



## CHAPTER 1

### ORIENTATION AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction, Background and Context

One of the challenges in higher education is the ability to cope with the growing number of enrolments which face-to-face universities cannot handle due to factors such as limitation in terms of space. This crisis has led many universities to start teaching students in groups and to use face-to-face methods in distance education, leading to the development of ‘dual-mode’ or ‘mixed-mode’ universities. In the light of this huge challenge, the refinement of teaching and learning methods has become critical. The challenge, as defined in this particular study, is how to teach and ensure successful learning in distance education. The last 25 years have seen the expansion of ‘open education’ and ‘distance education’ in South Africa, as elsewhere, and this has truly impacted on the availability of formal education to those who are unlikely to have pursued it or were unable to pursue it in the past (Pond, 2002). Garrison (1999) believes that distance is disappearing in distance education! This surely indicates the existence of a further challenge in terms of the designing of worthwhile educational experiences for students in such institutions.

The overall picture of distance education (DE) since the early 1980s shows that it has become a common practice in all parts of the world. Distance education provides an opportunity to those who cannot or do not want to take part in classroom teaching and learning (Holmberg, 1995). There are various distance teaching universities that offer different kinds of study material, depending on their teaching-learning system. Yet, there is no universal or common agreement about the definition and characteristics of distance education (Holmberg, 1995; Evans and Nation, 1996; Daniel, 1997). One of the key issues in this debate is the lack of a clear distinction between ‘contact’ and ‘distance’ higher education in South Africa and other countries (SAUVCA,<sup>1</sup> 2003b). Some of the findings of the research undertaken in universities show that in most parts

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<sup>1</sup> The South African Universities’ Vice-Chancellors’ Association. In 2004, this association was replaced by Higher Education South Africa (HESA).



of the world, higher education is in crisis (DoE, 1994; Holmberg, 1995; Daniel, 1996). Despite this crisis, Ross (1996) observes that distance education came of age in the 1990s. Thus, there is scarcely a modern university that is not significantly involved in distance education, and many visionary educational leaders envisage a virtual university of the future, one that is much more cost-efficient and technologically-based (Evans and Nation, 1996; Trindade, Carmo & Bidarra, 2000). This has led to what Champion (2001) sees as turmoil in all the world's universities because of the rapid changes that batter, blast and silence stakeholders, as well as deny them time to think. He further argues that universities are not alone in this turmoil, as other organisations are also under pressure to change. Champion (2001) adds that the current turmoil in universities makes them more vulnerable than ever before, and that being productivity-conscious reduces the space for reflection and contemplation over what is best for universities.

DE as a developing educational delivery system has become a viable alternative to traditional classroom teaching. It is primarily intended to meet the educational needs of students prevented by work or family obligations from attending classes at traditional campus locations during class times (Minton and Willet, 2003). Distance learning inevitably has to change because education in general is being transformed, and because of pressures arising from the changing societal context. Pressures such as globalisation, resulting in competition from overseas providers, and the growing acceptance by students of the marketability of qualifications that have an international dimension, are increasing. This has implications for student support mechanisms, the content of learning programmes, and learning approaches, which will be both expensive and time-consuming to address, and which will require considerable institutional commitment in order to be successfully addressed. It is within this context and background that the University of South Africa (Unisa) introduced their tuition policy in 1998<sup>2</sup>. This policy was put in place to enable effective teaching and learning. This study investigates the views and experiences of the research population relating to the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy and its influence on teaching and learning.

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<sup>2</sup> The Unisa Tuition Policy was accepted by the Senate in June 1998.



## 1.2 South African Policy Background and Statement of Purpose

The current status of distance education (DE) and open and distance learning (ODL) in South Africa is mixed and variable at best or, at worst, in a state of disarray, owing to the different forces impinging on it. The traditional distinction between contact and distance education and the different modes of delivery is becoming increasingly blurred. Higher education programmes continue to exist on a continuum, spanning distance programmes at one end and face-to-face tuition at the other (CHE, 2000a). The situation is further aggravated by perceptions of the changing roles and functions that DE and ODL play in transforming society. It is not surprising that those who frame policy and make decisions continue to recognise the value and contribution of ODL and DE to society. The 1994 Commission on Distance Education in South Africa<sup>3</sup> concluded that, taken as a whole, distance education's contribution to the priorities of education and training in the policy framework is variously marginal, inefficient and, in respect of the values sought for a democratic South Africa, 'dysfunctional' (DoE, 1994). In concurring with this view, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (DoE, 1996a) also recommended that the envisaged single, dedicated distance education institution should not only offer programmes to large numbers of students, but should also provide coordination for the production of high-quality learning materials for widespread use across the HE system.

In South Africa, the period from 1994 to 2000 witnessed debates about the transformation of South African higher education, dealing especially with questions of access, quality and the redress of past imbalances. Such debates cannot be separated from the issue of expanding DE so as to meet the needs of the higher education system in South Africa. The debates provoked several policy discussions, subsequently leading to the development of several 'green' and 'white' papers. The Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation (DoE, 1996c) argues very strongly that DE has a crucial role to play in addressing the challenge of access and the quality of learning for South Africa's diverse student population. The Green Paper (DoE, 1996c) recommends that contact institutions must reorganise their learning and teaching by using well-designed learning resources, which will result in improved

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<sup>3</sup> Commission established by the Department of Education in 1994 to investigate the nature and status of distance education in South Africa.



quality and effectiveness. The White Paper no.3 on Higher Education (DoE, 1997c) reiterates that, based on principles of open learning, distance education and resource-based learning will be critical in addressing the challenges of access for the variety of learners. The vision of the White Paper no.3 (DoE, 1997c) is for a programme-based higher education system to be planned, governed and funded as a single and coherent national system. Furthermore, the NCHE (DoE, 1996a) states that in the new funding dispensation, a distinction must be made between the broad categories of contact and distance education. In concluding its investigation, the Technology Enhanced Learning Investigation (TELI) team acknowledged that future policy makers should be aware that the growth and development of distance education delivery methods would be the key feature of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (DoE, 1996b).

In 2001, the Council on Higher Education recommended that ‘a single and dedicated distance education system that provides innovative and quality programmes, especially at the undergraduate level, is needed in South Africa’ (DoE, 2001a). SAUVCA (2003a) also acknowledged that the traditional distinction between ‘contact’ and ‘distance’ modes of delivery was rapidly breaking down here and elsewhere in the world. Though the authorities and politicians perceived DE and ODL as one of the best tools to transform society through teaching and learning, such transformation was still suspect in South Africa. The SAUVCA (2003a) report recommended that the education sector and ministry should abandon the practice of classifying institutions according to ‘modes of delivery’, and that the new funding framework should, over a period of ten years, move towards a funding formula for programmes which not only acknowledge but also promote various modes of learning delivery. The implication of this is that ‘traditional’ residential institutions should be allowed to continue with ODL within the parameters of the recommendations in the report.

The vision for the transformation of higher education in South Africa is expressed in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) in South Africa (DoE, 2001a:46). The demand made in this document was that the restructuring of DE should ensure that it was well placed to contribute to the development and transformation of the higher education system, and that it should also play its role in social and economic development. Furthermore, the plan insisted that the transformation of distance



education required a focus on improving the quality of programmes and learner support services. However, the NPHE presented few new ideas on how teaching and learning in DE and ODL should take place in a distance education institution such as Unisa, as a result of which the above documents and reports drew much criticism from different sectors of higher education.

Though these documents and reports provide guidelines on what needs to happen at the macro-level, institutions are taking different routes to implement these guidelines at the micro-level.

While there is a growth of public interest in DE and ODL, uncertainty about their focus, aims, purpose and strategies is still a problem. Most institutions of ODL have therefore developed a number of policies to give a clear picture of their vision and mission. Tuition policies and learner support policies, for instance, are attempts to clarify the purposes and functions of the distance education institutions where they are framed, but the lack of a national policy on distance learning continues to hinder the formation of a clear national purpose for DE and ODL, thus inhibiting initiatives that are critical to transforming society. Such initiatives end up being excluded from the development and implementation of institutional tuition policies. In the document outlining a vision for South African higher education, one of the key elements introduced is ‘integrative policy development’. The implementation of tuition policies in distance learning institutions should afford decision-makers an opportunity to assess the benefits of a large social investment such as a dedicated distance learning institution.

In the next section of this chapter, a statement is given of the research question that this study focuses on.

### **1.3 Research Question**

A number of issues relating to developments in DE and ODL at a national and international level have become concerns for our institutions of higher learning. Globalisation, competition for students, technological advancement, competition between conventional institutions and ODL institutions, merging of distance

education institutions for cost-cutting reasons, academic concerns, transfer of skills, quality of learning, content of learning programmes, and the nature of the curriculum, are some of the issues that demand instant attention from the various stakeholders. The argument in this study is that the Unisa Tuition Policy reflects some form of a teaching paradigm, but that the nature of the paradigm, as reflected in stakeholders' views and experiences, is a matter of contention. In attempting to illuminate how the views and experiences of stakeholders are aligned with the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy, this study will acknowledge that the development of an institutional policy is a complex process, but will insist that efficiency and consistency in its implementation are of overriding importance.

The Unisa Senate accepted the tuition policy in June 1998, and subsequently expected it to be used by its different stakeholders, such as academics and instructional designers, for the benefit of the learners. Effective learning environments offer positive experiences for learners, as the latter construct their own learning experiences and knowledge base. This study scrutinises the operationalisation of the policy from the points of view of groups of stakeholders, including learners, in order to judge whether or not the Senate's purpose, as stated in 1998, has been achieved. The nature of the document and the extent and quality of its implementation are therefore central to this study.

The following critical research question is asked in this study: What are the various stakeholders' views and experiences of the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy?

The focus here is on interaction among selected Unisa participants and their experiences in the development and implementation of the tuition policy, but places these concerns in the context of a comparison of the views and perceptions of major stakeholders in policy formulation in distance education circles. The policy document can be found in Appendix J. Appendix B gives details of the research sub-question, the propositions explored in each case, and the methods used in generating data.

The post-1994 democratic era in South Africa has produced many changes in the South African educational landscape. In particular, the introduction of an outcomes-



based approach in primary and secondary schools has had a ripple effect on teaching and learning in higher education institutions. It is against this background that teaching and learning have become a collaborative affair, where the lecturer and learner contribute together to the discourse (Harasim, 1995; Jordaan, 2001; Prinsloo, 2003). Furthermore, Prinsloo (2003) acknowledges that the changes embedded in the tuition policy require academics to move from content-driven to learner-centred teaching. However, these developments have yet to be enshrined in a clearly formulated, helpful national policy. Furthermore, this study looks at the challenge of how the Unisa Tuition Policy was developed and implemented against the backdrop of the absence of a national teaching and learning policy. It is also critical to link the research question to the context of the government. The Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, remarked, in her address to parliament in September 2006, that of the undergraduate students who register for the first-year at universities and technikons in South Africa, only 30% obtain their qualifications within five years of enrolling (McFarlane, 2006). Unisa and Technikon Southern Africa (TSA) data are presented separately from that of other face-to-face institutions, as it is assumed that the average time for completion of a qualification for students at these two distance institutions would be longer than the maximum (five years) at predominantly contact institutions. The ministry makes references to the attrition rates at Unisa and TSA, which were as follows:

Of the 20 173 first-time undergraduates who registered at Unisa in 2000, 59% dropped out, 14% graduated by 2004, and 27% had not yet graduated. At TSA, out of the 17 625 first-time undergraduates who registered in 2000, 85% had dropped out by 2004, 2% graduated by 2004, and 12% had not yet completed by this time. It is worth noting that not much has improved in terms of undergraduate throughput rates during the period of operation of the Unisa Tuition Policy (1998 to 2005). The principal of Unisa, Prof. N.B. Pityana, noted in his address to the Senate in 2006 that 88% of enrolments are in courses with less than 300, and generate 26% of university income (Pityana, 2006). Within this, 43% have less than 20 enrolments.

Furthermore, the drop-out rate is of concern, as shown in the following list:

- Bachelor of Science: 80% - 90%;

- Bachelor of Arts and Social Science: 85% - 96%;
- Bachelor of Commerce: 77% - 87 %; and
- Bachelor of Arts, Languages and Literature: 83% of 2001 enrolments dropped out, and only 5.59% have graduated so far.

Mathematics, Philosophy and Mercantile Law have the highest number of students repeating. ACN101-M<sup>4</sup> and ECS101-6<sup>5</sup> have the highest number of students repeating continuously for about fourteen times, and ACN102-N<sup>6</sup>, IOP101-M<sup>7</sup> and ECS102-8<sup>8</sup> have students repeating continuously for about thirteen times. In this context, one has to question the lack of impact of the teaching and learning policy, which was accepted in 1998. Most academics felt that there should be training to help staff to implement the policy. The author makes further reflections and input in terms of the findings of this study in Chapter 5.

Permission was sought from Unisa to conduct this study (See Appendix D).

#### **1.4 Rationale for the Study**

The author began the exploration represented in this study by reflecting on some of the experiences that led him to develop an interest in educational policy.

#### **Personal and Professional Context**

The author joined Unisa as a learning developer after a period of 6 years working at a face-to-face institution. This move triggered his interest in how teaching and learning occur at Unisa, as against his views and expectations. The study also allowed him to reflect on his own experiences as a former Unisa student (having taken 6 years to complete his first degree) and now as a professional working at the same institution, with part of his responsibility being the implementation of the institution's tuition

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<sup>4</sup> ACN101-M: Financial Accounting, Module 1

<sup>5</sup> ECS101-6: Economics, Module 1

<sup>6</sup> ACN102-N: Financial Accounting, Module 2

<sup>7</sup> IOP101-M: Industrial and Organisational Psychology

<sup>8</sup> ECS102-8: Economics, Module 2





policy. Thus, part of the study has an auto-ethnographic component. Pratt (1992) shows that auto-ethnography allows people to describe themselves in such a way as to engage with the views that others have of them. This is part of the purpose here. The use of auto-ethnography in this study integrates the ordinary, mundane realities of everyday life into academic writing, and is a form of ethnography that blurs lines between the personal and the social, the self and others (Simpson, 1996:372). This represents the reflexive turn in fieldwork involving human study, where the researcher is repositioned as an object of inquiry that depicts a site of interest in terms of personal awareness and experience (Crawford, 1996: 167). The author's own personal experience therefore played a role in the choice of the topic and methodology of this dissertation. His six years of hard work to obtain his degree at Unisa, which was a considerable effort, always surfaces when he is engaged in some aspects of his daily work.

As a coordinator for Staff Development (Continuing Professional Learning) in the Bureau for Learning Development<sup>9</sup> at the University of South Africa, one aspect of the author's job description is to see to the implementation of institutional policies, such as the tuition policy, by relevant stakeholders such as academics. During his involvement in staff development training and programmes, he has always noticed a reluctance to implement the policy by those who have the responsibility to do so - that is, the academics. In order to be able to understand the source of this resistance, he needed to investigate how the Unisa Tuition Policy was developed, and proceed to an understanding of the implications for the implementation of this policy at an institutional level.

Although this study has been undertaken at an institutional level, the author believes that it will have implications for policy development at micro- and macro-levels in the distance education arena worldwide, and it was in this regard that he felt that this study on institutional policy relates to a number of other policy issues in distance education, both nationally and internationally.

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<sup>9</sup> Due to the merging of Unisa and TSA, and the incorporation of Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC) in 2003, this unit became known as the Institute for Curriculum and Learning Development (ICLD).

## **Research Context and the Knowledge Age**

We are living in an information and knowledge society which sustains the demand for ODL to service the frequent changes in skills and competencies required at work, and to meet the demand for an improvement in the global standard of living. In this, the 21<sup>st</sup> century, knowledge is generated at great speed, and scientific and technological advancements are shared through the free flow of information. In the White Paper no.3 (DoE, 1997c), the South African Ministry of Education welcomes the developments in distance education, as these are an indication of the responsiveness of South African HE institutions to changes in both learning and teaching technologies.

The author has observed that conflicts about policy can obscure the main focus in distance education, which is teaching and learning. In contrast, recent general developments in distance education are centred on the student's ability to understand, select and absorb knowledge, and are forcing distance education institutions to transform their usual structures and traditional academic policies. Demands are being made on institutions to integrate, implement and harmonise new processes with existing ones. They are being impelled to develop new modalities of teaching and learning. And, the concern here is whether or not the development of the Unisa<sup>10</sup> Tuition Policy is a valid response to the need to address innovation in teaching and learning.

## **Context of Models and Policy Framework**

The Department of Education has made it very clear, in several statements and documents, that the outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning should be used in our educational system. Despite the role of a tuition policy in helping to further this aim, there are very few initiatives by academics to implement this policy at Unisa. We have seen a new development in recent years, whereby students are now demanding distance education because of personal preferences, technological advancements, job demands, social contexts and the fact that they live in geographical

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<sup>10</sup> This policy was accepted by the Unisa Senate Committee in June 1998.



locations where they cannot access face-to-face university education. This is why we need to create learning experiences that provide for a variety of ways to learn. Simonson, Smaldino, Albright & Zvacek (2003) suggest that distance education is a dramatic idea which may change or even restructure the provision of education in more general terms. In accordance with this vision, we need to make the experience of the distant learner as complete, satisfying and acceptable as that of any other learner.

Gellman-Danley and Fetzner (1998) state that policies can provide a framework for operation (an agreed upon set of rules that can explain all participants' roles and responsibilities), whereby policies can be grouped into several operational areas, such as academic, fiscal, geographic service areas, governance, labour-management, legal, and student support services. When one looks at the already existing academic policies, most of them only emphasise issues relating to academic calendars, course integrity, transferability, transcription and evaluation processes, admission standards, curriculum approval processes and accreditation. It is very difficult for one to find policies that provide guidance about teaching and learning practices. This is the reason why King, Nugent, Russell, Eich & Dara (2000) conclude that the general policy analysis framework based on Gellman-Danley and Fetzner's model (1998) is effective and functional when analysing distance education policy, even though there may be more detailed and specific elements or components in a particular educational situation. The insights gained from this research could help future policy makers in DE and ODL to critically consider issues that could make distance teaching and learning effective.

Gellman-Danley and Fetzner (1998) developed two policy frameworks, namely their 'Policy Analysis Framework for Distance Education' and the 'Three-Tiered Policy Analysis Framework'. These frameworks are critical for decision-making by planners and managers in distance education institutions. However, these frameworks say very little about decision-making in teaching and learning in distance education. Even though the models may be used as an evaluation instrument in areas where the institution is doing well or badly in relation to its policies, they do not help in the attempt to evaluate the efficacy of teaching and learning at the institution.



Simeroth, Butler, Kung & Morrison (2003) suggest that future doctoral students could usefully focus on areas where there is a lack of research and policy framework: learners and learning, technology and the design of instruction models for distance education, faculty in distance education, administration, management, institutional contexts, and international contexts. This study takes up their challenge in relation to teaching and learning.

The process of creating a distance education policy, delegated to the relevant Council on Higher Education Task Team, should also benefit from this study through information-sharing on policy formulation issues. The Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2004a) commissioned the Improving Teaching and Learning Resources (ITLR), which dealt with institutional policy and practice. However, their brief was limited in that they only dealt with admission, access, selection, placement and enrolment of students in distance education. This study may assist statutory bodies such as the CHE, by giving them access to the views of various stakeholders in relation to an institutional tuition policy. It explores a wide variety of audiences in different settings, in order to establish the critical issues in the implementation of tuition policy, and to gather information about the policy development and implementation process. COL (2001:1) advises that in the developing distance education environment, policy must be constantly reviewed and adapted or new policies developed, in order to accommodate changes in practice. Continued policy development in the area of teaching and learning would most certainly help to advance and inform future distance learning policy development and practice in the context of contesting stakeholders.

The key findings of this research should be able to help academics, instructional designers and tutors to be aware of policy issues, in order to develop effective learning processes for distance teaching and learning. The findings should, furthermore, help practitioners in ODL (lecturers, tutors, managers and administrative, academic and professional staff) to focus on societal transformation issues from a tuition policy perspective. The voices of academics, lecturers and students, as contesting stakeholders, which remain silent for the most part in policy formulation, should be given a platform. This study further provides a platform for institutional policy discussions by management, academics, learning developers,

students and various other stakeholders, and it should be able to help institutions to identify gaps in policy and make proactive decisions.

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there have been major investigations into the operation, administration and management of distance education in South Africa. The 1994 Commission on Distance Education (DoE, 1994) was one of the most important of these studies. One of the reasons for instituting the commission was the vast scale of the South African distance education enterprise. Large numbers of students enrol at various South African distance education institutions every year.

Distance education policies are generally informed by particular theories. In the area of tuition policies, these relate to assumptions about whether the major responsibility for learning lies with the learner or the academic. This dichotomy is reflected at Unisa, where issues of teaching and learning raise serious debates on how academics teach and how students learn, and by extension to questions about the theories and guidelines that influence teaching and learning at Unisa. A review of practices at other distance education universities suggests that the development of a sound tuition policy and other related policies would enhance teaching and learning in this mode of delivery.

In the absence of national guidelines for teaching and learning in ODL, it is to be hoped that this study will serve as a ready reference for managers, academics and learning developers when they engage themselves in developing and implementing teaching policies at a distance education institution. This study suggests the need, in particular, to frame policy that looks beyond the issue of access to that of throughput rates. Unisa, for example, has a large body of students, but the throughput/graduation rates are very low. This study is likely to yield results that would be helpful in trying to improve the throughput rates.

In addition, this study explores the uncertainties surrounding how to implement teaching and learning policies, and attempts to clarify these uncertainties and contribute to knowledge formation in this area. The strengths and weaknesses in



academics' teaching practice are identified, as perceived by students, and advice on intervention is also given. In general, this study gives a practical overview of what happens when a policy has been developed and is to be implemented by various stakeholders at an institutional level.

Due to the fact that most publications on policies in higher education deal with issues such as admission, access and finance (costs), this study will contribute to the literature by providing more information with regard to the development and implementation of tuition policies.

In addition to the above, most studies on policy in distance education limit themselves to the development and implementation of national and government (external) policies aimed at regulating distance education (COL, 2005). COL (2005) reviewed policy development in ODL, and concluded that most of the research already undertaken focused on admission, funding, throughput rates, ICT policies and accreditation policies. Such policies focus on general issues in the context of experiences in both the public and private sectors (Perraton and Lentell, 2004). A number of authors have noted the lacuna in intense research in teaching and learning in distance education (Ross, 1996; Peters, 2002; DoE, 1994; COL, 2000). It is against this backdrop that COL advises on policy areas that need revision in both distance education and face-to-face campuses.

