

**APPRAISSAL OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION AT
UCC**

BY

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DECLARATION

With the exception of references used, for which due acknowledgement has been made, I, Sekyi Elvis Dan, do hereby declare that this thesis is an end product of my own research under the supervision of Dr S.K Badu-Nyarko and Rev. Prof. Elom Dovlo of the Institute of Continuing and Distance Education, University of Ghana, Legon.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Mrs Ernestina Efua Armoo (née Buckson), my wonderful mother. God bless you.



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I give praise and thanks to the Most High, Creator of the universe and all that is in it for guiding me through this research.

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of the distance education programme at UCC has over the years widened access to higher education to many, especially those who hitherto would not have had the chance in the conventional education system. Student numbers have grown tremendously to about 30,000 in the 2012/2013 academic year. To ensure the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, some student support services are being operated. Common support services for students include face-to-face tutorial, learning materials, guidance and counselling as well as administrative support.

A multi-staged approach comprising purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques was used in selecting respondents from the UCC DE programme. This was done to ensure that the results were more representative of the target population. The instrument used for collecting information from respondents was the questionnaire. In all, 144 students and 20 tutors were interviewed at three study centres located at the Accra High School, OMESS and Holy Child College.

Findings from the study revealed that generally, while support for students in terms of face-to-face tutorials and learning materials were seen as satisfactory, there was more room for improvement with regards to guidance and counseling and administrative support.

Recommendations for supporting students effectively were made and they included the following;

- i. Tutors should ensure that marking of assessment tests and quizzes are done more quickly, especially with regard to tests which are not in the multiple choice format.

- This was brought to light when some students indicated their preference for multiple choice assessment formats because their scripts were marked and returned earlier.
- ii. DE students find classroom furniture to be uncomfortable and therefore UCC should introduce suitable furniture to reduce discomfort among distance students. This challenge arises because the furniture in the classrooms are specifically made for younger students in the rented premises and therefore not suitable for these older DE students.
 - iii. To create awareness of the availability of guidance and counselling services and to increase patronage by students, offices should be designated at all study centres for such purposes. Additional classrooms or offices can be rented to serve such purposes on tutorial days. Also, posters can be put up on notice boards or at vantage points on tutorial days to publicise the availability of such services
 - iv. Since study centres are located at rented premises, it will not be advisable to put up permanent library structures there. Therefore, a mobile library service can be introduced to cater for the library needs of distance students. Also, collaborations with local libraries or libraries in host institutions can be made to provide such services.

In sum, it was evident from the study that the role of support services in facilitating learning by distance students helps in ameliorating the challenges they face and that, UCC's provisions are satisfactory in terms of face-to-face tutorial support and learning material support but inadequate with regards to guidance and counseling and administrative support to students.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The government of Ghana established the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in 1962 to churn out educationists to enhance the educational system at all levels. This became necessary due to the government's rapid development agenda to enhance the human resource potential of Ghana to take control of emerging industrialization and internationalization of the economy. The function of training manpower for the nation is still a vital role that UCC plays. Akuamoah-Boateng, Sam-Tagoe and Brown (2012) note that, UCC's DE programme serves as a tool in upgrading the productive potential of the country through on-the-job training to teachers and other workers. Over the years, the task of the university to train competent and knowledgeable teachers for the classrooms has been satisfactorily accomplished and many achievements attest to this fact. Many of its alumni occupy responsible positions in both local and international organizations. It is also worthy of note that five members of the university's faculty have been admitted in the prestigious Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences by 2011. UCC has become one of the most sought-after universities in the West African sub-region due to its academic prowess. The Chancellor of the university Sir Sam Jonah in his speech at the 44th graduation ceremony in October, 2012, lent credence to this fact thus, "So much has been achieved over the last 50 years and the University's reputation for scholarship is enviable. It has truly become an intellectual powerhouse, a centre of scholastic excellence."

UCC started with the Arts and Science Departments running programmes leading to the award of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science (General) Education degrees. The university now has 10 Faculties/Schools and 52 departments, which are running 78 programmes in total.

The university now has a total student population of 55,325 compared to the pioneering 155 students. The breakdown of the student population as at the 2012/2013 academic year is as follows:

- 16,308 regular students, including graduate students
- 9,017 sandwich undergraduate and graduate students
- 30,000 distance learning students

Over the years, the University has embarked on the diversifying of its programmes and expansion of some of its faculties and infrastructure to meet the changing demands of academia and also to cater for increasing demand for higher education in the country.

One of such novelties that UCC has pioneered in Ghana is distance education (DE) for teachers. Some of the factors contributing to the development of DE in Ghana were identified in a survey conducted by Aggor, Kinyanjui, Pecku and Yerbury (1992) for the Ministry of Education on the challenges of accessing tertiary education as:

- Lack of access because of insufficient space
- High unit cost
- Absence of projections for middle and high-level manpower
- Inadequate infrastructure (staffing, equipment and accommodation) for both learners and lecturers

It is as a result of research findings such as the above that UCC sought to devise ways of admitting more qualified applicants that it hitherto had to deny access. The university sought for both national and international assistance to run a DE programme. One of such assistance needed came from an international partnership with the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. The initiative was driven by the association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) with financing from the Canadian International Agency (CIDA). This made it possible for the effective take off of the programme in 2001, widening access to tertiary education in Ghana.

According to Kwapong (2010), distance education was seen as a solution to the challenges facing conventional education as outlined by Aggor, Kinyanjui, Pecku and Yerbury (1992) above by tackling the primary problems of space and infrastructure as well as the following:

- Widen access to tertiary education
- Create opportunity for work and study
- Enhance access to participation in education at all levels
- Promote equality and democratisation of education
- Provide cost- effective and affordable education and
- Serve as an avenue for financial resource mobilization for the public universities

The UCC website (2013) dates the inception of the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) to 1997 to provide higher learning opportunities primarily for teachers and then other public servants. The centre also provides opportunities for applicants who, even though qualify for admission, fail to enter the university due to constraints in physical facilities.

The University of Cape Coast admitted 10,722 learners for the 2012/2013 academic year as against 721 learners that were enrolled at the inception of the programme in 2001/2002. With regards to the 2012/2013 admission, some 8,140 of the total number of students admitted will offer courses in Education whilst 2,582 will study Business related courses. (Student Records & Management Information Section, UCC, 2013)

Of the number, 4,688 are pursuing Diploma in Education while 1,911 are pursuing Psychology and Foundations of Education, 598 are pursuing Diploma in Commerce, 679 are reading Diploma in Management Studies and 1,218 are reading Bachelor's Degree in Basic Education.

The popularity of the UCC DE programme can therefore not be underestimated with regard to its subscription. This might be attributed to some vital measures put in place by the CCE. According to Akuamoah-Boateng, Sam-Tagoe and Brown (2012), the foundational principles were based on:

- leadership with a sound knowledge base in Distance Education and institutional backing to plan, design, implement and manage the programme:
- and highly motivated academic staff to produce learning materials and supervise the programme to ensure quality and parity of esteem between DE and campus-based programmes.

As part of its desire to vigorously promote distance education, the CCE has acquired sites in seven out of ten regions for the construction of permanent study centres. This has been necessitated by the steady rise in student numbers in the DE programme as shown below:

Table 1.1 Admissions to UCC DE Programmes (2001-2013)

Year	Applicants Admitted
2001/2002	721
2002/2003	2,314
2003/2004	2,878
2004/2005	4,795
2005/2006	5,315
2006/2007	5,981
2007/2008	7,001
2008/2009	6,468
2009/2010	19,234
2010/2011	11,000
2011/2012	12,407
2012/2013	10,722
Total	88,836

Source: Student Records & Management Information Section, UCC, 2013

For any institution to be successful in conducting programmes in the distance mode, it will have to consider the issues of policy, technology, quality assurance, student support services among several others. Galusha (1997) for instance asserts that student support services should be given the necessary attention when planning DE programmes because it resolves issues arising out of isolation of the student from the teacher.

This study therefore focuses on assessing the student support services that the institution provides to the students and attempts to identify aspects of the students' support services that are most critical to the learning process.

In the view of Simpson (2000) student support services in DE refers to all activities beyond the delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of students in their studies and that, these can be in the form of facilities, administrative assistance, supplementary reading materials and references, human interaction, advice and moral support.

Therefore, students support services in DE is generally actions taken by the distance education institution to facilitate learning by the students and reduce the disadvantages associated with learning at a distance. Distance education institutions therefore strive to provide students guidance and counselling services, course content, face-to-face tutorials, library resources and many other services to enhance effective information and administrative systems in the teaching and learning process. Tong (1994) also acknowledges that support services help students overcome difficulties that affect the quality of their academic work. This gives students the confidence that they are not being left on their own, but the institution is interested in their academic progress. In their survey of students' perceptions on quality in higher education Hill, Romich, Seagull, Peebles and Strecker (2003) found that the most influential factors in the provision of a quality education are the quality of the lecturer and the student support systems. Lea and Farbus (2000) also posit that support services for distance students are 'an educational necessity'. Conceptually, in the distance education system, it is generally argued that frequent faculty-learner contact is desirable on the assumption that such experiences contribute to the growth and development of the learners. Student support services may differ from institution to institution and may be influenced by financial standing, its administrative setup or student

preferences. It is the duty of the DE institution to respond to the needs of its students by monitoring and diagnosing their concerns. This is necessary because as noted by COL (2004), some challenges that distance students face varied and usually in the forms of the following:

- Academic - that is understanding difficult material and doing assignments;
- Isolation - that is in terms of feeling lonely and far from needed help and
- Personal - in terms of financial costs and family commitments.

Considering the above challenges, Sewart (1993) suggests that for the effectiveness of students support services, they should be designed to take care of the following:

- the varied needs of students
- the educational peculiarities of the country or institution
- geographical spread of students, resource mobilisation and curriculum
- heterogeneity of the students

For institutions that are into DE or are about to start, the UCCø approach is an experience worth considering because in spite of the challenges in the delivery of student support services which affect the whole programme, it has managed to achieve the following:

- Emerged as the largest and most popular DE programme in Ghana
- Developed experts in module development and writing
- Served as a source of employment for tutors, printing staff etc
- Accrued enough internally generated funds to put up a magnificent 5 storey edifice for the centre totalling about \$8,400,000

The UCC DE programme has also declared monetary gains over the years of its operation as depicted below.

Table 1.2: Monetary Gains of UCC DE Programme (2003-2009)

Year	Value
2003	1,324,921.28
2004	1,475,739.92
2005	4,740,358.02
2006	9,170,531.23
2007	9,850,642.35
2008	10,605,457.15
2009	13,192,193.22
Total	50,359,833.17

Source: Finance Section, UCC, 2010, cited in Akuamoah-Boateng, Sam-Tagoe and Brown(2012)

The success of DE depends on collaborative efforts shared by the DE institution, government, and in some cases private entities. DE institutions are required to ensure efficiency in access, student support services, quality control and other vital functions. This is usually taken care of by specialised departments or units in the institution. On the other hand, government supports is needed usually in terms of policy interventions. In 2006 for instance, the government of Ghana affirmed its commitment to the development of DE by amending its educational policy to entrench its necessity to the educational system (Smith 2013).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Distance education is gaining popularity at a faster rate now than ever before. It is seen to be more flexible or open to a larger number of learners. It virtually removes all physical barriers to education due to the availability of student support services. Some of these barriers include high residential costs, regular classes and student isolation (Galusha, 1997). A similar view is held by Sweet (1986) that without student support services, distance students are likely to drop out due to difficulties such as financial costs of study, disruption of family life, perceived irrelevance of their studies and lack of support from employers. Student satisfaction with support services can be likened to customer satisfaction in the business world and this affects the reputation of the institution. Therefore, in trying to provide students with services such as personal contact programmes, guidance and counselling sessions, library facilities, interactive teaching through TV and radio, and other similar activities that form the components of student support services, DE institutions must develop unique structures to compete in offering world class education to distance learners across the globe. Some features are however common among DE institutions over the world as shown below:

Indira Gandhi National Open University, India has the following:

- 29 Regional centres.
- 17 Specific regional centres
- 650 study/learning centres.
- Interactive radio and TV assistance are given.
- Assignments are received and marked at regional level.

(Distance Education in India, 2001)

Open University, United Kingdom has the following:

- 13 Regional centres.
- 260 study/learning centres.
- All students have the opportunity to be linked to a personal tutor ó 1 tutor to 25 students.
- All students have access to personal tutor counsellors.
- Limited residential school experiences are provided.

(Simpson and Gibbs 2004)

The University of Cape Coast is one of the institutions in Ghana which has pioneered this form of education and it has over the years recorded some experiences which will be beneficial for the future of distance education in Ghana. According to the CCE the programme holds immense potential in terms of its ability to reach larger numbers of students, to reach groups that have previously been excluded from educational opportunities, and to do so with a curriculum which is consistent in content and quality. The question therefore is; how has student support services in distance education facilitated learning by students?

1.3 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to find out how student support services in distance education has facilitated learning by students and reduced the disadvantages associated with learning at a distance to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to find out;

1. The effectiveness of face-to-face tutorial support to distance students.
2. The extent to which learning materials enhance learning at a distance.
3. How guidance and counselling meet the needs of distance students.
4. The extent of administrative support given to distance students.

1.5 Related Research Questions

Questions related to the research are:

1. How effective is face-to-face tutorial support to distance students?
2. To what extent does learning materials meet the needs of distance students?
3. How does guidance and counselling meet the needs of distance students?
4. To what extent is administrative support important to distance students?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study will present to researchers information about distance learners, their needs and desires and how they are being met. It is necessary because distance education is becoming popular in Ghana and student support services play an important role in its development. This study will reveal the important characteristics of support services that make DE work at the university level.

Also, the results of this study are vital for the institution to identify the vital areas of the support system that should be given greater emphasis and improvement to ensure a higher level of satisfaction among learners. It will also bring forth existing support services, their usefulness as

well as recommendations on enhancing efficiency. This appraisal will also provide information needed by external bodies, funding agencies, businesses, students, and other clients who want to provide students support services.

1.7 Definitions of Terms

Terms to be used frequently include:

- i. Open learning ó An educational arrangement that seeks to remove barriers to learning. It seeks to enable people to learn at the time, place and pace of the choice. This results in the widening of access to education to people who cannot or do not wish to go for the conventional education mode.
- ii. Student Support Services ó These are activities or actions packaged by DE institutions to enhance learning at a distance in order to among other things reduce drop-out rate and improve academic record.
- iii. Appraisal ó To assess the quality, quantity and other essential features of a programme or activity.
- iv. Distance Students ó Students who opt to study outside the conventional campus due to the opportunity of choice offered by the institution.

1.8 Scope of Study

The study will involve students and tutors of three of the distance education centres of the University of Cape Coast distance education programme. These study centres are on the campuses of Accra High School in Accra, Holy Child College of Education in Sekondi-Takoradi and Oyoko Methodist Senior High School near Koforidua.

1.9 Organization of the Study

The study will be organized in six chapters.

The first chapter proceeds with a general background of the study which is meant to serve as the foundation stone upon which to build the entire thesis. Readers are then introduced to the main research problem and objectives to be addressed, as well as purpose of study, objectives, research questions for which answers are sought for in the subsequent chapters and the significance of the study.

Chapter two will focus on the review of related literature on the concept of distance education, the need for and the challenges facing student support services.

Chapter three will show the methodology. It will look at the survey design, sampling procedures, the instruments for data collection and data analysis procedures.

Chapter four will display the results from the fieldwork.

Chapter five will provide discussions of the results and findings.

Chapter six will focus on the summary of the study, conclusions, the implication of the theory and practice, recommendations and areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORIES

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The role of student support services in DE is largely seen by scholars as an interactive mechanism that seeks to simulate the nature of conventional education because it presents to the distance student similar opportunities and assistance as that of conventional students via learning materials, library services, face-to-face tutorial sessions, financial aid, guidance and counselling services and many others. This study recognises that the nature and operation of support services for distance students is centred on the underpinning framework of distance education such as theories of autonomous and independent study, theories of interaction and communication, and the theory of industrialisation. However, this study was guided by the framework on isolation and control; overcoming isolation in distance education as espoused by Badu-Nyarko (2010).

Badu-Nyarko's framework stresses the role of the teacher and faculty in helping the student learn. He is of the view that the distance student should not be left in isolation but rather, should be contacted and supported physically, psychologically and emotionally as well. This means that the student will have a relationship or good rapport with the institution and teachers via telephone, internet, feedback on assignments, counselling and face-to-face tutorials. He therefore outlined two strategies based on communication and interaction.

Communication

According to Badu-Nyarko (2010), students will require more assistance from faculty at the beginning of their learning but less as they understand better. DE institutions therefore have to be in regular communication with students to understand their needs in order to meet them appropriately to make learning much easier. He further suggests the formation of study groups whereby students can communicate and share ideas. In distance education, the technology for communication varies from one institution to the other and more advanced institutions tend usually to use more advanced communication tools including Skype, MSN messenger, Wimba, webex and Elluminate (Ingirige and Goulding, 2009). Students need to be adequately briefed and trained in the use of communication technology that may be alien to them. For instance, many rural dwellers in Africa may not be used to internet communication and therefore may lose out when it is used in distance education without prior training (Kim and Shih, 2003).

Interaction

Badu-Nyarko cites Gilbert and Moore (1998) who came up with two types of interaction namely -social interaction and -instructional interaction meant to deal with the problem of isolation in DE.

Social interaction

Firstly, social interaction according to Gilbert and Moore (1998) may not be considered as directly contributing to the learning process but is important in making learning more effective. Some of the social factors include body language, greetings, exchanging personal information,

scheduling, logistics and class management. These are usually common during face-to-face tutorial sessions.

Fulford and Zhang (1993) and Bates (2000) cited in Ingirige and Goulding (2009) are of the opinion that although the face-to-face tutorial sessions may seem more appropriate in socialisation in DE, in its absence, other media should be used in promoting social interactions. This phenomenon is outlined in a case study of students pursuing the masters level programme -MSc1ø at a UK Higher Education Construction School where an internet-based medium known as Wimba serves as a virtual classroom facility enhancing social interactions. Table 2.1 below shows exactly the findings of the study of Ingirige and Goulding (2009) regarding the social interaction methods, the facilities offered within the Wimba virtual classroom and special interventions.

Table 2.1 Social Interactions of a Virtual Classroom

‘Social interaction’ methods	Facilities offered within Wimba virtual classroom	Special Interventions
Face-to-face contact between tutors and learners	Voice only, no video transfer	Not available
Opportunities for learners to question the tutor	Electronic chatting, raising hand and voice transferring	Electronic chatting, voice facility
Student feedback during lecture	Voting, raising hand, electronic chatting, voice transferring	Electronic chatting, voice facility
Assess student engagement in the lecture	Number of times raising hand by clicking icon, voting by pressing icon, electronic chatting using text, voice transferring using microphone and headset.	Room pulse identification
Opportunities for tutor to question learners	Voice transfer, electronic chatting	Electronic chatting, voice facility
Class control and measures to ensure equal opportunities	Initiate via electronic chatting (send personal messages to control specific students), voice transfer, disable student connection	Monitoring of discussion by tutor
Tutor presentation	PowerPoint slideshows, use of white board, archive sessions	Ability to talk through slides and archive
Share applications	Use of whiteboard, transfer of access rights to students, application sharing, desktop sharing	Access rights to students, electronic whiteboard
Guidance and support	Coursework support during tutorials	Write a chat line, use voice facility
Support if a student is absent for a tutorial	Archived sessions	Weblink to archive by tutor

Source: Ingirige and Goulding (2009)

Badu-Nyarko (2010), further explains that a more interactive interface that will enhance real time communication is desirable to motivate and improve learning. A simulated real-time

interaction between the DE institution and the distance learner is advantageous to DE and is presumed to produce good results.

