

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DISTANCE AND  
CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES  
ASSESSED IN TERMS OF ACCESS, DELIVERY AND  
OUTPUT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

**by**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is handed in herewith for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria is the researcher's independent work. It has not been submitted for a degree or examination before in this or any other university.

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\_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2007

## ABSTRACT

This study is about the comparison of distance and conventional education programs at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. It is assessed in terms of access, delivery modes and output. The purpose is to investigate and to compare the impact of distance and conventional education on the performances of learners in a postgraduate degree program (B.Ed. (Hons) with specialization in Education Management, assessed in terms of access, delivery and output. It explored documents that were both at the macro (Government Policy documents) and macro (University's / Faculty documents) with the aim of answering the main research question, with other identified sub-research questions that have been raised.: *What is the comparison between the impact of distance and conventional education on the performances of learners in a postgraduate BEd (Hons) degree program with specialization in Education Management, when assessed in terms of access, delivery mode and output? A review of relevant literature exposed and compared the essence of both modes of delivery.*

Data were collected from identified key role players on the program, which included administrators, module coordinators, course presenters, and tutors, some of the students on the program, and some of those that had discontinued their studies with the university. These were done using one-on-one semi-structured and focus group interviews, telephone interviews and questionnaires in order to obtain qualitative and quantitative data. A sample of 127 distance education students, 45 conventional students, 6 module coordinators, 10 course presenters, 4 tutors, 4 administrators, 1 instructional designer and 10 students that had discontinued their studies participated in the investigation. The data collected were analysed through the use descriptive and inferential statistics, and tabulation for the quantitative data, while the computer assisted qualitative data

analysis software [CAQDAS] (Atlas.ti) was employed for the analysis of the transcribed interviews.

From the data obtained, it was confirmed that there is a myriad of possible factors that may be responsible for the divergences in the performances, throughput and output rates of enrolled students on the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy at the University of Pretoria. It was further revealed that South Africa has identified distance education as a tool of redressing past inequalities in higher education, a process, which the university was involved in by starting relevant programs to this end. However, even though equal access is the focus of the country, but it appeared as if little is being said about financially supporting distance education as for instance, there was no financial assistance to distance education students on the program.

Due to the incursion of the university into areas, where the impact of university education had not previously being felt, its choice of the mode of delivery was limited to the *print*, the first generation, which was expected to bring all students on the program at par since all would have access to it. However, despite the efforts made by the university, it was discovered that there existed some gaps between the qualities of the learning experiences, which students from both modes were exposed to. Examples of those identified were lack of designated counseling unit for distance education students, and inadequate number of administrative staff to meet the needs of the ever increasing number of distance education students. However, it appeared that there were no prominent discrepancies that could be found between the two modes, and one could assume that both modes were guided by a similar underpinning philosophy, which drove the ethos of the programs that impacted on the instructional design.

It was also found that there were challenges faced by the academic staff involved in the program under investigation, who felt that there might be the need for the institution to demarcate between academe interested in distance education, and

those that were not, and the need for the institution to review its stand on rewards and incentives systems for staff involved in distance education. It was believed by them that this would be the way out of the dearth of research presently facing the university on this delivery mode.

The study suggests that quality issues especially in relation to an African setting should be looked into, since a large percentage of the students involved in the program were from the rural areas. Finally, the study identified various limitations, and made suggestions for further research, and recommendations for improvement and immediate action.

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## KEY WORDS

Conventional Education

Output

Distance Education

Quality

Transactional Distance

Quality assurance

Access

Mixed-methods approach

Delivery modes

Generations

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	-	Advanced Certificate in Education
ACRL	-	Association of College and Research Libraries
BEEd	-	Bachelor of Education
CE	-	Conventional Education
CAQDAS	-	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Software
CHE	-	Council on Higher Education
COL	-	Commonwealth of Learning
COLISA	-	Confederation of Open Learning Institutions South Africa
CQA	-	Centre for Quality Assurance
CUP	-	Committee of University Principals
DE	-	Distance Education
DoE	-	Department of Education
ETQAs	-	Education and training Quality assurance Bodies
FDE	-	Further Diploma in Education
HELP	-	Higher Education Loan Program
HESA	-	Higher Education in South Africa
HEQC	-	Higher Education Qualifications Committee
ICT	-	Information Computer Technology
JIPSA	-	Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition
MoE	-	Ministry of Education
NADEOSA	-	National Association of Distance Education Organizations of South Africa
NCHE	-	National Commission on Higher Education
NQF	-	National Qualifications Framework
NSBs	-	National Standards Bodies
OECD	-	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development

QAA	-	Quality Assurance Agency
QM	-	Quality Management
QPU	-	Quality Promotion Unit
QUAL	-	Qualitative
QUAN	-	Quantitative
RPL	-	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAIDE	-	South African Institute of Distance Education
SAQA	-	South African Qualifications Authority
SAUVCA	-	South Africa University Vice-Chancellors Association
SCOTVEC	-	Scottish Vocational Education Council
SGBs	-	Standards Generating Bodies
SERTEC	-	Certificate Council of Technikon Education
SMS	-	Short Message Service
TDT	-	Transactional Distance Theory
TQM	-	Total Quality Management
UP	-	University of Pretoria
UNISA	-	University of South Africa

# CHAPTER 1

## PROBLEM STATEMENT, AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 Overview of chapter 1

Chapter 1 provides a general overview of this study, which entails:

- A précis of Chapter One;
- A supporting background and problem statement;
- The research questions;
- The aims and objectives of the study;
- The research design.
- A description of the significance, limitations and delimitations of the study.
- The title and concepts clarification.
- This chapter ends with a summary that introduces Chapter Two.

### 1.2 Background and problem statement

According to Tsolakidis (2000), the conventional education

*'...is the universally accepted approach for knowledge acquisition. It is difficult for anyone to deny its success which is the main reason why it has survived over the centuries, without facing any urgent need to incorporate revolutionary innovation in its techniques.'*

In the same vein, distance education is nothing new. It has a history that spans at least the last 150 years, which establishes it as a legitimate form of instruction (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999:3-6; Holmberg, 2001:9). Distance education is a worldwide phenomenon, and it has become the favoured way for many universities in Africa to meet the escalating demand for higher education among the population (Brimoh, 2003:14).

However, many allegations have, over the years, been levied against distance education. Sadly, this is still the case. These allegations include:

- ‘Lack of contact with other students which can have a significant effect on the learner’s motivation’ (Suen & Parkes, 2004) as a result of ‘isolation caused by the students and teacher’s being separated by geographical distance’ (George, 1999);
- ‘Success in distance education requires a greater degree of self-motivation and self-discipline than is necessary for learning’ for which students are not adequately prepared (Keen, 1999);
- ‘Non-availability of computers, lack of knowledge of computers and lack of knowledge of networking’ (Fisher & Desberg, 1995), which is mostly the lot of ‘low-income, minority and underrepresented students that are supposedly to be catered for by the programme’ (Burke, 2002)
- And ‘the absence of non-verbal communication’ (Barnes, 1995), among others.

Despite the long history enjoyed by distance education and the enhancement of its reputation recently, it is ironical that there is still some persistence in regarding it as the second-best option (Mendels, 1998; Reich, 1999; Stencil, 1999; Aluko, 2000; Brimoh, 2003). Even in countries where distance education has for many years been an available option, where distance learning institutions are well established, there still exists the belief (among academics in particular) that conventional education is ‘real’ education, while distance education is second-class education.

In support of this, Tsolakidis (2000) stresses that 'there is the opinion that traditional education is non-substitutable ...' therefore, 'any non-traditional education is allowed to act on a complementary, somehow subordinate basis'. Consequently, most research on distance education focuses on comparative studies of distance and traditional methods of education (Diaz, 2000; Duffy et al. 2002).

Though it has been thought that there may no longer be the need for such comparative studies, Makin (2001) stresses the evidence of this is inconclusive. Hence my view that the ending of further research in this particular area, especially in a third world country such as South Africa, would be a paradox; this is because current works earlier referred to and even more recent studies (Hall, Thor & Farrell, 1996; Du Plessis & Van Der Merwe, 2005) show that this discriminating attitude still persists.

Consequently, it is the focus of this work to compare these two forms of education with each other in terms of *Access*, *Delivery Mode* and *Output*. This is to fill the gaps (Ehrmann, 1995; Saba, 1998; Phipps, 1999; Lockee, Moore & Burton, 2001; Diaz, 2000) already identified in past comparative studies that include:

- Failure to adequately define and differentiate between the two forms of education;
- Lack of taking into consideration other factors that affect the failure or success of students;
- Lack of focus on the total academic programme
- Inadequate the reasons for higher dropout rates of distance education students, among others.

Therefore, it is advised that further research on distance education should focus on *students' success* and be *learning-centered*, which would likely sensitize the faculties to the individual learner and prepare them to facilitate distance education (Diaz, 2000; Lockee, Moore & Burton, 2001).

Therefore, in this study, it is not the researcher's interest to focus on 'Which method is better?' (Diaz, 2000) The researcher would rather focus on what discrepancies may exist in distance education, when compared to conventional education, which have resulted in the prevailing skepticism, and focus on suggestions for alleviating such skepticism. In support of this, Hoyt (1999) stresses that:

*'the need to show that technologically delivered or distance education courses are as effective as lecture methods of instruction is not the most important research question, as it has been proved that the former is as effective in teaching students'.*

However, 'the way to maximize the potential of a particular medium or delivery method seems to be the more relevant question'. Therefore, it is hoped that such a comparison would bring to light the issues that cause such persistence in thought, and also indicate what suggestions can be proffered to alleviate such problems. This becomes non-negotiable because African countries in particular, to which this study is highly relevant, are increasingly turning to distance education as a means of solving the crisis in education (Bollag, 2001). For instance Dhanarajan (1997) predicted that by the first quarter of this century about 150 million young people seeking access to tertiary education would come from the developing world, and that might require the construction of one new university per week for the next twenty years. Also, Umar (2006) reveals that in Nigeria less than ten percent (10%) of qualified prospective students could gain admission into the conventional tertiary institutions.

One should start wondering how conventional education will cope with this expected swelling of student numbers, especially when considered in conjunction with the downturn in the world economy. Stressing this view, Daniel (1996:11) cites that, higher education is facing a crisis that is made up of five components, which are:

*an 'inability to accommodate the volume and variety of student demand; education is too costly and not sufficiently relevant to the labour market; teaching methods are too inflexible to accommodate a diverse student body; educational quality is not assured; and the university's sense of academic community is being eroded'.*

These have led to changes already occurring in higher education all over the world that is part of the pointer to this study. Various terms are being used to define these changes: a transformation, (learning) revolution, and paradigm shift (Pacific Crest, 2004).