In brief, this study explores the process of the Unisa Tuition Policy development, in order to reach some form of understanding of how management, academics, learning developers and students view and think about this policy from the points of view of their respective roles. Furthermore, this study explores the extent of various roles played by Unisa stakeholders, in order to determine their willingness to attempt to implement the tuition policy. This study may also help in identifying any weaknesses or strengths that can be utilised by other distance education institutions in the development and implementation of a tuition policy.



## 1.6 Contested Meanings, Constructs and Terminology in Distance Education

What is distance education? What is open and distance learning? The history of distance education can be traced back to the early 1700s in the form of correspondence education, but technology-based distance education might be best linked to the introduction of audiovisual devices into schools in the early 1900s (Jeffries, 2002). Since then, the notion of distance education has been contested in terms of its definition and operation. One can identify three distinct periods or phases of distance education during this period (Moore, 1973, Holmberg, 1977; Peters, 1992). The first phase saw the use of a correspondence mode without any form of teaching in between. The second phase saw the development of the open university, where multi-media material accompanied printed study material. The nature of the third phase is not yet clear, but one notices that ICT was being frequently used as a medium for teaching or to supplement learning. Each of these three phases is supported by various theories of the nature of distance and open learning.

This confusion of theory results in a situation where one cannot clearly define the nature of distance education. Attempting definitions, as in the past, serves a useful purpose, by explicitly revealing differing perspectives and assumptions, but they do not amount to theories (Garrison, 2000: 5). Of course, they are valuable, as they may be seen as setting or identifying principles which may either explain present practice or suggest future practice. The international literature points to confusion in the attempts to define distance education and its actual practice from time to time (Anderson, 2001; Bääth, 1979; Evans and Nation, 1983; Garrison, 1999; Holmberg, 2001; Keegan, 1980). What helps to fuel the contention is the proliferation of new concepts and terms, such as open learning, open and distance learning, flexible learning, or online or e-learning (Moore, 2001b; Moore and Thompson, 1990; Moore and Shattuck, 2001). The literature points to a number of theories relating to definitions of these concepts, and these will be explored in Chapter 2. The uncertainties arising from the existence of these many competing and conflicting theories, together with various other loose elements which influence how teaching and learning happen in distance education contexts, exacerbate the difficulties experienced

in trying to develop an efficacious tuition policy in a distance education context, and clearly demonstrate the interconnectedness of the elements dealt with in this study.

### **1.6.1 Distance Education, Open and Distance Learning, and Open Learning Constructs**

The author has indicated in the introductory section that the task of defining DE, ODL and open learning (OL) is a challenging one. There are sources of debate relating to these concepts. Open learning may conceivably suggest an emphasis on open entry and access to learning opportunities, and a focus on removal of barriers to learning opportunities, whereas, on the other hand, it may mean flexible learning. The term denotes both an educational philosophy and a set of techniques for delivering knowledge and skills (Ragatt, Edwards & Small, 1996). As a philosophy, open learning implies greater accessibility, flexibility and student-centeredness, and places the learner at the core of educational practice. As a set of techniques, it is characterised by the use of resource-based teaching and training, often associated with the use of new communication media.

The term ODL is invoked when we want to address a whole range of related forms of teaching and learning, without concentrating too much on an exact delineation and definition. ODL eliminates the autocracy of the university as an institution where regular attendance of classes by the students is demanded (Simonson, 2000; Cyr, 1997).

The term DE often seems to suggest a concern for openness and flexibility, with a focus on the possibility of communication between participants in the learning process across time and space, this being brought about by the development of new technologies. UNESCO (2002) indicates that DE, as defined in different contexts, is becoming a more important part of the higher education spectrum worldwide. A further observation is that DE reaches a broader student audience than residential education, saves money and, more importantly, employs the principles of modern learning pedagogy. Hence, in some countries, public policy leaders are recommending the use of distance education as opposed to traditional learning.





In short, the concepts of OL and DE represent approaches that focus on enhancing access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners. This study supports this approach, and the term ODL will therefore be preferred in this text.

### **1.6.2 Conceptions of Learning**

There is an abundance of literature, with different points of departure, about the subject of ‘the conception of learning’ (Entwistle, 1997; Marton, Beaty & Dall’Alba, 1993). In order to understand the notion of learning as a process, one probably needs to tap the views and experiences of people involved in the process. Malen and Knapp (1997) explore the ideas surrounding deep and surface approaches to learning: the assumed relationships between ‘conceptions of learning’, ‘perceptions of the learning environment’, approaches to learning, and learning outcomes may be successful in creating a generalised description of the goals and values of the elite academic culture, but do not address the issues of the majority of the students within a mass system.

In most educational contexts, one cannot talk about learning without linking it to teaching. The author briefly looks at what teaching and learning are in the context of this study.

### **Teaching and Learning**

In learning, factors that influence the learning process should be of interest to teachers. As teachers, we should be aware that learning is not always the outcome of a particular form of teaching. Learning manifests itself in various ways, and it is different from person to person. For example, some students learn more from their classmates than their teacher, while some learn by doing and others by exposure. There are also students who learn by imitating. Learning is not an automatic consequence of teaching. Students have various views on what teaching and learning are. Some students view assignments as doing what the teacher wants. The performance of students is directly tied to the values and standards of the instructor.



In the author's view, it is extremely important that teachers are also constantly learning. Formal values are the means for visually expressing concepts and delineating content. In learning, the problem of relevance affects students' interaction and productivity. Teachers must anticipate where problems will go before presenting them.

### **Teaching and learning strategies**

Teaching and learning strategies become a tool for success when they are implemented in a system which implements and supports the process of teaching and learning as a 'team' or 'collaboration' between teachers and students, students and students, and students and the institution. We need to develop an approach in which teaching and learning strategies and a supportive and positive atmosphere prevail. In such an atmosphere and environment, there is recognition of the emotional, social and physical needs of students, so as to recognise, develop and nurture individual strengths.

Teaching can be defined as the interaction between a student and a teacher in terms of a subject (Davis, 1997). Davis further advises that if we want to be effective in teaching, we should employ some of the following teaching strategies:

- Training and coaching
- Lecturing and explaining
- Inquiry and discovery
- Groups and teams
- Experience and reflection

The above strategies can be applied across any setting and with any student, from the subject, setting and student's perspectives (Davis, 1997).

### **Defining Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: ODL perspective**

In higher education institutions, teaching and learning, research and community engagement have for some time been the core business. CHE (2002) argues that the

two concepts (teaching and learning) should not be separated, as they are both an interactive process that requires the active cooperation of both the learner and the teacher. Therefore, a definition of teaching might be the inspiration and facilitation of learning, while a definition of learning might be conceptual and cognitive change as a result of direct or indirect interaction with a more knowledgeable and experienced other (CHE, 2002:8).

Defining learning is complex - thus, it can be broadly conceptualised not only to include what happens in the classroom in terms of teaching and learning, but also the policies, plans, procedures and activities that higher education institutions undertake to create suitable learning environments. One of the determining factors in the success of teaching and learning in distance education is the extent to which the institution and the teacher create an opportunity for quality dialogue between the teacher, learner and learning materials. Therefore, this implies that we reduce traditional distance by using multi-media to support printed material, so as to increase the dialogue.

In view of the above, the main question in this study is: what are the views and experiences of various stakeholders in teaching and learning in distance education? Thus, it is also critical to hear the views and experiences of the various stakeholders around tuition policy development and its implementation in distance education, and the author briefly discusses this issue below.

Traditionally, distance education is seen as a method of education in which the learner is physically separated from the teacher and the institution providing the tuition. Teaching happens through materials that are provided by the teacher, which will necessitate students learning in a structured way, so that there can be effective facilitation of learning. On the other hand, learning may be undertaken by an individual or group, in recognition of the physical absence of a teacher.

### **1.6.3 Policy Formulation and Implementation**

Whether in the general public domain or specific to the field of education, policies are formulated from a variety of contexts, but are implemented by individuals or groups within organisations. Even with a number of highly detailed pieces of legislation

already in the statute books, South African educational policy is still being generated and implemented, both within and around the education system, in ways that have intended and unintended consequences both for education and its surrounding social milieu (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1996; Sayed, 2002). Research shows that those who implement policy do not approach it as being ‘neutral’, but instead come with histories, experiences, values and purposes of their own, and may have vested interests in the meaning of a policy.

Policies will therefore be interpreted differently against the background of their different experiences. The implication is that policy writers cannot control the received meanings of their texts (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1996). This means that parts of a policy text may be rejected, selected, ignored or deliberately misunderstood, and even that responses may be frivolous. In other words, when it comes to policy formulation, tension is unavoidable, due to the existence of conflicting ideologies amongst various stakeholders. In many instances, the effort to reform and transform distance education has been seen as an opportunity for government to formulate political statements. White Paper no.3 (DoE, 1997c) raises issues of equity and redress, development, quality, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability as principles for regulating higher education. However, the document is not explicit as to how these principles will be applied, as most of them involve further policy formulation and implementation. Hence, the need for the South African Ministry of Education to brief the Council on Higher Education Task Team<sup>11</sup> to formulate a distance education policy will impact on this study, since the process only began in 2002.

Two distinct modes of state policy relating to distance education seem therefore to have been generated, or are being generated, and will perhaps need to be implemented. How the implementation of these top-down policies is to take place is still not clear. And one may ask whether the tensions in implementation that we see in the centrally-driven policy resemble those that happen in the development and implementation of an institutional policy such as the Unisa Tuition Policy. In policy

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<sup>11</sup> Council on Higher Education Task Team was set up in 2002 to advise the Minister of Education on aspects of distance education in South Africa. The Report was released in March 2004.



development, one of the issues that come to the fore is why there is a need for policy development at all. This study refers briefly to this issue in the next section.

#### **1.6.4 Policy Gap**

There is a need to create opportunities for all distance learning participants to explore specific learning issues involved in their programmes. However, the creation of such opportunities may take time, and much remains to be done. The International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL: 2000) (1995-2000 report) makes a distinction between policy research in the context of ODL (of particular interest to policy and decision makers), and its application by practitioners. The report indicates that the widest gaps were found in the policy research context of ODL, while research units within a handful of open universities had produced a range of findings to guide ODL policy practitioners. The feasibility study stemming from this report confirmed that policy makers were still ill-served by existing research in ODL institutions. The policy gap may be filled by the development of distance learning policies in ODL (DoE, 2001a; Fay and Hill, 2003).

The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) has commissioned research into learner support practices in South Africa. This was motivated by SAIDE's own interest in various national policy documents. The findings show that there is little policy commitment to learner support at ODL institutions in South Africa, and very little has been written on the issue. Policy should offer an environment for the planning of effective learner support and implementation at the level of pedagogy and practice. Current policy documents do not open up this domain (Mays, 2000). In sharing some African experiences, Bhalalusesa (2001) argues that successful continuation of the burgeoning distance learning programmes in Tanzania will depend, among other things, on the extent to which policy makers at the macro-level are committed to continuing with the innovation. This growth occurred in spite of the absence of clear direction in education policy, which is termed 'educational policy lag', wherein central authorities have lagged significantly behind developments in praxis (Bashir, 1998).



Without continuous implementation of an education policy, much work remains to be done before the educational policy lag can be overcome. Johnson and De Spain (2001) state that some of the issues that need to be addressed in the framing of policy for ODL are:

- The use of ICT, both in ordinary and distance teaching;
- Evaluation, research and development, learning from experience, and the growth of competence from activities in flexible learning in higher education;
- Relationships between the fields of higher education and adult education; and
- The provision to universities and colleges of the freedom to satisfy new demands for the restructuring and adaptation of study programmes for users.

Sayed (2002) argues that the notion of a policy gap should be understood as arising from a mismatch between policy intention and policy practice and outcome. This is a persuasive insight. In South Africa, between 1994 and 1999, the new government formulated great quantities of policy, but was faced with almost insurmountable difficulties in matching intention with outcome, and rhetoric with practice.

## **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

In the South African context, a theoretical framework for a study of distance education is hard to find, as there is no effective national policy relating to distance education. There are several existing documents and position papers which need further development if they are to be used as a theoretical framework for distance education. To a certain extent, this is a reflection of an international trend, where the development of a theoretical framework for distance education still poses a challenge. Though distance education tends to proceed on a pragmatic basis, there is still disagreement as to whether or not the existing documents relating to distance education could guide research and practice (Moore and Kearsley, 2003; Moore, 2001a). On this issue, Garrison (2000:1) insists that, in order to build distance education into a long-term, credible and viable field of practice, we will need good theoretical frameworks and models. Gorsky and Caspi (2005:137) agree with this view. The existence of a theory or theoretical framework makes it possible to relate phenomena to one another, generate hypotheses, frame questions, and test them empirically. Despite many theoretical contributions to the field of distance education,



the questions that are not being asked are whether or not distance education has a sufficient theoretical foundation to move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and what the theoretical challenges that face distance education in keeping pace with emerging communications technology and new practices will be. The following has been used as a guide, in order to come up with the theoretical framework for this study: theories of distance education; models of distance education; historical developments and policy discourse; and the Unisa Tuition Policy.

### **Theories of Distance Education**

The author notes that historically, the definition of distance education has focused on the separation of the teacher and the learner. The growth of distance education as a field of study has led to an expansion of the theories and conceptualisation, which in turn has led to new developments. The most well-known and well-developed theoretical basis is Michael Moore's transactional distance theory, which emphasises three key factors to be considered in distance education: structure, dialogue and learner autonomy. This theory will be elaborated on later on in this study. The challenges facing theorists in the development of distance education are reflected within the current practice. Models and approaches need to be developed to address legitimate institutional questions, and to provide a vision and approach consistent with the values and goals of these institutions. Garrison (2000) claims that distance education must be challenged by theory, in order to be able to provide an insightful framework that will promote a new era of praxis. Whether or not this will be realised is doubtful, as the balance between theory and practice may not be easy to achieve.

The point of departure for this study is that the theory of ODL is problematic, and that the development and implementation of institutional tuition policies for ODL may therefore raise conflict and tensions. This difficulty is aggravated by the fact that in the term ODL seems to denote different concepts in different theoretical works. Keegan (1986) classifies theories of DE into three broad categories, namely:

- Theories of independence and autonomy;
- Theories of the industrialisation of teaching; and
- Theories of interaction and communication.



Each of these categories of theory comes up with a specific definition or consensus as to how distance education can be practised. However, the distance education environment is always changing. One sees a close link between these theories and what Simonson et al (2003) refer to as terms that we can use to conceptualise the production of distance education. These terms are: fordism<sup>12</sup>, neo-fordism and post-fordism. It is doubtful, however, that fordism has been able to respond to the needs of distance education stakeholders. In this context, the author reverts to Moore's theory of transactional distance. Moore's theory looks at three important factors in the learning process, namely the dialogue which happens between participants (instructor and learner); the structure of the elements of course design; and autonomy (elements of learning that are under the learner's control).

Simeroth, Butler, Kung, & Morrison (2003) believe that in this model, dialogue is reduced, whereas the structure of course elements predominates, and that this results in the autonomy of the learner being severely constricted. They also positively relate the autonomy of the learner to the extent of the transactional distance, and contend that the optimal blend can be achieved when the independence level of students can be witnessed. Saba and Shearer (1994) enhance Michael Moore's theory by saying that distance is not to be determined geographically, but instead is determined by the variety of transactions that occur between the learner and the teacher. In this regard, they conclude that as dialogue increases, transactional distance decreases. It is not the location that determines the effect of instruction, but the interaction between the student and the instructor. Regrettably, there is no consideration here of how this interaction happens in the teaching and learning situation, and whether or not a tuition policy can influence such interaction.

### **Models for Distance Education**

Models for distance education were developed as a response to fordism and other theories. Different characteristics of ODL that may be seen in some of the following models cited by Holmberg (1995) are:

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<sup>12</sup> Fordism: a term associated with a 'form of production' or 'production paradigm' which prevailed in post-war decades in Western industrial countries.





- Charles Wedemeyer's liberal, individualising, independent study;
- Manfred Delling's process model;
- Kathleen Forsythe's learning system;
- Otto Peter's view of distance education as an industrialised form of teaching and learning; and
- Michael Moore's theory of independent study, classifying education programmes according to the two dimensions of autonomy and distance, and the student-centred, small-scale approach.

There are many points of criticism one could raise in relation to the above theories, and these will indeed be raised in subsequent chapters of this study. Simonson et al (2003) claim that the following theories show the current thinking in ODL:

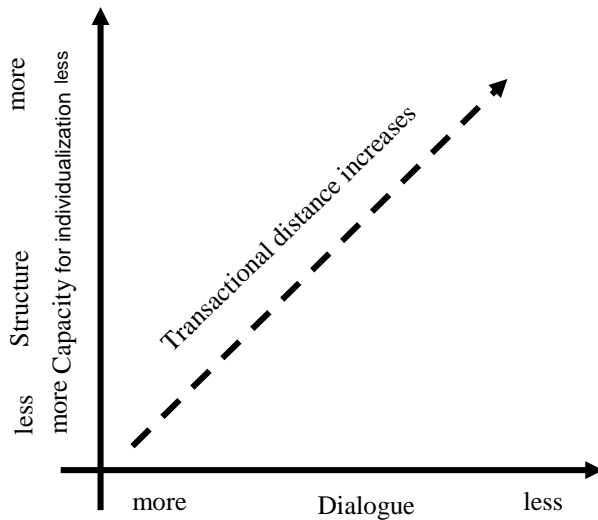
- Borje Holmberg's theory of interaction and communication;
- Malcolm Knowles's view of DE as andragogy;
- Hillary Perraton, who gives a synthesis of existing theories;
- Equivalency theory, an emerging American theory of DE; and
- Desmond Keegan, who provides a theoretical framework for DE.

The above theories of ODL are related to general theories of learning and teaching. In commenting on the relations among the above models, one can draw from Bääth's study in 1979, which concluded that models in DE should have at least some of the following features:

- Most models should be applicable to DE;
- Some models may be adaptable to DE in its reasonably structured form; and
- Some models can be applied with special measures.

This research is underpinned by the author's belief that ODL is an effective way of teaching and learning, which caters for various individuals in different contexts. Thus, the theoretical underpinnings begin with investigating and describing the theories of distance education. The author draws heavily on the theory of autonomy and independence of Michael Moore. The depiction of DE as intended to bridge the distance by and through various tools is emphasised for effective teaching and

learning. Therefore, throughout this research, the author makes reference to the theories which support and provide guidance in terms of effective teaching and learning in ODL.



Graph 1.1 Transactional nature (adopted from Moore, 1997).

The above graph simply shows how the variables of dialogue and structure determine transactional distance. In the diagram, one can see various elements used to achieve ‘transaction’ in ODL. The theory has two main dimensions: transactional distance and learner autonomy. The emphasis is on autonomy of the learner, in which s/he must be able to learn independently and autonomously. The transactional distance is not physical distance, but made up of two qualitative and continuous variables, namely dialogue and structure (Paulsen, 2003; Moore, 1993b). The dialogue between the teacher and the learner is not just an ordinary dialogue of interaction, but one with high positive qualities (Moore, 1993a; Moore, 1993b). The programmes with high levels of transaction increase the level and quality of dialogue. On the other hand, the programmes with low transactional distance show low structure and high dialogue (Paulsen, 2003). Therefore, when the level of autonomy of the learner increases, the transactional distance also increases. The transactional distance should assist us in designing courses that have varying dialogue and structure, so as to allow for different degrees of learner autonomy.



Saba (2007) describes transactional distance as an open system residing in a larger environment at the instructional system level, which is in turn part of a larger system in the hierarchical model. It is in this context that Moore says that transactional distance is only a pedagogical theory, and as such, it is a theory about teaching and learning (Moore, 2007). In terms of applying transactional distance among learners, we need to think of incorporating the new technology. Moore (2007) advises that with new interactive technology, we have the potential for dialogue between learners and a new form of learner (learner-to-learner autonomy aims at reducing the transaction distance for each student). Moore (2007) concludes that transactional distance theory is purely prescriptive and not descriptive - it is a summary of knowledge in one part of the field describing the teaching-learning process. The transactional distance theory has also assisted in promoting and grounding distance education as a field of study.

Peters (1998: 42) shows that transactional distance is not a fixed quantity, but a variable which results from the respective and changing interplay between dialogue, the structured nature of the teaching programme being presented, and the autonomy of the students. Thus, transactional distance theory provides a convincing explanation of the enormous flexibility of this form of academic teaching, and insight into the complex pedagogical world of distance education.

Tait (2003:5) affirms that, despite changes brought about by the ICT revolution, transactional theory remains the crucial framework of ideas, against which such assertions can be tested. Moore (2007) believes transactional distance subsumes concepts that are based on physical attributes such as electronics in e-learning, blendedness in blended learning, and wired or wireless telecommunications in online learning. Saba (2005:4) advocates that the theory of transactional distance should extend beyond the lower level system components and include fundamentals of psychology, sociology and education and other related areas of educational science. Jung (2001) suggests that in transactional distance education, more attention should be paid to learner-to-learner dialogue, which must be stimulated by constructivist philosophy and methodology, leading to a better understanding of learner autonomy, and a good response to what is an appropriate dialogue with the teacher, and what the appropriate course structures are.



The author suggests that the applicability of the variables of transactional distance to the conceptualisation of teaching and learning is grounded in the understanding of how to transact the distance between teacher and learner. Thus, in the pedagogical context, the transactional distance is grounded in the function of the dialogue and structure. Therefore, teaching and learning would be high on dialogue and low on structure.

The challenges to transactional distance should look at the demands on DE and ODL systems, so that we can inspire new developments inferred from the models and theories. The basis of the theoretical framework of this study must be viewed from the perspective that the relation between theoretical models and what happens in reality and the praxis of policy may be tenuous.

### **Development of Policy Discourse in Distance Education**

Taylor (1997) presents a political model of policy, based on a theory of discourse, which can be applied in this study. He believes that ‘discourse theories’ have enhanced the scope of critical policy analysis in a number of ways. From the perspective of discourse theory, policy making is viewed as ‘an arena of struggle over meaning’. This study will adopt this view and use it to explore the views and experiences of various stakeholders in the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy, drawing on how policy problems are constructed and defined, and on how particular issues come to be on the policy agenda.

This study is also situated in the historical context of the development of DE. In the 1960s, there was a shift from the concept of correspondence study to that of independent study or learning. Principles of equity, access and independent study were also related to self-directed learning and self-regulation. The desire to learn was thought to be under the geographical and temporal control of learners. In the mid-1960s, the structure of distance education was analysed, and there was an adoption of ‘industrial production techniques’ such as the division of labour, mass production and efficient organisation, in order to realise economies of scale and reduce unit costs. Teaching and learning were not thought to be issues of particular concern in this model. This trend has influenced the development of distance education to a large



extent until today. In the early 1970s, the inclusion of the notion of dialogue in the structure of independent learning became the norm.

