

Chapter 5 Data presentation and analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the data that sought to answer the question: *How do distance learners from marginalised communities perceive and experience learning support?* I interpret the findings by drawing on the empirical literature discussed in Chapter 3; taking special cognisance of the theoretical framework adopted for this study, namely, Holmberg's (2003) conversational learning theory. Learning support as offered by the service provider – BOCODOL is delivered via face-face support and mediated support. Learners had varying degrees of positive and negative perceptions of their distance learning experiences although 72.1% of the participants expressed overall satisfaction and 27.9% dissatisfaction. I conclude this chapter with a summary of the key findings and discuss three themes i.e. *transition*, *tension*, and *transactional presence* which emerged.

5.2 Learners' perceptions and experiences of learning support

In order to have an in-depth understanding of distance learners' perceptions of learning support, I ascertained their reasons for enrolling in a DE programme as well as their conceptualisation of learning support and expectations. I have used pseudonyms and *Atlas.ti*® references when quoting participants verbatim and visuals to facilitate data representation where appropriate.

5.2.1 Learners' reasons for enrolling

Distance learners were asked, through the open-ended questionnaire items and semi-structured interviews, to indicate their reasons for studying for the BGCSE. All 40 respondents indicated their aspirations for obtaining a BGCSE certificate in order to further their education and increase their opportunities for employment. Given the transition from a hunter-gatherer way of life after the government settlement policy compelled all citizens of Botswana to have a permanent settlement, the Basarwa and the Bakgalagadi can no longer follow their traditional way of life as hunting is now restricted. Given their poor socio-economic status, the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi learners held the fervent view that a BGCSE certificate would change their lives by opening up opportunities to move out of poverty and enter the job market. Participants felt motivated to study at a distance by young adults from their settlements that had passed BGCSE and were now employed by local

NGOs. Marketing by word of mouth by previous distance learners positively influenced enrolment at the remote settlements. Participants indicated that even menial jobs required a BGCSE level of education because of the increased competition for limited employment opportunities in Botswana. Some participants were more ambitious and had longer-term plans:

- Dineo: *So that my certificate should be better, so that when I apply for something they can take me because of better results. Because I want to upgrade my studies.*
- Lorato: *To upgrade my educational level so that I can be in high position at work.*
- Tshepo: *To upgrade my results. I did not do well and I do not qualify for the course that I want to do, so I think enrolling in BOCODOL will help me.*
- Pau: *Because I wanted to upgrade my studies and pursue further studying.*

Kagiso was inspired by Vision 2016⁵ to enrol for a distance education programme. Her response was:

Because I do not have a BGCSE certificate and for job opportunities and due to day-to-day style of living I enrolled for BGCSE to have that opportunity to reach the Vision we are talking about. In addition, to do that "Motto" we engaged i.e. all of us is supposed to be educated in Vision 2016, that's why.

Her voice demonstrates how the Vision has fuelled her ambitions and educational goals. This may suggest that community mobilisation through *Kgotla*⁶ meetings could be used to enhance learning support in order to sustain distance learner perseverance and improve through-put rates in remote settlements. The reason for enrolling in order to upgrade and improve their chances of admission into higher education institutions was put forward by the group, aged between 18 to 30 years. Whilst this age group was attracted to employment, they also aspired to studying for degrees. Some participants aged between 31 and 41 were already employed. They had enrolled for a BGCSE certificate in order to increase their promotional opportunities. Participants in this study, unlike those in Bourke et al.'s (1996) aboriginal learners study, had not enrolled to please their families, to be with their friends, out of mere interest or to meet community

⁵ Vision 2016 is Botswana's long-term strategy to propel its socio-economic and political development into that of a competitive educated and prosperous nation. It is underpinned by seven pillars, of which the first pillar is education.

⁶ A *kgotla* is a central meeting place in a village. Village meetings held at the *kgotla* are usually called by a chief whenever there is an important announcement or information to pass on.

expectations. Distance learner participants in this study were highly motivated and goal oriented. They had aspirations and some had this to say:

- Tshepo: I want to see myself in any Universities around the world.*
Interviewer: How about you; what motivates you to stay in distance education?
Pau: I want to see myself in distance education doing Bachelor of Science.
Interviewer: What about you?
Sylvia: I want to see myself being a nurse (P1:9 95:105).

The three learners had personal goals that went beyond just attaining a BGCSE certificate. This kind of focus appears to have motivated them to work hard and complete their studies. The three learners were amongst those distance learners who were successful and completed their BGCSE at the end of 2006 and enrolled for either diploma or degree programmes at tertiary education institutions in 2007 as indicated in section 5.2.7 of this chapter. The Basarwa and Bakgalagadi learners had enrolled striving to attain tertiary level entry qualification and possible employment. Adults sometimes enrol for a distance education programme in order to obtain knowledge, not credit or certificate and may therefore drop the course once they obtain the knowledge they desire (Rovai, (2002). However this was not the case in this study. In Kerala area of India, learners indicated that they had enrolled for distance education courses because of non existence of colleges in their locality (Krishnan, 2004). Whilst this was one of the reasons I expected, it was never mentioned by learners in this study. This means the need for a certificate qualification to improve their predicament overshadowed other possible reasons. Their conceptualisation of learning support was influenced by their previous educational experience at public schools.

5.2.2 Learners' conceptualisation of learning support

The BOCODOL guidance and counselling policy (2005) describes types of learning support rendered to distance learners and include orientation, examination practice, study skills, and individual and group counselling. The data related to the conceptualisation of learning support were gathered from responses to the open-ended items in a questionnaire and from interviews. Distance learners at Kang site understood what was meant by learning support better than those at Inalegolo, D'Kar, and New Xade, probably owing to their proximity and easy access to tutors and ODL staff. The definitions below encapsulate the general conceptualisation of learning support that distance learners had:

- Kagiso: Learning support is all about brightening somebody's future and also a way of trying to achieve a pillar of vision 2016 which says an educated and informed nation.*
- Pau: Our learning support is very well because they give us some books, audios to listen to them as like a tutor is teaching in class and you can understand.*
- Ayi: Helping each other on tips of learning.*
- Dumie: Helping the community to do well or correct their results for the better, so that they can find good schools and jobs.*
- Anele: This is the support given by tutors.*
- Thila: Supporting others to learn so that they pass.*
- Charlie: Learning support is the advices that you are given in order to achieve high marks in our examinations.*

The view these distance learners had of learning support is similar to that discussed in Chapter 3 of this study and supported by conceptual and theoretical thinking recorded on this topic in the literature (Tait, 2000; McLoughlin, 2002; Simpson, 2002; Thorpe, 2002; Wheeler, 2002; Holmberg, 2003; Moore, 2003; Robinson, 2004; Simpson, 2004; Tait, 2004; Alias and Rahman, 2005; Dzakiria, 2005).

Distance learners at D'Kar, Inalegolo and New Xade sites had an ill-conceived idea of learning support as they believed it meant being taught as in a regular classroom. During the interview, this is what Lizwe said:

- Lizwe: We don't want to come to class with some questions or problems that we encounter at home. We want to be taught not to be assisted where we met problems. I do believe most of us we don't understand what is meant by studying through distance learning. We still need to be taught not tutoring.*

His use of 'we' indicates that he probably speaks on behalf of others. He admits that most of them do not understand studying at a distance. Their misconceptions may be a result of language challenges experienced during pre-enrolment counselling resulting in ineffective orientation on how to learn at a distance. The officers did not speak the distance learners' mother tongue and used English as a means of communication - a third or fourth language for some distance learners. Distance learners' previous learning experiences at public schools also clouded their conceptualisation of learning support.

Given their contextual challenges and other issues, participants thought the following could work best for them in order to achieve better grades at the end of the year. Their paraphrased responses include:

- *Attending more weekend classes*
- *Submitting more assignments*
- *Group discussions*
- *If I had past year's examination papers, I think that would help me.*
- *Learner support courses should be conducted regularly*
- *I think submitting many assignments and studying hard can make me achieve better goals/results*
- *Weekend courses at least twice a month*
- *Assignments must be marked on time and sent back to us quickly*
- *Guidance and counselling sessions*
- *Tutors should help us even between the during the week*
(P9:20 132:144)

Participants' conceptualisation of learning support as indicated in the responses above, fall into two categories: face-to-face support and mediated support. I discuss these two forms of support later under section 5.2.5. Participants also shared their expectations of learning support and anticipated that these would be addressed by the DE provider.

5.2.3 Learners' expectations of learning support

Learners enrol for distance learning with particular expectations and if these are unmet, they feel misled and may withdraw (Fung and Carr, 2000). Learners need to know exactly what they can expect in support, how to interact with the institution, what their responsibilities are, and how to determine when they need assistance (Hughes, 2004). The BOCODOL Learner Charter (2000) and the BOCODOL Guidance and Counselling policy (2005) undertake to provide learner support to all distance learners across all programmes for the duration of their study. Distance learners were asked about their expectations during the interviews. Participants at the all sites (Kang, Inalegolo, D'Kar, and New Xade) concurred that they expected to be provided with teachers who taught like at a public school. This is not surprising as they were first time distance learners and their experience of teaching and learning was limited to what they had experienced while attending public schools previously. Three distance learner participants had this to say:

Interviewer: *When you enrolled with BOCODOL what did you expect from BOCODOL, and did you get that?*

Khumbu: *I expected to be taught but fortunately, I was a teacher by myself.*

Ayi: *I expected BOCODOL staff to provide us with extension materials but they provided us only with core materials.*

Dumie: *I expected them to give us more revision materials from past papers but they gave us only a few.*

Informal discussions revealed that distance learners expected tutors to be exceptionally good in their course delivery and to be knowledgeable. They believed in the common adage used in Botswana, that says ‘*teacher no mistake*. They did not expect a learner-centred approach to be used or learning material to replace the teacher. The journal entry of one tutor confirms such learner expectations:

They dislike the learner-centred approach. Most learners prefer to be taught everything word by word as they are lazy. Their expectations are that tutors should teach and not facilitate, such that if there is no tutor there is no learning, most would want to go home and do other activities, (P4:36 108:111).

The participants did not apparently understand the active role they ought to have played in terms of taking responsibility for their academic progress. Their misguided expectations suggest that pre-enrolment counselling and learner inductions had not been effective in sensitising them to the demands of studying via distance mode. This mismatch between expectation and experience may also have accounted for a loss of interest and frustration. Some distance learners had not read the ‘*How to Study Guide*’ and the ‘*Learner Handbook*’ because they were overwhelmed with the learning material package, hence their perception that their progress was dependent on the quality of tutoring or learning support provision. Distance learners at Kang, however, understood their responsibilities and expectations. Anele and Charlie shared an understanding of what they expected by learning at a distance.

Anele: *I had information before that distance courses need our commitment to study ourselves - I knew that this was going to be my own business (P9:3 26:28).*

Charlie: *It is important because you are given the chance to study at your place, any time and at your own pace thus making you free to perform other work like domestic work and looking after my children (P 5:3 18:20).*

Distance learners like these, are likely to engage in their studies more meaningfully and complete their programmes. In the next sections: 5.2.4 to 5.2.7 I present and discuss positive and negative matters together in same unit.

5.2.4 Learners’ perceptions and experiences: biographical data

Learning support should be provided on an equitable basis regardless of gender, age, mother tongue or geographical location (Learner Charter, 2001). However, the perceptions and experiences of distance learners regarding the learning support provided may differ as is evidenced in the following biographical data analysis:

Gender

There were 29 female (75%) and ten male (25%) research participants. One distance learner did not indicate gender. There were more females than males because fewer males enrol since they spend most of their time away at the cattle posts⁷, hunting and searching for employment whilst females remain at the settlements attending to children and other domestic chores. This mirrors the enrolment pattern for BGCSE. For example, in 2005 there were 51 females and 19 males, in 2006 there were 130 females and 82 males and in 2007 there were 202 females and 85 males enrolled for BGCSE at the Kang regional centre as a whole (BOCODOL enrolment records 2005, 2006 and 2007).

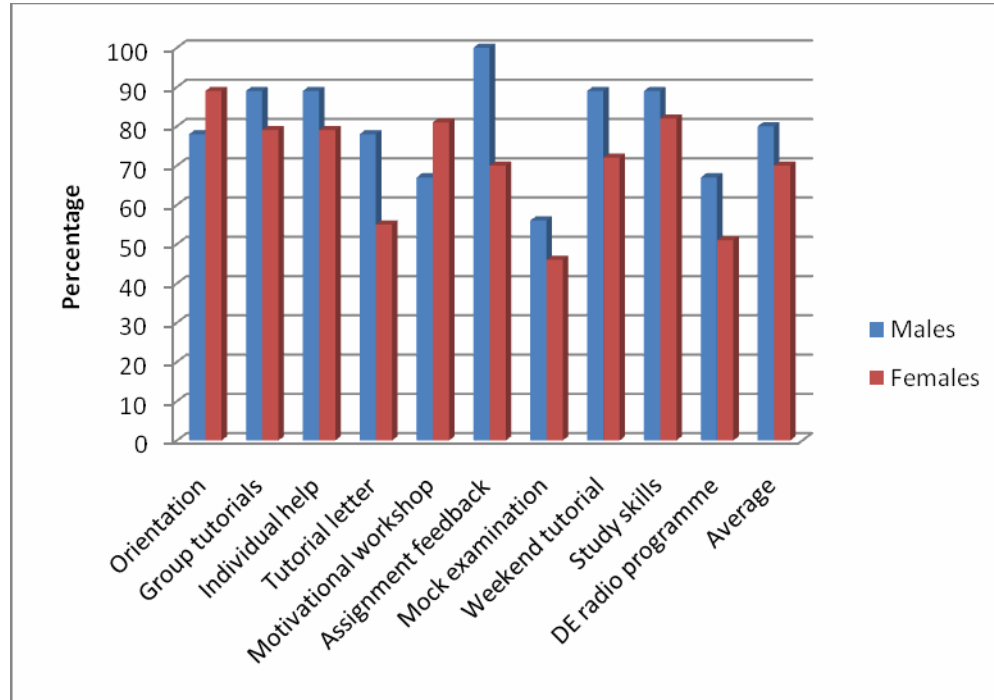
Figure 5.1 indicates that male learners were more satisfied than their female peers in eight types of learning support whilst females were more satisfied in only two types of support, namely the orientation and the motivational seminars. The 12% difference in male and female satisfaction suggests the support accommodated more male than female needs. It may also mean that females preferred the types of support that involved learners coming together. Orientation and motivational seminars brought learners together and addressed issues that included challenges posed by having multiple roles in the family whilst studying at a distance. Females perform multiple roles in the family hence they may have found discussions on issues related to their domestic roles more appealing than males.

Mock examinations did not attract high satisfaction from either females or males possibly due to a lack of public transport linked to the exam centre. Writing mock examinations at Kang village also meant learners had to pay for their transport, accommodation, and meals. This was a challenge that most learners could not meet, given that 60% of the learners were unemployed and 40% were employed in lowly paid jobs as cleaners, baby sitters, and tuck-shop assistants. The expenses involved compelled them to undertake the journey only once during their final examinations at the end of the year as this was more critical than a practice examination session. As far as radio programmes are concerned, reception is poor in the remote areas where these learners live and this is why satisfaction levels were lower than in other types of support. Males, however, were more satisfied than females with this

⁷ A cattle post is a place where domestic animals are kept far away from the fields where crops are grown. Men and boys are responsible for taking care of cattle at the cattle pos throughout the year.

type of support because they have more time to listen to the radio than women who attended to household chores.

Figure 5.1 Perceptions by gender



Radio broadcasts for distance education are scheduled at 21:15 after the Setswana news bulletin. This time slot suited males as they did not have domestic responsibilities at this hour as was the case for female learners.

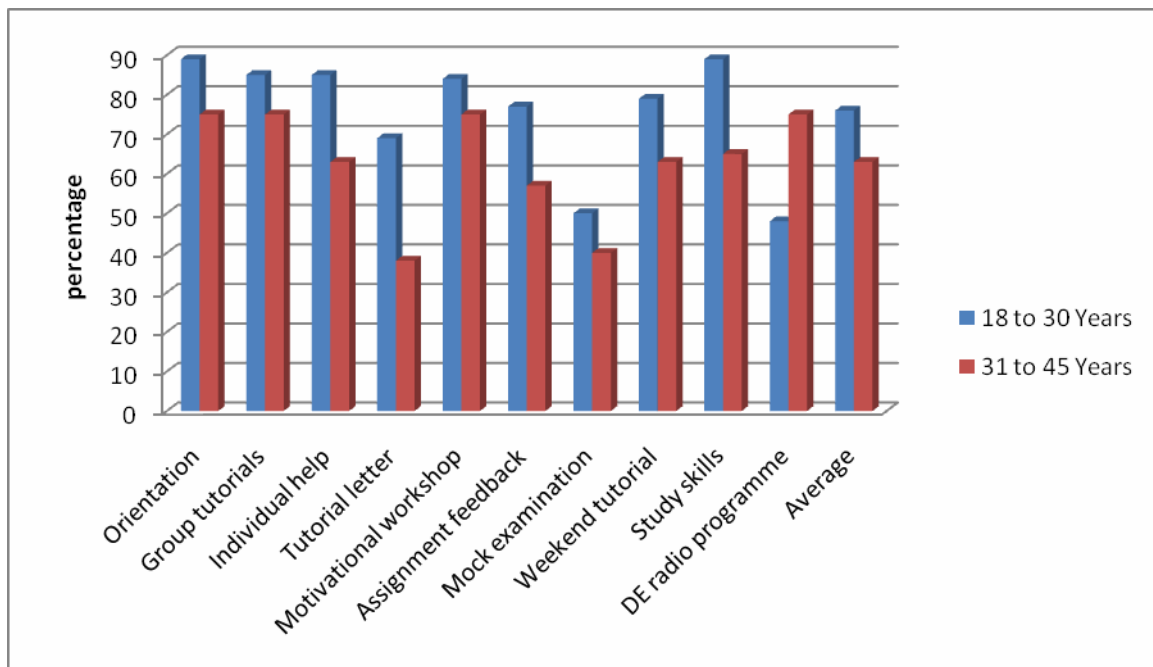
The levels of satisfaction differed in several respects between male and female participants. The discrepancies were most evident in perceptions about assignment feedback, tutorial letters, weekend tutorials, and the radio programme. Several factors seemed to favour males. The weekend tutorials and mock examinations were arranged at times which did not suit females who had to attend to domestic chores, children, the sick and often the elderly too. Assignments on the other hand, are individual tasks but given the multiple duties of females, they would have had less time than males to attend to them. Males had time between hunting and herding cattle and thus submitted assignments which were marked and returned with feedback – a motivating factor which increased satisfaction. Interesting to note in **Figure 5.1** is that males were satisfied with the types of support that demanded

more individual rather than collective application. Women, on the other hand, were more satisfied with group-oriented support.