The concept *paradigm shift* is mentioned when 'difficulties or anomalies begin to appear in the functioning of the existing paradigm which cannot be handled adequately'. And when there exists 'an alternative paradigm that will account for all that the original paradigm accounts for...and that offers real hope for solving the major difficulties facing the current paradigm' (Bair, 1995).

Three changes as such may be identified:

Firstly, the paradigm shifts from a teacher-centred instruction or teaching paradigm to a student-centre 'learning paradigm', which creates environments and allows for experiences that encourage self-discovery and construction of knowledge (Gwyer, 1997; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Fraser & Lombard, 2002; Pacific Crest, 2004).

Secondly, the question of access to higher education, that has become an important political demand (Herman & Mandell, 1999). According to Dhanarajan (1997), hardly would one find a political leader 'who does not speak of a need to increase opportunities for post-secondary education in his or her country' though he also argues that leaders are driven by 'economic liberalisation, competition for investment ... rather than the desire for pure commitment to greater social equity ...'

In support of this, Saint (1997) states that ‘on the eve of 21<sup>st</sup> century, tertiary education in Sub-Saharan Africa confronts unrelenting pressure to expand access in spite of declining educational quality and stagnant funding possibilities’. For example, in South Africa the government sees distance education as a means of equalizing tertiary education access for the majority who have been denied such access (Daves et al. 2004). According to Probert (1995), Blacks who represent over 70% of the overall South African population comprise only 43% of the 351 746 students enrolled in South African universities. Though according to him, ‘distance learning enrolment grew by 492% between 1993 and 1999’, in contrast to the decrease in enrolment for Conventional Education learning, there is still a long way to go. However, it can be said that this ‘long way’ is being gradually covered; Education Statistics in South Africa (2002) reveals that enrolment for distant learning courses is steadily increasing (DoE, 2004).

Thirdly, there is no concerted effort to minimize the differences between the two systems of education from various perspectives, mostly concentrating on the peculiar demographic nature of the students, as well as incorporating a wider use of technology as a teaching tool.

For instance, according to Daves et al. (2004), in South Africa it was discovered that in distance education teaching technology had been traditionally print-based, although tertiary institutions are now increasingly introducing varied technologies into their teaching methods. As the differences between distance and conventional education are minimized, both educational systems increasingly have the same modes of delivery (Tait & Mills, 1999).

According to Gwyer (1997), it has been said that these paradigm shifts require numerous changes, some of which are that:

- Judgement of institutional success on the quality of student learning;
- A seamless system of delivery “providing access to educational services for learners as they need them, when they need them”;

- The vision of the institution itself as a learner in that over time it continuously learns how to produce more learning with each graduating class, each entering student;
- An institution that creates environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves instead of one that merely transfers knowledge from faculty to student;
- The continual identification, development, testing, implementation and assessment of a range of effective learning technologies including new applications of computer and information technology and
- Education that is tailored to the needs of individual students.

Though many of these changes have already been, or are in the process of being implemented in institutions of higher learning, yet Boggs (1995 –1996) observes that it is not easy to change the traditional paradigms that dominate institutional thinking.

Paradigm shifts in higher education are rooted in theoretical underpinnings that have been altered over the years. With the advent of acceptance of critical theory came notable changes from ‘scientific theory, recognizing, acknowledging commitment, relativity and subjectivity as unavoidable, necessary and desirable characteristics’ (Gibson, 1986:4), as later cited by Fraser and Lombard, (2002:89).

Critical pedagogy, which emphasizes dialogue, democratic participation and the opportunity to protest on the already determined objectives of learning, is what Beck (2004) refers to as post-modernism. Theories have shifted from the behaviourism and cognitivism to constructivism, which presents a new view on how reality is perceived. The nature of knowledge is now perceived as internal to the student, but not static or passive.

Therefore educationists no longer regard the amassing of knowledge by their students as their only focus (Fraser and Lombard, 2002:92). They now acknowledge that reality is determined by the experiences of the knower, based on the network of things and relationships in and with his environment

(Von Glaserfeld, 1995). The implication of this for learning is that focus has shifted from the teacher to the learner. Thus, it has become imperative to focus on giving students what 'they need', and not what 'we offer' (Brimoh, 2003:14). Subsequently, such a paradigm shift affects learning, instruction and organizational structure (Simsek, Louis & Seashore, 1994), and the use of technology.

Additionally, attention has been drawn to the shift in the demographic nature of students of higher learning. Most now opt for distance education, using the mode of study that will enable them to find jobs, maintain these jobs, and - simultaneously - continue their studies. (This shift in focus has been largely due to a scarcity of jobs and accompanying high rate of unemployment within the country.)

Consequently, the challenges facing higher education, among others, include:

*'Providing lifelong study opportunities to working adults; defining flexible access policies for second-chance students... and designing flexible curricula for a rich spectrum of clientele...'* (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999: xix-xx)

This paradigm shift in higher education has led to a convergence of conventional and distance education. Tait and Mills (1999) have described this shift as bewildering. Convergence refers to the 'breaking down of barriers between open and distance learning and conventional education, and sees the creation of more and more institutions working across a range of modes' (Tait & Mills, 1999:1). The morphological differences between distance and conventional education are falling away as technology brings the educational exchange between the teacher and the student together (Johnston, 1999: 39; Thompson, 1999:151). Even though the process of learning at a distance was formerly seen as generically different from the conventional mode (Sewart, 1981) but, the same writer (1987:157) later asserted that 'all teaching and learning is based upon the same fundamental principles...There are no unique principles inherent in mainstream education'.

However, according to Jelfs (2001) "... little attention has been paid to 'customer satisfaction' as a measure of quality or through a 'fitness for purpose' definition'. This brings to focus the question of quality that has been raised in higher education, but even more in distance education (Garrison, 1996; Aluko, 2000). Black (1992) recommends that quality should be given more prominence because this alone has accounted for lack of faculty support for Distance Education. For example, in South Africa the Department of Education is 'worried about the need to improve the quality and the learner support services, as well as cost-efficiency and effectiveness of programme' which invariably impact on quality of distance education (DoE, 2001).

Internationally, research shows a trend from external control to internal quality assurance that requires a process of self-evaluation by the institution (SAIDE, 1996). The modern international trend is to view students as 'clients, customers and consumers of higher education' (Mandell & Herman, 1996). For example in the United Kingdom, 'The Charter for Higher Education (1993) explains the standards of service expected from the universities and other institutions that provide higher education in England' (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999:66). In addition to this, countries such as Italy, Denmark, Belgium, Spain and France have laws relating to private educational institutions only (SAIDE, 1996:34). The main aim of such legislation is to protect their consumer's rights, to prevent substandard learning quality. Ritzer (1998) reiterates this by proposing his 'McDonaldization' thesis in which students want education to operate in the same fashion as the McDonald food industry where customer satisfaction ranks supreme.

In closing, a review of available literature shows that there is no consensus on the issue of quality in distance education. This may be determined by various factors such as: 'choice of course or courses (on offer) by institution, assurance of the quality of the whole institution, the quality of the materials provided or the counseling and career guidance provision' (Jelfs, 2001).

### 1.3 Aims and objectives of the study

The main aim of this study is to investigate and to compare the impact of distance and conventional education on the performances of students in a postgraduate Bachelor of Education degree programme (specializing in Education Management, Law and Policy Studies (BEd Hons)). The study will be assessed in terms of *access*, *delivery* and *output*.

In order to achieve this, the following objectives have been set, to:

- Expose and compare the essence of both distance and conventional education by means of a literature survey together with statistical tests performed on students in terms of access, delivery mode and output;
- Ascertain reasons for the divergences between the two modes of delivery based on the responses of students to the questionnaires and interviews;
- Investigate, using questionnaires, to what extent the choice of media has extended access of learning to students;
- Assess what direct impact the interaction between the teacher and the students has on the promotion of learning and its outcomes in both forms of education, using questionnaires and conducting interviews;
- Investigate what administrative and financial constraints impact students' learning, using questionnaires and conducting interviews;
- Identify criteria regarding the quality assurance of distance education that can be applied and to ascertain how justifiable they are.; and
- Compare findings from this study with other similar studies by means of a literature survey.

### 1.4 Research questions

In an attempt to assess the comparability of distance and conventional education in relation to *access*, *delivery* and *output*, this main research question has been identified:

### **1.4.1 Main research question**

What is the comparison between the impact of distance and conventional education on the performances of learners in a postgraduate BEd (Hons) degree program with specialization in Education Management, Law and Policy, when assessed in terms of access, delivery mode and output?

### **1.4.2 Research sub-questions**

The following research sub- questions arise out of the main research question:

#### **Research sub-question 1**

Why is distance education often regarded as inferior to conventional education, when assessed in terms of access, delivery mode and output?

#### **Research sub-question 2**

What are the demographic and ethnic characteristics of students who choose distance education above conventional education, and to what extent does the choice of media extend access of learning possibilities to students in both modes?

#### **Research sub-question 3**

To what extent does the quality of the learning experience in distance education compare with that of conventional education in general and, more specifically, at the University of Pretoria?

#### **Research sub-question 4**

What divergences are observable in the output rates of the drop-out rate and performance of students between distance education and conventional education? What factors may contribute to this?

## **1.5 Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is based on Moore's Transactional Distance Theory (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3). In an attempt to explain the

concept, Moore (1993) defines it in relation to interaction in an instructional programme, 'as a function of dialogue, structure, and learner's autonomy', which is pedagogical, not geographic, and necessitates 'special organizations and teaching procedures'. Though a distance education theory, scholars have made attempts to test its relevance (Saba & Shearer, 1994; Amunsden, 1996; Bischoff et al. 1996; Saba, 1998; Gorsky & Caspi, 2005), and have discovered it can apply to both modes of delivery (Bischoff et al. 1996) because transactional distance is in all modes of delivery (Moore, 1993, 1996; Mueller, 1997; Stirling, 1997).

The concept has been adopted for this study in order to see the interrelatedness between the three selected variables. For instance, past studies (Garrison, 1996; SAIDE, 1996; Perraton, 2000; Dhanarajan, 2001) have revealed that the delivery mode of a form of education and its quality are directly related to access, either positively or negatively. Related to this is the output rate of both forms of education.

In other words, there is interplay between teaching and learning as they affect these criteria. And I hope this concept will solve the puzzle in my mind. This framework is explained in Chapter Four, and it focuses on quality issues as they relate to the three chosen elements of assessment.

## **1.6 The design of the study**

Research design has been defined as 'a general strategy or plan for conducting a research study which includes exploration of posed research questions, and a detailed presentation of the research steps to be followed in collecting, choosing, and analyzing data' (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

This study is a descriptive and interpretative case study whereby the focus is 'essentially a research in depth rather than breadth' (Verma & Mallick, 1999:81). However, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed for this study.

