creswell & Miller (2000) suggest that the validity is affected by the researcher’s perception of validity in the study and his/her choice of paradigm assumption. As a result, many researchers have developed their own concepts of validity and have often generated or adopted what they consider to be more appropriate terms, such as, quality, rigor and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; (eds) 2000; Mishler, 1990, 2000; Seale, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln (*eds*), 2000; Stenbacka, 2001; Davies & Dodd, 2002).

Stenbacka (2001) argued that the concept of validity should be redefined for qualitative researches. She describes the notion of reliability as one of the quality concepts in qualitative research which "to be solved in order to claim a study as part of proper research" (p. 551). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that sustaining the trustworthiness of a research report depends on the issues, quantitatively, discussed as validity and reliability. The idea of discovering truth through measures of reliability and validity is replaced by the idea of trustworthiness (Mishler, 2000), which is “defensible” (Johnson 1997, p. 282) and establishing confidence in the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Validity addresses the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure. Simply by being present the researcher altered the natural environment; however, there were still some things that would be done to increase validity. For example, the researcher arranged to be

in the setting for a period of time before one starts formally collecting data. This gave the participants the opportunity to acclimatize to the researcher's presence.

So far, the concepts of reliability and validity as they have been redefined for their usefulness in qualitative research have been presented. Now, the question which remains to be answered is 'How to test or maximise the validity and as a result the reliability of this qualitative study? Triangulation will be the basis for testing the quality of this study's findings. Mathison (1988) elaborates this by saying "triangulation has risen an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation [in order to] control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology." (p. 13)

Patton (2001) advocates the use of triangulation by stating "triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches" (p. 247). However, this study being designed from a constructivist paradigm, triangulation is defined within the parameters of qualitative research. Barbour (1998) stated that there is a need to define triangulation from a qualitative research's perspective in each paradigm. Constructivism views knowledge as socially constructed that may change depending on the circumstances. Crotty (1998) defines constructivism from the social perspectives as "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42).

In any qualitative research, the aim is to "engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features" (Johnson, 1995, p. 4) and constructivism may facilitate toward that aim. The constructivist notion, that reality is changing whether the observer wishes it or not (Hipps, 1993), is an indication of multiple or possibly diverse constructions of reality. Constructivism values multiple realities that people have in their minds.

Therefore, to acquire valid and reliable multiple and diverse realities, multiple methods of searching or gathering data have been used. Engaging multiple methods, such as, interviews, documents and personal journal entries led to a valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities.

The qualitative researcher does not share the same level of concern for generalisability as does the quantitative researcher. Qualitative external validity concerns itself with comparability (i.e., the ability of other researchers to extend knowledge based on the "richness and depth" of the description) and translatability (i.e., the extent to which other researchers understand the results given the theory and procedures underlying the study.) Gall, *et. al.,* (1996*).*

3.11 Summary of the chapter

This chapter presented a detailed description of the research design of this study. The researcher focused on the theoretical purpose of choosing the qualitative paradigm to guide this study. It also presented the justification of choosing the qualitative method, data collection tools and data collection and analysis. The next chapter presents the findings of this study as a result of data analysis. The researcher discussed the data obtained and the interpretation of the findings in relation to the research objectives of this study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

The main research question of this study focused on *what barriers remote rural students face when accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM.* The study therefore focused on the various aspects of the support services provided to distance education students, including general academic counselling, registration, career counselling, library and bookstore services and technology assistance.

4.2. Presentation and Discussion of data collected

Although the Centre for External Studies at the University of Namibia distance education system provides for various forms of student support services such as vacation schools, face to face contacts, tutorial letters and technology, the researcher learnt during the study that the support was not adequate. In order for the researcher to understand the inadequacy, the researcher used qualitative design where data was collected to achieve the research objectives (Creswell, 2004; Yin, 2004 and Silverman, 2001). Two qualitative design techniques were used to collect and analyse the data, namely interviews and students' written documents supported by the researcher's field notes and personal reflections *(see Appendices C, pp. 229-232 and F, pp. 250-253).* The techniques were used to explore and discover the richness of the participants' experiences on the research topic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As stated in Chapter 4, on page 104, concepts, issues and questions that emerged were summarised after each interview session and the study of each written document (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 51). The main research questions that yielded the summary were:

i. What barriers face distance education students from remote rural northeast regions of Namibia studying with CES-UNAM?
ii. What are the effects of these barriers on the total lives of the students?
iii. Is the current way of supporting remote rural distance education students at CES-UNAM effective and efficient?
iv. Can this current way of supporting students in remote rural areas be improved to accelerate completion rates?

The interview probes that were administered yielded some of the data. It was from the total summary of each case and each written document that the analysis and discussion of the data was made. Several statements came from the interviews and written documents as sources and were later summarised as follows:

i. Students complaining of face to face tutorials that rarely took place as promised,

ii. Inability to type assignments,

iii. Inability to use the computer,

iv. Inadequate access to library,

v. Irrelevant books that are in the library and,

vi. The library that is only accessed during the week

vii. The vacation school has less time (about four days), less time for writing project reports during the four days and write a test on the practical sessions within the same days,

viii. The families depend on the students' little income that is needed to pay for their studies as well,

ix. Too expensive courses with CES-UNAM,

x. The distance to the regional centres is too long with no public roads that could allow vehicles to reach places where students are working,

xi. Less public transport,

xii. The feedback from the lecturers is poor

xiii. mixed instructions in the examination papers,

xiv. The study materials reach students late or never at all,

xv. Assignments come back to students late

xvi. In some cases the assignments get lost and never recovered,

xvii. There are no opportunities to use videoconferencing and teleconferencing facilities,

xviii. There is no electricity and telephone reception in their areas where they study,

xix. The general environment around the students does not allow meaningful studies,

xx. Files and other documents that get lost and are never traced resulting in students losing their marks and money,

xxi. Much of the students' time is lost on the road as they need to walk some times before public transport is found.

From these statements, subthemes were identified from both interviews and students' written documents and these are:

i. inadequate academic support,

ii. ineffective feedback from tutors,

iii. study materials that are either late or are not available at the time that students need them most,

iv. the influence that families have on the studies,

v. lost assignments, files and other documents,

vi. flood in the Caprivi region and distance education,

vii. the long distance from the regional centres and,

viii. inaccessibility of regional centres due to poor infrastructure.

The subthemes were eventually grouped under three main themes namely academic, administrative and logistics/personal/natural disasters as barriers. *Academic barriers* included

absence or inadequate academic support, ineffective feedback from tutor. The *Administrative barriers* included study materials that are either late or are not available at the time that students need them most, lost assignments, files and other documents, while the *logistics, personal and natural disasters barriers* covered the flood in the Caprivi region, families, the distance from regional and the infrastructure that are nonexistent in most cases. The influence that families have on the studies of the students also fell under the third theme. This study was therefore conducted in that light.

The summary below shows the main themes with their subthemes that formed the basis of the study.

Themes	***Subthemes***
1. Academic barriers	1.1 Inadequacy of academic support 1.2 Ineffective feedback from tutors 1.3 Feedback too little too late from lecturers
2. Administrative barriers	2.1 Study materials not available at registration time 2.2 Assignments that get lost 2.3 Important documents that get lost
3. Logistic/personal/natural disasters barriers	3.1 Family constraints 3.2 Floods that make roads impassable 3.3 Long distances from regional centres

Table 4.1 Overview of themes from the interviews

Although the above themes seem to be same as those mentioned by various researchers in Chapter 3 of this study, it developed that students under study in Caprivi and Kavango regions

also mentioned similar barriers but emphasis on their social contexts of learning. Floods and longer distances from regional centres emerged as new barriers. The barriers are compounded by the poverty of the two regions as mentioned in Chapter 2, pages 69-70 of this study.

Written documents also yielded the same themes. They are showed below with the perceived causes of each barrier.

a)Barriers	***b)Writers' words***	***c)Perceived cause of barrier***
Inadequacy of academic support	'every year students enrolled for this course, but only 1% pass… please… investigate' (Doc. A, 2004) 'we are tired of him. We want a new person who is fairly allocating marks to us..' (Doc. B, 2006) 'we hear about cellular phones when we are town' (Doc. C, 2006) 'how do you send us *sms* when we cannot access them?' (Doc. C, 2006) 'show that you are helping us' (Doc. F, 2006) 'can we get the necessary care from our lecturers?' (Doc. F, 2006) '..the centre is closed on the weekends' (Doc. C, 2006)	➢ Failing in bigger numbers ➢ Taking too long to finish ➢ No communication between student and tutors ➢ marks unfairly awarded ➢ do not know how to use the internet and cannot therefore use it ➢ closure of learning centres over weekends

Administrative	'…few copies are available' (Doc. A, 2004) 'had the study materials arrived on time, we were going to consult with the regional centre to find someone who could help us…' (Doc. A, 2004) 'we are in dire need of urgent supply of History material before 7 July 2006' (Doc. B, 2006)	Late or unavailable study materials
Logistics/Personal/natural Disasters	'how can life be life this? …I want to finish, I am tired of this delay' (Doc. A, 2004) 'we are getting old, if I keep on failing I will be thrown out of the programme and lose my job' (Doc. F, 2006) 'imagine walking 40km on foot or using donkey carts…' (Doc. C, 2005)	Distance from regional centres

Table 4.2: Perceptions from documents on possible cause of barriers

The barriers listed above are not insurmountable, but the negative impact of some of them may be reduced through thought, proper preparation, and training of relevant departments within CES-UNAM. It should be noted also that CES-UNAM as an institution of learning cannot build roads and bridges to remote rural areas; neither can the institution influence the weather and personal circumstances of the students

4.3 Analyses of the themes that emerged from the findings

The discussion of the data collected followed immediately after the data was presented. This helped with the formation of coherent flow of ideas and minimise lost focus and attention of the reader. The analysis of the data on the themes was conducted as outlined in Chapter 3 on pages 104 and 105 data analysis section.

4.3.1 THEME 1: Academic barriers

As explained in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 above, themes indicated the academic barriers of students in remote rural areas. The respondents were quoted to substantiate the themes resulting from the analyses of their data. This theme further divided into subthemes namely:

- Inadequacy of academic support,
- Ineffective feedback from tutors
- Feedback too little too late from tutors

It was important in this study that the researcher had to first find out the services that were offered by CES-UNAM and how they were accessed by the respondents under study. The researcher prepared a checklist that was meant to do a spot check on student support services offered by CES-UNAM and whether students had access to them. The researcher asked each respondent similar questions and the responses were later collated in a checklist format. The responses in the table below (Checklist Matrix) were issues that fell under the themes of academic and administrative services offered by CES-UNAM and how they were accessed:

a) Services	***b)Academic***	***c)Administrative***	***d)Materials Development***	***e)Access to remote rural areas***
Face to face	Adequate but does	Preparations made but only for central	Adequate study materials written	Yes

	not cover all	or north students	and printed	
Vacation school	Adequate but does not cover all	Preparations made but only for central or north students	Adequate study materials written and printed	Yes
Library	Resources provided to regional centres	n/a	n/a	No
Telephone tutoring	Inadequately done	Inadequately supplied to regional centres	Nothing developed for tutors	No
Videoconference tutoring	Only two centres have facilities	Preparations done for the two centres	No materials developed	No
e-learning	Less done	Less sent as developed	Less materials developed	No
Audiotapes	Less done	Less sent as developed	Less materials developed	Yes, but rarely used
Videotapes	Less done	Less sent as developed	Inadequate/not all courses are developed	Yes, but may not be played
Radio tutorials	Nothing done	Nothing done	No materials developed	Widely accessed if developed

*Table 4.3 Checklist Matrix (*services offered by CES-UNAM and how they were accessed*)*

The services were listed in column (*a)*. Columns (*b)* and (*c)* sought answers to how academic and administrative support covered the services mentioned in column (*a)*. Column (*d)* checked on whether there were materials developed for the services while column (*e)* sought to find out how the services were accessed. Respondents did not know that, for example, there were services such as e-learning and videoconferencing tutorials that the CES-UNAM had always organised for other students that were in urban areas. On the other hand they strongly felt that radio tutorials would have benefited them more had such services been developed widely to target students that are far away from other services.

Table 4.4 below presents a data display matrix that helped the researcher analyse patterns of response concerning perceptions and assessments on the most effective student support service at CES-UNAM within the period that is under study. All respondents were asked to mention the services they knew and choose the ones that were most effective in their own understanding. They were also asked to briefly state why they perceived the mentioned services as effective. The most prominent responses below from each cohort were a result of the discourse:

Programme	***a)services named***	***b)which most effective***	***c)why?***
BETD students	• Vacation school • "Informal visits to the regional centre academic officer" • Face to face contacts	• Vacation school	• Opportunities to talk to the tutors and peers • "Academic and administrators listen to problems together and solve them on the spot"
B.ED students	• Vacation school • Face to face contacts • Video conferencing • Telephone discussions with lecturers	• Vacation school	• "Opportunities to talk to the tutor marker who may also be the examiner"

Table 4.4: Data display matrix on perceptions and assessments on the most effective student support service

All six respondents from the BETD and B.Ed. programmes showed that it was important for them to find opportunities to talk to their tutors and lecturers during vacation schools. This was a good opportunity for them since the lecturers that set the examinations taught most courses while the tutors that help them during the face to face contacts might also be present. The anticipation

of meeting the academic and administrative staff during this time made them like to attend vacation school. Respondents were asked why they were not attending vacation school if this appeared to be the most effective way of supporting them.

Student support programmes in distance education is the heart of institutions using ODL. Nunan, *et. al.*, (2000:92); Dillon, *et. al.*, (1992) Simpson (2000, p. 6); Rumble, (2000, pp. 232-3); King, (2001, p. 57) and Tait & Mills, (2003, pp. 59-60); have demonstrated that student support is central and integral to learning. Table 4.4 on page 118 showed several points concerning qualitative analysis that emerged from this relatively straightforward and preliminary exercise. A pattern of cross-group differences can be discerned even before the researcher needed to analyse the responses concerning the activities regarded as most effective, and why. The open-ended format of the question allowed each group to give its own definition of most effective student support service CES-UNAM could offer. It was therefore more important to begin to uncover relevant group differences in perceptions as this helped the researcher focus on the most effective service that CES-UNAM offered.

Differences in reasons for considering one activity more effective than another might also have pointed to different conceptions of the most effective student support service CES-UNAM could offer. Some of these variations were attributed to the fact that the respondent groups were from different educational programmes with different levels of understanding.

This clearly indicated the importance of tutors making all possible opportunities to avail themselves to their students. The data in column (c) indicate the participants seeing their main goal of attending vacation school as that of obtaining extra guidance from their tutors. By contrast, the BETD group of respondents just saw an opportunity of possibly meeting their tutors and peers. Their different approaches to the question reflected different perceptions based on the type of studies they were undertaking. In each case, the researcher tried to find out the barriers of each theme and related them to the student support services that CES-UNAM offered during the period of the study. As the researcher listened to the discussions during the interviews and

the repeated consultations of the transcriptions, it became clear that students in remote rural areas faced many barriers and therefore needed more academic support. Academic support is of greater importance to all distance education students. There is much more demand of it when students are transactionally far removed from their tutors. This is in line with the framework of interaction theory as supported by Seaton (1993) and Kearsley (1995). The more interaction students have with their tutors or the institution that gives them support the higher the success rate. Students in remote rural areas have sometimes no one to interact with and the involvement of academic support is therefore significantly important. In Chapter 2, section 2.2.8 on pages 34-35 of this research study we learnt that this support comes in forms of student-lecturer (dialogue between the student and the teacher, Garrison (1990), student-content (how students obtain intellectual information from the text), Bower and Hilgard (1981), student-student (how students exchange ideas among themselves) and student-media as another form of interaction, Hillman, *et al.* (1994). Respondents also emphasised this support and needed it more as they were farther from regional centres will all facilities for their success. The proper and useful interaction between students and technology could also influence the success rate of distance education students.

Inadequacy of academic support

After respondents A-F had mentioned all the services offered by CES-UNAM and how they were accessed, the researcher decided to analyse the findings of theme 1 as they appear in Table 4.3 on page 117.

(i)Vacation school and *face to face:* Respondents E and B showed differing opinions on vacation school. They felt that "it is difficult and more difficult to attend face to face classes when you are so deep in remote areas" (Respondent E – BETD, Kavango Region).

> It is difficult to attend vacation school or face to face classes. We are far away from the regional centres. Maybe the tutors must visit us at least once a quarter so that we could discuss our problems with them especially towards examinations (Respondent B – B. Ed, Caprivi Region)

Vacation schools offered students many opportunities. Respondents E and B went on to assert that vacation schools have face to face opportunities as were weekend face to face tutorials with their tutors. When asked on the significance of face to face tutorials, respondents said they use face to face opportunities to ask questions in areas where they could understand the application of the study materials content. "Face to face help us see the person who acts between us and the lecturers who will set the question papers, the person that has written the study materials and maybe the person who will mark our papers", Respondent B – B. Ed, Caprivi Region.

The researcher also wanted to know if there were face to face tutorials arranged for students during the weekends. Respondent A (BETD, Caprivi Region) on the second visit fumed that:

> I only know that there are tutors only during vacation school if I happen to be there. It is not easy to find tutorials at the regional centres. The person that is there works between Caprivi and Kavango. One must depend on telephones to get hold of him which is not easy. Why can't tutors follow us sometimes when they realise we have problems with our studies?

In the discussion, the respondent hinted that weekend face to face tutorials would only be possible if they were conducted at the end of the month. This was the time all teachers were paid and they would easily find time to come to town for shopping and attend tutorials if they were organised. Respondents C and D were further asked how frequent they attended vacation school and their responses were: "The vacation school and face to face contacts are far away" (Respondent C – BETD, Kavango Region).

> I failed this time around as I needed permission from my supervisor and he could not allow me to leave school earlier. There is no where schools can close on Friday and I be ready to leave this place, quickly reach town and immediately leave town on Sunday for vacation school that starts on the following day (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region)

Attending vacation schools became very difficult during flood times. It became more of a problem when the distance to town was long. Breaking from their schools on Fridays was not sufficient for them to reach the town in time enough to begin journeys on Sundays to places where vacation schools were organised. For example, Katima Mulilo regional centre is about

1300 kilometres from either Windhoek or Oshakati were the vacation school would be conducted.

Vacation school and face to face is important for all distance education students. It helps most students that have no opportunities to attend face to face contacts arranged by regional centres for weekend or otherwise. Vacation school has many advantages for students. They have opportunities to talk to their tutors and peers around content that seem difficult for them while on their own. Such contact times creates many opportunities for students to learn and obtain encouragement from their peers. The time renders opportunities to have their assignment drafts done and possibly handed to their tutors for further guidance before the assignments/projects are finally submitted. The other option would be that vacation schools are conducted closer to the students. There are nine regional centres in the country and at least four of these centres should be used for vacation schools instead of only one or two normally take place either in the north (Northern Campus- Oshakati) or Windhoek. Tutors tend to give more guidance towards examinations during vacation schools and in so doing benefit only those students who manage to attend such tutorials.

Vacation school attendance is not compulsory at CES-UNAM. Students have commented that attending vacation school tutorials is essential for the preparation of assignments and examinations as the interaction with tutors reveals their expectations and maximises students' opportunities to achieve better results.

The alternative that seems to compensate for remote rural students in their quest for vacation school is whether CES-UNAM should negotiate with the Ministry of Education to make attendance compulsory. Teachers on distance studies could be given special leave to attend vacation schools. CES-UNAM should also review its time management so that vacation schools start a week after students have settled from their areas of work. The present system where vacation school begins two days just after schools have closed may continue to be a burden on students who have to travel long distances to reach their places and begin longer distances to

places where vacation schools are held. Where school holidays are two to three weeks, one week could used for compulsory vacation school.

It is during vacation schools that students can i*nteract with the content being assisted by other students.* To promote and facilitate learning the writers of study materials need to structure activities in such a way as to encourage the kind of student interactions and active learning that foster meaningful learning (Holmberg, 1989, p. 161). Deep approaches to learning such as learning for understanding are integrative processes where students synthesise and connect material to existing knowledge. Deep learning, which has an extensive international research base, is predicated on four key principles as summarised by Rhem (1995): (1) assignments should motivate students to learn and (2) they should build on a carefully structured, integrated knowledge base. Learning should include (3) active student involvement and (4) interaction with their fellow students or content in their study materials. Careful planning therefore should support the students. With good planning of study materials production, the tutor should therefore find it easier to make follow-ups on the student through well structured tutorial letters.

Students have also time to *interaction with lecturers and tutors.* In view of the different arrangements employed in distance education, it is essential that personal contact between the tutor and the student is maintained at all times through tutorial letters or radio instructions. The lecturer should also know what the on-site tutor is doing with the students as is in the case of CES-UNAM. The tutor would tremendously support the students as this person is based at the regional centres.

Students often have difficulty when they do not have direct and ongoing contact with their tutors. In distance education, communication between the lecturer and the distance student is most of the time through the media of learning. In the traditional educational process there are not as many people involved in the teaching process ((Purches, 1992) as is in distance education. The dialogue that stands between a student and a teacher should be always felt (Garrison, 1998). Distance education students who are cut out of face to face and vacation schools as a result of

flooding and long distances are at a more disadvantage with guidance as compared to the ones that always have regular contacts with their tutors.

Lastly, the researcher learnt from discussions with Respondents D and E *(see Appendix G, pages 254-279)* that lack of accessibility to the lecturers is frustrating when vacation school or contact time comes. Distance education students that attend these sessions may not ask questions during the actual instruction period due to: the absence of interactive technology; intimidation of the technology or uncertainty about the lecturer whom students know only as a media figure. Some students prefer to ask their questions with tutors at the end of class or to do so by private appointment and time may not be enough during contact sessions.

(ii) Library: One area of particular interest in this study was how distance learners accessed library services. Closer study of face to face responses found that CES-UNAM did not offer distance education students access to library services at times when students need books most for their studies. All six respondents complained that they could not access the library during the weekends. The library at the regional centre operated during the week only when students were busy with their teaching far away from the regional centre.

> Like us that are deep into places that are far away from the regional centre, we face many difficulties. You want to come and do assignments during the weekend when time is available but the library is closed, you want to come and check some books to read but you cannot find the library open during the weekends. If you were to come after school time, especially on Friday, you could reach the regional centre when it is already closed (Respondent F – B. Ed, Kavango Region).

"The library is far away" (Respondent A – BETD, Caprivi Region)

"One needs books to refer to but the library is not there. By the time you reach the regional centre during possible weekends the library is closed" (Respondent B – B. Ed, Caprivi Region). The other observation was that the library did not keep relevant and newer editions of

recommended and prescribed books. Lecturers also prescribed books for further reading that were not stocked in the library.

Libraries should be open when students need them. There are books that are related to the studies that students undertake each year. Students submit weak assignments when their libraries are closed during their need. Irrelevant books do not also help students when they are about to write their assignments and projects. Research is an exercise that begins with students' assignments and mini-projects. Good books in the library encourage good research.

Distance education students in remote rural areas face the absence of libraries as a serious barrier more than what a student near the library do. Adult learners returning to formal education after some time away may experience lack of confidence in their ability to do research. Recent changes in libraries have brought about challenges for this student population. The information technology in libraries can be intimidating for many returning students as suggested by Onwuegbuzie et al., (2004). The quality of the products from distance education students may be compromised in situations where their research work is not supported by strong libraries.

Despite the fact that distance learning is an excellent method of reaching the adult learner, students in remote rural areas do not enjoy the benefits associated with it especially when they face barriers in accessing libraries. The structure of distance learning should give adults the greatest possible control over the time, place and pace of education even if distance education in remote rural areas has so many problems.

There is a strong need that CES-UNAM introduces mobile libraries to assist the two regional towns where students have failed to access the regional libraries. Namibia is a vast country and leaving all activities to the regional centres complicates the already delicate situation more. The country has many cluster centres, with about 500 teachers, for the Ministry of Education that

serve teachers with teaching and learning resources. Teachers frequently come to the local cluster schools where the resources are based and engage colleagues in the preparation and designing of teaching and learning materials. These clusters could be used by CES-UNAM as local centres to shorten the distance that remote students travel to regional centres. When numbers of students in remote rural areas increase, CES-UNAM could establish their own local centres in tandem with the cluster centres or separately. There will be less financial implications to CES-UNAM as it is mandated by the Ministry to service their teachers. Many resources that students require for their studies could be kept here. Extra library staff could be availed to the regional centres that could work on weekends to help students. The present situation where the only RASSO at the regional centre serves as a librarian as well cannot allow the opening of the library on the weekend for students.