The late 1980s saw a move towards sustained, real, two-way communication, as being at the core of the educational experience, regardless of the spatial separation of teacher and student. Theory became crucial in guiding the complex practice of the rational process of teaching and learning at a distance. It can be argued that any distance education theory must reflect both the predetermined and spontaneous nature of an educational experience, and that the evolutionary quality of the practice of distance education must be reflected in the theory. Practitioners are at the moment incorporating into their practice new and sophisticated methods of communications technology that allow for the creation of synchronous and asynchronous collaborative communities of inquiry, and the challenge for theorists is to adapt current theories to these new realities and, where appropriate, to create new theories of learning and teaching.

Garrison (2000) points out that major theoretical contributions to distance education have provided an analysis and interpretation of the current state of the field, but he does not review all those which have influenced the nature of DE today. In the last three decades, we have started to see evidence of the growth of a sound theoretical foundation to underpin praxis (Garrison, 2000). However, one cannot say that the current state of knowledge development is adequate to explain and shape new practices in ODL. Garrison (2000) further argues that in this century, we will see the emergence of the post-modern era of distance education, characterised by an increase in diversity and choice, made possible by new communication technologies. The new models may take the form of whatever evolves from the existing Open University model, and will probably complement and exist side by side with the traditional, self-paced, independent learning model of the industrial era. The challenge facing the field of distance education, therefore, is to construct theories addressing specific components and concerns of post-industrial distance education.

Higher education should be concerned about the value and quality of education, associated with a highly interactive and adaptable educational transaction. Models and approaches need to be developed which will address legitimate institutional questions and provide a vision and approach consistent with the value and goals of

institutions. This has not often been the case to date. Most theoretical contributions were until recently dominated by organisational and structural concerns (Garrison, 2000).

Perraton (1981) argues that education is related to power, and makes a case for the expansion of education as an egalitarian requirement, and for the importance of emphasising the need for dialogue as an essential component of the process. His hypothesis is that it is possible to organise distance teaching in such a way that there is dialogue. At the moment, distance education practice relies heavily on printed material, and new distance education theorists are starting to recognise the unique characteristics of text-based communication and its impact on the facilitation of learning outcomes in different ways and because of this, they must develop theories to meet the needs and concerns of new audiences. Ross (1996) remarks that too many of the newcomers are looking at distance learning through rose-coloured glasses, seeing it as the panacea for all the ills facing their educational systems today. Mass education has opened new possibilities for the rising generations to become members of their developing industrial societies (Evans and Nation, 1996). However, educational policy, including tuition policy, has largely remained in the domain of theory, and has not been translated into practice. The extensive work on the generation of policy documents has, for the most part, become the field of interest of closed circles in institutions, where small groups such as the management theoretically analyse national policy documents and produce interpretations of their own, thus becoming makers of policy in their own right, eventually producing documents that have little effect on the actual practice of academic staff of the institutions they purport to lead.

### **Unisa Tuition Policy**

The Unisa Tuition Policy investigated in this study was accepted by the Unisa Senate in June 1998 (See Appendix J). The policy starts by indicating that Unisa is a national asset and public institution dedicated to serving all of the people of South Africa, and to addressing the needs and challenges of our society. It then outlines the focus of the university, with its underlying principles. The next section discusses the philosophy and practice of ODL at Unisa, whereas the last section contains several guidelines on

tuition policy, on what is to be taught (qualifications offered, selection principles and criteria, curriculum principles), to whom, by what means, and by whom.

However, DE and ODL are complex practices, and teaching and learning cannot be satisfactorily contained in the categories used in the Unisa Tuition Policy document. In this context, there may be a need to review theories of teaching and learning in distance education. DE and ODL need the support of theory that is aligned to specific actions in educational practice seen as a transaction, and there is a need for theory-based policies that will define good practices of distance learning. Garrison's debate that a theoretical framework and models are essential to the long-term credibility and viability of DE and ODL as fields of practice supports this view (Garrison, 2000). He contends that ODL as a field of study should move from 'organisational' to 'transactional' issues if we want to make it effective. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which we could think of as the post-industrial era, transactional issues (teaching and learning) will predominate over structural constraints (geographical distance) (Garrison, 2000).

## **1.8 Research Design and Methodology**

When researching policy development and implementation, it is necessary to take cognisance of the fact that policy is framed on three different levels: the national, the provincial and the institutional. This research focuses mainly on the institutional level. Most importantly, this is chiefly a qualitative study, and different qualitative methods were used to look at the institutional and social processes of ODL and DE. The author used a combination of data gathering techniques, namely qualitative and quantitative, for this study. These were merged so as to provide an intensive analysis of the research problem. Of course, one acknowledges that, in spite of the strengths of qualitative research, there are some obvious weaknesses and pitfalls (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Bryman (1993) identifies some of the contentious issues in qualitative methodology, and justifies the use of the multi-method approach to data gathering. Some of these issues are highlighted in Chapter 3, which focuses on research design and methodology. The research design contains a number of complementary components, such as the analysis of policy documents and other strategic documents such as acts and papers; a literature review; questionnaires to elicit empirical evidence; semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders; the

interpretation and analysis of data with the help of Atlas.ti; the report on the findings; the drawing of conclusions and the making of recommendations. A more detailed elaboration of the research design is given in Chapter 3. Appendix C provides a synopsis of the chosen methods, and states the value of the methods and techniques used to investigate the critical questions.

The author has analysed the Unisa Tuition Policy in order to obtain the historical background and foundation of the policy, so as to check the policy statements against the realities of current practice. Furthermore, he has looked at some international trends in distance education policy development, and has interrogated the assumption that a tuition policy may be used as an instrument to enhance effective teaching and learning in ODL. The development of a tuition policy was tested against the notion of policy development, and the following questions were asked:

- (a) To what degree are such policies framed by the global context, and what are their objectives?
- (b) How well do the proposed strategies appear to be founded in reality?
- (c) How likely is it that the implemented strategy will lead to the envisaged development objectives?

Although one could say that the above questions can enhance policy development in ODL, if the issue of how we teach is not explored, it is likely that problems will arise.

## **1.9 Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses on the state of development and implementation of an institutional tuition policy in an ODL institution (Unisa) in South Africa. It is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of all of the conceivable issues with regard to a distance education institutional policy. However, this study believes that if the focus can be deepened to include an analysis of Unisa's policy-making and implementation in South Africa, one would have raised questions about the impact of institutional factors and other conditions that are affecting policy development and implementation in ODL at national and international levels.





Private distance education institutions in South Africa were excluded from this study, as the research was otherwise going to generate massive amounts of information. Although some of the literature is reviewed from an international perspective, it will only serve as a basis for the theoretical framework. Even though other institutional policies, such as the assessment policy and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy would have had an impact on the research findings, they were excluded from this study for practical reasons. The study focuses on the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy, but in some instances, generalisations were made to other institutions engaged in ODL practices. While acknowledging that other factors and practices outside the institution may have had an impact on the development and implementation of an institutional tuition policy, this study did not take them into account.

## **1.10 Organisation and Overview of the Study**

This study consists of six chapters, divided according to the different organisational themes.

Chapter One is an introduction, which outlines the background, research problem, rationale and context of the study.

In Chapter Two, the author provides a review of literature relevant to this study and explains the significant concepts in the study. He also discusses the theorists who are regarded as the founding fathers of distance education and their relevant theories. The chapter also examines the development of distance education in the 1980s, and highlights policy formulation and framing in open and distance learning, with a focus on policymakers and managers. Within this context, one accepts that policy formulation, development and implementation create tension, as there is very little agreement within policy studies about what constitutes implementation (Fritz, 2001: 53).

Chapter Three provides a detailed plan of the research methodology and design, as well as a description of the context of the University of South Africa as the focus of this study. This includes an overview of the history and development of the University



of South Africa. In detailing the research methodology, the author describes the qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques which gave rise to the data on which the analysis is based.

Chapter Four presents the data analysis and interpretation. This chapter explains the data patterns against the background of the first research question, as given in Chapter 1. The focus is on the presentation of data according to collection techniques. The author provides descriptions of the setting, and delineates the analysis of the data collected through the qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. He concludes by looking at the impact of various acts and documents in terms of policy development and implementation in higher education in South Africa.

Chapter Five presents the data analysis in terms of its relevance to the critical research question. It proceeds to present the overall findings of the study in relation to the theoretical framework. It is in this chapter that the views of the various stakeholders, as described and interpreted with the aid of Atlas.ti software, are presented.

Chapter Six is the final chapter, and it presents some of the overall conclusions that one could draw with regard to distance education institutional tuition policy development. It also makes recommendations with respect to distance education institutional tuition development and implementation. It is in this chapter that the author attempts to look at the construction and foundation of distance education tuition policy development, policy significance in terms of distance education development, and contested spaces for policy development in distance education. He also draws some conclusions with regard to the broader impact of institutional tuition policy on distance education. Furthermore, he shares some of the experiences he had and lessons that he learned during this study, which might have an impact on future studies and further developments in terms of distance education policy.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the available literature in distance education, with regard to distance education tuition policy development and implementation at an institutional level. Naturally, it would be awkward not to acknowledge that there are different views on different aspects of distance education. Distance education is a multifaceted subject, and can be viewed from different perspectives. The literature reflects various positions and contentions regarding what the realities of distance education practice are, and this impacts on how we develop and implement a tuition policy in a particular context. This literature review intends to interrogate the various definitions and conceptualisations of distance education from various perspectives, with a view to coming up with a multi-dimensional view of institutional policy development and implementation. It therefore examines the different definitions of distance education, or the diverse paradigms of distance education practice, so as to determine the factors that are important in developing and implementing a distance education institutional tuition policy. In this regard, the literature reviewed deals with the various theories of distance education; the development of distance education over the last twenty years; education, teaching and learning theories; institutional policy development; various policy formulations; and framing in distance education.

There are certain salient characteristics in the literature that may be expected to influence the development and implementation of an institutional tuition policy. This literature review was therefore organised around the following sub-themes: definitions of distance education; the chronological development of theories of distance education; teaching and learning theories in education; theories of learning with regard to distance education; and trends in distance education policy development and implementation at an institutional level.

Despite the evidence that ODL is a fast-growing field internationally, and the fact that literature investigating the implementation of policies in ODL is starting to emerge, literature in this field is still limited. In most cases, such literature fails to discuss the issue of policy formulation and implementation in distance learning (Meyer, 2002; Perraton and Lentell, 2004; King, Nugent, Russell, Eich & Dara, 1999). While literature regarding policy in distance education remains problematic, there are still some shared views about the benefits of distance education (Marland, 1997; Lockwood, 1995; COL, 2000).

There is a great deal of debate about what distance education is and how it should be operationalised in relation to various theoretical frameworks. However, the literature suggests a variety of definitions of distance education (Keegan, 1996; Holmberg, 1982; Evans and Nation, 1989). Some of the beliefs and theories have benefited distance education, in that one can develop further from them. However, the beliefs and practices on which distance education is founded are very diverse, a fact which is confusing to practitioners and policy-makers. In the next section, the author focuses on the different definitions of distance education.

## **2.2 Defining Distance Education through various Development Phases**

In accordance with this common practice, it is appropriate for this study to look at the definitions of distance education from a longitudinal perspective, tracing developments in thought on this topic from the traditional to the more recent. These definitions help in reflecting the development and practice of teaching and learning in distance education. However, such definitions lead to confusion if one attempts to use them to define what distance education is. There have been attempts to rely on comparative literature in defining what distance education is (Peters, 1998; Phipps and Merisotis, 1999). The Commonwealth of Learning (COL, 2000) asserts that the issue of the definition of distance education pervades the literature in this field. COL (2000) emphasises that there is no one definition of open and distance learning, but rather, there are many approaches to defining the concept, which may be done by looking at a variety of features. One may find a variety of terms describing the type of educational provision that involves some kind of an open learning approach, and that uses open and distance learning techniques.

Although the literature dealing with the definition of distance education is extensive (Keegan, 1998, Holmberg, 1982), it can be usefully organised into three distinct phases:

### **The Early Period in the Development of Distance Education**

It was around late 1800 and early 1900 when distance education as a form of obtaining knowledge outside the normal classroom was acknowledged. Although this helped in trying to formalise distance education, its very conceptualisation was problematic in terms of an acceptable definition. The problems were not only compounded in defining it, but also in the various theories that are used to practise it.

The following are the three phases during which distance education began to gain recognition:

#### **Phase One**

This phase began in the mid 1700s and lasted until the late 1800s. It was dominated by the correspondence mode (Bääth, 1979; Holmberg, 1977). The emphasis was on printed material and study guides. This is what Moore and Shattuck (2001:2) describe as correspondence education, which they term ‘first generation’ distance education. Correspondence education was regarded as a breakthrough, despite the lack of an instructional element in the system.

#### **Phase Two**

The dawning of the Open University in the UK in the 1960s led to the second phase. During this phase, multi-media facilities and materials (including the use of audio cassettes, radio, telephones and teleconferencing) were added to the more conventional printed materials and study guides. However, the weakness of the second phase was still the fact that instructional elements were non-existent. Furthermore, what compounded the problem was the myth that the use of multi-media would enhance effective learning.



### **Phase Three**

The development of advanced information and communications technology (ICT) led to the current phase, in which it is possible to observe the domination of different electronic technologies, networked by means of computers (Holmberg, 1995: 47-52). Rautenbach (2005:18) believes that this phase of distance education is still in its infancy and is yet to mature and develop.

However, some theorists have attempted to supply an overview of the entire process in the development of distance education, from its inception until modern times, and to design an overall framework according to which distance education may be viewed (Garrison, 1989; Keegan, 1986; Peters, 1983; Moore, 1993a; Sparkles, 1983). This school of thought will be briefly discussed in the next section.

#### **2.2.1 Traditional to Modern Definitions of Distance Education**

Literature defining distance education can be separated into that which relies on the usual, literal sense of the word 'distance,' and that which uses the term more metaphorically (Holmberg, 1977; Keegan, 1993; Peters, 1992; Moore, 1973). The traditional notion of distance conjures up the geographical separation of student and teacher. The most prominent author to use the more imaginative approach was Holmberg (1977:9), who thinks of distance as that which separates a teacher and a student, and concerns himself with the role of the institution in adding on to the learning process. The unfortunate weakness in his consideration is that he does not indicate what guidance and tuition from the institution should occur.

Another prominent voice in defining distance education is that of Otto Peters. He adds to Keegan's industrial metaphor (Keegan, 1986), by describing distance education as a way of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes based on different levels of labour divisions and institutional principles (Peters, 1992). He sees the need for an extensive use of technical media to produce high volumes of quality teaching material which will reach vast number of students, wherever they may be (Keegan, 1980; Keegan; 1986:41). Peters' definition of distance education is tied to his theoretical analysis,



which sees it as a form of indirect instruction imparted by media such as written correspondence, printed materials, teaching and learning aids, and audiovisual aids such as radio, TV and computers (Stewart, Keegan & Holmberg, 1983). Although this definition emphasises the planning and organisation to be done by the distance education institution, it does this against the background of being sensitive to the economics of the provision of education. In this model, quality teaching and learning may be sacrificed to economic imperatives. Another weakness here is that it makes teaching and learning look very technical, and seems to ignore the fact that learning is a human process.

Moore (1996) does not help when he adds to the complexity in viewing distance education as an industry, by placing an emphasis on production. Moore (1996:2) defines distance education as planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching, and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, and special methods of communication via electronic and other media. Thus, the communication between the educator and the learner must be facilitated by the use of print, electronic, mechanical and other devices (Moore, 1973:664; Keegan; 1990b:13). Moore (1993b:22) regards distance education as ‘the universe of teacher-learner relationships that exist when learners are separated by space and/or by time’. He writes about three kinds of separation: the separation of teaching and learning behaviours; the separation in time and space; and the separation involved in the use of technical media to facilitate two-way communication (Moore, 1996). His views are related to Otto Peters’ theory of industrialisation. However, there may be more than these three essential elements that he identifies in terms of learning and teaching in distance education.

Later, in accordance with this system of thought, Moore and Kearsley (1996) define distance education as a planned learning event occurring in a different place to teaching. In distance education, one needs special techniques to do course and instructional design, as well as clever communication devices to deliver the teaching. These should be organised by the institution in such a way as to make them effective. The pitfall in this model is that it assumes that the institution can easily organise course design and instructional design, and provide devices for communication between teachers and students. Even though one sees the shift in Moore’s original



definition of distance education, one also sees that he has complicated the issue. Mugridge (1991) defines distance education as a situation in which there is normally a separation between teacher and learner, and the study guide, telephone, etc can be used to bridge the physical gap. However, this definition does not take cognisance of the time factor and whether or not such communication devices are available. Furthermore, one can see the influence of what he believes is open learning, when he says that open learning should provide whatever educational opportunities are needed by anyone, anywhere and at any time (Mugridge 1991).

King, Young, Richmond & Schrader (2001) note the lack of a precise vocabulary with which to describe the domains of distance learning and distance education. They advocate the use of a single definition of distance learning, in order to make progress possible. However, this impractical suggestion would, in the unlikely event of its adoption, tend to nullify the rich field of theory in this domain, which springs from a number of different perspectives and therefore relies on a number of varied definitions. King et al (2001) advise that distance education should be regarded as formalised, instructional learning, where the time/geographic situation constrains learning by not affording face-to-face contact between student and instructor.

It is evident from the above that a definitive description of distance education has eluded theorists so far. What compounds the problem is our general assumption that when we talk about distance education, we understand what we are talking about. It is also evident that the common idea of distance education is loaded with concepts such as self-study, correspondence, independent study, distance learning and distance teaching. Some of these concepts are loosely translated and used without acknowledging that they may mean different things in different contexts. What arises from the literature review, then, is an indication that distance education is an important form of learning, even though the term means different things to different people, and that theorising about it can be rendered useless if it is not contextually based.

In the shifting debates concerning what distance education is, there are some theories that are representative of paradigms that shape the debate. Also, and more simply, it is evident that each author tries to justify his/her theoretical foundations by making





reference to the particular model or models of practice in which he/she is working, and therefore, that the theories of distance education are influenced not only by developments in the field of general theory, but also by the development of distance education as a field of educational practice.

### **2.2.2 Development of Distance Education as a Field of Study**

Keegan (1991) divides the study of distance education into four stages. The first stage is the study of terminology, and it was only after 1978 that there was general agreement that the field of study be referred to as distance education. In 1982, in Vancouver, the International Council for Correspondence (founded in 1930) became the International Council for Distance Education. Since then, it has been aligned with and has promoted the name of distance education. The second stage is the study of definitions. In the early 1980s, there was confusion about the definition of distance education, and this hampered developments in this field of study. It was only in the late 1980s that the problem with regard to the definition was solved, and there was general agreement that the study of the field of distance education should be endorsed. It was only in the 1990s that we started to see the precise nature of the field called distance education, and to distinguish the study of distance education from the study of other fields within the discipline of education (Keegan, 1990a).

In reflecting on the development of literature in distance education, one can see that the early literature concentrated mainly on writing about theories of distance education. In the late 1980s, there was a new energy directed towards the development of distance education. Daniel and Stroud (1981) regard this period as being of primary importance to the actual practice of distance education. The theories relating to the development of distance education practice were still characterised by differing views, which were related to what the theorists saw as the function of distance education. Daniel and Stroud (1981) believe that the unique function of distance teaching universities should be to reach out to all students, locally and abroad, and to provide tuition for them.

During the 1990s, there was an incredible growth in the conceptualisation of distance education, and in South Africa, we saw the enthusiastic introduction of ICT into the

delivery practice. Consequently, while traditional distance education models emphasised the independence of the learner, in the 1990s, there was a shift in the focus from the urge to define the phenomenon in terms of the separation of the teacher and the student, to pedagogy and the role of ICT. (The introduction of ICT in distance education and its effectiveness is a debate on its own, which is not covered by this study.) Evans and Nations (1989:25) claim that current debate in distance education circles seems to be largely pragmatic and obsessed with the issue of technology, especially in terms of matters such as the delivery of materials to students, hardware necessary for the delivery and receipt of materials, and the mechanisms whereby staff and students contact one another. They believe that distance education has been able to rise to new challenges, reshape itself to meet social changes, and transform itself in accordance with new contexts (Evans and Nations, 1989: 7).

Further developments in the field of ODL will largely depend on the policies and initiatives of individual institutions. State education policymakers will have to decide whether they want to exploit distance education and distance teaching as a stage in a more explicit educational strategy, or whether they want to leave it to the actors in the current education market to handle this development (Grepperud, Stokken & Toska, 2002). Hammond (1990) suggests that we need to look at the nature of policy implementation, the educational context of policy, the basis for teaching, and the process of change. In order to do this, one needs to look at how distance education theories influence actual practice.

### **2.3 Theories of Distance Education**

Literature falls short in that it has, over the years, devoted so much time and effort to describing what distance education is, and very little to the effectiveness of teaching and learning at a distance (Keegan, 1991; Keegan, 1998; IRFOL, 2003). This generates the believable and acceptable view that if we can describe distance education, we can effectively use it for the purpose of teaching and learning.

Theories of distance education can be classified according to distinct periods. Each of these phases generally overlaps with, is critical of, and builds from, the previous ones.



Keegan (1983) conducts an analysis of the writings of great distance theorists whose views started to shape distance education theory in the 1960s. Among the prominent ones are Charles A Wedemeyer, Michael G Moore, Otto Peters, John A Bääth, Börje Holmberg and David Stewart. Since the 1960s, there have been demands from various sectors to build theoretical foundations for distance education practice. These demands were based on competing interests and perspectives, each fighting for domination in terms of developing distance education in the USA and Europe. The literature is therefore limited, in that the debates were grounded in practice in the USA and Europe. The literature relating to other developed and developing countries is sparse. In the next section, the author will refer to some of the literature on theories of distance education.

In order to be of practical use, research into distance education should provide the foundation on which structures addressing the need for, purpose of, and administration of, distance education can be erected (Keegan, 1983). A theory of distance education must provide a base on which all relevant decisions, political, financial, educational or social, can be taken (Keegan, 1983). Moore (1973) seems to be more interested in theories than in practice, when he suggests that we need to identify various critical elements of distance education, so as to start building a theoretical framework. This means that the theoretical framework would be the end product of research, not sound practice informed by theory. Wedemeyer (1974) believes that the failure to fully develop the theory of education contributes to the underdevelopment and under-recognition of distance education. This view is critical when the development of the theory of distance education is recognised as the chief issue for debate in this field.