### **1.6.1 Target population**

All the participants in the study were drawn from University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education, Department of Education Management and Policy Studies in South Africa.

Two identical but separate studies were conducted with the participants, who were:

- Students registered to study the BEd (Hons) (Education Management, Law and Policy) in 2004. There were 127 Distance Education students and 45 Conventional Education students who participated in this study.
- 6 Module Coordinators who administer both the Distance and Conventional Education study programmes.
- 10 Course Presenters who teach courses that are part of both the Distance and Conventional study programmes.
- 4 Tutors who work with students and lecturers in the department
- 4 members of University of Pretoria staff, who administrate both the Distance and Conventional Education study programmes.
- 1 Instructional Designer. (Students from both the Distance and Conventional Education study programmes use the same learning materials.)
- A total of 20 students - 10 students from both modes of delivery - who had dropped out of the study programme in 2004 (or previous year).

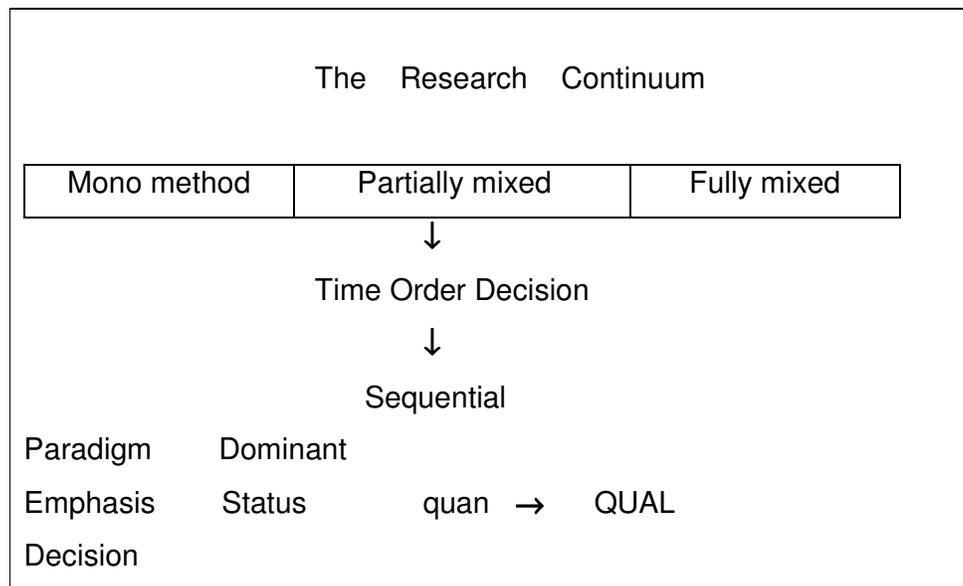
### **1.6.2 Research methodology**

To achieve the aims and objectives identified in a previous section of this thesis, a mixed-method research approach (Richie & Lewis, 2003) was applied. According to Seale (1999), each question itself often determines which research method to best apply. It has been advocated 'that research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important questions' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Therefore, the researcher’s method was ‘complementary’ and aimed to ‘seek elaboration, enhancement, illustration, (and) classification of the results from one method with the results from the other method’ (Greene, Caravelli & Graham (1989) in Keasley, 2004).

A dominant QUALITATIVE method (QUAL), with less emphasis on quantitative (quan) strategies, was applied during this study. Figure 1.1, below, illustrates the matrix of the mixed-method research approach applied during this study.

**Figure 1.1: Mixed-methods design matrix**



Source: Adapted from Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003)

The three *qualitative* questions that will be focused on are:

**Research sub-question 1**

Why is distance education often seen as inferior to conventional education, when assessed in terms of access, delivery mode and output?

**Research sub-question 2**

What are the demographic and ethnic characteristics of students who choose distance education above conventional education, and to what extent does

the choice of media extend access of learning possibilities to students in both modes?

### **Research sub-question 3**

To what extent does the quality of learning experience in distance education compare conventional education generally and, more specifically, at the University of Pretoria?

A literature study, document analysis, focus group interviews, personal interviews, structured and open-ended questionnaires were used as qualitative instruments in conducting an in-depth study to answer the questions posed above.

On the other hand, the *quantitative* approach was applied to the fourth research sub-question:

### **Research sub-question 4**

What divergences are observable in the performance output rates of students from both research groups? What reasons that support the findings can be deduced from the research?

This afforded the researcher the opportunity to compare student achievements and output rates from both distance and conventional education, using chi-square tests to show a statistical significance between the two groups.

### **1.6.3 Research strategies and instruments for data collection**

A brief description of the research strategies and instruments used to collect information and opinions, as well as the method used to analyse this information for this study is given below:

### **1.6.3.1 Overview of current trends in distance and conventional education**

The overview of current trends in distance and conventional education was done through a literature study and document analysis.

### **1.6.3.2 Using inventories as sources of information**

The inventories used were documents that were relevant to this study, which - on a macro-level - consisted of Government Policy documents and - on a micro-level - in-house University and Faculty documents. (The latter reflected the ethnicity of students involved in the research programme, their enrolment, throughput and output rates.)

### **1.6.3.3 Pilot application of the questionnaires and interview schedules**

Initially, my intention was to administer one hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire to students, as an initial test of the validity and reliability of this questionnaire, to then improve it where necessary. However, only seventy (70) students were available, so thirty (30) copies were returned to me.

The feedback from this pilot application identified five ambiguously worded questions - which the researcher reworded. (It was important that the questions be well formulated and structured, as the questionnaire was to be the main tool for sourcing my research data - it would have been an enormous task to have a separate in-depth interview with the participants in the study.)

This procedure was also applied to the interview schedules that were piloted on two course presenters, two course administrators and two students who had dropped out of the study programme. (These pilot interviews were conducted to good effect, and the findings were subsequently incorporated with the data from interviews conducted later in the research programme.)

#### **1.6.3.4 Final application of the questionnaires in the collection of data**

Copies of the content-validated questionnaires were then given to the targeted Distance Education and Conventional Education students for completion. (See Chapter 5, Section 5.5 of this study.)

This questionnaire comprised open-ended and closed-ended questions, to encourage an in-depth, descriptive contribution by each participant and avoid receiving less helpful contributions that would weaken the final result of the research and only serve to swell participant numbers.

Of the 230 copies distributed to participating Distance Education students, 100 (43.47%) were returned to the researcher. Of the 45 copies distributed to participating Conventional Education students, 27 (60%) were returned to the researcher. (See Chapter 5, Section 5.3.1.3.1 of this study.)

#### **1.6.3.5 Conducting in-depth interviews as data collection strategy**

A semi-structured interview schedule, that allows for fluidity of feedback (Yin, 2003), was applied to target key participants in the study. This enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the problem under review. This also encouraged detailed subject coverage, and the gathering of data along with explanatory evidence.

#### **1.6.3.6 Conducting focus group interviews**

A semi-structured interview schedule was also applied to focus groups, with the intention of achieving further depth in the information gathered. The researcher conducted these interviews with the module coordinators and tutors involved with distance education and conventional education separately, to enhance clarification on issues inherent to each group.

#### **1.6.3.7 Field notes**

Field notes were kept for reflexivity during the application of interviews to remind the researcher of salient information (which may not be possible to

remember after conducting too many interviews) and compare interview transcriptions with the notes that had been taken.

### 1.6.3.8 Research procedures

The procedure followed by this research is shown in the table below:

**Table 1.1: Research procedure followed during the investigation**

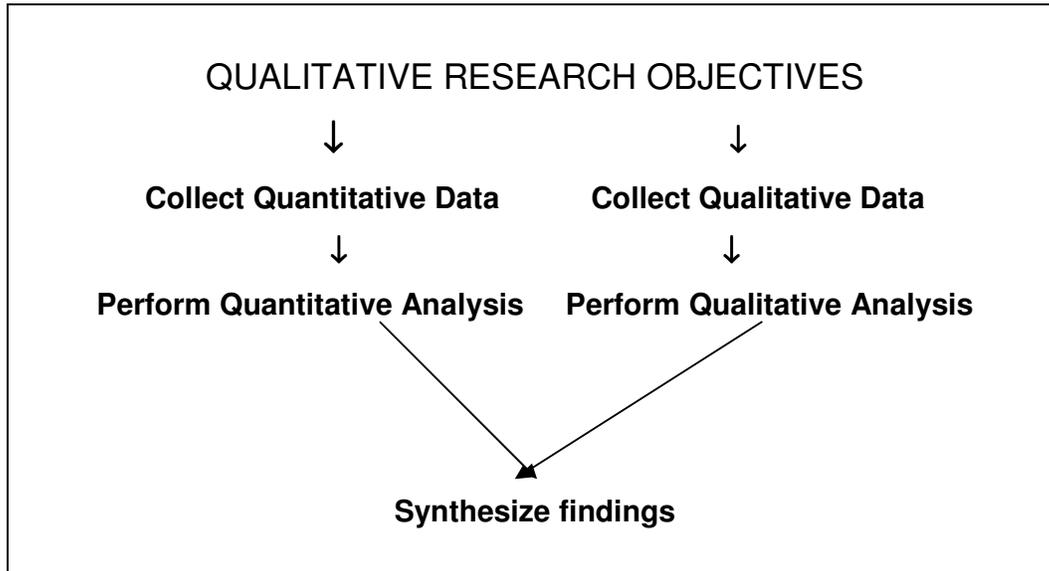
<b>Types of information required</b>	<b>Data collecting strategy/ instrument.</b>	<b>Outcomes achieved</b>
1. Overview of current trends in distance and conventional education in terms of access, delivery modes and output.	1. Literature study and documents analysis.	1. Current trends in good quality conventional education and best practices in distance education.
2. Opinions of teaching staff and administrators regarding the practices of distance and conventional education.	2. Personal interviews with focus groups, each lasting about 1 hour.	2. Qualitative, personal opinions related to the issues under discussion.
3. Opinions of Distance and Conventional Education students on the quality of their delivery mode(s) in relation to administration, finance, course materials, contact session, assessment and support.	3. Structured open-ended & closed-ended questionnaire.	3. Frequency distribution of respondents' opinions.
4. Assessment of the significant impact of the	4. Structured open-ended and closed-	4. Frequency distribution of

mode of delivery on the students in terms of satisfaction.	ended questionnaires.	respondents' opinions.
5. Opinions of both Distance and Conventional Education students who had discontinued their studies with the University of Pretoria.	5. One-on-one interviews conducted with each research programme participant, on the telephone.	5. Qualitative personal opinions on the issue under discussion.
6. Measurement of the significant statistical differences between students' achievements from both Distance and Conventional Education.	6. Application of statistical tests (Chi-square, Fisher's exact test and phi-coefficient) to data from the administration of the University of Pretoria.	6. The measurement of significant statistical differences between students' performances.
7. Comparison of the enrolments, output and drop-out rate of students from both distance and conventional education.	7. Documents from the administration of University of Pretoria.	7. Descriptive analysis of the data.