(iii) Telephone tutoring: Students did not also have access to their tutors or lecturers by telephone. Telephone numbers of lecturers were provided either at the beginning of the study guides or on the tutorial letters that were received with study materials. Students tried to call lecturers for further guidance but failed in some cases.

> Lecturers do not want to be called on their telephones even if they have included their contacts in the short tutorial letters that they send us. We sometimes have to go to the regional centre to plead with the academic support person to get hold of this (sic) people. It is not good what they are doing to us (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region)

Students tried to call lecturers for further guidance but failed in some cases.

Telephone tutoring relieves the isolation factor that has been mentioned by several respondents. They only unfortunate part of this is that students in remote rural areas have no infrastructure that could support the system. As a result no students in remote rural areas make use of the system. When infrastructure supports the system, telephone tutoring can serve many purposes. For example, telephone tutoring could increase the completion rate of distance education students.

This might sound as if it is easier to administer it. Several factors come into play when study materials are to be written. Activities that require the lecturers to get connected with students have to be clearly marked so that students and lecturers could find time to talk to each other. Lecturers should ensure that they are available during the contact hours that they have indicated to students. CES-UNAM requires students to submit their telephone contacts as do lecturers. Unfortunately these arrangements have not been used to that effect. Students may ask questions without time delay experienced in mail services. The results from such discussions have been covered under face to face of this study.

(iv) Videoconferencing: Students did not know about some facilities that CES-UNAM had for distance education students. These included videoconference, teleconference and the use of cellular phones that has just come. There were several computers connected to the World Wide Web at the regional centres and students did not make use of these facilities. They heard about the digital library that could be accessed through internet connection but had not used the facility as yet.

Respondent D (B.ED, Caprivi Region) was asked whether he had access to videoconferencing, telephone and the use of library. He responded that "I am out of that benefits (sic) really. I don't have any contact with my tutors. Yes, I live in this landlocked – you know what I mean? No accesses to anything of that nature...Cellular phones depend on MASCOM of Botswana and is too expensive".

From a remote ruralness point of view, respondents demonstrated the fact that there was no access to video conferencing facilities that their colleagues closer to such facilities had. Each region, i.e. Caprivi and Kavango had just but one videoconferencing facilities that belonged to the Regional Administrative Council of the government. These facilities were not meant for CES-UANM students. The areas where most of the students found themselves during their study times were in areas where telephone coverage was low or nonexistent.

> We hear about cellular phones when we are in town. I need the highest tree to make a call that may not even succeed. Life is difficult in remote rural areas. I could call my tutors if cellular phones were operative. You say you sent *sms* to all students, how do you send us *sms* when we cannot access them? Please do not blame us when we do not respond to what you want us to do, (Document C, 2005).

The student continued showing his frustration in the next line, "When will we get opportunities to use internet if it is not where we are and the centre is closed on weekends? That is the time we go to town once in a while. Sir, do not refer us to internet search when we cannot access it". Students might have wanted to be browsing web pages but some of them indicated that they "do not know how to operate a computer" (Document D, 2005). It became evident that respondents did not even know how to use a keyboard. Most of their project work and assignments were sent to people who demanded money for typing. When the work came back to students it was filled with numerous typing errors and this also caused them lose marks.

Electronic media such as email, list servers, threaded discussion boards and newsgroups are difficult to run in distance education especially where no infrastructure supports their use. Their use should only be justifiable if the costs are low, increases teaching effectiveness and accessibility to students. It is these costs that have made it very difficult in distance education institutions.

(v) E-learning: As showed in Table 4.3 on page 117, there was little development that had been taken place in this area. "We could have actually failed to use this service as we are far away from electrical connection" retorted Respondent B - B. Ed, Caprivi Region). When probed about the presence of generators in the school the respondent stated, "Maybe our machines could use that power. But remember that we could be restricted by the school authority as generators give power to all"

"I have seen CD-ROMs with some full time students and I thought this was just meant for them" (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region). Asked whether the Compact Discs have been

developed the respondent said they did not know. They needed to find out from regional offices and maybe during vacation schools.

(vi) Audio-tapes: The B. Ed respondents in the two regions mentioned that audiotapes appeared with the old curricula. They did not see them in the new curricula. Audiotapes were always found in English Communication Studies study materials. "They have now disappeared. We could have used them since we are in areas where the radio plays a big role" (Respondent B, - B. Ed, Caprivi Region)

(vii) Videotapes: Note that in Chapter 2, sections 2.12.1.1 and 2.11.1.2 on pages 70-72 of this study, Stork (2005) had noted that Caprivi and Kavango regions had poor infrastructure when it come to roads, electricity and the use of television and radio. Students would need though to buy generators for themselves for the supply of home electricity if they were to watch television.

> This is the same with video tapes. Maybe we could use them with CD-ROMs if the schools allowed us to use their power from generators. It is only bad that the world of CD and DVD have taken over VCR (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region)

Audiotapes and videotapes are effective in distance education. Despite their usefulness, CES-UNAM does not produce them anymore. They would be less used if produced as students in remote areas depend on batteries for power. Some students may fail to benefit from their use as they are far away from shops where they could buy batteries from time to time.

(viii)Radio and Television: The only wireless device that covered these areas was television and the radio even if no radio programmes had been developed for students. The popular form of electricity generation was through the batteries and solar panels that had assisted a few students. Respondents used the same source of power for radio operation. Candles when available were used at home for studies.

Table 4.3 on page 117 showed that *radio tutorials* are a mode of support that could be popular with remote rural students. The oldest mode of student support (print media and the radio) needs to be revisited for students in remote rural areas. Print media has come a long way in distance education. It was interesting that a good number of respondents showed that the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) covers most parts of the country including the areas from where most of the respondents came. Serious efforts should therefore be made by CES-UNAM to create slots on the national broadcasting network where students in remote rural areas are supported. It is a case that could be brought under the attention of the national government to avail free airways to CES-UNAM to engage their clientele at designated time slots. This arrangement does not compromise the quality of CMC teaching and learning opportunities as has been demonstrated recently by many researchers. What is made available to student through CMC teaching and learning should also be made available through the print media and summarised on radio.

All two groups (BETD and B. Ed) of respondents were asked why emails and *sms* and tutorial letters were not mentioned amongst the services. All six responded that it was difficult to mention them because:

1. the emails service depend on electricity connectivity

2. sms also depend on network connectivity

3. tutorial letters are not used as a mode of instruction

4. there are no radio programme that have been set up for extra tutorials even if radio covers almost 90% of the country.

All six respondents (BETD and B. Ed) were asked to state what they thought would satisfy them as they study. The following list was generated from the discussions by the researcher:

i. prompt return of assignments,

ii. well organized vacation schools,

iii. prompt availability of study materials,

iv. proper keeping of student records,

v. the opportunity to apply knowledge,

vi. conversations with the lecturer/tutor,

vii. relevant course content,

viii. a good study guide

In both Caprivi and Kavango regions, as noted in Chapter 2, sections 2.12.1.1 and 2.11.1.2 on pages 70-72 of this research study report, the absence of electricity becomes a serious problem and has repercussions on the academic support services of CES-UNAM. Students cannot use any videoconference, teleconference and web browsing facilities. These are facilities that they only hear about. Respondent E, (BETD, Kavango Region) showed that some of the facilities are not known when asked about them and he remarked, "What is videoconference or teleconference? Do you mean the video tapes to watch or what is that? I have not heard about that. Maybe it is only found in town".

Writers of Documents A, B, C and F perceived inadequacy of academic support services as a main barrier. The subthemes included irregular academic visits to students, poor comments and instructions from both tutors and examiners that are not helpful, and delay in returning assignments to students for future references. Feedback was also noted as coming late from lecturers. Sometimes there was no feedback at all when assignments are returned to students.

There was no guidance that students obtained for further corrections or resubmissions of assignments. In some cases the feedback was not helpful at all. This is highly showed in column *b* of Table 4.3 on page 117 in this study and the quote below from the written documents supports that well.

> We are really facing a lot of problems with him. In the first place every year students enrolled for this course, but only 1% pass (sic) the course every year. It is possible, could

> you please look into this matter as a matter of urgency and investigate what the problem is (whether it is in teaching or marking), (Document A, 2005).

When asked whether students received extra tutorial letters during the course of study they had mixed responses. Some had not seen any. Respondents A and E did not know what tutorial letters were. The researcher had to guide the discussion by giving examples of what would be found in tutorial letters. Respondents eventually disclosed that not all courses had tutorial letters. Some lecturers mixed tutorial letters with assignments.

Instructions given to students in examinations and assignments were unclear. Students struggled to understand what was expected of them. The marks showed along margins could not add up to the total. "We are tired of him. We want a new person who is fairly allocating marks to us according to our work (sic), we want to get what we deserve" (Document B, undated). The results for the examinations written came late to the students. In some cases, students received results when the examination periods had already elapsed.

Absence of tutorial letters as extra support is not helpful to students in remote rural areas. Students in remote rural areas of Namibia need to receive tutorial letters from time to time. The present practice at CES-UNAM where students receive only one tutorial letter that only stipulates a few lines of information at the beginning of each year is not sufficient. Tutorial letters should be written well to guide students on the content of the study guide, preparation for the assignments and for examinations. They should address the skills that are needed by an individual and isolated learner. They should be written early in the year and handed to students when all study materials are collected. Further guidance could be written towards the middle of the year when students sit for their midyear examinations to avoid failure for collection.

In this way students that miss vacation schools or face to face contacts as a result of distance could be covered. Lecturers should also be trained on how to write meaningful tutorial letters.

This is a barrier that is common in dual mode institutions like UNAM as full time lecturers may not have the background to teaching distance education students. The training should also cover on how to give feedback to students.

Students expect a lot from their tutors and lecturers. In addition to grading student assignments and monitoring student progress, lecturers and tutors fulfil other purposes. They serve as a bridge between students and the institution for the purpose of interpreting policies and solving problems. They can play an important role in adapting the curriculum to meet individual or local needs-which can be especially critical in international programs that span many countries and cultures (Perraton, 1974).

In order to meet the expectations of students, tutors and lecturers need to be academic and professional at all times. They need to be patient and accommodating. Students' needs differ at different times during their studies. Tutors and lecturers need to show empathy. They need to keep on encouraging students in tandem with the administrators. As tutors at face to face interactions, tutors should make students feel loved and understood. This makes students feel at ease when they ask questions. Tutors could give student revision strategies so that they are ready for examination. In some cases the tutors should provide *counselling and guidance* as most students in remote rural areas are compounded by various problems. Given the difficulties that distance learners often encounter, the role of counselling is much more important in distance education programmes than traditional courses.

Frequency to the regional centres is important in distance education. Listening to the respondents recounting their experiences the researcher found that CES-UNAM needs to find alternatives. Such alternatives are suggested in Chapter 5 of this study. It is important that distance education students have to access regional centres especially on weekends. It is difficult for students to access regional centres during the week as they stay far away from them. Students access regional centres for various reasons. Amongst many, they need to collect study materials. They need to check their progress from time to time. They visit regional centres for all what they need during their study periods.

Ineffective feedback from tutors

When the researcher discovered that several respondents mentioned feedback as a frequent barrier, in-depth interviews were prepared for all the six respondents again on the item topic. The in-depth study revealed that lecturers did not give meaningful feedback to students. When probed more on the issues surrounding ineffective feedback from lecturers, Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region has this to say:

> Something must be done with the comments we get in our returned assignments. We will not know whether tutors want us to guess what they are saying or we should always attend the vacation school in order to know exactly what they want us to know. It is difficult to know whether they are criticising our language or content, maybe skills of writing. It is difficult to know what they want us to do with the comments they insert in our assignments (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region)

When the respondent was asked to elaborate more on exactly what he wanted to see in the margins of his assignment he had this to say:

> Good comments that look at our ability to express ourselves in content and language use will help greatly. What does a tutor lose in making me know that my language is weak or my analysis of the content given is also weak? Nothing (sic) (with a raised voce). He or she simply shows that I am part of his or her student body including those that he is teaching fulltime (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region)

The student continued saying ‘we want feedback that tells us what to do next not comments that just focus on our previous mistakes and forget that the examinations is just around the corner”. In some cases, they do not even receive tutorial letters from their tutors guiding them on what they should do next or what they should do before attempting going through their study guides.

One interviewee remarked that:

> It is difficult to read the comments in the margin of the assignment. Some tutors seem to have difficulties with writing. They do not know how to write words that help students. What do you do with words like ‘good’, ‘not clear’ or ‘what is this?’ These words do not help. As students we learn nothing from such interaction with our tutors. They forget that they are not with us. They are far away from us (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region).

Little did the researcher know that by focusing on feedback as an issue more respondents would show frustrations and disappointment with the comments on the feedback that they received from their tutors. It was a barrier that looked simple but it showed that it was at the heart of student support services at CES-UNAM. It is difficult for students who were far away from their tutors especially when the separation is exacerbated by the absence of telephones or any medium of communication to be satisfied all the time.

When respondents were asked on what tutors and lecturers needed to do for the students in order to help them complete faster, other respondents insisted that tutors and lecturers should:

i. Find time to discuss content with them,
ii. Grade the assignments with intent to guide,
iii. Provide feedback on progress,
iv. Help students plan for the oncoming vacation schools, examinations and other assignments,
v. Motivate students in the marking,
vi. Praise students where they have done well,
vii. Answer or refer administrative queries,
viii. Supervise projects closely,
ix. Keep student records properly

When all respondents were asked on what they expected from their tutors and lecturers during their studies they had a lot of statements to make. The researcher collated the responses in a form of short sentences. They included inter alia:

i. fair and objective grading
ii. to have their work treated with respect

iii. an explanation and justification of the grade awarded

iv. a clear indication of how they can improve both in terms of specific responses to questions and in general

v. encouragement and reassurance about their ability and progress

vi. constructive criticism and advice

vii. an opportunity to respond if desired

viii. a timely response (i.e., before the next assignment is due)

ix. full contact address of the tutor they need to talk to, if need be

The researcher found that what matters most in the case of CES-UNAM is the presence of academic tutors and lecturers who pay attention to students' work and who help students feel that they are supported. It is therefore a responsibility of lecturers to pay attention to the work of students be it in the form of feedback or direct telephone calls made to the students (Jackson, 2001 and Thompson, 2003). Tutors also need to attend to face to face tutorials so that students find a bridge before they would face their lecturer during the vacation school. Meeting the needs of students is essential in distance education (Steyn, 2001).

The developing world is faced with a mammoth task in the use of computer mediated communications. Access to Internet and use of Internet are appreciated by students and tutors as open opportunities for sharing of experiences, learning from others and new possibilities for arranging effective learning situations. CMC has its own disadvantages that make the developing world suffer more. For example, designing attractive and effective learning is not an easy task. It is costly and places a financial burden on most institutions that are in the developing countries including Namibia. It is for this reason that CES-UNAM has found it very difficult to cope with in designing materials for its students. Adapting organisational and administrative procedures and systems to the activities of the electronic institution is not a trivial matter. It may include major changes in organisational systems, working styles and administrative computer systems. It

may also affect how students take up their lessons as the infrastructure in non-existent in remote rural areas.

On the other hand, the inadequacy or lack of student support services affect students in many ways. It is about the whole person development. Students need to be shaped by the content that they learn as such learning is needed for their jobs. Tutorial letters guide students in areas of difficult. Tutorials letters outline what is expected of a student. They help students right through their studying period (*unisa.ac.za/default.asp?Cmd-ViewContent&ContentID=20271*). Tutorial letters should therefore be regularly sent to students for continued guidance. This guidance creates opportunities for students to interact with other students of distance education greatly (Purches, 1992). Interaction can be a very important individualistic approach to learning if students knew who their colleagues is doing the same course/s.

Feedback from tutors is ineffective at CES-UNAM and needs serious attention. As observed earlier in Chapter 2, section 2.9 on pages 59-61paragraph page of this research study distance education students need clarifications. They need continued discussions and feedback all the time from their tutors and marker tutors (Gunarwadena, 1988).

Listening to the respondents and their voices on audio-tapes after the interviews, the researcher conceptualised own mind map that showed how students in remote rural areas suffer and eventually drop out as a result of inadequate academic support. To facilitate understanding the researcher drew a mind map drawn from a question that sought to find out how poor and ineffective feedback affects students in distance education.

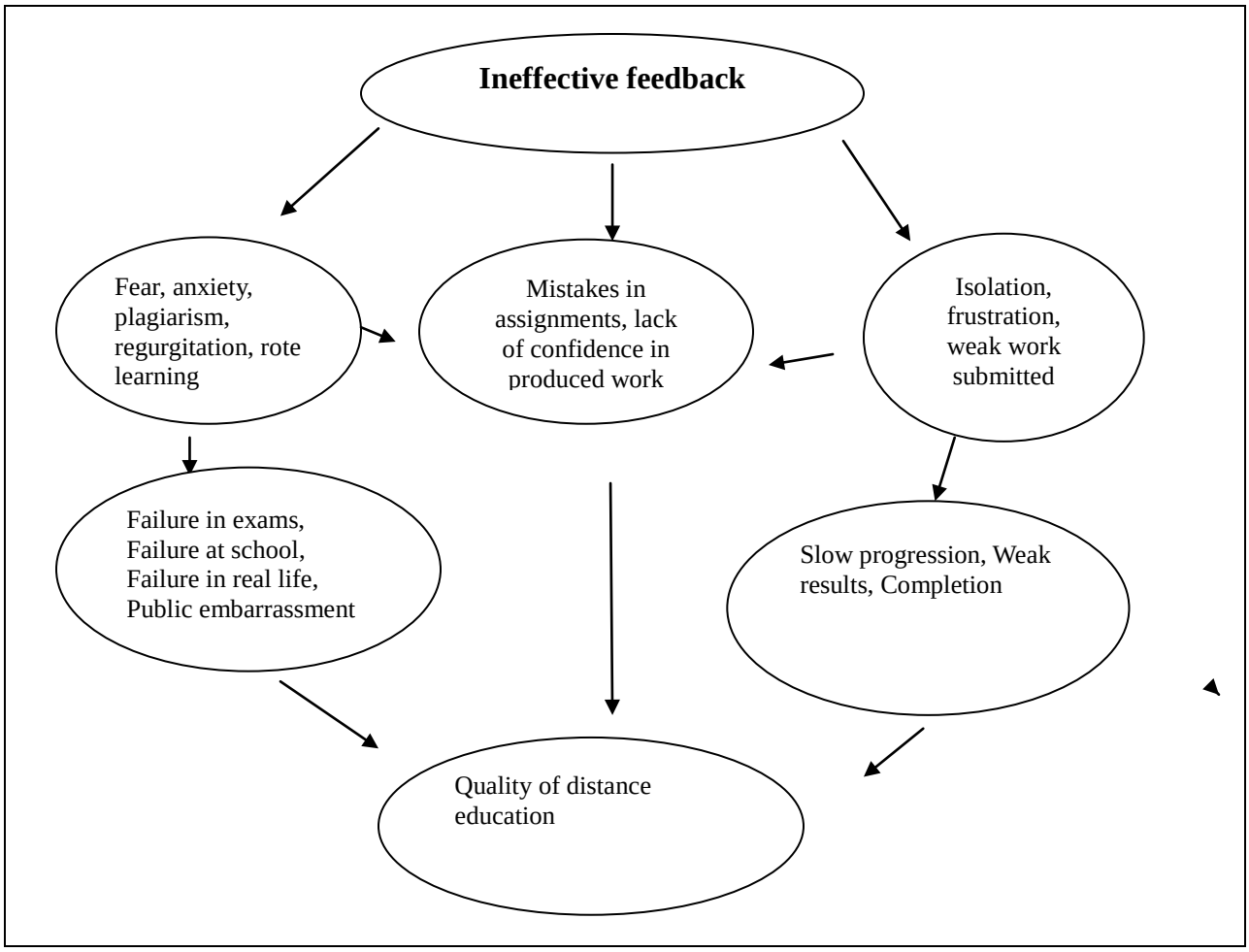

Diagram 4: Concept mind map showing effects of ineffective feedback

From this mind map, the researcher deduced that many areas of students' life are affected when one part of the whole support system is undermined or neglected by student support officers. For example, looking at the mind map above towards the left hemisphere, ineffective feedback has effects on students as they likely develop fear that they will not finish their programmes on time (this has been demonstrated in the interviews conducted and the documents that they have written). This fear of the unknown or that which they do not comprehend leads students to perform poorly in exams, school and even in real life.

Students feel the pressure of embarrassment from the public. Eventually the quality of distance education is compromised. Products that might go through such a system may have copied from

their colleagues even if they went on to graduate. Their products (learners) and the communities around them may not meaningfully interpret and apply education to real life well. Lives of such students may be characterised by dishonest and unfaithfulness. These are life skills that are drawn form an anxious society. Students do not prepare well for their school work when they constantly feel that their jobs could be lost any time as a result of not progressing in their studies. Some students want to apply what they have learnt in their courses at school to real life. They could be setting this knowledge from their studies. It is frustrating and depressing when they find that they have learnt nothing meaningful from their studies. Eventually they feel alienated from the learned groups of their societies. They themselves dissociate with groups that have succeeded with their studies.

On the other hand, the right hemisphere presents almost a similar picture. Students that have not been properly guided may show signs of isolation, frustration and low commitment in real life endeavours. This may be at school or even during the time of their studies. Such negative quality of life may also show slow progression in studies, weak results even if students may pass characterised with slow completion rates. This trend of life also culminates into compromising of the quality of distance education.

Generally such students' work shows multiple mistakes in assignments and even examinations. This is a demonstration that they did not learn anything usable from their lecturers through feedback. There is nothing good they could present in their life because what they know has not been guided to full meaning during their studies. Their confidence is lost. They feel isolated and what they submit demonstrates failure. They are left with two choices: they either continue with this pain with some self devised coping strategies taking too long to finish or they drop out of the programme when coping strategies are not there.

Feedback too little too late from lecturers

Another question looked at the *timing of feedback* as an issue that was raised in the discussions. Feedback arrived late to students. Students could not incorporate the feedback into their preparations for the coming examinations.

> One of the tools that CES does not realise is important for students is feedback. Of course we get some scratches around the assignments. Even such few words should come back to us on time. Who knows? Maybe one can deduce from such words what will come in the next examinations. Feedback is always to reach us. Maybe it is because we are far away from the post office. But I think it is always late. No wonder it sometimes never reach (sic) us at all (Respondent C – B. Ed, Caprivi Region)

When probed what he meant by being important the student clarified that feedback helped students to refocus and anticipate what might come in the examinations. The researcher wanted to know from Respondent D whether there was any rule on the frequency of returning assignments to students. The student responded that he knew nothing that encouraged lecturers to respond to students on time. It varied as lecturers returned assignments any time before or after the next.

Teaching through distance education is different from face-to-face teaching: in face-to-face teaching the student is in front of the tutor and could ask the tutor to clarify a point or provide additional examples. With distance education the tutor is unable to see if the student needs more practice or advice on how best to approach a particular problem. Consequently when preparing a distance education feedback, the tutor needs to put down in writing (tutorial letters) everything that he would wish to say to a student in a face-to-face setting. Distance education students should be provided with as many additional resources as possible to facilitate their learning. Even writers of study materials need to consider how best they can incorporate and communicate feedback into the study materials. Assessment should not be perceived by lecturers and students as disconnected from learning. Students should see feedback as part of assessment that builds future learning. Good feedback taps on the students' potential for development and helps establish a stronger dialogue between the tutors and students.

It is therefore important that all the circles above are attended to so that the negative aspects of the mind are turned into the positive. This will eventually assure distance education that its programmes are equal to the full time programmes. Many more students will regard distance education as being equal to the fulltime programmes.

As a subtheme of feedback, revealed three variables. (i) *Unclear instructions* revealing the weak organisational skills of lecturers that set assignments and eventually examination question papers were cited by respondents as serious barrier in learning. Learning alone in isolation can be frustrating for distance education students in remote rural areas. The instructions therefore need to be clear. The organisational skills of tutors to facilitate meaningful learning need to be revisited as well. Instructions should clearly delineate the task and/or explain the expectations of the lecturer. Instructions should indicate the degree of freedom given to students in structuring the task.