Age

In terms of age, the participants were grouped into young adults and older adults as the two were considered to have different interests and be attracted to different types of learning support. The age of the distance learner participants ranged from 18 to 45. Seventy-five per cent of participants were between 18 and 30 years old and 25% were in the older age bracket with the oldest participants being 45 years old. The age range shows that the majority of participants were young adults. Satisfaction by age is shown in **Figure 5.2**.

Figure 5.2 Perceptions by age



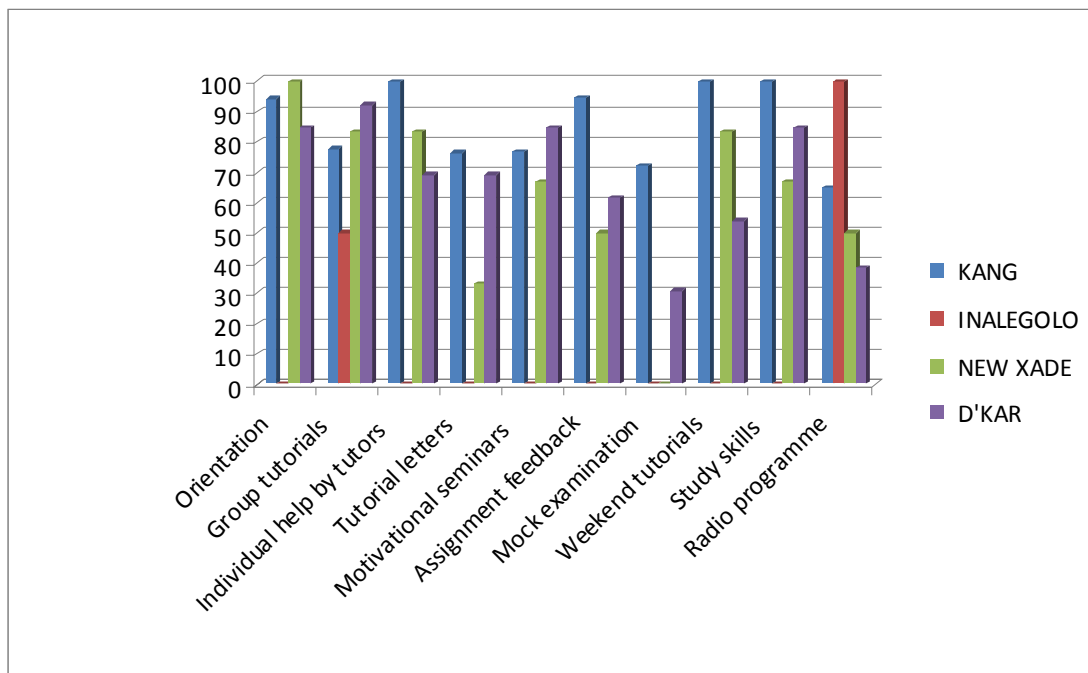
On average, 69% of the younger participants indicated that they were satisfied with the learning support whilst 66% participants in the older bracket shared their view. The average difference was small (3%). This means that overall the provision of learning support was perceived similarly by the two age groups. The striking exception is the view of learning support provision through radio. There were 75% positive responses from participants aged between 31 and 45 years old compared to 48% responses from the 18 to 30 age group. The difference of 27% means that radio programme support was not attractive or appealing

enough to meet the needs of the younger age group. Upon listening to the programme, I found that the sound tracks used music of the late '70s and early '80s. The radio support programmes were not branded with the latest music to which the youth would be attracted. This has implications for making learning support strategies more appropriate for all age groups. It is therefore, important to be conscious of the age differences and devise learning support strategies that appeal to all age groups in order to advance the learning process. I now present satisfaction in terms of where participants lived.

Location

The overall picture depicted in **Figure 5.3** is that participants at Kang were generally more satisfied with all ten types of learning support than participants at Inalegolo, D'Kar and New Xade. The issue of access to readily available support services explains the disparities in satisfaction at the four sites. Where support services were constantly rendered by part-time and ODL staff, satisfaction was more pronounced in all ten types of learning support. Where there was an empathetic and enthusiastic co-ordinator at D'Kar, satisfaction was better than at Inalegolo and New Xade where the co-ordinators were ineffective and apparently disinterested.

Figure 5.3 Perceptions by location



The perception being communicated by distance learners is that where there is availability of the human factor in the form of tutors, ODL staff and peers the quality of learning support is enhanced. The importance of ensuring the constant availability of tutors and advisors in distance learning at Kang and D'Kar compares well with Holmberg's theory (2003) of conversational learning. The human factor appears to be critical in advancing the learning process hence the perceived satisfaction in all types of support at Kang and D'Kar sites. The high satisfaction levels at Kang and D'Kar sites indicate that the distance learners' needs were better met than at Inalegolo and New Xade. The absence of effective facilitators at Inalegolo and New Xade raises questions of access and equity in the provision of learning support services. The implementation of the remote learner policy strategy suggested by Lelliot, (2002) was limited and as such did not address the disparities in the provision of learning support.

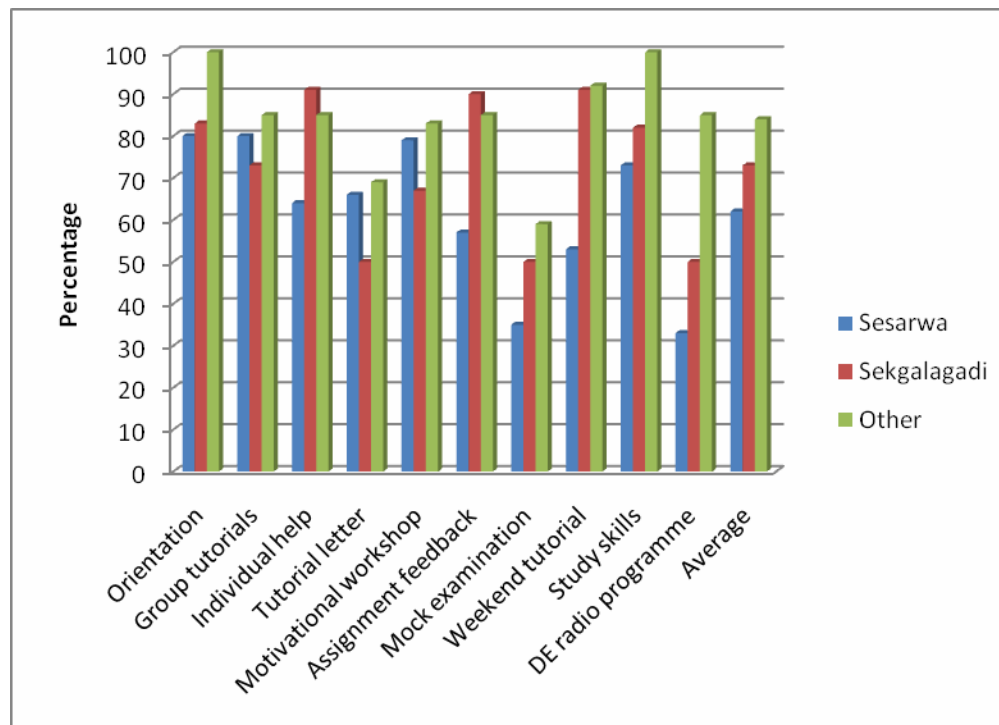
The availability of part-time tutors determined the satisfaction levels of distance learners at the four sites, hence all distance learner participants (100%) at Kang were satisfied with five types of support namely; course orientation session, individual help by tutors, assignment feedback, weekend tutorials and guidance with regard to developing study skills. At New Xade and Inalegolo sites, participants (100%) registered satisfaction with only one type of learning support each, namely orientation and radio programme respectively, whilst at D'Kar, they were insufficiently satisfied. However, in eight out of ten types of learning support, satisfaction at D'Kar ranged between 30% and 90%. At New Xade, satisfaction ranged between 50% and 81% in five out of ten types of support. Kang had the advantage of having tutors from the nearby senior secondary school and ODL regional staff who reside at Kang village where the regional centre is located. Part-time tutors at the learning centre at Kang conducted tutorials on a weekly basis. This was not the case at Inalegolo, D'Kar and New Xade sites where weekend tutorials were conducted thrice a year as was recommended by the consultancy on remote learner support policy strategy (Lelliot, 2002). This consultancy recommendation took into consideration the difficulty in accessing the satellite learning centres due to the sandy terrain and their spread across the Kalahari Desert. There were 25 satellite learning centres altogether, but only three had distance learners from the Basarwa community. Two 4 x 4 vehicles were purchased in 2003 in order to access and provide learning support to distance learners at the satellite learning centres.

The remote learner support strategy also recommended that weekend tutorial support be conducted thrice a year at the satellite learning centres. This frequency was regarded as inadequate by distance learners at Inalegolo, D’Kar and New Xade. I next present learners’ satisfaction according to their mother tongues.

Language

The use of English as a medium of instruction influenced the satisfaction levels of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi learners. As can be seen in **Figure 5.4**, distance learners who spoke Sesarwa were least satisfied when compared to those who spoke Sekgalagadi and other languages⁸. The satisfaction level recorded by those who spoke Sesarwa in the ten types of learning support was 62%, for those who spoke Sekgalagadi - 73% and for those who spoke other languages - 84%. The distance learners who spoke other languages were also fluent in Sekgalagadi and their English was better than that of those who only spoke Sekgalagadi or Sesarwa.

Figure 5.4 Perceptions by language most widely spoken



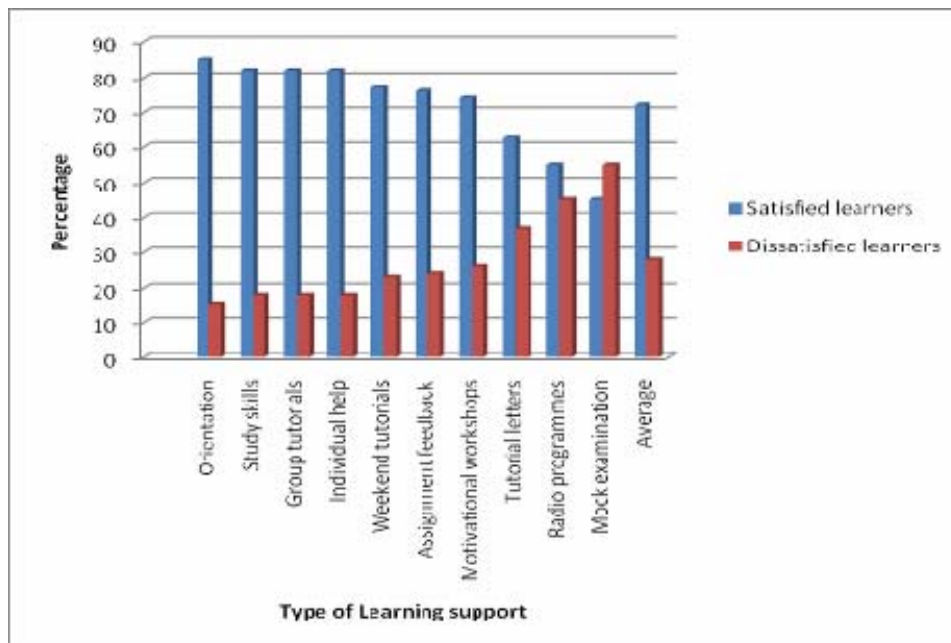
⁸ Distance learners who indicated that they spoke other languages often were actually Bakgalagadi who were upgraders and preferred speaking Setswana because they had previously attended senior secondary schools in the eastern part of Botswana where Setswana speakers are a majority and as such had got used to speaking Setswana, the national language.

Those who spoke Sesarwa felt that the mock examination and radio programmes had the least impact. The reason for this is that mock examinations were only administered at a learning centre in Kang and all the Basarwa participants live at settlements that are far away from Kang. Lack of public transport between Kang and the settlements made it difficult for participants who spoke Sesarwa to commute to Kang to sit for their mock examination. As for radio, the reason is that some do not have one and even if they have, the reception in their areas is poor and their languages are not heard on the radio.

5.2.5 Learners' perceptions and experiences: modes of learning support

Learning support was offered using both face-to-face and mediated mode. The face-to-face support involved: orientation, group tutorials, study skills training, individual help from tutors, weekend tutorials, and motivational workshops. The mediated support included: feedback on assignment and mock examinations, tutorial letters and radio programmes. A questionnaire with Likert-type items (*very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied and very dissatisfied*) was used to collect data on how distance learners felt about the different types of learning support. **Figure 5.5** gives an overview of satisfied and dissatisfied learners.

Figure 5.5 Learners' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with learning support



Data were collapsed into satisfied and dissatisfied in order to provide visual presentations for facilitating easy interpretation. A calculation of raw data gives an overall split of 72.1% for distance learners who were satisfied and 27.9% for those dissatisfied with learning support. Distance learners were satisfied with all the types of learning support except the mock examinations for reasons already explained in terms of travel, meals and accommodation (Daily News 15th June 2006; Kang Regional Centre report 27th January 2007

Face-to-face support

Face-to-face support was generally the most sought after support. My initial expectation of learning support was underpinned by Wheeler 's (2002) proposition that distance learners who experience more remote transactional distance will tend to demand more social and practical support from their instructors and less academic support was nullified as distance learners in this study demanded more of academic support. Their reasons for enrolling as influenced by circumstances of their families who make up the communities which are in a state of transition in Botswana as explained in Chapter 2, probably explains their desperate need for academic support. One would have expected that with the harsh circumstances they found themselves in and the remoteness as suggested by Wheeler (2002) social and practical support would have been on high demand than academic support. Their expectations were more on tutors teaching them to pass their BGCSE. They displayed heavy dependence on tutors just like the adult learners in a South African study by Greyling et al (2002). Learners' positive perceptions of the different types of face-to-face support are indicated in **Table 5.1**, in a ranking order. Support through orientation was perceived the highest (84.6%) followed by group tutorials (82.5%), study skills and individual help from tutors (82.1%). Weekend tutorials (76.9%) and motivational workshops (74.4%) were perceived lower than the first four but still attracted a high percentage. The high percentages in the six types of support indicate that distance learners highly valued the interventions that were made through the face-to-face support. Verbatim quotes in this section corroborate the high percentages.

Table 5.1 Level of satisfaction: face-to-face support

Type of support	Percentage of distance learners who were satisfied
Orientation	84.6%
Group tutorials	82.5%
Study skills training	82.1%
Individual help from tutors	82.1%
Weekend tutorials	76.9%
Motivational workshops	74.4%

Orientation workshops provide a platform to induct new learners into distance learning in terms of guiding learners in time management, reading and general academic skills (Sonnekus et al, 2006). Orientation workshops provided learners with opportunities for academic and social integration. Kanuka and Jugdev (2006) consider academic and social integration by programme facilitators critical in enabling learners to adjust and work towards completing their courses. When orientation programmes are not conducted for new learners, the danger is that they are more likely to withdraw from their studies because of lack of a sense of institutional belongingness. The interaction with other learners and tutors during orientation does influence learners' commitment to the institution, which in turn influences completion rates (Kanuka and Jugdev, 2006). This was previously confirmed in earlier studies by LaPandula (2003) and Kember et al (2001).

Orientation workshops help learners to become effective distance learners so that they can progress successfully through their studies (Lyll and McNamara, 2000, Forrester et al., 2005). The participants were first-time distance learners and the orientation was also meant to assist them to tackle their new mode of learning. Orientation workshops are also critical for establishing rapport between ODL educators and learners. At BOCODOL orientation workshops are usually conducted over two days and are designed to encourage belongingness and to influence learning positively. Anele's view suggests success in this regard.

- Interviewer: Did you get any orientation where officers told you on how to study in distance learning, what to expect from them and them from you?*
- Anele: Yes. We had a workshop, they were a lot of us and they talked a lot, on how we can learn from other learners, books and assignments and*

that we should have positive attitudes and the challenges we are facing us learners (P3:13 79:84).

Anele acknowledges that during the orientation workshop there were many who attended and they were told how to learn from various sources. Challenges faced by distance learners were also discussed. Whilst Anele may not have directly expressed satisfaction about the orientation workshop, it appears he realised that he was not alone learning at a distance, and was aware of the advice that was shared by the ODL staff about learning from other learners, books and assignment. Anele had a positive experience by attending the orientation workshop. Similar to Anele's views on induction, two learners at New Xade in 2004 wrote the following responses on their evaluation form after attending an induction:

I thought I don't have time to read, but the induction presentation helped me to divide time so that I can read and answer the questions. Came with the solution for studying in one class with my colleagues at least one to two hours in the evening because when I am at home I take the book and read for only 15 minutes then I sleep (Kang region Ghanzi tour report, 2004).

The induction presentation I like it. It helps us to familiarise with others. It helps to know what BOCODOL is and why we make studies through it. Also to know the role of the learner, how to overcome our challenges in our studies and knowing strategies in learning. It helps to know the importance of handing in assignments (Kang region Ghanzi tour report, 2004).

The 2004 learners' responses after attending induction further emphasise the importance of induction in helping distance learners adjust to the new ways of learning. Both learners highlight the need for 'others' and to learn with them. This finding is different from the findings by Lyall and McNamara (2000) whose Chemistry students despite geographic isolation from the university did not require interaction with other learners or with their tutors except when initiated by them. The difference could be due to the fact that the Chemistry students were studying at higher level and were more likely to be well equipped with study skills for independent learning than the participants in my study who were at secondary school level. Nevertheless the participants of my study appreciated the strategies which were shared during induction on overcoming challenges of distance learning. The effect of orientation is that some distance learners are able to form stronger peer relationships and study together. The other type of face-to-face support that learners perceived positively is the group tutorial.