Instructional interaction

The various aspects that make up instructional interaction according to Gilbert and Moore (1998) include communication of content, setting objectives, questioning, answering, pacing, sequencing, branching, adapting, evaluating, individualizing, handling responses, confirmation of learning, controlling navigation and elaboration. This kind of interaction just like the social interaction is facilitated by the teacher or instructor. Badu-Nyarko (2010) is of the opinion that instructors have the ability to either help students excel or fail in their academics. He asserts that instructors with warm, positive attitudes are particularly necessary for students who have often endured hostility and alienation in previous educational experiences.

In a similar line of thought, Moore (1989) identifies three critical types of interaction in DE. The first is the learner-instructor interaction which according to him facilitates motivation, feedback, and dialogue between the teacher and student. The second is the learner-content interaction which shows how students make academic use of learning materials at their disposal. The third type of interaction is the learner-learner interaction which shows the academic collaboration among students. Moore and Thompson (1990) also concur that frequent interaction between teacher and student such as feedback and tutorials, and also among students such as group studies is desirable for academic excellence.

Mason (1994) is of the opinion that effective interaction enhances the affective level of students and this results in a sense of enthusiasm in learning. In the same vein, during training workshops, interaction enhances the level of understanding. Trainees can easily remember routines or procedures because of their direct involvement during the training. Mason (1994) strongly

advocates for teacher-student interaction because according to her, "opportunities for learners to express their own points of view, explain the issues in their own words and formulate opposing or different arguments, have always been related to deep-level learning and the development of critical thinking" (p. 26).

The above positions espoused by various scholars bring to fore the indispensable nature of students support services in distance education because it creates the needed interactivity between students, tutors and the institution, thereby enhancing teaching and learning. In effect, support services are important in overcoming challenges of distance students including the absence of dialogue and isolation. When DE institutions effectively use support services, they tend to put the student at the centre of learning rather than the institution.

In spite of the above theories suggesting the indispensable nature of interaction and communication in relation to supporting distance students, Dzakira and Idrus (2003) caution, that the level of interaction should not be such that it is distractive to their learning, especially with regards to social interactions which does not deal directly with the learning process.

2.2 Literature Review

The existence of student support services has been the subject of numerous studies and commentary as evidenced by the extensive literature that has accumulated on the issue. A review of a wide range of literature reveals varied reasons for the use of student support services in distance education. This chapter represents a review of relevant literature on the role student support services play in achieving the goals of distance education.

2.2.1 Distance Education

Distance education, distance learning, dlearning or D-Learning is a mode of delivering education and instruction, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as a classroom (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_education). A discussion of distance education can be done from various perspectives but there are certain aspects that cannot be ignored such as its nature, justification, challenges, technology and its future.

Nature of DE

Distance education has developed from very modest beginnings to a more sophisticated nature. It has a history which spans over a hundred years. In its early stages, it was described as *correspondence education* because teachers taught students at a distance, separated by space and or time through the postal mailing system. Gradually and impressively, modern technological innovations have modified the practice significantly.

In French it is referred to as *enseignement* or *formation à distance*, *Fernstudium*/*Fernunterricht* in German, *educación a distancia* in Spanish and *istruzione a distanza* in Italian. Many other terms have been used to refer to distance education in many languages over the decades but not all are synonymous, though they might have some resemblances.

The following are cited by Keegan (1996);

Fernunterricht is a German word meaning 'instruction at a distance'. It stresses the physical distance between the learner and the teacher which does not allow direct interaction. The term is used by many non-governmental organisations and used to refer to the opportunity given to ambitious and gifted but underprivileged people who are denied the opportunity to access conventional education (Peters 1973:206).

Fernstudium is also a German word meaning 'learning at a distance in higher education'. Though its meaning is similar to *Fernunterricht*, *Fernstudium* mainly describes the situation whereby individuals, discontent with their socio-economic status try to elevate themselves in the social strata through education (Dohmen 1967:9).

Zaochny is the Russian term for 'distance' in DE. To Peters (1991:52), it suggests that the teaching and learning that take place is 'without eye contact' between the teacher and the learner. This means that education can take place all the time without necessarily involving physical contact.

Various scholars have come up with definitions for distance education over the many decades of practice. They include the following;

Distance education is an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner. (Perraton and Creed, 2000: 1)

The term distance education covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization. (Holmberg, 1977:9)

Distance education is all arrangements for providing instruction through print or electronic communications media to persons engaged in planned learning in a place or time different from that of the instructor or instructors. (Moore, 1990:xv)

It can be noticed that when the various definitions of distance education are examined, certain similarities arise and these are part of what Keegan (1996) identifies as the five main characteristics of DE listed below:

- i. The partly detached situation of teacher and student throughout in the educational process;
- ii. The conscious efforts made by DE institutions in supporting teaching and learning at a distance;
- iii. The usage of technologically based interventions such as print, audio, video or computer in bridging the distance gap between teacher and student and thereby enhancing the educational process;
- iv. The facility of cooperative communication that helps students to interact more easily with teachers despite separation by distance usually via feedback on assignments etc;

- v. The existence of occasional meetings between teachers and students for tutorials and also, among students for social activities. However, students usually learn individually rather than in groups due to the quasi-permanent nature of DE.

It is evident from the above characteristics that communication technology is very important in DE. It is the

In effect DE institutions will strive to have most of these characteristics to be more effective.

Definitions for distance education evolve as new modes of interaction are discovered. For instance, modern technological advancement such as audio-conferencing, video conferencing, or computer conferencing at scheduled times make instant interactive teaching and learning sessions possible without the teacher and learner being at the same place.

It can however, be deduced from the above characteristics associated with DE that there is a significant difference between the DE student and the campus-based student. Molefi (1998) has identified the following factors that distinguish distance students from campus-based students:

- Distance students are physically removed from the teacher but the campus-based student has face-to-face contact with teacher.
- Distance students are isolated from other learners but the campus-based student is in contact with other learners throughout.
- Distance students set their own working pace but campus-based students' learning pace is set by the teacher.

Justification for DE

The provision of educational opportunities has become the headache of many developing countries, which coincidentally have the highest population growth rate in the world. According to Haub and Gribble (2011), high population growth rate in developing countries is as a result of a myriad of factors, most notably, the incidence of high birth rates. The efforts of various governments to provide enough schools for its people have proved futile over the years. The cost in putting up classrooms, laboratories, residential facilities as well as pay lecturers in response to the rapid surge in educational demand is a source of worry and a burden that governments have difficulty with (Ahmed, 2011).

Though most students prefer conventional education, a substantial number also opt for the distance mode due to peculiar reasons. Cited in Gilham and Gilmour (1995:24), a study conducted on behalf of the Overseas Development Administration on DE in 1994 recognised the following advantages of DE for both students and employers.

For students:

- They have the free will in deciding where and when to study
- They can benefit from the modular form of credit accumulation which makes it possible for students to know their credit scores over the years of their studies
- They benefit from reaching greater academic achievement without leaving their job
- People who are disadvantaged by their family roles especially women or hindered by physical disability from accessing conventional education have the choice of studying at a distance in the comfort of their places of abode.

For employers:

- Workers who hitherto will have taken study-leave to better their academic qualification remain at post and do so via distance education.
- Employers benefit from the immediacy of application of better working skills to the job by workers which enhances production
- Time and other resources that would have been used to organize on-the-job training can be saved for other human resource activities since DE serves as further training for workers.

With the above advantages associated with DE, UNESCO cited in COL (2004) also proposes that the main concern should be the following:

Firstly, to promote basic education for those who missed out in their earlier years and for this reason DE will make it possible for more teachers to be trained. Secondly, DE should offer opportunity for adult education and higher education. Another concern that UNESCO proposes that DE should focus on is in encouraging relevant changes the provision of conventional education. The fourth concern to be addressed is the issue of teacher training. Teachers are to be encouraged to undertake further studies or training via DE to enhance their skills. UNESCO also urges development in higher education to bring about high-quality systems of education. Lastly, UNESCO proposes that competencies of DE personnel should be enhanced so that they give off their best.

Challenges of DE

In spite of the numerous reasons that tend to justify DE, Jackson (2013) identifies the following challenges of DE:

- Distance students are faced with the challenge of self-discipline in their academic work. This is so because the flexibility of the distance education programme makes it easy for procrastination. In this case, tutors are not physically present to ensure strict adherence to timetables and other academic schedules. In the relaxed atmosphere of their homes, students are confronted with distractions from family and friends to the detriment of their studies. Therefore, for any academic self-discipline in terms of giving academic work its desired attention is a pre-requisite for the success of any distance student.
- Although distance students can contact their teachers via post, email or telephone they feel disadvantaged because the usual physical presence of the teacher is absent. This makes the learning experience a bit artificial in the sense that the human element which most learners are used to is virtually absent. Sometimes, the time it takes for a student to receive feedback from the teachers is too long and in many cases the student may lose the confidence to ask follow-up questions.
- The feeling of seclusion from the classroom environment is a difficulty that distance students face. This is because unlike conventional education where students are taught together in a classroom, DE students are cut-off from their colleagues and are only connected via media such as the internet and video conferencing as well as specially organised tutorial sessions. Students who are used to studying in classrooms with their colleagues will therefore feel lonely and bored till they become used to it.

- With the fast advancing technological era, more sophisticated technology is being used in DE. Students therefore will need to be well versed and in the technology being used in order to access learning materials more easily. With regards to online courses students require a computer with internet access. They will also require some electronic gadgets like CD player to access learning materials in the form of VCD or DVD. Unless DE institutions offer special training for students who are not well versed in unfamiliar technology, they cannot benefit adequately from the learning materials.
- There is relative delay in feedback in distance learning. Distance students do not have immediate feedback from tutors as compared to on-campus students who are physically connected to the tutors. It is only during the specially scheduled face-to-face tutorials that immediate feedback can be obtained. In terms of questions and answers.

Technology in distance education

DE cannot do without technology because it is what brings the teacher and the learner together. It is through the use of technology that instructional materials are sent to learners. Over the many years of the practice of DE, differences between media and technology have become less as they are integrated into single transmission systems owing to global trends (Ahmed, 2011). Technology in DE is aimed at helping the learners to access learning materials, the teacher or the DE institution without problems. It also helps to increase access to information and provide greater access to learning for students with special needs.

The massive proliferation of technology over the last few decades and its increasing presence in academia also serves to encourage distance education. Educational institutions have come to

realize the advantages in using modern technology to reach a wider number of students who hitherto would have been denied admission. Siriginidi (2006) makes an effort to distinguish between the various types of technology used in DE in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.2: Some Common Technologies Used in DE

Technology	Characteristics	Notable features
Print	Readily available, materials inexpensive, portable and with high comfort level	Requires reading skills, no interactions, limited sensory involvement and time delay
Audio tape	Audio learning tool, very mobile, easily accessible and duplicated, and inexpensive when combined with print materials	Useful in language learning and practice as well as literature. Linear format with no visual cues and interaction
Video tape	Versatile approach to providing a wide range of learning activities from skill and drill to simulations	Hardware is expensive and being replaced by less expensive internet delivery
Telecourse	Delivery over TV, usually a cable public access channel or school owned channel	Model must include ways for learners to interact with the instructor. Phone call in is popular. Print materials accompany on-air instruction
Internet/web based	Instructionally delivery over the internet, either learning modules or entire courses; incorporates multimedia, worldwide access and interactive	Improved broadband communications will enable the effective use of video and communications. Requires computer and web access

Source: Siriginidi (2006)

According to Poulin (2010) the most recent advances in technologies have focused on computers and the internet. The popularity of these technologies has grown as an increasing number of personal computers entered homes, and as an increasing amount of data could be transmitted over regular telephone lines. The 1960s and 1970s saw experiments using computer-assisted instruction, which were self-contained computer programs that led the learner through the lessons. Given the speed of the computers, many of these programs were originally text-based, and they were greatly improved in later years when graphics, pictures, animation, video, and audio could be added. The Internet created a boom in online learning at the end of the twentieth century. The choice of either synchronous or asynchronous communications options, the ability to add audio and video, as well as a variety of new teaching techniques has made the online learning environment more attractive to both teachers and learners.

The integration of the internet-based learning has enhanced the learning experience, in the view of Hanna (2012). This intervention has made learning easier and fun. In this instance, distance students can engage in group work and exchange of ideas. Many institutions have also recognised this mode as a smart way of cutting costs which would have been in the form of printing for their numerous students. It is possible that many students may not be conversant with the internet and other modern teaching and learning technology. Aden, Sybouts and Wess (1998) therefore suggest that a special arrangement should be made to introduce such students to unfamiliar technology in order to make them feel at par with their colleagues who may be already conversant with them.

Though the relevant technology may be available, according to Valentine (2002), lack of training for both teachers and students is hampering the optimum use of technology. In this vein, Webster and Hackley (1997) hypothesise that students will experience more positive learning outcomes

from technology-mediated distance learning with instructors who exhibit more control over the technology. At the UK Open University, Jelfs, Richardson and Price (2009) note that "tutors are provided with access to the University's conferencing system, which provides them with an email account to use for any communication with students or the University, as well as access to a wide range of computer conferences" (p. 5). It is therefore evident that the mere availability of technology does not make it useful to teaching and learning. Similarly, Schnorr is of the opinion that though the idea of integrating new technologies into education is appealing to most institutions, the needed policy framework for its implementation is not forthcoming.

Distance education cannot do without technology because it is what brings the teacher and the learner together. It is through the use of technology that instructional materials are sent to learners. Technology in DE has therefore sought to aid the learner to access learning materials, the teacher or the DE institution without problems. According to Keegan (1995), DE was made possible, by advancement in transportation and communication technology, propelled by the Industrial Revolution. This was because, transportation, usually by rail and communication, usually by post sought to bridge the physical gap between the teacher and student. In this way, distance does not become a barrier to education and teaching is done through posted learning materials.

Though technology greatly enhances the teaching and learning process, it cannot be the panacea to all DE problems. The ability of the tutor to use innovative strategies and up-to-date information in teaching is a critical success factor of DE (Greenberg, 1998).

Table 2.3: Technology Options in DE

Type of activity	Some technology options for the institution	Technology required by students and/or tutor
Information to potential students. Eg. Advertising courses, course information	Leaflets	None
	Advertising in newspapers etc.	None
	Broadcast advertisements	Radio/TV
	Internet	Computer + Internet access
Student preparation of assignments	Handwritten submission	None
	Typed submission	Typewriter
	Word-processed submission sent by post	Computer + printer
	Word-processed submission sent attached to an email	Computer + Internet access
Assessment	Paper-based	None
	Computer-based	None

Source: COL (2004:54-56)

The future of DE

The future of DE is expected to be shaped by advancement in online technology. This will ensure that both teaching and learning process is considerably improved (Poulin 2010). LaMartina (2012) believes most institutions will have little choice but to expand their online offerings. He attributes this to the high costs involved in securing accommodation on campus as well as the risks in commuting to and from campus.

The International Association for Distance Learning (IADL, 2013), predicts that the future of DE will be marked by continuous learning whereby individuals will have to update their knowledge regularly in order to keep up with current trends and also to keep their jobs, gain promotions or to change jobs. The future of DE will also be marked by the growth in international study (IADL, 2013). This is because the use of new technology especially online media will make it possible for people all over the world to enrol in DE institutions anywhere in the world without the need to travel. Students also get the advantage of interacting with colleagues with diverse cultural backgrounds and establish important links. It is also expected that educational institutions will come up with more attractive offers in response to the global education competition. In the future, distance students will learn to be more independent and more comfortable in communicating via new media which hitherto was not used (IADL, 2013).

2.2.2 Student Support Services

According to Molefi (1998), student support services are any systems or procedures that are purposefully created and effectively utilised by a distance education institution to support and or facilitate teaching and learning at a distance (p. 1). Tong (1994) also regards support services as essential in helping students overcome difficulties that affect the quality of their academic work. This gives students the confidence that they are not being left on their own but the institution is interested in their progress. Donald (1997) sees student support as more overarching involving the entire setting in which learning takes place; the disciplines that provide the knowledge learning support, the learners and the arrangements made for them, the teaching and learning process, and the assessment of learning, institution and programs (Donald, 1997: p.xi).

One can probably argue that student support and learning support could be used interchangeably. Student support is generally viewed in two components comprising of academic support and non-academic support with an objective to help learners learn successfully (Simpson 2002). Learning support on the other hand is more learning specific. It refers to support systems intended to enhance and improve learning. The principal objective of learning support is to produce distance learners who are able to progress through their programmes learning successfully, able to be independent learners who have good learning skills and strategies, and able to interact effectively with tutors, learning materials and other learners at any time. Tait (2003) identifies three roles that support services in DE play: first, support services encourage the cognitive (learning) development of students; secondly, support enhances the self-esteem of students therefore building their confidence; thirdly, support for students is systematic in helping students meet the required standard expected of them so that they do not fall behind or redraw from school.

Notwithstanding the above views on student support and learner support, this study seeks to put the various support offered to DE students into the following groups;

- Face-to-face tutorial sessions
 - Tutorial schedules
 - Support by tutors
 - Student assessment
- Learning material support
 - Helpful course books
 - Reference materials
- Guidance/Counselling support services
 - Student orientation
 - Counselling
 - Availability of counsellors and counselling offices
- Administrative support services
 - Information dissemination
 - Help provided by administrative staff
 - Library use

2.2.3 Face-to-face Tutorial Sessions

Face-to-face tutorials

Face-to-face tutorials in DE are organised to enable students meet tutors who respond to their questions, offer further explanation or clarification to learning materials provided (COL, 2003). To Panagiotis (2010), regardless of their autonomy, self-motivation and interaction with the learning material the students of DL programs are vulnerable regarding the application of the acquired knowledge. Tutors are expected to establish a cordial relationship with students in order to help them learn and overcome all other problems that may affect their academic life. In other words, the tutor's role is that of counselling and tuition (Panagiotis, 2010). In order to ensure a good learning experience, the tutor is to among others things give information about the objectives of the study programme, regularly assess students' progress, provide opportunity for students to ask questions, respond to questions posed by students and control the learning experience (COL, 2003).