Clear instructions always include the time involved and even the clear allocation of marks. It is not so in some cases with CES-UNAM. Students cannot manage their time wisely if they cannot plan ahead. "Time on task" is a critical factor to student achievement. In fact, instructions should also include a "sponge" or extension activity that students must turn to if they complete the initial assignment. This "sponge" typically involves more challenging problems to solve or more complex issues to discuss. Clear instructions also eliminate barriers to learning. Tasks should be structured to make distance education content easy and desirable. Proper use of feedback with clear instructions in assignments is hat forms good dialogue in distance education (Moore & Kearsley, 1996:201).

(ii) Properly written and administration: Feedback is essentially a major part of the learning cycle (Weaver, 2006). As part of the interaction theory, it helps build a student-teacher relationship well if properly written and administered. It was clear that all six respondents in the study expressed that they were dissatisfied with the helpfulness of lecturers' feedback (Hounsell et al., 2008). Students need for meaningful and constructive written assessment feedback (Higgins et al., 2001). They need feedback to guide them through their learning all the time (Duffield and Spencer, 2002). As also emphasised by Respondent D, feedback should be

effective in guiding learning by focusing on the growth of the student rather than on grading. In this way, feedback encourages student learning (Sadler, 1983). Feedback will not encourage learning if misunderstandings exist and students are not able to make sense of feedback (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). Lecturers who do not listen to the student voice may be following a traditional model of providing written assessment feedback that could be described as a transmission process and considered to be about justifying the mark awarded (Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006; Weaver, 2006). This kind of feedback only exacerbates the misunderstandings between student and lecturer. Students may not understand the intentions of the lecturers and the students may fail to interpret what the lecturers intended them to understand. Eventually students may not use the feedback at all in their preparations for future assignments and examinations (Lea and Street, 2000).

Looking at what has come out from a small sample of students on the subject of feedback, it is clear that a holistic view from the student perspective is absent and needs to be addressed (Carless, 2006; Higgins et al., 2002; Mutch, 2003; Weaver, 2006). This should be done as to get a deeper understanding on how students feel when feedback is viewed as poor and ineffective.
There are numerous skills for distance education students that could be inculcated into feedback. For example, amongst many, students need to be encouraged to critique their own work. A lot of assignments that have failed to attract good marks could have been poorly written as a result of students who failed to edit or critique their work before sending it for marking.

(iii) Timing: The students' experience of timing of feedback showed that there is no fixed time by lecturers when they would send feedback to students. Some mentioned a few weeks, some mentioned months and some have never received feedback at all. The ones that never received feedback could fall into the group of lost assignments and documents. This clearly indicated that lecturers did not have a system in place when feedback is due to students. It also indicated that the administrative support base for students did not have any system in place when they would send assignments back to students in time for the next assignment or examinations. Most universities have a stipulated time for feedback to be returned to students (Mannion and Eadie, 2005). This has been done so as to facilitate learning in the next parts of their studies and the preparation of the next work. The timing of feedback is significantly important to student learning as highlighted by Gibbs and Simpson (2004). It is difficult for students when they do

not receive feedback as they may find it difficult to move on to new content. They may regard even the next feedback as irrelevant in their studies.

Looking at students' coping strategies in Table 4.6 on page 162 of this study, students should not "just have to memorise in order to pass". Education is intended to shape the whole life of a person. What students learn at various institutions should be seen in their daily lives. Students could learn the contents thoroughly and pass but if such content does not contribute to their total life it is a failure. Some of the lessons that students need to acquire during their studies should relate to their survival skills. How they are guided during their studies have an impact on how they will always guide others either in similar studies or in real life. They also have learners that they teach every day. Lessons learnt from how they are handled by the tutors could either shape them for good or for worse with their learners.

Not all geographically disadvantaged students take advantage of tutoring services when they are offered, although most students who do so report that it improves their satisfaction with the course (Rekkedal, 1983). CES-UNAM, like most of distance education institutions in the world suffer the same when it comes to the pool of tutors that takes care of its students (Baath, 1981; Holmberg, 1977). They are drawn from the ranks of conventional teachers as they find this different way of teaching to be unnatural (Murgatroyd, 1980) to them. The kind of tutorial support therefore could be weakened by the system.

The primary rationale for having tutors is to provide students with individualised instruction in their courses. In many situations of remote rural areas the tutor is the only person a distance education student ever has contact with. Having tutors in a distance education system greatly improves student completion rates and achievement, although such outcomes depend on the nature of the course, the tutor, and the student.

The future of CES-UNAM in the absence of the electronic age lies in proper and effective feedback. The question on why most of the respondents dwelt longer on feedback and their

tutors intrigued the researcher. It is an item that was not expected to be so worrying in the minds of the respondents and yet appeared to be overwhelmingly higher on the responses that were recorded. The comments have clearly demonstrated that feedback from CES-UNAM tutors have not been helpful to students especially to students in remote rural areas where no one would easily help them while in isolation (Hara & Kling, 2001). Feedback should guide students properly and be made part of students' learning cycle. Feedback has been defined by Jacobs (1974) as 'verbal and non verbal responses from others to a unit of behaviour provided as close in time to the behaviour and capable of being perceived and utilised by the individual initiating the behaviour'. In other words, feedback in assignments should enable change to take place in an individual and this change is brought about in the individual if the feedback information is understood and used. Improperly done feedback will not help students in distance education change from wrong answers to meaningful answers. Poorly structured and handwritten comments which move back and forth from general to specific issues with less legibility can affect students' response to feedback. The barrier of submission of student homework coupled with the tutor providing timely feedback to the student at the right time should always be avoided.

As much as feedback makes meaning in students' lives, they will always positively learn and will get connected with the stuff that they learn and should promote reflection. This is what distance education is all about. Embedded in feedback is the ability for students to reflect on what they have learnt. Students should interact with feedback received from their lecturers so that they know what they should do with it. Lecturers should enable distance education students through feedback so that students will understand and interact with feedback as 'it cannot simply be assumed that when students are 'given feedback' they will know what to do with it' (Sadler 1998, p. 2).

(vii)Feedback by written communication: The level of detail and usability of feedback comments should help students to progress. It intrigued the researcher seeing that respondents demanded clarification on why feedback was lacking at CES-UNAM. When the physical separation between students and tutors is so wide in the regions under study, and creates more transactional

distance, (a space for interaction between the tutor and the students) misunderstandings are likely to fill the gaps (Moore, 1986, p. 1). Students may not attempt their assignments with greater confidence. Anxiety, confusion and frustration could cause attrition (Mood, 2004). Therefore improved written communication to distance education students is essentially important to help tutors and students achieve a better reciprocal understanding and maintain the quality of guidance and learning. If we accept the view that the effectiveness of feedback is intrinsically connected to its communicative power, pedagogical practice should aim to implement a model that facilitates good communication between students and their tutors, (Higgins *et. al.*, 2001). It is therefore essential to identify the factors that intervene in the feedback exchange and to what extent they affect the potential to promote learning.

Feedback at CES-UNAM has often failed to address the knowledge components such as knowing the skills to interact with content (Bower & Hilgard, 1981) and knowing how and when to apply these skills in order to improve and show evidence of understanding. It has also failed to address the language use of students so that students write qualitative assignments and projects. The prevalence of content specific comments denotes an implicit assumption that experience alone will help students in developing skills for interacting with content. It has also highlighted the fact that lecturers have tended to regard themselves primarily as content specialists. As a result, they demonstrated that they lacked specific pedagogical training that should have enabled them to take a more holistic view of learning. One may argue that a good number of university lecturers have not done teaching methodology and as a result may only focus on content. They sometimes thought that distance education students would know and understand what their lecturers write in the margins. The margins of the CES-UNAM writing pads are so wide that meaningful comments could have been more explicit. Instead, respondents find one or two words (as showed by Respondent D, (2008) of this study. Students need to get used to the comments lecturers make from time to time. The mnemonics, short forms and style of commenting help students get acquainted with the lecturer's language. Hughes (2005); Walker (2006) and Sadler (1998) argue that feedback should be expressed in a language that is already known and understood by students as students need this feedback for future use.

As revealed by the interviews, the idea of feed forward and less description about the content of the work should be strengthened in distance education. Students do not want to see 'what' was wrong but want to see the 'how' so that they are enabled to respond differently next time. The *'why'* and *'what'* asserted by Respondents D and E in this study are neither encouraging nor particularly constructive in the eyes of the distance education students. Feedback should actually feed forward as it is needed to prepare students for future skills, content and language development. The FAST Project (2005) showed that 'feedback, in order to influence learning, should not only be framed in retrospective terms but should also provide advice for future learning and allow students to build on existing knowledge'. It is highly essential that this becomes CES-UNAM's practice for students in remote rural areas.

The comments used in feedback by Respondents D and F showed lecturers as members of the subject specific knowledge communities tend to take frames of reference for granted. Unless the meanings of the contents are unpacked and qualified they will always create misunderstandings, and unmet expectations. An important task of the feedback tools for the tutor is to help identify the source of difficulties and the misconceptions students have about a topic. As a result of feedback on students' work, those doing very poorly can be identified quite early.

It is unfortunate that CES-UNAM has not established self study groups where students can learn from one another. One of the most important advantages of students becoming acquainted with one another is that it enables them to experience feedback from peers regarding skills' development relating to course content. Students believed that having lecturers tutor is vitally important in helping them get the most out of a course and achieve a credit (Meacham & Evans, 1989). In distance learning it may be more difficult for students to gauge their own progress through the course with other students, whether through informal discussions, formal discussion groups, study groups or student networks. Many of the informal opportunities to interact and socialise are not as readily available for students of distance education in remote rural areas, and this unavailability can strongly affect a student's motivation to continue the course and/or programme.

Specifically, the isolation from other students can decrease the likelihood of networking with other students, can affect identification with the campus from which the student will graduate, can limit access to campus resources, and can lower the identification with student culture, all of which can affect the student's motivation and accomplishment within the distance learning process (Donnan, 1993).

4.3.2 Theme 2: Administrative

This theme further divided into subthemes namely:

- Study materials not available at registration time
- Assignments getting lost
- Important documents getting lost

Study materials not available at registration time

The unavailability of study materials at regional centres during registration times affected many students. Students that reached regional centres earlier received materials while the late comers received nothing.

> I went to the regional office several times. Each time I am told the study materials are not yet ready. Remember that I go to town once every month when I am paid. This is the time my principal who has a vehicle at our school goes to town. It is easier this time. If I miss the principal's lift (sic) I will have to use donkey cart which takes long (Respondent C - BETD, Kavango Region).

This was confirmed by Document B as seen in Table 4.2 on pages 115. The writer showed that study materials took long to arrive at the two regional centres under study. When such materials were at the regional centres few copies were sent (Document A).

> This is a waste of time and money. I have taken too long to finish because each time there is no materials. I delay in finishing. Sometimes the new curriculum catches with me and this also delays my progress (Respondent F – B. Ed, Kavango Region)

Students found it difficult when the due dates were not extended after receiving study materials late. "I doubt if we will have the due dates extended. There are only two weeks between the time the materials arrived and the submission date" Respondent B.

The findings from the interviews showed that insufficient copies of study materials was also a barrier. Out of the six documents, Document A revealed that the writer have had problems with study materials. Few scenarios occurred: The student arrived late at the regional centre only to find that there was no more study materials meant for their courses. The writer wrote with frustration:

> How can life be like this? How will I manage to come on time when few copies are available? Please sir, remember that my school is so far and by the time I reach here it is either no materials (sic) or come the other day we have ordered some. Can you make sure you keep for me one copy when they are there or else I will find myself repeating this course next semester? I want to finish, I am tired of this delay, (Document A).

In some cases, study materials arrived but found students struggling to cope with the content and the due dates. This forced students to submit assignments that were not properly written and thus caused failure.

> Look at what we are scoring in the exams. Is this a true reflection of our abilities? It is not fair as we are paying so much for these modules and only to fail. Had the study materials arrived on time, we were going to consult with the regional centre to find someone who could help us at a time when we are in town. Please know that we are not in town always (Document A).

Some of the courses never received study materials at all in the year that students enrolled for them. "We are in dire need of urgent supply of History materials before 7 July 2006" (Document B, 2006). Students had to wait for a year to receive study materials. They would however, be re-

registered without having to pay again but they would have already lost a year of studying. Students were told by the regional centre administrators that new courses were not written on time. Some of the response respondents received from the regional centre administrators were that writers were too slow as they (writers) also took care of the fulltime students' workloads. This negatively impacted on the production of study materials for distance education students.

It is not good in distance education when study materials are not available. Study materials form the basis of teaching and learning in distance education. Respondents showed frustrations and bad experiences with the unavailability of study materials. The unavailability of study materials on time has adverse repercussions on students. Students lose time and pace to their studies. They immediately feel threatened that they might not finish their programmes as pre-planned. They become stressed and may drop-outs. Slow progression in their studies might lead them to feelings of inadequacy, insecurity and a lack of confidence in their own abilities (Wood, 1996). Looking into faces of the respondents, the researcher could sense feelings of dejection. More work for students was expected to come yet the first assignment was already not properly supported. Feelings of intimidation also seemed probable as study materials looked voluminous and yet a short time between the collection of the study materials from regional centres and the due dates for submission were too close. CES-UNAM needs to develop distance learning materials on their own to avert the situation or they should be willing to pay fortunes by buying from other distance education institutions for adaptation (Galusha, 1998).

Hurriedly sent study materials to students have multiple typing errors in them. It becomes difficult for students who are far removed from their peers and tutors to get assistance in such situations. It becomes more frustrating to students in remote rural areas because they are far removed from modern technology such as internet or wireless devices that could help students communicate such errors to their tutors for guidance. Students coming from far areas away from the regional centre need enough time to go and prepare for their assignments and examinations. CES-UNAM should ensure that study materials are available at regional centres by the time teachers get paid as this is time most teachers come to town for shopping. They are less paid and

may not want to spend unnecessarily for trips where they find no assistance at the regional centres.

The practice at CES-UNAM is that students who did not receive study materials will not need to pay for the same course in the next semester is not important to students. Students have many reasons for wanting to finish on time. Students want to be promoted and thus earn more money. Some expect to learn new ideas on how to teach and therefore earn respect among their peers.

If the quality of study materials is low, it can add to the frustration, distress, and isolation of the distance education students. They are isolated as the situation they find themselves is different from that of a classroom where they could share their feelings with colleagues or their lecturers. Getting rid of isolation feelings through face to face tutorials could uplift their morale and encourage them to continue with their studies. Students beginning a tertiary study programme are less likely to persist with their studies if they encounter difficulties with study materials at the start. The pace of study may be getting harder. The nearness of examinations may add to the pressure. They may feel sorry that they should not have started the programme as social, domestic and financial pressures surround them more. Study materials for distance education must therefore take account of the significant proportion of students who enrol with little or no experience of tertiary study: these are the ones who will disappear without trace unless they develop study survival skills as rapidly as possible.

Delayed study materials affect the progress of students at CES-UNAM. The Centre should find ways to avail study materials for new courses or revised courses before enrolments are made. Corresponding numbers of copies for study materials to the enrolment of each year should be sent to regional centres in time. Where possible an added 10% of the total enrolment should be sent also. This will cater for students who may lose their study guides as a result of unforeseen circumstances such as natural disasters.

Assignments getting lost

Respondent E (BETD, Kavango Region) was asked to elaborate on *assignments that get lost*. The respondent said:

> I will not understand how UNAM works especially the department that handles students' assignments, examination marks and all our files. As students we are not happy when we get our assignments lost. You can send the assignments through the regional offices but you will be told later that Windhoek cannot find the assignment or files. After that Windhoek will tell you to re-register and pay again.

The researcher could not really understand what exactly the respondent wanted to express. Several in-depth probes were therefore asked Respondent E (BETD, Kavango Region) for the researcher to understand the situation. The respondent continued saying:

> Do they think money is just found anywhere? Do they think we have time to be repeating the same course/module for so many times as if we nothing else to do. Please, I want to request the director of CES to put the right people in places where our assignments are kept. Sometimes you will find the regional centres telling you or showing you on the computer that the assignment was recorded and you have passed. After two or three semesters the mark is no more. Are computers at regional office different from those that are in Windhoek?

The researcher could see that the respondent was really upset with this part of the interview. Greater care was therefore required for the researcher to allow the respondent to get to the question/issue under discussion. This is seen in how the tone in the above quotation started. Later in the quotation, the respondent addressed the question under discussion. The respondent demonstrated that more money was lost when students repeated courses several times. The respondent could not understand why assignment marks would be displayed and then withdrawn after some time. No explanation was provided.

The respondent showed that student administrators did not work for the students. The respondent kept on repeating that administrators kept their positions to bring money to CES-UNAM at the expense of the students.

> There are times when you are told that they cannot find the mark. You give them a copy of your assignment or test because earlier in the programme we had examination scripts returned to us. You send the script back to them and they fail you if had passed. They remark you five years after your same group which you were marked with have gone on graduation. I cannot understand this and I am not sure we have the right people in the right positions at CES (Respondent E - BETD, Kavango Region).

Assignments for students should not get lost in any form of education. Tests and Assignments in most educational organisations provide means for awarding course grades as well as giving students feedback on their progress. In a distance education setting, taking care to design ways of providing feedback and ensuring that lecturers give regular feedback of good quality is of great importance. Students are usually isolated and have limited opportunities for comparing their progress with others in the course. Assignments serve not only to provide the student with feedback on progress but also to pace the student through the course. While generally, setting assignments with cut-off dates motivate students to keep up with the work, and helps to prevent them from dropping out, it is not so with students in remote rural areas who are geographically disadvantaged. Cut-off dates only help them drop out quickly as they may not be able to reach their regional centres in time.

Assignments are only effective if the student receives meaningful feedback from the lecturer or tutor on time. If students only receive a grade or acknowledgment that the assignment was received, the utility and motivational value of assignments is significantly diminished. Looking at the list that was collated from the respondents on what they expect in relation to the handling of their assignments, the researcher found out that satisfying these criteria could take considerable time and effort on the part of the lecturer or tutor. However, it must be realised that this is where most of the interaction occurs in a distance education programmes (as opposed to what occurs in a full time class contacts) and therefore feedback is central to the whole process of teaching and learning. In the traditional classroom model, more time is allotted for personal interaction with students and therefore teachers are not encouraged to do so; in a distance education approach, this interaction is essential and must be a major part of the teaching and learning process.

Important documents getting lost

Respondent B was requested to highlight some areas that might have been missed in the interview. Names of people under attack at CES-UNAM were mentioned despite the researcher requesting the respondents earlier not to give names. The names have been cut out of the narration.

> How can we find our files elsewhere when we sent them to Windhoek? How do we become sure whether the marks we have been given is *(sic)* our own or they belong to some other students? It is not fair that our records are not in order especially when this is tied to re-registration and paying again. The programme has become expensive and only for those that have money (Respondent B – B.ED, Caprivi region).

The respondents A, C and E (BETD cohort) were probed to clarify the issue of marks. The researcher found out that the files of students were found in different regional centres torn apart. Examples of torn files were showed by Respondent C *(see Appendix D, pp.233-239).* "We suspect other students found our lost files and removed useful information from them and used them in preparing their own files" (Respondent C- BETD, Kavango Region) "Do you mean copying?" the student was asked by the researcher. The student asserted that it is common among BETD students that subject files and school-based activities (teaching practice) files were the ones that were easily targeted. "They are easily subjected to vandalism and they get lost more than the other files" (Respondent A – BETD, Caprivi Region).

Asked whether it is only assignments and the *(i) marks that get lost*, Respondent B said:

> No, even portfolios and files get lost. We sometimes keep sending identity documents, marriage certificates and other documents many times and they got lost especially when we are nearing graduation. You get surprised when they ask you of what was handed long time ago.

Above the other documents the B. Ed students Respondents B, F and D had problems with *(ii) observation files getting lost too.* Some of these files were never found by the students again. The lucky ones were found at different regional centres away from where the owners were staying.

In any organisation of distance education, the administrative support is of equal importance as the academic support. The two should work in tandem as the absence of the other weakens the whole system.

Important documents that get lost damage the image of distance education students. The effects could be seen in the eyes of the respondents as they insisted that there is nothing they could do if such valuable documents were lost. Keeping of records and all the data of the students have many advantages to distance education as it is in traditional education. Amongst others, students create confidence in the institution. Students provide the institution with any document that they are requested to submit. Lost files and portfolios provide opportunities to students to plagiarise from their colleagues' files. When such files and portfolios are kept away from the reach of other students opportunities for plagiarism are minimised and quality assignments are submitted.

Lack of support from student administration department (Galusha, 1998) may lead to dropping out of the programme (Sweet, 1986). Copies of captured marks should be kept by marker-tutors and the other copies be sent to the examination department for safe keeping. The other copy should be sent to CES-UNAM administration staff for computer. The present system where only one person keeps the mark should be done away with. It frustrates students, the academic support officers, and puts CES-UNAM in a bad picture to the public. CES-UNAM loses trust from the would-be students when such practices continue unabated. The quality of distance education is compromised.

Blaming academic support services without mentioning good student administration does not help the status of distance education at CES-UNAM. CES-UNAM needs administrators who have the knowledge of distance education so that they are enabled to understand what distance education students are and what surrounds them as they study. Such administrators will appreciate that students in distance education have certain needs. Administrators will be more aware of the difficulties and problems of distance education students in remote rural areas. Distance education students may feel inadequate for the course they have chosen. They may

have doubts about the degree issued by distance education institutions. It therefore requires that they should be encouraged at different stages of their programmes. They need reassurance and development of confidence right through their studies. Proper communication with such students is therefore of utmost importance at all stages of their studies. This is not suggested as to lower the quality of distance education. It is raised in this study to lift up the standards of distance education. When a student administration staff or academic support staff understands who distance education students are they eventually all work well for the betterment of the system of distance education.

Assignments and important documents should be properly kept at CES-UNAM. Good postal and record keeping systems have to be developed by CES-UNAM. As regional centres post assignments to the main campus for marking and recording, the main campus need to develop systems that easily account and retrieve posted assignments and documents.

4.3.3 THEME 3 Logistics/Personal and Natural Disasters

This theme further divided into subthemes namely:

- Family constraints
- Floods that make roads impassable
- Long distances from regional centres

Family constraints

Some families are large. The researcher found one family that kept eight members in a single and poor *lapa* (an enclosure with several huts) (*see Appendix F – reflections, pp.250-253 and Appendix D – photos, pp. 233-239*). Children in this *lapa* were not showed as the parent refused permission. Respondent F feared that the failure to finish on time would make him a family

reject. He was afraid that the other family members might think that he had just been wasting family financial resources.

When Respondent D was asked about what the student used as form of light while studying at school he replied that he used a gas bottle. It became difficult when the gas ran out.

> I have to stay for more than three weeks without light and doing nothing because I get my salary from Katima. There are no banks where I am, no ATMS – nothing. I only get money from Katima. No candles once they are finished from the small shop around here. Many schools within this part of the region suffer the same (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region)

As indicated earlier in Chapter 2, sections 2.12.1.1 and 2.11.1.2 on pages 69-71, there was no electricity, no telephone and no roads in these areas. The roads that were there were footpaths. They changed course each year depending on which parts of the land got drier faster. Even government vehicles used the same roads but in most cases only the four-wheel vehicles were used.

Students found it difficult to be *parents and students at the same time*. "I am with my children and my husband", stated Respondent F. Time was short for all that they wanted to do. It was complicated by the fact that their living environments did not allow them to find time after school work as no studying facilities were available (*see Appendix F – Reflections*).

The respondents have families to support. They found it difficult to support whoever they had at home and themselves during their studies. "With no electricity in the rural areas it is difficult to study at night. Night time is good because we can get away from our families" continued Document F (2006).

Age looked to be a high factor among the students that had enrolled for the BETD. Most of the students indicated that they would not gain anything from their studies if they kept failing their courses. "We are getting old, if I keep on failing I will be thrown out of the programme and lose my job. Can we get the necessary care from all our lecturers? Show us that you care by helping us when we need you" (Document F, 2006).

Floods that make roads impassable

With a greater voice, Respondent A (BETD, Caprivi Region) felt that flood is a natural disaster that cannot be controlled.