Group tutorials are occasions for learners to receive feedback about their constructions of meaning (Pastoll, 1992), they help learners get immediate feedback, share common problems both academic and social, provide opportunities for immediate two-way communication, encourages development of positive attitudes about learning at a distance, boosts confidence and morale to learn and difficult concepts are explained, (Modesto & Tau 2008). Unlike in the Asian studies (Venter, 2003; Dzakiria, 2005) where distance learners were passive participants during discussions as a result of culture, distance learners in this study were sometimes passive because of their previous educational experiences which made them expect to be taught like at public schools. Group tutorials are conducted by part-time tutors with each subject allocated one hour. Distance learners learn from each other through various ways including question and answer and discussion. Part-time tutors help learners find solutions to their academic problems the group tutorial sessions. The learner-learner and learner-tutor interactions advance the learning processes (Holmberg, 2003) and appeared to be valued by learners. One participant, Kagiso, shared her experience in a journal, when she wrote that:

Group discussions also play a very good role in our studies. We come up with topics which gave us problems and try to discuss them in a group. This helps us because at the end of our discussions each one of us will be having more points which will assist him/her during the examination. And I like this team work because we are free to ask each other questions and present the difficult one to our tutor during the lesson (P6:19 39:43).

Another participant, Martin, explained the importance of learning in a group by pointing out the following:

Studying alone, you may not understand everything on your own. Still, you may run short of materials, not be serious about following study schedule if you are working alone. In a group, notes and other revision materials can be shared. Since we discovered that studying at distance is different from senior school. At senior school, the teachers organise everything and tell you what to learn (P 7: 18 50: 54).

Martin prefers learning in a group because it is easier to stick to a study schedule and to share learning materials. Martin is aware of what it takes to learn at a distance without teachers and takes responsibility in terms of what to learn and how to learn. Another view on the value of tutorial support was shared by Felix, a participant, when he said:

Tutorial assistance can make one to be able to research, interpret and analyse information. This can prepare one to be ready and dictate the final results of the candidate. (P 8:3 12:16)

If distance learners apply the skills identified by Felix, they are more likely to use a deep-learning approach. The deep-learning approach is characterised by a search for understanding, application of critical analysis of new ideas and leads to high achievement (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Biggs, 1997; Alstete and Beutell, 2004; Havard et al., 2005). Distance learners need to apply deep-learning strategies if they are to achieve quality grades and Felix is aware of this when he says:

'...can prepare one to be ready and dictate the final results of the candidate.'

Group tutorial sessions provide a platform for distance learners and tutors to interact, share ideas and for solutions to challenges encountered in their studies to be sought. In her journal, Kagiso expressed her opinion on tutor support and said:

The tutorials we get from our tutors are of high calibre because we share ideas on what we understand and when we get stuck, they help us until we capture the material clearly. Kgosi ya tsie e known key go tshwaraganelwa which literally means that a heavy load becomes lighter if we help one another which makes learning easier. (P8:5 18:21)

The experience described by Kagiso is a positive one and her view is similar to that of Martin. She acknowledges and appreciates the facilitative role of the tutor and perceives it as critical in sharing ideas and overcoming learning challenges whenever learners are stuck. She has developed confidence in her tutors and appreciates the role they play in helping her and fellow students to tackle the challenges they face. Learners who have access to tutors and who engage with them like Kagiso did tended to enjoy learning because the conversation learning between the learners and the tutor leads to greater motivation and attainment of learning outcomes (Holmberg, 2003). This kind of interaction is vital and is supported by Anderson (2003) who argues that it has the highest perceived support value amongst learners.

Kagiso further emphasises the practice of sharing work by using a Setswana proverb. She seems to be drawing from her cultural values and practices that emphasise communal effort on traditional tasks that enhance community unity. She appreciates and works well with others, an attribute that is essential for co-operative learning. Furthermore Kagiso stated in her journal that:

Our tutors are patient with us since we understand differently. When results are released and we have not done well, our tutors become disappointed at the efforts

they wasted. They do not give up but come up with alternative strategies which end up improving our performance and they become satisfied. (P8:4 21:25)

The attribute of being patient and recognising that learners understand differently, means the tutors had empathy, hence learners were helped until they improved their performance. The data from interviews with distance learners on group tutorials were confirmed by tutors who were requested to record in their journals their impressions of the support programmes they had facilitated during the first term of 2007. Tutor impressions were based on the group face-to-face tutorial support they had given. Tutor impressions on contact sessions at Kang differed remarkably from the contact sessions conducted at Inalegolo, New Xade and D'Kar. Ms Tsholo and Ms Cats respectively wrote that:

Learner participation in tutorial was excellent because our tutorial was based on a speaking exercise – each learner had to introduce themselves and tell the whole class about themselves i.e. by stating their names, where they come from, which subjects they registered in, which subjects they would be writing the exams and when, hobbies (P13:43 74:77).

Learner participation is very good. They ask questions and try to answer questions asked by the tutor. What delighted me was active participation and submitting the individual work which was given to them – topic: speech writing. The lesson was lively and exciting (P11:9 46:49).

The impressions from Ms Tsholo and Ms Cats demonstrate a learner-centred approach to group tutorials which encourages learners to participate actively. In other words, the learners' personal experiences and backgrounds were used as the point of departure in a learning activity and allowed for active participation to develop freely. Learners volunteered to solve problems on the board. However, initially there were those who passed snide remarks about the volunteers. This is how the tutor, Mr Jele captured this experience in his journal:

It was disappointing to learn later that when one learner was helping to explain a concept on the board, there were a few learners who started to scorn the other learner saying that if he thinks he is intelligent he would not be in BOCODOL but at UB by now. I made an attempt to counsel these learners and to indicate to them that peer tutoring is a vital mode of learning (P10:15 60:65).

The perception held by some distance learners of associating intelligence with enrolling at a conventional academic institution was rather unfortunate. It means learners believed they were less intelligent because they had to join BOCODOL for an attempt at gaining university entrance. The other type of learning support that was ranked following group tutorial is the study skills training.

In the learner support programme, alerting students of the value of acquiring study skills was deemed essential and considered as a separate item. Study skills were viewed by 82.1% of respondents as being critical to successful learning. Study skills include time management, academic reading and tips for writing examinations, formation and the use of study groups. Study skills equip learners with the necessary reading techniques and organisational skills for tackling academic tasks successfully. During interviews and in their journals, participants indicated that study skills were explained to them and that they studied on their own. The excerpts from the interview and journal by Kozi and Xika serve to illustrate this point:

Kozi: *Study skills, explained. Yes.*

Xika: *Study on our own. We are given a lot of support of which it urges us to work hard and aim high, (7:31 84:87).*

Evidence from Kozi suggests that distance learners who were equipped with study skills and supported through encouragement were able to aim high. Other than study skills learners also valued individual help from tutors.

Individual help by tutors through one to one sessions discuss issues that pertain to an individual learner and as such provide the learner with feelings of being valued and enables the learner to express personal problems without being embarrassed as might happen in a group (Modesto & Tau 2008). The positive perceived importance of the tutors by learners in this study is similar to Thorpe's (1988) study in which 93% of the 500 students valued the role of the tutor in their studies. In other words, the human factor or the transactional presence of a tutor is critical in instilling learner confidence in studying. Individual help by tutors during the face-to-face tutorial sessions was perceived by distance learners to be essential to improving academic performance. This emerged from the journals by way of statements like these:

Dineo: *I have improved a lot; the teacher is very good; we ask a lot of questions. I started getting 60% then 70% to 85%, I think I am going to get A (P3:6 54:60).*

Tshepo: *The English tutor helped me a lot as I did not know much about a summary, as time went I improved. Even in Setswana I got 40%, then rose to 80%, an A, (P3:8 63:65).*

Martin: *Mathematics, the way he express it, simplify it for us to understand it. The lesson was interesting and enjoyable the way he normally does, challenging the class with Maths on the board. I always feel good in a Maths lesson though it used to give me stress and I hated Maths from*

my previous school. I told people I will never do Maths in my life but I'm surprised, I'm getting to enjoy it, (P7:34 104:111).

The role of tutors in academic performance is acknowledged by all three learners. Each of the three learners acknowledges an improved academic performance as a result of tutor support. The positive change in academic performance, interest and attitude, as it emerged from the three learners' journal entries implies that tutor support had a positive impact on academic performance. Students working in groups and individually tutored learned and achieved more than those who worked with only one other partner, (Schacter, 2000). Lizwe also acknowledged tutor support when he wrote the following in his journal:

The tutor explains it and we did some examples on board. What we realised on Maths is it isn't that Maths is tough as we thought. The thing is we don't revise it and the moment the tutor left the class we close our books till we meet again on the next lesson. We don't give ourselves time at home to attempt the subject. Even if we are given the assignment we are likely to forget and realise when comes in class that we were given something to do at home (P7:68 256:261)

What also emerges from Lizwe's journal is that tutor support contributes to a change of mindset. This happens when an individual comes to realise the possibilities of achieving what initially seemed impossible. When tutors mediate the learning process successfully, there are possibilities for learners to improve their academic performance. Learner experience of success as a result of tutor support makes them have a strong sense of connectedness with the tutor (Shin, 2003). The type of support ranked after individual help from tutors is weekend tutorials.

Weekend tutorial attendance unlike in Gaba and Dash's (2004) where it was low because of long distances that learners had to travel, in this study, it was due to poor communication by the Regional office staff. Learners did not get timely invitations for weekend tutorials. The problem was more of a managerial challenge rather than that of distance. However, weekend tutorials provided an opportunity for distance learners to meet tutors and other learners. This is how Felix described his experience with regard to weekend tutorials:

The encouragement we receive from BOCODOL is during weekend courses because it gives us an opportunity to come together or to share experience and to understand what we do so that finally we produce satisfactory results. I have also learnt that reading and revision can help the learner on what to expect during the examination. This helps in preparing for exams to avoid confusion during examination. The audio cassettes clarify materials and explain just like a tutor. Their

teachings last forever; this makes one not to forget about what is being taught. They are precise in their information presentation, (P8:11 55:57).

Distance learner participants took weekend tutorials seriously. Weekend tutorials brought participants together and they were able to share experiences. The weekend tutorials were perceived to be critical in enhancing academic performance. This is similar to the perceptions of Nigerian students who were pleased with weekend contact sessions and thought that the contact sessions were absolutely essential for their understanding of the course (Ukpo, 2006). At Kang distance learners took the initiative to organise weekend tutorials in addition to the weekly face to face tutorials. D'Kar learners also arranged weekend tutorials with the support of their co-ordinator. Amos had this to say about their initiative;

Another important thing is that we have arranged weekend courses because we realised that we have very short time during the week, so we extended it to push on our syllabus so that we can finish it on time and be ready to prepare for our examination (P6:21 50:53).

The initiative of organising weekend tutorials demonstrates that distance learners were focused on their studies and determined to attain their goals. They took responsibility for their own learning similar to adult learners in Greyling et al (2002) study in South Africa. They showed similar tendencies like their South African counterparts of depending too much on the tutor. They believed more in tutor support. A D'Kar weekend tutorial report (07/10/06) by a tutor states that:

The lesson was more of a lecture as learners did not have much to ask. Topics discussed were: Doing Science and Science and Everyday life.

One participant, Xika, expressed how interesting the weekend tutorials were in this way:

Learning support is very interesting for example tutorial support, learning materials...Kaisase i kòo qǎè e, Bocodol dis xg'ae thuu hàaraa ka. Thuur ncàm-m. Kaisase i ko qǎè e. (Very excellent effort by BOCODOL team. I loved it very well, People its helpful (P9:1 5:11).

Xika's expression is full of excitement and gratitude and indicates that the weekend tutorials are helpful, but does not indicate in what way they were helpful.

Weekend tutorial support attracted a reasonable attendance as shown in figures given in **Tables 5.2** and **5.3**. In the two tables, **HSB** stands for Human and Social Biology and **Hours** for length of time spent on tutorial sessions

Table 5.2 Weekly tutorial attendances at Kang during October and November 2005

<i>Month</i>	<i>No. of learners</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Maths</i>	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Setswana</i>	<i>Hours</i>	<i>HSB</i>	<i>Hours</i>
Oct	43	25	3	26	3	13	3	6	3
Nov	43	19	4	18	4	10	6	18	4

Source: Kang BOCODOL Regional Centre 2005

Table 5.3 Weekend tutorial attendance during November 2006

<i>Learning Centre</i>	<i>No. of learners</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Maths</i>	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Setswana</i>	<i>Hours</i>	<i>HSB</i>	<i>Hours</i>
D'Kar	12	5	2	8	2	1	2	8	2
Inalegolo	10	7	2	10	2	3	2	8	2
New Xade	8	5	2	5	2	1	2	5	2

Source: Kang BOCODOL Regional Centre 2005

The weekly tutorial schedules at Kang provided more time than the weekend schedules at the other three centres. And learners in my study felt that time allocated for each subject was not enough. This differed from the findings by Ravhudzulo (2003) where learners who were teachers and upgrading felt that the length of contact sessions was accepted. The reason for the difference could be the fact that as teachers they were better in terms of study skills and time management than participants in my study. At Kang learning centre tutors were readily available whilst at the other three learning centres tutors had to be transported on scheduled weekends. Learners' perception of weekend tutorial meetings at Inalegolo, New Xade and D'Kar was similar to the Malaysian distance learners who were not happy with the infrequent meetings with tutors (Dzakiria, 2005). The similarity demonstrates that distance learners in both contexts were more dependent on tutors because of their previous learning experiences at public schools. The dependence on tutors of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi might also be due to a cultural influence in which they tend to learn from elders who still remain the custodians of culture and often share their knowledge, ideas and skills with the young (Tlhalefang and Oduaran, 2006). Despite the limited time for weekend face-to-face support, learners valued their weekend tutorial meetings but the challenge for some remained being that of grasping what was being shared in the weekend tutorial meetings with tutors.

Some learners did not benefit from weekend tutorial meetings because of poor understanding. The medium of instruction is likely to have contributed to learners' poor understanding. Sylvia and Thila's responses during the interview attest to the issue of poor understanding during weekend tutorials.

Interviewer: Did you understand?

Sylvia: Yes, I did understand.

Interviewer: How about you?

Thila: I did understand, but some other things I did not.

Interviewer: Did you ask your tutors on the areas you missed?

Thila: No.

Interviewer: Why did you not ask?

Thila: When they were present, we thought we understand but when they left we realised we did not understand when we were doing on our own, (P2:8 81:96).

During the tutorial session, Thila was convinced that she understood but only to realise later that she had not. This was probably due to the medium of instruction. In addition to the medium of instruction the approach used in the tutorial also contributed to poor understanding. From observations while monitoring weekend tutorial sessions I found that some tutors did not involve learners and instead lectured. This is confirmed by a tutor's report after conducting a weekend tutorial:

The lesson was more of a lecture as learners did not have much to ask (Tutor report, 7/10/06).

An excerpt from an interview with Thembi is more or less similar to Thila's experience and shows how she gave up on her studies.

Interviewer: Did you ask where you did not understand?

Thembi: No

Interviewer: Why?

Thembi: Because I thought, it was a waste of time because I did not understand (P5:10 69:75).

Failure to ask questions, as Thembi intimated, means that the learner was not involved in her studies. When learners fail to ask questions or do not know how to ask, the consequences are that they may contemplate withdrawal. The other face-to-face support valued by learners valued and meant to help learners persist in their studies was the motivational workshops.

There were 74.4% distance learners who indicated satisfaction in motivational seminars. What was covered during the seminars and the need to come together from time to time may have led to distance learners developing positive perceptions about motivational

seminars. Coming together made them feel part of a learning community. This is what several authors have intimated (Tinto, 1993, Kember, 2001; Ashby, 2004). Motivational seminars are conducted partly to guide distance learners in their learning and also to encourage distance learners to submit assignments and adopt good study habits in order to decrease the number of learners withdrawing before completing the course. Motivational seminars and other face-to-face session were perceived positively because of the presence of the human factor.

The presence of the human factor in distance learning transactions can promote or break the system. There were thus negative experiences that were experienced by participants during the delivery of the face-to-face support. For instance, some tutors and learning centre co-ordinators that were ineffective. The Learner Charter states that qualified and dedicated tutors would be provided at local study centres. The reality was that tutors from junior secondary schools who were not familiar with the BGCSE programme were recruited and learners complained that these tutors were not effective and one participant, Ayi at D'Kar had this to say:

We are taught by junior teachers. They teach geography while there is no geography at junior school, so they keep on researching for the questions we ask them. After research he will not give the feedback, (P3:25 31:33)

The experience shared by Ayi is that some tutors from junior secondary schools had no sense of empathy. This could be the result of inadequate tutor training. Tutor recruitment and training challenges were an issue that management could have addressed. Managerial flaws were also responsible for other challenges like poor communication.

Poor communication led to low attendance at weekend tutorials. Tutors who facilitated weekend tutorials at Inalegolo and New Xade were disappointed with the entire preparation for the event and cited poor communication between ODL staff and distance learners. One of the tutors wrote the following in his journal:

The programme started a bit late, as we had to do a house-to-house (hut-to-hut) hunt for learners. A few who came really appreciated the visit and the content covered during the tutorials. The learners all claimed to have not received the invitation letters to the weekend course (P10:39 176:179).

The other thing one can point out are the trips to satellites e.g. Inalegolo, Bokspits etc. I have been to Takatokwane, Werda, Bokspits, and Inalegolo. The most common thing about these trips is that, learners always seem not to be prepared for

all these weekend courses because they have to be picked from their homes hence causing a delay in tutorial sessions (P11:12 112:117).

The tutors had to look for learners in order to conduct weekend tutorials as a result of poor communication, a purely managerial issue. Learners need to know well in advance so that they can prepare for the tutorials. One other challenge related to poor communication was the issue of power play towards part-time staff by fulltime staff.

A power play incident by one of the ODL staff members was raised by one tutor in his journal. In his journal, Mr. Jele articulated power play issues by stating the following:

What was a bit disturbing was the fact that there was a misunderstanding between tutors and the officer we were travelling with during our journey back to base. The cause of the misunderstanding was that the officer in question had other assignments, which were not official, which delayed us on the way. Anyway, I personally wasn't that much worried. This could be one of the reasons the officer in question has now sidelined us and we are now denied the opportunity to meet our learners whom we mark their assignments after all. Face-to-face tutorial has undoubtedly an advantage of making the learners personalise their learning as they come to know the tutor who always mark and comment on their work (P10:58 159:165.)