Face-to-face interaction is the most common means of offering tutorial contact services to distance students, especially in developing countries. These tutorial sessions are moderated by an assigned tutor who offers further explanation on relevant course materials mostly based on questions that the students ask (Thorpe 1990). Aggor and Asomaning (2007) agree that face-to-face tutorial sessions are vital in the success of academic success in DE, and that, without tutorials, students will be found wanting. An important aspect of this medium of tutorials is that it brings students and tutors physically together to interact in order to improve the teaching and learning experience. The class size then becomes an important factor because it is usually seen that large class sizes do not permit thorough interaction between tutor and student and even

among students themselves. A contrary opinion is held by Barwick (2007) who states that adequate research has not been done to prove that small class sizes are better than large class sizes or vice versa. He is therefore of the opinion that ascribing the success of the learning process to class sizes will not be accurate since to him there are a myriad of other factors.

In Tanzania, such face-to-face interactions, present to tutors the onerous task of reinforcing the learning that students have done individually (Tanzania Distance Learning Assessment 2009).

According to Jelfs, Richardson and Price (2009) the tutor's role is to mark assignments with detailed formative feedback and to provide support to students as appropriate (p. 4). Also cited in Donkor (2011:41) the Namibia Polytechnic Face-to-Face Manual (2009) recognises the primary role of tutors in making learning materials more understandable but also charges them to encourage and motivate students in the following ways:

- Using assignments to buttress tutoring
- Devising ways of encouraging interaction among students
- Aiding students to improve academically
- Being ready to assist students at all times
- Being in tune with the characteristics and needs of distance students

Thorpe (1988) recognises the important contributions of tutors in achieving academic success and thus suggests that tutors be taken good care of by DE institutions. Tutors face problems relating to the attitudes of students towards academic work and personal issues too. DE institutions should therefore focus satisfactory amount of attention to help curtail challenges faced by tutors. For example, conditions of work such as wages and other benefits need to be reasonable and disbursed on time.

The University of South Africa (UNISA) employs the services of competent and experienced tutors who facilitate the face-to-face tutorial sessions for the students at each regional centre. Apart from this, students also have access to e-tutorials via internet links such as video conferencing, e-mail, Skype and myUnisa online student portal (www.unisa.ac.za).

At the Open University of Malaysia (OUM), during face-to-face sessions tutors are tasked to ensure that students have adequately grasped the subject matter by providing the needed explanations and additional learning materials where necessary. At such sessions, students are encouraged to interact with themselves as well as with the tutors to build healthy academic relationships. Students at OUM have access to an online discussion forum known as MyVLE where they have access to learning materials and e-tutors as well as the opportunity to interact with peers online. This is usually available to students who may wish not to partake in face-to-face sessions due to some reasons. (www.oum.edu.my)

In a study of the University of Swaziland by Sukati, Esampally and Vilakati (2007), they noted the following about face-to-face tutorial sessions;

In UNISWA, each module is given a total of 15 lecture hours and 10 tutorial hours for the whole academic year. The lecture hours include time for tests and other assessment work and contact-cum-counselling work. (Sukati, Esampally and Vilakati, 2007)

In the case of online tutoring Tella et al. (2001) cited in Kanninen (2008), note that the DE tutors' task in online learning is to design the learning process in a way that motivates the students to learn. The tutor also has to put in measures to enhance the communication network of the students and faculty. Another role of the tutor in the online tutoring situation, a tutor is to organise the learning process in simple and understanding manner to help students understand

what they learn much easily. The online tutor also plays the role of a communicator by encouraging the use of social networks and learning resource bases for academic purposes. Finally, in an online learning environment, the tutor serves as a guide to students, helping them to follow the learning pace and to fully utilise what is provided for them online because of the absence of a face-to-face meeting.

In a study of three distance learning institutions in the United States of America in 2011, Nsiah (2011) notes that the notion of optimal class size differed from one institution to the other. The desirable class size is mainly based on the nature of the class or programme. Therefore, the study revealed that the three institutions operated class sizes of 15-30, 18-30 and 125-150 (Nsiah2011).

Student assessment

In the development of Distance Learning programmes, Schools should ensure that the intended aims of the programme can be achieved at a distance, and that the relevant learning outcomes of taught elements can be adequately assessed. (University of Birmingham Code of Practice, Distance Learning, 2013-2014: p.7).

Student assessment is one of the key issues in education because it helps teachers to know if students grasp what they learn. In some cases, more developed DE institutions will prefer computerised assessments for students but mostly, students will have to converge at their various study centres to be assessed. This is not done often due to the high number of students compared to the tutors or examiners who will mark the scripts. Tutors set such assessment tests, clarify the instructions, mark and give the necessary feedback to students (COL, 2003). As cited by Lentell (2003), Jackson (2001) states that ‘careful reading of student work is the core of teaching’ if

students realize you are paying close attention to their work, they feel a responsibility to pay close attention to you (p. 45)

Du Plooy (2007) outlines some important strategies of student assessment such as testing for content knowledge based on recognition, free recall and aided recall. Recognition is the ability of the student to make the correct choice from other alternatives. Free recall is the descriptive ability of the student of activities and experiences. Also, aided recall tests the student's ability of providing appropriate answers or solutions to problems or questions posed to him/her without being assisted in any way.

According to the Michigan State University (2013), assessment should aim at bringing out results that will enhance the teaching and learning process. In effect, a desirable assessment is one that:

- evaluates learning outcomes
- is fair, reliable and accurate
- is easy to administer, score, and interpret
- updates the teacher on the academic progress of students
- provides the teacher an opportunity to correct mistakes of students
- seeks to help students to improve academically

Though it is the aim of every assessment activity to help the students exhibit what they have learned, it is difficult to understand why many of them despise this exercise, which is for their own good. Koomson and Ahiatrogah (2010:2) narrate a situation of this sort at UCC as follows;

The University of Cape Coast, like most institutions of higher learning, believes that examination is an important tool for evaluating students learning outcomes. In her

determination to live by her vision and mission statement of being a centre of excellence, the Centre for Continuing Education, every semester, organizes 3 quizzes, 1 assignment, and an end of semester examination to assess the academic performance of her students. Unfortunately, many students are not comfortable when their learning is to be assessed. It is even alleged that the mere mention of the word 'tests' sends fear down the spines of distance education students while others consider tests as a way of keeping them on their toes (Koomson and Ahiatrogah 2010:2).

Due to peculiarities of each institution, they may have particular ways of assessing their students based on what the assessment sets to achieve. The Michigan State University (2013) for instance uses among others, the following;

Practice exams

Practice exams, class assignments and homework usually consist of questions assessing the day-to-day or topic-to-topic progress of students. Practice exams are usually related to such courses which involve practical work such as agriculture, engineering or nursing. The nature of these forms of assessment enables students to pre-empt what the actual exam may entail and make them feel less tensed. In most cases, grades scored in practice exams are added to the final exam grade.

Subjective assessment

Subjective assessment is a form of questioning which may have more than one correct answer (or more than one way of expressing the correct answer) (Wikipedia 2013). Subjective

assessment relies on the sole conclusions of the teacher on how he thinks a student fared in a particular subject and this is informed by how persuasive the answer is.

Objective/Multiple choice assessment

Objective assessments are made up of questions which come with possible answers. Students are required to identify and select correct answers from several wrong ones. Multiple-choice items are best used for checking whether students have learned facts and routine procedures that have one, clearly correct answer (<http://www.fairtest.org/facts/mctfcats.html>). This kind of assessment is easy to mark compared to subjective assessments since all students are required to produce the same correct answers.

Self-assessment

This is done to help the student know whether they are in tune with whatever they are being taught. This serves as a measurement of how the student is progressing and also helps him/her to find out his/her strengths and weaknesses.

Interactive assessments

Interactive assessments are technologically based and they are designed in such a way that students can know how well they fared immediately after taking the test. This is mostly computer-based and is especially important in DE because of the geographical gap between students and the educational institution. DE students in many DE institutions can access examinations online and find out how well they fared too. This seeks to reduce the cost involved in printing exam questions and marking the scripts of thousands of students. According to Jelfs,

Richardson and Price (2009) tutors in the UK Open University have since 2007 been expected to use the electronic assignment submission system for most courses, and are increasingly expected to make use of computer conferencing, whether as an adjunct to other forms of support, or as the primary means of learner support to their student group (p. 5).

In a study of three cases in DE in the United States of America, Nsiah (2011) made important observations concerning assessment of student learning. The three institutions studied used assessment in measuring the academic progress of students. They used subjective as well as objective methods concurrently to achieve various targets. He noted that true or false questions were also used. Usually, DE institutions use objective and true or false questions to fasten the rate at which scripts are marked and graded since subjective questions require more attention to detail in order to assess. He also identified the problem of plagiarism in all three cases and noted that the institutions were making efforts at combatting the practice. One such intervention was the use of the www.turnitin.com online service which helps in identifying plagiarised work.

At UNISA, student assessment undergoes regular re-designing in order to bring out the best of students. This can be summarized by a comment on newly designed courses by Van Zyl (1996): 'A unique assignment system designed in collaboration with the Bureau offers students three routes: a fast route for those who are able to work through the course material at an accelerated rate; a normal route for those who prefer to submit assignments at regular prescribed intervals; and a back-up route for those who find it difficult to adhere to fixed submission dates'

2.2.4 Learning Material Support

Learning materials

According to the Distance Education Council of India's (2006) guidelines, for regulating the establishment and operation of distance education institutions, "all learning materials including print, counselling, multimedia and innovative methods should be adopted as an integral part of the delivery of programme" (p. 6).

In DE, study materials serve as the primary source of knowledge to students. They are usually printed and are designed in such a way that they can be understood easily. Printed materials may include workbooks, assignments, and tests sheets. It is the traditional practice in DE for students to receive printed test sheets via post and submit completed assignments in the same way. In recent times however, many DE institutions require students to access some learning material online and even take assessment tests in the same mode. These two media go side-by-side in many DE institutions (Tanzania Distance Learning Assessment 2009). According to du Plooy (2007) the study material is specially designed to help the student learn as if a teacher was present.

At UCC, lecturers are contracted to write and design course modules for distance students. They explain the modules to the tutors of the various study centres and provide them with standard assessment tests. The collaboration of the campus-based lecturers and the DE tutors enhance the learning process and DE students feel they are receiving just as much as the campus-based students (Akuamoah-Boateng, Sam-Tagoe and Brown 2012). If learning materials are not carefully designed and produced, they will be difficult to comprehend and students might end up

not appreciating it. DE managers therefore need to ensure that they are made to adhere to the highest standards of quality (Sim, Atan and Idrus 2005).

The unique role of course module in DE cannot be overlooked since it serves as the primary source of learning for distance students. COL (2004:81) therefore identifies the following features that a course module should contain to make it effective:

- Learning targets
- Useful progress tips
- Words should relate to students personally by addressing him/her as 'you'
- Use of many examples and case studies
- Coherent outline of topics
- Use of symbols
- Use of assessment tools in checking student's progress
- Concise explanations
- Answer spaces for self-assessments
- Reviews of topics
- Self-assessment questions

Ploy (2007) also has a similar opinion to that of COL (2004:81) that the characteristics of effective study materials include interactive texts, skills-building activities and tasks, as well as questions that require a critical review. In the view of Sukati, Esampaly and Vilakati (2007), course materials should aim at enhancing the student's ability to be self-directed, self-motivated and self-evaluating.

At UNISA, the basic learning materials are printed and these are developed by staff based at the headquarters. In order to encourage easy and effective learning, other learning materials such as multimedia and internet-based materials are provided to students (www.unisa.ac.za). Study materials produced by UNISA are in English and Afrikaans. However, efforts are being made by the Department of African Languages to translate additional study material into the other nine official languages of South Africa (Slabbert 2009).

2.2.5 Guidance/Counselling Support Services

Guidance and counselling for distance students is meant to take care of critical issues that affect aspects of their lives which may have impact on their status as students. Guidance/counselling for DE students therefore usually target the academic, social, personal, occupational, health, family and spiritual aspects of their lives though some may be more pronounced than others.

Student Orientation

Orientation for fresh students in any educational institution serves as the maiden official physical contact between students and the faculty of their new academic institution and is described by Mullendore and Banahan, (2005) as a period where students pick up certain traits and character which they hope will make them adjust to their new environment but this can also have major effects on their academic performance. Orientation is provided to help students to adapt better to a new environment. New students may be socially and psychologically lost because they have lost the psychological support of former teachers, friends and parents (in the

case of campus-based students). Distance students on the other hand may not be bothered socially because usually their social lives are not affected by their academic life.

At most orientations, students have the opportunity to talk to the institution's personnel about issues such as financial aid, suitable tutorial schedule and even regarding their future academic plans. In addition to asking questions, students have the chance to collect their reading materials and student identity cards made.

During orientation, students are introduced to a variety of tutoring and student support systems, and explore various issues and critical concepts. According to Nsiah (2011) DE students become well-versed and confident with teaching and learning delivery systems when they are given the relevant know-how at the commencement of their study. Training of students can also be done in the course of their study when new technology is introduced.

Guidance/ Counselling

Guidance in schools refers to the provision of experiences which assist students to understand themselves. It involves a series of activities until its goal is achieved. For guidance to be effective and to plan satisfying interventions, adequate information is taken from the students through observation, interview, and questionnaire among others.

Hal and Maclean (1955) cited in Kankam and Oniuehu (2000:6) define counselling as 'a process which takes place in a one-to-one relationship between an individual beset by problems which he cannot solve alone and a professional worker whose training and experience have qualified him to help others reach solutions to various types of personal difficulties' (p. 6).

Counsellors serve the purpose of assisting students in making plans and choices in relation to their education or personal development. The total well-being of the students is their priority, although they may provide some form of counselling for the academic staff too.

Guidance and Counselling play a vital role in education settings; identifying potential barriers to learning, developing and assisting learners to overcome these barriers, assisting their transition from education to work, or supporting a transition into higher education or into further career opportunities. Therefore, guidance and counselling interventions may target academic, social, personal, occupational, health, family and spiritual aspects of a student's life.

Cited in Kangai, Rupande and Rugonye (2011), Robinson (1991) categorises guidance and counselling interventions in three ways as follows:

Those relating to study techniques and learning difficulties:

Distance students face a myriad of learning difficulty mostly relating to how to learn effectively, how to use learning times judiciously and being able to exhibit knowledge attained when required to do so.

Those arising from an individual trying to interact with a distant and sometimes impersonal institution

Distance students are likely to feel isolated from their various institutions due to the distance barrier compared to the on-campus students who are physically present at the campus and has access to all the facilities provided by the institution. Distance students may therefore encounter problems with accessing learning facilities such as libraries, laboratories and also, problems with contacting counsellors or friends who may assist in overcoming a difficulty.

Personal problems which affect the student's work

This relates to the day-to-day occurrences that impact a student's academic life. Distance students may face such problems with regards to family commitment, work matters and also financial difficulties. These issues may be recurring and unpredictable. Therefore, the existence of guidance and counselling support for DE students is therefore vital throughout their programme duration.

Table 2.2 below depicts the guidance and counselling services provided by the Zimbabwe Open University for distance students throughout the course of their programmes.

Table 2.4: Guidance and Counselling Services Provided by Zimbabwe Open University

Stage	Guidance and counselling services provided
Pre-entry stage	Students receive information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programmes on offer, their market value and recognition - Entry requirements - Application procedures. - Registration procedures
Induction meeting	Students receive information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structure, functions, rules and regulations of the institute - The best way of achieving their goals and objectives without disturbing their daily routine activities. - Features of Open and Distance Learning - Role of the Regional Centre - Study skills in Open and Distance Learning - How to write assignments
During the course of the programme	Students receive information on: The process of dealing with the assignments, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their progress, - Assignments grades, - Weekend schools/tutorials - Research projects, - In class tests, - Improving study skills, - Overcoming personal and technical problems - Difficult units, - Revision work, - Preparation for term-end examinations, - Payment of fees
Exit Stage	Students receive information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Graduation ceremony - Certification - Further studies

Source: Kangai, Rupande and Rugonye (2011)

In the provision of such important support services to distance students, many institutions may not have the capacity to provide guidance and counselling offices at all their study centres and

also provide qualified counsellors for all of them. In such cases, tutors may sometimes play the role of counsellors when students approach them with challenging issues but they are required to possess special skills such as:

- Enthusiasm
- Capacity for sympathy
- Flexibility
- Knowledge of the organisation
- Liaison skills
- Capacity to facilitate group activities

(Thomas 1974 as cited in COL 2004:145)

Counselling services at UNISA can be accessed personally at the regional centres or via telephone, post or email. Counselling services available are academic-based and career-based.

(www.unisa.ac.za)

2.2.6 Administrative Support Services

Welch and Reed (2005) are of the view that administrative support in DE aim at providing adequate facilities and learning resources to distance students. Administrative support includes all information on admission, registration, examination and timetables. It also includes the availability of academic progress report to students upon request (COL, 2003). In effect, any assistance provided by administrative staff to students and teachers contributes to the overall well-being of the institution. The University of Birmingham Code of Practice for Distance Learning (2012-13: 9) stipulates that prospective students should have a direct access to information about:

- The admission requirements of the programme, particularly where these include access to resources, hardware, and/or software and whether on-going access to these is a requirement for continued registration on the programme;
- The expectations, including time commitment, that would be placed upon them as distance learners;
- The nature and extent of independent, collaborative and supported study contained within the programme;
- Any requirement for attendance at any location at any time throughout the programme; and
- Additional costs which might be associated with the programme such as travel and subsistence, or necessary provision for personal tutors to visit the student's location.

(Source: University of Birmingham Code of Practice for Distance Learning, 2013-14: 9)

For continuing students the University of Birmingham ensures that students have information about:

- The mechanisms for providing formal feedback on their experience of the programme, including access to External Examiner reports, meetings with the External Examiner, and interaction with the Student Representation System;
- Opportunities for inter-learner discussion, both to facilitate learning and to provide a basis for facilitating their participation in the quality assurance of the programme; and
- If the programme is delivered via a collaborative organisation, the respective responsibilities of the awarding institution and the programme presenter for the delivery of the programme or element of the programme, as set out in the legal agreement.

(Source: University of Birmingham Code of Practice for Distance Learning, 2013-14)

Library service

By virtue of the independent learning concept of the Distance Education System, library facilities occupy a prominent place in the learners' learning process and form an essential part of support services (Koul et al 1988:71 cited in Kamau and Selepeng-Tau 1998). Library service provides students the opportunity to select, acquire, and refer to books and other printed materials. Some educational institutional libraries tend to serve the general student body and may therefore have a wider variety of books covering many disciplines. On the other hand, some libraries may be attached to specific departments of the school and may therefore not contain a wide variety of books on different disciplines. They tend to primarily serve the departments they are attached to. In the view of Aden, Sybouts and Wess (1998), distance should not disadvantage distance students from the kind of library services available to campus-based students because they are all going through the same academic development. It is therefore imperative to innovate ways of reaching out to DE students with the relevant library services.

The experience of University of Botswana's library service to DE students in Selibe Phikwe town is narrated below;

This scenario has been established between the university branch library in Francistown and the public library in Selibe Phikwe. With the permission of the library in the town, bound copies of the computer print-out of University of Botswana library holdings (both in Gaborone and Francistown, otherwise known as 'card catalogue update') are deposited in Selibe Phikwe Library. Staff and learners of continuing education at the centre are encouraged to go to the library in Selibe Phikwe, select the materials needed from the card catalogue update and record their requests in the notebook provided. The university then regularly (a minimum of three times a week) links up with the library and notes the requests. Requests that can be met from the university collection in Francistown are promptly despatched to Selibe Phikwe library where they are collected. The postal system takes between two and four days (Kamau and Selepeng-Tau 1998).