> Flood is not a threat for us who were born here. We enjoy it. It is only that one is inconvenienced if one does not have his/her own dugout canoe (*vuwato* – local name). It should be big enough to carry you safely, but, no one is used to something like water that can kill any time. Flood normally comes very big and losing your life is easy. So you cannot play around paddling every week to go to Kabbe where you can find transport to town to go and send your assignment at the regional centre. In some cases, we must negotiate with the regional centre head to cover us when assignments are late. It is difficult and makes the whole life of a student in these areas very difficult, (Respondent A - BETD, Caprivi Region).

This was what a respondent had to say despite the fact that *flood* negatively affected the student's learning time and the time that was needed to submit the assignments on time. On the other hand some respondents showed that flood was indeed a threat not only to their studies but also to their general welfare.

> It is difficult to row a canoe when you were not born in these areas. It is part of the tradition and culture that you should not be scared with so much water. It would have been better if it was boats that are using generated power *(sic)* not hands. When the winds blow, you do not know even what to do. The waves are higher and, oh, it is difficult. I don't think I can row about 40 km of water to reach the drier land. I wish I was not posted to this place, (Respondent B, 2008).

Long distances from regional centres

Distance and absence of public transport emerged from the discussions of the interviews. It looked highly characteristic of the remote rural students' lives. Remote rural distance education in this study looked at distance as being more geographical than transactional as seen by Martindale (2002). Distance and the unavailability of public transport to reach the regional centres on time looked intertwined with flood in the discussions that were commonly higher with the interviewees from the Caprivi region. An example was that of (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region) who taught about 90 km away from the regional centre. He was interviewed via telephone as it was not easy for the researcher to reach the student by land.

An announcement through the radio was made for the student to cross into Botswana where telephones were easily accessed than where the student taught. The student sent a signal of his availability for interviews through the short message *(sms)* to the researcher. This was about 130 km away from the point where the researcher was. A lengthy interview around the research question was conducted with a Bachelor of Education student living in the remotest part of the Caprivi region. Some key issues emerged from the interview and these included the effects of flood and the distance. The respondent remembered very well that November was near and his difficulties would soon begin. "From November when the rain is heavy, there is no transport that can make me to reach the centre in Katima except the canoe *(sic)*" (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region).

When the respondent was asked about *(ii) how frequent* he visited the centre in a month he had this to say:

> When I come for salaries or when I come for materials, it takes almost four days. Two days to come and two days to go back *(sic)*. If you have a problem with canoes or public transport it can even take a week. It is not easy to obtain permission from superiors to keep on going to town every one week of each month. It disturbs my teaching (Respondent D – B. Ed, Caprivi Region)

When the respondent was asked on how he easily could access the regional centre he stated that it was not easy. He would go through Zambia or Botswana as these places were near to his school. He paddled through even if there were risks of storms and hippos. He continued to state that when the floods were subsiding, some parts became shallow and navigation became difficult. Some areas demanded that the canoe must be pushed to the deepest ends. He had to fight against long grasses sometimes over 5 km to reach deeper waters where paddling was easier. When the streams could no longer be accessed by canoes, walking began. One could cover about 40 km of walking and crossing some streams that might still have water.

There are many dangers also associated with this trend of transportation. In the first place, it is far to reach the drier areas where public transportation is expected. Secondly, one could be rained down and the assignments and study materials that are being carried could get soaked. Lastly, there is no enough time to rewrite the assignments while in town as one might lose more days from work. As a result, the assignments would be submitted very late.

On the other hand, respondents C, E and F from the Kavango region indicated also distance as a main barrier during their studies. Apart from the main roads marked by the government, most roads that lead to schools in the remote rural areas were footpaths developed into roads used by motor vehicles. They required four wheel drive vehicles to access them. They were sandy and were difficult to access during the drier parts of the year when rain had not rained yet. This was in contrast to what rain brought for students of the Caprivi region. Sandy roads became good roads during the rainy season. Because of the use of the four drive vehicles, it became difficult to reach the regional centres when there was still time to either submit assignments or consult with the academic support officers at the centre as the four-wheel drive vehicles were scarce. The vehicles that used the roads were also scarce and in some cases students had to walk 20km to reach their nearest better roads for public transport.

One could see desperation and discomfort in the eyes of the student. The researcher had also to use a four wheel drive vehicle to reach the area of the student. The place was 140 km from town

and yet there were several schools situated within a 40 km radius of the vicinity. It was not easy for a student to know whether a friend nearby was doing the same subject. It was late when once in a while they all met during the vacation school. They might not have met again as the distance between their places was too wide and could not be easily done on foot.

Though distance from regional centres and flood formed part of the major themes, the researcher felt that much presentation and analysis should focus on the academic and administrative barriers and generally the surrounding environment that included the distance and the flood. The study materials theme was embedded into the academic and administrative major themes. The sections below therefore focused more the academic and administrative barriers in relation to student support services offered by CES-UNAM as possible solutions.

Frustrations were showed by Respondent C (BETD, Kavango Region) vented with anger against CES-UNAM and what was seen as a weakness in the government's development policies.

> I wish the office could understand our problems. It is not easy studying in the inland (remote rural areas) as distance is killing us. There is nowhere you can go to the regional office many times in a month. I have a small sedan car but I leave it in town because I can't use it in the inland. Something must be done with our roads, electricity and telephone lines. We are in the dark when our friends in town can just walk to the regional centre and find what they want. Too bad, very bad (sic). The development is slow. We don't know when electricity and these are other facilities will reach inland schools, (Respondent C – BETD, Kavango Region).

As stated earlier Caprivi and Kavango regions are wide and the road infrastructure is not so good. Document C blamed the failure to write examinations on time, inability to consult with the tutors during weekends, consulting with the tutors in the week and visiting the regional centres regularly to the long distance from learner support facilities that are found in remote rural areas.

This is seen in Table 4.5 (Effects Matrix) below that summarised the effects. Seeing that the main barriers had effects on students, questions were posed on the second visit to respondents intending to find out what effect(s) had slow completion rate on the students.

Effect type	***During studies***	***After studies***
Academic	• "Hesitates to attend vacation school" • Write poor assignments • Performs poorly in assignments and examinations • "Try to change modules or area of specialisation" • Eventually drops if it does not work	• No trust in CES-UNAM • Transfers to other institutions of higher learning • "May never want to study with UNAM again" • Loses confidence in UNAM's lecturers
Administrative	• No respect for submission of proper work • Can easily plagiarise/copy • Removes materials from colleague's files	• No trust in CES-UNAM • "No respect for UNAM quality in record keeping" • Eventually drops
Surrounding environment	• No support for and from the family • "Seen as a failure/wasting meagre resources" • Hate the environment • Performs poorly at school/where employed	• May never want to talk about education any more • Public embarrassment

Table 4.5: Effects Matrix

Respondents were also asked on what they do when the academic and administrative difficulties listed in Table 4.6 surround them. The Thematic Conceptual Matrix adapted from Huberman & Miles, 1994.131-133) below shows the answers that respondents gave.

Barriers	***Possible Coping Strategies by remote rural students***	
	Academic barriers	*Administrative barriers*
1. Inadequate/poor feedback and meaningless comments	"I just have to memorise in order to pass" "I ignore what I have received" "I sometimes ask friends who have done the same course if I find them when I am in town" "I insist to go for vacation school maybe I might see the one who wrote the comments and ask for clarity"	"there is nothing I can do, I just ignore their failures" "I trace my own documents until I find them" "I wish I could take them to court to defend my case especially if regional centre records shows that I sent the documents"
1.Unavailable/late study materials	"I borrow books from fulltime friends" "I ask fulltime students to quickly look for me materials at CES stores in Windhoek" "I ask the names of students who have graduated and cal them to help with materials if they have them"	"They are difficult to work with, I just ignore them" "I insist to register for courses that I see have materials on the shelves"

Table 4.6 Thematic Conceptual Matrix on coping strategies

It was clear from the responses above that respondents had some difficulties during their studies. As human beings would do, they therefore devised ways on how they would deal with what was affecting them.

Students were also asked to shade some light on how they cope up with the barriers they face in their natural environment. Most responses centred on their families and the places that are supposed to be used for their studies. Quotations in Table 4.2, page 115, from respondents show that the academic and administrative support base for CES-UNAM has done little to help students do well in their studies. It is natural that human beings would always find ways to handle problems around them. Some do well while others fail. Most of the remote rural areas students fall under the group that may completely fail to cope with the difficulties in distance education and my thus drop out.

Family Constraints

The researcher could clearly see throughout the discussion that students were not happy with CES-UNAM. The difficulties they encountered during their studies have had some effects on their lives for many following years.

As seen in Chapter 2 of this study, pages 34 and 35 distance education students are self motivated, but could find life very difficult. They have many obstacles in their daily lives (Kember, 1988). Some of the obstacles are psychological in nature and it was very difficult to interpret the behaviour that occurred during the interviews or visits. For example, young children came around disturbing their parents during our interview discussions. Some children came running to inform the teacher under interviews that the teacher needed to stop what we were doing and attend to the problem on the school grounds. This was a school where teachers were only three and the teacher under interviews was the only one at the school premises that time to take care of all school programmes. All these disturbances showed that distance education

students differ considerably from the full time students who in most cases are in classrooms listening to the lecturer or other students.

Students were also asked to shed some light on how they coped up with the barriers they face in their natural environment. Most responses centred on their families and the places that are supposed to be used for their studies. Quotations in Table 4.2 on page 115 from respondents show that the academic and administrative support base for CES-UNAM has done little to help students do well in their studies. It is natural that human beings would always find ways to handle problems around them. Some do well while others fail. Most of the remote rural areas students fall under the group that may completely fail to cope with the difficulties in distance education and may thus drop out.

Termination of service for civil servants appeared to be a serious threat that shook numerous teachers who were not qualified. Some of them who are being threatened to leave their jobs fail to finish their studies within a specified time. The BETD and B.ED groups under study were given up to 31 December 2007 to finish their studies or face termination. "As per the Memo of Understanding signed on 15 December 1999 between the Ministry of Education and NANTU (Namibia National Teachers Union) with regard to the professionally under and unqualified teachers aimed to achieve equity in all education Regions (sic), please take note of the followings: (sic) The Memorandum effectively gave under and unqualified teachers a grace period of eight (8) years to upgrade/complete their qualifications ....If you did not upgrade your qualifications by the end of 2007 you will no longer enjoy employment protection ...." (Ministry of Education, 2007). This is a serious threat and may cause a lot of anxiety among students.

The threat touched areas of job security which feeds into how such affected teachers would eventually support their families. Students began to panic and as the imminent termination of service affected many students when study materials are not in order. What affects one in the family also spills over one's studies. It is very difficult for students to take examinations when family responsibilities interfere with their studies.

Kishore (1998) observes that several major responsibilities are needed in place in order to support distance education students. Students in remote rural areas need conducive environments to learn, the methods in learning should be facilitated in the way their study materials are written all the time and they must be encouraged to continue learning. We have seen in Chapter 2 pages 34 and 35 of this research study, that the social environments in which students find themselves have a tremendous impact on their motivation, attitudes and learning (McIsaac, 1993). It is important that even remote rural students find learning environments that are conducive to individual work habits or else they will fail dismally in their efforts to upgrade themselves. We have been reminded by many researchers (Gatta, 2002; Rovai, 2002 and Sikora & Carroll, 2002) that distance education students have complex settings in which they operate. It is worse when such students are in remote rural areas. With older age, jobs and families, remote rural students are likely to be affected by misfortunes such as death and sickness of neighbours than their counterparts in urban areas. Teachers in remote rural areas are seen as leaders in the community and anything that happens affects the learning environment of the student.

Distance education students in Caprivi and Kavango have a diverse profile that could make it difficult for students to access all the academic support services that CES-UNAM offers. The absence of good infrastructure coupled with the geographical distance students cover in both regions negatively affected students in remote rural areas. The government should find ways to overcome the barrier for both the students and people living in the flooded areas.

As a natural phenomenon, flood is beyond human control. It is difficult for CES-UNAM to control natural disasters such as *floods*. Although floods are God-directed phenomena, CES-UNAM could still needs to devise ways on how to support students who are affected by floods. Mobile academic support staff could be deployed to help them during their relocation periods. It is easier for students to shelve their studies during such times as floods disturb several routines of life.

Distance from regional centres is outside the influence of CES-UNAM. Students that are place in schools that are far away from the regional centres need to be supported like any in urban areas. Increased support should be made available to students in remote rural areas.
It emerged as a new barrier in distance education for students in remote areas of the Caprivi region because the Caprivi floods cover wider areas making it different from what the world has known.

CES-UNAM could still go back to radio programmes as a means of reaching all students in such areas as this has proved to be effective in many developing countries such Ethiopia and Somali where the Interactive Radio Instruction for Somalis (IRIS) is working well. As stated by (Respondent D, 2008), radio coverage in the remote areas of the regions is a positive step for CES-UNAM to develop further.

As much as greater geographical distances, compounded by floods still exist, steep challenges for delivering helpful instructions to students in Caprivi region will keep on escalating. There is a great need that the private sector should begin investing in the better delivery of guidance to distance education via radio in the remotest and rural areas of the country. CES-UNAM cannot at the moment, on its own carry the burden. For example, as mentioned above, interactive radio can provide students in remote rural areas with active and student-centred lessons. It is not easy to remove people from the flooding areas as they were born there and their culture is tied up with the phenomenon. Gradual levels of development must step in to help them understand the situation before they could surrender the cultural living zones. Political commitment to distance education must be solid and should not lose its quality in the end.

It was clear from the discussion with the respondents that they desired to have equity of distribution of infrastructure in all parts of Namibia to enhance their opportunities of study. They also showed that they wanted to see the comfort that is enjoyed by students in urban areas also reaching them in remote rural areas. It is unfortunate as this situation cannot be the same. However, students in remote rural areas should begin to understand that it will take a long time for them to have telephone and electricity installed in all parts of the country. These amenities need national policies that will place them in all parts of the country. CES-UNAM depends on

national policies for it to introduce online teaching effectively covering also the remote rural areas. It is also difficult and costly for CES-UNAM to run separate but parallel programmes for students in remote rural areas and those in urban areas. This will also compromise the quality of education. Geographical isolation has been identified as one of the major problems for distance students (Meacham and Evans, 1989 and Christopher, 2004).

Knowing that transactional distance (Moore, 1990; Saba & Shearer, 1994 and Moore & Kearsley, 1996) will always exist in distance education, greater care should be given to students in remote rural areas. While adult learners are returning to school for a variety of reasons, each one must cope with the explosion of electronic information. As these adults increasingly engage in lifelong learning, they have different needs for training and assistance. In the midst of an ever-changing electronic environment, adult learners must learn new technology skills in order to survive. It is not sufficient that an adult learner will always give colleagues their own work for typing or asking a colleague to browse the World Wide Web for information that they would need for their studies. Distance education students need to learn how to use the modern devices such as computers and laptops for information storage (Sarkodie-Mensah, 2000). “Since most students have little experience learning at a distance, they are unfamiliar with it and may be anxious about taking distance education courses” (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 176).

Appropriate various media of communication should be kept in mind when planning for distance education in remote rural areas (Martindale, 2002). Students need to learn how to communicate with their tutors and other students via computer technology because of the rise of technology use in distance education courses in colleges and universities. According to Moore and Kearsley (2005), “the most common reason for taking a distance education course is to develop or upgrade the skills and knowledge needed in employment” (p.162). As a result, distance education students should upgrade their skills and knowledge with the readiness to face new technology for their use in studies.

CES-UNAM students may fail to access the internet and other technological advances as advocated by Martindale (2002), but, their ordeal is far from being over. There remains the greatest challenge in Namibia where the whole country needs to be covered with electricity connections as this aids access. Their availability will aid efficient service and support to students off campus and thus reduce interpersonal distance, nurture interaction, increase feedback, and enhance learning and message transfer.

As distance education continues to emerge as an alternative for delivering formal education, barriers affecting student-tutor communication should always be kept in mind. These barriers confront distance educators with a variety of communication problems directly affecting the teaching/learning process.

The researcher could clearly see throughout the discussion that students are not happy with CES-UNAM. The difficulties they encountered during their studies have some effects on their lives for many years to come. The situation (Table 4.5, p. 161) where respondents showed that barriers had effects on them has meaning to the researcher and distance education practitioners. As seen in Chapter 2, pages 34 and 35 of this study, remote rural distance education students like others are self motivated, but could find life very difficult as seen in the table above. They have many obstacles in their daily lives. Some of the obstacles are psychological in nature and it was very difficult to interpret the behaviour that occurred during the interviews or visits. For example, young children came around disturbing their parents during our interview discussions. Some children came running around to inform the teacher under interviews that the teacher to stop what we were doing and attend to the problem on the school grounds. All these disturbances showed that distance education students differ considerably from the full time students who in most cases are in classrooms listening to the lecturer or other students. A concept mind map (Diagram 4) on page 138 showed how students in remote rural areas suffer and eventually drop out as a result of inadequate academic support. The mind map was drawn from a question that sought to find out how poor and inadequate feedback affects students in distance education.

It is not part of the system of distance education that students should "hesitate to attend vacation school" or decide to "try to change modules or area of specialisation" each year. Students need to enjoy what their studies offer. What they learn has meaning in their lives now and forever. It shapes them to be better or worse practitioners. CES-UNAM should not be perceived as offering substandard quality of education. The graduates of CES-UNAM need to trust the institution. In this way, they will go on to market distance education not only to their regions but the world of distance education. It is essentially important that students of CES-UNAM do not jut "ignore what [they] received" from the institution. Students should appreciate and value their form of education.

Distance education, regardless of the technology used, places unexpected demands on students and teachers. *Family constraints* are everywhere with all different kinds of students. Such family constraints are seen with distance education students. It is worse with students in remote rural areas. CES-UNAM cannot alleviate the constraints that are experienced by students in remote rural areas. The Centre can help students by teaching them organisational skills. For example, students need to create time for their studies. They need to arrange with their family members to give them ample opportunities for their studies. They need to negotiate with their families to support them financially and socially.

Patterns and relationships that emerged from the study

From the discussions and conclusions above, several theories emerged which were studied with the theoretical frameworks of this study (Chapter 2, section 2.2, pages 30-39). For example, looking at Garrison (1990) on pages 36-37, he argued that students who have higher interaction with their lecturers and other students have higher motivation rate. The case for the remote rural students presented the researcher of this study with an exact understanding. Students who have less interaction with their lecturers and other students have low motivation. The absence of frequent dialogue with their lecturers and other students (interaction theory) made students under

study develop situations where they felt it was not the right choice for them to take up distance studies while in remote rural areas.

Coupled with this theory is the fact that students in remote rural areas demonstrated that other students have some influence on their completion or success rates (vicarious interaction theory argued by Seaton, 1993 and Kearsley, 1995). The absence of other students within the learning environment negatively influenced the motivation and attitude towards learning of the students under study.

Learning environments contribute to how knowledge is constructed (social interaction, page 36 of Chapter 2). A test of the theory of Krajick, *et. al.,* (1999) demonstrated that he absence of resource references such as libraries contributed to the weak assignments of students in remote rural areas. The low internal drive in students affected students' progression. Meaningful and effective feedback as a form of tutorials comprises a large part of distance education. Remote rural students' perceptions and that f tutors and lecturers on feedback is important in distance education.

Student-student interactions were not meaningful in this case study. It developed from this study that the Centre did not emphasise interactions in any form and students did not even dare demand it from the Centre. If Moore (1989) is serious with this form of interaction, the Centre should then engage it with its students and lecturers.

4.4 Chapter Summary

We have learnt of three main barriers that affect distance education students in Caprivi and Kavango regions. These are academic, administrative and logistics, personal and natural disasters. Amongst others, meaningful feedback received the highest attention in the discussions with the respondents. Some students have had time in their studies when they decided to stop for

a while and continue when time may seem convenient for them. It has not worked like that and students have decided to go back to their studies as a result of pressure from losing their jobs.

We have seen that rains and flood continue to affect students differently in the two regions. Distance from the nearest regional centre also emerged as students do not seem to find a solution to it. This has affected their studies and their educational plans. As a result of the above barriers, distance education students in these areas are always in fear and desperation. They are constantly afraid that if they do not finish their programmes in time they would have lost their jobs and this will drastically affect their family set ups.

We have also seen that there are several facilities that distance education students in the regions under study do not access. In some cases, it is because they do not know of their presence while in some cases it is merely the fact that students do not know how to use them. Students need academic support and optimum feedback is one of the solutions to students in remote rural areas.

The next chapter looks at the conclusions and the recommendations drawn from the data presented.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the conclusions were derived from the findings of the study on *barriers to remote rural students' access of distance education support services offered by the Centre for External Studies at the University of Namibia.* The implications of the findings and the resultant recommendations were presented using the research question as the base. The study therefore endeavoured to do this by interviewing past students of two programmes that the CES-UANM offered to practising teachers on a part-time basis through distance education in Namibia.

5.2 Overview of the study.

The study was explorative, descriptive in nature and contextual qualitative study. The researcher adopted an interpretive approach to achieve the objectives of the study. A case study approach was followed over a period of almost two months with the participants before getting out of sites. Six distance education students narrated their cases through interviews supported by documents written to the Department of Student Support Services CES-UNAM. The researcher worked alone as no co-researcher was enlisted. After extensive visits of two months to the interviewed respondents and the six written documents, three main themes were extrapolated. These included the academic, administrative and logistics, personal and natural disasters support. Conclusions and recommendations in this chapter therefore are written under the above three main themes.

The conclusions and recommendations described below were centred on the experiences of six respondents, the research questions, objectives and the themes that emerged from data analysis.

The four main questions that guided the study were:

i. What barriers face distance education students from remote rural northeast regions of Namibia studying with CES-UNAM?
ii. What are the effects of these barriers on the total lives of the students?
iii. Is the current way of supporting remote rural distance education students at CES-UNAM effective and efficient?
iv. Can this current way of supporting students in remote rural areas be improved to accelerate completion rates?

These endeavoured to answer the main research question: *What barriers do remote rural students face when accessing student support services offered by the CES-UNAM?* By answering this question, the study achieved the following objectives:

i. Investigate, examine and determine barriers that face distance education students from remote rural areas of Namibia studying with CES-UNAM;
ii. Examine current CES-UNAM student support service for distance education students in remote rural areas
iii. Establish effective and efficient student support services for students in remote rural areas;
iv. Contribute to the theory on student support for distance education
v. Make recommendations that could work for remote rural students for the CES-UNAM

The first research question investigated the barriers face distance education students from remote rural northeast regions of Namibia studying with CES-UNAM. The study has found out that there are three main barriers that affect distance education students in remote rural areas of Namibia. Although the barriers that emerged in this study may be the same with barriers that affect all distance education students, their effect is more severe on the students in remote rural areas. This is so because remote rural areas are complicated by the absence of academic support in the first place and the harshness of the surrounding environment that is complicated by

logistics, personal problems and natural disasters. Secondly, many facilities such as telephone lines, electricity, public roads and state or public transportation services are absent or are inadequate. Of course, CES-UNAM cannot install all the facilities listed in this study, but the nearness of academic support should be provided. Thirdly, respondents mentioned other barriers that cover administrative issues.

The second research question investigated the effects of these barriers on the studies of the students. The findings of the study showed that respondents were frustrated and angry at the way CES-UNAM has treated them. As a result a good number has either transferred to other institutions of higher learning or have totally dropped out. Students that dropped out felt embarrassed in their lives and blamed CES-UNAM for their failure.

The third research question examined whether the current way of supporting remote rural distance education students at CES-UNAM are effective and efficient. The study found that CES-UNAM has failed in addressing the needs of remote rural areas. CES-UNAM has services that do not cover all its students. Students in urban areas have access to telephone contacts. They can easily attend vacation school. They can visit the library in the week and use the computers. There is also electricity in town that could aid the use audiotapes and videotapes. There is no support system that has been put in place in the above areas of support to specifically target students from remote rural areas. For example, the power of radio instruction communication by tutorial letters have not been used make up for the inability of electronic communication to reach the remote rural areas. While it is true that CES-UNAM has no political power to ensure that remote rural areas have electricity and the other facilities that are lacking to facilitate learning, using existing opportunities is an advantage for CES-UNAM to explore. Their provision could help students in remote rural areas greatly.