It appears the ODL staff member took advantage of his position and misused it. Professional conduct requires one to respect other colleagues and consider their interests. Part-time tutors play a major role in learning support and taking care of their interests and needs is crucial for a continued and successful partnership. Misunderstandings between full-time staff and part-time staff are unhealthy and can affect the delivery of tutoring adversely. The underlying tone of the tutor's journal entries is of a committed and willing tutor who cherishes assisting learners from remote settlements. Whilst he states that he was not personally worried, what he articulates in terms of being sidelined and being denied the opportunity to meet learners in order to correct their assignments, is a clear concern that he was not happy at all. He rightly points out that it is best for learners, and to their advantage that he meet with them after he has marked their assignments. Other than the written feedback, any opportunity to meet learners and provide face-to-face feedback is likely to enhance learning. Taking care of part-time tutors is critically important for ensuring general high morale. The evidence of power play submitted by the tutor is further amplified when he states the following:

My impression is that it is of paramount importance for the tutor to occasionally meet the learners especially from remote areas or marginalised groups like Basarwa.....(P10:37 173:186.)

Personal issues in my opinion should not be part toward choosing teachers at the expense of learners by saying I will only take so and so with me on trip. Please understand me very well, get me clear, I am not in anyway trying to despise their credentials. My argument is that we tutors do have records of performance of these learners of their assignments and as such may be better placed to know their weaknesses (P10:41 191:196).

The sentiments expressed above demonstrate not only the dedication of tutors in rendering learning support to remote learners, but also the discomfort with the practice that the ODL staff member sidelined those who had marked the learner assignments. The policy on tutoring at BOCODOL is that only trained tutors at the community study centre should provide learning support services to learners at the learning satellite centres. However, it appears the ODL staff member had taken teachers who were not marking learners' assignments and these are likely to have been teachers who had not been trained in supporting distance learners. Other than the face-to-face support, learners had both positive and negative experiences of mediated support.

Mediated support

Mediated support like face-to-face support is meant to enhance learners' academic performance. Data from the questionnaire and interviews showed that learners were generally satisfied with the mediated support provided. The level of satisfaction in the three aspects of mediated support is indicated in **Table 5.4**. Assignment feedback was perceived to be very important and 75.68% of distance learners were satisfied. Tutorial letters attracted 63.16%; mock examination feedback 47.22% and radio programme 55.26%.

Table 5.4 Level of satisfaction: mediated support

Type of support	Satisfied participants
Assignment feedback	75.68%
Tutorial letters	63.16%
Radio programme	55,26%
Mock examination feedback	47.22%

These findings are similar to findings from South Africa, India, and Ghana that show that distance learners had positive impressions about helpful and encouraging assignment feedback from tutors (Venter, 2000, Gaba & Dash, 2004, Mensah, 2004). Tutor

constructive feedback or comments help learners realise their weaknesses and strengths, (Modesto & Tau 2008). Sixty six percent of students in Thorpe's (1988) study expected the tutor to analyse errors and deficiencies in their assignment and provide constructive feedback. Like in Venter's (2003) study, learners in this study when it came to assignment feedback, wanted academic guidance, feedback and reassurance that they were on the right track. The perception of distance learners in my study of the value of assignment as a form of assessment was similar to Chinese distance learners who considered progress assessment necessary and useful as it forced them to learn and to perform better in the final examination (Jian & Lyons, 2006). Distance learners in my study like the Chinese students indicated that they read tutor feedback and learnt from it as, Freddie's response shows:

Interviewer: How do the assignments help?

Fredie: Help to test ourselves whether we are weak or strong.

Interviewer: If you compare marks you got in assignments and mock examination was there any improvement?

Fredie: Yes, because I completed my assignment where I met difficulties the tutor helped me (P1:13 130:143).

Mr. Jele reveals the importance of completing and submitting assignments in order to get feedback from which they can learn when he writes:

Six assignments were marked and all the learners got 75% and above. The reason for these high marks was in part due to the practical demonstration of the concept which has proved to be difficult over the years for most learners in assignment 1. The answers that were given were outstanding because technical terms were used appropriately with understanding (P10:17 73:78).

Mr. Jele's observation shows that using a practical demonstration in a tutorial session is likely to enable learners to understand an abstract concept or solve an abstract problem in assignments successfully. His reasoning is based on the quality of answers that differed from learners' previous attempts. Mr Jele's assertion is similar to findings by Venter (2000), where students actually preferred doing practical work as opposed to theory. During interviews, distance learner participants described how feedback from tutors helped them improve their assignments. The responses from Dineo provide insight into teaching and learning through assignments.

Interviewer: In your assignments that have been marked by your English tutor you got comments, what kinds of comments were written in your assignments?

Dineo: Comments were encouraging.

Interviewer: What kind of comments did you get?

- Dineo: All encouragement were good, I remember getting 17% in Mathematics and the man never said you are going to fail but encouraged me to press on up until now. (P1:10 107:117).*
- Interviewer: What did you do after getting the assignment?*
- Dineo: I did the paper again and I got 37%.Comments, I kept on improving (P1:11 119:122).*

Dineo spoke freely about her experience. She was not bothered by the low marks but was rather full of appreciation for the support she had received. For the assignment Dineo got 33% and the feedback from her tutor was:

You did a very good job of submitting your work on time Dineo. You did not do well in this unit because you did not understand most of what the questions wanted. The summary part was supposed to follow from the comprehension not from your personal knowledge. Anyway, all is not lost, you can still meet me and we discuss your weakness. Looking forward to another piece of your assignment, (Tutor comments 17th May 2006).

The feedback is written in a conversational style, it addresses the learner by name. It starts on a positive note. All this makes the learner feel that the tutor cares. This is what he wrote as feedback for the regional centre staff to communicate to tutors:

There are generally good comments by some tutors. They acknowledge the strengths and the areas that need attention by learners. Examples are learners: 1385; 8260; 9215; 2902; 9306B; 8466. Comments in the margin – those comments by tutor-marker against the learner’s work are very helpful and should be encouraged e.g. Learner Fran. 2562 U (Internal Memorandum, 28th January 2005).

This kind of feedback on tutor performance can make tutors feel valued and it encourages them to help distance learners. Another participant Lorato wrote about the importance of assignments and revealed a similar experience, when she stated that:

Assignments help us a lot; one reads and understands after that one would answer the questions. Therefore, this helps when the marks are low to be able to work harder by asking for tutorial assistance. One can also form study groups to be assisted to understand better since ‘setshwarwa ke ntsa pedi sega se thata. (the job becomes easier if there is more than one person). Assignments enable us to remember materials we studied before and also help us to remember during final examination preparations. On the other hand, they simplify notes and are easy to comprehend (P8:10 46:53).

What is striking about Lorato’ response is that, like Dineo, she believes that if the marks attained are low then one has to work harder. One would expect a distance learner to be discouraged, but for these two learners, it was not the case. Lorato also uses a Setswana proverb like Kagiso, to emphasise the need to work as a team, citing the advantage of making the tasks easier. Use of Setswana proverbs, is meant to emphasise a point.

However, this code switching is also a result of not having an English equivalency. This cultural influence of a non-competitive spirit exhibited by Dineo and Lorato, needs to be exploited in order to enhance the delivery of learning support to distance learners from marginalised communities. Dineo also believes that assignments help to prepare for examination. In other words, when she goes over an assignment she remembers beyond the material learnt, what the assignment covered and believes assignments assist in understanding content since it simplifies the notes.

Despite the value of assignments feedback, there were participants who did not complete all the set assignments. Pau did not submit all the English assignments because she had to study other subjects in order to catch up on areas she felt behind in. She submitted one assignment for English language instead of six explaining:

Because of time, I wanted to cover up the material that I did not, to prepare for the coming examination. (P1:3 124:128)

It appears Pau was working under pressure. The reasons for working under pressure could be associated with procrastination or other commitments may have taken up her time for study. Conscious of the need to prepare for the examination she had to compromise by not doing assignments for the English language course. She was, however, successful in managing her study challenge. She achieved a D grade in English and passed six other subjects, achieving a B grade in the History and a C grade in the other four subjects. She was admitted for an Associate degree programme at Linkokwing University of Creative Technology the following year. BOCODOL, through its learner charter commits itself by saying:

Learner assignments will be marked and returned within the shortest time possible and will include detailed feedback and helpful comments for each learner. (BOCODOL Learner Charter, 2001)

This commitment was not adhered to when it came to Inalegolo, D'Kar and New Xade because of postal service challenges. However, at Kang, assignments were returned within the stipulated 14 days turnaround time. Assignment submission was high at Kang and low at the other three sites as shown in the data given in **Table 5.5**. The volume of assignments at Kang demonstrates the ideal scenario whilst at the other sites it sends a message that not all was well (see *Addendum 12*). The disparity is largely due to the principle of flexibility and self-pacing practised at BOCODOL. Learners are therefore not compelled by any deadlines

to submit assignments. The issue of access to tutors and quick turnaround time at Kang is responsible for the high volume of assignment submission than at other learning centres.

Table 5.5 Assignment submission by 23rd May 2007

Learning centre	No. of learners	Total assignment submitted
Kang	21	196
D'Kar	27	39
Inalegolo	10	31
New Xade	16	4

Source: Kang BOCODOL Regional Centre 2007

The Learner Charter states that learner assignment will be marked and returned within the shortest time possible but the experience of learners was that assignment feedback delayed and at times assignments were never returned. This is a case of mismatch between policy and practice. Assignment feedback was viewed to be critical and there were concerns raised over the delay of assignment feedback. The learning co-ordinator for D'Kar also raised the concern in her January 2007 report when she stated that:

I am disappointed because no assignments came back. We would like you to help find assignments and send them back (Learning Satellite Co-ordinator's monthly report, January 2007)

The concern over the delayed return of assignments by the co-ordinator confirms what Xika raised. She was indeed disappointed, as she was not enabled to support the D'Kar distance learners. She was concerned because some learners were no longer willing to continue unless they had received their assignments. This is how she recorded learner concerns in her report:

I talked to students, they wanted to start again, during holidays the discipline was gone. Some first want the results of the assignments before they can continue, (Learning Satellite Co-ordinator's monthly report, January 2007).

The issue of assignment turnaround time made the work of the co-ordinator difficult. Distance learners were not prepared to continue their participation in study sessions without assignment feedback. The issue of assignment feedback delays for remote learners was also picked up by the internal auditor from BOCODOL headquarters when he visited the Kang regional centre in 2007, and this is how he captured the challenge in the report:

We have observed that in many instances the turnaround time for assignments is longer than the stipulated period. In some of the cases we examined assignments (for remote learners) were submitted by the learner on the 01st Feb 06 and the assignments were returned back to the learner on the 25th September 06, taking seven (7) months. The Regional Manager must see to it that staff makes efforts to ensure that assignments are returned back to learners within the stipulated turnaround time. This will not only give feedback to learners, but will also give them motivation and time to address areas they did not perform well (Kang Region Audit report, 2007).

The observations and recommendations of the internal auditor are critical for best practice. The report highlights the importance of assignment turnaround time in enhancing academic performance and completion rates. Other than concerns of assignment turnaround time, interviews revealed yet other challenge that is low assignment submission and poor percentage score. An interview with Thembi and Thila revealed the magnitude of the challenges remote distance learners faced.

*Interviewer: Did you do other assignments?
Thembi: Yes, I had submitted them for marking.
Interviewer: How was your performance?
Thembi: I got 38% and the other one 20%.
Interviewer: What were your tutor's comments?
Thembi: Need a lot of improvement and be serious with my studies.
(P2:10 117:127)*

The low percentage achieved by Thembi indicates the need for more academic support. The comments feedback provided by tutor that the learner should be serious does not help the learner to identify where he or she went wrong. Thembi needed assignment feedback that was more helpful by directing her on how best she could have attempted the assignment. Another poor assignment submission was revealed by Thila as follows:

*Interviewer: How many assignments did you submit?
Thila: I only submitted Mathematics assignments.
Interviewer: Were they marked?
Thila: Yes.
Interviewer: How much did you score?
Thila: 4%
Interviewer: What was the problem?
Thila: I did not understand. (P2:12 129:139)*

Given the low assignment submission and the poor percentage score by Thembi and Thila, there is clear indication that remote distance learners needed more support than they were being provided with. Mr. Jele in his journal as he empathised with the learners at Inalegolo and New Xade where he had participated in delivering learning support as a tutor further elaborates on the need for support.

I have a feeling that learners from these remote areas need the most support from tutors and staff because there are no public libraries, no newspapers, no radios and very few if any educated people who can help these learners. It looks like the only support at their disposal is marked assignments and study material. To them this portion on the assignment cover where the tutor-marker writes means of contact, it does not make sense because most of them do not have the means to contact the tutor (P10:40 181:187).

The observation by Mr Jele is that remote distance learners only benefit from marked assignments and study materials. However as already indicated above, some of the assignment feedback hardly adds value. As correctly noted by Mr Jele, remote learners are unable to contact tutors for follow up on assignment feedback because of lack of means to do so. Failure to get useful feedback and to make follow up on feedback received does not help learners improve the quality of their assignments. Learners end up providing assignment responses without applying any cognitive skills. For example tutor minutes (Tutor meeting 2002: 24) indicates that tutors said the following about learners' assignment responses:

The answers are directly copied from the workbooks (units), therefore, this clearly show that the students are not creative in thinking.

The direct copying of answers may be due to assignment tasks being poorly developed and encouraging learners to copy. It may also be due to inadequate guidance on how to answer assignment questions. Whilst this may have been a challenge tutors could have solved, learners were not happy with assignments that were not returned by tutors. Distance learners were also not happy with tutors who did not return their assignments and this is what Xika had to say:

Business dim xгаа-xgaasekg'ao ba thuu táá tcgāya assignment di k_abia máá ta a. Domkar qāè-tcao úú tama gaas koe. (The Business studies teacher did not give me back my assignment, that's why I am not that happy). Xгаа-xgaakg'aoa ne kòò káà a káíkg'aise. Gataga méé i ko wèé beke ka hàà. Wèéan gar kòò kaisase ncàm! (Shortage of tutors and that they must come weekly (P9:21 14:22).

The main concern for Xika was common at Inalegolo, D'Kar, and New Xade. The issue of delayed feedback and turnaround time for assignments at D'Kar, New Xade, and Inalegolo was a major concern. It did not enable learners to pace themselves effectively. Delayed assignment feedback is one aspect which management could have addressed in order to adhere to the assignment turnaround time policy.

The issue of not meeting the assignment turnaround time and misplacements of assignments violated learners' rights to prompt feedback and support as per the learner charter. The learner charter and the guidance and counselling policy stipulates the assignment turnaround time of 14 days but for satellite sites the maximum time allowed is 25 days because of the postal delivery challenges. The issue of providing assignment feedback timeously is critical for best practice. Assignment turnaround time enhances academic performance and completion rates. This is also emphasised by a number of authors (Cookson, 1989; Gibson, 1990; Wright, 1991; Sweet, 1993). Holmberg (2003) stresses that, in order to advance the learning process, it is necessary to have both frequent assignment submission and short turnaround times for feedback. However, BOCODOL assignment submission frequency is up to the learners. The effect of this open learning principle is that the flow of assignment submission was low as learners were not obliged to submit assignment at a particular time as no detailed schedule exist. Challenges experienced in assignment feedback were also experienced when it came to mock examination feedback.

Mock examination as indicated previously attracted a 47.2% satisfaction from distance learners who were participants in this study. Learners living far away from community study centres like those at Inalegolo, New Xade and D'Kar were not able to take their mock examination at their local centres despite that there were entitled to such support as promised in the Learner Charter. This means learners at the remote settlements were denied full support that was given to other learners who lived closer to centres designated community study centres. The failure to provide mock examination support through commission or omission raises questions of negligence and ethics on the part of the regional office staff. The common grounds for negligence include failure to provide adequate supervision and being responsible for inadequate provision of support (Squelch & Bray, 1998). Mock examination is written by distance learners as part of their preparation for the end of course examination. The support through mock examinations complemented the other types of learning. Those who wrote the mock examination and got timely feedback were better prepared and achieved better results in final examination. However, some learners reported that mock examination feedback was delayed and there were instances where some learners indicated that they got the feedback after writing their final examination and as such, the feedback had not been

helpful. The issue of missing assignments and delayed feedback indicates poor handling of assignments and is one of the issues that reflects on ineffective administrative support that even affected learners emotionally when it came to registering for examinations.

Inefficient administrative support affected distance learners like Kagiso. She was unhappy when ODL staff members were not helpful and narrated her experience in her journal by stating that:

BOCODOL officials do help us although there are those who would try to let us down by not providing effective service. There was a time and a certain Tuesday when people were preparing for holidays when I went there to pay for examinations. I left the money and ID with one of the officials since I had to attend a patient at home and there were many people. I arranged that I will return before the end of working hours. On my return, there was no one in the office although there was still time. When I came again, the official told me that already, she had completed the job for the day and gave me my money and ID back. I was disappointed and learnt that there are individuals who can deny one her rights. A similar incident also occurred recently when one learner who had been sent by the other was returned because they did not have a learner number to register for exams. Since the Lord never keeps anyone at bay, I helped the learner until we got the number although the office where our learner numbers are kept was available. This is a sign of taking our quest lightly and it will kill our spirits, it will demoralise us (P8: 6 27:38)

Kagiso admits that ODL staff tries to assist them, however, she takes exception to some ODL staff members who are not considerate and helpful. She presents her experience maturely by first acknowledging the positive aspects, articulating the negative aspect in a calm manner. She confirms being denied her right but does not show anger or bitterness as one would expect. When a similar incident occurs to another distance learner, she assists the learner until she succeeds. She has attributes of kindness, sympathy, and love for humankind and does not want to see others suffer. When asked about why she did not report the officer who had failed her, she responded by saying she did not want to see the officer fired from her job. Besides these unfortunate incidents, tutorial letters were another form of mediated support.

Tutorial letters as previously stated were perceived to be useful by 63.1% of distance learners who were participants in this study. This is because some learners had no postal addresses as they lived in settlements where there were no postal services. However those at Kang like Thila had this to say about tutorial letter support during an interview:

- Interviewer: Did you receive any tutorial letters?*
Thila: Yes.
Interviewer: What was it about?
Thila: About weekend courses.
Interviewer: Were there any tutorial letters that were encouraging, specifically written to encourage you to stay in the programme?
Thila: Yes; I received one; most I heard from other learners, (1:19 174:182).