The above library support provided by University of Botswana to its DE students can be emulated by other DE institutions because it saves costs where the institution cannot build its own library. On the other hand, it cannot be operated where there is no public library or where the nearest public library is too far for easy access by students.

Also, the Continuing Education Department at Eastern Michigan University and its Distance Education Librarian have collaborated in setting standards to help distance students benefit adequately from the university's library service (Block (2008). These standards include:

- To improve the nature of distance learning
- To make it easier for students to get information

- To broaden the scope of students in learning
- To make learning more independent and fun

Block (2008) notes that the importance of library services to learning cannot be underestimated and that distance student should be encouraged to seek library support. Librarians should also make special services known to students and relate to them in a way that makes them feel comfortable to ask for assistance.

In the provision of immediate support to students UNISA strategy has been set up seven regional centres in South Africa, servicing students in all nine provinces. These are Eastern Cape (East London, Mthatha, Port Elizabeth), Gauteng (Ekurhuleni, Florida, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Vaal Triangle), Kwazulu-Natal (Durban, New Castle, Pietermaritzburg, Richards Bay, Wild Coast), Limpopo (Giyani, Makhado, Polokwane), Midlands (Bloemfontein, Kimberley, Kroonstad, Mafikeng, Potchefstroom, Rustenburg), Mpumalanga (Middelburg, Nelspruit), Western Cape (Cape Town, George). In addition to the above regional centres, UNISA also has several institutes, museums, units and centres which support academic development and research (wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_South_Africa).

UNISA can also boast of the largest academic library in Africa on the Muckleneuk campus in Pretoria with other regional libraries in Polokwane, Sunnyside, Durban, Cape Town, Florida, Johannesburg, Rustenburg, East London, Nelspruit, the SBL in Midrand, Ekurhuleni and Akaki in Ethiopia. Mobile library services are also provided in Western Cape and Limpopo. The library is part of UNISA's learner support strategies, which include lending services for learners, postage of books to learners, reference materials and skills training by some library staff (www.unisa.ac.za).

OUM has 53 learning centres fully equipped with tutorial rooms, computer laboratories, library and Internet facilities. The main campus is at Jalan Tun Ismail, Kuala Lumpur and there are 37 learning centres throughout Malaysia, out of which 10 are regional learning centres. Other international learning centres are located in Ghana, Hungary, Bahrain, Maldives, Yemen, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Somalia and Zambia where they provide information for prospective students and tuition and other services for enrolled students. (Wikipedia, 2013)

2.2.7 The Management of Student Support Services

Kishore (1998) suggests a 3-tier system for an effective management of student support services. These are at the headquarters, regional centre and study centre levels.

The headquarters will take care of the following:

- Planning, executing and monitoring student support services
- Provision of adequate and appropriate physical, financial and human resources
- Staff development/training/orientation activities for regional and study centre staff
- Exploration of new strategies and diversified delivery systems, coordination of activities of regional and study centres
- Liaison with concerned schools and divisions at headquarters for smooth functioning of the system of support services
- Dissemination of information and redressal of student grievances

Regional centres should also be tasked in the following ways:

- Coordination and monitoring of activities of study centres
- Providing linkage between headquarters and study centres
- Acting as nodal agency at state/regional level and maintaining liaison with state governments
- Undertaking academic activities relating to student admission, counselling, recruitment and orientation of counsellors, conduct of examinations, maintenance of student records and monitoring of assignments
- Carrying out research on programme implementation and evaluation
- Undertaking administrative activities relation to purchase and maintenance of equipment and infrastructure, financial disbursement and management, recruitment of staff, maintenance of service records, and maintenance of library facilities
- Undertaking public relation and promotional activities through press and broadcast

Students support services at the study centre level will also require the provision of the following:

- Organisation of counselling and practical sessions
- Identification of counsellors
- Disbursal of remuneration to all part-time resource persons involved in study centre activities
- Management and maintenance of study centre
- Liaison with academic institutions and experts/scholars
- Evaluation of assignments and their despatch to students; forwarding of grades to headquarters
- Conduct of examinations

- Dissemination of information to students, prospective students and the public
- Provide grassroots feedback to headquarters and regional centre

Kamau and Selepeng-Tau (1998) in a study of the University of Botswana however suggest two distinct responsibilities (administrative and academic) for the regional centre

Administrative responsibilities

These include identifying, recruiting and training of tutors as well as supervising their work and forwarding their payment claims. Also, the regional centre is expected to identify educational resources available and regularly link students to the main campus.

Academic responsibilities

These are mainly performed by tutors and they include provision of tutorials at specified periods and duration. In addition, tutors are to help students progress academically and socially by providing solutions to their difficulties and encouraging study group activities.

At the University of Botswana, it was planned that by the end of Botswana's National Development Plan Period No 8, 1997-2002, a study centre system will be in place comprising five regional centres and seven others making twelve centres in all, each serving a catchment area and strategically located. Each centre will be coordinated by an academically sound staff recruited at the lecturer scale with a backing of adequate human and material resources (Kamau and Selepeng-Tau 1998, p. 17).

2.2.8 The Future of Student Support Services

The future of student support services will undoubtedly be spearheaded by the advancement and introduction of new technology in DE as evidenced in the development of DE throughout its

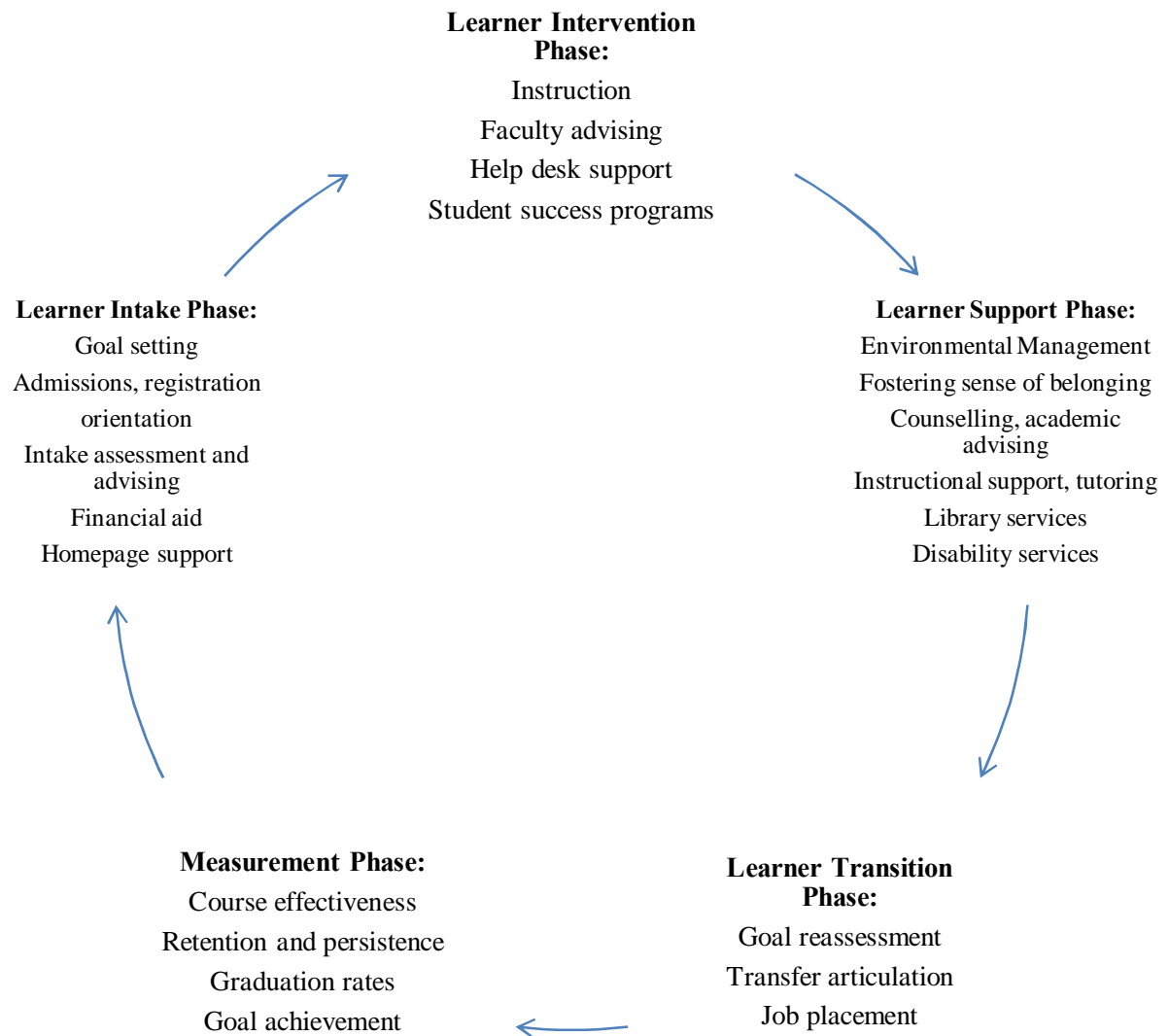
inception. Tait and Mills (2002:1-2) have however proposed the following major change issues that must also be considered:

- The impact of ICT on what is wanted by learners today, what can be provided by institutions, and what restructuring of organisations has to follow
- The change of status from student to that of customer
- The pressure of educational policy to recruit participants from wider social segments of society, in particular from those which have not traditionally taken part in education
- The pressures on costs for institutions in competitive environments
- The need to work in more complex ways with work related programmes that make the workplace a site of learning, and demand assessment methods of greater complexity

Floyd and Casey-Powell (2004) however propose the Inclusive Student Services Process Model, to guide future student support services. This is based loosely on Miller and Prince's (1976) student development process model, which was to meet the needs of all students, to plan for change rather than react to it, and to engage the full academic community in this collaborative effort (p. 58). They recognised five phases of a distance education as; learner intake, learner intervention, learner support, learner transition, and measurement of effectiveness. Distance students require unique support services at each of these phases and the ability for DE institutions to meet their needs will be key to their success (Floyd and Casey-Powell 2004). They are also of the view that support services for DE students should be in tune with modern technological advancements which make learning easier and guarantees greater success.

Traditional services such as admissions, advising, registration, financial aid, career services, counselling, and library services must be reframed to incorporate strategies that meet the needs of a technologically oriented student population. This effort requires all campus constituents to work collaboratively toward student success, regardless of the instructional delivery system (Floyd and Casey-Powell 2004: p. 62).

These are summarised in Fig. 2.1 below;

Figure 2.1. Inclusive Student Services Process Model

Source: Floyd and Casey-Powell (2004)

Gathering from the above propositions on the future of support services it is evident that the student numbers are expected to grow considerably and DE institutions will have to undergo some technological restructuring to cope with the numbers so that the needed communication and interaction is not sacrificed to the detriment of the students.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the procedure employed in collecting and analyzing data for this study.

The chapter therefore focused on the following areas:

- Profile of the study area
- Population
- Sampling
- Research design
- Sampling technique
- Instrumentation
- Validity
- Pretest
- Fieldwork
- Response rate
- Ethical issues
- Analysis of data

3.2 Profile of the Study Area

The study will be based on three study centres of UCC in three different regions. This is to aid in getting a fair idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the support services across the country. These centres are rented premises which serve as 'mini-campuses' of UCC. They are supervised by Acting Centre Coordinators (ACC) who also report to the Regional Resident Tutor (RRT). These centres are on the campuses of the Accra High School in the Greater Accra Region, Holy Child School Takoradi in the Western Region and Oyoko Methodist Senior High School in the Eastern Region.

The Accra High School centre of the University of Cape Coast was chosen for the study because it is one of the centres with the highest number of distance students in the country, with 1,329 students pursuing the Diploma in Basic Education, Bachelor Degree in Basic Education and Bachelor Degree in Psychology programmes. Its location at Asylum Down in Accra makes it easily accessible to students who live in various parts of Accra due to good road network to the place. In addition, it is one of the well organized and documented centres. The centre was originally located at the Accra Polytechnic campus but moved to its present location in 2008. Distance students meet there on weekends for face-to-face tutorials according to their timetable and academic calendar. They have these tutorials in the classrooms of the school and write their examinations in the assembly hall. The centre has no library and counseling office. However, there is a notice board which displays recent information for distance students concerning tutorial schedules and examination timetable. Apart from this centre, the Greater Accra Region hosts other centres of the UCC DE programme at the Saint Margaret Mary Senior High School, Zenith College, Tema Senior High School and Ada College of Education.

The Holy Child College of Education centre of the UCC DE programme serves 378 distance students pursuing the Diploma in Psychology, Bachelor Degree in Psychology and Bachelor Degree in Basic Education programmes. It is located at Fijai, a suburb of Sekondi-Takoradi which is affectionately called the 'Twin-City' in the Western Region. The centre shares boundaries with the Fijai Senior High School. On weekends, distance students are offered a face-to-face instruction based on their course content and other learning materials. These tutorials as well as tests and examinations are held in the classrooms of the College. The premise is pleasant and conducive for academic work because it does not lie in the busy parts of the city which are characterized by high human and vehicular traffic with its associated noise. There is no library and counseling facility for DE students. However, there is an office allocated to the Coordinator of the centre but it is only open on tutorial days. Other study centres in the Western Region are on the campuses of Takoradi Polytechnic and Fiaseman Senior High School.

In the Eastern, the UCC DE programme has study centres at the Ghana Senior High School, Oda Senior High School, Abetifi Senior High School and the Oyoko Methodist Senior high School (OMESS). This study will however focus on the centre at OMESS which is located near Koforidua, the regional capital. There are 1,202 students assigned to this centre pursuing the Diploma in Basic Education, Bachelor Degree in Basic Education and Diploma in Psychology and Bachelor Degree in Psychology programmes, and they go there on weekends for face-to-face tutorials in the classrooms. The centre does not have any library service, counselling office or computer laboratory. There is however a notice board that has relevant information for students.

The Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) for Distance Education at the University of Cape Coast is developing a GH¢3.4 million study centre in Accra to further increase access to higher education.

The project, which is being funded from the university's internally generated funds, is expected to be completed by 2013 and will provide comfortable and adequate lecture space for students enrolled in the programmes and reduce the dependence on other institutions for lecture halls. This plan was made public by the Vice Chancellor of UCC, Prof. Naana Jane Opoku Agyeman at the launch of activities to mark the centre's 10th anniversary celebration in 2011. The CCE has acquired plots of land in all the regions and that there was a schedule to move to the remaining regions of the country with these projects (Ghanaweb, 2011).

3.3 Population

The population for this study comprises the students currently enrolled in the UCC DE programme and the tutors in the three selected study centres as depicted below.

Table 3.1: Population for the study

Centre	Number of students	Staff	Population (Total)
Accra High School	1,329	15	1344
OMESS	1,202	13	1212
Holy Child College of Education	378	10	391
Population (Total)	2909	38	2947

Source: Student Records Management Unit, CCE (2013)

3.4 Sampling

The sample size was 164 comprising 144 students and 20 members of tutors.

Table 3.2: Stratified Sample for Students and Tutors of Selected Study Centres

Centre	Number of students	Number of tutors	Proportionally allocated sample size of students	Proportionally allocated sample size of tutors	Percentage of students (%)	Percentage of tutors (%)
Accra High School	1329	15	66	8	45.8	40
OMESS	1202	13	60	7	41.7	35
Holy Child College	378	10	18	5	12.5	25
Total	2909	38	144	20	100	100

Source: Fieldwork (2013)

3.5 Research Design

This research used both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies. However, the cross-sectional survey research design was used extensively in this research. Survey research was important in this study because according to Badu-Nyarko (2011), the results of a survey give a generalized account of the subject matter under investigation. It also helped in describing the opinions, characteristics, perception and preferences of respondents. This type of survey research design enabled a wider coverage area and also gave respondents the opportunity to give answers within the institutional framework of the study.

3.6 Sampling Technique

The researcher employed a multi-staged approach comprising purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques in selecting respondents from the UCC DE programme. This was done to ensure that the results were more representative of the target population.

Purposive sampling method was employed in the selection of the three study centres involved in the research. The purposive sampling method is a non-probability sampling in which the researcher is at liberty to select which individuals will make up the sample. They may be selected based on factors such as their accessibility, convenience or other characteristics that the researcher sees as important for the study (Badu-Nyarko 2011). Therefore, the researcher based his selection of the Accra High, Holy Child College and OMESS centres on their location in different regions and also on the accessibility of their location in the regional capital cities.

The researcher selected a sample size of 164 comprising 144 students and 20 tutors because he believed these numbers were manageable enough to work with and also representative of the total population. In addition, simple random sampling was used to select respondents. How the calculation was done for the stratification is shown below.

For students;

Proportionally allocated sample = [centre population \times sample for the study] \div Population size

Accra High Sch. (allocated sample) = $[1329 \times 144] \div 2909$

$$= 66$$

OMESS (allocated sample) = $[1202 \times 144] \div 2909$

$$= 60$$

Holy Child College (allocated sample) = $[378 \times 144] \div 2909$

$$= 18$$

For tutors;

Proportionally allocated sample = [centre population \times sample for the study] \div Population size

Accra High Sch. (allocated sample) = $[15 \times 20] \div 38$

$$= 8$$

OMESS (allocated sample) = $[13 \times 20] \div 38$

$$= 7$$

Holy Child College (allocated sample) = $[10 \times 20] \div 38$

= 5

3.7 Instrumentation

The instrument for gathering data was questionnaires for DE students as well as interview schedules with tutors.

In designing the questionnaire much attention was given to ensure that the objectives of the research are covered in order to make it effective. The questionnaire was used because it enabled the respondents to work at their own pace and convenience because of the busy schedule of most of the DE students. Many had travelled from quite far places purposely to attend tutorials and return. It will be used in other to get a large sample size to generalize the data. Furthermore, the questionnaire was appropriate because it guaranteed anonymity of the respondents according to Mason and Bramble (1997). The questions were close ended and open ended but there were some Likert scale type questions too which the researcher found to be more flexible. In the view of Masons and Bramble, (1997) closed ended questions help to facilitate coding, analysis and cross tabulation. Open ended questions were used to remove restriction and to enable the researcher get in-depth answers from respondents. This is to enable the subjects give detailed responses and express themselves better. The student research questionnaire was divided into five sections. Section A focused on the demographic data of students while Section B focused on the face-to-face tutorial support for DE students. Section C was about the learning material support to DE students, Section D was on guidance and counseling support for DE students and Section E was based on administrative support services. On the other hand, the tutor research

questionnaire was divided into two sections, A and B. Section A focused on the demographic data while Section B focused on face-to-face tutorial support for DE students.

3.8 Reliability and Validity

The questionnaires were reviewed by the researcher's supervisor and colleague students to ensure that the content was appropriate for the study. Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (2008) refer to this as content validity and is meant to find out whether the questionnaire was representative enough of all the other probable questions that could have been asked concerning the subject under study. The researcher therefore ensured that data collected using represented the content area under study by identifying the relevant items for each of the instruments to be used in the study.