Lastly, from the discussions with the respondents and study of the written documents, the researcher interrogated the responses to see whether the current way of supporting students at CES-UNAM could be improved. The results are that students in remote rural areas need

effective academic support. A system should be put in place to help such students. The vacation schools could support the cellular phones and radio instruction in situations where facilities such as videoconferencing and internet based instruction is failing. The results are that many support services at CES-UNAM could still be improved for example; face to face contacts could be encouraged to cover all students irrespective of their geographical distances (*see Table 4.3 on pages 117*). Vacation school could be done a week after schools close. In this way students could have a week to move to towns where they could find public transport in time for the start of the vacation school. The present practice of beginning vacation schools just after the closure of schools is not helpful to students who are far away from public transport.

Even if CES-UNAM seems to have student support services that have been mentioned in Chapter 3 of this study, the services are not adequate. It was for the reason that the researcher needed to delve more to understand the barriers that are associated with students in the two regions. Looking at Chapter 2 of this study, one would find that the three main barriers under study were common in previous studies. The intriguing dimension of the barriers is how they are to be understood when experienced under the effects of flood and distant places from regional centres.

The wider coverage of floods in the Caprivi region places numerous barriers on students studying through distance education. It is not a stream or river that must be crossed but students face flood plains as wide as 40 km during the months of March to June each year. This is compounded by the absence of infrastructure that could support such students in terms of computer mediated communication technologies. Worse still is the fact that students are far away from one another, from the regional centres where support is accessed, the libraries at regional centres are closed during weekends, the roads are bad during flood times and communication between the students and their tutors is inadequate.

The inaccessibility of roads and poor infrastructure in Kavango region also has a bad effect on the students studying through distance education. Schools are distant from each other and as a

result students cannot easily find their friends to share areas of study that they find difficult to understand. In most cases the areas where students teach are not visited by tutors from the nearest regional centres. Some schools are as 160 km into the hinterlands far away from the regional centres. During winter the roads are so sandy that only the use of 4 x 4 vehicles can access the areas. The libraries are also not in use during weekends.

In the above cases, students find it very difficult to study as their families expect them to finish and become stronger breadwinners. The longer the programme the more students find it difficult to concentrate and continue with their studies.

5.3 Implications for theory

The researcher briefly reviewed several theories in the related literature in Chapter 2 of this study. They are revisited in this chapter not to disprove them but to see whether they could generate possible theories around what is already known. The transactional theory Moore (1983) and later Saba (1998) was overviewed in relation to the situations where most of the students that were studied lived during their studies. While the researcher agrees with how transactional theory builds and affects distance education in general, there is more that needs to be explored when it comes to students in remote rural areas. Transactional distance theory is intertwined with clusters of dialogue, structure and learner autonomy. Structure according to Martindale (2002) refers to the actual design of the course, the organisation of the instruction and the use of various media of communications. It is imperative that the transactional theory be revisited with greater focus on students that are in remote areas like the ones that have been focused in this study. It is essential that when designing distance education courses, the lecturers anticipate that the future learners may never meet the instructor face to face. This is true for students that teach in remote rural areas. CES-UNAM might have well designed their courses but interaction and learner autonomy have been hampered by the lack of person to person communication and the surrounding environments. The use of appropriate media such as radio and text/tutorial letter has been neglected at the expense of modern technology that cannot be accessed at the moment by distance education students in Namibia. CES-UNAM has found this challenge difficult and

should endeavour by all means to understand this transactional challenge and also find ways on how to minimise it

Interaction theory in Chapter 2, pp. 34-36 of this study, briefly reviewed interaction between student and the instructor. The conclusion was that dialogue between the student and the teacher is far from being realised at CES-UNAM. Many students felt that the teacher-student interaction had little effect on them. Their motivation was low and needed some more interaction with tutors to raise it. The remote rural students' interaction with the content (how students obtain intellectual information from the text) appeared to be quite better when compared to how the other variables of interaction fared. For learning to occur, either alone, or in a group, the student must interact with, and process, the content of the course. It is unfortunate that remote rural students felt that they did not really learn much from their content. Respondent D and E had only to memorise the content and later regurgitate it during the examinations. Content cannot merely pass before being cognitively processed. The processing of such content is meant to facilitate other learning in the future students' learning activities. The last part of this theory is that students should exchange ideas among themselves. It is difficult for remote rural students to exchange ideas as they are scattered and may not even know that there exists another student doing the same programme as theirs. More future research focusing on interaction in remote rural areas could shed more knowledge in ODL.

While Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has roused interest amongst researchers because it is one type of educational technology that reaches students synchronously and asynchronously (Salmon, 2000), it has not fared well in developing countries. Computer based communication is demanding and time consuming both for administrators, student counsellors and tutors. There are still many questions that remain unanswered or that are only partially answered. For instance, how will students generally accept electronic communication in distance education? Despite CMC being flexible and has freedom for students, how will students in remote rural areas integrate electronic learning into their poorly developed areas? How can this technology be applied to represent a more attractive and efficient learning environment for

distance students? How can CES-UNAM design academic and administrative systems to make distance education based on CMC really cost-effective?

From these questions, there is a need for CES-UNAM to investigate how CMC could be used to support its students in remote rural areas. The introduction of wireless connections for example could be an alternative that could be investigated on how to support students in remote rural areas. The source of power for devices that would be used in wireless connection also needs to be investigated as remote rural students are far removed from sources of power. Academics and administrators that are well vested with the use of CMC in learning believe that presenting the students to Internet as a resource of information and means of communication solves the problem of offering effective and efficient education at a distance. The conclusion in this study is that this is not the case at CES-UNAM. The challenge for CES-UNAM as a distance education institution is to find ways of planning, organising and carrying out teaching in ways that will help students learn according to individual needs independent of time and place restrictions. This means that the medium itself does not solve any problems. CES-UNAM must learn how to design instructional programmes that include student learning activities based on CMC to achieve optimal outcomes for different kinds of learners in different subjects having different aims and objectives. These programmes should keep in mind how to support students in remote rural areas.

Patterns and relationships proposed by social context and locus theorists such as Boyd (1966) that being a matured and experienced adult one can manage oneself well do not apply fully in remote rural contexts. The researcher found that the attitude of students towards learning in such difficult times waivers. It fluctuates according to the personal and environmental factors surrounding students. The learning style for students is determined by the pressure that surrounds them during studies. The researcher also came to conclude that the social context for remote rural students is affected by the presence of the community. The community sees them as leaders in the first place. Communities see them as people that might have a vehicle to use during many misfortunes that befall them, or as people that have money despite how little the teachers might receive. That role makes students assume multiple roles and lessen their

opportunities to study well. They lose the inner drive that could have helped them stand fast in times when no academic or administrative staffs are seen within a period of five to six months during their studies.

To understand more what is suggested by the researcher in this section, the Baynton (1992) model of locus control needs to be revised. Baynton proposed independence, competence and support as the basis of higher motivation and drive in distance education. Remote rural areas need structured study materials with higher interactions to make their lifelong learning time to be more meaningful. They do not need materials that might be loaded with too much work that they cannot carry out properly as libraries that could give them extra information are removed from them. Remote rural students need to choose their own content even if programmes for the institution are predetermined. This is better learner control mechanism over their progress.

The advent of CMC as promoting student interactions and enhancing learning outcomes needs wider investigation at CES-UNAM. Bruce *et. al.*, (2005) suggest that the web has the ability to provide student interactions and multiple paths for learning. Students can have greater control over information access, individualised pacing and timing and with more support in the inquiry process when student interactions are promoted in distance education. Lebaron and Miller (2005) advocate the vast possibilities offered by effective online design. They suggested entry to a global range of resources, 24/7 interaction within a purposeful learning community, convenience of access, and opportunities for reflective dialogue.

At the same time, for CES-UNAM to join the e-learning world, CES-UNAM needs to develop skills in helping students, lecturers and tutors adjust to the unique features of distance education. Students must be able to motivate themselves and manage their own time wisely. They should take responsibility for their own learning and participate in the give-and-take of electronic discussions (Rovai, 2003). Students must also take initiative, be resourceful, demonstrate persistence, and believe in their ability to organise and carry out the actions needed to engage in learning (Derrick, 2003).

The lack of adequate training may prevent tutors from fully participating in the distance education practices (Galusha, 1998), especially considering that they have to spend twice as much time in preparing and delivering an online course as compared to a traditional course (Willis, 1994). With all of the challenges facing distance education, studies show that distance learning students desire content and motivational support beyond course materials and are limited in their success without it (Williams, 2006). Distance education practitioners should therefore ready themselves through negotiated government expansions of the needed technology to venture such kind of effective and affordable technology.

In the case of improved radio instruction and wireless instruction, *collaborative learning* or self study groups is one of the solutions to the situation of remote rural students. Anzalone (1987) concluded that radio in particular can increase access to and improve the quality of instruction. They should be helped by CES-UNAM to find colleagues that they can collaborate with during their period of studies. Swan (2003) pointed out that students' interactions among classmates as being one of the five areas of interactivity. Therefore, promoting student interactions in distance education courses is important for setting up a lifelong learning community.

5.4 *Policy and practice*

It is important that policies on distance education are developed in Namibia. In a situation where policy issues are non-existent distance education providers with dubious educational provisions arise. Policy is the overarching umbrella under which organisations and their approaches to distance education evolve. Policy influences the organisational mission statements that are meant to be aligned with national and increasingly international development objectives. In the case of Namibia, the main policy issues should address the question of access through the development of ICTs to an increasingly large number of people that are still in remote rural areas. In addressing the question care should be taken that the numbers who may be reached should not be receiving inappropriate education that may not enhance personal development as a result of the barriers that stand in their way. The quality of such provision then becomes questionable.

The planning of distance learning in Namibia should involve policy issues at national and institutional level. The international issues arise in part because the forces of globalisation are affecting the content and practices of education and in particular distance education in remote rural areas (Perraton, 1998). The absence of facilities such as public roads, electricity and telephone lines is a national barrier in Namibia as a developing country. While the international developed world sees CMC as the option to transactional distance in distance education, they should also rise to help countries develop their infrastructure to a level where ITC becomes the best option for delivering instructions to even remote rural areas. The absence of such a negotiated delivery adversely affects distance education in the slowly developing world.

Despite the research carried out by the WGDEOL pointing to the fact that has not fully benefited from their electronic potential it is still possible that Namibia can still investigate the possibilities of covering its population with network thus reducing several barriers that slow the progress of its learning population (WGDEOL 2002, 2003). Africa has only failed because of its lack of sound policy initiatives, adequate indigenous expertise and infrastructure and the negative past experiences in the design and implementation of programmes and projects using these technologies.

Namibia needs an enabling policy framework that would allow the emergence of effective, efficient and sensible management systems focusing on organising, directing, coordinating, planning, budgeting and optimum use of resources. The policy framework should also cater for the development of students engaged in distance education initiatives as well as the national development of a country. Namibia should also begin to see policies that will keep CES-UNAM and other legitimate distance education students in line with the international expectations. Careful planning, based on sound knowledge of who is going to learn what, by what means, in what kind of circumstances, to what effect and with what purpose in mind, needs to be combined with effective ways to ensure, through formative evaluation based on feedback from the learner, that intended purposes are met at CES-UNAM. The essence of quality in academic support

services is embodied in the expertise and skills of the staff and in their capacity to build positive relationships with their students. We have seen a wide variety of student types with a wide variety of difficulties as they study while in remote rural areas. Such varieties pose a great challenge in designing, organising and administering student support services that may be common for all students, courses and programmes, which though may be specific for students and courses.

Policy makers at the CES-UNAM need to find answers to the demographic factors that have been raised by students in remote rural areas of Caprivi and Kavango regions. Their age and gender do not easily allow students to paddle long flooded distances to reach regional centres for academic support. Their employment and circumstances of learning have an effect on their studies too. Policy makers need to find more on whether students can study at home, have access to a telephone or electricity, and whether they are able to use any other form of a device that could be used without electrical power such as solar panels. Policy initiatives that promote supportive relationships and rich learning opportunities for distance education students create a strong foundation for higher achievement followed by greater productivity in the workplace and solid citizenship in the community.

As Johnston (1997:120) aptly put it: "there is no alternative but to face the inevitability of a profound impact of new technology on teaching and learning and to work to establish a rich educational environment within that framework…". Tertiary educational institutes need to respond to the requirements of the information society to ensure that educational principles govern future post-secondary education. How they should effectively respond to such technological advances is something that policy makers need to respond to with speed and proper timing.

There is a need that the *study guides* allow students with great latitude to develop skills in writing quality assignments and projects thereof. If study guides are developed, CES-UNAM must put up a policy on how the study guides will be designed and written. The unavailability or

late study materials as a barrier need serious attention at CES-UNAM. CES-UNAM need to decide on what will be the policy on study materials, whether CES-UNAM will be writing and producing their own study materials or will be buying from other ODL providers. CES-UNAM should decide whether bought materials will be adapted or used in their original state.

5.5 Private sector manager

Namibia has just seen a variety of private institutions continuing to grow and change as the needs for continuing education and training grow and change. Driving this expansion is the perceived need for individuals and foreign universities mushrooming to deliver specialized training programmes. The non-governmental organisations want to offer the training nationally or regionally irrespective of what support remote rural area students need. They do it because of the technological advances that have made such offerings feasible. Lastly, they want to do it because of the vigorous marketing policies that drive them to gain access into the country for specialised programmes.

While this expansion is desirable, the private sector should also contribute to the policies of the national government that will ensure proper infrastructure, administrative and academic support that will cater for remote rural distance education students a well. The institutions should be regulated within the public policy framework of the national government. For example, Namibia has seen after independence the interest that the World Bank, the UK Department for International Development and the Commonwealth of Learning showing interest in broad-based development. These agencies need to consider issues such as

- Should they be reactive or proactive after seeing all the barriers that have emerged in this study affecting remote rural distance education students?
- Should they develop and deliver programmes or serve merely as facilitators?
- Should projects be government to government, government to institution, or institution to institution and funded by an agency-or should they follow some other structure?
- What part should the Ministry of Education in Namibia play in regulating development projects?

- What part should CES-UNAM play when these development projects are being rolled out by the Ministry of Education?

Good answers to the above questions will help CES-UNAM reach all its students regardless of distance or where they are during their study period.

5.6Public sector policy analysts and managers

Distance education is defined by Perraton (1986) as 'an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and time from the learner.' The link between that 'someone' and the learner is provided by different means of communication and instructional support.

In considering how CES-UNAM fits into the context set by national policy, CES-UNAM needs to ask themselves questions such as these:

- How do national and regional differences in strategic planning affect distance education policies?
- Does Namibia’s strategic planning affect the provision of distance education?
- What is the role of the private sector in distance education nationally and regionally?
- What is the role of government infrastructure policy and regulation in distance education? The potential advantages of the information revolution should prompt efforts by the Namibian government to support changes in the nature and reach of information delivery infrastructure.
- What are the legislative issues affecting distance education?
- Has political leadership played a major part in the development of distance education? If not, when will this begin to take place?

The national strategic management on the establishment of infrastructure needs to address the interest and concerns of the CES-UNAM distance education administration, academics and students.

We have seen the results that our research question has yielded. For the learning process to be effective, it should provide ways for the distance learner to communicate back to the distant teacher. This allows students to play an active role in their own learning and helps to overcome the sense of isolation students often experience in a distance education environment. Broadening the communication environment to include student-student interaction, besides student-teacher interaction, constitutes a further improvement of the system.

The success of distance education solutions is contingent upon their being an integrated part of educational policies, investment plans and the creation of budgetary mechanisms to meet recurrent costs if these are not to be recovered from the end users. Policy makers should consider increasing the availability of parent education and family support programs that have been demonstrated to be effective. Within this context, the time has come to begin to close the gap between what we know (from systematic scientific inquiry across a broad range of disciplines) and what we do (through both public and private sector policies and practices) to promote good practices for our student body.

The need to address significant inequalities in study opportunities is both a fundamental moral responsibility and a critical investment in our nation's social and economic future. As such, it is a compelling task that calls for broad bipartisan collaboration between CES-UNAM and the government to reach all students irrespective of places of employment. And yet, debate in the policy arena often highlights ideological differences and value conflicts more than it seeks common interest. In this context, the science of open and life-long learning can provide a values-neutral framework for informing choices among alternative priorities and for building consensus around a shared plan of action.

5.7 Recommendations for further research

This study concluded that the experience of the students at CES-UNAM have barriers that are more complicated than their counterparts in urban areas. The various barriers that emerged from both the interviews and documents demonstrated that there is still a need for the CES-UNAM to endeavour by all means to reach its student body with all facilities at its disposal irrespective of where students find themselves during their study periods.

5.7.1 Academic support

For greater effectiveness and responsiveness in distance education, the researcher recommends that student support services need to be decentralised to regional centres in order to focus on students' psychological, pedagogical and social needs. The current system where all students have their academic support services based in fewer regional centres does not help students in remote rural areas. Lecturers are too far from the students. The cost of having regional academic support officers therefore needs research.

Addressing the perceptions, fears and concerns of academic staff in order to change their attitudes towards feedback to distance education students is also necessary for further research. CES-UNAM should invest in investigating the current perceptions of feedback mechanism. The perceptions and experiences of lecturers on how students use feedback could also contribute to this study. The use of radio instruction and short messages to support distance education student in remote rural areas of Namibia need further studies. More research into instructional methods and models is needed to identify those that work well in distance learning (Jackman, *et. al.,* 1994). Further research into course development techniques will help learning institutions understand which methods work best in the distance learning classroom.

The researcher believes that research now needs to be aimed at identifying the types of communication needed to be used to best reduce geographical and interpersonal distance, nurture

interaction, increase feedback and message transfer, and enhance the fundamentals of post-secondary education in developing countries.

In Namibia access to technologies remains limited due the high cost of establishing, using and maintaining the necessary infrastructure. The lack of expertise required and the generally low computer literacy rate among the user groups is also a barrier. In order to embrace the use of internet-based teaching and learning with conviction, caution and vision, CES-UNAM needs to take policy initiatives, among others, to increase its tele-density which is low in Namibia. Putting up proper infrastructure in remote rural areas is a challenge for Namibia to research. Further research therefore needs to focus on the cost of establishing, using and maintaining the necessary infrastructure in the flooding areas of the Caprivi region. Natural disasters not only hinder development, but also exert an enormous toll on human safety and property or state damage.

Governments and the private sector need to conduct flood impact assessment to assist planning. Flood impact assessment will serve as a tool for estimating the overall adverse effects on all human development that will eventually shed some light on how to support remote rural life. The critical and fundamental role that ICT could play in networking distance education services once the necessary infrastructure is in place will help distance education development in Namibia. A need to increase the general level of computer and information literacy should be studied. Sustained ICT support and training for skills development and choices of teaching and learning should follow in such a study. The recent successful implementation of radio instruction (IRI) in Guinea could serve as a catalyst for countries with similarly structured education systems.

5.7.2 Administrative support

Good administrative support should account for all paperwork sent to CES-UNAM. Students should not learn that their assignments, marks and anything sent to CES-UNAM is misplaced or lost. Students become more frustrated upon learning that they are not administratively supported.

CES-UNAM needs to ensure that administrative staff do what they employed to do. Services such as keeping students' records, examination scripts and files should be done well. CES-UNAM needs to investigate how PIMS is practised in some institutions and learn from it. PIMS enables students to view and in some cases modify their own personal details over the web. Students will be able to change their address and contact details in PIMS. It also helps the students' teaching departments or Student Administration know so that if any other changes are required, such as their examination venue, that this can be amended at the time saving problems later on. PIMS is also a useful tool as it allows academic support staff easy access to a student's details for contact and further academic assistance.

CES-UNAM should also investigate self study groups as a possible solution to isolation of distance education students. The landmass size of Namibia compels that students are encouraged to establish self study groups that will help them get immediate support from colleagues including members of the same knowledge who might have already graduated.

Determining student attrition and retention rates has been difficult for the researcher to access at CES-UNAM. There is a need for future research to see how these two have affected distance education for students in remote rural as compared to those in urban areas. There is no clear system at the moment that measures retention or attrition at CES-UNAM. As a result, it becomes difficult for CES-UNAM to determine the causes of attrition or retention.

All the above recommendations call for a long-term investment by all segments of society—including the business community, private philanthropy, both faith-based and secular voluntary organisations, professional associations, and government at all levels—to work together to strengthen educational modes of delivery, and provide professional assistance for all forms of students who need help.

5.7.3 Logistics/Personal/Natural disasters

CES-UNAM cannot control natural disasters such as flood. Neither can the Centre control problems that face students as persons and the way they conduct their daily lives. There is only a need for the Centre to integrate survival, reading, writing and study skills in the materials of the students. For example, the Centre should help students develop their ability to engage in self-directed learning using traditional instruction such as vacation schools where face to face is with lecturers and other students is possible. This helps students to own their learning and eventually master the situations in which they could find themselves during their studies.

5.8 Summary of the chapter

Lastly, there is a need for academic support officers at CES-UNAM to conduct research in the following areas of student support:

(i) How interaction of distance education students in remote rural areas with their lecturers and other students affect their success rates,

(ii) Whether autonomy and transactional distance are related for students in remote rural areas,

(iii) Whether an optimal blend of success could be achieved when the independence level of the student is not known in such harsh environments and add value to learning,

(iv) Whether natural disasters such as flood affect meaning to the structure and construction of knowledge in assignments and examinations and the general application of knowledge,

(v) How lecturers perceive and construct feedback for students in remote rural areas,

(vi) How learning styles, personalities, attitudes, locus of control and motivation affect students in remote rural areas,

(vii) How self study groups as a form of interaction in remote rural areas could affect motivation towards successful leaning.

The results could help other regions with similar academic, administrative and logistics, personal and natural disasters. Such results would positively impact on the planning of academic and administration of distance education in Namibia and other countries practising distance and open learning.

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APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Four main questions guided the study, and these were:

   i. What barriers do you face as a distance education student living in remote rural northeast regions of Namibia studying with CES-UNAM?
   ii. What effects have these barriers on your total life as a student?
   iii. Is the way CES-UNAM support remote rural distance education student effective and efficient?
   iv. Do you think the current way of supporting students in remote rural areas can be improved to accelerate completion rates?

Interview probes addressed issues of:

   i. Services offered by CES, UNAM and how they are accessed (see Table 4.3, p. 110)
   ii. Effects of the barriers on the students (see Table 4.5, p. 131)
   iii. The possible coping strategies of remote rural students (see Table 4.6, p. 132)

5. Each interesting statement and subtheme was probed. The following are the subthemes:

   i. inadequate academic support,
   ii. ineffective feedback from tutors,
   iii. study materials that are either late or are not available at the time that students need them most,
   iv. the influence that families have on the studies,
   v. lost assignments, files and other documents,
   vi. flood in the Caprivi region and distance education,

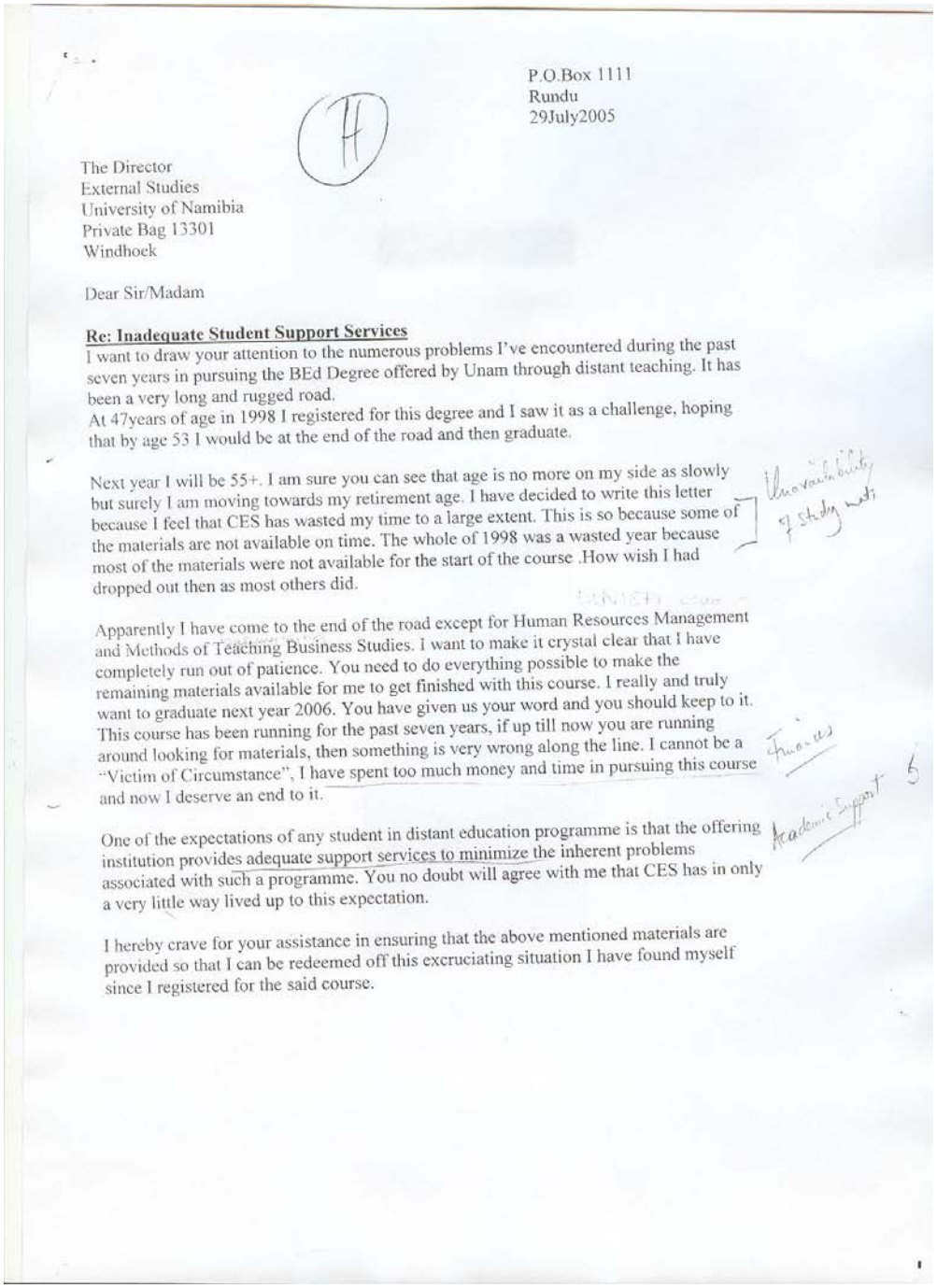
vii. the long distance from the regional centres and,

viii. inaccessibility of regional centres due to poor infrastructure.