Thila's experience is that she received tutorial letters about weekend courses. She appears to be unaware of any other use they might have other than conveying administrative information. Tutorial letters were not as effective as the other types of learning support due to postal challenges already mentioned. However, tutorial letters have the potential of adding value and enhancing academic performance if they are fully exploited. Tutorial letters are also used to correct mistakes in the learning material and to provide advice on how best an assignment could have been answered. Tutorial letters remind learners of important academic events like examination dates, open and prize-giving day ceremonies promote feedback on academic queries and pass on important announcements like the introduction of a course and invitations for competitions. One such invitation was on Independence National Essay Competition, in which five learners participated as part of the Independence Day celebrations. One of the learners emerged in first position in an English essay competition that involved students from conventional senior secondary schools. Whilst the success was an isolated event, it made news headlines in the local media both through radio broadcasts and newspapers. The learner's confidence in English was boosted. She got publicity, prize money worth P1 000 (US Dollar 330) and a computer for Kang regional centre. She was quoted in the Sunday Tribune, (2 – 7 September, 2006: 5). saying:

I felt a great sense of achievement as it was my first time to win any prize whatsoever.

She went on to complete her BGCSE in 2006 and in 2007 enrolled for a degree programme with the University of South Africa through Bai Sago University College. The role of tutorial letters is critical in providing support just like radio. Learning support provided through the radio programme can be very useful however, due to poor reception and late broadcasts learners at the remote settlements did not derive the value expected. The distance learner participants who were satisfied with distance

education radio programmes comprised 55.3% of the sample. The distance education programmes are broadcast every Monday after the 21:15 hours news bulletin. These were ranked ninth in terms of participants' satisfaction and the lower rating is due to poor radio reception in the remote areas. Participants were also of the opinion that the broadcasts came too late in the evening. This view of radio programmes being broadcast late was also reported by Lelliot (2002). Despite the poor reception useful information is passed on during the broadcasts as Felix explains:

The education we receive from radio broadcasts has helped us a lot. I am glad because this reminds and encourages us to take BOCODOL education as that of first class. This radio informs us on the examination dates and times (P8:7 41:42).

Felix acknowledges the usefulness of the distance education radio programme especially for the reminders, motivation and information on examinations. The human voice over the radio also gives rise to learners like Felix feeling positive about radio support. When the voice over the radio welcomes all enrollees and directly addresses them as BOCODOL learners, they feel recognised. Being identified over the radio makes them feel that they belong to BOCODOL no matter where they live. The status of being associated with BOCODOL makes enrollees proud as it differentiates them from the rest who are not distance learners. The advantage of using the radio in distance learning is that it reaches many people at the same time. Unfortunately the poor reception results in distance learners in those remote areas not being able to enjoy the radio support service fully. Some learners like Thembi in the remote settlements did not even possess a radio and as such could not listen to the radio programmes and this is what she said:

I have only cassettes for studying but I don't have the radio, so it makes difficult for me to study (P2:9 98:115).

A number of families at the settlements as indicated in Chapter 3 are poor and would not afford a radio when the basic need, food was a priority. Despite the challenges, learners' perceptions and experiences of the various modes of learning support were generally more positive than negative. There were, however, crosscutting curriculum issues that affected the effectiveness of learning support provision to remote distance learners from marginalised communities.

5.2.6 Learning support: cross-cutting curriculum issues

The three cross-cutting curriculum issues emerged from my study of official documents, journals and interviews: the language of instruction, the range of subjects offered and the learning materials.

The language of instruction

The language of instruction is different from the language spoken by distance learner participants in this study as indicated in their biographical data (section 5.2.4). The RNPE recommends the development of a language policy to accommodate other languages spoken in Botswana including those of marginalised communities in order to promote the teaching of mother tongue at early phases of education. However, the policy implementation has not taken off yet in addressing the issues of mother tongue. The distance learner participants' languages are as yet to be written. They therefore had no privilege of learning through their own language. English is used as a medium of instruction in all subjects except in teaching the Setswana language. Distance learners studying BGCSE are expected to have an adequate command of the English language, (BOCODOL, 2001; Hughes, 2004). A good grasp of English language can facilitate understanding. However for some remote distance learners the medium of instruction is a barrier to understanding the printed learning materials. Due to poor understanding of the medium of instruction some learners like Thembi indicated during the interview that they had stopped studying.

Interviewer: Do you study in the morning, during the day or afternoon?

Thembi: I do not study and do not write.

Interviewer: Why don't you study?

Thembi: Due to lack of understanding.

Interviewer: When do you study?

Thembi: I don't study at all. (P2:9 98:115).

Understanding printed learning materials can assist learners to comprehend what they study. Without adequate understanding learners like Thembi are more likely to fail to complete assignments and are more likely to become inactive. The reasons for lack of understanding of learning materials was probably due to inadequate study skills. A study in India by Biswas (2001) shows that distance learners from disadvantaged backgrounds have inadequate learning skills for coping with their studies. Dropping out could be due to management failing to put in place mechanisms for detecting learners without adequate learning skills and providing programmes that could support such

learners. In a study reported by Creed et al (2005), poor management at regional level was responsible for a 69% dropout rate in a distance education programme in Pakistan. Language appears to be another issue responsible for lack of understanding of the learning materials by distance learners from a predominantly oral tradition with limited reading culture and restricted access to libraries or reading materials. The typical prose-intensive style of print in distance learning materials makes heavy demands on learners who are often unpractised readers and writers in both their mother tongue and official language of instruction (Creed et al, 2005). BOCODOL learning materials are developed for selected subjects offered at a distance by part-time writers.

Range of subjects offered

The subjects offered to BOCODOL distance learners are based on the same curriculum offered in public conventional schools. The range of subjects offered in the curriculum however does not include the natural sciences namely chemistry, physics and biology nor information and communication technology or subjects that have a direct impact on their livelihoods as is the case in public conventional schools. The current subjects distance learners study includes human and social biology, Setswana, and history. These are subjects that are perceived to have low status compared to the pure sciences and this could have serious consequences for their future employment and training (Collins et al., 2000). Despite the unavailability of learning materials in natural science subjects learners at Kang took some science subjects privately. The journal entry below by one participant shows that learners were prepared to pay tutors to help them with physics and chemistry privately.

For the Double Science students they have come up with a very good idea of contributing 3 US Dollar (P20) each so that they can hire a tutor from Matsha. This really shows some improvement on our learners. There will be hiring two tutors for Chemistry and Physics (6:20 45:48).

The initiative of engaging private tutors for chemistry and physics demonstrates commitment in their studies despite that the natural science subjects are not currently being offered. Learning materials in all the subjects offered were available.

The learning materials

The Learner Charter promises learners high quality and up-to-date materials, however the reality at the time of this study was that learning materials had not been reviewed

since their publication in 2001. The learning materials were written by part-time writers who are teachers from conventional schools and live in or around Gaborone city. Learning materials are expected to be user friendly with support being embedded in them. Such support is meant to assist distance learners through their studies with fewer challenges. When learning materials are poorly designed distance learners are disadvantaged even more.

Inadequate support in the learning materials exacerbates the challenges faced by remote distance learners. The support challenges are further complicated by existence of errors in the learning materials. In order to advance learning, distance learners should be issued with error-free learning materials. Errors that have not been corrected in the learning materials that are the only source of reading for learners in remote settlements, contribute to poor understanding. When I joined the college the issue of errors in the learning materials was identified in 2002 and discussed at a tutor conference (Minutes for specific subject group meeting, 2002). An attempt to identify and document such errors was done with the help of tutors and submitted to the authorities responsible for learning material development and distribution. Another issue raised by tutors in the minutes is that some sections or topics are shallow. For example, the specific subject minutes (BOCODOL, 2002: 22) for the human and social biology (HSB) group recorded that the HSB material is not free of factual and technical errors. The document gives this information about HSB Unit 2:

The information about photosynthesis is shallow e.g., factors, which affect photosynthesis, should have been included. The starch test on the leaf, this could help those who left school a long time ago. The experimental information is vital for students.

When information is considered by subject experts to be shallow it means learners need extra learning materials if they are to perform well in the examination. Learners who have no access to libraries like those at Inalegolo, New Xade, and D'Kar are disadvantaged and may not easily satisfy the examination requirements in terms of high level thinking skills. The issue of errors in the learning materials is not new. A customer satisfaction survey conducted by Sebopelo and Ntuma (2005) in all BOCODOL regional centres also highlights tutors' concern on the issue of errors in the learning materials when it says:

Fifty-seven percent of respondents say that the materials have a lot of typing errors, 64% of respondents agree that there is a lot of wrong information in the material and 75% say that the material does not provide detailed content.

The findings of the customer survey by Sebopelo and Ntuma (2005), confirms the challenge in learning material provision. Learning materials with errors compromise quality and mislead learners, because learners tend to believe that what is in print is correct and they learn from printed material without question particularly instructional learning materials that substitute a teacher. This explains the low academic performance attained by some distance learners. The failure to attend to the errors was also a major concern raised by tutors in their journals for example the following journal entry:

Ever since the College started, various tutors and other stakeholders have pointed out the corrections needed in the learner study materials. One wonders why up to now the materials have not been revised. No one knows the impact on the learners of study materials riddled with errors, both workbooks and assignments. (P10:52 259:262)

Some learners in remote areas, the only materials they interact with are their study books. As a result, the information in these books should be accurate and up to date, (P10:53 165:168).

The concern raised by the tutor above cannot be overemphasized. Learners like Amos as indicated previously in this section, get frustrated and find it easy to withdraw when learning materials are not user friendly. The findings of my study is a complete opposite of the findings by Ukpo (2006) on Nigerian students who perceived course learning materials to be clearly written and felt the modules were well written and easy to follow.

My examination of learning materials revealed a lack of presence of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi issues in the English and Setswana study materials. I discussed this issue with two programme development co-ordinators. They confirmed that the learning materials had little or no aspects that the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi learners could relate to and that some sections and activities in the learning materials were not user-friendly and, as such, did not build on distance learners' existing knowledge. By way of example, English Language Study Unit 1 has activities that do not give the distance learner from marginalised communities the opportunity to interact meaningfully with the learning materials. The activity on page 24, presupposes that the learner will have access to a library. Moreover, on page 31, the learner is asked to *'go into a shop that sells magazines and newspapers.'* This is

activity could not be done as distance learners from all the four sites live in areas where there are no such shops. The activity on page 37 is a passage entitled ‘*Gospel Singer Thrills Audience*’. The passage is about an event that took place at Boipuso Hall in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana, which distance learners at Inalegolo, New Xade and some at D’Kar and Kang have never been to Gaborone. On page 51, distance learners are asked to write about a busy market place, a sports stadium and a busy bus station early morning and on page 55, they are asked to write about an extravagant wedding and a dangerous journey on a motor cycle. None of these are known to remote distance learners and therefore present difficulties and hinder learning.

The Setswana learning materials are as out of tune as the English ones as they also focus more on the Setswana culture. The materials are not inclusive and are rather foreign to Basarwa and Bakgalagadi. Topics like *Bogosi*, *Lenyalo*, *meila ya Setswana*, are mainly about the main Setswana communities, Bakwena, Bakgatla, Bangwato and others. For Setswana literature, the books have settings in urban and mining areas. For instance, ‘*botshelo teemane*’ the setting is in Jwaneng Township and this is unfamiliar and foreign to many distance learners. Some tasks in Setswana involve translation from Setswana to English. This presents difficulties as their Setswana is already not that good. A distance learner from D’Kar would first translate the Setswana into his mother tongue and then to English and in the process fail to get equivalent terms and the whole translation loses meaning thus impacting negatively on learning.

5.2.7 Learners’ perceptions and experiences: academic achievement

The delivery of learning support influenced the academic achievement of distance learners. The achievement comprised the following, active academic participation, progression, retention and completion (Prebble et al., 2005). The academic outcome of distance learners was examined in relation to their achievement in examinations, completion of BGCSE and the achievement of goals that relate to their progressing into higher education, getting employment or promotion at work (see *Addendum 13 and 14*). **Table 5.6** explains the distribution of examination grading using letters. Letter ‘U’ means learner achievement was

not graded because it was not satisfactory. **Table 5.7 and 5.8** depict the performances over three years at Kang site and at the satellite learning centres. There were 180 examination entries at Kang. The quality grades (over 50%) achieved were 60 in total. There were 125 examination entries from satellite learning centres. The quality grades achieved by candidates from satellite centres were 35 and this represents 29.11%. The difference in performance was 4.22%. On examining B (over 60%) or better grades, Kang site candidates achieved 2.77% whilst candidates from satellite centres achieved 5.6%. In terms of quality, grades candidates from satellite centred performed better by 3.83%. This difference may suggest that academic performance was not a result of learning support delivered through the regional office structures. Learners at satellite learning centres may have found private assistance or otherwise have just been better students.

Table 5.6 Distribution of exit exam scores with respect to BGCSE

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
	85% and above	75% to 84%	60% to 74%	50% to 59%	45% to 49%	40% to 44%	30% to 39%	20% to 29%	0% to 19%
Qualitative value	Exceptionally Excellent	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Pass	Weak Pass	Very weak	Very week	Ungraded

Source: BOCODOL Academic Registry 2006

Table 5.7 Academic achievement at Kang site 2003 - 2006

Subject	No. of Exam Candidates	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
		85% and above	75% to 84%	60% to 74%	50% to 59%	45% to 49%	40% to 44%	30% to 39%	20% to 29%	0% to 19%
English	76	-	-	1	17	33	23	2	-	-
Setswana	21	-	-	4	8	6	3	-	-	-
Maths	59	-	-	-	20	4	12	15	5	3
HSB	24	-	-	-	10	3	5	4	1	1
Totals	180	0	0	5	55	46	43	21	6	4

Source: Kang BOCODOL Regional Centre 2006

Table 5.8 Academic achievements at satellite learning centres 2003 - 2006

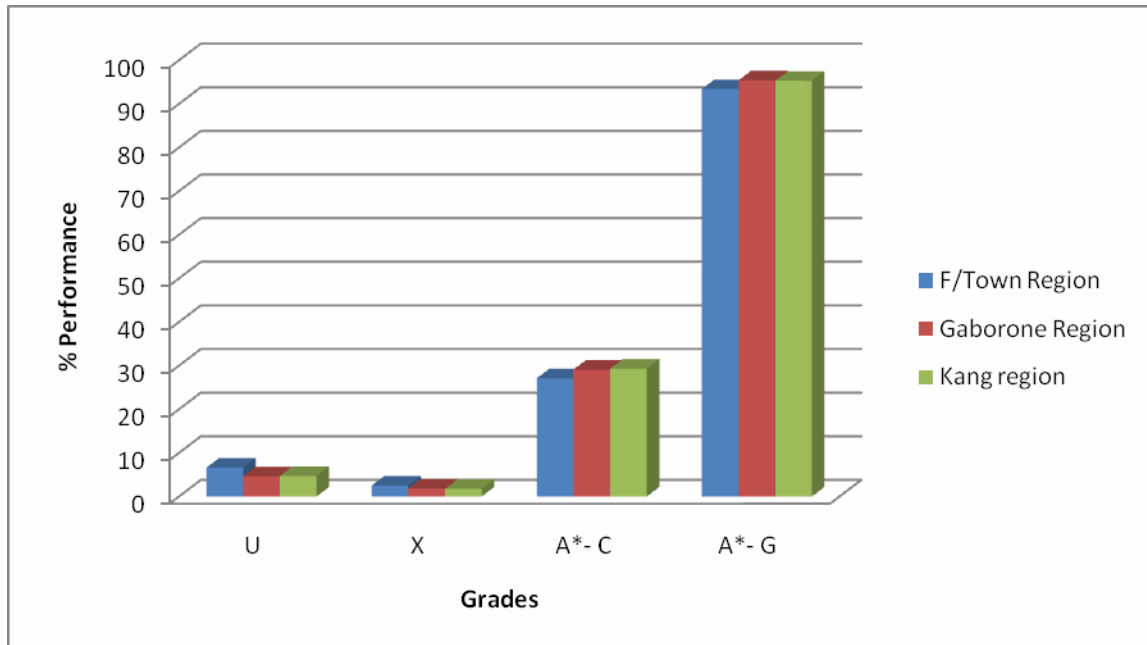
	No. of Exam Candidates	A* 85% and above	A 75% to 84%	B 60% to 74%	C 50% to 59%	D 45% to 49%	E 40% to 44%	F 30% to 39%	G 20% to 29%	U 0% to 19%
English	43	-	-	1	6	21	13	2	-	-
Setswana	24	-	-	2	6	8	5	2	1	-
Maths	36	-	-	2	10	4	4	6	6	4
HSB	22	1	-	1	6	2	9	2	1	-
Totals	125	1	0	6	28	35	31	12	8	4

Source: Kang BOCODOL Regional Centre 2006

The role of learning support on the academic achievement of distance learners from marginalised communities was generally positive when the entire Kang region is compared to two other BOCODOL regional centres located urban areas namely, Francistown and Gaborone. **Figures 5.6, 5.7, and 5.8** depict learner academic achievements. X in **Figures 5.6, 5.7 and 5.8** refers to candidates who did not appear for examination.

Generally the academic performance of learners from Kang was satisfactory and similar to that achieved by learners from urban areas. This is despite their geographical remoteness and historically disadvantaged background as indicated in Chapter 3 of this study. In 2005, learners from the Kang regional centre out-performed learners from Francistown regional centre and achieved the same level of performance like learners from Gaborone in terms of A* to G grades. In terms of quality grades A* to C learners from Kang slightly achieved a better performance than learners from the two urban areas. There were less U and X recorded in Kang than at Gaborone and Francistown.