#### 1.6.4 Data analysis

The mixed-method research approach was chosen to conduct this study and the data from the Distance and Conventional Education study programmes were analyzed separately – to accentuate their inherent natures. The diagram below shows what this process entailed:

**Figure 1.2: Illustration of the application of the mixed-methods research approach applied during the Investigation**



Source: Adapted from Tashakkori and Teddlie, (2003)

#### **1.6.4.1 Analysis of the data collected during the application of the qualitative research strategies**

Analysis of the collected data was dealt with in the following ways:

- The data gleaned from the completed questionnaires was analyzed by the Department of Statistics, from the University of Pretoria.
- The in-depth interviews were analyzed with the aid of computer software. This data was sorted into the following categories: naming, categorizing and labeling recurring issues and themes. (The software programme used was ATLAS.ti and details of these interviews may be accessed from the accompanying compact disc.)
- Lastly, a descriptive analysis of the enrolments, output and drop-out rate of students participating in both distance education and conventional education was done by comparing the available data (see Chapter 5 - Section 5.4 of this study).

#### **1.6.4.2 Analysis of the data collected during the application of the quantitative research strategies**

Inventories from the Department of Student Administration, from the University of Pretoria showing the comparison of student achievements and output rates were used. In dealing with these inventories, statistical tests (Chi-square, Phi-coefficient and Fisher's exact) will be applied to test the significant differences between rates of student performances (see Chapter 6 of this study). The hypothesis for these tests was:

*Ho: There is no significant difference between the pass rates of distance learners as compared to the pass rates of contact students, who participated in the investigation.*

#### **1.6.4.3 Analysis of the data collected during the application of the mixed-method research strategies**

According to Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003), the mixed-method analysis of data is defined as 'the use of quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques... at some stage beginning with the data collection process... from which interpretations are made'. Consequently, findings from the data collected from both distance and conventional education were integrated to achieve the aim of this study (see Chapter 8, Sections 8.4 and 8.5 of this study).

### **1.7 The significance of the study**

The target group of this study is the Distance Education component of the University of Pretoria. However, the researcher hopes that the findings from this work will expose areas of strength and identify areas that need strengthening in both the distance and conventional educational study programmes of this institution.

However, the researcher is also aware that the findings of this study may apply to relevant higher teaching institutions throughout South Africa, and that, as such, they would glean valuable information from this exposition.

The researcher hopes the findings of this study will assist those involved in policy formulation, especially when focussing on distance education.

The researcher also hopes the findings of this study may go beyond the borders of South Africa, to assist in other African countries where distance education is an important means of furthering the education of the population.

Finally, other researchers will find this study useful, as further areas of study that emanated have been identified.

### **1.8 The limitations and delimitations of the study**

The aim of this study is to discover possible reasons for the sceptical attitude that is persistently cast on distance education, to view it as the 'second-best' option for seeking higher learning. The researcher hopes findings from this study will expose reasons for this, and result in improved attitudes toward this form of education, making it generally more accepted (see Chapter 8, Section 8.6 of this study).

However, it must be stressed at this point, it is not the intention of this study to argue a case to indicate which form of education – distance or conventional - is the better one. And countries all over the world, especially the 'developing' countries such as are found in Africa, are faced with the reality that the only way of reaching their teeming population in order to meet the demand for higher learning is through distance education - this form of education is here to stay. Consequently, answers to questions that explore reasons for the prevailing scepticism must urgently be sought - even faculty members from the very institutions that support distance education study programmes are affected by this scepticism. This study may even expose the fact that there is no foundation for such an attitude at all.

The researcher is aware that the practices which govern the administration of Distance Education at the University of Pretoria follow guidelines that reflect the underlying philosophy toward education adopted by this institution. The researcher is also aware that this study may highlight certain practices at this

university that may not apply to other institutions also offering both distance and conventional education study programmes. Nevertheless, such institutions should be able to adapt findings of this study, to suit their prevailing conditions and situations.

Lastly, it is important to note this study cannot provide all the answers to the many questions to be raised on this subject - it is merely an attempt to fill some of the gaps already identified and indicate their possible solution.

## 1.9 Clarification of terms and concepts applicable to the study

Definitions of key terms that apply to this thesis are provided below. These working definitions were clarified during the literature review of such concepts, and key authors are, in certain cases, cited to substantiate such definitions. Full definitions are also explained in the appropriate literature chapters.

**Distance Education:** The form of education in which there is a geographical separation between the teacher and the student. According to Holmberg (1993:330), it 'covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which nevertheless benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of tutorial organisation'.

**Conventional Education:** This is often referred to as the face-to-face system in which the students and the teacher meet. To buttress this is the definition of Baker, Frisbie and Patrick (1993) who state that such education takes place at a set time and in a predetermined location where both teacher and students meet most of the time.

**Delivery Modes:** Methods of transmitting knowledge to the students that include print, audio, video, and computers.

**Distance Education Generations:** This refers to the evolutionary and revolutionary patterns of change of the different delivery modes as they appear on the scene. Garrison (1993) clarifies it by explaining that the term describes the historical occurrence of the methods of delivery

**Paradigm Shift:** This depicts the changes taking place in higher education. According to Bair (1995) 'difficulties or anomalies begin to appear in the functioning of the existing paradigm which cannot be handled adequately and at the same time there is the existence of an alternative paradigm that will account for...and that offers real hope for solving the difficulties facing the current paradigm.'

**Access:** This refers to making education available to those whom it was formerly denied. Herman and Mandell (1999) see it as giving opportunities to those who have been denied education.

**Output:** According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2004), 'output' refers to 'the product of any industry ... viewed quantitatively.'

**Quality Assurance:** This refers to 'all the actions taken to ensure that standards and procedures are adhered to and that delivered products or services meet performance requirements' (Bambooweb Dictionary, 2004).

**Transactional Distance:** This describes the inter-related relationship that exists between the teacher and the student during learning. According to Moore (1993), when defined in relation to interaction in an instructional programme, it is 'a function of dialogue, structure, and learner's autonomy' that describes 'the special nature of the relationship between the learner and the instructor during learning' (Stirling, 1997).

**Dialogue:** This depicts the interaction that occurs between the teacher and the student as they relate to each other in the course of teaching and learning. According to Moore (1996), this involves development as a result of response from both sides.

**Structure:** This refers to how a teaching programme is designed. It often reveals its flexibility or rigidity and the extent to which the learner will benefit from it.

**Learner Autonomy:** This depicts a shift of focus from the teacher to the learner in which the latter becomes the subject of his or her education.

**Learner Support:** This refers to the aspects of the system that respond to the individual needs of the learner, in order to enable him or her and the educational system interactively achieve their goals.

### 1.10 The Structure of the Research

**Chapter One** focuses on the orientation to this study and opens with a brief glimpse into the researcher's background which sums up the personal motivation for the study. It also exposes the research questions, aims and objectives, the significance of the study, its limitations and delimitations, and the structure of the research programme.

**Chapter Two** is a literature review, and involves an in-depth study of current literature in distance and conventional education in terms of access, delivery mode and output on a global level.

**Chapter Three** is an extension of the literature review, and looks at the history and the present state of distance and conventional education in South Africa and, in particular, at the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education, Department of Education Management and Policy Studies.

**Chapter Four** focuses on the implications of the findings in Chapters Two and Three with regard to quality assurance issues (in relation to the three indices of assessment: access, delivery mode and output). This also extends to the state of quality assurance in South Africa and, in particular, the University of Pretoria bearing in mind, the paradigm shifts in higher education, and convergence of both forms of education.

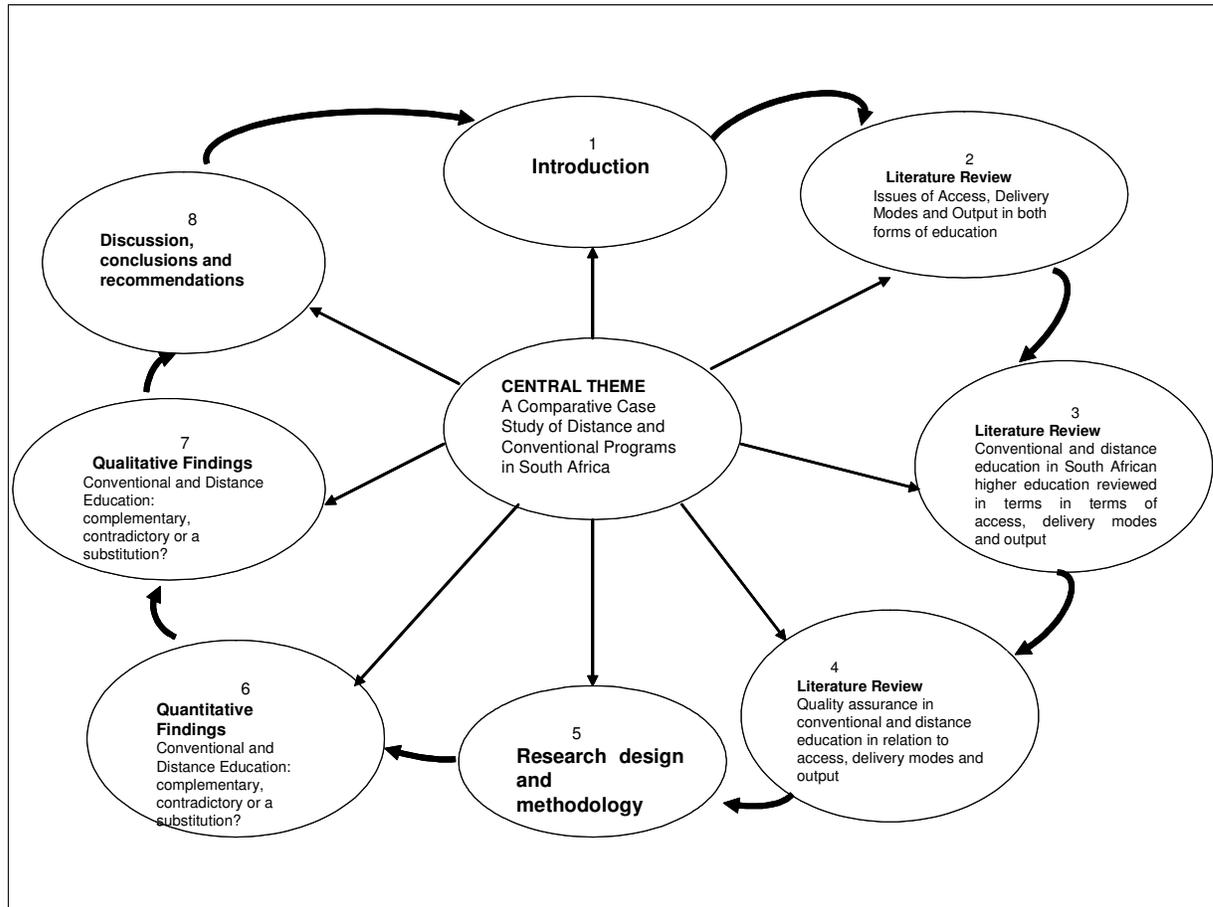
**Chapter Five** focuses on the empirical study, research design and methodologies adopted for the study. The result of the analyses and interpretation of the data is revealed.