APPENDIX B:

LETTER FROM STUDENTS

(Examples)



P.O.Box 1111
Rundu
29July2005

The Director
External Studies
University of Namibia
Private Bag 13301
Windhoek

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Inadequate Student Support Services

I want to draw your attention to the numerous problems I've encountered during the past seven years in pursuing the BEd Degree offered by Unam through distant teaching. It has been a very long and rugged road.
At 47years of age in 1998 I registered for this degree and I saw it as a challenge, hoping that by age 53 I would be at the end of the road and then graduate.

Next year I will be 55+. I am sure you can see that age is no more on my side as slowly but surely I am moving towards my retirement age. I have decided to write this letter because I feel that CES has wasted my time to a large extent. This is so because some of the materials are not available on time. The whole of 1998 was a wasted year because most of the materials were not available for the start of the course .How wish I had dropped out then as most others did.

Apparently I have come to the end of the road except for Human Resources Management and Methods of Teaching Business Studies. I want to make it crystal clear that I have completely run out of patience. You need to do everything possible to make the remaining materials available for me to get finished with this course. I really and truly want to graduate next year 2006. You have given us your word and you should keep to it. This course has been running for the past seven years, if up till now you are running around looking for materials, then something is very wrong along the line. I cannot be a "Victim of Circumstance", I have spent too much money and time in pursuing this course and now I deserve an end to it.

One of the expectations of any student in distant education programme is that the offering institution provides adequate support services to minimize the inherent problems associated with such a programme. You no doubt will agree with me that CES has in only a very little way lived up to this expectation.

I hereby crave for your assistance in ensuring that the above mentioned materials are provided so that I can be redeemed off this excruciating situation I have found myself since I registered for the said course.

Student
B C
Assessment

PO Box

Rundu

Namibia

23/04/2005

To the Student Support Officer

CES, Unam

Rundu

Dear Sir

Complaint about student support services

I am a B.Ed student who is highly frustrated by what I have observed at CES. As students, we receive letters from tutors sometimes that expect us to respond on time because sms were sent to us. This is interesting and amazing. We hear about cellular phones when we are in town. I need the highest tree to make a call that may not even succeed. Life is difficult in remote rural areas. I could call my tutors if cellular phones were operative. You say you sent sms to all students, how do you send us sms when we cannot access them? Please do not blame us when we do not respond to what you want us to do

Sms no use

I cannot understand how I should work with you office if things are not sorted on time and to the satisfaction of the students.

When will we get opportunities to use internet if it is not where we are and the centre is closed on weekends? That is the time we go to town once in a while. Sir, do not refer us to internet search when we cannot access it. We do not know how to operate a computer. There is not electricity where we are most of us. We rely on our candles and thats how we do our work.

internet use - nothing cmc ?

Find ways or reaching us on time and with the necessary support we deserve. Remember we are paying for the support.

I will be glad if you do something to this situation.

Sincerely Yours

Student number 94

Student #E

PO Box

Ohangwena

Namibia

23/04/2004

Dear Mr M

I write with anger because of the way CES treat the students. I have learnt that my friends have received some study materials that were long overdue for BED students. When I called Northern Campus this morning, I was told that the materials are finished.

How can life be like this? How will I manage to come on time when few copies are available? Please sir, remember that my school is so far and by the time I reach there it is either no materials (sic) or come the other day we have ordered some. Can you make sure you keep for me one copy when they are there or else I will find myself repeating this course next semester? I want to finish, I am tired of this delay.

Few copies study mats

Look at what we are scoring in the exams. Is this a true reflection of our abilities? It is not fair as we are paying so much for these modules and only to fail. Had the study materials arrived on time, we were going to consult with the regional centre to find someone who could help us at a time when we are in town. Please know that we are not in town always, retorted.

Study mats on time

Be informed, sir, that some of us have been on this programme since 1998. We are threatened by many difficulties. We could lose our jobs and our families may be in trouble also. They need bread from us and we need to realise our goals. Please sir do something for us. Get copies for us and find someone to help us with the materials.

Thank you for your support in matters of this magnitude.

Sincerely Yours

Document G

Private Bag

Rundu

Namibia

2003

Dear Sir

I write to inform that you must do something with my studies. I have done my best in the past years but things don't seem to work.

We are getting old, if I keep on failing I will be thrown out of the programme and lose my job. Can we get the necessary care from all our lecturers? Show us that you care by helping us when we need you. The Ministry of education has always sent letters warning us of our delay in these studies.

job security

Sometimes we are blamed that we are too slow to finish. How do you study in rural areas? With no electricity in the rural areas it is difficult to study at night. We should be studying during the night. Night time is good because we can get away from our families. But unfortunately there is nothing light to do that.

Lecturers- no electricity

Please find ways to help us even during weekends. We can use our cluster schools if you come and visit. Please help us because age is catching up with us.

weekends ?

Thank you very much

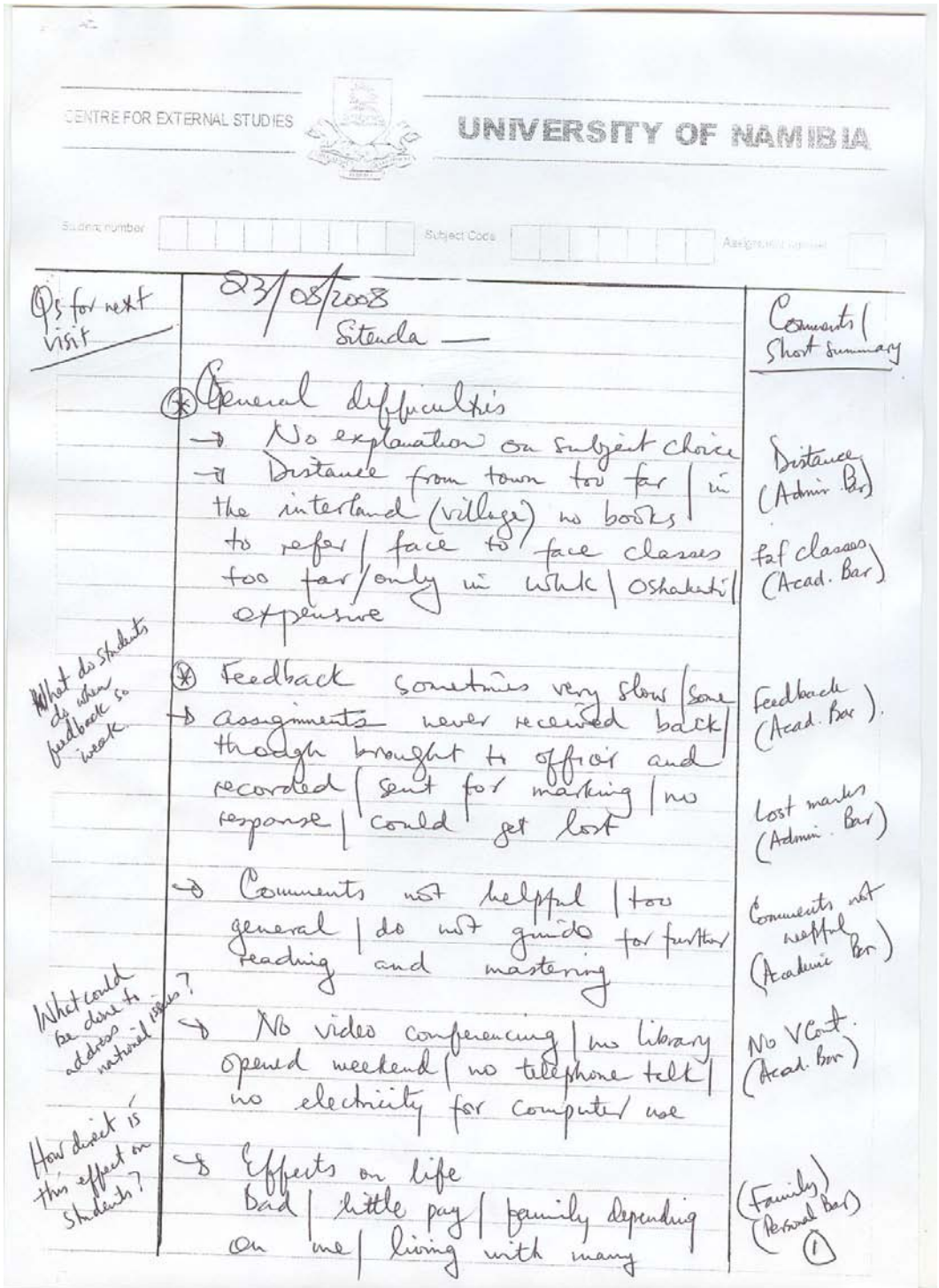
Yours

Student no.

APPENDIX C:

RESEARCHER NOTES

(some extracts)



CENTRE FOR EXTERNAL STUDIES — UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

Student number | Subject Code | Assignment number

Q's for next visit

23/08/2008
Sitenda —

Comments / Short summary

(*) General difficulties

→ No explanation on subject choice — Distance (Admin Bar)

→ Distance from town too far / in the interland (village) no books to refer / face to face classes too far / only in Wlvk / Oshakati / expensive — faf classes (Acad. Bar)

What do Students do when feedback is weak

(*) Feedback sometimes very slow / some → assignments never received back / though brought to office and recorded / sent for marking / no response / could get lost — Feedback (Acad. Bar) / Lost marks (Admin Bar)

→ Comments not helpful / too general / do not guide for further reading and mastering — Comments not helpful (Academic Bar)

What could be done to address natural issues?

→ No video conferencing / no library opened weekend / no telephone talk / no electricity for computer use — No VConf. (Acad. Bar)

How direct is this effect on Students?

→ Effects on life bad / little pay / family depending on me / living with many — (Family) (Personal Bar) (1)

CENTRE FOR EXTERNAL STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

Student number | Subject Code | Assignment number

What is the Current way? List?

(*) Current way not supporting students not well because of what listed above as problems

Current Acad. Support System.

(*) CES improve?

→ Yes, bring vacation classes closer

→ Library opened in the weekend

→ Use radio to reach us/even for teaching

→ Have mobile tutoring as distance too long / no public transport

Vacation the schools answer.

(*) Generally

→ Course expensive

→ too much time lost when no money / budget not allowing paying all money at once or for repeated courses.

Family (Personal-bar)

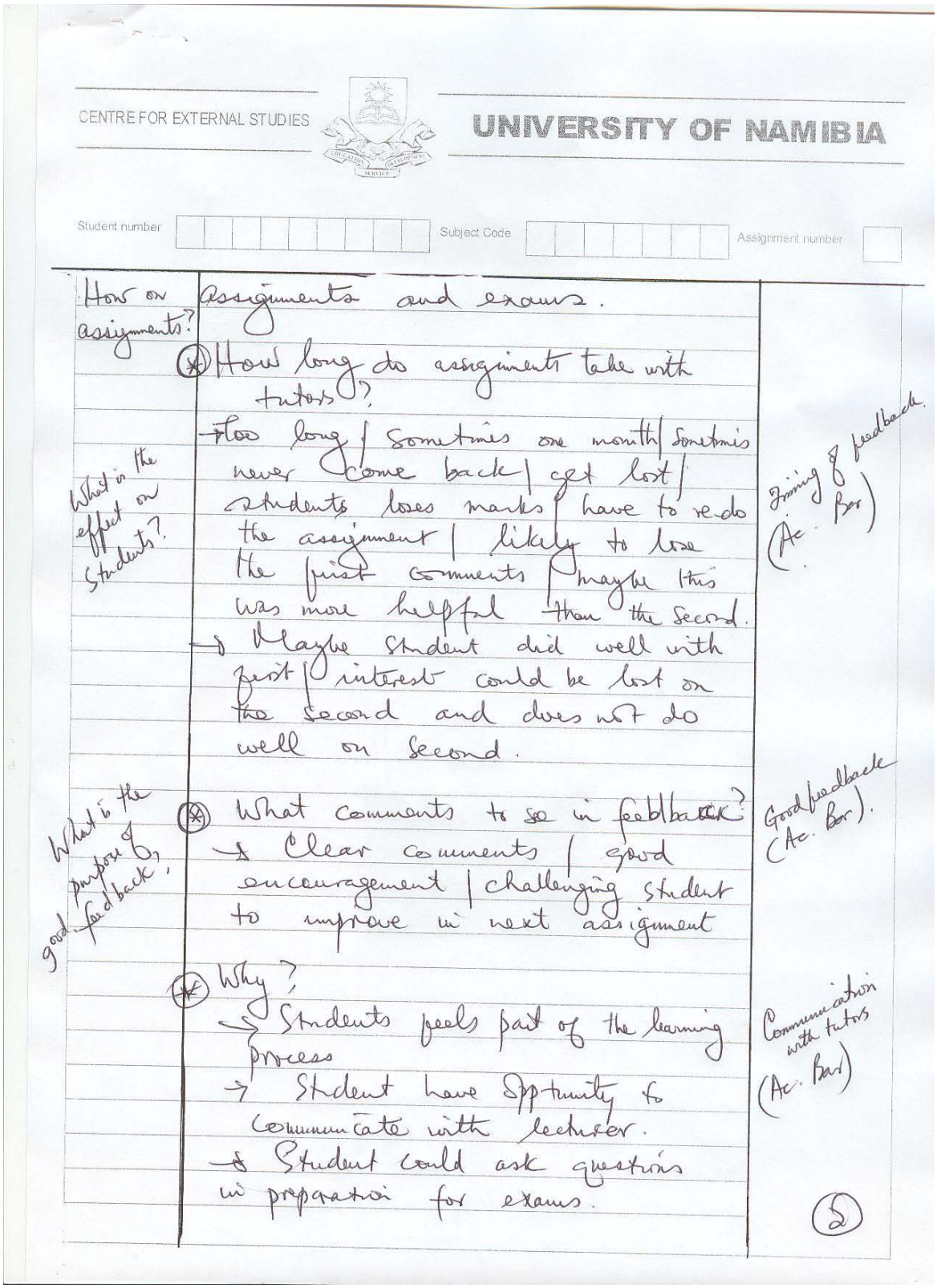
(2)

CENTRE FOR EXTERNAL STUDIES **UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA**

Student number | Subject Code | Assignment number

Questions for next interview contact	Notes	Comments / Summary
	21/08/2008 A. S[redacted]-K[redacted]	
	Issue: Feedback — how helpful?	Feedback (Ac. Bar)
	Tis helpful ni some cases. Some cases not.	
Is this feedback adequate?	Helpful cases? sometimes tutors/ lectrers show mistakes. Few comments in the margin	Tutor + help (Ac. Bar)
What is adequate feedback?	Not helpful? Comments not clear/ inadequate feedback/ only Grade / student cannot easily know how Grade reached.	
What is inadequate feedback?	Student struggle to reach the total/ feedback (what should it do to student?).	
	→ lead to other assignments	Feedforward (Ac. Bar)
	→ connect known knowledge to the expected	
Do tutorial letters help during studies?	→ properly guide students in content and its application.	
	Any tutorial letters that could cover feedback?	Tutorial letters (Ac. Bar)
	→ Yes, though also not clear	
	→ they should be our guidelines	
	→ they should give us the scope of	

(1)



CENTRE FOR EXTERNAL STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

Student number | Subject Code | Assignment number

How on assignments?

Assignments and exams.

(*) How long do assignments take with tutors?

→ How long / Sometimes one month / Sometimes never come back / get lost / students loses marks / have to re-do the assignment / likely to lose the first comments / maybe this was more helpful than the second.

→ Maybe student did well with first / interest could be lost on the second and does not do well on second.

What is the effect on students?

Timing of feedback. (Ac. Bar)

(*) What comments to see in feedback?

→ Clear comments / good encouragement / challenging student to improve in next assignment

What is the purpose of good feedback?

Good feedback (Ac. Bar).

(*) Why?

→ Students feels part of the learning process

→ Student have opportunity to communicate with lecturer.

→ Student could ask questions in preparation for exams.

Communication with tutors (Ac. Bar)

(2)

APPENDIX D:

PHOTOS

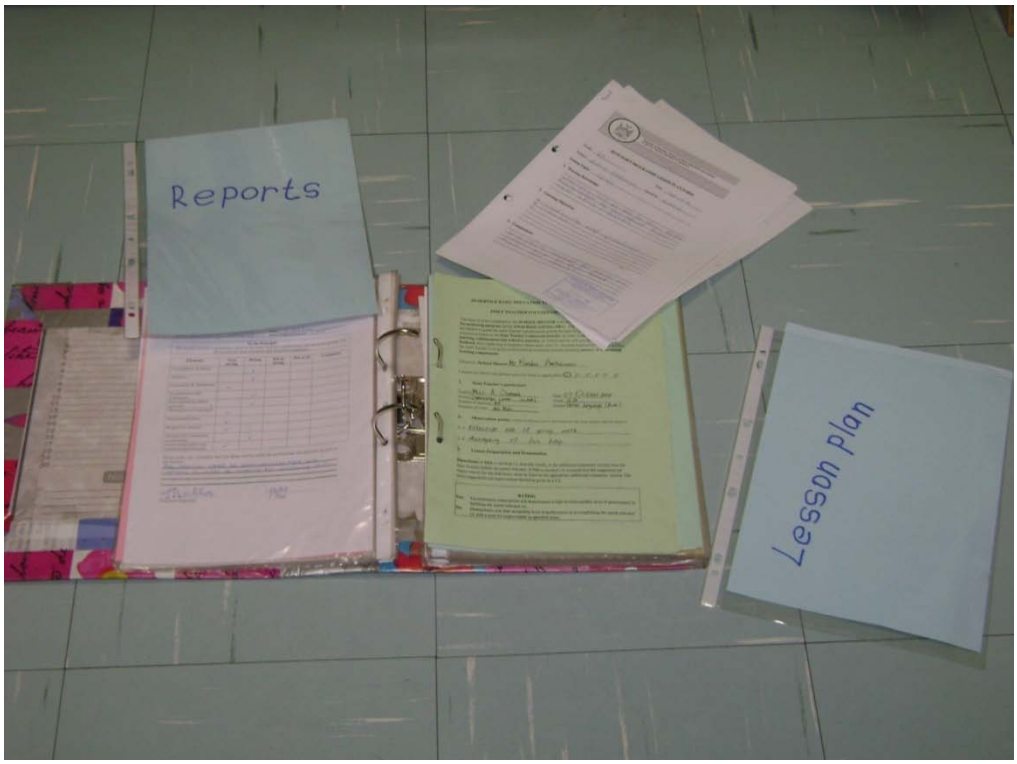
Photo D. 1: Flooded teachers' houses

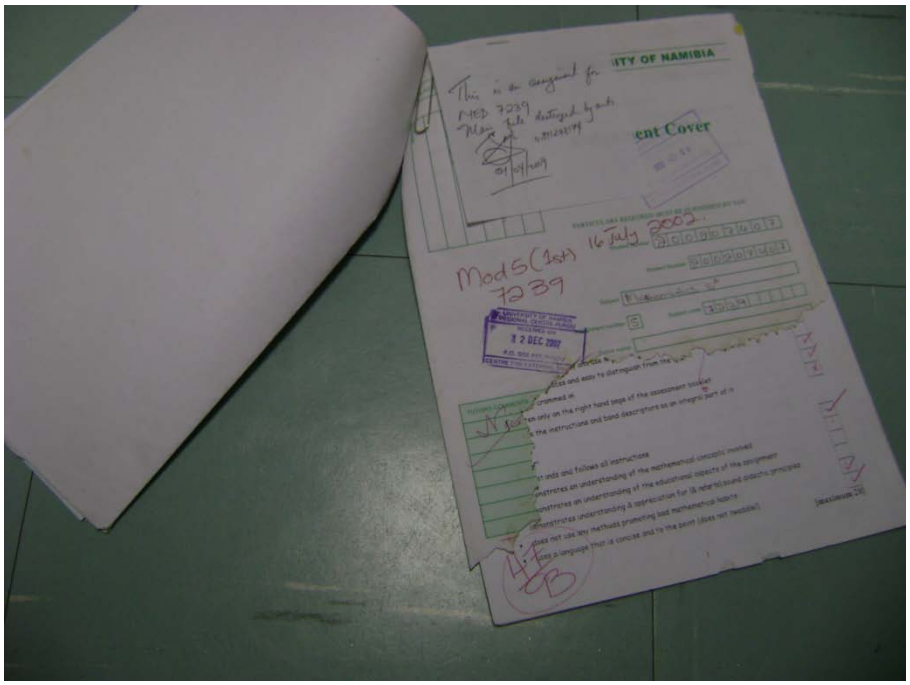
Photo D.2: Vuwato (form of transport during floods)

Photo D.3: Teaching and learning under trees

Photo D.4: Huts of teachers

Photos D.5 Torn Files of students





Photos D.6: Lapa (enclosure)

Photo D.7: Impassable roads during flood

APPENDIX E

CONTACT SUMMARY FORMS

CONTACT SUMMARY FORM A

Visit:__A Site: Schuckmannesburg (Caprivi)

Phone: Contact date: 8 August 2008

Written by: NM Porogramme: BED

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck in this contact?

- *afraid of the flood;*
- *absence of student support from the regional centres;*
- *assignments, files and even examination marks sometimes get lost and we are forced to re-register and pay more money;*
- *don't know when electricity and other facilities will reach inland schools.*
- *use candles;*
- *Roads are bad, they are sandy during drier times of the year and you only need four wheel drives in most parts*
- *Late or no study materials at all*
- *Distance from the regional centre*
- *This area has no telephone,*

2. Summarise the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact.

Question	Information
What do you think should be done for you in situations of this nature?	wish the office could understand our problems;
How do you study?	I use candles when they are there
Is transport readily available on these roads?	Possible transport moves opposite; hired transport is expensive alone
Any other problems?	too far away from town and this affects our studies drastically. Our salaries are too low

3. Anything else that struck as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

- *Student feels that some of the problems could have been avoided*
- *Student feels that the government should provide some solution to challenges*
- *Student sees the need for a school to be where he works*

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact with this site?

- *Can the student elaborate more on the positiveness of being where the school is?*
- *Does the student receive feedback from tutors? What kind of feedback?*

Concern:

The student does not really show why he has been on the programme for so long

Delayed materials could have an negative effect on the completion rate of students or even have them drop out

Adopted from Miles and Huberman, (1994.53)

CONTACT SUMMARY FORM B

Visit:__**B** Site: Schuckmannesburg (Caprivi)

Phone: Contact date: **15 August 2008**

Written by: NM Porogramme: BED

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck in this contact?