Existing literature on distance education has been based on theories developed over a number of years, yet the literature does not suggest how to link theory and practice. Perraton (1988:13) finds this unproblematic, and believes that distance education has managed very well without any theory. On the other hand, Keegan (1983:3) proposes that a theory of distance education - which could eventually be reduced to a phrase, a sentence or a paragraph - could provide the touchstone against which decisions could be taken with confidence (Keegan, 1983).

The author has already indicated in his review of the literature that the many theoretical positions available to us can be organised into three categories as follows:

### **2.3.1 Theory of Autonomy and Independence (Late 1960s and Early 1970s)**

Current theorising in distance education is largely devoted to descriptions and critiques of these theories (Perraton and Hulsman, 1998; Peters, 1992). The contributors are Rudolf Manfred Delling of the Federal Republic of Germany, Charles A. Wedemeyer of the USA, and Michael G. Moore of the United Kingdom.

Delling (1996) introduced the term ‘independent study’ to define and classify distance education at a university. He sees distance study as an artificial signal carrier which shortens the distance between the teacher and the learner. Therefore, the role of the teacher and the educational institution is reduced to the minimum (Stewart, Keegan & Holmberg, 1983).

Wedemeyer (1974) says that independent study comes in two forms, namely that involving internal students and that involving external students. He argues that independent study, for an external student, must be based on democratic social ideals and a liberal educational philosophy. This means that no-one must be denied education because s/he is poor, geographically isolated or suffering from ill health. The critical point of independent study should be that it is self-paced, individualised, and offers freedom in terms of goal selection. Learner autonomy is meant to allow for interaction with learning materials. This implies that learners must select goals and activities that will help them achieve their objectives. In order to justify his theory of independent study, Wedemeyer tries to distinguish open learning from distance education, by listing the characteristics of independent study (Wedemeyer, 1974). According to him, four elements are important in any educational situation: the teacher, the learner, the communication system and the content. This theory emphasises autonomy and independence, although it may be thought to do so at the expense of ignoring effective teaching in distance education, and by placing too great an emphasis on the learner’s autonomy and independence.



Moore argues that independent study means ‘apartness’ and ‘autonomy’ (Moore, 1972; Moore, 1973; Moore, 1974). His notion of independent study relates closely to two critical elements: his allegiance to democratic social ideals and to a liberal educational philosophy. The first suggests that the learner is autonomous to a greater or lesser extent, and a teacher modifies the concept of teaching to suit this autonomy and the distance mode. The second refers to the method of communication needed by the learner to cope with distance education. These elements are characterised by individualisation and dialogue. In the theoretical situation, we need the variables of ‘apartness’ and ‘self-direction’ in order to be able to develop a theory of distance education (Moore, 1974). Moore’s theory is based on liberal principles, and the criticism is that it is perhaps very difficult to practice. To sum up, his view says that all people must be given an opportunity to learn, despite their status in relation to factors such as poverty, regional isolation and physical weakness. Independent study, according to him, should at all times be self-paced, individualised and goal-free, and the institution must therefore not limit students’ freedom to learn (Stewart, Keegan & Holmberg, 1983). Although the contribution of this theory to distance education is enormous, it reduces almost all learning to the sole ‘responsibility of the learner’. It does not emphasise or promote the active role of the teacher, instructor or facilitator of learning in distance education.

Moore (1974) ramifies this theory by adding to it what he terms ‘transactional distance theory,’ which postulates that distance is a pedagogical/andragogical phenomenon which must be addressed by design, curriculum, forms of communication and interaction, and the appropriate management of distance education programmes (Moore and Kearsley, 1996:200; Moore and Shattuck, 2001:9). Moore’s (1972) theory of transactional distance is based on three major variables: dialogue or interaction between participants; structure or elements of course design; and autonomy or elements of learning that are under the learners’ control. He argues that the transactional distance becomes small if the structures are fully utilised, which results in a decrease in the student’s autonomy. The optimal blend can be achieved when we are aware that student autonomy and transactional distance are positively related. This theory can be most obviously criticised for oversimplifying the relationship between dialogue and transactional distance.



### **2.3.2 Theory of Industrialisation (throughout the 1960s and Early 1970s)**

Otto Peters can be regarded as the founding father of the theory of industrialisation. His basic argument is that using conventional instructional theory to teach distance education has failed, as it is not producing any results (Peters, 1983). He recommends that distance education should be compared to the industrial production of goods. He believes that distance education is the most industrialised form of education, and we must therefore develop an industrialisation theory to define it. The difference between distance education and conventional education can be found in the choice of content, methodological and media structures, and personal and social changes. Peters (1998) concludes that we need an industrial theory for distance education, as conventional education cannot meet the needs of society.

Peters (1998) argues that conventional ways of teaching at a distance are not successful or productive, and sees successful distance education as an industrialised form of teaching grounded in technically formulated forms of communication. The author does not totally agree that all forms of distance education can be industrialised. His view suggests that operating a successful distance education system would be like operating a successful factory - it would be predominantly a technical operation. The production and distribution of learning materials can be industrialised, produced in bulk and dispatched quickly, but one cannot simplify the process of teaching and learning in the same way as an industry. Teaching and learning are complex human activities, and this human complexity must be taken into account when theorising about them.

### **2.3.3 Theory of Interaction and Communication (Late 1970s and Early 1980s)**

The main contributors here are Börje Holmberg of Sweden, and later of the Federal Republic of Germany, John A. Bääth of Sweden, and David Stewart of the United Kingdom. Recently, we see Kevin C. Smith of Australia and John S. Daniel of the UK.

Holmberg believes that the theory of distance education must be grounded in didactic dialogue, the important feature of which is learning by individual students (Holmberg,



1981). All of the other issues in distance education are only important if they support individual learning. Didactic dialogue can be real or simulated. He outlines the basis on which didactic dialogue needs to develop, and suggests procedures for effective learning facilitation. His theory of distance education is that it is a guided didactic conversation between the institution and the student. This theory would perhaps have been strengthened if it did not only focus on the individual learner, but also took the needs of target groups or communities of practice into account.

### **2.3.3.1 Two-way Communication in Correspondence/Distance Education**

Bääth provides critical input with regard to two-way communication in correspondence education (Bääth, 1979). He endorses Wedemeyer's view of distance learning as an individual act, and not a social interaction (Bääth, 1979). Bääth's analysis of distance education is in terms of teaching models. He believes that in order to help adult learners in distance education, we must define their learning goals, select appropriate learning materials, help with problems and difficulties, and evaluate their progress. In general, he introduces and critically emphasises the role of the tutor in the distance education system. He proposes that the theory of distance education should be based on two-way communication, in terms of which learning materials must have activities and self-check tests, and provision must be made for communicating with students via mail, computer and telephone. Although this study agrees with the importance of communication, one cannot reasonably reduce the process of learning and teaching in distance education to two-way communication. The author believes that two-way communication is a technique, not an end, and that its purpose should be to promote the proper end of distance education, which is deep and reflective learning.

### **2.3.3.2 Continuity of Concern for Students Learning at a Distance**

One can clearly see the influence of dealing with the managerial task of providing support to many students in distance education in David Stewart's theory (Stewart, Keegan & Holmberg: 1983). His theory of distance education can be seen as being concerned with continuity for students learning at a distance. According to him, the provision of education by means of material packages cannot in itself be thought of as



teaching, because the teaching process is complex and complicated. Therefore, support to students in distance learning is crucial. The absence of immediate feedback and benchmarking is important to him in considering the nature of support to be given to the student. The motives behind his theory of distance education can be sensed in his interest in developing new communication technologies, and in catering for the dropouts and left-outs of residential universities and conventional teaching. His main criticism is that no matter how well developed materials are, they may not cater for all the demands of interactivity in distance learning.

Even though continuity in distance teaching and learning should be an issue of concern, it must not take away the responsibility of the learner. This study believes that continuity of teaching and learning can be seen in what learners are able to do after completing their studies via the distance education mode. A good teaching policy should be able to suggest how continuity can take place throughout the learner's life.

The theoretical literature fails in general to look into the operation of distance education from an empirical point of view. In a way, this lacuna reflects the nature of teaching and learning in distance education. Very little empirical evidence has been provided about the way in which teaching and learning manifest themselves in distance education.

After having looked at the theoretical writings produced over the last hundred years, one comes to the conclusion that there is still no single distance education theory that can claim to dominate the field or have had a profound effect, in isolation, on the practice of distance education. A number of authors show that many disparate attempts have been made to try to define and find the best theory of distance education. Surveying the field, Evans and Nation (1992) conclude that many theorists have emphasised the physical distance between teacher and learner. Shaffer (2005:10) suggests that we have become aware that there is no accepted theory of anything in distance education. Moore (2004) adds that, even though there are many theories of distance education, each new writing questions or ignores everything that has come before. This difficulty is compounded by a new development which requires fresh theorising. One cannot ignore the fact that more and more residential universities are





embarking on distance education learning in order to increase student enrolments, although they have little grounding in ODL (Trindade, Carmo & Bidarra, 2000; UNESCO, 1997). This trend has seen some South African universities introduce distance education or part-time learning programmes in addition to their face-to-face programmes.

Anderson (2003) contends that there must be an expansion of the theory of distance education to address the practice of educational research, as this would have an impact on the framing of public policy. It is therefore critical to look at some of the educational theories relating to teaching and learning.

#### **2.4 Educational Theories relating to Teaching and Learning**

In addition to debates on how to define distance education, there is disagreement regarding how the theoretical foundations of distance education affect teaching and learning. In this section, the author briefly examines some of the teaching and learning theories that have implications for distance education. Furthermore, he indicates how the theorists referred to earlier in this chapter justify the linking of their theoretical foundations to actual teaching and learning in distance education.

The literature includes many theories about how people learn, which may be used in different contexts (Burns, 1995a:99; Inglis, Ling & Joosten, 1999:104-105). However, teaching and learning that takes place in distance education are particularly complex phenomena, riddled with contradictions (Evan and Nations, 1989: 10). Key questions on learning should therefore be in terms of how we understand learning, and the implementation process. The lack of research on implementation of a tuition policy in distance education is of great concern. It does not help that many of the theories defining learning come from the psychological field, which is particularly fraught with vagueness and contradictions.

In attempting to design a teaching and learning policy, it is essential to understand the range of learning theories and take them into account. Some of them could conceivably influence learning in distance education, and should be used when we design and implement learning. For this reason, this study highlights some of the

general education learning theories that relate to distance education, which are: the behaviouristic orientation to learning, the humanistic orientation to learning, and the social/situational orientation to learning.

Smith (1999:5-6) regards the abovementioned as the major orientations to learning which actually influence teaching.

#### **2.4.1 Behaviourist Approaches**

Behaviourism was one of the first theories of learning. Obviously, it relies on the fact that a stimulus is generally followed by a response. Moore and Kearsley (1996:204) say that this has implications in the distance education context. Behaviourists believe that learning is evidenced by a change in behaviour, the teaching role is one of the presentations of facts and skills, and that learning takes the form of drill and practice. This approach fails to account for a great deal in distance learning, and may be contrary to the principles of adult learning. While behaviourism has contributed to theories of learning, it can no longer hold a dominant position, as cognitive-oriented approaches are gaining increasing favour.

#### **2.4.2 Cognitive Theories**

The emphasis in Moore and Shattuck's (2001:2) theory is on the learner's prior knowledge and style of learning. The inference is that the design of the learning activity is of paramount importance. Educators must immerse learners in complex interactive experiences which are real and meaningful to them, and students must be given problems so that they can, through engaging with them, gain insight and reflect on their learning experiences. The writers and designers of learning material have to be thoroughly conversant with the issues of 'deep design', in order to be able to conceptualise tasks that will challenge learners. This approach provides truly significant benefits for the learner, but it is very demanding.



### 2.4.3 Constructivism

Moore and Kearsley (1996:204) view learning as having a foundation in the autonomous or independent individuals who must construct their own knowledge, as influenced by their experiences. This theory relies on an epistemology that stresses subjectivism and relativism, and posits that reality is personal and unique. Knowledge is seen as an active process of subjectively building a system of meanings (Moore and Shattuck, 2001; 2). The premise is that learning reflects our own experiences, insofar as it is a construction or understanding of the world we live in. As individuals, we generate our own rules and mental models, and communication is possible only because many of our experiences are so similar. Thus, in order to teach, we must understand our student's mental models, as learning is a search for meaning, whether in whole or in part. The focus here is on general concepts rather than isolated facts. An individual must make personal meaning out of learning.

There is some empirical evidence to support the use of this approach in distance learning, but a major practical difficulty remains: how can we know and design materials based on a student's prior knowledge, and how can we provide hands-on problems relevant to that particular student?

### 2.4.4 Adult Learning (andragogy)

Knowles (1978) is regarded as the theorist who brought adult learning (andragogy) to the fore. He argues that when people change their lifestyle and are believed to behave as such, they can be regarded as adults. Moore and Shattuck (2001) call adult learning andragogy, and define it as an approach that is based on assumptions about learning, which include the following:

- Adults need to know why they need to learn something;
- Adults need to learn experientially;
- Adults approach learning as problem-solving; and
- Adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value.

Knowles (1978) believes that adult learning should be different from normal teaching.

Dunn (2000:4) lists some of the ways:

- Adult learners bring experience to learning, which must be used as a source of learning and reference;
- Adults are likely to indicate what and how they are to be taught;
- Adults want to be active participants, and should be encouraged to engage in designing and implementing educational programmes for themselves;
- Adults want to apply what they have learned;
- Adults are interested in how the learning will be evaluated; and
- Adults expect constant feedback about their learning progress.

Burns (1995b) argues that one cannot clearly define an adult and, therefore, one cannot define adult education. He believes that school education cannot be used as the sole basis for an adult learning model. Given the difficulties of definition, Burns (1995b:233) advocates that one should concentrate on the qualities of being an adult, which he calls adulthood, rather than on adults themselves. According to him, people with the qualities of adulthood are self-directing, a fact that lies at the heart of andragogy, which should be student-centred, experience-based, problem-oriented and collaborative, in the spirit of the humanistic approach to learning and education. The whole educational activity should focus on the student.

Even though there may be different ways of conceptualising adult learning theories on the whole, literature suggests that adult learning is close to distance education. Andragogy is regarded as a progressive educational theory that underpins curriculum design using problem-based strategies, and relates to the notion of the self-directed learner, but it is based on assumptions about adult learning that may be difficult to prove. It also suggests techniques of teaching which may be even more difficult to implement.

## **2.5 Deep and Surface Approaches to Learning**

Originally, the notions of deep and surface learning were proposed by Marton and Säljö (1976). The approaches were further studied by Ramsden (1992), Biggs (1987,

1993) and Entwistle (1981). The concept or term ‘learning’ elicits different interpretations from different people in different contexts. Säljö (1979) asked a number of different adults what they understood by learning. Based on their replies, he came up with the following five categories:

- Learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge i.e. acquiring information or knowing a lot;
- Learning as memorising i.e. the storing and reproducing of information;
- Learning as acquiring facts, skills and methods that can be retained and used as necessary;
- Learning as making sense or abstracting meaning i.e. parts of the content are related to each other and the real world; and
- Learning as interpreting and understanding in a different way. This means that learning involves comprehending the world by reinterpreting knowledge.

Smith (1999:4) says that out of the five categories identified by Säljö (1979), we must be concerned with learning as a process (see paragraph 2.4.1). The question is: what happens when the learning takes place? Smith (1999) cites Ryle’s (1949:48-49) opinion that there is a difference between ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’. The first two categories of Säljö (1979) concern ‘knowing that,’ whereas the third concerns ‘knowing how.’ In this regard, Ramsden (1992: 27) views students who can see learning as the basic understanding of what reality is as individuals who are increasing their capability or knowledge of doing things

Several other researchers, including (Ramsden (1992), Biggs (1987, 1993) and Entwistle (1981), conclude that ‘deep learning’ goes with intrinsic motivation, and ‘surface learning’ goes with extrinsic motivation. Atherton (2005:2) provides a table to summarise the features of deep and surface approaches:

Table 2.1 Deep and Surface approaches to learning

<b>Deep approach</b>	<b>Surface approach</b>
Focuses on 'what is signified'	Focuses on the 'signs' or on the learning as a signifier of something else
Relates previous knowledge to new knowledge	Focuses on unrelated parts of the task
Relates knowledge from different courses	Information for assessment is simply memorised
Relates theoretical ideas to everyday experience	Facts and concepts are ineffectively associated
Relates and distinguishes evidence and arguments	Principles are not distinguished from examples
Organises and structures content into coherent wholes	A task is treated as an external imposition
Emphasis is internal (within the student)	Emphasis is external, based on the demands of the assessment

Adapted from Atherton (2005); Ramsden (1992)

Surface learners fear failure, and attempts by teachers to make them deep learners cause them to reproduce features of the deep approach from a surface basis (Atherton, 2005; Ramsden, Beswick & Bowden, 1986). Therefore, surface learning is regarded as an uphill struggle, characterised by boredom and depressive feelings, whereas deep learning is experienced as an exciting and gratifying challenge. It is also worth noting that several authors have written about deep and surface approaches to learning in a variety of studies encompassing different contexts (Marton and Säljö, 1976; Biggs, 1979; Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983). Houghton (2006) provides a table depicting the characteristics and factors that encourage deep and surface approaches to learning. He based the table on the work of researchers such as Biggs (1999); Entwistle (1988) and Ramsden (1992).



Table 2.2 Characteristics and Factors in Deep and Surface Learning

Terms/ Concepts	Deep learning	Surface learning
Definition	Examining new facts and ideas critically, incorporating them into existing cognitive structures and making links between ideas	Accepting new facts and ideas uncritically and attempting to store them as isolated, unconnected items
Characteristics	Looking for meaning Focusing on the central arguments or concepts needed to solve a problem Interacting actively Distinguishing between argument and evidence Making connections between different modules Relating new and previous knowledge Linking a course to real life	Relying on rote learning Focusing on outwards signs and formulae needed to solve a problem Receiving information passively Failing to distinguish principles from examples Treating parts of modules and programmes separately Not recognising new material as building on previous work Seeing course content as material to be learnt for the examination
Encouraged by students	Having an intrinsic curiosity in the subject Being determined to do well and mentally engaging when doing academic work Having time to pursue interests, through good time management Positive experience of education and confidence in ability to understand and succeed	Studying a degree for the qualification, and not being interested in the subject Not focusing on academic areas, but emphasising others e.g. social, sport Not enough time/too high a workload Cynical view of education, believing that factual recall is what is required High anxiety
Encouraged by teachers	Showing personal interest in the subject Bringing out the structure of the subject Concentrating on and ensuring plenty of time for key concepts confronting students' misconceptions Engaging students in active learning Using assessment that requires thoughts and ideas to be used together Relating new material to what students already know and understand Allowing students to make mistakes without penalty, and rewarding effort	Showing a lack of interest or even distaste for the material Presenting material so that it can be perceived as a series of unrelated facts and ideas Allowing students to be passive Assessing for independent facts (short answer questions) Rushing to cover too much material Emphasising coverage at the expense of depth Creating undue anxiety or low expectations of success by making discouraging statements



Terms/ Concepts	Deep learning	Surface learning
	Being consistent and fair in assessing declared learning outcomes, and hence establishing trust	or imposing excessive workloads Having a short assessment cycle

Adapted from Houghton (2006); Biggs (1999); Entwistle (1988); and Ramsden (1992)

In the learning context, we try to be explicit about what students must do and why they must do it. Entwistle and Ramsden (1983) insist that we must distinguish between a ‘deep approach’ and a ‘surface approach,’ whereby, in a deep approach, students aim to understand what they are learning, whereas in a surface approach, students have no motivation to learn. It is in this latter type of learning that, at times, students aim to get all the marks for the course. Entwistle (2003) proposes research about teaching and learning at a university level, and suggests that such research should have a conceptual framework describing what influences the outcomes of learning.

With regard to the characteristics of deep and surface learning, Entwistle (2006) provides the following contrasting characteristics, as adapted from Marton, Hounsell & Entwistle (1984) and Entwistle and Ramsden (1983):

Table 2.3 Intentions and Strategic Approaches in Deep and Surface Learning

Deep approach	Strategy	Surface approach	Strategy
Intention is to understand the material for oneself	Organising study thoughtfully	Intention is simply to produce parts of the content	None
Intention is to understand the material for oneself	Managing time and effort effectively	Accepting ideas and information passively	None
Relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience	Forcing oneself to concentrate on the work	Concentrating only on assessment requirements	None
Relating evidence to conclusions	Being alert to assessment requirements and criteria	Interacting with content vigorously and critically	None





Deep approach	Strategy	Surface approach	Strategy
Examining the logic of the argument	Monitoring the effectiveness of ways of studying	Not reflecting on purpose or strategies	None
		Memorising facts and procedures routinely	None
		Failing to recognise guiding principles or patterns	None

Adapted from Entwistle, 2006; Marton et al, 1984; Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983

In terms of this topic, Entwistle (2006:2) concludes that a deep approach is consistently linked to studying the subject for its own sake, and with self-confidence. The deep approach has been found to be more common in classes which have good teaching and a fair amount of freedom in learning. The surface approach is associated with anxiety and fear of failure, and to some extent, with vocational motives. Students who practice surface learning are often in classes where they have a heavy workload and where assessment procedures are overemphasised. They are inclined to reproduce detailed information without a grasp of the whole of which the details are a part. The following table indicates a selection of books and texts constituting the literature on the theme of teaching and learning in education, which are applicable to some extent to distance education.