**Chapters Six** and **Seven** relate the findings of the quantitative and qualitative investigations performed respectively on distance and conventional education, to ascertain whether they complement, substitute, or subordinate each other.

**Chapter Eight** concludes this study by focusing on the assessment of discussions, conclusions and recommendations that may emanate from it.

The figure below gives a bird's view of all of the above:

**Figure 1.3: A diagrammatical representation of the order of events followed during this research study**



## **1.11 Summary**

Chapter One introduced the background and the problem statement of this study. The research questions, aims and objectives of this study were then expounded upon. The significance of this study for those who may benefit was explained. The limitations and the delimitations of the study were also noted. A graphical display of the research process is found in Figure 1.3 that is found on page 27.

In Chapter Two an in-depth review is made of literature that is relevant to this study, which expound on current practices in distance and conventional education with regard to access, delivery mode and output on a global level.

# CHAPTER 2

## A LITERATURE REVIEW OF DISTANCE AND CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION REVIEWED IN TERMS OF ACCESS, DELIVERY AND OUTPUT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter Two exposes the review of literature that has been covered concerning the three indices under investigation in this study, namely: *Access*, *Delivery Mode* and *Output*, commencing with a selective elucidation and definition of *distance* and *conventional education*. These aspects become important in view of this being one of the gaps already identified in past comparative studies (See Section 1.2).

This chapter also provides a thorough explanation from review of different researchers' opinions regarding the practices of both these forms of education. It compares the efficiency of the two practices in terms of the three chosen indices, and an attempt is made to familiarise the reader with the advantages and disadvantages of both learning strategies. Attention is also drawn to the 'clientele' of both forms of education. Issues of quality and convergence are ever on the

researcher's mind, as all these aspects are discussed, including the implications of the literature findings of this study.

## 2.2 Conventional education

*'A college is a place to which a young man is sent;  
A university is a place to which he goes.'*

Charles William Elliot (Shore, 1991:5)

### 2.2.1 The concept of conventional education

'The idea of a university' as expressing its essence and mission, has long preoccupied academics and policy makers (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999:1), and since its inception in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century it has changed in different places. In the words of Shore (1991:29-31), 'throughout history, each society has conceived of the university in different terms...a facet of the church...hotbeds of religious controversy...symbolism of the powerful and spiritual realm of book learning...representative of professional training, research and a place where one spends a few years before becoming credentialed and considered fit to hold an adult job'. According to (Pister, 1999:232), 'it provides facilities for faculty, students and staff through which implementation of the institution is carried out.' As a higher institution, it has survived for so long, because people believe in it (Barnett, 2000) and because it has not remained static.

In the words of Williams (2003:5), 'One common feature of universities over the centuries has been that they are communities of relatively clever people who at times have been idle, self-serving, decadent or corrupt, but their institutions have survived and, on the whole, prospered by staying ahead of the game'. According to Kumar (1997:29), 'Universities bring people together. They allow for a cross-fertilization of minds on a scale and in a manner not possible anywhere else in society'. Also in the words of Bates (1999:207), 'teaching, research and public service are the core functions of a university which still need to be served in a

rapidly changing world'. Even though there is the question of whether, a university education leads to a reasonable and secure life, in the words of Smith and Webster (1997:29), 'it gives its recipient a start in life...without which, one cannot even start or only with great difficulty, and at great risk'. In addition to this, Moore and Kearsley (1996:1) refer to it as the 'ancient tutorial, in which a teacher and an individual learner meet at the same time and place...and the more familiar contemporary model of instruction in a classroom where a teacher talks to a group of learners, all together at the same time in the same place'.

All the above are few definitions of conventional education, and according to Baker, Frisbie and Patrick (1993), other definitions are not particularly different from these, though with different modes of operation for example the problem-based learning, residential instruction and face-to-face classroom are other terms for conventional education.

Concerning the future of the university, Pister (1999:236) submits that 'universities will continue to represent all three attributes of place, process and paradigm'. In the same vein, while writing from the idea of the university as a post-modern institution, Barnett (2002:21), explains that the university is now virtual, not because of the Internet (as this has only accentuated it), but in 'its loss of a defining centre' thus, 'it is no longer a site of knowledge as such, but rather, a site of knowledge possibilities'. Hence, various factors such as the demographic nature of the student body and technology, among others, have to some extent changed the conception of 'the university as a place'.

Similarly, Lewis (2002:6) identifies the demands of continuing stakeholders for accessible provision; increasing diversity of students in higher education, and in particular the involvement of new groups; recruitment pressures on institutions; the need to maintain quality and increasing resource constraints on higher education institutions'. In the same vein Pacific Crest (2004) stresses that universities today are changing their nature in order to adapt to the 'societal

factors such as changing student demographics for, example, large number of non-traditional students (many of those that have part-time/full-time jobs with family responsibilities), and technology'. Corroborating all the above, Peters (2000:10) explains that in most countries, universities are faced by unprecedented challenges of:

- Rapid technological and societal changes;
- Changes to educational paradigms;
- Volatile increases in the significance of distance education and open learning;
- The beginnings of digitization of learning and teaching;
- Chronic financial difficulties; and
- The quest for quality and steadily increasing industrialization, commercialization and globalization.

Finally, in agreement with Pister (1999:236), the researcher is of the opinion that the 'society will continue to place pressure on the academy to deal with the purposes and goals of higher education, driven about the cost of education, productivity of faculty and assessment of educational outcomes for graduates' irrespective of the mode of delivery.

### **2.2.2 Distinctive features of conventional education**

From the above, the following can be identified as the distinctive features of the conventional education:

- It gives the idea of a geographical location (Hagel, 2000; Lewis, 2002) thus making the teacher and the student present most of the time;
- This the mode is synchronous in nature (Hagel, 2000);
- It serves as a catalyst for creating communities (Pister, 1999);
- This leads to the development of oral presentation skills and interpersonal skills as a result of high teacher/learner and learner/learner interaction;

- The normal conventional students proceed directly from secondary education and ‘progress through the system in a lockstep fashion’ (Powel, McGuire & Crawford, 1999:89);
- Selective admissions which vary all over the world (Wikipedia, 2005); and
- The availability of drop-in services such as careers centres and the student support system.

### **2.2.3 Working definition of conventional education**

From the foregoing, the working definition of conventional education, which the researcher has adopted for this study, is ‘*The mode of education in which the teacher and the learners often meet face-to-face at the same time and place*’.

### **2.2.4 The practices of conventional education**

According to Selinger (2000:87), ‘universities of any description are sources of learning communities...which have been traditionally associated with a physical location; a school, a college, a university, an evening class or a laboratory’. However, the modern modes of conventional education include ‘collegiate university’, ‘research oriented university, and the modern ‘multiversity’ (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999). According to Wikipedia (2004), ‘a collegiate university is a university whose functions are divided between the central departments of the university and a number of colleges’. An example is the University of London, United Kingdom. Also, according to Sorimachi (2005), the ‘research-oriented’ university ‘emphasizes advanced research and development, which promote the creation of [an] intellectually innovative society and set global standards’. Examples are Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). In addition to the above, the Word Reference (2005) defines the ‘multiversity’ as ‘a university system having several separate campuses and colleges, and research centres’.

However, they all give the idea of a geographical location drawing students and teachers from distant places together to learn and pursue knowledge in various

fields of study. On this, Lewis (2002:2) explains that, 'universities were designed as residential institutions to initiate young students into a distinctive social and learning experience'.

### **2.2.5 The achievements of conventional education**

According to Peters (1989), conventional education is noted for its ability to retain students, direct interaction, learning groups, and teacher-centred instruction. Lending his voice in the debate, Burke (2002), states, 'The potential for learner-learner instruction is very high'. To this, Tsolakidis (2000) adds that this form of education is considered superior for the following reasons:

- It introduces the learner to a new environment - the school or academic environment that offers opportunities for socialisation, something that can be even more important than knowledge acquisition itself;
- It offers face-to-face interaction that seems to be non-substitutable;
- It allows the teacher to use his personal style in teaching;
- It offers to the learner the opportunity to participate in an organisation that stimulates hierarchical order of the society.

Thus, according to Pister (1999:232), 'through its academic and often residential structures, it is...a catalyst for the creation of communities, whether disciplinary, social or political in nature'.

### **2.2.6 The drawbacks and limitations of conventional education**

Nevertheless, there has been strong scepticism about conventional education. In the words of Evans and Nation (2000:1), the conventional universities 'have often been characterized as conservative and reluctant to change'. Also, Garrison and Anderson (2000:24) opine that 'traditional universities are by their nature collegial, research focused and zealous defenders of their culture and traditions. As a result, they have been resistant to change'. Supporting this, Tsolakidis (2000) gives the following as some of the issues that have been raised against it:

- The bad preparation of the teacher, his/her inexperience or his/her being in a bad mood;
- It 'was useless to some students because either they were physically absent or they were only physically present';
- 'It is questioned whether face-to-face teaching on its own is adequate to guarantee knowledge acquisition' as it is always complemented with asynchronous learning;
- Most educational systems agree that knowledge is gained if, in addition to teaching at school, work is done at home on individual basis, using educational material, which is prepared beforehand (essentially distance learning nature).

In support of this, Johnson et al. (2000:29) explain that its 'environments have been criticized because they encourage passive learning, ignore individual differences and needs of learners, and do not pay attention to problem solving, critical thinking, or other higher order thinking skills'. Buttressing this view, Garrison and Anderson (2000:24) lament, 'Lecture presentations to large number of students reduce opportunities for interaction and critical discourse'. Giving reasons for this, Laurillard (1993:108), stresses that 'the success of a lecture requires the lecturer to be aware of the capabilities of all the students and for all students to have a similar background'. Also, Jones (1996) laments that, 'the economic pressures and the tendency to open access in today's universities results in classes with large enrolments...In combination, these factors, make the lecture a particularly inappropriate teaching method'.