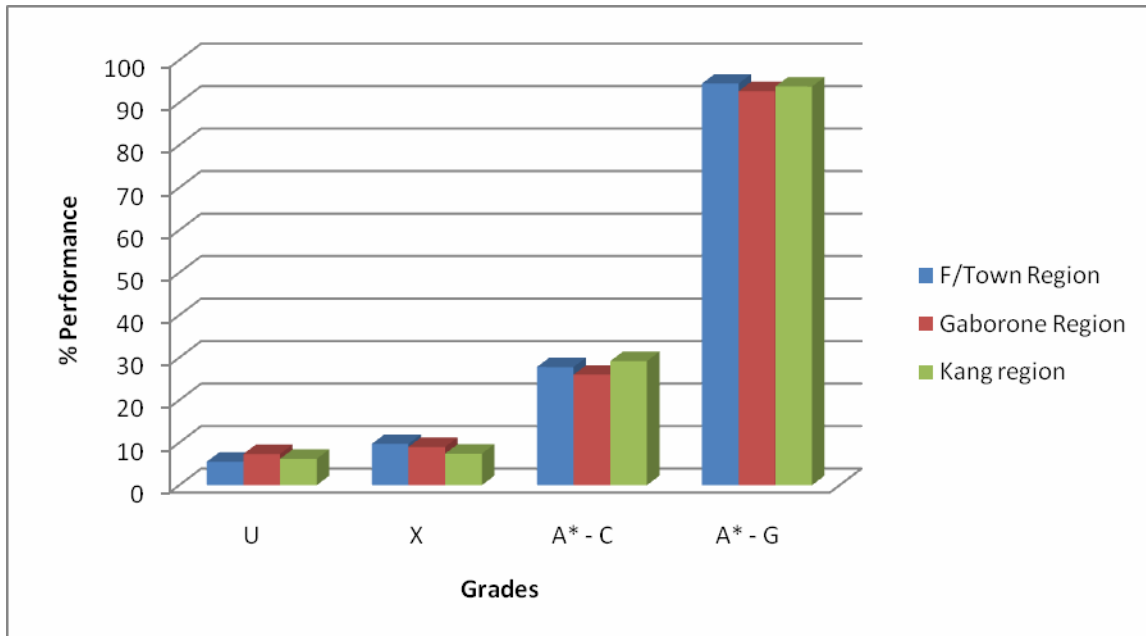
Figure 5.6 2005 Kang region examination achievement compared to urban centres



Source: BOCODOL Academic Registry 2006

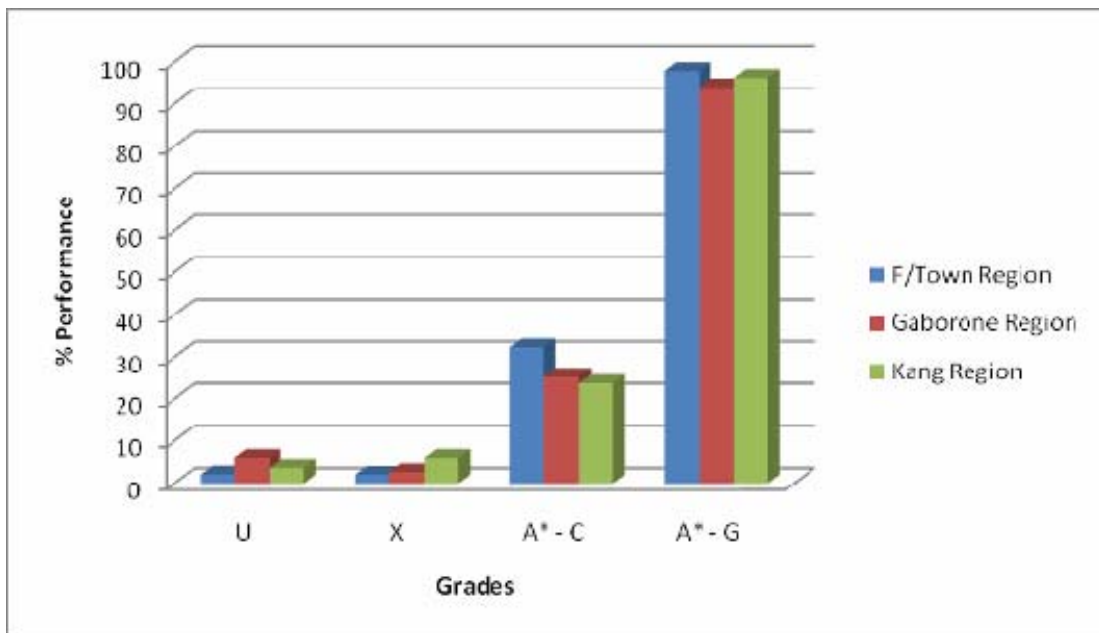
In 2006 learners from Kang regional centre still performed comparatively well. They outperformed learners from Gaborone regional centre and matched performance achieved by learners from Francistown regional centre in terms of A* to G grades. In terms of quality grades A* to C learners from Kang still achieved a better performance than learners from the two urban areas. And again there were less U and X recorded in Kang than at Gaborone and Francistown. In 2007 learners from Kang regional centre achieved academic performance similar to those in urban areas in terms of A* to G grades. In terms of quality grades A* to C learners from Kang achieved a lower performance than those from urban areas and also recorded a higher number of learners who did not turn up for examination. However, the overall achieved was satisfactory given their geographical remoteness and distances from the regional centre. Some learners who achieved quality grades were able to realise their goals for enrolling for the BGCSE programme delivered through the distance learning mode. Twenty-one of the 40 participants in this study were traced to find out where they were after completing their BGCSE. **Table 5.9** depicts 14 learners who progressed to pursue tertiary level programmes and 7 who went on to be employed. Thus they fulfilled their goals of further education and getting employment as stated in section 5.2.1 of this chapter.

Figure 5.7 2006 Kang region examination achievement compared to urban centres



Source: BOCODOL Academic Registry 2007

Figure 5.8 2007 Kang region examination achievement compared to urban centres



Source: BOCODOL Academic Registry 2008

Table 5.9 Learner progression after BGCSE

# of learners	Post-BGCSE	Tertiary Level Programme
3	University of Botswana	Degree
5	Linkokwing University of Creative Technology	Associate Degree
1	Gaborone Institute of Business Studies	Diploma
7	Employed by district councils	Not applicable
1	Institute of Health Sciences	Diploma
1	Gabane Brigade (Technical Training)	Certificate
1	Gaborone Academy of Education	Diploma
2	Bai Sago University College (UNISA Agent)	Degree

Source: BOCODOL Kang Regional Centre 2008

The provision of face-to-face and mediated support contributed in aiding remote distance learners from marginalised communities to achieve acceptable tertiary level entry requirements under unenviable circumstances. The learners who completed their secondary school programme had goals that went beyond attaining BGCSE as was indicated in section 5.2.1 learners' reasons for enrolling. Their achievement compares to Schloer's et al (1994) study in which Canadian students who completed their secondary school programme tended to have post secondary goals whilst those that dropped out tended to have secondary education goals. Some remote learners managed to persist in their distance learning initiatives because of strategies such as open day activities and prize-giving ceremonies that were annually organized to motivate them and recognize their academic efforts.

Open day and prize-giving events provided opportunities for inclusion, connection, collaboration and shared goals and presented some form of extrinsic motivation to distance learners and positively influenced retention and eagerness to complete BGCSE. The 2005 open and prize-giving report states the purpose of the open and prize-giving day, that is:

To create an opportunity for learners from various remote locations in the western part of the country to experience a sense of belonging to the college as this strengthens their identity needs, that serve a critical role in their academic life and encourages them to be able to persist studying with the college. The sense of belongingness is also critical when it comes to retention challenges that we face (Kang Report 27th August 2005).

To cultivate fun and joy in studying through the DE mode. We believe learning should not be a painful venture but should be an activity that is punctuated with fun and joy in order to reduce stress, anxiety and fatigue of continuous study for example after two weeks intensive mock exam writing, an event of this kind serve as a therapy that the body and brains need (Kang Report 27th August 2005)

Evidence from interviews and journals indicate that the aims of the prize-giving days were achieved. One participant, Lorato, wrote her experiences and how she judged the value of the open and prize giving ceremony as a source of motivation:

I congratulate BOCODOL on Prize-Giving because this motivates learners to put more effort in their studies. The prizes and certificates we receive encourage every learner to have an opportunity to be awarded a prize. The learner feels proud when called repeatedly during the awarding of prizes. This encourages parents to pay school fees with the hope that we will finally get good jobs. Prize Giving is a challenge for those lagging behind to aim higher since “phokoje yoo kwa morago dintsa di a bo di mmone” (it is embarrassing to be left behind). This gives a chance for one to build a good name for herself (P8:12 59:66).

Lorato also acknowledges that not all distance learners get awards and stresses the role of the ceremony, in contributing to introspection, whereby those distance learners who do not receive awards, are challenged to improve. Open day activities and prize giving awards encouraged Lorato to work hard and to feel really cared for and appreciated as she felt that she had changed when she said:

I have matured and changed my educational status as a result of BOCODOL. I am confident that after completion of my courses, I will find a good job. BOCODOL has improved my social being because I never dreamt of a time when I would be in possession of a BGCSE certificate. This is a sign of progress in my life. I encourage the youth to enrol with BOCODOL in order to have a better future and not just relax since mokoduwe go tsoswa o o itekang (Those who struggle for perfection will receive assistance), (P8: 1 2:8).

Lorato is a mother of two and had been one of the recipients of the prize-giving awards and had utilised all ten types of learning support offered by BOCODOL. She had written and passed four out of six subjects at BGCSE level at the time of reporting this in her journal. She first enrolled in 2003 and finished her BGCSE in 2007 when she wrote her last two BGCSE subjects. She could have finished within the four years recommended by the BOCODOL enrolment policy (2001) but could not because of administrative inefficiency discussed later in this chapter. The excerpt from Lorato’s journal demonstrates the role of learning support when an individual is receptive to it and has set herself achievable goals. Lorato confirms that her educational status has changed and that she has matured, and has

made progress in her life. She was confident of getting her BGCSE certificate. She eventually got her BGCSE and, after her results were published, she was employed as an HIV/AIDS Co-ordinator under the Global Fund. Prize-giving awards motivated some distance learners and as such complemented the various modes of learning support. In the next section I briefly discuss the findings under three themes that emerged from the findings presented in this chapter.

5.3 Discussion of findings

The findings are discussed using three themes namely; *transition*, *transactional presence and tension*. The theme: *transition* emerged from learners' perceptions and experiences as revealed in their reasons for enrolling for BGCSE through the distance learning mode, their conceptualisation of learning support and expectations. *Transition* relates to the state that distance learners and their marginalised communities find themselves in as they negotiate their survival in the dynamic and changing world. The theme: *transactional presence* emerged from learners' perceptions of face-to-face support and mediated support in which helpful DE facilitators were perceived positively as a key to better academic performance and learners were satisfied. Absence of DE facilitators or presence of unhelpful DE facilitators was perceived negatively as a source for poor academic performance and learners were dissatisfied. *Transactional presence* occurred when distance learners felt the connectedness with the ODL institution and staff, learning centre coordinators, tutors, peer learners and significant others (Shin, 2003) during the course of their learning at a distance. The theme *tension* emerged from a mismatch between policy claims (as espoused in the RNPE, Vision 2016, BOCODOL Act 1998, the Enrolment policy, the Guidance and Counselling policy, the Learner Charter) and practice. Practice did not address the issues of access and equity as claimed in the policy documents. This was exhibited in some learners' perceived inadequate learning support and in some managerial flaws with regard to administrative support especially assignments handling, communication and inadequacy in the area of part-time staff recruitment and training. *Tension* in terms of policy and practice, was exhibited when as the former encouraged educational expansion even to the hard to reach remote areas whilst learning support practice was not able to address policy claims because of the limited human, financial, and physical resources. Despite the challenges that include their state of transition, distance learner participants were highly motivated to attain a qualification for betterment of their predicament.

5.3.1 Transition

The reasons for learners from marginalised communities enrolling for programmes offered through the distance education mode as stated in section 5.2.1, their conceptualisation of learning support (section 5.2.2) and their expectations (section 5.2.3) can be explained within the context in which learners and their communities find themselves in. The need to improve their quality of life and overcome their predicament drove them to find alternative ways of moving from the traditional way of life to a modern way of life. The *transition* to a modern way of life stemmed from external factors which included the process of marginalisation over the years as was described in Chapter 3 of this study. The state of transition compelled learners from marginalised communities to enrol in a distance education programme in order to fit into the fast and changing world they found themselves in. The Basarwa communities are changing from a traditional nomadic hunter-gatherer and egalitarian community to an unfamiliar way of life, farming. Those who were relocated now keep a few cattle and goats given by government. This is part of the agro-based economy, which the Bakgalagadi and other communities in Botswana have traditionally been engaged in. The Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities are fully aware of their state of transition towards the industrialised economy that Botswana is aspiring to. The 1994 Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE 1994:5) complemented by Vision 2016. states that:

The goals of the Revised National Education Policy are to prepare Batswana for the transition from a traditional agro-based economy to the industrial economy that the country aspires to.

However, for marginalised communities and in particular the Basarwa who have for centuries survived as nomadic hunter-gatherers, the transition towards an industrial economy presents a huge challenge. The country's Vision 2016 pillar on education puts pressure on marginalised communities as they lag behind the rest of the Botswana society in terms of basic education. The Vision states that by 2016, Batswana⁹ would be an educated and informed nation. It encourages all citizens of Botswana to participate in education and promises that Botswana's wealth of different languages and cultural traditions will be recognised, supported, and strengthened within the education system and no citizens will be denied the right to education based on their mother tongue. It also states that

⁹ Batswana refers to all citizens of Botswana. All ethnic groups who belong to Botswana, are nationals and are called Batswana.

Botswana will have entered the information age on equal footing with other nations and society will be free and democratic and have full access to information on the operations of government, private sector and other organisations (Tau, 2006). It is in the light of this context that BGCSE is a critical qualification for learners to attain in order to gain entry into institutions for tertiary education and training in order to participate in a fast and changing world. Distance learning support is meant to assist learners in attaining their targeted qualification with fewer challenges. The challenges that face distance learners can be minimised by ensuring that there is transactional presence of the human factor in distance learning that is, the constant availability of ODL facilitators and other learners within the learning support framework. Learners who perceived a transactional presence of the human factor were satisfied in both face-to face and mediated support.

5.3.2 Transactional presence

Transactional presence refers to the degree to which distance learners sense the availability and connectedness with an ODL institution and staff, learning centre coordinators, tutors, peer learners and significant others (Shin, 2003). The transactional presence in the various types of learning support led distance learners to have positive perceptions and experiences. The ODL facilitators play a key role in mobilising resources for learning support, both human and physical. The availability of such resources has the potential of enabling learning transactions that satisfy learners' academic needs.

Personal support from tutors helps learners in managing their emotional matters so that they focus on learning. Personal support is one of the elements of learner support along with academic support and administrative support. The three components of learner support overlap and as such, tutors usually find themselves called upon to perform all of them in order to facilitate successful learning (Simpson 2001; Thorpe, 2002; Moore, 2003; Tait, 2004). This was the case when some learners in a tutorial session made snide remarks and associated intelligence with learning at a conventional institution. Such perceptions encourage learners to be passive learners and this undermines the learner-centred approach, which is employed in tutoring in order to make them independent learners. However, the professional conduct of the tutor was commendable as he went beyond his academic role of academic advising and did some personal counselling and there was no repeat of the incident thereafter.

Personal support through guidance has the potential to inculcate in learners respect for each other, and a team spirit. This was the case at the Kang learning centre where a *transactional presence* of peers through a learner management committee fostered a sense of learning communities. The sense of learning communities meant that learners were able to learn and support each other with the aim of being successful in examinations. The opportunity of coming together also helped reduce feelings of isolation that were experienced at Inalegolo and New Xade. The interactions during face-to-face support meant they could share social and learning experiences as a community of learners. Learner management committees empowered distance learners and inculcated a sense of responsibility. It provided them with a platform to voice issues that affected their learning. It also encouraged learners to interact amongst themselves and in the process; some formed subject specific study groups and motivated each other. The sense of a learning community experienced by learners in this study was similar to Hong Kong learners whose perception was strong in respect of peers and teaching staff (Kember et al., 2001). The sense of a learning community was also encouraged through the open days and prize-giving ceremonies.

The annual open days and prize-giving ceremonies enhanced distance learners' sense of belonging to the institution. Feelings of belonging encourage persistence and are more likely to contribute towards completion of programmes. The support by significant others during open days and prize-giving ceremonies as acknowledged in this study motivated distance learners. The presence of significant others in these annual events helped to make learners realise that their communities ascribed great importance to their educational engagements. Whilst the human factor presence was valued by learners, there were instances where it contributed to learners' negative perceptions and experiences as was revealed by participants in interviews and journals.

The short comings of ODL facilitators in the provision of support were responsible for learners' negative perceptions and experiences for example, handling of assignments and incidents of inefficiency during examination registration. The poor handling of assignments led to delayed assignment feedback and it meant that learners could not learn from the assignment feedback at the time they were still motivated. Inefficiency is a managerial

matter. It was due to poor monitoring and supervision of full-time and part time staff. Managerial flaws relating to the recruitment and training of part-time staff contributed to learners' dissatisfaction as tutors recruited could not deliver face-to-face support and mediated support they expected. When learners' expectations are not met they are more likely to feel frustrated and helpless as there are no other academic support systems in remote rural areas. The other managerial flaw relates to poor communication and work ethic. Poor communication led to poor attendance at weekend tutorials. This meant that learners were not informed and could not take advantage and attend in large numbers. Poor work ethic on the other hand led to incidents of power play on part-time staff by full time staff. This went undetected due to inadequate control measures within the regional operational system. Power play did not only frustrate part-time staff during their return journey from a weekend tutorial, it also meant that they could not participate in further weekend tutorials despite the fact that they marked learners' assignments. Power play therefore denied learners to meet tutors who evaluated their assignments. Learners were denied the opportunity for face-to-face feedback with those who marked their assignments. The managerial flaws were further complicated by tension between policy claims and practice.

5.3.3 Tension

Four tensions emerged from the findings and these are:

- Tension between tradition and modernity
- Tension between the right to education and national capacity to deliver -in remote and sparsely populated areas
- Tension between ODL policy pronouncements and practice
- Tension between national curriculum and distance learners' aspirations.