Table 2.4 Summary of some of the literature dealing with teaching and learning related to distance education

Authors	Contents	Criticism/ or identified gap
Illeris, K. (2002). The Three Dimensions of Learning. Contemporary Theory in the Tension Field between the Cognitive, the Emotional and the Social. Frederiksberg, DN: Roskilde University Press	Adult education is situated within lifelong learning policies in the European Union. Tension between philosophical and pragmatic neo-liberal ideology	Views do not represent the entire landscape of adult education theories, policies, programs and practices
Merriam, S.B. & Caffarella, R.S. (1991, 1998). Learning in Adulthood. A comprehensive guide. San	The text looks at an overview of learning theory and explores adult development and learning, and the learning process	Lengthy and overly detailed description of learning in adulthood. Describes all major models and needs



Authors	Contents	Criticism/ or identified gap
Francisco: Jossey-Bass		serious exploration
Ramsden, P. (1992). Learning to Teach in Higher Education. London: Routledge	The text indicate the learning process and the implications for programme design and encounters in the classroom	Does not address the issue of providing high quality feedback on time
Rogers, A. (2003). What is the Difference? A New Critique of Adult Learning and Teaching. Leicester: NIACE	It explores the nature of learning, looks at debates around informal learning and compares adult learning and teaching to that of young people	Regards humanistic psychology, which shaped adult education, as misleading, inappropriate and unhelpful. Emphasises only the postmodernist perspective which draws on continental philosophy
Tennant, M. (1998). Psychology and Adult Learning. London: Routledge	Discusses the relevance of psychological theory to adult education. Issues included are humanistic psychology and the self- directed learner, the psychoanalytical approach, adult development, cognitive development, learning styles, behaviourism, group dynamics, critical awareness and situated learning	Advocates that we cannot develop independent, rational, autonomous and coherent adults in a world characterised by difference and diversity
Tennant, M. & Pogson, P. (1995). Learning and Change in the Adult Years. A Developmental Perspective. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass	The text looks at the relationships between development and learning in adulthood, intellectual development, practical intelligence and expertise, theories of the life course, autonomy and self-direction, experience and the teacher-learner relationship.	Theorises about a few aspects of adult learning. Makes for a critical understanding of psychological theory from the perspective of an adult educator
Jarvis, P. (1987). Adult Learning in the Social Context. London: Routledge	Adult learning in a sociological perspective is explored.	Explores and gives views on reflection and experiential learning from a very general point of view
Kolb, D. (1984). Experiential Learning. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall	Learning as a process leading to the production of knowledge	There is an over-emphasis on the thought that without reflection, we would repeat our mistakes. Reflection does not always lead to our recognising our mistakes.



Adapted from Smith (1999); Tennant (1998); Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins (1997).

It is evident that the literature varies in terms of the extent to which it can be used to underpin teaching and learning in distance education. Most of the studies undertaken have remained on an abstract, fairly theoretical level, and have made little use of empirical evidence as a point of reference. Such studies can be expected to fail in their application to actual teaching and learning in distance education.

Nevertheless, questions regarding the relation between the theory of distance education and that of conventional education will not go away. For instance, the debate about whether distance education is as effective as conventional education has been with us since the inception of the first forms of distance education. The theorists agree, obviously, that one of the major differences between distance education and face-to-face education is that the teacher and students are not in at the same place at the same time (Keegan, 1980; Keegan, 1994). Whether distance education is just a different form of conventional education or not, Keegan (1996) proposes that the basis for any theory of distance education must be to regard it as a form of education. Many theorists who have written about distance education have made suggestions as to how teaching and learning should happen in the context of their theories. The next section will look at some of the general teaching and learning theories related to distance education.

## **2.6 Theories of Teaching and Learning in Distance Education**

One of the points of agreement among theorists of teaching and learning in distance education is that there are several starting points which are valid, although some of them contradict each other (COL, 2005; Holmberg, 1977; Peters, 1998; Evans and Nation, 1992). Rivers (2006:3) believes that distance education is in a strong position to meet such challenges, as it is sufficiently flexible to meet the demands of the learners, while also conforming to the tenets of relevant theory. While this statement looks good, the lack of empirical evidence to back it up makes it questionable. Holmberg (1985b), on the other hand, argues that a theory of learning is descriptive, as it only attempts to describe and explain the learning process. Conversely, he asserts



that a theory of teaching is prescriptive, as it indicates what knowledge and skills must be gained through specific teaching practices. If this is so, theories of teaching can be deduced from theories of learning - however, learning may be influenced by other factors related to teaching. King et al (2001) strongly argue that we need to define distance learning before we define what distance education is. Perraton (1988) argues that the success or failure of distance education depends on the political context, as well as the methods of teaching. On the topic of the expansion of distance education, he offers the hypothesis that one can use any medium to teach anything. Distance education can also cater for the staffing problem, as more students can be taught by fewer staff, in comparison with the situation in a face-to-face classroom. What is critical in his argument is that distance teaching can reach audiences who would not be reached through orthodox means. With regard to dialogue Perraton writes that distance education can be organised in such a way as to be conducive to dialogue. For example, if there is a tutoring system, the role of the tutor is then to facilitate learning, not to communicate information. He also advocates that group discussion is an effective method of learning, as opposed to teaching, which is used to bring relevant information to the group. He concludes that in most communities, there are resources which can be used to support distance learning to educational and economic advantage. He argues that, in order to be effective, distance teaching materials should ensure that students undertake frequent and regular activities over and above reading, watching or listening. Perraton's views on teaching and learning in distance education are recent and seem to be reasonable.

Inevitably, the literature suggests that there is an indirect relationship between learning theory and teaching theory (Perraton, 1988; King et al, 2001). However, one must be aware that for the purpose of scholarship, there must be a theoretical framework to bring an explanation and understanding of teaching and learning in distance education together and there must be a specific model leading to the practical application of the theory (Holmberg, 1985a). Holmberg argues strongly that the theory of teaching in distance education should be empirically grounded or founded, and that there must be functional relationships between the conditions and outcomes of learning. All of these must be expressed in such a way that the research data that can be collected should refine the theory (Holmberg, 1985a). However, while



strongly advocating these views, he seems to be in doubt, regardless of his suggestion that we need data in order to refine the theory.

Peters fulfils one's expectations of him: he is so thoroughly grounded in the theory of industrialisation that he pays little attention to the functional relationship between the conditions in distance education and the outcomes of learning (Peters, 1974; Peters; 1988). This comes as no surprise, as he believes that distance education can be applied using an industrial model. Wedemeyer (1974) points to a number of problems when teaching and learning at a distance. One of these is the separation of teaching from individual learning. He does not hypothesise about how we can overcome this challenge. In a similar vein, Holmberg (1985b) believes that teaching in distance education is, and must be, nothing more than a guided didactic conversation. Therefore, any good distance education must be guided by good conversation, provided in the learning material, which facilitates learning. Thus, guided teaching invokes a pervasive didactic conversation that helps individuals to build strong relationships with the institution. If we make studying personally relevant to learners, there is a great chance that they will be personally involved and motivated to learn effectively. Holmberg emphasises the role of the institution, but he does not supply his vision of the role of the institution in facilitating this didactic conversation.

It is this context that Keegan suggests that we need a theoretical framework for distance education before we look at teaching and learning in distance education (Keegan, 1994; Keegan, 1996). With regard to the theoretical framework, Keegan (1996) says that one is confronted with a cluster of activities which give rise to questions which need answers, for example on whether distance education is a particular sort of educational activity or a conventional one, and/or whether distance education is possible or just a contradiction in terms. Asking whether or not distance education is an educational activity, Keegan says that there have been suggestions that distance education does not involve a teaching activity, and can therefore not be regarded as an educational activity (Keegan, 1996). This is a radical view and open to question, especially when one looks at the empirical evidence of teaching as an educational activity in distance education. He outlines the consequences of, as he puts it, reintegrating the act of teaching into distance education. These consequences are the industrialisation of teaching, the privatisation of institutional learning, the change

in administrative structures, different plants and buildings, and changes in costing structures. He strongly advocates the reintegration of the act of teaching into distance education, thus taking a position which ignores the fact that teaching is already the core function of distance institutions.

Peters (2002) believes that distance education is fundamental to the introduction of adult learning as a field of education, and an important pedagogical innovation. This study discussed this issue in the section on adult learning (andragogy). In the same vein, Holmberg (1995; 1997; 2001) suggests that distance education is a non-contact type of teaching and learning, since students and teachers do not meet face-to-face most of the time. And, since it enables people to do other things instead of only focusing on learning, he affirms that it is mostly good and is suitable for adults. The critical thing is that teaching and learning happen within a mediated situation, and we see the use of technical media for both subject matter presentation and interaction. Furthermore, Peters (2000) agrees that the digitised distance education era helps us to cope with major societal changes. Peters (2002) concludes that distance education is now at a premium, and helps societies to break traditions and design new ways of teaching which are relevant to the post-industrial knowledge society. He believes that the university of the future will acknowledge and integrate more than one type of presentation, ranging from face-to-face to digital, and that the teaching typologies in play will differ totally from traditional forms of teaching. The university of the future will be flexible, variable and adaptable, providing tailor-made programmes for any kind of undergraduate or graduate student, and for any who want to continue with their education. These are strong, challenging views, which may represent an altogether too optimistic vision of the future. It is difficult to see how the institutions of the future, which are likely to be as bedevilled with human error as our present ones, are going to be able to cope with being flexible, variable and adaptable, and are going to be able to provide tailor-made programmes for both undergraduate and post-graduate studies.

One can see the interrelationships between the array of theories briefly referred to above, and how they agree with or oppose each other. One of the strengths to be derived from all of them is that they agree that, from the historical and social point of view, distance education suits adult learning. However, in this study's view, there



seems to be too much emphasis on producing learning materials and the facilitation of interaction via various electronic media. Such an emphasis at times ignores that we are communicating with human beings, and that the media are only tools required for the presentation of subject matter and communication. One demand is that the institution providing distance education must apply empathy as the guiding principle for distance education. With regard to learning and teaching in distance education methodology, Holmberg (2001:47) says that teaching must be in support of learning, and must rely on media, since this is a non-contact mode, but he also insists that the conversation-like interaction between distance students and their providing institution should promote motivation, learning pleasure and study results.

Since the introduction of media into distance education, one sees new trends and debates regarding teaching and learning. In this context, Rivers (2006:2) says that a challenge in distance education is to move away from print-based to online delivery. However, Holmberg (1982) emphasises that distance learning should enable optimum use to be made of both learning and educational technology. Rivers (2006) believes that the focus should be on how to move away from the role of an educator, as a director of the learner's studies, to that of a facilitator (someone to guide students during the learning process), and how to ensure that learning rather than technology is the driving force, since the teaching element is separated in time and place from the learning element.

## **2.7 Other Views on Teaching and Learning in the Context of the Practice of Distance Education**

Holmberg (1995) indicates that the term 'distance education' covers various forms of study at all levels, and that planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organisation guide it. Therefore, distance education should be described by its characteristics, which concern its applications and interpretations. Although Holmberg's contribution in terms of distance education theory provides the basic framework for understanding distance education, his work lacks the empirical studies that would suggest what teaching and learning should be like.



Marland's (1997) argument is that the practice of distance teaching can only be understood through the practical theories which underpin and shape a distance teacher's practice, which must be scrutinised by the particular teacher. The author finds this to be of critical importance, but the challenge is what to do after achieving such an understanding. Marland talks of distance education as promoting and developing reflective practitioners, but the issue is what one does with one's reflection.

On the other hand, Keegan (1994) argues that distance education could primarily be considered to be a complete method of teaching and learning, an instruction method in its own right. Despite the fact that he argues that didactic principles in distance education can be based on twenty-seven elements – which he supplies - he does not indicate how these teaching elements can be implemented. Furthermore, he does not indicate how this will relate to the development and implementation of teaching policy. However, theory in distance education should be connected to other major theories of learning and instruction (Moore and Kearsley, 2003:1). Delling (1996) writes that, despite the existence of distance teaching critics, we must begin to rely on theory. He acknowledges that there is a systematic theory of distance teaching, but warns that to regard the systematic theory of distance teaching as the only relevant theory would be dangerous and intrinsically flawed.

Holmberg (1985a) suggests that the demands of distance education should inspire new developments which can be inferred from the theories. However, we must acknowledge that some learning theories can work better with distance education than others. He argues that people in distance education are concerned with management, that is, the constant preoccupation with deadlines, print-runs, transmission times, fonts and making lists, instead of pedagogy. It is the argument of this study that regardless of whether we accept or reject distance education's theoretical foundations, they will influence the way in which we operationalise teaching and learning. The literature shows that a common criticism of distance education practice is the supposed behaviourist, programmed-learning approach (Simonson et al, 2003). This suggests rigid curricula and content, and uniform learning strategies required of students, not taking into account their different cognitive profiles.





## **2.8 International Trends in Policy Formulation and Framing in Open and Distance Learning: Issues for Policymakers and Managers**

One area of consensus in the literature about policy formulation and framing is that there are various issues that open and distance learning policy should address (Perraton and Lentell, 2004). The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and other organisations with an interest in distance education, such as the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), have carried out a great deal of research in distance education in various countries. The kind of literature they provide is massive, but despite this, intensive debates still rage on about how to define distance education, the conflicting theories of distance education, and what the nature of policy should be. Due to their positioning, UNESCO and the World Bank are driving policy choices in most developing countries. COL, the World Bank and the United Nations (UN), through UNESCO, are the big organisations that are promoting the benefits of open and distance learning worldwide.

The literature reflects the tension between what ODL institutions should be able to achieve and what policies need to be in place in order for them to do so. Lentell (2004) says that a clear policy for open and distance learning is often lacking. She holds the belief that the framing of policy would help in the cost-effective and educationally sound expansion of open and distance learning. Many countries have not yet developed clear and well-articulated national policies for open and distance learning, in order to demonstrate the clear benefits that can be achieved through ODL, including South Africa. Some countries are still trapped in the stage of trying to define distance education. One can postulate that the absence of national policies and frameworks in any particular country reflects the lack of knowledge and skills among national and institutional policy makers. Lentell also remarks that the neo-liberal agenda has eroded the capacity of governments to plan centrally, and believes that this contributes to the absence of a coherent, integrated policy on ODL at national and even institutional level.



In formulating policies aimed at bringing distance and open learning to the forefront of national development, it is suggested that, as most ODL students are employed, they must participate in decision-making regarding the shaping of their careers and the type of knowledge needed. Policymakers should be warned against spending less on ensuring a sound through-put rate and more on access, without considering what the outcome will be. Unisa is a typical example of this.

Peratton and Lentell (2004) outline questions that planners and policymakers in open and distance learning must address at any level of education. In practice, policymakers, educators, managers and citizens must allocate resources in a rational way between educational alternatives. Farrel, Ryan & Hope (2004) state that, in driving the policy agenda, one can make a distinction between forces driving and constraining global activity in education. It is quite obvious that the literature indicates the tension between policymaking and policy implementation at national and institutional levels.

There are many contested issues in distance education policymaking, as in any other sphere of education. Robinson (2003) lists strategic questions for policymakers and planners in reviewing or planning good governance for open and distance education. However, with regard to policy, he focuses on the question of whether or not the policy basis for ODL is adequate for its governance and regulation. Lentell (2004) says that policy decisions need to be taken with regard to the framework of education and training policies in general. Furthermore, she advocates that, in practice, planning and implementation must be interactive processes. She identifies crucial policy-making areas and some issues for distance education policymakers. These areas are: identifying target audiences and types of ODL systems, choosing the appropriate technology for the distribution of materials and interaction with students, business planning and costing, materials, tutoring and supporting students, recruiting and enrolling students, assessing students, managing and administering the ODL system, and monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance. She concludes by saying that we need to concentrate on national and institutional policies and identify policy frameworks at the other two levels, which are regional and international. She argues that fundamental policy and planning issues at international, national and institutional levels must be in place, otherwise access to education and investment will be in vain. However, in reality, such planning may not be aligned at international, national and

institutional levels. And, in some instances, there are tensions between what policy envisages at international, national and institutional levels.

UNESCO (2002) states that the mission of a distance learning system must define its role within the context of national policy. In its review of ODL, UNESCO (2005) advises that we must look at opportunities, definition of relevant concepts and contributions, current global and regional trends, policy and strategy considerations, capacity building and international cooperation in ODL. In most countries, distance education has been introduced to increase access to learning and training opportunities, provide increased opportunities for updating, retraining and personal enrichment, improve the cost-effectiveness of educational resources, support the quality and variety of existing educational structures, and enhance and consolidate capacity (UNESCO, 2002). Consequently, policy in ODL focuses on these issues and not on teaching and learning. Upon reflection, it would seem to be self-evident that the policy framework should place learners at the heart of the teaching and learning process. It should focus on learners' characteristics, circumstances and learning needs. Such a focus is difficult to achieve, as there is not yet a shared view of who the learners in distance education are and what and how policy can drive this.

In examining why the operational effectiveness of distance education has been below expectations, Kinyanjui (1998) raises three issues. Firstly, at the policy level, the introduction of distance education strategies has not been properly coordinated, and as such lacks planning for adequate resources. Secondly, at the organisational level, distance education technology has been introduced without an adequate understanding of how it will improve teaching and learning. Thirdly, the interaction between policy formulation and practical effectiveness has not been clearly defined or understood.

He concludes that a policy needs to show greater sensitivity to contextual issues at the organisational level. Kinyanjui (1997) states that policymakers tend to assume that the mere introduction of distance education will bring about the desired changes in organisational work ethics and productivity. He says that the purpose of national distance education policy should be to promote the achievement of economic and social benefits, ensure that the utilisation of resources is optimised, encourage domestic technological capabilities, and ensure that procurement decisions are rationally taken.



At the institutional level, there must be recognition of excellence in the design, development and delivery of distance education courses. Kinyanjui (1998) says that it is important that national policy on distance education is integrated into the general educational policy framework for the country, and distance education, along with open learning, must not be marginalised. After conducting an observation of international trends and policy framing in distance education, this study will briefly look at the influence of policy development in higher education in the South African context, insofar as it has an impact on distance education provision.

## **2.9 The Development of Higher Education Policies in South Africa**

Generally speaking, the developments in higher education in South Africa since 1994 have been accompanied by minimal policy formulation, compared to other education sectors. The establishment of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (DoE, 1996a) in February 1995, the release of the Green Paper on Higher Education in December 1996, the Draft White Paper on Higher Education (DoE, 1997b) in April 1997, and, finally, the release of the Education White Paper 3 (A Programme for Higher Education Transformation) (DoE, 1997c), have all indicated that higher education in South Africa is facing massive challenges in terms of vision and principles.

When looking at what has been reflected in the NPHE (DoE, 2001a) (with regard to distance education and open and distance learning), and in Outcomes 10 (Regulation of Distance Education Programmes) and 11 (Establishment of a single dedicated Distance Education institution), nothing more is said about institutional tuition policy formulation and implementation. In contrast to the attention that has been given to other types of higher education (face-to-face education), there has been little effort to address the issues that affect both public and private higher education institutions of open and distance learning in South Africa.

All of the abovementioned documents provide a vision for the future of higher education, but they do not suggest ideas for the development and implementation of a tuition policy for societal transformation. The documents have opened up an arena



for debating various issues within higher education institutions in South Africa. In Chapter 4 of this study, the author will review and analyse them in order to gain informed insights into issues that impact on policy formulation, and especially the lack of direction in terms of policy formulation concerning various issues affecting ODL institutions, discussing each document separately and comparing their points of emphasis. A decision taken on the recommendation of the National Working Group, which was to have far-reaching, complex consequences in many dimensions, was the merger of the University of South Africa (Unisa), Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC), and Technikon Southern Africa (TSA). However, there is no indication of the effects that this will have on tuition policy formulation and development. Developing countries such as South Africa need to meet the challenge to provide quality education, in order to improve the quality of life of the mass of their citizens. Public higher education remains the key to their participation in the global economy and knowledge society, and the distance education mode is the only mode which makes it possible to provide higher education to the bulk of those who could benefit from it. Given this situation, it would seem to be strange that there is so little national policy addressing the provision of distance education per se. There has not been any major policy directive on distance learning from the Ministry of Education, except the Distance Education Task Team report from the CHE (CHE, 2004d).

## **2.10 Some Considerations for Policy Issues in Distance Education in the South African Context**

An examination of the literature on education policy shows that there are many policy issues to be addressed at institutional, state and other levels (Sayed, 2002; Kraak and Young, 2001). Though not writing about distance education, Jansen (2001) makes a critical input by showing that the literature in South Africa around policy debates has been characterised by controversies and arguments. Distance education cannot simply grow on the back of existing educational structures and policies - therefore, conditions must be created and policymaking organs must be set up. Young (2000) indicates that after 1990, many policies for a new system of education and training were launched in South Africa. Jansen (2001) argues that recent education policy development in South Africa can be divided into three phases:



- The early 1990s and the race for policy positions;
- The mid 1990s and the race for policy frameworks; and
- The late 1990s and the race for policy implementation.

The development of educational policies in the 1990s in South Africa was characterised by vicious and gruelling debates. Some of the policy initiatives were centrally driven (hence the fact that there was political, rather than educational, will behind their development and little drive towards implementation). One political motive was the desire to change things as quickly as possible (from an oppressive apartheid system to a democratic one). An obvious element in the activities arising from this initiative was the minimal input in terms of the debates on policy in distance education.

Some local authors also discuss the issue of policy development in distance education. According to Waghid (1998), we need to look critically at how distance education institutions bring about excellence in teaching and learning. He argues that the development of the practice of good teaching and learning at distance education institutions is driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Therefore, to develop DE practitioners to improve teaching and learning, with a specific focus on course-design, development, production and delivery, will require collegiality. International research has also shown that in order to improve teaching, we need to focus on learning.

When considering tuition policy, one must think of a policy that brings together education and training. Knowledge and skills formation are also critical. The development of new ideas through teaching and learning, scientific discovery and scholarly research lead to the management of knowledge production and reproduction. Therefore, learning policy must primarily be concerned with attempting to manage knowledge and skills production and reproduction through education and training. This implies that the emergence of learning policy is linked to the economy in a systematic way, which goes beyond anything that has been previously noted. Jansen (2001) shares this view in saying that the change and theory of policymaking are influenced by two forces: firstly, global and economic influences driven by the



international political economy, and secondly, the fragile position of states which appear to be modern and legitimate. The major concern for Jansen is that the implementation of such policies is a problem. The inclusion of guidelines for implementation in policy documents is a prerequisite for effective national planning and the utilisation of open and distance learning as part of a consistent education and training strategy. However, as Jansen (2001) indicates, policy change does not easily follow linear steps between policy and practice.

One of the milestones for distance education in South Africa was the Report of the International Commission, compiled by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) in 1994 (DoE, 1994). It stated clearly that the aim of the review and assessment was to make a thorough assessment of the current provision of distance education in the country. Based on this, the commission was then to propose ways in which distance education could contribute integrally to the realisation of the principles and goals proposed for the new education and training system, including open learning, and was to recommend how the then education provisions would need to be changed. The commission was limited to a political context, as it was working within the ANC education department's Policy Framework for Education and Training. As a result, it was to recommend changes in policy direction, including structure and finance, and provide policymakers with the main elements of initial policy and organisation for open learning and distance education. It operated from the viewpoint that the distance education system must be maximised in order to contribute to a democratic South Africa. The Commission made several recommendations on various issues, which included a vision for open learning, a review and assessment of current provisions, new goals and priorities, the organisation and management of open learning, adult basic education, further education and training, and science, engineering and technology. The limitations of the recommendations are that they focused mainly on increasing access, achieving redress and reaching priorities of reconstruction and development, as the key policy instruments. There was no proposed strategy regarding how the recommendations were to be implemented. There was therefore no clarity on how effective teaching and learning would take place in open learning/ distance education.