In addition, Daniel (1996:16-17) is of the opinion that 'the traditional campus-based model of teaching is under challenge because it is up to 50 percent more expensive than distance education and cannot meet the increasing demand for access to higher education'. Unfortunately, it has been stressed by Gordon (2005) that 'lecturers at traditional institutions have enormous licence to compromise standards by, for example, relying on the same yellowed lecture

notes, year after year, with groups of students who can hardly be expected to know what is out of date'. All the above has encouraged critics of conventional education to see it as unchangeable, inflexible, teacher-centred, and static (Fitzpatrick, 2001). Therefore, Pister (1999:232) states that 'this traditional model has never fitted all institutions completely and has been evolving steadily since the end of World War II'.

Considering the pros and cons of conventional education, one cannot but be tempted to consider its superiority over its distance counterpart. But, before one is lured into making this conclusion final, it is important to take a cursory look at the changing nature of society. Long has the university been forced to leave its ivory towers - of dictating to its students what they are to be to the society - for the reverse situation, has become the norm. With the changing demographic nature of students, as discussed earlier, and the modern necessity of paper qualifications for certain jobs and the level of family and social commitments, students fear leaving their jobs to study and also fear not having jobs to come back to upon completing their studies. These are just a few of the odds against the university remaining forever conventional. No wonder Shore (1991:33) foresees the university as 'having responsibilities to the future'. And this future, one can say, has no end in sight.

Finally, the researcher tends to agree with Braimoh (2003) that it is high time the university gave to the student and society what they require: continuous relevant education. According to Pister (1999), the traditional model has never fitted all institutions. Thus, is it possible to agree with Barnett (2000:100) that because the idea of the modern university has been not been addressed, the word *university* has become simply a term, and 'it is no longer a concept, standing for anything of substance'.

## 2.3 Distance education

### 2.3.1 Defining distance education

Distance Education is nothing new. It has a long history that can be traced through the millennia, and it established its roots as a form of instruction at least 150 years ago as a correspondence study (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999; Holmberg, 2001). In the words of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (1999), it 'is an exciting component of postsecondary education, providing opportunities to expand the reach of education and change its impact'. It is now a worldwide phenomenon as enrolment for this delivery mode is increasing every year, and is now in vogue among many African universities, to meet the escalating demand for higher education (Braithwaite, 2003). According to Srivastava (2002:1),

*'In 1994, 68% of Canada's community colleges and 54% of their universities were offering distance education courses. Of those universities that had not adopted distance education, 94% planned to offer distance education courses within the next five years. Globally, United States dominated the distance education scene accounting for 76% of the courses being offered online. Canada accounted for 19%, Australia 3%, and other countries accounted for barely 2%. However, in India during the period 1975 to 2001, distance education increased from 2.6% to 20%. It is expected that there will be a 30 to 40% annual growth of the distance education system as opposed to only a 5 to 10% growth for the formal education system'.*

However, there are diverse designations of distance education in various languages, and even within the same language, which connote the meaning people attach to it. Though its former definitions were linked with its old delivery mode - correspondence (Baker, Frisbie & Patrick, 1993) - its mode has, however, shifted to teleconferencing and computer-based technology (Garrison, 1993).

The definitions of distance education vary (Perraton, 2000). For example, the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 1999) - using the term *distance learning* - defines it as 'a way of providing higher education that involves the transfer to the student's location of the materials that form the main basis of study, rather than the student moving to the location of the resource provider'.

Also, the Commonwealth of Learning [COL] (2004) defines it as ‘the delivery of learning or training for those who are separated mostly by time and space from those who are teaching or training them’. But, according to Holmberg (1993:330), this mode has been summed up as the form of education that ‘covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which nevertheless benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition [and] of tutorial organisation’.

In order to reflect the evolutionary changes that are affecting distance education media, Rekkedal and Qvist-Eriksen (2003:1) have included the following:

- The use of computers and computer networks to unite teacher and learners and carry the content of the course
- The provision of two-way communication via computer networks so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue (this distinguishes it from other uses of technology in education).

Moore and Kearsley (1996:1) lend their voice to this definition by stressing that distance education has as its fundamental concept the separation of students and teachers by distance and sometimes by time, which necessitates the introduction of ‘an artificial communications medium that will deliver information and also provide a channel for interaction between the teacher and the students.’

However, it is also important to clarify what distance education is not. This becomes necessary as the term is used interchangeably with what it is not. For instance, Holmberg (1993:330), explains that there has existed for a long time opposing views of interchanging the word *distance education* with that of *open university*. Even though the usage is blurred today (Holmberg, 1995) and others distinguish between them (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999), the confusion still persists. According to Holmberg (2002:15), distance education is not open learning,

because the latter implies ‘forms of study which refrain from all avoidable restrictions as to access, study time and methods...even though the approach may be suitable for it’ - nor is it a ‘technological extension of classroom teaching’.

Supporting this view, Rowntree (1992:32) explains that ‘even though all open learning (even on-site) involves some degree of distance learning, not all distance learning involves much openness...’ Also, UNESCO (2001:3), in an attempt to differentiate between the two, states that ‘distance education has been defined as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner...while open learning is an organised educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on study are minimised in terms either of access, or of time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination of these’. In addition to this, the Commonwealth of Learning [COL] (2004) explains that, ‘open learning policies need not be part of a distance education system but are complementary to it’. Also, Bernard et al. (2004:381) explain that, ‘it is not a medium of instruction, but instead makes use of media for delivery and communication’.

According to Nuan (1996:194-195), distance education among other core values, has the following:

- Powerful interaction processes between learners and teachers at a distance, which are valuable in their own right;
- Valuable educational planning which focus upon student learning and their openness to critical scrutiny;
- Distance education like other forms of education, values communicative competence between participants.

It is of interest to note that scholars in this particular field use various terms for the concept *distance education*. According to the Quality Assurance Agency for

Higher Education (QAA, 1999), ‘there is considerable debate, nationally and internationally, about appropriate terminology, and a number of different terms are commonly used which refer to the same or similar sort of activity’. For example Rowntree (1992) uses the term *distance learning* because he believes that it covers all distance learning, as such learning extends to both industrial and professional training. On the other hand, Keegan (1990) prefers using the term *distance education* because it includes both distance learning and distance teaching. Holmberg (1995:3), shedding further light, suggests that the term *distance study* should be limited to denoting the activity of the students while *distance teaching* denotes that of the supporting organization, particularly its writers, editors and tutors. Bernard et al. (2004) also share this view.

### **2.3.2 Distinctive features of distance education**

According to Holmberg (1993; 2001), irrespective of the term used for distance education, it can be deduced that its two elements are ‘mediated subject-matter’ and ‘mediated interaction’ between the learners and the instructors. However, it is of interest to note that most distance education scholars (Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Holmberg, 2001; Bernard et al. 2004) often cite the characteristics given by Keegan (1990) as the most comprehensive. Therefore, it becomes important to take a cursory look at the characteristics, which literature in this field often refers to. According to Keegan (1990:44), the following are its characteristics:

- The quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the course;
- The influence of an educational organizing both in planning and preparation of learning materials and support services;
- The use of technical media-print, audio, video and computer;
- The provision of two-way communication to assist interaction;
- The quasi-permanent absence of a learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups (sometimes with occasional meetings).

However, as an addendum to the last characteristic, Keegan (1998:43) in a later work states that, distance education can be 'either individual-based provision or group-based provision'. This, Holmberg (2001:13) explains as having 'the possibility of non-contiguous group work by means of modern technology'. It should be noted that this is now becoming more the rule, especially when one takes the Open University (OU) tutor system into consideration.

Reinforcing some of the above, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA] (2005), explains that 'physical proximity is not a requirement of study and programs made available through distance learning, all involve some degree of physical separation of the student (learner) from the institution responsible for providing the teaching and making the award'. Hence, Moore and Kearsley (1996) explain that, 'because of the *separation* that distinguishes distance education from other forms of education it becomes imperative to provide an artificial communications medium which will deliver information, and at the same time make room for interaction'. Also, the Commonwealth of Learning [COL] (2004) states that in this mode, 'the teaching is done with a variety of *mediating processes* used to transmit the content, to provide tuition and to conduct assessment or measure outcomes'. Thus, distance education has as its sole aim to provide an educational opportunity the same as what one obtains in the conventional classroom.

Another distinctive feature of distance education is the profile of the students involved. According to Peters (1998:13), they differ primarily in the following ways:

- Students will usually have a greater experience of life;
- Most of them bring considerable experience of working to academic courses, and this also has an effect on the ways in which they study, in particular when the studies and the professional experience cover the same field;

- Many of them come from backgrounds in which academic studies were not offered when they were younger, and they use distance education as a second chance;
- There are distance education students who want to reach a higher socio-economic status as a result of their experiences at work;
- Distance-learning students have more qualifications than students in traditional universities; and
- Studying at a relatively late age has in general a completely different function than with 19-25 year-old students because it fits into plans for life and life-cycles in a different way.

Several studies have been conducted to buttress these facts about distance learners. For example, Tucker (2003) while complementing the previous studies by Gillard-Cook (1997); Guernsey (1998); Ashby (2002), and Halsne and Gatta (2002) discovered that the majority of distance learners were female, older than twenty-five years of age, lived in the rural areas, had prior college experience, and had job responsibilities, among others.

Corroborating this, Lewis (2002) explains that forms of various distance education developed because the needs of certain groups of people were not being recognised and met by the conventional higher education. Explaining further, Lewis (2002) gives the list as including stay-at-home mothers, the disabled, prisoners, those with paid jobs, and even employers of labour...who are now much more likely to support their staff, not just in developing the skills immediately needed at work, but also on programs that build a general and continuing capacity to go on learning'. In the words of Tucker (2003:1), irrespective of its models, 'it is important to note that...distance education is not meant for everyone...as it appears to be in a unique position to serve diverse learners who cannot or will not participate in the traditional classroom setting'. Hence, it can be concluded that distance learners are a special group of people.

### 2.3.3 Working definition of distance education

From the above, distance education in this study is defined as '*the mode of delivery in which the teacher is separated from the learners, thereby necessitating the use of artificial communication that encourages interaction among teacher/learners and learners/learners*'.

### 2.3.4 The practices of distance education

According to Rowntree (1992) institutions can offer distance education courses with varying degrees of commitment and expertise. Buttressing this, the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 1999), states that there exists 'great diversity in the large number of... actual and potential arrangements'. However, Mark (1990:16) choosing the term *distance learning*, develops a typology showing four different types of distance education programmes which are: Distance Learning Institutions, Consortium, Distance Learning Academic Unit and Distance Learning Program. As well, Moore and Kearsley (1996:2-4) explain the different levels of distance education as:

Levels of Distance Education:

- Distance Learning Program -  
These are activities carried out in a conventional college, university, school system, or training department whose primary responsibilities include the traditional classroom...and it does not usually have its own faculty or administration.
  