Tension between tradition and modernity arises from the fact that the whole world is changing and all nations need to be on board so that no community is left behind. A knowledge driven society is emerging as a result of the advent of technological advancement. The Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities as part of the global village are faced with the challenge of catching up. The Botswana Government's 2016 National Vision and its 1994 Revised National Policy on Education guide the fast tracking of all communities in Botswana to become part of an industrialised knowledge society. The

vision pillar of education is that by 2016 Batswana must be an informed and educated nation. However, the attraction of living in the old ways still prevails in the communities. But the current legal framework prohibits old traditions to be practised without permission and some individuals within the communities end up on the wrong side of the law when they practise their traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle. Acquiring an education that equips one with knowledge and skills to join the labour market has become crucial for adjusting to a modern lifestyle. Lack of education amongst the remote Basarwa and Bakgalagadi means one cannot become part of the modern society. The dilemma renders one to risk clashing with the law as one is left with no alternative to subsist but to hunt and gather in a terrain that no longer belongs to the community but to a modern government.

Tension between the right to education and the national capacity to deliver arises from the fact that education is a right as indicated in Chapter 3, section 3.2. Through its Constitution, the Government of Botswana regards the right to education as an inalienable right. It has thus come up with policies to guide the provision of education in the country. The RNPE (1994) has made an undertaking to provide education to all Botswana. The policy implementation in terms of expanding access to education through the distance education mode was mandated to BOCODOL through an Act of Parliament, No. 20 of 1998. The policy raised the nation's expectations that they would benefit as it promises that BOCODOL would reach all parts of the country. However, under financing of distance education has led to tension in terms of policy implementation. Policy issues as stated in the RNPE, such as use of mother-tongue in early phases of schooling, access and equity remain a major concern. The provision of learning support services to remote distance learners is inadequate and leads to learner frustrations as expectations are not met. This is one reason for learners withdrawing from studies. When learners de-register, the public's misconceptions about distance learning are confirmed.

Tension between ODL policy pronouncements and practice is mainly at micro level. The Learner Charter (2000) and the Guidance and Counselling Policy documents (2001) commits BOCODOL to provide learning support services to all distance learners but the provision of such services has not been equitable. Remote distance learners have

remained without access to community study centres and tutors whilst learners who are not remote have enjoyed full learning support services as espoused in the policy documents. This shortcoming on the part of BOCODOL is responsible for the mismatch between learners' expectations, perceptions and actual experiences. Provision of adequate and up to date information during pre-enrolment counselling and orientation workshops as indicated in the Learner Charter (2000) could have addressed the misconceptions about learning support and mismatch between expectations and experiences. The consequences of inadequate information led some learners to be demoralised as their expectations were not met. The expectation of being taught is rooted in learners' past educational experience in conventional settings where quality education is measured through the quality of teaching. The failure to adhere to best practice as espoused through the learner charter, the tutor-marker guide, as well as the guidance and counselling policy led to some learners' dissatisfaction.

Tension between national curriculum and distance learners' aspirations arises from the failure of the current curriculum to address the needs of all communities equitably. Firstly, learners from marginalised communities cannot make connections with the curriculum as examples used are not from their environment. Secondly the range of subjects offered limit their aspirations as it does not enable them to attain careers in pure science related subjects nor in information and communication technology. The curriculum therefore excludes distance learners from participating in subjects that could enable them to be part of an information rich society of which the country's Vision 2016 advocates. The curriculum offered tends to perpetuate the exclusion of learners from marginalised communities in terms of remaining outside the mainstream knowledge and information society that Botswana is striving to become. The curriculum therefore limits the opportunities for distance learners in competing for well-paid employment to low-paid jobs such as tuck-shop assistants, cleaners or herd boys.

The other curriculum issue in which there is tension is the medium of instruction. The RNPE recommends the development of a language policy and provides for the teaching of mother tongue at early phases of education, but the policy implementation has not taken off yet in addressing the issues of mother tongue. The distance learner participants' languages are yet to be codified. The distance learners from marginalised

communities did not have the privilege of learning in their own language. What this means is that being educated in an unfamiliar language was restrictive and led to poor comprehension of concepts presented in an unfamiliar language.

Failure to understand concepts in printed learning materials resulted in learners disengaging. Low understanding resulted in some learners' motivation decreasing to levels in which they failed to complete assignment and to study. Non-completion of assignments meant learners were unable to gauge their performance and led to frustration. When one enrolls for a programme, the expectation is to engage with and grasp the content of in the learning materials. Where there is greater interaction between learners and tutors as happened at Kang, learners overcome the challenges of posed by the learning material. Where there is less or no interaction between learners and tutors, learning materials tend to be more structured because of the limited dialogue. Both Moore (1990) and Holmberg (2003) encourage interaction between learners and tutors in order to avert the challenges in the learning materials. The learning materials were written targeting second language speakers and not learners from marginalised communities who hardly speak English as was revealed in their biographical data in section 5.2.4. There was therefore a mismatch between the medium of instruction as used in the learning materials and the proficiency of learners in the English language. These mismatches in terms of language and learning materials is what Evans (2006) terms instructional dissonance, that is, the ignorance or denial of barriers and distortions that negatively affect the learning event in particular for the learner. Instructional communication, whether verbal or written, must be meaningful before content can be mastered. The findings of my study are summarised in the next section.

5.4 Summary: main findings

The three key findings that emerge from this study are that:

- learners' intrinsic motivation to succeed was exceptionally high.
- policy and managerial flaws frustrated the provision of equitable learning support.
- positive perceptions and experiences were exhibited where distance learners had access to personalised academic and affective support.

The value of education for marginalised communities in *transition* lies in the possibilities of breaking the cycle of poverty encountered over several decades as a result of political and

socio-economic disruptions by more powerful communities. Distance learners from marginalised communities enrol for secondary education programme offered through the distance education mode in the hope of obtaining a BGCSE certificate in order to enhance their opportunities for further education and training and for increased opportunities for paid employment outside their remote settlements.

Distance learners in this study were disadvantaged in many respects. They had to defy the odds by working hard on challenges that include geographical distance, psychological distance, a curriculum with little content from their environment and a medium of instruction that is either their third or fourth language. These challenges were a result of *tension* between policy and practice. Expanding educational access to the hard to reach in remote areas, without the necessary human, financial and physical resources is a major source of tension between policy and practice. Policy raised expectations that could not be met. The result has been dissatisfaction with DE learning experience that manifested in negative perceptions and experiences by 27.9% of distance learner participants who were not able to access the expected learning support services. Despite the many challenges, 72.1% distance learner participants indicated positive perceptions and experiences of learning support. This suggests that in particular personalised academic support was highly valued by participants. Evidence from various sources also demonstrates that learning support positively influenced the academic performance of distance learners from marginalised communities who were able to access such support. Distance learners who were able to sense the availability and connectedness with the ODL institution, ODL staff, and part-time staff and significant others perceived and experienced a *transactional presence* that inspired them to persist in their studies. This study confirms Holmberg's (2003) theory of conversational learning and its applicability in a less developed context. Personalised learning support anchored in empathy remains a key driving force in sustaining distance learners' motivation to learn. This study has further given distance learners from marginalised communities a voice in the sense that previously they had been inaudible and the challenges that affected their learning had remained speculative. It has, therefore, provided supportive empirical evidence for policy and practice to meet the needs of distance learners from marginalised communities studying in a less developed context. It has added to the existing DE literature by documenting evidence of distance learners' perceptions and experiences of learning support.



5.5 Conclusion

The main findings of this study fall into three themes: *transition*, *tension* and *transactional presence*. These are the themes that have emerged from distance learners' perceptions and experiences pertaining to learning support. Interpreted within Holmberg's (2003) theory of conversational learning, the positive outcomes emerging from the *transactional presence* are anchored empathy, a key element of personalised learning support. Learners' perceived value of the BGCSE programme is within the institution's control. High levels of learner's intrinsic motivation to succeed despite policy and managerial flaws were unexpected. In the next chapter, I highlight the significance and implications of this study. I provide recommendations directed at addressing issues of policy and practice that emanated from the findings relating to *transition* and *tension*. I also suggest topics for further research in the area of learning support, curriculum and policy.

Chapter 6 Significance and implications of the study

6.1 Introduction

Understanding the context of remote distance learners in marginalised communities has helped me reflect on the effectiveness of learning support provision and the relevance of a distance education programme for such learners. This study, explored the perceptions and experiences of remote distance learners and the findings cast light on the policies that frame the provision of learning support offered by Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) and help unravel the often-unquestioned institutional assumptions that construct, entrench, and perpetuate the marginalisation of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi (Nthomang, 2002). I first present an overview of this study and then discuss the significance and implications for policy and practice. I conclude this chapter by making recommendations for a learning support network strategy and for further research.

6.2 Overview of the study

In this study I investigated the provision of learning support in an underdeveloped context with the view to gaining an in-depth understanding of how distance learners from marginalised communities perceived and experienced learning support. Findings have been categorised under three key themes, *transition* from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle and agro based economy to an industrial economy spearheaded by the country's Vision 2016, *tension* between policy and practice that affects the delivery of learning support negatively and the *transactional presence* of tutors, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) staff and significant others, that promotes meaningful interaction which enhances learning and the achievement of learner goals. This study spans the period from 2003 to 2007 and is presented in six chapters.

Chapter 1 contextualised the study within the distance education domain. During my tenure as a regional manager for BOCODOL - an open and distance learning institution, I was perturbed by the generally low completion rates and poor academic achievement of learners despite apparent adequate learning support. This puzzle helped me formulate a critical research question: *How do distance learners from marginalised communities perceive and experience learning support?* In the first chapter, I also explained the uniqueness of this study and the key terms as applied to it. I briefly outlined the research design and

methodology used in my systematic investigation. In explaining the methodology, I also indicated steps taken to ensure ethical dealings with the research participants as well as how I ensured the trustworthiness of this study. I also indicated the research constraints and steps taken to minimise them. I concluded the chapter by providing a structural outline of this study.

Chapter 2 offered a rich description of the participants and their geographic, socio-economic, and cultural context. The purpose was to ensure that the reader appreciates the unique circumstances in which the research participants live and endeavour to complete their Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) qualification via the distance mode in remote areas of western Botswana. In Chapter 3, I first examined the provision of education to marginalised communities with reference to education as a human right and the concept of open and distance learning. I then reviewed literature on the theoretical frameworks underpinning distance learning. Given the cultural sensitivity and background of my participants, I found *the conversational learning theory* by Holmberg (2003) appropriate for my study. I explained and acknowledged the value of other theories (Gorsky, Caspi and Trumper's *dialogue theory-2005* and Moore's *transactional theory 1990*).

I also reviewed literature on learner support in order to situate learning support in its operational framework. I highlighted three fundamental aspects of learner support namely- learning support/academic support, personal support and administrative support. I explained that it is not easy to separate these three functions of learner support when it comes to supporting distance learners. I distinguished each of the three aspects of learner support in terms of conceptual definitions and operational function before reviewing literature on factors influencing success in distance learning. I highlighted the surface, deep and strategic learning approaches and contrasted them with similar approaches, field dependence, and field independence. I did this bearing in mind the profile of distance learners described in Chapter 2. I drew on the value of these approaches and made assumptions on how distance learners are likely to approach their learning in an underdeveloped context. Transferability to similar contexts may be possible based on the thick descriptions provided. The review also included empirical literature related to learning support in developed and developing contexts. I

drew inferences from comparable studies in the available literature to articulate the research problem and used these to refine the data collection tools and later in Chapters 5 and 6, to enrich the discussion. I concluded this chapter by demonstrating how the silence in the literature – particularly related to learning support in developing contexts - was addressed by my study, which documents the perceptions and experiences of distance learners from marginalised communities in Botswana.

Chapter 4 elaborated on the research design and methodology. Firstly, I explained the major paradigms in research that is; the positivist and interpretivist paradigms, before justifying my choice of the latter in order to gain an in-depth understanding of learning support provision using distance learners' perceptions and experiences. I used quantitative data collection methods where appropriate as a way of complementing my qualitative methods. I justified the choice of my data collection methods and demonstrated how they were appropriate given the nature and purpose of my study. I explained ethical considerations and the steps I took to ensure trustworthiness of this study as well as how I minimised the constraints I anticipated. The research design and process described in Chapter 4 permitted a rigorous process of collecting data, the outcome which is analysed and presented in Chapter 5. The analysis uncovered learners' reasons for enrolling, their expectations and conceptualisation of learning support. The primary focus fell on their perceptions and experiences of learning at a distance and was grouped into three themes - *transition*, *transactional presence* and *tension*. The themes relate to the perception that obtaining a BGCSE programme is critically important for the successful *transition* from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to being integrated into the mainstream Botswana society. The *transactional presence* of ODL staff, part-time staff and significant others resulted in both positive and negative perceptions and experiences of learning at a distance. The *tension* between policy and practice affected the provision of equitable learning support. The key findings of this study are that:

- Learners' intrinsic motivation to succeed was exceptionally high.
- policy and managerial flaws frustrated the provision of equitable learning support.
- positive perceptions and experiences were exhibited where distance learners had access to personalised academic and affective support.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the significance of the findings and their implications for policy and practice. I conclude by making recommendations and identifying areas for further

research in order to enhance distance education learning support theory and practice thereby validating this study.

6.3 Significance of the study

This study contributes to the literature base of distance learning and highlights how when policy is not aligned with practice, learners may be disadvantaged even more than their remoteness merits. The literature on learner support (in which learning support is a subset) in southern Africa and elsewhere in developing contexts tends to be descriptive and does not give insight into how distance education providers address the perceptions and experiences of distance learners from marginalised communities (ADEA, 2002; DEASA), 2006; Nonyongo and Ngegebule, 2008). This study has provided an intimate perspective on learning support as experienced by marginalised communities in a southern African region. The findings are pertinent for ODL policy makers, managers, and practitioners who ought to address the tensions that exist because policies are not accommodative enough of the needs and context of marginalised communities. The tension arising between policy and practice results in challenges that hinder effective learning support in less developed contexts. Distance learners in this study faced challenges similar to previous studies such as isolation, poor reading culture, poor scholastic backgrounds and bad educational experiences (Mogwe, 1992; Boko, 2002; Polelo, 2003; Mensah, 2004; Wheeler, 2004; Dzakiria, 2005) Distance learners in this study however did not have recourse to libraries, internet, or educated people in their areas. They live and study in communities that are trapped between the hunter-gatherer traditional lifestyle and the modern industrial based economy - a transition they are negotiating with uncertainty and many challenges.

This study also highlights the importance attached to education by communities in transition. Distance learners' perception of the BGCSE programme is that it is critically important for their successful *transition* from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle through an agro based economy to an industrial one as envisaged in the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education and supported by country's Vision 2016. The attainment of a BGCSE certificate promises increased opportunities for further education and training and for seeking paid employment outside their remote settlements in mines and urban centres. This may be a false promise yet their chances of returning to their nomadic lifestyles are very remote. The way forward for them is to seek

equitable integration. This may only be attained when they have the necessary education and skills that can earn them the respect from mainstream society and to compete for opportunities at the same level. The BGCSE programme is currently the only vehicle through which to negotiate the transition and due to unavailability of alternative ways of attaining BGCSE, the distance-learning mode is also the only option available. The Basarwa and Bakgalagadi learners face many challenges unrelated to their motivation or remote location, most, which pertain to policy implementation and management. Although their expectations of learning support were not fully accommodated in terms of policy implementation they were still satisfied. They could not benchmark, as there was nothing comparable. Nevertheless, they still performed well beyond what their circumstances and they still valued the presence ODL facilitators despite the fact that it was not equitably distributed.

This study highlights the importance of equitable distribution of transactional presence if distance learners from marginalised communities are to attain their educational goals and compete fairly with the rest of the society for opportunities for further education and training. The *transactional presence* of ODL staff, part-time staff and significant others is critically important for distance learners to attain their goals for successful transition and eventual integration into the mainstream society. Holmberg (2003) and Shin (2003) explain the effects of transactional presence of the providing institution, tutors, and peers in terms of motivating learners and facilitating academic achievement. Transactional presence is indispensable in the provision of effective learning support and is even more critical for distance learners disadvantaged by context and inadequate policy implementation due to unintentional tensions.

The *tension* between policy and practice affects the provision of learning support negatively. The perceptions and experiences of distance learners who could not negotiate their learning on their own due to policy and practice colliding have been negative. The open access policy led to the enrolment of learners whose abilities were not sufficient to learn from the learning materials without constant learning support. The capacity of learning support structures that were put in place did not adequately match the demand. It led to disproportionate delivery of learning support, with learning support meant for very remote learners being compromised due to financial and human constraints. This managerial challenge was a result of poor strategic planning. Policies in place do not respond adequately to the needs and aspirations of distance learners from marginalised communities, for example, learning support policy make claims to

provide all with guidance and counselling, up to date information but in practice, this has not been the case. On issues of curriculum, the claim is that it provides all to progress to the envisaged industrial based economy but the content has little to do with the context of marginalised communities in assisting them to build on their existing knowledge systems. In other words, the learning materials neglect the experiences and knowledge systems of marginalised communities. The right to equitable learning support for remote distance learners is therefore compromised. The challenges of tension between policy and practice call changes.

6.4 Implications for policy and practice

This study has immediate implications for ODL policy and practice. There is a need for a revision of policy formulation and implementation with regard to the provision of learning support service that meets the needs and aspirations of distance learners from marginalised communities. A review of the remote learner strategy shows an anomaly in policy decisions and implementation. The Remote Learner Strategy Consultancy Report (Lelliot, 2002) as stated in Chapter 1 section 1.3 has not been transformed into a College policy document.

The current strategy has the unintended consequence of perpetuating academic failure and social exclusion of marginalised communities. A revised curriculum strategy ought to address the needs and aspirations of marginalised communities.