3.9 Pretest

A pilot test was carried out at the Cape Coast distance education centre of the University of Cape Coast to help in redesigning the instrument if need be. The pretest was necessitated by the determination to check on suitability and the clarity of the questions on the instrument designed, relevance of the information being sought, the language used and the content validity of the instrument from the responses given.

3.10 Data Collection

The interview was conducted at the various centres on arranged dates when tutorials were in session with the help of the centre staff and a research assistant. Respondents usually used about 8 to 10 minutes to answer the questionnaire. This also included the time used in explaining the purpose of the interview and some portions that the respondents wanted clarification. The response rate to the questionnaires was very good as every respondent was eager to participate because they saw thought it bothered on a very crucial subject to their lives as students and tutors.

3.11 Ethical Issues

Approval of intention to carry out the study at UCC was granted by the Director of CCE on behalf of the centre. The tutors and students interviewed were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the also their anonymity.

3.12 Analysis of Data

The data collected was coded, analyzed, interpreted by use of central tendencies such as standard deviation and mean. Open ended questions were analyzed in a descriptive-narrative form. According to Leady (1989), in order to understand quantitative data and make them easier to work with, they have to be analysed thoroughly. Data was transcribed from the SPSS software and represented with frequency tables, a pie chart and a bar graphs to make it easier to

understand and more meaningful. They showed the frequencies, percentages, standard deviations and means of the results.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the results of the survey in two parts namely; Section A and Section B. Section A analyses results from students while Section B deals with that of tutors. In all, the respondents involved were 144 students and 20 tutors from three study centres.

Section A was presented under the following sub-headings;

- face-to-face tutorial support for DE students
- learning material support to DE students
- guidance and counseling support for DE students
- administrative support services

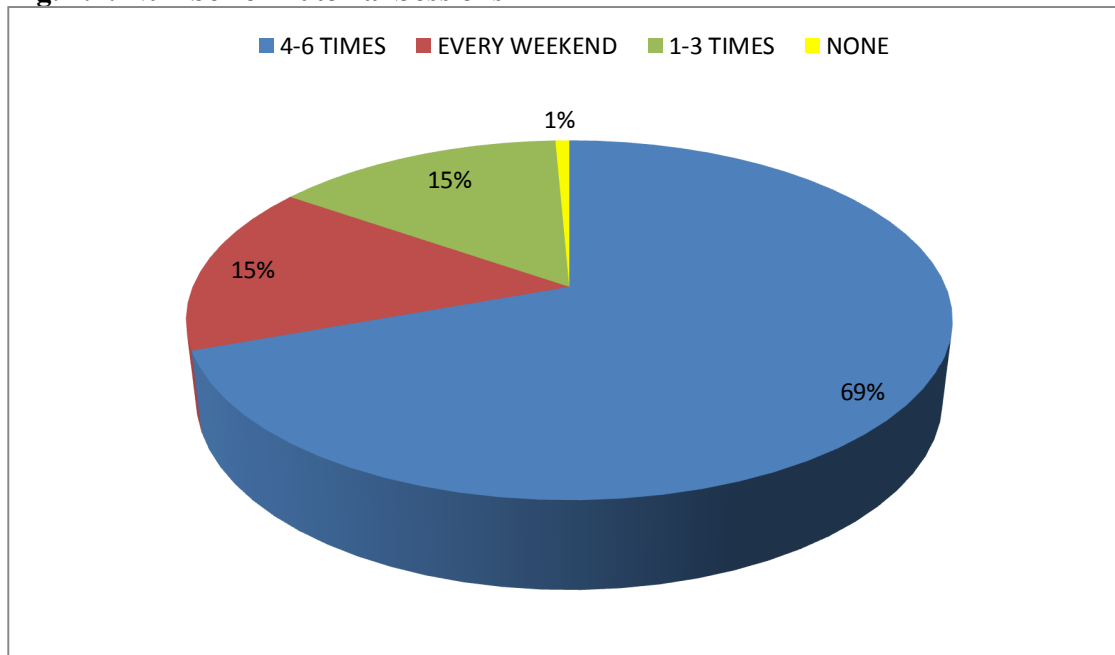
Section B deals with the responses given by tutors, regarding their role at face-to-face tutorial sessions.

Section A: Responses from Students

4.2 Face-to-face Tutorial Support

Face-to-face tutorials in DE are organised to enable students meet tutors who respond to their questions, offer further explanation or clarification to learning materials provided (COL, 2003). It offers students the opportunity to clear their doubts about some aspects of their learning materials by seeking further guidance from tutors.

Fig. 4.1: Number of Tutorial Sessions



N= 144 Source: Field Data (2013)

The study revealed that between 4 to 6 tutorial sessions are organised per course for distance students of UCC each semester. However, figure 4.1 shows the number of tutorials students prefer to be organised in a semester. It was observed that, most (69%) of them wanted the current number of tutorials per course each semester to be maintained.

4.2.1 Tutorial Medium

The nature of DE does not allow for full-time on-campus tutoring for students like that of conventional education. Due to this, DE institutions develop appropriate media for tutoring students as a means of supporting them wherever they may find themselves. The common types of media used include the face-to-face tutorial sessions, online student portal and video conferencing. However, it was observed in the study that only the face-to-face tutorial medium was available to the students. Further probing also showed that students still preferred this medium to any other due to reasons such as the following:

- *I prefer face-to-face tutorials because it helps me to meet the tutor and ask for explanations – (OMESS Student)*
- *Face-to-face tutorials enable me to relate to others and learn from them – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *It creates the platform for me to ask more questions – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *It is more natural – (OMESS Student)*
- *It is more effective and everybody can afford – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *Because I want to socialise – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *I want to meet tutors and friends – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *If I go for tutorials, I understand things better – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *It helps to clear my doubts on some topics – (OMESS Student)*
- *I love the answers that are given at tutorials – (OMESS Student)*
- *When I am always at home, I don't understand what I learn – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *I think we are more used to face-to-face tutorials – (Holy Child Centre Student)*

On the other hand, a student who stated that he/she preferred the online student portal as the tutorial medium stated that;

- *This will help to minimise the cost and risk of travelling – (OMESS Student)*

4.2.2 Class Size

Face-to-face sessions involve the physical meeting of tutors and students for learning. Class sizes are important because usually they affect the level of interaction between the tutor and the students. While small class sizes may aid in the tutor giving adequate attention to every student, large class sizes on the other hand may hinder such interaction and this may go a long way in affecting the learning process. Figure 4.2 shows the average number of students in the respondents' classes per study centre.

Table 4.1: Cross-tabulation of Study Centre Class Sizes

Class size	Accra High School	OMESS	Holy Child	Total
30 and below	-	21 (35.0%)	10 (55.6%)	31 (21.5%)
31-61	32 (48.5%)	30 (50.0%)	8 (44.4%)	70 (48.6%)
62-92	11 (16.7%)	9 (15.0%)	-	20 (13.9%)
93-133	23 (34.8%)	-	-	23 (16.0%)
Total	66 (100%)	60 (100%)	18 (100%)	144 (100%)

Source: Field Data (2013)

The study results show that majority (48.6%) of the respondents indicated that their average tutorial class was made up of 31-61 students while fewer students belonged to larger class sizes as depicted in Table 4.2. It was also found that students who belonged to larger classes were from the Accra High School study centre.

4.2.3 Students' satisfaction with components of tutorial support

Some vital components that constitute face-to-face tutorial support include tutorial schedules, attitude of tutors towards students, opportunity to ask questions, answers given by tutors to questions, further explanation of learning materials, class size and duration of tutorials. These are all meant to enhance the teaching and learning process and therefore any study about face-to-face tutorial support cannot ignore them. Table 4.3 below therefore shows the level of satisfaction of students with regards to such provisions on a 5-point Likert scale instrument displaying the mean, standard deviation and percentages of responses.

Table 4.2: Satisfaction with Components of Tutorial Support

Support	V.S	S	M.S	D	V.D	Mean	Std. Dev.
Tutorial schedules	26.8%	43.7%	16.9%	11.3%	1.4%	2.1690	.99625
Attitude of tutors	33.3%	39.6%	19.4%	4.2%	3.5%	2.0486	1.00579
Opportunity to ask questions	40.6%	41.3%	13.3%	.7%	4.2%	1.8671	.96588
Answers given by tutors	32.9%	49.7%	14.0%	2.8%	.7%	1.8881	.79704
Further explanations	16.8%	37.8%	26.6%	12.6%	6.3%	2.5385	1.10549
Class size	32.4%	40.1%	21.8%	5.6%	-	2.0070	.87920
Duration of tutorials	27.3%	42.7%	17.5%	10.5%	2.1%	2.1748	1.01617
General level of satisfaction	30.0%	42.1%	18.5%	6.81%	2.6%	2.0990	0.96654

Source: Field Data (2013)

N= 144 across; Very Satisfied (V.S) = 1; Satisfied (S) = 2; Moderately Satisfied (M.S) = 3; Dissatisfied (D) = 4; Very Dissatisfied (V.D) = 5

The findings as depicted in Table 4.3 shows that students were very satisfied with the face-to-face tutorial schedules. It also shows their high level of satisfaction with the attitude of tutors towards students during face to face tutorials. With regards to the opportunity to ask questions, the answers given and further explanations by tutors, students showed a high level of satisfaction as well. In addition to this, the study revealed that students were not bothered with their class

sizes and the duration of tutorials. On the whole, students were generally satisfied with the above mentioned components of tutorial support.

4.2.4 Number of Quizzes

Academic assessments including quizzes are used to assess students' performance in the course of their study to ascertain their level of understanding of the course taught. It was also revealed that the number of quizzes organised at all three centres was recorded to be 2 per course each semester. Figure 4.2 shows the number of quizzes students prefer per course each semester.

Table 4.3: Number of Quizzes Respondents Prefer

Number of quizzes	Frequency	Per cent
1	1	.7
2	61	42.4
3	74	51.4
4	7	4.9
More than 4	1	.7
Total	144	100

Source: Field Data (2013)

The findings show that most of the students preferred at least three quizzes a semester. More than half wanted 3 quizzes to be organised at their study centre per course for each semester. The reasons they gave include the following:

Two quizzes

- *I prefer two quizzes because I will have enough time for my studies – (Accra High Student)*
- *I want two quizzes because it allows enough time for learning – (OMESS Student)*

- *I just want two quizzes because the exam is more important – (Holy Child Centre Student)*

Three quizzes

- *I suggest three quizzes so that the examiner will select the best two for the records – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *I want three quizzes because it will equip us to study rigourously – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *I prefer three because it will help us prepare for exams – (Holy Child Centre Student)*

Four quizzes

- *I prefer four quizzes because it will make me learn harder – (OMESS Student)*
- *This will make us more serious – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *I want four quizzes so that I feel more confident to write the exams (Accra High Centre Student)*

4.2.5 Assessment formats

Much as assessments are meant for the well-being of students, some students are more comfortable with one format or the other. The most common formats are the objective/multiple choice format which offers possible answers to the questions and the subjective/essay type where students are free to argue their answers in their own way. Table 4.4 shows which formats are more preferred by students.

Table 4.4: Students' Preferred Assessment Formats

Assessment format	Frequency	Per cent
Objectives (multiple choice)	96	67.1
Subjective (essay type)	5	3.5
Both objective and subjective	31	21.7
Interactive (computer programmed)	3	2.1
Filling In The Gaps/Completing the sequence	8	5.6
Total	143	100

Source: Field Data (2013)

It can be deduced from Table 4.4 that majority of students (67.1%) were comfortable with objectives (multiple choice) and 21.7% wanted an assessment format with both objective and subjective options. Most of the reasons they gave revolved around those stated below;

Objective/Multiple choice

- *Objective/multiple choice format covers more areas so it helps me to read more – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *I prefer objective assessments because possible answers are given – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *Objective assessments are better because the scripts are marked faster – (Accra High Centre Student)*

Subjective assessments

- *Subjective assessments enables me to express the knowledge I have acquired – (OMESS Student)*
- *This format will help us to think because there are no possible answers – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *I like subjective assessments because the questions are I can explain my answer well – (Holy Child Centre Student)*

Both objective and subjective

- *I prefer both multiple choice and essay types of assessment because if one part doesn't favour you, the other part will – (OMESS Student)*
- *This helps us to learn all-round – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *I like both of them because they cover all that we learn - (Accra High Centre Student)*

4.2.6 The need for academic assessments

The importance of assessments in any academic institution cannot be underestimated. The benefits cover the tutor, student and institution since the results define the success of the teaching and learning process. In this study, students were asked what they thought academic assessments were meant to achieve and Figure 4.3 depicts their responses.

Table 4.5: What Academic Assessments are meant to Achieve

Opinion	Frequency	Per cent
To evaluate learning	76	53.5
To update the teacher on students' progress	28	19.5
To provide teacher the opportunity to correct students' mistakes	13	9.2
To help students improve academically	25	17.6
Total	142	100

Source: Field Data (2013)

Table 4.5 shows that more than half (53.5%) of students interviewed were of the opinion that academic assessments were meant to evaluate learning. Other students viewed them as means to update the tutor on the academic progress of students, to help students to improve and to provide the teacher an opportunity to correct mistakes of students.

4.2.7 Whether Academic Assessments Achieve Their Aim or Not

Though students involved in this study mainly believed that assessments were meant to evaluate learning, they were further probed to indicate whether or not they thought this aim was being achieved. It was revealed that (85.4%) were sure the assessments had achieved their aims while the rest did not think so.

4.2.8 Satisfaction with face-to-face tutorial support

Face-to-face tutorial support provides similar opportunities for the distance students to learn just as in the case of conventional education. The students involved in the study were therefore asked to indicate their level of satisfaction of the over-all face-to-face tutorial support they received from UCC and the results showed that the majority (86.5%) were satisfied while the rest were not. Some of the reasons they gave for their responses included the following;

“Yes”

- *Yes, because I do well in my exams – (Accra High Student)*
- *Yes, because the tutors take their time to answer our questions - (Accra High Student)*
- *Yes, because I feel confident after every tutorial that I am learning something (OMESS Centre Student)*

“No”

- *No, because we pay a lot but the desks are bad – (OMESS Centre Student)*
- *No, because some tutors do well but others are not performing at all - (Accra High Student)*
- *No, because the furniture is uncomfortable – (Holy Child Centre Student)*

“Indifferent”

- *Indifferent, because I have not really assessed things here – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *Indifferent, because things can always get better – (OMESS Centre Student)*

In line with the above, students' suggestions on improving face-to-face tutorials were sought and they are as follows;

- *Give tutors more incentives so that they teach better – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *Increase face-to-face duration so that we can ask more questions – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *If we get accommodation near the centre, it will reduce our transportation costs and the risks of travelling – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *Supervise tutors to do their work well – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *Better desks are required to make us comfortable – (OMESS Centre Student)*
- *There should be accommodation for both tutors and students who want to sleepover – (OMESS Centre Student)*
- *We need a place to put our babies so that they don't disturb us - (OMESS Centre Student)*
- *We want better furniture that befits us – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *More time for questions needed – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *The tutors should be treated well by the University – (Holy Child Centre Student)*

4.3 Learning Material Support

DE course modules are designed to satisfy the learning needs of students with regards to specific courses and topics. However, tutors may recommend to the institution the necessity of providing some other materials that will complement the course modules. Students may however not be satisfied with what the learning materials provide and therefore mostly resort to the tutorial sessions for further clarification. It is for this reason that this study sought to find out how learning materials enabled students to achieve academic success.

4.3.1 How Respondents Want To Receive Learning Materials

All the respondents indicated that they received their learning materials personally from their respective study centres. A further probe showed that 94.4 per cent of students still wanted to receive their learning materials personally from the study centre.

4.3.2 Provision of Other Printed Learning Materials and CDs/DVDs

The study also revealed that apart from the course modules, no other printed learning materials were provided to DE students. In addition, they were not provided with CDs/DVDs for learning purposes but most students (84%) expressed the desire to have such provisions while a few were not enthused about the idea. The reasons they gave include the following:

“Yes”

- *Yes, because I can access the information anytime I want – (OMESS Student)*

- *Yes, because these days everything is computerised so we should move forward – Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *Yes, because they may contain new information that the printed materials may not have – (Accra High Student)*

“No”

- *No, because not all of us have computers to access them – (OMESS Student)*
- *No, because they will serve as additional costs for us – (Holy Child Centre Student)*

4.3.3 Some Components of Learning Materials

DE students spend more time with learning materials than with their tutors due to physical separation. Learning materials are therefore designed in a way that simulates physical learning interaction between the tutor and the student. The study therefore inquired from students whether they agreed to some statements which had to do with the usefulness of course modules. Table 4.6 presents the results in percentages while Table 4.7 shows the responses on a 4-point Likert scale displaying the percentages, mean and standard deviations of the responses.

Table 4.6: Students' Agreement to Statements about Some Components of Learning Materials (Percentages)

Statement	S.A	A	D	S.D
Learning materials contained relevant information	64.1%	33.8%	2.1%	-
Objectives stated in the modules matched the information covered	58.0%	37.8%	4.2%	-
Self-evaluation activities helped assess understanding of modules	39.9%	43.4%	16.8%	-
Tables, charts and diagrams helped in simplifying information	39.0%	39.7%	14.2%	7.1%
Summaries helped review learning	50.3%	30.8%	11.9%	7.0%
The volume of materials was sufficient	33.8%	36.6%	21.1%	8.5%
General level of agreement	47.5%	37.0%	11.7%	3.7%

Source: Field Data (2013)

N = 144 across; Strongly Agree (S.A) = 1; Agree (A) = 2; Disagree (D) = 3; Strongly Disagree (S.D) = 4

Table 4.7: Students' Agreement to Statements about Some Components of Learning Materials (Mean and Standard Deviation)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
Learning materials contained relevant information	1.3803	.52905
Objectives stated in the modules matched the information covered	1.4615	.57860
Self-evaluation activities helped assess understanding of modules	1.7692	.71888
Tables, charts and diagrams helped in simplifying information	1.8936	.90002
Summaries helped review learning	1.7552	.92094
The volume of materials was sufficient	2.0423	.94436
General level of agreement	1.7170	.76530

Source: Field Data (2013)

N= 144 across; Strongly Agree (S.A) = 1; Agree (A) = 2; Disagree (D) = 3; Strongly Disagree (S.D) = 4

The results of the study as displayed by Table 4.6 and Table 4.7 show that 84.5% of students were satisfied with critical components of the learning materials provided them.

In line with the above, the study intended to establish how far students understood the modules.

4.3.4 Further Understanding of Modules

Though modules for DE students are designed to cater for the absence of the tutor, students may not always grab the total understanding of the content provided. While some of them may wait for tutorial sessions to seek clarification from tutors or fellow students, some may also read more related materials on the subject or even pay for private tutoring. Table 4.8 shows the options students preferred for further clarification of modules in times of difficulty.