In the end, the commission emphasised the role of national and international development agencies in assisting by coming up with adequate policies that would pursue open learning in a wider context of reconstruction, development and social equity. But will they be relevant, and can they be contextualised in South Africa? The main conclusion drawn by the commission was that commitment to the practice of open learning should be regarded as a national policy by all education and training institutions. However, one question that arises is whether or not all South African higher education institutions are subscribing to open and distance learning. Their conclusion also fails to acknowledge that the adoption of open learning as a philosophy will have implications for how we operationalise distance learning. Expert policy advisers and decision-makers who have implemented policies for open and distance education in other systems advise on the need for advocacy, indicating that the benefits of open learning are apparent even to conventional teaching institutions, and must be driven by money.

Internationally, as in South Africa, research on policy in education concentrates on areas other than teaching and learning in distance education. In writing about the development of responsive academic policy, Willis (1994) argues that once distance educators and administrators have developed the content and software, they feel that their work has been done and tend to forget the plethora of challenging academic policy issues that arise. Policies regarding access, assessment and governance have been explored to a certain extent. The COL (1992) symposium concludes that the use of distance education offers significant potential for higher education during a period of increased access and quality. Willis (1994) agrees that distance education and its variants have the potential to provide equity of access on a worldwide scale by the beginning of the new millennium. However, exploration of teaching and learning policies is still an under-researched area. In the 2000s, with the new millennium well under way, we are still generally spending time looking at policies such as access, the recognition of prior learning, assessment and ICT, and spending very little time on institutional policies based on the core tasks of distance education institutions, namely teaching and learning. This study propounds the view that we will have to look at the views and experiences of those engaged in the development and implementation of tuition policy at an institutional level, in order to be able to develop truly useful policy in this area. COL (2000) argues that national education policies in ODL are generally





meant to extend access to higher education, provide upgrading opportunities to those employees without degrees, deliver continuing technical or professional education to graduates already in the workforce, and encourage closer economic ties between industries and education institutions. COL (2000) describes the type of national policy that could lead to ineffective distance education institutional policy development, and also describes the type of state or national policy that could help distance education policy development.

The Council on Higher Education's (CHE) (2004a) Distance Education Task Team argues that the 'Size and Shape document in Higher Education' gave rise to tension and resulted in conflicts, doubts about policy, retractions and reversals. In addition, the CHE (2004a) has released a report commissioned by the Ministry of Education on distance education. It is surprising that even this recent report is preoccupied with matters of governance, accessibility and ICT.

## **2.11 Trends in Open and Distance Learning Policy Development**

Gellman-Danley and Fetzner (1998) present the only model that this study has found to date of a truly powerful policy framework capable of helping decision-makers to productively address the policy arena of distance education. Gellman-Danley and Fetzner acknowledge that advanced policy deliberation and development is essential to the success of distance learning programmes and their students. They emphasise that asking tough policy questions in advance can mitigate future bureaucratic problems and roadblocks. They suggest seven elements that need attention, namely 'academic, governance/administration/fiscal, faculty, legal, student support services, technical, and cultural aspects'. However, in the academic policy area, they emphasise issues such as calendars, course integrity, transferability, transcripts, student/course evaluations, admission standards, curriculum/course approval, accreditation, class cancellations, course/programme/degree availability and recruiting/marketing.

Their study presents the idea that most educators know that even a minor midstream policy skirmish draws the focus away from their most critical concern, which is teaching and learning. According to them, policies can provide a framework for operation - an agreed upon set of rules that explains all participants' roles and



responsibilities. They delineate the field in order to retain focus, by grouping policies into several operational areas: academic, fiscal, geographic service areas, governance, labour-management, legal and student support services. In the academic development area, they highlight key issues such as academic calendars, course integrity, transferability, transcription, evaluation processes, admission standards, curriculum approval processes and accreditation. Their study is limited, as it does not clearly pinpoint teaching and learning as a policy development area. It offers and reinforces key policy issues and provides one example of an ongoing distance learning discussion at state level, and not at institutional level. The author believes that this study will, to some extent, provide a more detailed scenario (based on views and experiences of different stakeholders) of the development and implementation of a tuition policy at institutional level.

A number of authors have expressed concern about various policy developments in distance education (Berg, 1998; Chang, 1998; COL, 1992). Moore and Anderson (2003:463) indicate that policy issues of higher education to consider in developing distance education programmes are the institutional context and commitment, curriculum and instruction, faculty support, student support, and evaluation and assessment. Berg (1998) observes that we need to move beyond the learning theory debates about the value and validity of DE, and focus on the policy issues, as well as on the forces behind the policies. He analyses what he believes to be the central issues of policy formulation which, for distance education, are competency-based credit, state residency and funding issues, accreditation, finance, private involvement of industry in higher education, and university governance. The methodology used in Berg's study was an analytical comparison (showing the similarities and differences) of learning policies in DE. The findings of his study demonstrate that business and university administration collaboration seeks only profit and control to drive distance learning. Students, professionals and university administration are at one end of the tug-of-war, and at the other is the company that wants to sell 'educational products'.

The significance of these matters for this study is that it will be shown that administrative and management issues have a major impact on the implementation of a tuition policy for distance education at the University of South Africa. Schifter



(2002) agrees that faculty participating in DE and ODL education are much more likely to be motivated by those issues that possess intrinsic motivations.

Meyer (2002) argues that it is difficult to outline the role that policy plays in DE, as there are strong market forces at work in this phenomenon. He suggests that one reason why institutions frame policies is to avoid lawsuits or to justify their actions on the basis that they are following an adopted policy. The point here is that policies do actually affect human behaviour. Even though one acknowledges that there are many complexities in distance education, with many variables and elements involved in any instructional setting, there is no clear direction on how these building blocks can be integrated into ODL.

This study argues that the most promising beginning to framing an institutional teaching and learning policy would be to start with the core issue of instructional interaction, grounded on the theory of transactional distance learning (Saba, 2000). Subsequently, the changes with regard to how education should be facilitated at an institutional level would bring other dimensions to bear on the approaches to teaching and learning. Such changes would influence the development and review of institutional policies. On the other hand, the demands of a learning society cannot be ignored any longer. Increasingly, academics in distance teaching need more time to plan, more instructional support and additional training, in order to modify courses for all of the potential delivery formats of distance teaching. Thus, flexible learning is education and training offered in ways intended to make its provision more adaptable to the needs of different learners.

Some other authors have noted that in terms of policy development in institutions, various stakeholders are ignored or denied an opportunity to participate in such initiatives (Olssen, Codd & O'Neill, 2004; Perraton and Lentell, 2004). Sayed (2002) concludes that the voices of university-based academics and other stakeholders are not included in many policy developments. In this regard, he suggests a move towards 'jointed up' policy analysis, by including other stakeholders. However, ways in which these stakeholders will contribute to the process are not indicated.

## **2.12 Institutional Policy Issues for Distance Education**



Moore and Thompson (1990) agree that distance education units and programmes must be supported by institutional policies that encourage their development and implementation. In their view, without the support of the highest level of administration, the value and effectiveness of distance education will be limited. They argue that many distance education institutions deal with different administrative or management policy issues in distance education, mistaking them for academic policy matters. They further argue that an institution offering distance education must draw up policies on choice of courses, contact methodology, credit grants and transfers, and methods for accrediting courses. Their argument that institutional policies must be established regarding faculty support, evaluation and compensation is of critical importance.

Moore and Thompson (1990) argue that the most recent worldwide writings on policy in distance education fall into either of two general categories, namely prescriptive and descriptive. The prescriptive ones indicate what should be, and emphasise the area of policy development and implementation. The descriptive ones focus on what is included in the inventories and case studies of policies within particular political or organisational divisions, where reports on government actions and legislation become critical.

The prescriptive or theoretical policy literature covers policy areas such as terminology, purpose of policies and regulations, broad issues in policy and regulation, and guidelines for establishing policy regulation and/or oversights. On the other hand, descriptive policy literature deals with policies originating from legislation, policy documents, technical plans, district education plans or telecommunication plans.

CHE (2004b) categorically states that enabling policies and procedures must be in place in order to maintain and enhance the quality of postgraduate programmes. Strangely, however, they do not say anything about enhancing undergraduate programmes. The report also requires that the areas of programme design, student recruitment, admission, selection, staffing, and teaching and learning strategies must be attended to. COL (2000) states that dual-mode institutional teaching on campus



and at a distance tends to focus the institution's policy on campus students, and neglects distance students, since they are usually small in number and are therefore of only peripheral interest to the institution.

Furthermore, COL (2000) concludes that due to rapid developments, distance education policies must be reviewed, adapted or developed in order to accommodate changes. It is difficult to apply established general educational policy to distance education without adapting it to the distance education context. In order for policies to work, policymakers in the institution must consider how distance education policies are influenced and shaped by state and national policies.

### **2.13 Conclusion**

In looking at various issues relating to the development of distance education, the literature shows that it is grounded in different theoretical frameworks, which are to a certain extent influenced by the major theorists in education. This literature review has attempted to obtain a general understanding of the notion of distance education from a variety of definitions, as seen through the eyes of various theorists. The literature dealing with the definitions and theories of distance education provides some insights into how distance education is conceptualised and practised in different contexts. The literature on the development of distance education follows certain patterns, but contention still surrounds the nature of distance education, theories of distance education, operation and administration of distance education, and teaching and learning in distance education. In addition, the literature points out the importance of distance education practice as a growing field of study in South Africa and internationally. The current literature in South Africa on distance education is sparse and does not cover enough ground in terms of the development and implementation of an institutional tuition policy in distance education.

Literature on distance education theory emphasises that the foundation of distance education should be based on educational theories. In comparing different educational theories on teaching and learning, the literature shows that it is done according to a conventional approach. Cognitive theory, constructivism and action learning contribute to effective teaching and learning in distance education, but it is andragogy

that is the most promising. Andragogy has an influence on distance education tuition policy, as it describes the art and science of helping adults to learn. Therefore, it is obvious that the field of adult learning theory still needs further research. However, this will depend on whether or not one has a clear understanding as to what really affects adult learning.

In examining teaching practices, the literature refers to a conventional range of activities in distance education, using terms such as curriculum, course development, examination, assessment, tutoring, course writing, pedagogy, andragogy and teaching methods or strategies. Thus, the theorists critically reflect on assumptions, concepts and theories behind the teaching practices existing in distance education, especially those brought about by good teaching and the fostering of the freedom to learn. There is a tendency for most distance education theorists to write from a prescriptive position, and not to take into account how real learning and teaching occur.

The literature contains a great deal about the principles and theories of distance education, but very little has been written about policies in distance education. Furthermore, even those who have written about policies have concentrated on areas such as costs, admission, planning and administration. Most of the literature on tuition policy refers to such matters as the rate of fees that students have to pay at distance education institutions. In addition, much of the literature addresses international trends in policy formulation, framing and implementation in distance education as an issue of national development, and thus falls into the trap of using a top-down approach, being prescriptive, and not taking into account how real learning and teaching occur. In the South African context, there are various views from a variety of researchers on how government policies and regulations should be developed for effective implementation. Therefore, literature focuses a lot on what the basis for policy development is, and what the best way would be of ensuring effective implementation.

International literature has concentrated on other areas of distance education and not on policy issues, but in some instances, the literature suggests policy framework models for distance education. The following general trends may be derived from the literature as a whole:



- Agreement that the whole concept of distance education is still evasive;
- As the theories underpinning the various contradictory definitions are mutually exclusive, we are still struggling to come up with a coherent theoretical framework for distance education;
- The conditions for the development and implementation of teaching and learning policies in distance education are a contested terrain; and
- The development of national and institutional policy is characterised by tensions, contentions and high emotion.

There are attempts in some of the writings to acknowledge and endorse developments around policy issues in distance education. However, such attempts fail to acknowledge the various guidelines and policies already in existence in teaching and learning in distance education, and can therefore not respond to issues relating to the development of institutional tuition policy or render any assistance to academics and policymakers in making critical teaching and learning decisions.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the author outlines the research methods used in conducting this study. The focus is on exploring the views and experiences of various stakeholders in the development and implementation of the University of South Africa's tuition policy, in and outside the institution. The author presents and elaborates the work-plan as a research design. Subsequently, he explains why a qualitative research design was used, and provides the context in which the research was undertaken. This study chose to use a qualitative research design, as the methods would help in investigating the research question. Firstly, the author accepted that he needed to understand the complex relationships in the area of study, rather than attempt an explanation by isolation of single relationships, such as 'cause-and-effect' relationships (Flick, Kardorff & Steinke, 2004: 8). Secondly, he believes that qualitative research methodology requires that one must attempt to study human action in the context of social factors, the primary goal being to describe and understand human behaviour rather than to explain it (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). He is aware of the fact that this view is contested by Phillips (1987), but continues to hold it. Thus, in exploring the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy, the author tried to gain insight into the views and perceptions of various groups of Unisa stakeholders.

#### 3.2 Qualitative Research

There are various classes of definitions of qualitative research, beginning with those that compare it to quantitative research, stating that it does not depend on statistical processes which go on to more complex methods that focus on the interpretation of data collected from individuals in a specific context. However, despite their differences, the author could still choose a contextualised definition for the purpose of this study. McMillan and Schumacher (1993:372) view qualitative research as a naturalistic enquiry in which one uses non-interventionist data collection strategies to





discover the natural flow of events, and constructs an interpretation thereof in a natural surrounding. In her call for qualitative research, Hoepfl (1997:47) agrees that it uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings. Strauss and Corbin (1990:17) assert that in qualitative research, we arrive at our findings without using statistical procedures or any other form of quantification. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:12) define qualitative research as a learning process in which we want to learn by investigation and through involvement and participation. On the other hand Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) see qualitative research as having a multi-method focus similar to an interpretative naturalistic approach to the subject matter, studying things in their natural setting, and attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people attach to them.

There are many characteristics of qualitative research, and one of them that influence this study is that the report is a rich narrative based on individual interpretation. In addition, the basic element of analysis is words/ideas. The above descriptions characterise qualitative research and are important for this study, as it focuses on the views and experiences of various stakeholders in the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy.

### **3.2.1 The Role of the Researcher**

There are numbers of roles that the researcher can play in qualitative research. Hoepfl (1997), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that the researcher must embrace and internalise naturalistic enquiry. This implies that the researcher must be skilled and ready to conduct the qualitative research. Such skills can be acquired by reading, as well as personal or even professional experiences. Furthermore, the researcher must be able to be a 'human instrument,' a tool which will be used for the collection and interpretation of data. S/he must be able to view situations in a holistic way, collect and process data, give feedback and verify the data (Hoepfl, 1997: 51). The implication is that, as a researcher, the author had to be aware of what he was doing, so as to be able to critically reflect on the research process, including his own situation within it.



It was central to this study for the author to investigate the actions of different stakeholders in relation to the development of the Unisa Tuition Policy, and their views on the meaning, development and implementation of the policy. Furthermore, he needed to acknowledge that conducting this type of study involved him in a number of tricky situations in his attempts to collect valid and reliable data. Qualitative inquiry aims to cultivate the most useful facet of all human capacity, which is the capacity to learn. Through this study, the author learnt about tuition policy development and implementation, but also about the members of his research population, and ultimately about himself.

As a researcher, the author aimed at gaining a holistic view on how things were happening, and through the presentation of the purpose of the research to participants, he has always given them an overview of what he wanted to achieve. He attempted to understand people's management of activities indicated in the Unisa Tuition Policy. The author also tried to ensure that when he interacted with the participants, they were in their natural setting and were performing their core tasks. The data collection process took place from 2004 to 2006.

The implication of the above approach in this study is that as a researcher, he wanted to learn about and understand the views and experiences of various stakeholders in relation to the Unisa Tuition Policy development and implementation. The author also strived to make a contribution to knowledge in the discipline, in particular by addressing some of the fundamental questions of the discipline, and using Unisa as a case study was a key strategy which allowed him, as a researcher, to use a wide range of methods to gather empirical evidence. Furthermore, he aimed at gaining a deep understanding of the participants in context, so that he could understand their reactions and meanings.

### **3.2.2 Description of the Research Context of this Study**

There are many ways to describe the research context. Since this study is about an institution, the first attempt was to try to describe it as a case study. In building a case study, one can follow three steps (Patton, 2002). Firstly, one assembles the raw case data of the organisation and writes it down. Secondly, one constructs a case record,



where the data is condensed, classified and edited into a manageable and accessible file. Lastly, one writes a final case study in a narrative form. The case study should be readable, make sense of the information provided, and the reader should be able to understand it. The case study should offer an integrated portrayal, presented with any context necessary for the understanding of the case.

Yin (1994) remarks that the body of literature in case study research is still 'primitive and limited', and will need some major contributions. There are some suggestions that case studies should follow a general approach in design which can be exploratory, explanatory and descriptive (Tellis, 1997:7) If so, one must select a case study that offers the opportunity to maximise what can be learned, and knowing that time is limited, one should select 'easy and willing' subjects (Stake, 1995).

Alvarez, Binkley, Bivens, Highers, Poole & Walker (1990) believe that case studies have been used to develop critical thinking. Yin (1994:64) says that any case study should follow a certain platform, and what stands out in this study is the section concerning questions to focus on during data collection.

The unit of analysis is a critical factor in a case study and is a system of action, rather than an individual or a group of individuals (Tellis, 1997: 8). In the author's view, case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined, and should result in a multi-perceptual analysis. Hence, the researcher must consider the voices and perspectives of the relevant group of actors and the interaction between them (Tellis, 1997:9). Yin (1994) recommends that a case study researcher must operate like a senior researcher during the course of data collection. As such, the researcher needs to know the reason for the study, the type of evidence being sought, and what variations in responses might be expected (Tellis, 1997). This study used interviews to align the author's method with these requirements, as they are one of the most important sources of case study information (Tellis, 1997:11).



Yin (1994:20) advises that when we design case studies, we should consider a study's research questions, propositions, logical linking of data to propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings. The case study method provides a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analysing information and reporting the results. Yin (2004) suggests that it is usually possible to take over operations at a suitable point, in the role of an external adviser or from a position in the case. This is an exploratory inquiry, as the study may allow for a large-scale investigation of the same issues in the future (Rogers, 1978).

In qualitative data collection, analytical and interpretive procedures are locked into the notion of contextuality (Flick, Kardorff & Steinke, 2004). Therefore, we must focus on everyday events and various forms of knowledge within reach. At the time of conducting this study, the author was a member of staff at Unisa, a fact which afforded him an opportunity to be aware of the various events and influences with regard to teaching and learning at the institution.

Flick, Kardorff & Steinke (2004) state strongly that any form of qualitative study must begin with the analysis and reconstruction of specific cases. This is done to allow for the process to proceed to the next stage, which will come up with a generalisation or comparative or contrasting point of view.

### **3.3 Research Design**

A research design must show two outstanding features: firstly, it must be specific and highly flexible. Secondly, it must be expansive enough to adapt to these very complexities, while still pointing towards relevant data (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is used in this study because of its characteristics, as summarised by Flick, Kardorff & Steinke (2004:9). It may be useful to look briefly at such characteristics in order to justify the choice of the design of this study. The author has also linked the characteristics to Lincoln and Guba's list of a number of tenets relating to the typical design of a qualitative research study, as follows:



- Determine the focus for the enquiry by clearly defining things to include in and exclude from the study;
- Align the focus of the research with the research paradigm;
- Be clear on where, when, by whom, and how data will be collected;
- Plan the data collection, recording modes, other instruments, logistics, scheduling and budgeting; and
- Put measures in place to examine the trustworthiness of the analysis of the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, an effective research design links abstract and stylised concepts and questions to the empirical world. This implies that a variety of methods which may come from different approaches can be used (Flick, Kardorff & Steinke, 2004). The author decided to use certain methods and designed this case study focusing on Unisa, in accordance with those methods. In his research proposal, he outlined the various instruments that would be used for collecting data, and how the data would be analysed. He also dealt with issues pertaining to ethical considerations, strategies for ensuring validity and reliability, and research instruments to be used.

### **Unit of Analysis**

Qualitative research must start with the construction of a reality (Flick, Kardorff & Steinke (2004). Paton (2002) says that the design specifies the unit or units of analysis to be studied. This influences the decisions about sampling strategies. This study's focus on Unisa tuition policy development and implementation is intended to uncover the various ways in which individuals and groups (within and outside the institution) participated in the process, which they see as a reality. In the author's view, policy development and implementation are processes which happen in reality, are ongoing, and are influenced by negotiations and interpretations by various participants. In the process of policy development, issues that seem to be natural and that obviously demand implementation may just be the images of a reality for a particular individual or group at that given moment.

The key issue in selecting and making decisions about the appropriate unit of analysis is to decide what it is one wants to be able to say something about at the end of the



study (Patton, 2002). Bernard (2000) advises that, no matter what one is studying, one should always collect data on the lowest level unit of analysis possible. The unit of analysis refers to the ‘what’ of a study, i.e. what object, phenomenon, entity, process or event one is interested in investigating (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). In this study, the central unit of analysis is the Unisa Tuition Policy. This unit of analysis will be used as a springboard to elicit several responses from various participants’ groupings: students, academics, learning developers, managers and external stakeholders.

Vygotsky (1987) suggests that a new method of study requires a new unit of study, and a new conception of method. By a unit, he means a product of analysis which, unlike elements, retains all the basic properties of the whole, and which cannot be further divided without losing them (Vygotsky, 1963). Thus, ‘not the chemical composition of water molecules and their behaviour is the key to the understanding of the properties of water. The true unit of biological analysis is the living cell, possessing the basic properties of the living organism’ (Vygotsky, 1987). Cole (1985:158) adds that the unit of analysis should ‘consist of an individual engaged in goal-directed activity under conventionalised constraints’.

We can use the following three elements to try and describe some of the individuals in this study, namely:

**Characteristics:** Individuals can be characterised by age, height, etc. and organisations by structure, location and description. Unisa, as a unit of analysis, may be described as an institution of higher education operating in the open and distance education delivery mode. It is centrally situated in Pretoria, and has five regional offices across South Africa. In 2003, 82% of the registered students were from South Africa, 10% from SADC regions and 6% from other countries in Africa. 2% were international students.