The current curriculum relegates marginalized communities to the bottom of the Botswana social class because it is not diverse enough to offer broader study options for career development. The BGCSE offering is based on the National Curriculum Syllabus (BOCODOL Act No. 20 of 1998) but does not provide for pure sciences and practical vocational subjects for distance learners and BOCODOL has not yet developed learning materials which address the aspirations of learners who desire to study pure sciences and practical vocational subjects. Distance learners from marginalised communities cannot engage private tutors for subjects not offered through distance as is the case for students living in villages and towns, and can thus not pursue careers within the pure sciences like engineering and medicine. At national level a diverse and balanced curriculum which addresses the needs of marginalised communities in Botswana as well as the national needs would encourage equitable integration rather than the current curriculum that promotes the assimilation of marginalised communities into the dominant Tswana ethnic group. Dewey (1944: 99) quoted by Perry (2009) argues that there should be a diverse offering of curriculum and instructional approaches to ensure that all learners can reach

their maximum individual potential and that social classes should not be restricted to particular types of education. The current curriculum frustrates distance learners who complete the BGCSE only to discover that their educational choices are restricted. The pre-enrolment counseling and orientation programmes need to highlight these limitations when recruiting new enrollees. Furthermore, these learners are disadvantaged when it comes to government sponsorship. The government grant and loan scheme provides incentives to candidates who specialize in pure science and technology related programmes at tertiary level (Tau, 2005). Those who take pure science and technology programmes like medicine, radiography and ICT engineering are awarded grants. They are fully sponsored by government whilst those who take humanities are granted loans which they need to pay back, at times keeping them in debt for many years. The current curriculum offering if allowed to continue as is, has the potential to perpetuate social exclusion and injustice which may eventually lead to tensions between ethnic groups. Perry (2009) explains education by borrowing a perspective from the emancipatory, transformative and critical theorists and argues that education is as democratic in as much as it leads to the liberation of oppressed classes and transformation of oppressive social structures. Democratic education empowers individuals to free themselves from oppressive circumstances (Perry, 2009). All role-players in the Botswana distance learning area need to appraise seriously their current service provision in order to ensure that they do not exclude or short-change any citizen thereby defeating the government's Vision 2016 goals.

In order to expand equitable access to education BOCODOL has a decentralised learner support system. In 2003, the Kang regional office was the first to involve elected learner representatives in management committees (BOCODOL Annual Report, 2004/5.) The involvement of learners draws on Freireian thinking (Perry 2009) which argues that the path to liberation comes through a critical awareness of one's reality and that learners can become active subjects of their own destiny when they are in control of their learning. Through the learner management committees, learners have gradually become more responsible for their learning. The BOCODOL decentralised learner support system has a number of policy documents that guide ODL practitioners. However the formulation of some of these policies does not show any prolonged and broad consultations in terms of involving the representatives of marginalised communities. The consultancy for the remote learner strategy (Lelliot, 2002) was carried out from the 21st October to 1st November 2002. The limitation of the report is that it does not indicate any constraints met nor did it include the political and cultural representatives

of marginalised groups in the consultation process. In a democracy, like Botswana, individuals are citizens rather than subjects and thus it is implicit that individuals or their representatives have a right to participate on issues that affect them directly or indirectly. The list of those who were consulted on page 26 of the remote learner consultancy report is dominated by the names of primary school teachers and officers from the dominant Tswana ethnic group, BOCODOL staff, seven learners at D'Kar, one at Etsha and five at Motokwe. The consultation on the remote learner strategy left out key informants who could have contributed by highlighting the uniqueness of their lifestyles and academic needs. A policy strategy that is more likely to address the needs of the targeted population group should include a thorough environmental scanning to identify strengths and key areas for improvement and aim to create affective experiences that alleviate isolation. It is critical to now develop clear policy guidelines on how to support distance learners in less developed contexts.

The findings of this study also implicitly point to inadequate training of learning centre coordinators as well as tutors. Training of ODL part-time staff and the execution of regular performance appraisals are central to the provision of quality learning support services. If tutors recruited from junior secondary schools had been adequately trained in the tenets of ODL and adequately supported by ODL staff, their competencies would have been on par with their counterparts recruited from senior secondary schools. Informed and knowledgeable tutors who have good teaching skills increase the quality of learning support and ensure that learners have confidence in those appointed to guide them.

It is imperative that a training policy or tutor manual should be developed with clear guidelines that promote pedagogical dialogue with distance learners in order to improve academic performance. Furthermore, financial and appropriate human resources should be mobilised to enhance learning support initiatives. In other words, the challenges faced by distance learners from marginalised communities require a more political and economic commitment from various national and local authorities including the District Council, local political and traditional representatives. These stakeholders should to be made aware of the potential role of the distance education mode towards contributing to social development and empowerment of marginalised communities. An improved value of ODL awareness could lead to a political acceptance by national and local

government, NGOs, and the private sector. This stakeholder support would see prioritisation of ODL issues and financial support for the development of educational facilities and resources in underdeveloped contexts. Infrastructural development for information and communication technology (ICT) and libraries could contribute towards the promotion of a reading culture as well as advancing a knowledge society.

The existing policy documents (the Enrolment Policy, the Guidance and Counseling Policy, the Learner Charter and the Remote Learner Strategy Consultancy Report) that guide the delivery of learner support at BOCODOL do not currently recognise the uniqueness of marginalised communities because the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) - from which the college policies are derived - regards all citizens of Botswana as equal. The pitiable socio-economic status of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi requires a redress if social justice is to prevail. This therefore calls for policy changes and practical strategies targeting the improvement of education delivery to the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi. At a theoretical and practical level, a conversational learning theoretical framework which embraces empathy should be adopted to strengthen and inform the delivery of distance learning to marginalised communities in underdeveloped contexts. Besides the development of a policy strategy, managerial inadequacies in the delivery of learning support need to be addressed, hence the call for a practical strategy.

In order to develop appropriate strategies, which enhance best practice in the delivery of learning support in underdeveloped contexts the following is recommended:

- DE providers with distance learners from marginalised communities should ensure that a thorough needs assessment of learners is undertaken in order to produce learner profiles and thus identify learner needs and expectations. These are helpful in the design and development of appropriate learning materials and culturally sensitive learning support services.
- ODL policy makers and managers charged with managing distance learners from marginalised communities should be adequately trained through benchmarking with similar institutions in countries like India, Kenya, and Nigeria, where education provision for marginalised nomadic populations is attempting to address their needs and aspirations.

- Criteria for selecting learning centre co-ordinators should be refined and empathy should be a critical attribute to use in the selection. Roles and responsibilities of learning centre coordinators should be clearly defined and all recruited coordinators should be adequately inducted, mentored, monitored, and remunerated reasonably and timely, in order to sustain their morale and to enable them to be effective helpers in rendering learning, administrative, and personal support.
- The contents of the BGCSE curriculum should reflect aspects of the socio-cultural and geographic contexts of marginalised communities in order for distance learners from marginalised communities to relate easily to the new knowledge. Such an inclusion would enhance the learning process, as learners would be able to connect with learning materials that have relevance to their contexts. This is more likely to promote positive academic performance.
- Learning support should be comprehensive and be embedded in the learning materials. In other words, language and study skills support should be made an integral part of the learning materials. Such a step will help support learners to progress with fewer challenges in the study units.
- Internal and external quality audit checks currently undertaken at the regional centre should be extended to community study and learning satellite centres in order to promote accountability at all levels. This will encourage distance learners to be involved in the quality assurance processes and will give them confidence that systems are working towards improving their learning events. It will also encourage ODL practitioners to effectively support distance learners, as they will be aware that the process of appraising their effectiveness extends right up to distance learners. Such a practice would lead to best practice as processes and procedures are adhered to. The delivery of learning support services would address the needs and expectations of distance learners.
- A communication and academic literacy support programme targeting distance learners whose mother tongue is not English should be developed and delivered preferably through face-to-face contact. Such language support in the medium of instruction is critical for coping with independent study.
- Empowerment strategies through initiatives such as creating communities of learning through the establishment of learner management structures should be

promoted at all learning centres. This has the advantage of fostering cohesion (Perry, 2009) and as such instils solidarity and increased sense of belongingness. These aspects are important for retention and motivating learners to complete their programmes. Such initiatives are likely to encourage distance learners to take responsibility for their learning and to engage DE providers on policy aspects. To illustrate, the promises in the learner charter and the learners' handbook would be challenged and this would lead to improved support.

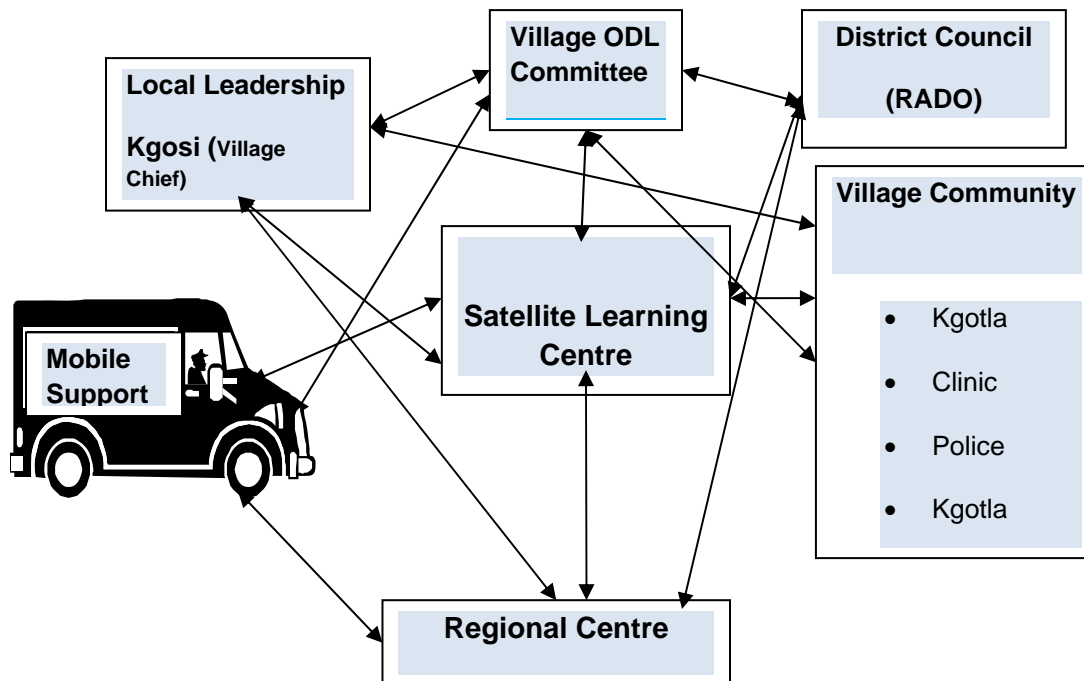
- ODL advocacy involving traditional leadership and sponsorship of distance learners from marginalised communities should be promoted through community engagement and meetings. This would help distance learners to be supported by their communities and family members. Participation of family members and local traditional representatives in ODL special events like open days and prize-giving ceremonies can also help in the retention of learners and marketing of ODL products and services. Relevant messages can be communicated to families and sponsors to market ODL and to counter any misconceptions about distance education and feelings of social exclusion.
- Political mobilisation, networking and advocacy should be carried out targeting key stakeholders like representatives of marginalised communities through the various media, in order to plea for infrastructural development that support the provision of enhanced quality learning support services through appropriate media and technology. I therefore recommend a learning support network strategy.

Learning Support Network Strategy

The learning support network strategy I recommend is presented in **Figure 6.1**. The strategy is meant to enhance ODL and learning support within a remote rural context. The strategy should take on board key stakeholders in remote settlements such as the traditional leadership in this case the Kgosi (Chief) and the political leadership represented by a local Councillor. The leadership in the person of the chief and councillor is strategic in spearheading development at the settlement. As head of the village the Kgosi is recognised by government and respected for his traditional control of the village and his community. He has a critical voice when it comes to issues of welfare

for his community and service delivery is likely to be made when he appeals to the relevant authorities. The Councillor, on the other hand, is the elected head of a political ward in which the settlement (village) belongs and has the political power. This person can propose and present motions on developmental matters and the needs of his or her village at District Council meetings.

Figure 6.1 Learning support network strategy



For leadership to take up ODL concerns, BOCODOL ought to advocate for and educate the village leadership on the value of education and the advantages of using ODL in remote rural context. The advantages of ICTs in distance learning if well articulated, by the leadership at village level could be scaled up by the relevant authorities. The leadership in remote rural settlements of a democratic country like Botswana have voting power and definite influence over the community on who to vote for, so Government tends to listen to their concerns and makes attempts at addressing them. The leadership in remote rural areas - if well mobilised - can convince private companies to demonstrate their social responsibility by enabling their communities to enjoy digital connectivity. It is through this leadership that the community should be engaged and

encouraged to elect a Village ODL Committee with the mandate of promoting distance learning by using advocacy, mobilising financial resources for the vulnerable members of their community, lobbying for ICT infrastructural development and improved radio broadcasting services, library and other academic support facilities in their settlement in order to enhance the experience of learning at a distance.

The Village Community shares norms and values that they transmit from one generation to the next. As a community the people have aspirations and needs that they endeavour to address mainly through the Kgotla system headed by the Kgosi. During a Kgotla meeting every member of the community has the right to speak and to make suggestions that can be adopted by the community. It is therefore crucial for BOCODOL to take advantage of the Kgotla meetings engage the remote rural communities through public education and in the process also promote ODL. When remote rural communities appreciate the role of ODL and the advantages it provides, they are more likely to promote and participate in ODL. They are also more likely to put pressure on their political leaders and demand that government put in place the critical infrastructures for ICTs, road and transport networks so that they are connected to major service centres. Actually, BOCODOL should engage the Botswana Telecommunications corporation and other stakeholders and explore possible appropriate ICTs for example; Wifi technology, given that studies by Hasson et al., (2003) that indicate Wifi as one technology that can open up new possibilities for rural connectivity in developing countries.

The uptake of ODL in remote rural areas can be facilitated by the communities constituting a Village ODL Committee. This committee can advance ODL advocacy mobile resources from various sources and support the mentoring and tutoring of distance learners from their community. An ODL committee constituted through the Kgotla chaired by the Kgosi is more likely to deliver on its mandate as it is supported by the community in its activities. As community representatives, the Committee is more likely to be consulted by government and to be used by ODL providers as part of consultation in the development of learning materials that are culturally sensitive and accommodate the values, needs and aspirations of these remote distance learners.

The District Council is a local government structure created by national government to deliver social services such as health and education to communities including those in far rural contexts. For remote rural areas the government of Botswana has employed Rural Development Officers (RADO) who take care of the basic needs of communities that have been relocated like the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi. RADO are therefore key stakeholders for ODL initiatives in remote rural areas.

The ODL provider through the Regional Centre should provide a mobile support vehicle for its remote service as was previously suggested by Lelliot (2002). Investment in such a mobile support vehicle could enable the provision of library support and media services critical for remote distance learners. In order to ensure best practice in the area of supporting distance learners from marginalised communities in similar remote contexts, I suggest areas for further research in the next section.

6.5 Recommendations for further research

Potential areas for further research by ODL practitioners include curriculum and policy issues. In the area of learning support, I suggest the following questions to guide future research:

- Do learner profiles and characteristics in distance education matter? A perspective for sustainable learner support strategies in less developed contexts.
- Can traditional counselling and guidance strategies used by marginalised communities be infused in tutoring distance learners? A personal and counselling perspective.
- Language support programmes for distance learners not proficient in the language of instruction for general improvement of academic skills: What models and what strategies would apply to marginalised distance learners?

Learning support can be more successful if the curriculum offering has relevancy to the targeted audience.

Curriculum issues are critical for development and can be politically sensitive. When the curriculum is not sensitive to the expectations and needs of marginalised communities, learning support efforts may not lead to improved academic performance. I therefore

suggest the following questions for further research in order to improve curriculum content and delivery in underdeveloped contexts:

- Whose curriculum? Whose agenda? Open and distance learning reality at the crossroads in attaining the national vision in underdeveloped context.
- Why a negotiated curriculum and assessment for marginalised communities? Implication for policy and strategy.
- Why design and develop self-directed learning materials for distance learners from marginalised communities? Issues that matter in enhancing success and throughput through ODL.
- How do remote distance learners and their communities engage in knowledge construction? Perspectives from historically nomadic communities.
- Do indigenous ways of knowing really matter? Lessons for delivering national curriculum through ODL to marginalised communities.

The deployment of an appropriate curriculum that addresses the needs and expectations of marginalised communities in a highly contested educational environment may not be successful if policy guidelines are unavailable. I therefore suggest the following research topics in the area of ODL policy:

- A policy for standards in the delivery of learning support: perspectives of deeply marginalised distance learners and tutors.
- Institutional obligations and learner rights: Policy perspectives for enhanced learner support for distance learners from marginalised communities.
- Institutionalising specialised learner support services for marginalised distance learners in an inclusive education approach: A reality or rhetoric.
- A dedicated policy for delivering education to indigenous and First People: Policy debate for democratic education and social justice.

In the light of the stated implications and recommendations, this study provides a foundation for future comparative research on learning support. ADEA (2002) has observed the absence of comparative research on learner support and indicates that there is little on the impact of learner support strategies. This study therefore contributes to literature in the sense that it has partly addressed the concerns raised by ADEA (2002) and the limitations on the available literature on learner support that Moore and Thompson (1997) and

Robinson (2004) have alluded to. Whilst these authors (ibid) agree that research and publication on learner support has practical value, Robinson (2004) at a global level further claims that most of the empirical studies on learner support lack theory and that some studies are unsubstantiated or lack validity when transferred to other contexts. This study has addressed the claim made by Robinson (2004) as it used Holmberg's (2003) theoretical framework and is also underpinned by empirical studies from both developed and developing contexts and a thick description of the distance learners' context was made in Chapter 2 of this study, in order to provide for trustworthiness and transferability to similar contexts. The perceived positive and negative perceptions and experiences of distance learners in this study provide fundamental lessons and contributions for best practice in the provision of learning support services generally.

The findings of this study are particularly important for distance education providers. A programme is regarded successful when it has had a positive influence on the lives of the targeted audience (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993). The learning support programme as provided by BOCODOL Kang region was perceived positively by 72.1% of distance learners who were participants of this study. The positive perceptions and experiences were attributable to the transactional presence of tutors and significant others. The personalised and affective support by enthusiastic and empathetic tutors and co-ordinators was highly valued by distance learners. Learners' intrinsic motivation to attain their educational goals was also a critical reason for academic success in the light of the policy and managerial flaws that frustrated the provision of quality learning support. The academic achievement of distance learners from marginalised communities exceeded my expectations as it matched that of distance learners in urban centres. I therefore, claim that when the quality of learning support is perceived and experienced to fit the purpose, needs, expectations and aspirations of the target audience, motivation to achieve goals set is increased and learners take responsibility for their learning and academic performance which eventually results in improved throughput.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has concluded the study on how distance learners from marginalised communities perceive and experience learning support. It summarised the six chapters and provided the significance and implications for policy and practice. I also made