Table 4.8: Further Clarification of Modules in Times of Difficulty

Option	Frequency	Per cent
Ask tutors during tutorial sessions	62	44.0
Ask fellow students	31	22.0
Seek help from a private tutor at a fee	30	21.2
Read more related material on the subject matter from other sources	18	12.8
Total	141	100

Source: Field Data (2013)

In times of difficulty in understanding learning materials, Table 4.8 shows that most of the students (44%) asked tutors for further explanations/clarifications in understanding the learning materials while 22.0 per cent preferred asking fellow students for help. Respondents who could afford private tutorship for further explanations on learning materials represented 21.3 per cent and 12.8 per cent opted to read more related materials on the subject matter from other sources.

which may include journals and periodicals when they are faced with the difficulty of understanding the learning materials.

Giving a general sense of satisfaction about learning materials students made suggestions for the improvement of learning materials as follows:

- *Modules should be given to us earlier in the semester – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *CDs/DVDs should be introduced to help us learn more things – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *More diagrams should be put in the modules – (OMESS Centre Student)*
- *There should be more self-evaluation activities – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *There should be more coloured pictures in reading materials - (OMESS Centre Student)*
- *Tutors should make copies of relevant materials which are not in the modules for us – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *The modules should be printed in bulk so that we all get it at the same time – (Accra High Centre Student)*
- *The modules are good but when the diagrams are coloured, they will be nicer – (OMESS Centre Student)*
- *Those in charge of distributing the modules should device ways of making it faster – (Accra High Centre Student)*

4.3 Guidance and Counselling Support

Guidance and counselling support for distance students is usually crucial in reducing attrition rates and academic failures. Such support targets critical aspects of the student's life such as academic, social, personal, occupational, health, family and spiritual.

In the study, an overwhelming number of students (94.4%) indicated that they did not know of the provision of guidance and counselling services at their study centre. However, it was identified that the 4.9 per cent knew of students who knew about such provisions were those who had benefitted from them. They indicated that the guidance/counselling support bothered mainly on their academic lives and to a smaller extent, their social and personal lives.

Table 4.9: When Academic Guidance/Counselling Is Most Needed

Period	Frequency	Per cent
During the application process	9	6.4
During the registration process	23	16.4
During student orientation	62	44.3
Beginning of every semester	37	26.4
Beginning of every academic year	8	5.7
Examination period	1	.7
Total	140	100

Source: Field Data (2013)

With reference to Table 4.9, when students were further probed on which period of their student lives they preferred academic guidance/counselling, most (44.3%) of them indicated that the best

time was during orientation. Others preferred the beginning of every semester or during the registration process.

4.3.1 Importance of Guidance/counselling

Distance students are confronted with a myriad of issues which when left unattended to can sabotage their educational pursuit. The study sought to find out how students rated the importance of guidance/counselling in helping them deal with certain issues. Table 4.10 displays the results in percentages, mean and standard deviations as ranked by students on a 4-point Likert scale.

Table 4.10: Importance of Guidance and Counselling Services to Students' Issues

Issue	V.I	I	M.I	N.I	Mean	Std. Dev.
Academic	94.9%	5.1%	-	-	1.0511	.22100
Social	45.3%	35.0%	16.8%	2.9%	1.8029	.92227
Personal	46.4%	23.9%	19.6%	10.1%	2.0362	1.25802
Occupational	46.7%	26.7%	20.0%	6.7%	1.9333	1.2767
Health	32.8%	27.7%	23.4%	16.1%	2.3869	1.36795
Family	38.2%	23.5%	22.8%	15.4%	2.3088	1.38518
Spiritual	42.0%	22.5%	19.6%	15.9%	2.2536	1.41453
General level of importance	49.5%	23.5%	17.4%	9.6%	1.9675	1.12080

Source: Field Data (2013)

N=144 across; Very Important (V.I) = 1; Important (I) = 2; Moderately Important (M.I) = 3; Not Important (N.I) = 4

The results show that most students acknowledged guidance/counselling as important in helping them deal with academic issues. Most students however did not believe guidance and counselling was critical in helping them overcome social, personal and occupational problems.

4.3.2 Challenges Facing Guidance/Counselling Support Services

In spite of the invaluable contribution that guidance/counselling makes in helping students resolve distractive problems affecting their education, there are some challenges that threaten its operation at the study centres. Table 4.11 shows some of these challenges as perceived by students.

Table 4.11: Challenges with Guidance and Counselling at Study Centres

Challenges	Frequency	Per cent
Absence of guidance/counselling office	91	65.0
Lack of trained counsellors	4	2.9
Busy schedule for available counsellors	1	.7
Students' apathy towards guidance and counselling	7	5.0
Lack of student awareness of such services	37	26.4
Total	140	100

Source: Fieldwork (2013)

The major challenge facing the operation of guidance/counselling services is the absence of consulting offices at the study centres. With no designated offices, students are likely to interpret the situation as the non-existence of such services. To a lesser extent, students bemoaned the low level of awareness among themselves which results in apathy towards such services.

4.3.3 Making Guidance/counselling Useful to All Students

The indispensable nature of guidance/counselling to distance the student means that it will be in the right direction to improvise means of making all students benefit. In the light of the challenges facing such provision, the study sought the views of students as to what measures should be taken to make guidance and counselling beneficial to all students.

Table 4.12: Suggestions to make Guidance and Counselling Useful to all Students

Suggestion	Frequency	Per cent
Offices at all centres	97	68.8
Training of more counsellors	7	5.0
Effective supervision of counsellors	2	1.4
Creating awareness of availability of such services	35	24.8
Total	141	100

Source: Field Data (2013)

With regards to overcoming the challenges associated with guidance/counselling support to DE students, most of the respondents (68.8%) suggested that, guidance/counselling offices should be set up at all the DE centres and where there is such services, students should be made aware.

4.4 Administrative Support Services

Administrative support for distance students brings them closer to the institution in terms of making them feel part of a bigger group rather than as isolated individuals. These services include all information on admission, registration, examination and timetables. Such services are provided for prospective students, admitted students and even past students. Most times administrative support deals with information dissemination but it also includes the running of institutional facilities like laboratories and libraries.

Table 4.12 shows how often respondents received information from the UCC main campus.

Table 4.13: How Often Respondents Receive Information from UCC

Rate	Frequency	Per cent
Regularly	96	68.1
Not regularly	40	28.4
Not at all	5	3.5
Total	141	100

Source: Field Data (2013)

The findings according to Table 4.13 show that 68.1 per cent of students received information from UCC regularly while 28.4 per cent received information but not regularly. However 3.5 per cent did not receive any information from UCC.

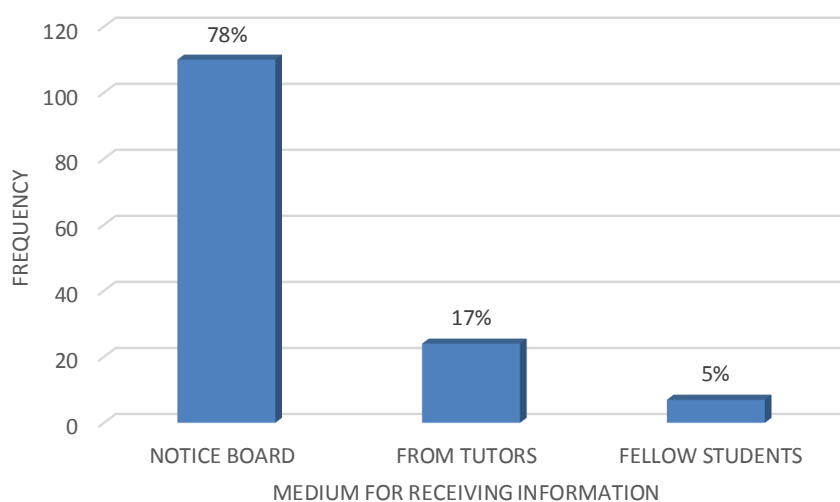
On which information students usually sought, most of them gave responses similar to the following:

- *Timetable information – (73 Students)*
- *Information about fees – (16 Students)*
- *Examination results – (55 Students)*

4.4.1 Medium for Information Dissemination

Information dissemination is vital for both students and faculty in the smooth running of an academic institution. Information usually emanates from the faculty through various media but most common among them include the notice boards, tutors and students. Figure 4.3 shows the medium through which students received most of their information.

Fig. 4.3: Medium by Which Respondents Received Most of Their Information



Source: Field Data (2013)

The study brought to fore that majority of students (78%) received most of their information from notice boards, while others depended on their tutors and fellow students.

4.4.2 Preferred Means of Receiving Information

Although there are various other means of receiving information, students have their peculiar preferences. The study enquired from them which medium they preferred most and their responses are displayed in Table 4.13.

Table 4.14: Preferred Means of Receiving Information

Means	Frequency	Per cent
Phone call	18	12.7
Notice board	90	63.4
Text message	22	15.5
E-mail	7	4.9
From tutors	5	3.5
Total	142	100

Source: Field Data (2013)

Table 4.24 summarizes the preferred means by which respondents would like to receive information. While 63.4 per cent still preferred the notice board at the centres, 15.5% preferred text messages as a means of receiving information. A few of them would like to receive information through either the phone, e-mail or from tutors. This is tied to the provision of administrative support.

4.4.3 Timely Provision of Administrative Support

Administrative support has to do largely with information dissemination and attending to enquiries concerning the activities of the institution. Students often seek the schedules of activities concerning their academic lives such as tutorial timetables and the general academic

calendar. They also seek to know their grades in the various assessments tests they take as quickly as possible. The study therefore sought to find out how satisfied students were with the timely provision of some administrative support in terms of access to academic progress reports, provision of timetables and the assistance from members of staff. Table 4.15 below shows the percentages, mean and standard deviation of how students ranked their level of satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale.

Table: 4.15: Satisfaction with Timely Provision of Administrative Support

Service	V.S	S	M.S	D	V.D	Mean	Std. Dev.
Access to academic progress report	20.4%	35.9%	26.1%	15.5%	2.1%	2.4296	1.04778
Provision of academic timetables	32.4%	40.1%	19.7%	7.7%	-	2.0282	.91437
Assistance from staff	14.1%	35.2%	28.2%	19.0%	3.5%	2.6268	1.05595
General level of satisfaction	22.3%	37.0%	24.6%	14.0%	1.8%	2.3615	1.00603

Source: Field Data (2013)

N= 144 across; Very Satisfied (V.S) = 1; Satisfied (S) = 2; Moderately Satisfied (M.S) = 3;

Dissatisfied (D) = 4; Very Dissatisfied (V.D) = 5

Table 4.15 shows that administrative support is very responsive to some of the most important needs of students. Students showed their satisfaction with the timely provision of progress reports, provision of timetables and assistance from staff. In the area of access to academic

progress reports 56.3 per cent felt content. However, the high percentage of 26.1 who were indifferent is a source of concern. Also, 72.5 per cent were satisfied with the timely provision of academic timetables which in effect ranked highest among the three variables investigated with a mean of 2.028 and a standard deviation of .91437.

4.4.4 Library Support Offered by UCC to DE Students

Supporting students to satisfy their library needs is an important assistance which when ignored by DE institutions affect the learning of their students. In conventional education, students have access to campus-based library facilities. On the other hand, if DE students are to enjoy similar provisions, then they need to be able to access the library at their study centres. The findings of the study show that there was no library support for UCC DE students at their centres. As a result of this, 66 per cent indicated using other libraries with 34 per cent not using any library service at all.

The above stated response led to further investigation of those who used other libraries to find out the types of libraries patronized. The following libraries were mentioned:

- *Community library, Koforidua – (OMESS Student)*
- *Western regional library, Sekondi – (Holy Child Centre Student)*
- *Community library, Adenta (Accra High Student)*
- *Church library, Spintex (Accra High Student)*
- *District library, Akim Oda – (OMESS Student)*
- *Senior High School library, Adabraka – (Accra High Student)*
- *University of Ghana Library, Legon – (Accra High Student)*

These libraries are regional specific and near to the places of work or abode of students.

4.4.5 Factors Influencing Library Choice

In the absence of library facilities for DE students at their centres, they tend to use other libraries.

Since not all libraries may attract them, the study sought to find out the reasons why DE students may visit a library. Table 4.16 shows their responses.

Table 4.16: Factors That Influence Respondents' Usage of Library Facilities

Factors	Frequency	Per cent
Convenient opening hours	19	13.6
Closeness to home	69	49.3
Library owning materials I need	21	15.0
Helpfulness of staff	8	5.7
Availability of book loan service	22	15.7
Silence	1	.7
Total	140	100

Source: Field Data (2013)

The findings of the study according to Table 4.16 show that one of the most important factors that influenced library usage was closeness of the library to the homes of the students (49.3%). Other factors that influenced their choice of library were convenient opening hours and whether the library owned materials they needed.

4.4.6 Importance of Library Provisions

Library support includes several provisions such as library collections, book loans, photocopy of articles and chapters of books, access to electronic databases and opening hours. The availability of these services may vary according to the resources invested or the needs of students. The study therefore interviewed students on the importance of some library provisions to their

learning. Table 4.17 displays the results obtained in terms of the percentages, mean and standard deviation when students ranked the level of importance of such provisions on a 4-point Likert scale.

Table 4.17: Importance of Some Library Services to DE Students

Service	V.I	I	M.I	N.I	Mean	Std. Dev.
Library collections	38.2%	28.7%	19.1%	14.0%	2.1618	1.21850
Book loans	36.5%	32.8%	19.7%	10.9%	2.1606	1.23808
Photocopy of articles and chapters of books	34.8%	31.9%	18.8%	14.5%	2.2754	1.3328
Access to electronic databases	18.8%	33.3%	27.5%	20.3%	2.6957	1.34874
Opening and closing hours	36.2%	29.7%	15.2%	18.8%	2.3551	1.4889
General level of importance	32.9%	31.3%	20.1%	15.7%	2.32972	1.32540

Source: Field Data (2013)

N=144 across; Very Important (V.I) = 1; Important (I) = 2; Moderately Important (M.I) = 3; Not Important (N.I) = 4

The study revealed that library collections, book loans, photocopy of materials and access to electronic databases were seen by students to be very important library interventions. Table 4.17 also shows that students did not underestimate the unique contributions these provisions can make to their academic lives. The most important was the availability of book loan service to

students with a ranked mean of 2.1606. On the other hand, students considered the access to electronic databases as least important to the other services investigated. This is evident from the ranked of 2.3551.

Summary

In sum, the study revealed that while some support services provided for UCC DE students were functioning effectively, others were virtually non-existent at the study centres.

Students were generally satisfied with aspects of face-to-face tutorial support which enabled them to interact with both tutors and colleagues. Therefore, they preferred this tutorial medium to any other. They appreciated academic assessments which are aimed at evaluating their learning and also making the tutors aware of their weaknesses so they can give them appropriate feedback. Notwithstanding the general satisfaction with face-to-face tutorial support, students made known their displeasure about the nature of the classroom furniture which they described as 'uncomfortable'. They therefore made recommendations to the effect that classroom furniture be changed in terms of size to suit their status as adults.

It was also found out that learning material support to students was satisfactory. They acknowledged the fact that the content of the learning materials was relevant to their studies and that this informed their way of questioning tutors during tutorial sessions. On the other hand, students desired to be provided with CDs/DVDs to compliment the printed materials because they may contain new and helpful information. They also suggested that modules should be distributed more effectively and should contain more coloured diagrams.

With regards to guidance and counselling support to DE students, it was uncovered that though there were no designated offices at the study centres for such purposes, some tutors provided

such services to students who approached them with issues that directly or indirectly affected their academic lives. There was however the major challenge of providing guidance and counselling offices at the study centres designated for such purposes. Students therefore suggested that such provision should be taken seriously so that they can benefit from the services more.

Additionally, the study revealed that administrative support to distance students was satisfactory. Most students recognised the regular dissemination of information about timetables and examination results via the notice boards provided. The provision of library services to DE students at the study centres was absent. Students therefore resorted to using nearby libraries to satisfy their library needs. In effect, students lacked the necessary library support from UCC.

4.5 Section B: Responses from Tutors

Tutors interviewed responded to questions relating to how they supported distance students during face-to-face tutorial sessions. Although the study also asked students questions about face-to-face tutorial support, these questions to tutors differed in the sense that they facilitated the process and their role in the learning process cannot be ignored.

4.5.1 Tutorial Sessions and the Roles Played by Tutors

From the study results, tutors noted that they organized 3 to 6 tutorial sessions per course for students each semester. Their basic role was to explain learning materials to the understanding of students. Moreover, tutors perform other roles which are also important to the success of the teaching and learning process. Table 4.18 displays some additional roles as recorded in the study.

Table 4.18 Additional Roles Played by Tutors

Additional roles	Frequency (Multiple responses)	Percent
Invigilation	18	39.1
Supervision	5	10.9
Teacher-made tests	13	28.3
Marking and recording	9	19.6
Counseling	1	2.2
Total	46	100

N=20

Source: Field Data (2013)

The study reveals that apart from explaining learning materials and answering questions from students most tutors organized and invigilated tests, marked and recorded them. Few other tutors indicated that they supervised corrections to marked assignments during tutorial sessions.

4.5.2 Number of Quizzes per Course Each Semester and Feedback

All the tutors interviewed organised two quizzes per course to their students each semester and when these quizzes are done, feedback is given to students in order for them to know how they are faring. The study results also revealed that tutors made several efforts in encouraging participation from students, motivating them to learn and encouraging them to ask questions during tutorial sessions. They did so by the following means:

I make students take part in solving questions on the board – (Accra High Tutor)

I assure students that I will answer all questions because they are important – (OMESS Tutor)

I give incentives to students who perform well in tests – (Holy Child Tutor)

I pause for students anytime they say I am moving too fast – (OMESS Tutor)

I make sure students are applauded for asking questions – (Holy Child Tutor)

The students are free to bring up suggestions to improve learning – (Accra High Tutor)

4.5.3 Tutor Satisfaction with Aspects of Their Work

The work of a distance tutor is a very important one and the conditions associated with it are necessary to the success of the teaching and learning process. The study therefore sought the views of tutors as to their level of satisfaction with some aspects relating to their work and this is shown in Table 4.19 below which displays the percentages, mean and standard deviation of responses when ranked on a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 4.19: Tutor Satisfaction with Aspects of Their Work

Item	V.S	S	M.S	D	Mean	Std. Dev.
Infrastructure and classrooms	55.0%	20.0%	20.0%	5.0%	1.7500	.96655
Marking deadlines	25.0%	40.0%	25.0%	10.0%	2.2000	.95145
Teaching resources	45.0%	40.0%	15.0%		1.7000	.73270
Relationship with CCE	45.0%	40.0%	10.0%	5.0%	1.7500	.85070
General level of satisfaction	42.5%	17.5%	17.5%	5%	1.85	0.87535

Source: Field Data

N= 144; Very Satisfied (V.S) = 1; Satisfied (S) = 2; Moderately Satisfied (M.S) = 3; Dissatisfied (D) = 4; Very Dissatisfied (V.D) = 5

On the whole, tutors expressed greater satisfaction with the teaching resources provided (Mean = 1.7000). To a relatively lesser degree they were also satisfied with the nature of infrastructure and classrooms and marking deadlines. It was also refreshing to note that that had a very good relationship with CCE, their head office at UCC.