**Orientation:** Individuals can be characterised by describing their attitudes, beliefs, values, etc. Organisations might be characterised by general tendencies, inclinations and policies. In this study, individual beliefs, values, and attitudes towards the Unisa Tuition Policy will be dealt with through several questions during the interviews.



**Action:** Individuals may be characterised by describing their actions, as may organisations. As there are various participants in this study, one will be able to account for the various actions of the respondents, and for how these influence Unisa as an organisation.

The primary participants in the study were from the University of South Africa. There were secondary participants from outside Unisa, who were indirectly involved in the distance education process. The collection of data was spread over a two-year period (2004 to 2006). Data was collected from the participants, as indicated below in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Stakeholders and participants

<b>Primary participants</b>	<b>Members</b>
Unisa management	2 Unisa members of staff (management level)
Unisa academic staff members	2 Academic members of staff
Unisa learning developers <sup>13</sup>	2 Learning developers 2 Learning Developers who had worked on the Entrepreneurship Law Study Guide
Unisa authors/writers of a specific guide	2 Authors of the Entrepreneurship Law Study Guide
Unisa students (3 groups)	8 Students using the Entrepreneurship Law Study Guide 2 Focus Groups of Students (8 in each group) on Unisa policy.
External stakeholders from 3 organisations or institutions having a direct or indirect relationship with Unisa	1 member of the South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE) (an external stakeholder) 1 member from the National Distance Education and Open Learning of Southern Africa (NADEOSA) (an external stakeholder)

The data collection schedule is presented in Appendix A. The design of the interview schedule was influenced by the following: the objective, nature of the subject matter, need to solicit facts, opinions and attitudes, need to seek specificity or depth, kind of

<sup>13</sup> In the Unisa context, the term Learning Developer is used instead of Instructional Designer.

information expected, respondents' level of education, extent of the interviewer's own insights into the respondents' situation, and the kind of relationship that the interviewer could expect to develop with the respondents. The author has strived to give full details and insights into participants' experiences of the Unisa Tuition Policy development and implementation and how this makes meaning (Stake, 1995:5; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

### **3.4 Data Collection Plan and Analysis**

There are various methods that can be used for data collection in a case study. In this study, interviews were used for data collection, and several documents were also analysed. The views and experiences of various stakeholders regarding the Unisa Tuition Policy would contribute towards a better understanding of the actions, values and practices of these individuals in relation to the development and implementation of such a policy.

#### **3.4.1 Phase 1: Document Review and Analysis: Acts and White Papers**

In this phase, the author reviewed the national documents (Acts, White Papers and Reports) that are linked to higher education development in South Africa. Some of these documents had a direct influence on distance education practice in South Africa. He also reviewed the Open University of United Kingdom Teaching and Learning Strategy (2003-2008) Institute, as this institution is one of the leaders in open and distance learning. The purpose of the analysis of these documents was to have a better understanding of policy development and implementation at a national level, which then influences what happens at an institutional level. Furthermore, the analysis helped the author to understand the crucial policy issues in open and distance education in terms of the legislative framework. In the design of the interviews, he picked up on the same issues that are referred to in the White Papers and Acts pertaining to policy development and implementation.





### **3.4.2 Phase 2: Steps in Data Collection**

#### **Step 1: Pre-interview Phase**

This phase presented the author with an opportunity to work on the research questions and their alignment to the theoretical framework. At first, it became apparent that he did not have sufficient insight into the theoretical framework. It was after the presentation of provisional findings that he started to develop insight into the theoretical framework. In the pre-interview questions, the author wanted, as far as possible, to test his methods in advance. This proved valuable, as it made it possible for him to eliminate some of the questions, refine some of the phrasing of the questions, and look again at the approaches to the questions. Furthermore, this helped him to determine which methods were appropriate and could be conveniently used.

#### **Step 2: Pre-Interview Questions**

It is in this section of the study that the author formalised the dates of the interviews and the process (ethics and recording of responses). This afforded him the opportunity to also send pre-interview questions to some of the participants, so as to generate some thinking and self-reflection about their role in policy development and implementation.

### **3.5 Data Collection Techniques**

As a researcher, the author chose different instruments to collect and interpret data. To collect his data, he chose to conduct interviews and focus-group interviews, distribute questionnaires and keep a diary of activities. He also chose the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, so that one approach was used to inform the other, which increased validity in this study. Furthermore, this helped to create new lines of thinking, by the emergence of fresh perspectives and contradictions. These methods of collection were chosen with the convenience of data analysis in mind.



### 3.5.1 Interviews

Patton (2002) says that the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer. One can use different types of qualitative interviewing such as informal, conversational, semi-structured and standardised, open-ended interviews (Patton, 1990). The author used a standardised, open-ended interview, in which he arranged questions in sequence and allowed some probing. As Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) state, the purposes of an interview are many and varied. The purpose of the interviews in this study was to gather data to address the critical research question. The author was deeply exposed to issues relating to the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy. Data collection is influenced by the purpose of the research. There are many purposes of social research, and the most common and useful ones are exploration, description and explanation (Babbie, 2001). As this study is an exploration into the views and experiences of stakeholders in the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy, it involved exploration through the use of interviews.

Hoepfl (1997:52) points out that ‘qualitative interviewing utilizes open-ended questions that allow for individual variations.’ As qualitative research is one of the two major approaches to research methodology in social science and involves investigating participants’ points of view, it will be crucial to capture participants’ views in clear and unambiguous terms (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002). It is essential that when one goes into the interview process, one must determine how the data will be recorded (Hoepfl, 1997:52). Patton (1990) recommends tape recording, but Lincoln and Guba (1985) say that this must only be done when there are very good reasons for it.

The literature suggests that there are several ways in which the interviewer can guide the interview process. Kvale (1996) identifies seven steps or guidelines in the interviewing process, which the author found to be very useful for this study. These are the following:

- **Thematising:** this is clarifying the purpose of the interviews and the concepts to be explained. The five major themes relating to the Unisa Tuition Policy as



the focus of this study were the understanding of the policy, focuses of the policy, development of the policy, major threats, obstacles or hurdles, and major opportunities or strengths in terms of the implementation and impact of the policy on teaching and learning at Unisa;

- **Designing:** this is laying out the process in order to accomplish the purpose. A set of questions was developed for the semi-structured interviews. For example, one of the first interview questions was: ‘Do you have a basic understanding of the Unisa Tuition Policy?’
- **Interviewing:** this is the process of conducting the actual interview, and includes the process of questioning, probing and recording the interview. The author used a tape recorder to capture all of the responses;
- **Transcribing:** this is writing a text of the interview, typing up all the responses, and includes the use of Atlas.ti software to develop families, codes and recoding of the responses;
- **Analysing:** this is determining the meaning of gathered materials in relation to the purpose of the study. This is elaborated on in Chapter 5;
- **Verifying:** this is checking the reliability and validity of the materials, including taking the responses back to the interviewees for them to check their responses; and
- **Reporting:** this is telling others what one has learned - the presentation of the findings. This includes writing up the research findings, as is done in Chapter 6 of this study.

The interviews were primarily used to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations for people’s attitudes, preferences or behaviours with regard to the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy. Semi-structured questions were used to allow the respondents to have room to express themselves. Therefore, in these semi-structured and focus-group interviews, the author was influenced by the following questions:

- (a) What do I really want to get out of the interviews?
- (b) Who should I interview, and will they talk to me?



- (c) How many interviews should I conduct?

The author made the following arrangements for each interview:

- (a) He sent a letter to the respondent, containing the interview questions.
- (b) He did a follow-up by setting an appointment for the interview on an electronic diary or by telephone.
- (c) He made a telephone call or sent an SMS message a day or two before the arranged date, in order to remind the respondent about the appointment.

The individual interviews lasted for anything between 40 minutes to about an hour and a half. The focus group interviews lasted much longer, and ran for anything from one hour to two hours.

The first part of the interview was intended to build a relationship. This involved the revisiting of the purpose of the interviews and the process that would be followed for data analysis, some ethical issues, and an expression of appreciation for the willingness of the respondent to participate. It was at this point that the author indicated the seriousness of the research, that he intended no harm to the participants, and that he relied on their willingness to cooperate (Wolff in Flick, Kardorff & Steinke: 2004:195). This part of the interview started with very simple questions, such as 'Are you aware of the Unisa Tuition Policy?' and, if the response was yes, this was followed by 'How did you become aware of it?'. This helped in securing and setting up an appropriate situational context for the research and interview process (Wolff in Flick, Kardorff & Steinke; 2004:202).

The second part of the interview was intended to determine the participants' understanding of the Unisa Tuition Policy. The author also wanted to find out about their views on the different focuses of the Unisa Tuition Policy. The third part of the questionnaire was about the role of the participants in the development of the Unisa Tuition Policy. Those who did not play any role in its development were asked: 'What do you see as your role if a new Unisa Tuition Policy were to be developed?' The fourth section of the interview dealt with two major issues in the implementation

of the Unisa Tuition Policy. Firstly, were there any challenges, hurdles or threats in implementing the policy; and secondly, were there any particular opportunities, strengths or chances to implement or apply the Unisa Tuition Policy? The author also asked them whether they envisaged any changes, or whether they had experienced any impact in terms of teaching and learning as a result of the existence of the policy, and if they thought that such a policy should include an implementation plan.

The last section of the interview gave the respondents an opportunity to state what they felt needed to be said on the topic of teaching and learning at Unisa. This could include anything about the Unisa Tuition Policy or outside it. The intention of this section was to attempt to add a description of the phenomenon from the respondent's perspective and a description from the researcher's perspective (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The conclusion of the interviews was an explanation of what would be done with the responses, and how the respondents would be contacted again after the transcription of the interview responses had been completed. The conducting of the interviews involved prompting and trying to draw relevant responses from interviewees. The author showed them that he was appearing in their context for a short period of time, and reassured them that they would be rid of him as a researcher in the foreseeable future (Wolff in Flick, Kardorff & Steinke; 2004:200).

The timing of the interview was critical. For instance, when interviewing the academics, the author had to ensure that he did not attempt to do so during the peak times of examination marking and submission of study guides to scheduling departments. With learning developers, he had to ensure that the interviews were not during the peak time of learning development projects to be submitted for scheduling. In interviewing the students, he scheduled interviews after examinations, and also immediately after registration.



### 3.5.2 Focus Group Interviews

In recent years, we have seen researchers moving beyond experimental comparative studies to introducing new methods such as discourse analysis and in-depth interviewing of learners (Saba, 1989). Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) agree that group interviewing is a useful way of conducting interviews. The author used focus group interviews for these reasons, since in this type of interview, there is the potential for discussions to develop, yielding a wide range of responses.

The focus group interview schedules included open-ended questions and probes, so that responses regarding people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge could be interpreted in context. The scope or spectrum of problems addressed in the focus group interviews needed to be not too narrow. The questions had to be posed in a specific way, and the dimension of depth had to be appropriately represented. The focus group interviews involved small groups of 6 to 10 people, focusing on specific topics. The author had four focus groups. Three of them focused on their understanding of the policy, and one group focused on the Entrepreneurship Law Study Guide and Unisa Tuition Policy implications.<sup>14</sup> This study guide was one of those that implemented the Unisa Tuition Policy guidelines, and was entered for the Unisa Excellence in Tuition Awards competition. Appendix HI contains a letter sent to Unisa students using the Entrepreneurship Law 1 Study Guide. Appendix H2 presents the interview questions for students using the Entrepreneurship Law 1 Study Guide.

Another reason for using the focus group interview technique was that participants' responses are usually made in social context. Focus group interviews have several advantages:

- Data collection can be done within a short time, hence it is cost-effective;
- Interaction among participants enhances data quality, as they tend to provide checks and balances for each other;
- There is a relatively consistent sharing of views, and a great diversity of views can be assessed; and

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<sup>14</sup> This study guide was entered in the Excellence in Tuition Awards of 2004 on the basis of having applied the Unisa Tuition Policy of 1998.



- Participants tend to enjoy working as a group, as people are social beings (Patton, 2002).

The focus group interview can also identify issues that the researcher never thought of, hence inspiring new ideas. Furthermore, focus group interviews can help in reflecting group behaviour and thinking (Morgan, 1997). According to Patton (2002), the power of focus group interviews resides in the interviewer being focused, and focus groups are recruited to discuss a particular topic. On the other hand, Bernard (2000) concludes that the key to successful interviewing is learning how to probe effectively, by stimulating a respondent to produce more information without injecting oneself so much into the interaction that one gets only a reflection of oneself in the data. In choosing the participants for the focus groups, the author checked that there were enough participants, and that the array of topics to be covered provided an opportunity for all of the people to participate. Babbie (2001) advises that exploratory research uses focus group interviews most of the time. This study is exploratory research, and used focus group interviews to satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding, and to test the feasibility of an undertaking.

In order to construct the interviews as an effective exercise, the author conducted the interview as carefully and sensitively as he could. He considered the dynamics of the situation by addressing interpersonal interactions and communicative and emotional aspects during the interviews. He avoided loaded or leading questions. The disadvantage of open questions is that many different responses are possible, and will eventually have to be summarised and possibly coded. The author was very careful when transcribing the data, as this was crucial to this study. He avoided massive data loss, distortion and reduction of complexity, by taking necessary precautions such as backing up the data and saving it (writing of the files onto CD and saving the data on a memory stick).

The letter sent to all of the participants asking them to participate indicated that the interviews would be recorded for the purpose of analysis. This letter also indicated that there was an ethics statement dealing fully with all 'ethical issues' relating to the



interviews. Appendix E is a letter sent to all students requesting them to participate in this study. It was followed by the contents of Appendix G1, which contains the pre-interview questions, and Appendix G2, which contains the questions used in the focus-group interviews.

During the research investigation, the author had to be sensitive to the fact that the participants were diverse, and that their different perspectives needed to be considered. The questions therefore had to be open and, as the researcher, the author had to acknowledge that any investigation using this method of data collection could not be bound by a predetermined pattern. He attempted to be open in relation to participants' concerns and questions, which he addressed to the best of his ability.

### **3.5.3 Questionnaire**

The Thames Valley University Dissertation Guide (2006) states that it is highly unlikely that research will be purely qualitative or quantitative - it will probably be a mixture of the two approaches. In this study, the author chose to work with a small sample, something which is normally associated with qualitative research, and he also used a questionnaire, something which is normally associated with a quantitative approach, in order to determine the attitudes and perceptions of management, academics, authors of study guides, learning developers, external stakeholders and students regarding the development and implementation of the Unisa Tuition Policy. One misconception, a source of confusion for many people, is the belief that quantitative research only generates quantitative data (numbers and statistics). At times, this is the case, but both types of data can be generated by both approaches. Another misconception is that statistical techniques are only applicable to quantitative data. There are in fact many statistical techniques that can be applied to qualitative data (Thames Valley University Dissertation Guide, 2006). One of the criticisms of the qualitative approach is that the relationship between theory and research is not strong, as there is no emphasis on instilling theoretical elements. The use of questionnaires was an indication that the linking of some of the research issues in this study to a larger theoretical framework and construct was significant in this study. Another concern in the use of a qualitative research method is the extent to which the findings can be generalised beyond the limits of a particular case study. One way in



which the author addressed this issue in this study was through the use of a number of data gathering methods (including quantitative) and processes.

Questionnaires are a popular means of collecting data, and may need many revisions before the final one. The main advantage of the questionnaire is that it can be used as a method of data collection in its own right or as a basis for interviewing. The author designed a questionnaire for academics and learning developers, which was divided into several parts as follows:

(a) **Personal information:** The researcher asked about their position in the university, their qualifications, age, gender and learning development or teaching experience.

(b) **Availability and accessibility of the Unisa Tuition Policy:** The researcher asked about their awareness of the policy, if they had a copy, and if so, how they obtained it, and if they thought they had a general understanding of the policy.

(c) **Understanding and guidelines for implementation:** In this section, the interviewer provided statements, and interviewees had to respond by choosing one of five options: strongly agree; agree; not sure; disagree; or strongly disagree. The statements were about policy understanding and implementation guidelines.

(d) **Understanding of the policy:** The researcher wanted here to find out whether or not academics and learning developers understood the expectations of the Unisa Tuition Policy. He made statements to which they had to respond by choosing one out of five options: strongly agree; agree; not sure; disagree; or strongly disagree.

(e) **Unisa Tuition Policy intentions:** In this section, the researcher wanted to establish whether or not participants aligned themselves with some of the intentions stated in the policy. Issues ranged from curriculum guidelines to the development of the study guide. Appendix I contains all the sections of the questionnaire.

#### 3.5.4 Qualitative Document Analysis

There is a limited amount of research that focuses on the development and implementation of tuition policies in distance education. Most of the policies that talk

about tuition in distance education refer to fees and the cost of studying at distance. In the process of document analysis, one focuses a lot on data that has been captured in a way that records and preserves context (Patton, 2002). Documents are written texts that serve as a piece of evidence or record of an event or fact, and as such have an important position in our societies (Wolff, 2004). One can view the Unisa Tuition Policy as a piece of such writing.

One can see that documents are significant because of the increasing legalisation and organisation in all areas of life. The written documents in an organisation may be a preferred form of representing reality, as seen in the way that the Unisa Tuition Policy describes teaching and learning. According to Wolff (2004), documents are standardised artefacts, as they may appear in notes, case reports, etc. Their main intention is legitimisation of the recipients, and as such may be legally used to draw conclusions about an organisation, as may be seen in various acts and policies.

If one views and reads documents as a basic representation of something else, one is looking at them as a 'window-pane,' and this action may distort the 'view,' which we can rectify by means of a more transparent representation or more profound interpretation (Wolff, 2004; Patton, 2002). Thus, documents may be used as evidence or indication of factual content or decision-making processes. Therefore, documents present an independent (objective) level of data. Wolff (2004) further argues that documents should be treated and analysed as methodologically created, communicative objects. On the other hand, Hoepfl (1997:54) notes that another source of information which is very valuable to qualitative research is the analysis of documents, and these may include official records, letters, newspaper accounts, diaries, published data in literature reviews and reports.

Wolff (2004) recommends that in analysing documents, we must adopt the maxim derived from conversation analysis of ordering all points that present themselves through various formulations and strategies. There are a number of documents that provide a theoretical and policy framework for this study. In order to provide some responses to critical questions in this study, the following documents were analysed:

- (a) Unisa Tuition Policy: 1998



- (b) Open University of United Kingdom Teaching and Learning Strategy 2003-2008
- (c) National Plan for Higher Education: 2001 (DoE, 2001a)
- (d) The New Academic Policy (DoE, 2002)
- (e) Council on Higher Education: Distance Education Task Team Report (CHE, 2004b).

In order to determine some of the views and experiences that may underlie distance education policy, the author had to analyse these documents, looking for the purpose of each, the process or procedures for implementation, challenges of implementation, and a description of the envisaged change or impact to be brought about by the implementation. In other words, the documents were analysed with the intention of gaining insight into the issues that influence policy development and implementation.

The University of South Africa's Tuition Policy was also examined in terms of its guidelines, principles and criteria, and curriculum principles.

### **3.6 Research Ethics**

#### **3.6.1 Ethical Considerations**

The biggest problem in conducting a research project investigating human behaviour is not selecting the right sample size or making the right measurement, but in doing these things ethically, especially with regard to the effect on the research population of their participation in the project (Bernard, 2000:22). In everyday language, ethics is associated with the issue of what is right and wrong, and the regulation of individuals or groups belonging to an organisation or institution. Babbie (2001) advises that anyone involved in social scientific research should be aware of general consensus by researchers as to what is proper and good conduct when conducting a scientific enquiry. Bernard (2000) echoes this opinion, and says that the key ethical issue in conducting all social research is whether or not those doing the studying place those being studied at risk.

The first step in dealing with ethical issues in this research was to submit an ethics statement to the University of Pretoria Ethics Committee to request permission to conduct this study, as it involved human beings. Furthermore, the author asked permission from the Research Committee of the University of South Africa (Office of the Vice Principal: Research). In this section, the aspects considered as forming a code of ethics are elaborated on below.

In the context of the interviews, the researcher had to consider many ethical issues, ranging from considering management's views, learners' attitudes and feelings towards Unisa, external stakeholders' perceptions and views of Unisa, and his own values, attitudes, knowledge and beliefs regarding Unisa. Informed consent was explained to the members of the research population time and again, and furthermore, the researcher had to inform them of the whole ethics statement, as agreed upon and submitted to the University of Pretoria Ethics Committee.

During the interviewing process, there were times when the author was confused about what to do, especially when participants started to vent their anger and frustrations about some of the issues they were not satisfied with at Unisa. He had to do a balancing act of handling the situation so as not to frustrate them, as he was going to lose their vital inputs, without colluding with them in the denigration of the institution. He tried to maintain his project's moral accountability and responsibility, by reminding himself of the ethical codes and principles with which he had begun the research. However, he also found himself experiencing divided loyalties, to both individual respondents and the institution. It was difficult to deal with the question of 'to whom am I accountable?'

The institution had partially sponsored this study, and the author was also under the watchful eye of the management in terms of what this study would come up with. However, on the other hand, he had to consider his participants, who were from inside and outside of Unisa. And, to a certain extent, those from inside had the expectations and wishes that he would listen to some of their complaints. There were times when he was sympathetic towards what they were saying, but he had to remind myself of his intentions as a researcher. The author recalls that in one interview, when he indicated to the interviewee that he had also interviewed a member of the

management, the interviewee immediately wanted to know what his/her response to the question had been.

A difficulty which arose in working with external stakeholders was that they were sceptical when it came to them having to comment, since they had their own views on internal issues regarding the Unisa Tuition Policy and other programmes. What stands out here is that there is a history, whereby stakeholders had previously been required to evaluate Unisa's programmes, and the comments from facilitators after such evaluations had not been positive. Another issue for them was that they felt that Unisa had an international status and credibility, whereas they themselves belonged to a small organisation, and therefore they thought that those stakeholders from Unisa would question their credentials and be inclined to ignore whatever they said.

### **3.6.2 Voluntary Participation**

The ethical norms of voluntary participation and of doing no harm to participants have become formalised in the concept of informed consent. The participants were asked for their consent, and open communication was maintained throughout the research. It was obvious that, since participation was voluntary, the author had to ensure that the participants were not being harmed because of their participation.

### **3.6.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Anonymity refers to a situation in which even the researcher cannot link specific information to the individuals it describes, whereas confidentially refers to a situation in which the researcher (although knowing which data describe which subjects) agrees to keep the information confidential. For this reason, one must destroy identifying information as soon as it is no longer needed. The principles of anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout this study. The author used the term 'anonymous' to mean confidential, and he assured respondents that the study guaranteed confidentiality, so that even if he could identify a given person's responses, he promised not to do so publicly. As a researcher involved in obtaining intimate knowledge given in confidence, he believes that he has a moral obligation to



uphold the confidentiality of the data. Therefore, no names are given in the coding and data analysis process.