- *afraid of the flood*
- *library is not there*
- *Late or no study materials at all*
- *Distance from the regional centre*
- *This area has no telephone, no electricity, friends are far away and we only depend on radio.*

2. Summarise the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact.

Question	**Information**
What is it about the flood?	There are dangers associated with the flood;
The only problem you have?	It is taking me so long; study materials never arrive on time. Sometimes they are not there; change in the curriculum; the library is not there; during possible weekends the library is closed; no lecturer talks to you either via radio which is popular or via mobile phones which sometimes is accessible; Not even letters are sent to us to help us; Comments do not make meaning to us; difficult to attend vacation school or face to face classes; cannot even use the videoconferencing;
Why NIED?	They are treated better than us;

3. Anything else that struck as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

- *baby continued to trouble the mother crying*
- *Enjoys the environment even if flood comes*
- *the student has been passing some modules and this has made her continue*
- *the student is organised despite disruption by the baby*

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact with this site?

- *Can the student elaborate on how she has been coping without proper academic support?*
- *Does the student receive feedback from tutors? What kind of feedback?*
- *Does the student know any of the friends that left the UNAM programme as a result of late or unavailability of study materials?*
- *What was she doing during the years that she was not having study materials/*

Concern:

The student does not really show why he has been on the programme for so long

Next time the child could be made to be far away from the mother

How important is vacation school to students?

Adopted from Miles and Huberman, (1994.53)

CONTACT SUMMARY FORM C

Visit:__C Site: Karukuvisa

Phone: Contact date: 20 August 2008

Written by: NM Porogramme: BETD

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck in this contact?

- After we have registered; they did not explain to us how to pick the relevant subjects.
- *Some of us dropped during this time waiting for a time when you will enough money to continue*
- *less contact with my tutors because I only meet them during vacation schools*
- *Comments are there but they are weak*
- *Distance from the regional centre*

2. Summarise the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact.

Question	Information
Which subject (s) were out of your specialty or interest?	Mathematics
What difficulties have you encountered as you studied?	library is closed during weekends
Can you share with me how useful feedback from lecturers has been to you especially when doing your assignments?	Feedback in assignments is very bad
Any problems that you want to share with me?	Sometimes the assignments get lost and still have to re-register and pay.
What do you do with the assignments when they are not	ask others (students) to help you

clear?	
Let us look at the comments that you get from tutors, how helpful are they?	Yes, the comments are there but they are weak.
Ever used video and teleconferencing facilities?	No
Any time you failed to continue with your studies?	Yes two years

3. Anything else that struck as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

- *Student is honest with his assessment of the challenges*
- *Student sees the need for strong student support system to facilitate higher completion rates*
- *Student is worried that lost years cannot be recovered*

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact with this site?

- *I would want to know how she coped with a subject that was never her choice.*
- *What else could she have taken in place of mathematics?*
- *Would she have done better?*
- *Why didn't she drop out like many have done?*

Concern:

I want to find out how she handled herself around mathematics that seemed difficult for her

What are the consequences of delayed academic support?

Adopted from Miles and Huberman, (1994.53)

CONTACT SUMMARY FORM D

Visit:__**D** Site: Kasika (Caprivi)

Phone: Contact date: **18 August 2008**

Written by: NM Porogramme: BED

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck in this contact?

- *have written several letters to the office of external support but no help; have been delayed by the writing of the modules ; It takes time for the information from Windhoek to reach our centres.*
- *no transport that you can use to reach the centre in Katima on time.*
- *Rain, flood*
- *absence of student support from the regional centres;*
- *don't know when electricity and these are other facilities will reach inland schools.*
- *use candles;*
- *Roads are bad, only need four wheel drives in most parts*
- *Late or no study materials at all*
- *Distance from the regional centre*
- *This area has no telephone, electricity and other amenities*

2. Summarise the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact.

Question	**Information**
When you say that you are an old student when did you start with this degree?	From 1998 to 2008 I am still struggling; Sometimes we have been delayed by the writing of the modules; study materials that do not arrive on time
'Flood' as an issue?	The rain is heavy, there is no transport that you can use to reach the centre in Katima on time.
How often do you move from your place to Katima when it is flooding time?	When I come for salaries or when I come for materials, it takes almost four days
What do you use when flood comes?	Sometimes I go via Zambia, Botswana or use a canoe of which when I paddle there are hippos on the way; very difficult to reach my place; I walk on foot sometimes 40 to 50 km to reach drier places; could be soaked with all your belongings, assignments included;
No government public roads?	There is nothing like that here
How many schools could be in the flooded areas?	more than fifteen schools with five clinics
How far is your school from the regional centre?	Maybe 87 or 90 km.
How do you study?	Sometimes I get a gas bottle for light; candles
What about your family and your study/	They question my financial spending; Even if I explain that the subject was handed even if late and so it has expired, they do not understand that
Telephone, video conferencing at UNAM?	just saw that in Windhoek and realised that students in Oshakati are also enjoying
Attend vacation school?	Not enough time;
Get letters from your tutors explaining or giving you additional information?	There is nothing
How do you find comments from your tutors?	It is difficult to know whether they are criticising our language or content, maybe skills of writing
Do you understand the feedback from your tutors? Does feedback help?	Feedback comes so late, sometimes after the exams; It is difficult to read the comments in the margin of the assignment; words do not help; we learn

3. Anything else that struck as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

- *Student is honest with his assessment of the challenges*
- *Student sees the need for strong student support system to facilitate higher completion rates*

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact with this site?

- *The student to expose more on how he feels when his progress has been 'delayed' by CES*

Concern:

I need to give him more time and guide him as he talks.

Students are may drop out when programmes are delayed

Adopted from Miles and Huberman, (1994.53)

CONTACT SUMMARY FORM E

Visit:__**E** Site: Sitopogo (Kavango)

Phone: Contact date: **22 August 2008**

Written by: NM Porogramme: BETD

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck in this contact?

- *assignments lost*
- *have children at UNAM and in secondary schools to be supported*
- *Some of us dropped during this time waiting for a time when you will enough money to continue*
- *less contact with my tutors because I only meet them during vacation schools*
- *Comments are there but they are weak*
- *The means of transport to the regional centres and back is not easy to find*
- *Telephone lines should be constructed also. This will facilitate communication in all levels.*
- *Electricity should be provided to schools.*
- *Not only should the responsibility rest on UNAM. It should be on the government use We could have opportunities to buy computers and go on internet if libraries cannot be provided*
- *Distance from the regional centre*

2. Summarise the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact.

Question	**Information**
How does weak administrative support affect your studies?	students not happy when we get our assignments lost
Anything that you want to elaborate on administrative support?	They remark scripts you five years after your same group which you were marked with have gone on graduation
Is there any other problem that you experience as you study?	When I come for salaries or when I come for materials, it takes almost four days I cannot concentrate on my studies because I have children at UNAM and in secondary schools. How can I do that when my salary is so little?
When did you start studying this diploma?	I started in 2002 in level three.
But why has this taken you so long?	The main reason is that during the first years, 2002 and 2003, our examination marks were not recorded; Our portfolios landed in other students' hands, especially in Oshakati; They could remove our scripts and other work that we had done and we never got our files still intact. After one or two years you will be told by the regional office, especially the Windhoek office that the marks are not recorded; repeating English Communication Skills
Do you ever receive comments or feedback to guide you when the assignments come back to you?	Yes, the comments are there but they are weak.
What do you think UNAM should do when life seems so difficult for you during your studies?	Government should construct good roads to all schools. Telephone lines should be constructed also. This will facilitate communication in all levels. Electricity should be provided to schools.

3. Anything else that struck as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

- *Student is honest with his assessment of the challenges*
- *Student sees the need for strong student support system to facilitate higher completion rates*
- *Student understands that what effects him affects the family also*

- *Student demonstrates the zeal to use computer for several reasons*

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact with this site?

- *Student needs to elaborate more on the comments that tutors give as part of feedback.*

Concern:

I need to find out how tutors help students to prepare for the examinations if student support is a bone of contention.

Quality may be compromised as students' assignments and other relevant documents are lost

Adopted from Miles and Huberman, (1994.53)

CONTACT SUMMARY FORM F

Visit:__**F**_____Site: Ncuncuni (Kavango Region)

Phone:_____Contact date: **23 August 2008**

Written by: NM

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck in this contact?

- *Delay in finishing the course*
- *Late or no study materials at all*
- *Assignments, files and portfolios getting lost*
- *Expensive programme and handled differently from NIED programme in marking, payments and catch-up*
- *Distance from the regional centre*
- *This area has no telephone, no electricity, friends are far away and we only depend on radio.*
- *No extra materials or letters sent to you in the course of the year*

2. Summarise the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact.

Question	**Information**
Programme takes ages to complete	Student started in 2002 but still doing it in 2008; the programme should have finished in 2006 the latest but has been delayed by poor record keeping;
What caused all this delay	Poor record keeping; assignments and files getting lost; examination marks being not captured on time; If any of these got lost, you must know that you needed to re-register and pay more money
Why NIED?	They are treated better than us;
let us go to your area of study. What problems are here?	Distance from the regional centre; no telephone, no electricity, friends are far away and we only depend on radio; library is far away; assignments are always late and no one wants to listen to you
attend vacation schools or face to face tutorials?	not attend all vacation schools;

3. Anything else that struck as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

- *Patience of the student to continue irrespective of the situation*
- *The student is furious, discouraged and feels embarrassed that the programme is not finished, those came from behind have finished*

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact with this site?

- *How does the student explain the fact that he could not pass some of the modules irrespective of the opportunities given?*
- *Does the student receive feedback from lecturers? What kind of feedback?*
- *Does the student know any of the friends that left the UNAM programme as a result of assignments, files and other documents being lost by CES?*

Concern:

The student does not really show why he has been on the programme for so long

Adopted from Miles and Huberman, (1994.53)

Appendix F

REFLECTIONS

Extracts from personal journal

Respondent A (face to face)

It is a clear day with no clouds hanging on *8 August 2008*. The rains are gone but the aftermaths are still seen around as some swamps are not dry yet. I have missed the time we agreed to meet but the student has allowed me time to meet him. I have had an opportunity to talk to the student face to face after a long trip of getting stuck in the mud. The school is about 100km east of Katima in the Caprivi region. There are no public roads from Kabbe (where the main road ends) that reach the school except expanded footpaths. No electricity as they only gas bottles. Teachers stay in small houses. There is no library except a small room that keeps books for learners. The regional centre library is 100km away from the school of the respondent. The area is flooded each year between February and June. Roads can be difficult to use during rainy season. No public transport except dugout canoes during flood and people walk long distances on foot. Luckier times people use vehicles that go their direction. There is noise all around as children are playing. The teacher-learner ratio is a challenge as one teacher may handle two grades simultaneously.

15 October (face to face)*:* the roads have now become easily accessible though bumpy and dusty. I have decided to go back to the same person to seek more information on feedback and comments from lecturers. The vegetational environment has changed. The grass is drier. It has taken me shorter to reach the place. Fortunately I reached the school in the afternoon and there is no waste of time to go into the interviews. I began to record the interview. It took us 45 minutes and we finished going over the usefulness of feedback and comments. I did not probe any other areas of the interviews. The respondent has promised to give more on the other issues we addressed earlier on if I were to come back to the school.

10 November: I decided I will set up my teleconferencing facility this time to interview my informants on the administrative barriers that they face. I was able to find Respondents D (on the expensive line), E, C and F. It was difficult to find Respondents A and B as they are not easily reached. I had to set up dates with the help of the regional centre head of Katima Mulilo to call them for me via radio. They came to his office and I set my teleconferencing facility on 15 and 18 November for recording. This was the most difficult barrier to handle. All six respondents sounded angry and in some cases I had to restrain them from calling names.

There are many questions to raise here: Why are students angry? What is wrong here, the system or persons handling the system? What should be done? I need to find answers to these questions.

Respondent B (face to face)

It is *15 August 2008* when I am able to meet respondent B. The direction of the trip is about the same as that which was carried on *8 August 2008*. I took long to return because of problems on the car. The bad roads have forced me to attend to the pickup. The school is slightly distant from the previous one. It is 110 km east of Katima. There are no public roads after Kabbe. There is no electricity around the school. Teachers and learners use gas bottles or candles for light. The houses of teachers are just around the school. Only classrooms are brick and zinc structures. Teachers' houses are poorly built with reeds, grass and mud. One teacher has also more than one class group. There is no library. Colleagues doing the same programme are far away. There are 8 children in the *lapa* who are sharing the same house. They call it home service.

18 October (face to face)*:* There are similarities with the other school that I have been to three days ago. The situation of no electricity, public roads and libraries has not changed. I have gone to the informant to dig into the usefulness of feedback and comments from lecturers in assignments and projects. I have at least found out data is worthwhile considering in my patterns and relationships (data analysis stage)

Respondent D (via telephone)

Three days later I cannot reach a student that is deeper in the flooded areas. The water is subsiding but the main channels are still full. Canoes will do better than the vehicles even if they were 4x4 wheel vehicles. The best is to reach him by telephone via Botswana. It is expensive though as he uses Mascom. It is *18 August 2008*. I have tried three times to get hold of him but I could not. I am able to find him on the fourth time. He is doing a BED programme. Sounded more frustrated in his voice. His complaints are captured on the tape. I could not see him face to face. I tried to make him give me the picture of his situation but could not vividly capture it. Maybe I will be lucky some day to see his place. He gave me the longest interview with numerous issues.

One month later (*22 October*), I am able to meet the man face to face. Unfortunately I meet him in Katima regional centre office. I still fail to see where he is teaching and the environment thereof. He tells me stories that are repetitive of the interview we had. I have to direct him more through the probes. This time around I wanted to know from him the importance of libraries and laboratories to BED students. At least I obtained information that relates to my question.

Respondent E (face to face)

I immediately packed my stuff together so that I am able to go back to Rundu. My next appointment is on *22 August 2008*. I rose up very early in the morning to go meet my next client. The trip is long punctuated by stops as sand makes it difficult to drive. The pressure of the tyres for the pickup is lowered to allow quick speed in the sand. No public roads. Sometimes we had to stop so that we could remove fallen trees in our way. After five hours I

reach the school with two boys I had requested to give company. The school is small. It is about 160 km kilometres away from the regional centre. My next client has many children in the family. Has many jobs at home and at school. The playing field is closer to house where the interview took place. Some children passed by and disturbed. The only transport available to go to town is the principal and the head of department's vehicles.

30 October (face to face)*:* I meet the informant in town. He has come to do shopping. I requested the informant to share with me a few thoughts in my office. The informant agreed and we looked at the usefulness of feedback and comments from lecturers. I find the session very interesting as new facets of information come out. We finish and promise to continue working together. At least the informant has helped me not go through the gruelling sand I had last time.

Respondent C (face to face)

20 August 2008

This is Kavango region. One covers 100 km on the tarred road before fixing oneself ready for the sandy 40km zigzagging road to reach the small school. The roads change each time someone discovers a better one that has less sand. The time taken to cover the 100 km on the tarred road is shorter than the time needed to cover the 40km. Houses of teachers are built of grass and mud. They are small. We used a classroom for the interviews as learners had gone for sport. The classrooms are of brick and zinc. There is no electricity to the school. They use gas bottles and sometimes solar panels to generate electricity. No libraries. Colleagues doing the same programme are far away. There is public transport to the turn off into the forest. Teachers depend on the principal's vehicle to go to town once every Friday or any day the principal is called by the educational regional office. Sometimes teachers walk on foot to reach the tarred roads in order to catch lifts.

2 November (face to face)*:* I take another opportunity to venture into the sandy roads and thickets of forests. The first rains make my road a little better to use. The sand is a little hard and easier to use. I reach the school quicker than before. I am following my informant wanting to find out more on the usefulness of feedback and comments from lecturers. We have a good discussion that spreads over 30 minutes. Notes are written and there is no tape recording this time as the batteries of the recorder seem to lose power.

Respondent F (face to face)

28 August 2008

I have taken a break in order to reflect on the information that I received from the five respondents. Maybe another respondent will give me some differing thoughts on the issues that have been covered. The school is near the town but the distance is made difficult because it is a new school. The school is in the bushy area south of the town. People have recently come together here for a big borehole that supplies water for their cattle. The road to the school is

therefore sandy and one takes about 1 hour 30 minutes to reach it. I arrive 1 hour before the actual interview. I have enough time to go around the school to note a few things within the environment of learning for my client.

There is no electricity to the school. They use gas bottles and sometimes solar panels to generate electricity. No library. The houses of teachers are poorly built. The school is built out of zinc and brick. There are many children. Most teachers have left their families behind because of poor accommodation. They still use donkey carts to go to town.

6 November (face to face)*:* It has taken me long to go back to my last informant. I was still comparing what has come out of the other 5 respondents to see whether there is yet a need to go to informant number F. I thought it wise to cover all my informants on the same topic (the usefulness of feedback and comments from lecturers). I made sure that this time I have new batteries. The interview is recorded.

APPENDIX G

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF INTERVIEWS

Respondent A

8 August 2008

Interviewer: I have come here today to find out challenges, problems that have delayed you in your studies. Can you share a few with me?

Respondent: I started BETD in 2002 and expected to finish in 2004 but unfortunately this is taking me ages.

Interviewer: Allow me to find out something from you right there. What do you mean by ages?

Respondent: (Shifting from side to side) Coughs and then continues. This programme had exit points. You finish in two years' time if you had only to do year three and four. It is a four year programme but people joined at different levels as per their prior knowledge. Our previous qualifications helped us join any level as we were given credits from previous studies. I then had to start in the third year. But, alas, (he changes his face expression) those who did all the four years have finished before me. I have been studying from 2002 up to 2008 April is when I graduated. This is almost six years. Even a bachelor's degree cannot take one this long unless if it is through distance.

Interviewer: What caused all this delay if I may find out from you?

Respondent: (Changes position of sitting and grimaces). Sir, it is embarrassing to mention some of the reasons. They could have been avoided by UNAM. Look (he shows me study materials on the shelves of his office) these materials always affected me. You either get them late or they are not there at the regional centres. Very discouraging. (Looking to get angry) I feel that my time was wasted in this manner. Before I forget, one of the most discouraging thing is that our assignments would get lost, marks not traceable and even our portfolios. If any of these got lost, you must know that you needed to re-register and pay more money. Where do I get this money? Look (he pulls out his salary slip and shows me how he gets) where do I get all the money that makes me pay and pay and pay? Sir, we have been disturbed by this programme. We could have

already done higher degrees to this. This has discouraged many from continuing and as a result they have left for the NIED BETD programme.

Interviewer: Why NIED if you allow me to interrupt you again?

Respondent: They are treated better than us who are studying with UNAM. We are marked by doctors in education and NIED uses some of our colleagues to mark the scripts.

Interviewer: How does that affect your studies?

Respondent: UNAM is too strict in marking even if we write the same papers with NIED. You will be surprised if we compared the marks or the work that we do. An assignment that I submit for UNAM which I fail fetches an A with NIED.

Interviewer: Any other reason?

Respondent: (He now looks at ease) Yes, they are treated better when it comes to resubmission or catch-up. They pay less and only for the part they have failed. We pay N$350.00 with UNAM whether it is an assignment only or the EMA that you have failed. This is what makes the difference and making the UNAM BETD expensive.

Interviewer: Thanks for the information; let us go to your area of study. What problems are here?

Respondent: Distance from the regional centre is a challenge. You either have to walk long distances during rainy season or you have to paddle long distances during flood time.

Interviewer: Do you enjoy staying here especially during flood?

Respondent: (At least a smile is showed as he begins) Flood is not a threat for us who were born here. We enjoy it. It is only that one is inconvenienced if one does not have his/her own dugout canoe (*vuwato* – local name). It should be big enough to carry you safely, but, no one is used to something like water that can kill any time. Flood normally comes very big and losing your life is easy. So you cannot play around paddling every week to go to Kabbe where you can find transport to town to go and send your assignment at the regional centre. In some cases, we must negotiate with the regional centre head to cover us when assignments are late. It is difficult and makes the whole life of a student in these areas very difficult,

Interviewer: If it is not a threat, why do you think it is a challenge?

Respondent: No one will enjoy staying in such a land locked area and still call him or herself a student. Yes, a student of the flood and what God has done. This area has no telephone, no electricity, friends are far away and we only depend on radio. The library is far away. If the candles are finished you only depend on the light of God (the sun) to study. You cannot study in the night. The assignments are always late and no one wants to listen to you when you raise the issue with Windhoek.

Interviewer: Is there any help that you get from Windhoek or regional office concerning your studies?

Respondent: Nothing. You only get your study materials, if they are there, and no extra materials or letters sent to you in the course of the year. You only learn about new information if you happen to go to vacation school.

Interviewer: Do you attend vacation schools or face to face tutorials?

Respondent: (The face begins to change again to sad one again) I do not attend all vacation schools. By the time we have closed here and the time you need to go to town and catch lifts it is already late. I always attend vacation schools that are conducted outside the flood times. Yes, the second part of the question is that there are no opportunities for face to face classes.

Respondent: I am sorry; children are shouting that one of our school children has fallen from a tree. Can we stop here so that I can go and help? I am the only one at school this afternoon. We can continue later.

Interviewer: Oh, this is bad. Well, attend to the child and maybe I could even help take the child to the clinic. We will continue some day.

Respondent: Thanks

Respondent B

15 August 2008

Interviewer: Thank you for giving me this opportunity to meet you and discuss with you some of the challenges that face us students who are in remote areas. Do you have anything to share with me on the topic/

Respondent: Yes, sir I have plenty especially this flood.

Interviewer: What is it about the flood? I will allow you to begin with that so that it is out of your chest

Respondent: (shifts from side to side). It is difficult to row a canoe when you were not born in these areas. It is part of the tradition and culture that you should not be scared with so much water. It would have been better if it was boats that are using generated power (sic) not hands. When the winds blow, you do not know even what to do. The waves are higher and, oh, it is difficult. I don't think I can row about 40 km of water to reach the drier land. I wish I was not posted to this place.

It is even more difficult to work here while studying. You are first of all afraid of the flood, the hippos and large crocodiles and many other things. How do you study in situations of this nature? *(stops and looks as if she will not continue with the topic).* After all I am a woman and cannot wrestle with the canoe all my life. I will soon ask for a transfer even I love this place with its people and the fish that is so plenty.

Interviewer: Is this the only problem you have?

Respondent: It is good that you informed me earlier what we were going to discuss. I needed to tell my husband about the topic and instead it also helped me prepare what I am going to tell you. I am a BED student that started the programme in 1998. It is now 2008 and this is ten years. I should have finished in about six years the latest. It is taking me so long. The reasons for this are clear. I have talked about the flood and here are some:

No.1: the study materials never arrive on time. Sometimes they are not there. Changes are brought into the curriculum which drastically affected our group. We had no basic mathematics

as a course when we started but the change in the curriculum has meant that we begin to suffer with this terrible subject.

No 2: A bachelor's degree programme is not something one can play with. One needs books to refer to but the library is not there. By the time you reach the regional centre during possible weekends the library is closed. You also need computers to browse the internet. We have studied about computer literacy and we have *As* and *Bs* but cannot use them because they are not where we are. If you had one you could not still use it as there is no electricity to connect here.

No3: no lecturer talks to you either via radio which is popular or via mobile phones which sometimes is accessible. Not even letters are sent to us to help us. Worse still are the comments we receive once our assignments are returned. Comments do not make meaning to us. We are just being criticised and called this and that. Remember that we are distant from them. Our situations are complicated and complex. Something must be made to reach us and keep us on board.

No 4: it is difficult to attend vacation school or face to face classes. We are far away from the regional centres. Maybe the tutors must visit us at least once a quarter so that we could discuss our problems with them especially towards examinations. Unfortunately we cannot even use the videoconferencing that I saw in Oshakati or Windhoek. This is what I prepared for you.

Interviewer: Thank you also for making my job easier. How do you feel now that this delay has been brought into your studies?

Respondent: It is terrible. I do not have words to use. It is pathetic and embarrassing. My children and my husband want to see me finishing. My principal also wants to see me finishing the course. But there s nothing that I can show them. I am very unfortunate. I should have done something that I could have finished on time.

Interviewer: But have you been passing?