Summary

In sum, the study revealed that the basic role played by the tutor was to provide further explanation on learning materials to students during face-to-face sessions. They however indicated that they made tests and marked assignments as well. Tutors made efforts to encourage students to learn by answering their questions and making them participate in solving questions on the board. The tutors also expressed their general satisfaction with aspects of their work such as the teaching resources provided and the nature of infrastructure and classrooms.

The findings of this chapter are discussed in light of the objectives, theoretical framework and literature reviewed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in light of the objectives, theoretical framework and literature reviewed. The results were therefore discussed in light of the various objectives that the study sought to investigate.

The objectives of the study were to find out:

- The effectiveness of face-to-face tutorial support to distance students.
- The extent to which learning materials enhance learning at a distance.
- How guidance and counselling meet the needs of distance students.
- The extent of administrative support given to distance students.

5.2 Face-to-face Tutorial Support

The study revealed that each semester, 4-6 tutorial sessions are organised for students per course and most (69.4%) of them prefer this kind of arrangement.

It was also found out from the study that only the face-to-face tutorial medium is available to the distance students. This kind of arrangement is however preferred by most students citing the opportunity to see tutors, ask questions and interact with colleagues as some of the reasons.

The fact that majority of students selected the face-to-face medium as their preferred tutorial mode can be attributed to the importance of the human factor in DE (Sewart, 1998). Personal contact with its accompanied social interaction is important to remove the loneliness associated

with learning at a distance (Vassilou-Papageorgiou & Vassala, 2005). With the current development of ICT, online student portals may become part of the tutorial system. Henri and Rigault (1996) describe ICT enabled communication in education as more intense communication than face-to-face groups, where (students experience) the lack of social pressure and the greater freedom to express their views without struggling for the right of audience (p. 10). This means that though students have the opportunity to interact physically with tutors at face-to-face sessions, it is likely that the tutor's attention will be sought by other students as well, therefore making such interaction minimal or not complete. On the other hand, using an online medium will enable each student to have access to the tutor without much struggle albeit such interactions may not delay since replies are not immediate.

Face-to-face tutorial sessions give tutors the opportunity to answer questions and elaborate on the learning materials. All tutors interviewed revealed that they performed other functions apart from their major duties. In addition to explaining learning materials, they also set questions, invigilated assessment tests and socialization needs of the students. As cited in Donkor (2011:41) the Namibia Polytechnic Face-to-Face Manual (2009) recognises the primary role of tutors in making learning materials more understandable but also charges them to encourage and motivate students in the following ways:

- Using assignments to buttress tutoring
- Devising ways of encouraging interaction among students
- Aiding students to improve academically
- Being ready to assist students at all times

- Being in tune with the characteristics and needs of distance students

Thatch & Murphy (1995) see interpersonal communication and intimacy as significant social roles that foster a relationship of trust which enhances the learning process. During such sessions, tutors make the effort to encourage students to communicate with each other at tutorial meetings, to help them interact and share ideas and as this can remove the feeling of isolation (Abrahamson, 1998; Badu-Nyarko, 2006). Tutors encouraged students to take part in solution of questions on the board and also urged them to ask more questions by insisting that all questions were important. Tutors also motivated students to learn by reminding them of the essence of their certificate when the course is completed and also making encouraging comments on their marked scripts.

The biggest class size ranged from 93 to 133 and the smallest had student numbers of 30 and below. It was revealed from the study that about half (48.6%) of the respondents belonged to average class sizes of 31-61 students. In a peculiar case, it was noticed that a substantial number of students (34.8%) at the Accra High Centre belonged to classes with an average of 93-133 students. According to Barwick (2007), enough research about how class sizes affect interaction has not been done to prove that small class sizes are better than large class sizes or vice versa. He opines that there might be other factors such as the teaching style that can either encourage or inhibit tutor-student interaction. On the other hand, Seyoum (2008) is of the view that –a distinctive feature of the ODL education system is interaction with other learners and tutors during tutorial sessionsø (p.1). This means that the higher the student numbers in a class, the more difficult it becomes for one-on-one interaction with the tutor due to how every student will be seeking for the tutorø attention. In order for this to be implemented effectively, the number of students in a class needs to be reduced to a manageable size by engaging more tutors. This

study's results show that students were satisfied (Mean = 2.0070) with their class sizes. Since most (70.1%) of them also belonged to average class sizes of 61 and below, it will be advisable to ensure that class sizes fall within this range.

In general, tutors indicated their satisfaction for the infrastructure and classrooms provided, marking deadlines, teaching resources as well as their relationship with CCE. This shows how comfortable they find the classrooms and how the period given for marking suits them. Also, tutors indicated that resources needed to execute their duty to the best of their abilities were enough, indicating high morale to perform. The welfare of tutors should be taken seriously because their contribution to learning cannot be quantified (Thorpe, 1988).

The study showed that most students were satisfied with regards to tutorial schedules, attitude of tutors towards students, opportunity to ask questions, further explanation of learning materials by tutors, class size and duration of tutorials. These are very important components of the tutorial services and the high level of students' satisfaction indicates that tutorial sessions were helpful to students.

Assessment and Feedback

The study revealed that most students (53.5%) see assessment as a way of evaluating learning. Others believed they are meant to update the teacher on the academic progress of students and also to help students improve academically. Two quizzes per course are organised for students each semester. Schlosser and Simonson (2002) regard students' assessments as a means of facilitating communication rather than mere instruments of assessment. This means that as students are being tested to show their level of understanding, tutors also get the opportunity to communicate their concerns to the students.

The study revealed that most students (67.1%) preferred the objective/multiple choice format of assessments. The common reason given was that it covered most of what they had learned and this made them read broadly. On the other hand, objective/multiple choice assessment formats may not necessarily prove a student's competence in a subject. This may be due to among others, the reason stated below:

Students may recognize or know facts or procedures well enough to score high on the test, but not be able to think about the subject or apply knowledge, even though being able to think and apply is essential to "knowing" any subject. Therefore, the conclusion or inference that a student "knows" history or science because she got a high score on a multiple-choice test may be false.

(<http://www.fairtest.org/facts/mctfcats.html>)

The tutors give feedback to students regarding marked quizzes citing reasons to the effect that students can identify where they fell short and remedy it in subsequent assessments. This is important to both tutors and students because it enhances the learning process and erases misunderstandings. Also, feedback that relates to the personal and academic progress of students guides them to excel (Galusha, 1997).

Most tutors also indicated that assessments give them the opportunity not only to bring out the weaknesses but also praise the strengths of students. Beaudoin (1990) sees this as a way for tutors to build trust as they add a personal touch to the communication (Notara, 2001). To most of the students, academic assessments achieved the aim of evaluating their learning and also helping them improve academically. The Michigan State University (2013) also expects the following similar outcomes from a good assessment:

- evaluates learning outcomes
- is fair, reliable and accurate

- is easy to administer, score, and interpret
- updates the teacher on the academic progress of students
- provides the teacher an opportunity to correct mistakes of students
- seeks to help students to improve academically

5.3 Learning Materials Support

The study revealed that all students received their learning materials personally from their respective study centres. The majority of them also affirmed their preference for this medium of collection. This may be due to the fact that it is the main option available and students have become used to it. In comparison to the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), students are given the opportunity to view or download IGNOU Study Material free of cost from the University website www.ignou.ac.in by registering via <http://www.egyankosh.ac.in/register>. This enables the students to access learning materials no matter where they find themselves in the world.

It can also be deduced from the study that all students noted that they were not provided with any other printed materials or CDs/DVDs apart from the course module. However, 84.6 per cent of them want to be provided with CDs/DVDs as additional learning materials citing reasons to the effect that they may contain relevant information not provided in the modules while a few (15.4%) of them did not welcome the idea citing the possibility of difficulty in accessing information and unfamiliarity with such materials.

Responses from most students (64.1%) also showed they recognized that the learning materials contained relevant information for their studies and also objectives stated in the modules matched the information covered. This is a good sign of the effectiveness of the module because it gives exactly what it promises and therefore students are not disappointed.

Most students (78.7%) agreed that tables, charts and diagrams found in the modules help in simplifying information. They make the teaching-learning process simpler and helps students increase their analyzing skills (www.answers.com, 2013). According to Chan (2011), tables, charts and graphs do make data clear and easy to understand. This gives the student the ability to grasp more information provided in a small space. It is however desirable that tables and other figures are clear enough for easy understanding of the student.

The study also revealed that the volume of materials provided the students were sufficient and that self-evaluation activities helped students assess their understanding of the modules. From the survey 58 percent of the students strongly agreed that objectives stated in the modules matched the information covered and this is believed to control the focus and expectations of the students on the relevant information (Schwier and Misanchuk, 1993).

In times of difficulty in understanding learning materials, most (44%) students stated that they asked tutors during tutorial sessions. A sizable number (31%) also opted to ask fellow students to get better understanding. However, 21.2 per cent of student preferred paying for the services of a private tutor to explain their difficult areas. This buttresses the point that students trust tutors to help them in their studies and therefore see them as the first point of call when they encounter any difficulty (Thatch & Murphy, 1995). It is however disadvantageous to students who pay for tuition at school to once again pay private tutors to help them with studies. This may be due to

several reasons such as the students needing urgent help and cannot wait for tutorials times, the student having difficulties with asking questions at tutorials or the student not being content with answers given at tutorials. If the above reasons are widespread, then students who may not be able to afford to pay for the services of private tutors will be more disadvantaged.

On suggestions for improvement of services regarding learning materials provided, students were of the opinion that the modules should be given to them earlier in order to read them before tutorials start. This is because many learning materials come in bits from the main campus and so some students will have to wait for their turn to receive them later than others and this makes them lag behind their colleagues.

5.4 Guidance and Counseling Support

According to the study results, most students (94.4%) stated that there wasn't any provision of guidance/counseling services. Only a few (4.9%) acknowledged the provision of such services at the study centre. It is however worthy of note that the same number of students admitted having benefitted from guidance/counseling support. It may therefore be inferred that though students may not be aware of the provision of such services, they purposely seek for them when they need them. It is possible that they approached some tutors with their guidance/counseling problems and they were helped. This trend is evident in the responses given by tutors regarding additional roles they played. Only one tutor cited guidance/counseling as a role apart from the primary roles of explaining learning materials and answering questions from students. Tutors who provide guidance and counseling in many African educational institutions do not have specialized training to do so but they stand in the gap where there are no trained counselors (UNESCO,

2000). According to Gladding (1998), it is incumbent upon counselors to make their services known to students since students usually intend looking out for them. Also, counseling services may therefore be available at the centres but students may not know of them.

The study also revealed that students who sought guidance/counseling did so because they had academic, social and personal issues. Mutie and Ndambuki (2004) suggest that students with such problems can be assisted to overcome them through counselling. Most of them (70.7%) indicated the need for academic guidance/counselling during the orientation period and at the beginning of every semester. They therefore stated that guidance and counselling services are very important in helping them with academic and social issues. This may be due to the fact that counselling services for tertiary students is usually aimed at helping students make appropriate decisions for more productive academic, social and personal development (Rana, 2000).

In the case of UNISA, prospective students are made aware beforehand of access to counselling services before registration in order to make the right course choices. When enrolled, counselling services are provided to help students develop academic skills and to cope with personal and career difficulties. Upon exiting UNISA, students can also access services relating to finding suitable employment. (www.unisa.ac.za)

With regard to challenges with guidance /counseling at the study centres, the majority (65.0%) of students indicated the absence of guidance/counselling office while some (26.4%) also indicated the lack of students' awareness of such services. Challenges regarding the absence of offices at the study centre, can be attributed to the fact that these centres are located on rented premises with no special allocation for such purposes. This infrastructural deficit can be overcome by employing the use of online counselling as in the case of UNISA where students are encouraged

to visit <http://www.unisa.ac.za> for guidance/counselling issues which may be career-related, academic or personal.

5.5 Administrative Support

According to the study, the majority (68.1%) of students indicated that they received regular information from the main campus. Only a few (3.5%) did not receive any information from UCC. The rest of them indicated that although they received some information from UCC, this was not regular. According to the Distance Education Council of India's guidelines, for regulating the establishment and operation of distance education institutions, academic and administrative support are to be available at every study centre. This will provide the necessary information to students and make them feel part of the parent institution (DEC, 2006).

Also, the study revealed that most (95%) students received their information from the notice boards and tutors. Furthermore, most of them also expressed the desire of receiving information from the notice boards. This is a good opportunity for those who attend tutorials to have access to them. These notice boards are placed at the study centres for such purposes and they usually belonged to the host institution. Notice boards are vital in disseminating variety of information. Notices which are usually in the form of posters, memos, letters and timetables from the parent institution are displayed for the perusal of all stakeholders (www.genite.co.uk). Though information on notice boards are most accessible to DE students, such information are liable to being defaced due to weather conditions or constant tampering. Notices can also fall off the boards when there is no proper fixing. When information is defaced or lost from the notice

boards, students are denied of news concerning them and unless other sources of information such as tutors intervene, there might be confusion.

The IGNOU handbook (2013) suggests that information from DE institutions can basically be done at the pre-entry stage, during the learning programme and after the learning programme. At the pre-entry stage, usually require information about entry requirements, application procedures, and courses offered. During the learning programme, students usually require such information on learning materials, assignment grades and accessibility to counselling services. Also students usually require information on further studies or advice about their careers. In essence, students need information throughout their educational life and the availability of relevant information can have major effects on their progress.

It is also worthy of note that a smaller number of students (20.4) according to the study, preferred receiving information via email and text messages. This is however a bit surprising since email and other online information services are common in other DE institutions in Africa. UNISA for instance has made information on regional centre, student assessment, application details, student admission and registration available online for easier access wherever the student may be. Students can also get information about applications and registration, assignments and student accounts by dialling the SMS short codes 43578, 43584 and 31954 respectively (www.unisa.ac.za).

The study revealed that most students were satisfied with their access to academic reports. The University of Michigan states that "whatever the format of an academic progress report, the intention is to provide a framework for constructive discussion of student progress toward the degree and to document suggestions, guidelines, and benchmarks provided to the student"

(www.umich.edu). This means that most students had access to their reports without much difficulty and this is intended to help them know their strengths and weaknesses so they can work on them.

It was also revealed that the majority of students were satisfied (Mean = 2.0282) with the provision of academic timetables. This provision helps them to plan effectively for assessments. The few students who stated their disappointment with the provision of academic timetables will therefore mean that either they did not have access to them or they were wrought with mistakes which misled them in their planning.

The duty of administrative staff in educational institutions usually involves being helpful to colleague staff members, students and other visitors to the institution. Students also, indicated that their satisfaction level with regards to assistance from staff was high (Mean = 1.05595). On the other hand, a significant total of 22.5 percent of respondents said they were dissatisfied with the assistance from the staff. With regards to the tutors, 50 per cent were very satisfied with their relation with the CCE at UCC while 5 percent indicated their dissatisfaction with their relationship. It however seems that administrative procedures could be better co-ordinated to allow for quicker and more efficient communication between the students and the university. This is necessary because the provision of immediate assistance and adequate flow of communication will help solve both academic and administrative problems. For this to work, it will have to be spearheaded by planning, organization, leadership and control (Rumble 1992, cited in Schlosser & Anderson, 1994).

With regards to library support for DE students, the study found out that there was no library support for distance students at the study centres. This means that they had to resort to the use of

other libraries close to their homes or workplaces. This situation might be due to the fact that the study centres are rented premises and that building a library structure for use by DE students might not be allowed. In this case, distance students are handicapped in accessing research materials which will help them in their studies. This is contrary to the University of Birmingham's Code of Practice for Distance Learning (2012-13) which states that 'students following Distance Learning programmes, as fully registered students of the University, will have access to the University's computing and library facilities. eLibrary and the services provided by Library Services to Distance Learning students will be of particular importance, as will any resources offered through the University's Virtual Learning Environment'. However, to cope with the absence of library support, 61.7 per cent of students indicated that they used other libraries such as a community libraries as well as the University of Ghana library at Legon. Appleton (1994) is of the opinion that 'academic institutions ... have a responsibility to provide off-campus students with resources and facilities equivalent to their on-campus peers' (p.79). In Ghana for instance, the mobile library service is operating on a pilot basis in two communities within two selected districts in all ten administrative regions. 'Indeed, the library seems misplaced, ignored, or forgotten in many distance education programs' (Mirtz 2010, p.858).

The study also sought to find out which factors contributed to respondents' usage of libraries. It was revealed that almost half (49.3%) of the number of respondents cited the closeness of the library to their homes as what influences their choice of library. This can be attributed to the fact that many distance students are adults who have family responsibilities and therefore need to be home often. The closeness of a library to a DE student will therefore afford him/her the opportunity to access the library much easily. The issue of access to library materials is often cited by researchers as a key component in distance education (Tait, 2000). This challenge, once

attended to, will help students to be more independent in their learning as they will have a wider platform for reference.

A sizable number of students also stated the availability of book loan service and the library owning books they needed as their reason for patronizing a library. When the library owns books they need they serve as additional learning materials for them while book loans enable them to borrow books and use anywhere they want even after the normal library hours. In the view of Sampson (2003), "since a number of students do not have access to reference material (and have expressed frustration at not being able to access the material they need to complete their work), it would appear to be worth looking into ways of providing students with the ability to access key resource material, either by establishing a relationship for this purpose with a local university or by providing access to an on-line data bank" (p. 1).

A few other students (5.7%) stated that the helpfulness of library staff influenced their choice of library while 0.7 percent of students stated other reasons that influenced them such as seating capacity, serene atmosphere, internet access, good lighting and good ventilation among others.

In general, students expressed much contentment with face-to-face tutorial sessions and the learning materials provided. They were excited about their interaction with tutors and colleagues and the opportunity to ask questions during tutorials. They acknowledged the extent to which the learning materials aided them in their individual learning. Students were also happy with the information dissemination aspect of administrative support but were not enthused about the non-availability and lack of awareness of library and guidance/counseling services respectively. They expressed more interest in receiving information about timetables and examination results regularly. Students wanted libraries that were closer and operated book loan services to help

them in their individual learning. It was therefore evident that while some support services were functioning to the benefit of students, some were either non-existent or malfunctioning.

With reference to these findings, appropriate recommendations, and conclusions have been provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings, recommendations, and conclusions for the study. It should be stated that these conclusions are based on the data derived from interviews conducted. The conclusions are meant to present to researchers and DE institutions information about distance learners, their needs and desires and how they are being met.

6.2 Summary

The study set out to find out how student support services provided by UCC to distance students facilitated learning. This was necessitated by the important role the institution has played since 2001/2002 as the largest DE provider in Ghana with a current student population of about 30,000 nationwide. The provision of support to distance students is critical to the success of any DE programme because it helps in bridging the physical gap between the students and the institution, thereby helping them overcome the feeling of isolation. When the needs of distance students are largely met via the support given them, this can also help in reducing failure and attrition rates. The study therefore investigated some vital aspects of student support services such as face-to-face tutorials, learning materials, guidance and counseling as well as administrative support. The study further investigated the effectiveness of face-to-face tutorial support to distance students, the extent to which learning materials enhance learning at a distance, how guidance and counselling services meet the needs of distance students and the extent of administrative support given to them. The study was guided by the framework on isolation and control; overcoming

isolation in distance education as espoused by Badu-Nyarko (2010). This was to find out how student support services helped students physically, psychologically and emotionally through its various means of communication and interaction. The researcher employed a multi-staged approach comprising purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques in selecting respondents from the UCC DE programme. This was done to ensure that the results were more representative of the target population. The instrument used for collecting information from respondents was the questionnaire. In all, 144 students and 20 tutors were selected to respond to the questionnaires at three study centres located at the Accra High School, OMESS and Holy Child College.