- Distance Learning Unit -  
This is a special and separate unit within a conventional college, university, or school system that is dedicated to distance learning activities...that has its administrative staff. This concept was first developed in Australia (Holmberg, 2001).

- Distance Learning Institution -  
Its sole purpose is distance education...and such an institution will have a faculty and administrative staff whose duties are different from those at a traditional college, university, school system, or training department.
- Distance Learning Consortia -  
'Consortia normally consist of two or more distance learning institutions or units who share in either the design or delivery of programs, or both. However, the course is based on the practices of the parent institution.'

Also, Peters (1998:15) gives the following operating mode within institutions:

Operation Modes of Distance Education:

- Single Mode -  
University planned and developed exclusively for distance education.
- Dual Mode -  
A traditional university that also provides distance teaching.
- Mixed Mode -  
This is the process whereby a university provides several forms of studying parallel to one another and leaves it up to students to use these forms in accordance with their own needs and opportunities.

On the other hand, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 1999) for higher education, in the United Kingdom, identifies some 'distinguishable aspects that are commonly found, under various labels' in distance education. However, 'they do not refer to different models of distance learning' and they may not be uniform. These are:

- Materials-based learning -  
This refers to all the learning resource materials made available to the students by the providers, and these range from printed, audio or audio-visual material, experimental equipment and material on the World Wide Web and to other electronic or computer based resources. The methods for distributing materials include personal delivery to students by travelling teachers, despatch through post, distribution through electronic communication and personal collection by students from a distribution point.
  
- Programme components delivered by travelling teachers -  
This refers to staff of the providing institution travelling on a periodic basis to the location of the students to deliver components of the programme. The functions may include initial orientation; delivery of learning materials; intensive teaching of the programme; tutorial support; student development and guidance; assessment and gathering feedback. These operations may be supported and supplemented by a local agent.
  
- Learning supported locally -  
This involves the providing institution employing persons specifically to undertake certain defined support for the local support of students following the study programme.
  
- Learning support from the providing institution remotely from the student -  
This is the defined support and specified components of teaching provided remotely for individual distant students by a tutor from a providing institution. Modes of information delivery may include postal correspondence in print or by audio or videocassette, telephone, email and the Internet. Also, it may include voice, video or computer-based conferencing.

Also, the South African Institute for Distance Education [SAIDE] (1996:85-86) identifies the following as components of a well-functioning distance education system: course design and development; counselling and support; quality assurance; and effectively managed distance learning.

Strengthening the above, the American Federation of Teachers [AFT] (2000:7-15) after a survey, recommends the following standards for good practice of distance education:

- Faculty must retain academic control;
- Faculty must be prepared to meet the special requirements of teaching at a distance;
- Course design should be shaped to the potentials of the medium;
- Students must fully understand course requirements and be prepared to succeed;
- Close personal interaction must be maintained;
- Class size should be set through normal faculty channels;
- Course should cover all material;
- Experimentation with a broad variety of subjects should be encouraged;
- Equivalent research opportunities must be provided;
- Student assessment should be comparable to the conventional mode;
- Equivalent advisement opportunities must be offered;
- Faculty should retain creative control over use and re-use of materials;
- Full undergraduate degree programs should include same-time same-place coursework; and
- Evaluation of distance coursework should be undertaken at all levels.

### **2.3.5 The achievements of distance education**

Distance learning breaks the association of *learning* with *classroom*; thus, preparing students with skills for the self-directed continuing and recurrent

education which will be essential for their continuing professional development in a world of rapidly changing information and ideas (Johnston, 1997). According to Truman (1995), 'the shift from the perception that distance education serves the student stranded in the backwoods or desert is making room for the student just down the street with a harried schedule, family or social commitments, illness, disability or learning preference'. Hence, its learners are characterised by a strong sense of independence, appreciation of owning the direction of their inquiry, and an ability to shape and manage their studies (Cook, 1997; Barell, 1995). They are usually more mature, motivated, self-directed and self-confident (Tait and Mills, 1999:1; Holmberg, 2001; Rogers, 2000).

Also, Hellman (2003) identifies the following as some of its potential benefits: increase of access, flexibility, financial economy (great savings in the construction of universities and teachers' salaries.). Strengthening this, Bollag (2001) states that a report sponsored by UNESCO and the World Bank in 2000 'found that at the world's 10 biggest distance institutions, the majority of them in the Third World, the cost of education per student is on average, about one third the cost at traditional institutions in the same country'. However, Hellman (2003) has drawn attention to the fact that 'most calculations based on *per-student* costs fail to take drop-out rates into account'.

Still focusing on access, Dlamini (1998) explains that about 20% of qualified students are denied access to university education in Swaziland for lack of space on the conventional campus. Reason for this is not far-fetched. According to Lewis (2002:2), 'the full-time student experience was the norm and of highest status; part-time provision was of a second best; while the distance route was largely invisible (even though many thousands of students sought to prepare themselves by this mode)'. However, with the advent of distance education, Magagula and Ngwenya (2004) explain that distance education has enabled the anomaly in Swaziland to be greatly corrected, as several students have been catered for.

It will be a great injustice to this aspect of this study if mention is not made of the contributions of distance education to the teaching profession. According to Adekanmbi (c2004), ‘an examination of the use of distance education in Africa tends to show its wide application in the area of teacher preparation’ and its focus has been on ‘Africa’s basic problems of mass illiteracy, poverty, squalor and a general low level of development, which are not usually addressed by conventional education’. In support of this, Brown and Scase (1997:89) explain that, ‘for virtually all employees the future consists of uncertainties and anxieties, and requires ability to cope with the unpredictable nature of the world of work’.

According to UNESCO (2001:3):

*‘Distance education has been used to teach, support and develop teachers for many years. UNESCO was a pioneer through its UNRWA/UNESCO Institute of Education, which was training teachers for refugees forty years ago. While the success of programmes has varied, experience demonstrates that distance education can be used to enable teachers to learn and to gain qualifications.’*

Continuing on this, UNESCO (2001:2-3) explains that “First, some countries have used distance to provide a route to initial qualifications for significant numbers of teachers, both new entrants to teaching and experienced unqualified teachers’. Examples are the China Television Teachers College and the National Teachers’ Institute in Nigeria.

Second, distance education is also being used to raise the skills, deepen the understanding and extend the knowledge of teachers. Examples are several programmes run by the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India and the University of South Africa.

Third, distance education can have a role in programmes of curriculum reform, which aim to change either the content or the process of education. For example, in Mongolia, radio and print are used across large distances to re-orient teachers to official changes in curriculum and teaching methods within a country in transition’.

Lastly, distance education has been used for teachers’ career development.

### **2.3.6 The drawbacks of distance education**

Even though distance education has many advantages, it is still plagued with many drawbacks. This delivery mode - especially as technology advances – ‘has inspired hope and dismay, as well as excitement and fear’ (Hellman, 2003). According to the American Federation of Teachers [AFT] (2000:5), sceptics of distance education practice cite the following concerns:

- Whether deep understanding of difficult material - beyond amassing facts – can occur in the absence of same-time same-place interaction;
- Whether distance education may be ineffective for certain types of subjects and students, leading to higher drop-out rates;
- Whether needed equipment, training and technical support is reaching distance education students and faculty; and
- Whether limitations on the availability of library and learning materials impair distance education courses.

Also, Hellman (2003) states that its drawbacks include ‘cost and capital intensity, time constraints and other pressures on faculty, isolation of students from instructors and peers, the difficulty of evaluating students that faculty members have never met, dropout rates which are higher than in conventional education and deskilling of teachers’. In no fewer words Truman (1995) explains that, ‘obvious barriers to adopting and implementing distance education are money, equipment and staff...Poor teaching strategies are exaggerated in

distance teaching, and territorialism among states and institutions (where there is no strong centralized government)'. Others cite the following: technology (Murphy, 1995) and lack of skills in time management and discipline by the students (Sherry, 1996).

From the students' perspective, according to Keen (1999), a study conducted in 1999 by the Alberta Government on the *Study of Student Satisfaction* with Alberta's universities and university colleges reveal the following weaknesses:

- Oral presentation skills are not developed by distance education effectively as on campus;
- Interpersonal skills, such as conflict resolution, team building, leadership are much more developed in face-to-face situations;
- Students have less of a *broadening* experience since they are denied the opportunity of meeting diverse students face-to-face on campus; and
- Drop-in services, such as careers centres are mostly not available through distance education.

However, Eaton (2001:2) explains that, 'Distance education is in many ways a welcome phenomenon, even as it is creating challenges for and arousing concern among many in the higher education community ... It holds enormous promise for enriching education, and focusing only on its negative aspects is a distortion'. In the same vein, Badat (2005:193) explains that, 'high-quality distance higher education can be immensely valuable, doing public and social good'.

## 2.4 Access, delivery modes and output in higher education

### 2.4.1 Introduction

According to Duderstadt (2002a), 'since knowledge has become not only the wealth of nations but the key to one's personal prosperity and quality of life, it has become the responsibility of democratic societies to provide their citizens with the education and training they need, throughout their lives, whenever, wherever, and however they desire it, at high quality and at an affordable cost'. This statement sums up what the researcher will be dealing with in this section. The researcher will undertake an in-depth study of the issues of *access*, *delivery mode* and *output* as they pertain to higher education. Past studies (Garrison, 1996; SAIDE, 1996; Perraton, 2000; Dhanarajan, 2001) have revealed that the delivery mode of a form of education and its quality are directly related to *access*, either positively or negatively. Related to this is the throughput rate of both forms of education.

### 2.4.2 Access in higher education

#### 2.4.2.1 The concept of access

The issue of access is not new to debates on higher education. According to Shore (1991:24), the tiny colleges found in North America in the 1600's and 1700's reflected that at the medieval universities of England 'women and black slaves were...excluded...and relatively few of the poor were admitted'. However, all over the world, university education has moved from its former position of *elitism* to *massification*. For instance, according to Bollag (2001), most universities are creating or considering creating distance education branches. Also, in the Arab region, UNESCO (2003) explains that in 1950, there were only ten universities scattered across this region, however, this has increased to about 200, coupled with an unprecedented increase in enrolment. Commenting on this, Mohamed (2005:1) states that, 'this increase has resulted from a growing public demand for education, an enlarged population, and the governments'

commitments to making higher education as accessible as possible'. According to Smith and Webster (1997b:101-102), even though mass higher education has induced 'inflation of credentials', it has opened up opportunities for expansion and has eased entry barriers, 'enabling mature students to attempt higher education'. What then is meant by the term *Access*?