Respondent: Yes there are many courses that I have passed especially the education courses because they came on time. The science courses have been slow to come.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much again for the brief meeting that we have had. I will arrange for some other time so that we can share on issues that we might have missed.

(The discussion was abruptly stopped as the baby continued to trouble the mother crying sometimes. It was wise that the discussion is cut in a way that could still help us come together some day)

Respondent C

20 August 2008

Interviewer: Good afternoon sir, I am here to discuss challenges that you have encountered during your studies. Can you share some with me?

Respondent: Yes, it is good that you have come. BETD has given me trouble. Some of the trouble could have been avoided and some are difficult still to avoid.

Interviewer: Allow me to interrupt, could you give examples of the avoidable and those that you cannot?

Respondent: Ok, look at the distance from town to this school. Look at the surrounding. You actually cannot believe that there are people who live here. By the way, how did you reach this place?

Interviewer: Well, I found someone in town who had indicated to me that he was coming around this place. I asked him if he knew where this school is and he said he will direct me after dropping him off.

Respondent: Then I understand. We are very far from town. This is about 140 km away from town. The roads are manmade in some cases. You cannot easily avoid this one. People came here for agricultural purposes. The land is fertile and they decided to come here. It is also an area that captures a lot of rain. So the government eventually established this school. There are a few schools within our reach. You cannot easily avoid this.

But you could avoid things like the absence of student support from the regional centres. Here I mean there are no visits from the regional centre. I just saw you for the first time today. There are no books to refer to except the study materials. Our assignments, files and even examination marks sometimes get lost and we are forced to re-register and pay more money. The vacation school and face to face contacts are far away. These, sir, could have been avoided. This was going to help us finish on time. Some are really unnecessary.

Interviewer: What do you think should be done for you in situations of this nature?

Respondent: I wish the office could understand our problems. It is not easy studying in the inland (remote rural areas) as distance is killing us. There is nowhere you can go to the regional office many times in a month. I have a small sedan car but I leave it in town because I can't use it in the inland. Something must be done with our roads, electricity and telephone lines. We are in the dark when our friends in town can just walk to the regional centre and find what they want. Too bad, very bad (sic). The development is slow. We don't know when electricity and these are other facilities will reach inland schools.

Interviewer: But, how do you study?

Respondent: I use candles when they are there. Their absence means that I should only depend on light. Remember this is the time we supervise study for our learners at school. We also have manual work to supervise and we have meetings with parents and among ourselves. Time is just short.

Interviewer: Let us go back to the roads that you mentioned a little while ago. *(Before I could finish the sentence he takes over)*

Respondent: Roads are bad. They are sandy during drier times of the year and you only need four wheel drives in most parts. The roads only appear better during rainy season but you still have problems with the muddy parts of the road. Kavango is a sandy region.

Interviewer: Is transport readily available on these roads?

Respondent: You will be lucky if the principal of the school or a member in the community has a vehicle. It is interesting here. Those that have transport come to our place on Friday for the weekend and go back on Sunday. This is the time we want to be in town on Friday and also come back on Sunday. We work in reverse. Sometimes we organise a vehicle with someone we know and he comes and take us to town. Unfortunately you cannot hire this person alone as it is expensive. This disturbs me when it comes to posting assignments. Assignments are either late or never reaches the centre if you gave them to someone to submit them for you at the regional centre. When you ask the person he will tell you that I forgot to give it in and then by the time you rectify that mistake time is already gone. Failing to submit on time could mean that you will miss the opportunity to write exams and have to re-register. This is frustrating.

Interviewer: Is there anything that you want to add to our discussion?

Respondent: No sir, but please the centre or UNAM must understand our situation. We are too far away from town and this affects our studies drastically. Our salaries are too low. I cannot pay all the years because the programme is expensive and so I am forced to skip some years without studying. This is delaying me and all my plans are not there anymore. I am seriously discouraged.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for the opportunity given. I will send a word through the radio and we could meet and continue this discussion

Respondent: Thank you sir. You are welcome. Maybe by the time you come I will have more questions to ask also.

Respondent D (via telephone from Botswana)

18 August 2008

Interviewer: Hallo, Good afternoon sir, how are you/

Respondent: I am fine and how are you?

Interviewer: Very fine too

Respondent: Thank you

Interviewer: Hmmm, I would like us to look at the difficulties that, as a student you have faced while doing your Bachelor of Education degree with the University of Namibia, Centre for External Studies. Could you share a few with me on that?

Respondent: Yes, maybe one thing I can say I have written several letters to the office of external support but no help from them of course. You could find my letters with them.

Yes, sometimes we even talked straight to the director and posed the difficulties that delay our studies. As you have seen that maybe I am one of the oldest students in the BED programme. Up to now I have not completed my degree.

Interviewer: Now, what do you mean when you say that you are an old student? When did you start with this degree?

Respondent: From 1998 to 2008 I am still struggling. Sometimes we have been delayed by the writing of the modules. We started being registered for courses that have since been changed as the new curricula have been coming into effect. We are caught and we do not know what to do sometimes. Some of the modules have taken a long time to reach us as they were still outstanding. We would be told to register for them and to find out that they are cancelled as they are not on the shelves yet. An example is Electrical and Magnetic Optics. This course has been outstanding for a long time. I only got it this year in April when I went for vacation school. I have studying the subject when it was incomplete.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Respondent: Some parts were given us as drafts sometime back and we attempted to write the assignment without the full modules. This has seriously disturbed us as we have been failing it heavily.

Interviewer: I realise that you almost mention that materials is an issue, study materials that do not arrive on time. Is this what I am hearing from you?

Respondent: That is exactly. That is the most difficult issue that we are facing or I am facing.

Interviewer: Ok?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Where are you teaching?

Respondent: Well it is a remote area. I might say that it is next to Botswana. When it is flooded I do have problems with my studies especially reaching the centre to come and get study materials or find out the materials that I want to use. It takes time for the information from Windhoek to reach our centres.

Interviewer: Now, you mention 'flood' as an issue?

Yes, especially as from November when the rain is heavy, there is no transport that you can use to reach the centre in Katima on time.

Interviewer: How often do you move from your place to Katima when it is flooding time?

Respondent: Yes, when I come for salaries or when I come for materials it takes four days, two days for going and the other for coming back to my place. If you have a problem on the way you could even take a week. That way my teaching is also affected. When I come for salaries or when I come for materials, it takes almost four days. Two days to come and two days to go back (sic). If you have a problem with canoes or public transport it can even take a week. It is not easy to obtain permission from superiors to keep on going to town every one week of each month. It disturbs my teaching

Interviewer: What do you use when flood comes?

Respondent: Sometimes I go via Zambia, Botswana or use a canoe of which when I paddle there are hippos on the way. When the rain comes you could be soaked and your assignments become nothing. You will reach Lusese which is the nearest dry land and may even sleep there waiting for public transport.

Interviewer: In other words, you are saying you could take one week out of the month just to go and pick materials?

Respondent: Exactly. Sometimes that week is lost as you may not get the materials at the centre. You cannot call in advance as your cellophane battery might have gone flat. I am forced to make an order and may not easily come back in the same month to get the materials. I need permission from my superiors and this is not easy.

Interviewer: This is August in the year, are you are reachable by car?

Respondent: Not exactly, there are still some puddles and streams that are not dry yet. It is very difficult to reach my place. That is why I have come today to a place where you can talk to me.

Interviewer: In terms of the difficulties, the canoe is out now. You talked of few streams left with water, what do you do?

Respondent: I walk on foot but you know that I could be carrying books. You have places that require a canoe and other places need one to walk. This is very difficult.

Interviewer: Rain comes, flood begins to swell, how do you move around places?

Respondent: You are forced to walk long distances and you could be soaked with all your belongings, assignments included. When you reach the regional centre to report about the loss of materials you will be told that only a certain number of materials are always sent to centres. You cannot easily get replacements and yet the ones you might have are soaked beyond recognition. It also gets muddy with roads that only four-wheeled vehicles reach some places. You are forced to walk all the 40 to 50 km to reach drier places such as Nakabolelwa, Bukalo, Kabbe or Lusese where public transport maybe waiting.

Interviewer: You are talking of mud; are there no government public roads?

Respondent: Aaaa, no, no, no nothing. There is nothing like that here. You are only talking about manmade roads which change course any time of the year. Even government vehicles suffer the same when wanting to reach the schools that are found in these areas.

Interviewer: How many schools could be in the flooded areas?

Respondent: They are more than fifteen schools with five clinics.

Interviewer: Roughly, how far is your school from Katima?

Respondent: Maybe 87 or 90 km.

Interviewer: And errrr, are you the only student that side doing this programme?

Respondent: Yes, I am. The regional office knows this. Most of my friends have left this place so that they could do their work well. They have gone to Unisa where the materials are.

Interviewer: Now we are at the school. It is your time to study, how do you do it?

Respondent: Well, I face difficulties as this is a remote area. Sometimes I get a gas bottle for light. If it is out of gas I must wait for almost three weeks and go and fill it when I go for salaries. We get our salaries from Katima. We are very strategic when we go to Katima. We use the trip for many things, shopping, handing assignments, and so forth. Most of the time my assignments are late. But I do always write the reason that they are late and it is not recognised. This situation makes me find myself behind. I cannot do more modules in a year as I will need to repeat the following year.

Interviewer: How else can you study?

Respondent: As I have said, I have to stay for more than three weeks without light and doing nothing because I get my salary from Katima. There are no banks where I am, no ATMS – nothing. I only get money from Katima. No candles once they are finished from the small shop around here. Many schools within this part of the region suffer the same.

Interviewer: Besides this which you are sharing with me, what about candles?

Respondent: Candles do not give you the light that you need for studies and besides they are very difficult to find as this is a remote area.

Interviewer: Now if we look at your family as we looking at where you are during yours studies, is there any difficult that face from them?

Respondent: Yes, even if I do not live with them here I have to leave them in Katima with money. This is difficult as the money is little to share. They sometimes do not understand why I keep on repeating courses. They question my financial spending. Even if I explain that the subject was handed even if late and so it has expired, they do not understand that. This has a huge bearing on my family and finances. You know that the subjects are expensive, almost 910.00 per subject.

Interviewer: Let us look at some of the support services that students in the town get. We talk about video conferencing at UNAM. Do you know of anything like that?

Respondent: Well I just saw that in Windhoek and realised that students in Oshakati are also enjoying. I do not have any contact with my tutors. If I did I might not have found myself in this situation. I am landlocked and cannot just access what I could.

Interviewer: What about telephoning with your tutors?

Respondent: There is nothing in this area. The network for mobile phones is also a stumbling block. If you use your mobile phone you can only do it via MASCOM of Botswana or CELTEL of Zambia. The other option is to come closer to where you can access MTC of Namibia. It is very difficult to contact my tutors. That is why I cannot even contact my regional centre for anything as communication is a problem. I am out of that benefits (sic) really. I don't have any contact with my tutors. Yes, I live in this landlocked – you know what I mean? No accesses to anything of that nature...Cellular phones depend on MASCOM of Botswana and is too expensive".

Interviewer: We talked about video conferencing which is out of your reach as is telephone, when you have time to come into town, do you have opportunities to use the computers that are in the regional centre for your studies?

Respondent: Yes, but time cannot allow me.

Interviewer: When there is vacation school, do you always attend that?

Respondent: Yes, I do but there are times when I fail. I failed this time around as I needed permission from my supervisor and he could not allow me to leave school earlier. There is no where schools can close on Friday and I be ready to leave this place, quickly reach town and immediately leave town on Sunday for vacation school that starts on the following day.

Interviewer: We have covered a lot of issues but I am sure you will still allow me to come back to you for further information. This is a learning exercise. Before I close this conversation, is there anything that I did not cover that is of interest to you?

Respondent: We should be given opportunities to answer questions in the examinations that are related to where we are. In this way we are able to apply the knowledge of where we are. We are learning from these situations and surely we could share a lot of experiences. CES should understand our situation and give us ample time to submit our assignments. I do not mean that we should submit even after time has really gone away. If ask permission from them for extension late it be. It is not easy studying here.

Revision should be given us on time. Study materials should also be given to us on time. Even letters explaining or giving us extra information should be sent to us on time.

Interviewer: Now you have reminded me of something. Do you allow me to continue asking new information?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: Do you always get letters from your tutors/lecturers explaining or giving you additional information?

Respondent: There is nothing. We always just get general time tables pasted on walls. Things are out of control.

Interviewer: How do you find comments from your lecturers?

Respondent: Something must be done with the comments we get in our returned assignments. We will not know whether tutors want us to guess what they are saying or we should always attend the vacation school in order to know exactly what they want us to know. It is difficult to

know whether they are criticising our language or content, maybe skills of writing. It is difficult to know what they want us to do with the comments they insert in our assignments.

Interviewer: Do you get feedback from your tutors?

Respondent: Yes, in some cases but not always

Interviewer: Do you understand the feedback from your tutors? Does feedback help?

Respondent: Feedback comes so late, sometimes after the exams have already been written. I always use my posting box. Sometimes I use the radio to get contacted but still it is late to get feedback. If you are lucky that you have the feedback, you might find yourself stranded as well. It is difficult to read the comments in the margin of the assignment. Some tutors seem to have difficulties with writing. They do not know how to write words that help students. What do you do with words like 'good', 'not clear' or 'what is this?' These words do not help. As students we learn nothing from such interaction with our tutors. They forget that they are not with us. They are far away from us.

It would be better still if they contacted us even through the radio. Whoever hears that you are being called through the radio will attempt to tell you that you are needed at a particular place. So most of the things do not reach me in time or they get lost.

Interviewer: What kind of comments would like to see in the margin?

Respondent: Good comments that look at our ability to express ourselves in content and language use will help greatly. What does a tutor lose in making me know that my language is weak or my analysis of the content given is also weak? Nothing (sic) (with a raised voce). He or she simply shows that I am part of his or her student body including those that he is teaching fulltime.

Interviewer: Can you call your lecturers on their mobile lines for guidance once you are areas that have network connectivity?

Respondent: Lecturers do not want to be called on their telephones even if they have included their contacts in the short tutorial letters that they send us. We sometimes have to go to the

regional centre to plead with the academic support person to get hold of this (sic) people. It is not good what they are doing to us.

Interviewer: I have learnt a lot from you. As I said earlier on I will always come back to you for further enquiries. I will call you through the radio so that we can arrange how and where to meet for a continued discussion. Thank you so much

Respondent: Thank you sir, you are welcome. I will be waiting for that opportunity.

Respondent E

22 August 2008

Interviewer: Following the appointment I had made with you I have come this day so that we could have a discussion on the challenges that you face each day during your studies, especially while in these remote areas. Can you share a few with me?

Respondent: There are many problems that have troubled me in my studies:

No 1: I will not understand how UNAM works, especially the department that handles students' assignments, examination marks and all our files. As students we are not happy when we get our assignments lost. You can send the assignments through the regional offices but you will be told later that Windhoek cannot find the assignment or files. After that Windhoek will tell you to re-register and pay again.

Interviewer: So, how does this type of administrative support affect your studies?

Respondent: Do they think money is just found anywhere? Do they think we have time to be repeating the same course/module for so many times as if we nothing else to do. Please, I want to request the director of CES to put the right people in places where our assignments are kept. Sometimes you will find the regional centres telling you or showing you on the computer that the assignment was recorded and you have passed. After two or three semesters the mark is no more. Are computers at regional office different from those that are in Windhoek?

Interviewer: Anything that you want to elaborate on this discussion of administrative support?

Respondent: There are times when you are told that they cannot find the mark. You give them a copy of your assignment or test because earlier in the programme we had examination scripts returned to us. You send the script back to them and they fail you if had passed. They remark you five years after your same group which you were marked with have gone on graduation. I cannot understand this and I am not sure we have the right people in the right positions at CES.

How can we find our files elsewhere when we sent them to Windhoek? How are we sure whether the marks we have been given is our own or they belong to some other students? It is

not fair that our records are not in order especially when this is tied to re-registration and paying again. The programme has become expensive and only for those that have money.

Interviewer: Is there any other problem that you experience as you study?

Respondent: Yes, my family is also a problem. You may not believe this. I cannot concentrate on my studies because I have children at UNAM and in secondary schools. I am about to retire and they want to see money to support them. How can I do that when my salary is so little? This retirement issue leads me to some other bigger problem more than my family. I will only graduate my BETD programme after retiring. My pension will be calculated on my present salary notch. It means that my studies have helped me nothing.

Interviewer: When did you start studying this diploma?

Respondent: I started in 2002 in level three.

Interviewer: But why has this taken you so long?

Respondent: The main reason is that during the first years, 2002 and 2003, our examination scripts were sent back to us. Sometimes the marks were not recorded. We put these marks in the portfolios and sent them to Windhoek for moderation purposes. Our portfolios landed in other students' hands, especially in Oshakati. These were students that had not finished their studies yet. They could remove our scripts and other work that we had done and we never got our files still intact. After one or two years you will be told by the regional office, especially the Windhoek office that the marks are not recorded. You can jump up and down trying to tell them that you passed the course long ago but no one will listen to you. Then you re-register and must pay again. You might find that you owe more money this time and they will not allow you to add modules if your account is high. Some of us dropped during this time waiting for a time when you will enough money to continue.

One of the reasons why I took long to finish is the modules of English Communication Skills. We have repeating module 10 and 11 for many times. There are people who repeated this module for more than five times. This means that these people have paid 350.00 per 5 modules which gives one N$1750.00. I have already paid more than N$20 000.00 if I calculate how I have suffered during this BETD and yet I will not get this money back.

Interviewer: What about academic support to help you with English Communication Skills?

Respondent: These modules have eluded many. I have had less contact with my tutors because I only meet them during vacation schools. It is difficult and more difficult to attend face to face classes when you are so deep in remote areas. The means of transport to the regional centres and back is not easy to find. You just sit here waiting for the vacation school. No academic support officer that comes around to guide us in our studies. You will not find anyone at the office if decide to go on Friday and seek guidance. Our offices are shut during the weekend and the library is also closed.

Interviewer: Do you ever receive comments or feedback to guide you when the assignments come back to you?

Respondent: Yes, the comments are there but they are weak. You find words or sentences like: what is this? Reference? Good, Poor, useless, and many clumsy comments. They do not guide us well. I think our tutors in Windhoek do not understand distance education. They forget that we are not in situations where we can consult libraries and other sources of information. Our only source is the study material. There is a possibility that we will memorise what is in the study guide and just put it back (regurgitate) it during examinations. They do not care about our total development. This has been a bad experience of learning in my life.

Interviewer: What do you think UNAM should do when life seems so difficult for you during your studies?

Respondent: Not only should the responsibility rest on UNAM. It should be on the government. Some of the challenges we face are of national level. They should construct good roads to all schools. Telephone lines should be constructed also. This will facilitate communication in all levels. Electricity should be provided to schools. We could use it in many ways.

Interviewer: What do you mean by ‘many ways’?

Respondent: We could have opportunities to buy computers and go on internet if libraries cannot be provided us. I could constantly check my results via the internet and stay informed about my progress. I could also visit websites that can provide me with exercises on English communication and enhance my studies. This could not have made fail when I could have

passed. Yes, maybe UNAM also should find ways to reach its students in remote and rural areas. We also want to further our studies but if this trend continues, we will go to other institutions that can help us on time any place.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for the discussion that we have had. May I come back to you when there are areas that need clarity?

Respondent: Thank you, you are welcome

Respondent F

23 August 2008

Interviewer: Could you share with me the difficulties that you had during your studies.

Respondent: There were many difficulties that I came across during my studies. The first one is after we have registered; they did not explain to us how to pick the relevant subjects. Later on like on my side, I tried to change the subjects from 2001. When it came to my favourite subjects, I was given what I did not like.

Interviewer: Which subject (s) were out of your specialty or interest?

Respondent: Mathematics

Interviewer: What difficulties came as you were given Mathematics out of your interest?

Respondent: When you are at school, you teach a subject that is different from what you learn. You cannot apply what you have learnt and this makes it very difficult. I had to take mathematics because it was grouped with Integrated Natural Science that I had wanted and which I teach.

Interviewer: Generally, what difficulties do you find as you study? For example, CES offers face to face, we have libraries that you could use, computers that you can use.

Respondent: Like us that are deep into places that are far away from the regional centre, we face many difficulties. You want to come and do assignments during the weekend when time is available but the library is closed, you want to come and check some books to read but you cannot find the library open during the weekends. If you were to come after school time, especially on Friday, you could reach the regional centre when it is already closed.

Sometimes some of us have no time to attend classes, so you miss a lot of information from the library and the vacation schools. I have children that I take care of. They will not allow me to go for classes as I am a single parent.

Interviewer: One of the areas that I have come to learn from other students as a barrier is feedback. Can you share with me how useful feedback from lecturers has been to you especially when doing your assignments?

Respondent: Feedback in assignments is very bad. You can try to do what you are told but you still fail the assignment. This delays my progress and I will have to re-register the same module and it is expensive. You will keep on registering again and again and each time you pay. This is bad. I do not like it. It is a waste of time and money. It is not good. Sometimes the assignments get lost and still have to re-register and pay. It is not good.

Interviewer: How do you know that the assignment reached Windhoek?

Respondent: You bring the assignment to the regional office for posting.

Interviewer: What do you do with the assignments when they are not clear?

Respondent: You ask others (students) to help you or if you are lucky, you will find someone at the regional office to help you with the assignment.

Interviewer: Let us look at the comments that you get from tutors, how helpful are they?

Respondent: In my case, the comments are not helpful sometimes. Mathematics needs more guidance from tutors. When the tutors are giving comments, they have also to give an answer. These comments should help you do the rest of the assignment.

Interviewer: In other words, the comments could be helpful; if they designed in that manner.
Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: How are general instructions in your study materials or assignments or in the question papers are they clear?

Respondent: Yes, they are clear.

Interviewer: Ok, let us look at some of the support that CES offers such as video conferencing. Video conferencing is where you would sit in Rundu and someone teaches from Windhoek. You see the person and you can ask questions as he answers and vice versa. Did you have opportunities to do that?

Respondent: No, such opportunities are not known with us who are in remote areas.

Interviewer: Now what about the place where you are, you said it is far, how far is it from here?

Respondent: It is about 40 km from town.

Interviewer: Any electricity that will help you during your studies?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: So what do you use when do you not have electricity?

Respondent: You will just study during the day

Interviewer: How many are you in the family, i.e. where you are based during work? How many are you? Are you alone?

Respondent: I am with my children and my husband.

Interviewer: What difficulties do you find when you have these people around you during your study?

Respondent: It is very difficult because when you bring your assignments and you want to study they also want to come around and disturb. It is very difficult.

Interviewer: How do you run away from that?

Respondent: I am teaching under a temporal structure and you have no choice but to go there and try to do all your work. It is also difficult there as animals are passing; all sorts of movement are made many creatures. It is equally difficult. It is also disturbing (OK)

Interviewer: The other thing that I want to know is errr, what made you do the BETD?

Respondent: Nowadays life in teaching is becoming difficult because qualifications are needed. With lower qualifications, if you look at your salary, the family, it is very difficult. It will force you to study.

Interviewer: How expensive is this programme?

Respondent: Very expensive

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Respondent: Your family expects to be supported by the merger salary that you get, oh it is difficult. You pay above and beyond what you earn. Sometimes you must stop a year or so and then continue the other year when you have money. You need money for contact classes as they are offered very far from the regional centres. You need to pay for your transport, accommodation there and food. This is very expensive.

Interviewer: Is there a year when you failed to continue with your studies?

Respondent: Yes, I have lost two years in the entire period of study.

Interviewer: Ok, how did you feel during these years?

Respondent: Very bad, because you want to finish but there is nothing you can do. You want to continue with other senior programmes for promotion and good salaries but here you are stuck in the BETD.

Interviewer: How do you think the University should help you in this regard?

Respondent: We thought that we could be helped by letting us finish the programme and then demand that you cannot get your qualification before paying off all the outstanding money. They should not stop us from continuing with modules if you still owe especially when it is so expensive. It could be better.

Interviewer: Anything that you want to contribute to this discussion which you think maybe we did not cover as we talked. Look at the books in the library whether they were helpful during your studies.

Respondent: Yes they were helpful to some extent though the distance of reaching the study centre before it is closed stands as the highest barrier.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for the short discussion that we have had. Should there be any areas that we have left kindly allow me to come back to you for further discussions.

Respondent: Thank you, you are welcome.