6.3 Major Findings

In general, the study showed that face-to-face tutorial support which was the sole tutorial medium available was seen by students to be vital to their academic success as most (98.6%) of them expressed their preference for this medium to others because it created the opportunity for physical interaction with tutors and colleague students.

It was found out that tutors improvised learning activities at contact sessions to make learning more fun and also encourage students ask more questions. One of such ways was making students participate in solving questions on the board.

Also, the study revealed that students (53.5%) generally saw academic assessments as a means of evaluating their learning but they (67.1%) preferred the objectives/multiple choice format because it enabled them to read more widely and also, their scripts are marked and returned to them on time.

With regard to the learning materials provided, the findings show that they were delivered to students at the study centres and incidentally, almost all of them (99.3%) indicated their preference of this to any other means. They generally agreed (84.5%) that learning materials enhanced their learning.

The study also revealed that though most (95.1%) students did not know about the existence of guidance and counseling services at their centres. The few (4.9%) students who had benefitted from guidance/counseling services indicated that it involved largely their academic and social lives (85.7%).

The findings of the study also brought to fore that the information that students received from UCC was usually from postings on notice boards provided at the study centres (stated by 78% of students). Though information on notice boards was exposed to all sorts of hazards including the possibility of wearing off, most students (63.4%) still indicated their preference for information via this medium. The study revealed that distance students were generally satisfied (Mean = 2.3615) with access to academic progress reports, provision of timetables and the assistance they received from staff.

It was also revealed in the study that there was no library support for DE students at their study centres (all students attested to this fact). Most students (66%) therefore used other libraries to satisfy their library needs. They preferred libraries which were located not far from their homes. They however cited library collections, book loans, photocopying as well as opening and closing hours as important aspects of library support to their learning (Mean = 2.32972).

6.4 Conclusion

In the view of Nunes and Fowell (1996), learning is a complex process involving a large range of activities, some active, some passive, some creative, some reactive, some directed, some exploratory (p.1). All these kind of activities are necessary for successful academic pursuits and they made possible largely by processes of communication and interaction (Badu-Nyarko, 2010).

This study has identified some strengths and challenges of how UCC supports its distance students. This was analysed against the backdrop that supporting distance students is aimed at encouraging them overcome challenges such as loneliness, difficulty in understanding learning materials, being abreast with information regarding their studies and getting relevant advice concerning issues that affect their educational pursuit. Therefore, widening access to higher education must be seen as not only increasing the motivation, knowledge and skills of professionals who want to pursue higher education, but also be concerned about assisting them throughout the period of their enrolment. Services such as face-to-face tutorial sessions, the and learning material support were operating satisfactorily while guidance and counselling and administrative support were inadequate in helping students overcome the challenges of learning at a distance. This resulted in students resorting to a variety of coping mechanisms including visiting community libraries to satisfy their library needs.

6.5 Recommendations

Despite the numerous achievements and benefits of the UCC DE programme, there exist a few challenges and constraints. They include poor guidance and counseling support, lack of library support at the study centres and uncomfortable classroom furniture. Following the findings, some recommendations are offered to enrich the support services of the programme.

The following recommendations are meant for both DE institutions and researchers:

- v. The study revealed disparities in the additional roles performed by tutors. Therefore, UCC should establish guidelines that detail their roles and responsibilities so that their routine will be standardised to bring clarity and sanity in their work.
- vi. Stronger systems for feedback between students and tutors should be built by UCC. This is because regular communication between tutors and students on non-tutorial days will ensure immediate help to students.
- vii. Tutors should ensure that marking of assessment tests and quizzes are done more quickly, especially with regard to tests which are not in the multiple choice format. This was brought to light when some students indicated their preference for multiple choice assessment formats because their scripts were marked and returned earlier.
- viii. To help enable students start reading on time and keep pace with colleagues, UCC should ensure that students receive required learning materials on time.
- ix. To expose them to more information that will help complement the modules, UCC should respond to students' call for the introduction of CDs/DVDs as additional learning resources.

- x. When academic challenges of students are not attended to, this can make them fail or even quit schooling. Therefore guidance and counselling should help tackle more academic and social issues because they are the major challenges that students have.
- xi. DE students find classroom furniture to be uncomfortable and therefore UCC should introduce suitable furniture to reduce discomfort among distance students. This challenge arises because the furniture in the classrooms are specifically made for younger students in the rented premises and therefore not suitable for these older DE students.
- xii. To ensure that students are able to attend tutorials regularly because of the high costs and risks involved in travelling to and from the study centres each tutorial day, alternative accommodation for students who will like to sleepover for the weekend tutorials should be arranged.
- xiii. More coloured diagrams should be added to modules to enhance its visual impressions. This will help make diagrams clearer, more attractive and therefore easily remembered by students.
- xiv. To create awareness of the availability of guidance and counselling services and to increase patronage by students, offices should be designated at all study centres for such purposes. Additional classrooms or offices can be rented to serve such purposes on tutorial days. Also, posters can be put up on notice boards or at vantage points on tutorial days to publicise the availability of such services
- xv. As distance students visit the study centres on weekends only, counsellors should be available on weekends during tutorials to enable students access them.

- xvi. Aside the use of notice boards, introduce faster and more secure ways of disseminating information to students. This is because notice boards are prone to damage and also are useful to only the students who visit it. On the other hand, text messages, phone calls and e-mails are more secure, faster and also accessible to students wherever they may be.
- xvii. Since study centres are located at rented premises, it will not be advisable to put up permanent library structures there. Therefore, a mobile library service can be introduced to cater for the library needs of distance students. Also, collaborations with local libraries or libraries in host institutions can be made to provide such services.
- xviii. The university can also introduce an online library service where students can access relevant information anytime and anywhere.

6.6 Implications for Adult Education

The UCC DE programmes are primarily targeted at adults who are already in the teaching profession. However, prospective teachers and adults of other vocations are captured significantly. As adults, these students generally have other commitments with regards to family, occupation and the community and therefore will require varying degrees of support from UCC to accomplish their academic aims.

Also, DE students are scattered all over the country and therefore, they are separated from the main campus, their tutors and their colleague students. Many of these students have been out of a formal learning setting for a long time, and will need assistance in re-adjusting to student life. The tutor therefore has the responsibility of establishing a friendly atmosphere which will ease communication and interaction.

Face-to-face tutorial sessions help students to come together and have a sense of belonging so that the feeling of isolation is removed. Study centres provide the grounds for interactions between tutors and students and among students. Support from tutors during face-to-face sessions which include answering questions posed by students, providing further explanations on learning materials and in some instances providing guidance and counselling services are important in helping adult learners cope with higher education.

On the other hand, learning materials are important support interventions that help the adult learner in his/her studies. The provision of learning materials is indispensable to distance students because as adult learners, they usually have other commitments and need these materials to study at their own convenience. That is why DE modules are designed to simulate actual tutor-

student interaction by the use of simple language set in a conversation tone with evaluative exercises.

Also, guidance/counselling services provided to distance students aid adult learners who might have difficulty with combining work and family commitments to their studies. The challenges that arise from attending to the various aspects of adult life can threaten their academic progress but can be dealt with to a greater extent by the institution providing guidance and counselling interventions.

Administrative support services such as the dissemination of information and the provision of library services to distance students are important in enhancing the learning process of adults. Adult students may not get the time to visit the main campus for information and therefore when they have adequate access to needed information without travelling to the main campus, they feel much connected to the institution. In another vein, adult students involved in distance education require library support to provide them with relevant study materials at all times. Readily available library resources mean that the adult student does not need to go through much stress in having access to related course materials.

6.7 Areas for Further Research

The subject of student support services in the UCC DE programme, as important as it may be, is a very broad one and which requires more research to enable DE institutions as well as students benefit more. The following areas can therefore be considered for further research:

- The role of student support services in reducing attrition rates in the UCC DE programme
- An assessment of the effects of student support services on academic performance of DE students.

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APPENDIX

INSTITUTE OF CONTINUING AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

STUDENT RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

TOPIC:

**APPRAISSAL OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION AT
UCC**

INTRODUCTION:

The objective of this questionnaire is to enable the researcher gather information on the above topic for his mastersødegree.

Kindly assist by giving frank answers because your answers will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

.....

Elvis Dan Sekyi

SECTION A: Demographic Data of Students

Please complete the questionnaire by making a tick in the space provided.

1. Please tick your study centre

(a) Accra High School []

(b) OMESS []

(c) Holy Child College []

SECTION B: Face-to-face tutorial support for DE students

2. How many tutorial sessions are organised for each course per semester?

(a) None []

(b) 1 ó 2 times []

(c) 4 ó 6 times []

(d) Every weekend []

3. How many tutorial sessions would you prefer to be organised for each course per semester?

(a) None []

(b) 1 ó 3 times []

(c) 4 ó 6 times []

(d) Every weekend []

4. Through which of the following media are your tutorials available? (Please tick as many that apply)

(a) Face-to-face []

(b) Online student portal []

(c) Video conferencing []

(d) Via radio []

(e) Via television []

(f) Skype []

(g) Other (specify) í í í í í í í í í í .

5. Which tutorial medium would you prefer most?

(a) Face-to-face []

(b) Online student portal []

(c) Video conferencing []

(d) Via radio []

(e) Via television []

(f) Skype []

(g) Other (specify) _____

6. Please state why you selected the response in 5 above;

[illegible]

7. How many students make up your tutorial class?

(a) 30 and below []
 (b) 31 ó 61 []
 (c) 62 ó 92 []
 (d) 93 ó 133 []
 (e) 134 ó 164 []
 (f) Above 165 []

8. How satisfied are you with the following components of face-to-face tutorial support?

Please tick below the relevant letter as indicated in the scale below.

a = very satisfied; b = satisfied; c = moderately satisfied; d = dissatisfied; e = very dissatisfied

Support	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
i. Tutorial schedules					
ii. Attitude of tutors towards students					
iii. Opportunity to ask questions					
iv. Answers given by tutors to questions					
v. Further explanation of learning materials by tutors					
vi. Class size					
vii. Duration of tutorials					

9. How many quizzes are organised per course for you at your study centre each semester?

- (a) 1 []
- (b) 2 []
- (c) 3 []
- (d) 4 []
- (e) More than 4 []

10. How many quizzes are organised per course for you at your study centre for each semester?

- | | | |
|-----|-------------|-----|
| (a) | 1 | [] |
| (b) | 2 | [] |
| (c) | 3 | [] |
| (d) | 4 | [] |
| (e) | More than 4 | [] |

11. i. Which assessment format are you more comfortable with?

- (a) Objectives (Multiple Choice) []
- (b) Subjective (Essay type) []
- (c) Both Objective and Subjective []
- (d) Interactive (Computer programmed) []
- (e) Other (Please specify) í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ..

ii. Please state why

í
 í

12. In your opinion, what are academic assessments meant to achieve?

- (a) To evaluate learning []
- (b) To update the teacher on the academic progress of students []
- (c) To provide the teacher an opportunity to correct mistakes of students []
- (d) To help students to improve academically []
- (e) Other (Please specify) í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ..

13. In your view, do academic assessments achieve their aim?

- (a) Yes []
- (b) No []
- (c) Don't know []

14. What suggestions do you have to improve face-to-face tutorial support?

[illegible]

SECTION C: Learning material support to DE students

(a) Via post []

(b) Personally from study centre []

(c) Via email []

(d) Personally from the main campus []

(e) Other (specify) í í í í í í í

(a) Via post []

(b) Personally from study centre []

(c) Via email []

(d) Personally from the main campus []

(e) Other (specify) í í í í í í í

(a) Yes []
(b) No []
(c) Not aware []

(a) Yes []

(b) No []

(c) Not aware []

(a) Very easy []

(b) Easy []

(c) Difficult []

(d) Very difficult []

19. To what extent do you agree with the following provisions associated with learning materials? Please tick below the relevant letter as indicated in the scale below.

a = strongly agree, b = agree, c = disagree and d = strongly disagree.

	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
i. Learning materials contained relevant information for my studies				
ii. Objectives stated in the modules match the information covered				
iii. The self-evaluation activities helped me assess my understanding of the modules				
iv. The tables, charts and diagrams that were used helped in simplifying information				
v. The summaries helped me review what I should have learned.				
vi. The volume of materials was sufficient				

20. In times of difficulty in understanding learning materials, how do you get further clarification?

(a) Ask tutors during tutorial sessions []

(b) Ask fellow students []

(c) Seek help from a private tutor at a fee []

(d) Read more related material on the subject matter from other sources []

(e) Other (Please specify) í .

21. What area(s) (if any) of the learning materials could be improved? (Please separate with comma if more than one.

.....

.....

.....

.....

SECTION D: Guidance and counselling support for DE students

22. Are guidance and counselling services provided at your study centre?

- (a) Yes []
- (b) No []
- (c) Not aware []

23. i. Have you benefitted from any guidance/counselling service(s) at your study centre?

- (a) Yes []
- (b) No []

ii. If "Yes", which of the following aspects of your life was involved?

- (a) Academics []
- (b) Social []
- (c) Personal []
- (d) Occupational []
- (e) Health []
- (f) Family []
- (g) Spiritual []
- (h) Other (Please specify) í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í .

24. At which of the following points do you recommend academic guidance/counselling?

- (a) During the application process []
- (b) During the registration process []
- (c) During student orientation []

- (d) Beginning of every semester []
- (e) Beginning of every academic year []
- (f) Examination period []
- (g) Other (please specify)

25. How important are guidance and counselling services in helping DE students with the following issues? Please tick below the relevant letter as indicated in the scale below.

A = very important; b = important; c = moderately important; d = important; e = not important

Issue	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
i. Academics					
ii. Social					
iii. Personal					
iv. Occupational					
v. Health					
vi. Family					
vii. Spiritual					

26. What challenges do you have with guidance and counselling at your study centre?

- (a) Absence of guidance/counselling office []
- (b) Lack of trained counsellors []
- (c) Busy schedule for available counsellors []
- (d) Students' apathy towards guidance and counselling []
- (e) Lack of student awareness of such services []
- (f) Other (Please specify) í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ..

27. What measure will you suggest should be taken to make guidance and counselling useful to all students?

- (a) Offices at all study centres []
- (b) Training of more counsellors []

- (a) Phone calls []
- (b) Notice board []
- (c) Text messages []
- (d) E-mail []
- (e) From Tutors []
- (f) Fellow students []
- (g) Other í í í í í í í .

31. By which means do you prefer most in receiving information?

- (a) Phone calls []
- (b) Notice board []
- (c) Text message []
- (d) E-mail []
- (e) From Tutors []
- (f) Fellow students []
- (g) Other í í í í í í

32. How satisfied are you with the timely provision of the following components of administrative support for DE students?

Please tick below the relevant letter as indicated in the scale below.

a = very satisfied; b = satisfied; c = moderately satisfied; d = dissatisfied; e = very dissatisfied

Service	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
i. Access to academic progress report					
ii. Provision of academic timetables					
iii. Assistance from staff					

33. What library support for DE students is offered by UCC? (Please tick as many that apply)

- (a) Book loans []
- (b) Photocopying from library materials []
- (c) Access to electronic databases []
- (d) Inter-library loans []
- (e) Mobile library service []
- (f) Other (please specify)

34. How did you learn about the library support for DE students? Please tick all that apply.

- (a) School brochure ☐
- (b) Students' Orientation ☐
- (c) Tutors ☐
- (d) Student Handbook ☐
- (e) Administrative Assistant ☐
- (f) Fellow students ☐
- (g) Other (Please specify)

35. i. Do you have access to library services at your centre?

- (a) Yes ☐
- (b) No ☐

ii. If No, how do you satisfy your library needs?

- (a) Use other libraries ☐
- (b) Use the library on the main campus ☐
- (c) Use the library of another centre(s) ☐
- (d) Do not use any library service ☐
- (e) Other (Please specify) í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í

36. Which other library/libraries have you been using?

(Please list them separating each with a comma)

í
í í

37. What are the factors that influence your usage of library facilities? Please tick all the answers that are relevant to you.

- (a) Convenient opening hours ☐
- (b) Closeness to home ☐
- (c) Library owning materials I need ☐
- (d) Helpfulness of staff ☐
- (e) Access to electronic databases ☐
- (f) Availability of book loan service ☐
- (g) Other (please specify) í

38. How important are the following in the provision of library services for DE students?

Please tick below the relevant letter as indicated in the scale below.

A = very important; b = important; c = moderately important; d = important; e = not important

Service	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
i. Library Collections					
ii. Book Loans					
iii. Photocopying of articles and chapters of books					
iv. Access to electronic databases					
v. Opening and closing hours					

THANK YOU

INSTITUTE OF CONTINUING AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

TUTOR RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

TOPIC:

**APPRAISSAL OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION AT
UCC**

INTRODUCTION:

The objective of this questionnaire is to enable the researcher gather information on the above topic for his mastersødegree.

Kindly assist by giving frank answers because your answers will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

.....

Elvis Dan Sekyi

SECTION A: Demographic Data

1. Please tick your centre

- (a) Accra High ☐
- (b) OMESS ☐
- (c) Holy Child College ☐

SECTION B: Face-to-face tutorial support for DE students

2. How many tutorial sessions do you organise for students each semester per course?

- (e) None ☐
- (f) 1 ó 3 times ☐
- (g) 4 ó 6 times ☐
- (h) Every weekend ☐

3. What basic role(s) are you required to play in meeting the face-to-face tutorial needs of DE students?

- (a) Explain learning materials ☐
- (b) Mark assignments ☐
- (c) Disseminate information ☐
- (d) Guidance/counselling ☐
- (e) Answer questions from students ☐
- (f) Other (Please specify) í ..

4. What additional roles do you play? (Please state as many that apply)

- (a) í í í í í
- (b) í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ..
- (c) í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ..
- (d) í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ..
- (e) í í í í í í í í í í í í í í .

5. How many quizzes do you give your students each semester?

- | | | |
|-----|-------------|-----|
| (a) | 1 | [] |
| (b) | 2 | [] |
| (c) | 3 | [] |
| (d) | 4 | [] |
| (e) | More than 4 | [] |

6. Do you give feedback on marked assignments/quizzes, and why?

- (a) Yes []
- (b) No []

[illegible]

7. How do you encourage participation from the students to make learning more fun?

[illegible]

8. How do you motivate students to learn?

[illegible]

9. How do you encourage students to ask questions?

[illegible]

10. How satisfied are you with the following aspects relating to your work?

Please tick below the relevant letter as indicated in the scale below.

a = very satisfied; b = satisfied; c = moderately satisfied; d = dissatisfied; e = very dissatisfied

	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
i. Infrastructure and classrooms					
ii. Marking deadlines					
iii. Teaching resources					
iv. Relationship with CCE at UCC					

THANK YOU