#### **3.6.4 Deception, fairness and caring**

Participants were assured that sharing information about their institution would not result in repercussions at their workplace or institution. However, there were also stages during the interview process in which a lot of responses generated sympathy. It was also very difficult to deal with some of the issues raised, for instance by students who were repeating one course for the fifth time, those who felt that ‘Unisa does not care’ and that ‘Unisa fails students.’ It was difficult not to express an opinion or say anything about this. However, the author often responded by informing participants about who to contact with regard to any issues that they were not satisfied with. He also dealt with some of these issues in a polite way, by saying that he would set time aside to talk about these issues after the interviews. He had to deal with the fact that because he was working at Unisa, he became the ‘face of Unisa’ to the students who, in most instances, wanted to express their views about how they perceived things at Unisa. In interviewing academics and learning developers, the author had to deal with emotional issues such as complaints from academics who have to mark fifteen thousand examination scripts, or those who have four or five projects on their tables. He was emotionally and ethically challenged by some of these issues. Sometimes, in cases such as these, he would pretend to a measure of naivety, in order to avoid ‘being or wishing to appear too wise too quickly’ (Wolff in Flick, Kardorff & Steinke, 2004: 200). He did not intend to conduct any casual chats with colleagues and some of the participants in the interviews, but after their interviews had ended, some persisted in talking about this study and the tuition policy at Unisa. Such conversations often shifted from issues such as ‘this is the type of research we want to do as Unisa’s management’ to ‘why are you studying through the University of Pretoria (a face-to-face institution) while you are investigating policy at a distance education institution (Unisa)?’ This highlighted the perception and view that some people still regard ‘distance education’ as second best to ‘face-to-face education’. The author also had students, who had participated in the interview, who would afterwards swamp his office on the pretext that they wanted to know how the research was proceeding. Then, suddenly they

would ask for something, anything from ‘printing something’ to ‘how can I tackle this assignment.’

### **3.6.5 Sampling**

Patton (1990:169-186) provides about sixteen different types of purposeful sampling. A sample can be described as a special subset of a population observed in order to make inferences about the nature of the total population (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The author has set a number of limitations for this study in terms of data collection, as indicated in section 3.9 below. Another dimension which impacts on the validity and reliability of this study is the sampling method. The literature shows that sampling is a complex issue, as there are many variations and overlaps in the available types of sampling. The intention of qualitative research is not to generalise but to gain an in-depth understanding about the issue under investigation. Therefore, purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases to illuminate the questions under investigation (Patton, 2002). In this study, the author used a combination or mixed purposeful sampling, as this combines various strategies such as random purposeful and typical case approaches to sampling. He used random purposeful sampling to select students who participated in this study, and typical case sampling in choosing other participants (academics, learning developers, management and external stakeholders), as he was interested in what one would call ‘typical, normal or average for a particular phenomenon’ (Patton, 2002).

An effort was made to select participants from as broad a base as possible, but this does not imply that the author managed to capture all of the issues that this study would like to have presented. The study was limited to Unisa, and one can see that a variety of related concerns might have been presented if other ODL institutions had been included. However, the author cannot make generalisations which may be applicable to contexts other than Unisa. Nevertheless, this study still offers value in terms of an understanding of the development and implementation of tuition policies in ODL institutions, and it may have a significant impact on future policymaking in distance education in South Africa.



Patton (2002) argues that the validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size. As previously mentioned, Patton (1990) indicates that there are sixteen different types of purposeful sampling, and advises that we must always be sure that we seek information-rich cases that can be deeply explored. For this reason, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the extensive use of variation sampling. Bernard (2000) suggests that the credibility of research results comes from the power of the methods used in measurement and sampling. He says that good measurement is the key to internal validity, and that representative sampling is the key to external validity. The author selected his sample on the basis of his own knowledge of the population, and the elements and nature of the research aims. Another issue that influenced his decisions on sampling was the fact that neither he nor the members of his research population could spare very large amounts of time to carry out the research.

### **3.6.6 Documenting the Interview Process**

As with most qualitative processes, the author used a diary to document the research process. His prior understanding of policy development and implementation in open and distance learning was highlighted. The data collection instruments, collection methods and collection contexts were outlined. Steinke (2004) stipulates that the documentation of the data demonstrates whether a particular type of interview has been correctly carried out or not, and that the documentation of the method of analysis allows for an evaluation of the interpretation. The documentation of information sources includes the verbal statements of interviewees, records of meetings, descriptions of the context of statements, and investigations and interpretations on the part of the investigator (Steinke, 2004). The documentation of decisions and problems includes considerations of sampling and the choice of method, as well as criteria that the study must satisfy. For this purpose, the author kept a diary to document the interview processes. The diary had the following sections for reflections: process, communication, contact, main themes or issues in the discussion, interesting or disappointing views, future visit(s), and anything else worth noting.





### **3.7 Data Analysis: Transcription of Conversations using Atlas.ti.**

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:295) define data analysis as the way in which a researcher moves from a description of what the case is to an explanation of why 'what is the case' is the case. Marshall and Rossman (1989:111) say that data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion - it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data. Patton (2002) states that two primary sources in data analysis are the questions that were generated during the conceptual and design phases of the study, and analytic insights and interpretations that emerged during data collection. In this study, the main purpose of analysing the data was to obtain usable and useful information, which was done through describing and summarising the data, identifying relationships between and similarities and differences in issues. The first steps after conducting the interviews were to transcribe and organise the data. Thereafter, the author continued to analyse the transcripts systematically, grouping similar themes together and attempting to interpret and draw conclusions from them. He had to guard against the fact that there are many different ways of presenting qualitative research data, which is invariably subjective, as qualitative information is normally presented in the form of words. This allowed him an entrance into the process and outcomes of the research through the analysis of the data that he collected and, furthermore, he was able to get an insight into what he was researching.

Bernard (2000) advises that analysis is the search for patterns in data, and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place. He continues by saying that an analysis is qualitative and may start before one collects data, as one should have some idea as to what one is going to study. Thus, the analysis of data must pass through the stages of data reduction, data display and verification, so as to draw conclusions (Keeves and Sowden, 1997, citing Keeves, 1997). Once the data was collected, it was analysed on the basis of reflexive and reactive interactions



between the researcher and interpretations of social encounters reflected in the data. In interpretative analysis, one must look at descriptions of characteristics, processes, transactions and contexts which build the process or even the study which the researcher is investigating (TerreBlanche and Durrheim, 1999:139). This study further followed the advice from Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) and Neuman (2000) that strategies of data analysis should include generating natural units of meaning; classifying, categorising and ordering units into meaning; structuring narratives to describe the interview contents; and interpreting the interview data. The analytical focus draws from what has been learned, which will make a contribution to the literature in the field of enquiry. Some of the analysis will be provided as a summarised evaluation in terms of its contribution to the policy.

This phase involved listening to the interview responses and writing them down. The responses were typed out at a later stage. The author conducted the data analysis based on the interview transcripts. He used Atlas.ti (Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software - CAQDAS). Atlas.ti is a relational database software tool with special capabilities that allowed him, as a researcher, to code chunks of text and fit them according to set criteria (Bernard, 2000:431). The Atlas.ti tool helped him to build networks of codes and then produce reports in a set of text (Bernard, 2000:431). The Atlas.ti software has various tools that assisted him in data analysis. One of the advantages of this software is that it affords the researcher an opportunity to have an interface in the data analysis process. This involved the coding and recoding of the responses and, at the same time, the creating of different 'family trees.' The coding and recoding involved the sifting of the data.

Data interpretation can vary, but needs theoretical underpinning for consistency (Miles and Huberman, 1994:6-7). The implication is that there is a variety of data interpretation, but one must have measures to check consistency and must rely on coherent theoretical underpinnings.

Transcription is understood as the graphic representation of selected aspects of the behaviour of individuals engaged in a conversation or interview (Kowal and O'Connell, 2004).

In the transcription, the author was guided by the abovementioned authors' recommendations, which are:

- Only conversation to be analysed should be transcribed (including all interviews);
- Letters should be used to represent verbal features of utterances, and punctuation marks should only be used for their conventional function (See Appendix F); and
- In the transcripts, clear distinctions between descriptions, explanations, comments and interpretations should be made.

Atlas.ti allowed the author, as a researcher, to be creative with the qualitative data (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). However, he had to guard against the danger of overly subjective interpretation, by trying to reflect on the views of the interviewees in a thorough and methodical way. Another advantage of using Atlas.ti is that data can be coded in various ways, as one can formulate codes which have no segments attached to them, or create new codes and attach text to them. He used its auto-coding feature to automatically find and code certain segments of text. With this package, it is easy to retrieve codes and quotes.

Babbie and Mouton (2001) recommend the package because it allows one to make extensive notes and memos while analysing the data and one can make field notes and write down other thoughts for a better quality of analysis. In the analysing process, the package can also do query searches on the data. The package also helps in organising classification codes for segments of texts. One can also make hypertext links without coding. Finally, the package helped to create images of the data in terms of the context of interrelationships, which allowed the author to come to some form of theory as an output. If, after analysis of the data, there is a need to create a SPSS output, then the package can assist in giving frequency tables of codes and texts, which may be put onto the World Wide Web.



Atlas.ti provided the author with a platform on which all the transcripts of the interviews were coded and recorded. This was done verbatim, and assisted him in creating and choosing the themes on various ideas and concepts. The Atlas.ti illustration can be viewed in the following:

```
HU: Policy studies
File: [c:\documents and settings\tshivac\my documents\Policy
studies]
Edited by: Super
Date/Time: 07/07/09 10:49:41 AM
```

```
-----
PD-Filter: All
-----
```

```
P 1: Interview10FGIStudents1.txt [C:\Policy Studies\Text
documents\Interview10FGIStudents1.txt] ANSI
  Families:
    focus of the policy
    major opportunities
    transforming teaching and learning
    Understanding policy
```

```
P 2: Interview11FGIStudents2.txt [C:\Policy Studies\Text
documents\Interview11FGIStudents2.txt] ANSI
  Families: transforming teaching and learning
```

P stands for primary documents (therefore P 1 means Primary Document 1, which was the first interview). Families are indicated under each primary document, as in P1 we see families of the focus of the policy, major opportunities, transforming teaching and learning, and understanding policy. It was important that the author started by creating families and associating codes with each family. Such codes had to be aligned with different views and experiences as they came out of the interviewees' responses.

```
All (34) quotations from primary document: P 4:
Interview13FGIStudents2UsingStudyGuide.txt (C:\Policy Studies\Text
documents\Interview13FGIStudents2UsingStudyGuide.txt)
```

The above indicates that the quotations used were from Primary Document 4 (which was schedule interview 4).

```
HU: Policy studies
File: [c:\documents and settings\tshivac\my documents\Policy
studies]
Edited by: Super
Date/Time: 07/07/06 10:47:43 AM
```

```
-----
All current quotations (380): Quotation-Filter: All
-----
```



P 1: Interview10FGIStudents1.txt - 1:1 (13:13) (Super)  
 Codes: [writing study guide]

P 1: Interview10FGIStudents1.txt - 1:2 (15:15) (Super)  
 Codes: [students' involvement]

P 2: Interview11FGIStudents2.txt - 2:1 (26:28) (Super)  
 Codes: [policy focuses]

P 2: Interview11FGIStudents2.txt - 2:2 (12:12) (Super)  
 Codes: [how to study]

P 3: Interview12FGIStudents1UsingStudyGuide.txt - 3:1 (11:13)  
 (Super)  
 Codes: [objectives of Unisa policy]

P 3: Interview12FGIStudents1UsingStudyGuide.txt - 3:2 (21:21)  
 (Super)  
 Codes: [teaching policy]

P11: Interview5LD1helpStudyGuide.txt - 11:35 (185:185) (Super)  
 Codes: [anything on policy]

P11: Interview5LD1helpStudyGuide.txt - 11:36 (189:189) (Super)  
 Codes: [new tuition rule]

The above entries indicate that in Primary Document 1 (which is interview 1), one of the codes is 'writing study guide'. This continues for all of the other interviews. Thus, the code 'writing study guide' indicates different views and experiences on the use of the Unisa Tuition Policy to accomplish this task. Further views to be classified under this family would be issues such as: 'well, I think that as you know in my work. My belief is that material development should happen in a team' and 'But I do know that it should give clear guidelines'.

All Codes Alphabetical

HU: Policy studies  
 File: [c:\documents and settings\tshivac\my documents\Policy studies]  
 Edited by: Super  
 Date/Time: 07/07/06 10:42:36 AM

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 Codes hierarchy  
 Code-Filter: All  
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academic participation <is> Root  
 research, students <is> Root

African perspectives, ICT <is> Root

Africanisation <is> Root  
 basic understanding <is> Root

understanding of policy <is> Root



capacity and ICT <is> Root

challenges to ODL <is> Root

The above indicates the codes in a hierarchical order, and the codes have been ‘filtered.’

HU: Policy studies  
 File: [c:\documents and settings\tshivac\my documents\Policy studies]  
 Edited by: Super  
 Date/Time: 07/07/06 10:45:00 AM

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 Code neighbours list  
 Code-Filter: All  
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- academic research, students
- basic understanding
- basic understanding of policy
- change teaching and learning
- college offerings
- college tuition committees

The above terms/concepts indicate the ‘code neighbours list.’

HU: Policy studies  
 File: [c:\documents and settings\tshivac\my documents\Policy studies]  
 Edited by: Super  
 Date/Time: 07/07/06 10:45:24 AM

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 Codes-Primary-Documents-Table  
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Code-Filter: All  
 PD-Filter: All

CODES	PRIMARY DOCS											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13 14 15 16 Totals												
academic participati	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1												
academic research, s	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1												
basic understanding	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 2												
broad transformation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1												
capacity and ICT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1												



challenges to ODL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1													
democratic context	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1													
development process	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1													
writing study guide	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1													
young students	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1													
young students and a	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1													
-----													
Totals	25	54	56	34	21	20	20	18	25	27	42	37	
0 0 0 0 0 1 380													

The above table indicates ‘Codes-Primary Documents Table’

HU: Policy studies

File: [c:\documents and settings\tshivac\my documents\Policy studies]

Edited by: Super

Date/Time: 07/07/06 10:47:00 AM

List of current quotations (380): Quotation-Filter: All

1:1 I don't think they must be involved.. (13:13)  
 2:13 Yes, I knew about it and is on.. (382:386)  
 3:17 Generally as they are lecturer.. (101:101)  
 4:29 The Unisa fees are very reason.. (135:135)  
 5:8 The tuition policy provides guidelines.. (45:45)  
 6:5 Do the various stakeholders come.. (26:26)  
 6:6 I think it's bit difficult to .. (31:31)  
 7:7 What is the policy addressing?.. (30:30)  
 8:16 The tuition policy - do you think.. (77:77)  
 9:13 I don't think it is that much .. (67:67)  
 10:5 Did you play any role in the development.. (24:25)  
 11:16 Well I don't think we have ach.. (73:73)  
 12:7 I think everyone needs to play.. (38:38)

2:13 Yes, I knew about it and is on....(32:36) - this means that it is quotation 13 in the Primary 2 document, which is interview number 2 and lines 32-36. Thus, P 5: Interview14AcadAuth1StudyGuide.txt [C:\Policy Studies\Text documents 5:8 means that this is coming from Primary document 5 (which is interview 5) and quotation 8 line 45. The quotation is ‘The tuition policy provides guidelines..’.

Within each family, the author grouped together specific views and perceptions, then associated them with a specific code. In the whole process of coding, recording and creating families, he was guided by the three critical questions of the research.

Thinking within the context of the questions, he looked for concepts that would unpack them, such as the role of the respondents in the development of the Unisa Tuition Policy, their understanding of the tuition policy, focus, major hurdles and opportunities to implement the policy, and the impact of the policy on learning and teaching at Unisa.

Due to the complexity of the Atlas.ti software, the author at times became confused in terms of coding, and had to rely on experts to assist him. The result was that he had to recode and, at times, even had some responses listed under different codes. However, the benefit of using the Atlas.ti tool is that each interview was grouped separately, and one could easily follow up on a respondent's views from such transcriptions. And, now and then, he had to guard against taking responses out of context. When going through the views that he had grouped in all the families, there was a link in terms of the depth of meaning and the views expressed during the process of the interviews.

Flick, Kardorff & Steinke (2004) conclude that the discovery of new phenomena in collected data is linked to the overall aim of developing theories on the basis of empirical evidence. Therefore, the discipline of discovery is still the focal point of qualitative research, and the author contrasted and compared the trends and patterns in the data that was collected.

### **3.8 Validity**

This phase of the project involved the 'member-check' by respondents of the accuracy of their responses and the author's interpretations thereof. He went back to check the accuracy of the captured transcripts with the respondents. This was done to lend a form of validity and credibility to the study. This also allowed the sharing of emerging findings with participants in terms of data analysis.

There are various views of validity in qualitative research. Tellis (1997:9) believes the need for triangulation must arise from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes. In qualitative research, the term 'validity' refers to the accuracy and





trustworthiness of the researcher in presenting the data and findings of the study (Bernard, 2000). Patton (2002) defines it as the cross-checking of data using multiple data sources or two or more methods of data collection. Validity in this study refers to the criteria used to make the collection of data, interpretations, insights and applicability of the research trustworthy.

In this study, the author used the following validity checks:

**Triangulation:** This is regarded as one of the most used and reliable method of checking validity. In this study, triangulation was used to obtain deeper meanings and a better understanding of responses and views from participants. As there were different participants, the author had to triangulate between the different methods of data collection, which included interviews, document analysis, questionnaires and personal reflection. He went back to participants to check and reflect on their responses. Flick (2004a) advises that a method such as triangulation should involve checking the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods, and that it should be understood as a means of extending our knowledge of the research issue (Flick, 2004b). Therefore, the author had to keep on cross-checking data and information from various sources. This involved a comparison of data obtained through interviews and that obtained through questionnaires. The comparison was done on a superficial level, since if it had been intensive, it would have consumed a lot of time. Another factor was that qualitative research does not offer the pretence of replication. The primary external evaluators were the supervisors, who now and again had to do a quality check which provided a platform for validity checking. Their input in terms of validity was relating the quality of the work to the standard for PhD research. The author also benefited from the input of a few colleagues who were sounding boards for what he was trying to write in terms of transcribing the data. Some of these colleagues were supervisors of masters and doctoral students at the university.

Member checks were carried out. This involved taking the transcripts and analysed texts back to participants and checking whether or not such transcripts and analyses were a true reflection of their views and input. The author also had to deal with some of the ethical issues in this approach. Some participants were anxious. The fact that



he could come back to them with their responses clearly demonstrated that he could identify them. Their responses had therefore not been anonymous, and they were concerned that he might breach confidentiality. Another weakness in member checking was that some of the participants said they were a ‘bit shocked with what they said during the interviews’ and ‘it sounded very harsh.’ However, member checking also allowed the author to reflect on his epistemological view that, when it comes to policy development and implementation, there are many factors which come into play, which are regarded as obvious – as elements that need not be taken for granted when it comes to policy development and implementation. On the other hand, there were also additional issues that some of the participants wanted to raise, such as issues relating to the ‘changes brought by the merger’ and ‘how will that impact on the teaching and learning?’ Some divergent views emerged, as suggested by a question such as ‘how do we teach at a comprehensive university when we do not know what a comprehensive university is?’

**Authenticity:** The author had to look at issues such as participants/interviewees’ statements and their underlying value, the orientation of interviewees before the interviews, and the purpose of the research. He ensured that the environment was conducive to interviews, by allowing respondents to speak freely and by not distorting what they said. He took personal notes to describe the environment in which the interviews took place, and the issues that emerged during the interview. This helped him to deal with his personal influence, views, perceptions, opinions and beliefs, as they would always influence any act of qualitative research. During the interview, he had to ensure that he kept on checking that his views were not influencing those of the respondents, and he had to remain focused on the crux of the question. He tried to be realistic and reflected on two critical issues: had he gained full access to the knowledge and meanings of informants as a researcher, and would experienced researchers use the same questions or methods if they were to undertake this study? The documenting of the interview process was discussed in section 3.5.3.3, and forms part of checking for validity in this study.



### 3.9 Limitations of the Research

This is a qualitative research project focusing on Unisa as a case study. Because of this, the extent to which one can generalise the findings is limited. The research aimed at exploring views and experiences of various stakeholders in the development and implementation of a tuition policy at Unisa, and the area of focus was therefore only Unisa. The time period of the study was limited, as the author had to fulfil the requirement of completing it within the stipulated period. He would have liked to continue up to a point where the impact of the research could have been investigated, but this was not possible.

As the research was an exploration of the views and experiences of various stakeholders in the development and implementation of the tuition policy accepted by Senate in 1998, the issue of the merger promulgated by DoE in 2002 was a reality that could not be investigated. Now and then it reared its ugly head, and one could sense some anxiety about the changes that the merger had brought about.

Another limitation of the research is that the researcher may have gained a better understanding of why the 'tuition policy' happened as it did, but could not look extensively at what would happen in terms of future research, except to make recommendations. Furthermore, another major limitation of this study as a case study per se is that one cannot necessarily generalise from its conclusions (Yin, 2004). In terms of limitations relating to the sampling, one can see distortion as a major issue i.e. distortion caused by insufficient breadth in the sampling; distortion related to the brevity of the time-span of the project, and distortion caused by a lack of depth in the data collection at each site (Hoepfl, 1997:52; Patton, 1990). In addition, the author was involved in the research to a greater extent than usual in a qualitative research project, and could not easily detach himself from the process. As a past Unisa student and present member of staff, he had strong views and beliefs about what should be happening. This could have led to a lot of subjectivity, and he was rigorous in attempting to maintain his research and professional stance. A further dilemma arose in relation to the issue under investigation. What was the author to do with the findings, which would end up in the public arena, as the study had been registered at a different, competing institution?

The study was conducted in the English language, something which may have been a barrier for first-year students and may, therefore, have had an impact on their interpretation of the questions and their responses.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to present a more detailed explanation of the research design of this study. It has looked at different issues, such as methodology, ethics, and the data collection instruments. Qualitative research places an emphasis on in-depth knowledge and the elaboration of images and concepts. Hence, the qualitative methods have been viewed as particularly useful for the areas of social research, such as those which ‘give voice’ to marginalised groups, the formulation of new interpretations of the historical and cultural significance of various events, and the advancement of theory. In-depth, empirical qualitative studies may capture important facts missed by more general, quantitative studies.