Various scholars have tried to define the term *access*, and it can generally be assumed to mean 'opening opportunities for people to attend college who were once excluded' (Herman & Mandell 1999:16; Holmberg, 2002:81). This exclusion depends on a number of reasons, such as inability to afford the cost and because circumstances do not permit them to attend full-time, which was previously the characteristic of conventional education. Equally, Holmberg (2002:81) sees it as giving a second-chance to its clients. The trend towards *massification* of higher education due to an increase in population, increased demand for skilled work and an increase in the political power of ordinary people has been given as the reason for increased access to learners (SAIDE, 1996:32; Braimoh, 2003:3).

In the words of Gourley (1999:85) factors such as 'economic necessity or democratic principle,...changes in the labour market accompanying a trend away from goods production to service, and a rise in educational requirements for jobs in key sectors of a developing global economy' all influence access. However, according to Smith and Webster, (1997a:12), there exists a paradox because 'we are seeing an increase [in] accessibility in higher education, but in parallel with this is a heightened competition for places at the top universities, a situation in which the most privileged are winning most of the awards and continues to seize the rewards when it comes to getting the jobs. We are seeing the coexistence of greater inclusion alongside greater exclusion'.

According to Cele and Brandt (c2005), there are various forms of access to teaching and learning which include: 'access to space; access to resources; access to knowledge, [which Jansen (2001) termed *epistemological access*];

access to skills and competency; access to dialogue; access to workplace education and access to feedback. These can be grouped into learner invitation (access, admission and placement) and learner hosting (academic provision, service and capacitation)’.

#### **2.4.2.2 Perspectives on access in higher education**

According to De Vuyst (1999:100), ‘Education throughout the centuries has been a system controlled by the ruling groups in the society’. Gourley (1999:90) in agreement with this view stresses that universities have been for a long time ‘the elite institutions – bearers of a particular canon and reproducers of a particular class or meritocracy’ in the society. However, in the words of Pond (2002), ‘it is only in the last hundred years that education has become more *democratized* and thus available to a much broader population...’ However, the view of *elitism* is being discarded all over the world since the economic strength of a nation depends on how many of its citizens have access to quality education. In the words of Morley, Unterhalter and Gold (2003:57), ‘enhancing access and participation has been a powerful policy objective throughout the Commonwealth. It is linked to economic rationales and those of democratization and social inclusion’. Also, Morley (2000) explains that in the policy discourse of the learning society, access to higher education is seen to have redemptive power as it promises social inclusion and cohesion as well as national prosperity. Hence, the term *mass higher education*.

However, according to Williams (2003:7), ‘this term is problematic and critics of this term and practice believe’ that it ‘has undertones of [a] soulless production line (Fordism), tabloid journalism (Murdochism?), the Costa Brava (ClubMedism?), and Hamburger cuisine (McDonaldization)’. These days, students are being viewed more as *customers*. However, Fritzgerald (1996:12) advises that, ‘Students are not simply consumers of education. They are also producers of it’. It is a known fact and an almost *acceptable* attitude all over the world that universities should be enterprising. This leaves at great risk students

whose parents cannot afford the course fees and those that have to *labour* to pay their way through a higher education study programme.

Nonetheless, according to William (2003), it is ironical that 'in contrast to some complaints about commodification, autonomous, enterprising universities competing in a mass market using appropriate technology may be the most effective way of avoiding standardized production line provision of academic services in the provision of mass higher education'. Regrettably, buttressing this are Cele and Bandt (c2005), who state that 'in spite of the agenda of the public good, it remains the reality that globalisation trends have turned higher education institutions into skills corporations and knowledge malls that have to contribute to the economic well-being of their societies ...'

However, views on regarding the university as *going enterprise* differ. For instance, in strong terms, McNay (2003:20) describes the feelings of others about this idea by stating that, '... enterprise provokes...an image of shady villainy, a fifth column gnawing away at the basic values that define a university, a wolf masquerading as a milk-cow'. On the other hand, the question of income generation for universities may not really be the focus of universities in the developing world. According to Williams (2003:17), 'high fees inevitably benefit students from families who are able to pay them'. Buttressing this, the Council on Aid to Education (1997:11) citing the example of America, explains that:

*'[While] public support per student has just kept pace with inflation ... real costs per student have grown by about 40% ... Until now, institutions have been paying for [these] rising costs by sharp tuition increases; however, such increases will shortly begin to keep Americans from pursuing higher education'.*

While sounding a note of warning and citing the case of South Africa Subotzky (2001:107), laments that

*'International thinking on higher education is dominated by trends and driving forces prevailing in the developed world. Under pressure from rapidly changing demands and limited capacity, less-industrialised countries (LICs) are inclined to adopt first-world approaches and models without sufficient critical analysis, which carries a substantial risk of unforeseen consequences'.*

Even though access to higher education has improved in a country such as South Africa, according to Scott (2003:41), 'the persistence of historical-educational disparities has been central to the under-performance of skewed patterns of access, participation and success'. Hence, there is the need to be cautious to not adopt methods that will hamper access even though it is the aim of the less-industrialised countries to not do so. In other words, there must be a way to increase access, while not losing credibility in the face of financial stinginess on the part of the government. Deviation from investing money into the higher education system and embracing 'higher education corporate management models' according to Cele and Bandt (c2005), has been widely critiqued as 'failing to advance the social justice agenda through education and training'.

Nonetheless, the enterprising university, according to McNay (2003:26-27), have the following benefits, among others:

- Enterprising approaches can enhance outreach to promote equity of access; and
- Equity approaches can moderate the elitism and exclusion that excellence may drift into.

On the other hand, it is ironical that in spite of the accusations levied against distance education, it has been accredited all over the world as having the capability to open up access to those previously denied. Shedding further light on this, Nuan (1996:195) explains that 'distance education has largely borrowed

from the language of social justice and equity; access, equity, educational opportunity, situational disadvantage and gender-related barriers are all taken from the general discourse of education'. In an attempt to describe the nature of distance education, Nuan (1996:193) analyses *key values* (social and political) held by those who identify themselves as distance educators. One of these is that:

*'Education by distance mode serves a political end. That is in addition to the purpose inherent in [the] curriculum that it conveys; its very existence is directed towards increasing access to education. Distance education is unavoidably connected to the issues of social justice, involving equity for groups and personal liberation for individuals'.*

This is strongly connected to the fact that education is regarded as a right of the citizens of a state.

Nevertheless, there are many implications for widening access. According to Singh (2001), the ratio of educator to students often increases immensely without corresponding finances. This invariably affects the performance of students who drop out of the system in large numbers thus forfeiting the essence of access. Also, citing the case of Britain, Lewis (2002) has predicted that opening up access to previously disadvantaged and under-represented groups in the United Kingdom will lead to the following challenges:

- Curriculum development to create programs that appeal to these new student groups;
- Changes in the ways in which students learn and are assessed; and
- New ways of delivering the curriculum, particularly those using communications and information technology (C&IT).

While writing on the issue of technology, Hellman (2003) laments that

*'The digital divide that polarizes the technological haves and have-nots separate the wired world from those without access to this technology, and within the developing world, separate those who have the requisite levels of literacy and computer skills to make use of the Internet and other forms of communication from those who have not'.*

However, it is interesting to observe that the issues raised above may not only be peculiar to Britain, but may be applicable to higher education in diverse environments. Thus, Matentjie (2001) and Cele and Brandt (c2005) have rightly observed that there is the need to consider putting some structures in place. These include among others: academic development, diagnostic assessment, effective learner support systems and personal support diagnostic.

### **2.4.3 Delivery modes in higher education**

#### **2.4.3.1 Introduction**

In the words of Smith and Webster (1997b:103), even though there is much room for improvement, 'the past couple of decades have marked real advances in the knowledge and practice of teaching and learning'. These are as a result of 'clear course aims and objectives; articulated learning outcomes; explicit assessment linked to what students are expected to learn; course guides; students induction into information resources and study habits', to mention but a few. Hence, a cursory review will be taken at the modes of delivery in both forms of education.

#### **2.4.3.2 Move from instructivism to constructivism**

According to Pond (2002), early academic education was devoted almost exclusively to transmitting content or *knowledge*. The curriculum was finite and was 'expected to serve the learner for life'. Buttressing this, Shachar and Neumann (2003) state that, 'from time immemorial, teacher-lecturing/student-listening was the primary mode of traditional academic education. The delivery system for higher education has been a classroom setting with a professor (stage

on the stage), giving a lecture, and students listening, and writing notes'. This, according to Diaz and Bontenbal (2001) is termed generically as *Instructivism* and they explain that it 'asserts that knowledge – besides being independent of and external to the learner – flows in a mostly unidirectional path, proceeding from the knowledgeable authority (teacher), or from instructional content, to the passive learner'.

Commenting on the lecture method, Laurillard (1996:108) explains that the method has been legitimised by 'the eight hundred years of university tradition' and it thrives on 'the lecturer, knowing the capabilities of students very well, and on the students having very similar capabilities'. However, Laurillard (1996:108) continues that 'Lectures were defensible perhaps in the old university systems of selection of students on the basis of standardised entrance examinations, but more open access and modular courses make it most unlikely that a class of students will be sufficiently similar in background and capabilities to make lectures workable as a principal teaching method'.

In the same vein, learning theories have undergone serious changes; hence, the move towards *Constructivism*. According to Diaz and Bontenbal (2001), attention has shifted from teaching to learning, in which constructivism 'asserts that the learner constructs new knowledge through a process of relating information to prior knowledge and experience...teachers become guides rather than dispensers of knowledge'. In support of this, the Instructional Policy (Draft) of the University of Pretoria (UP, 2003:3) explains that learning has shifted from reproductive to productive; behaviourism to constructivism; teacher-centred to student-centred; teaching-centred to learning-centred; conveying content to facilitating learning; content-based to outcomes-based and content-based assessment to outcomes-based assessment'. On his part, Tapscott (1998:15-33) cites eight shifts in learning today:

- From linear to hypermedia.
- From instruction to construction and discovery.

- From teacher-centred to learner-centred education.
- From absorbing material to learning how to navigate and how to learn.
- From school to lifelong learning.
- From one-size-fits-all to customized learning.
- From learning as torture as learning as fun.
- From the teacher as transmitter to the teacher as facilitator.

Buttressing this, research shows that students of today learn differently (Anson, 1999; McCormick, 1999), therefore classrooms need to become more learner-centred (Moersch, 1995; Boettcher, 1999; Sprague & Dede, 1999).

The table below shows a summary of the differences between old and new assumptions of learning:

**Table 2.1: Old versus new assumptions on learning**

Old	New
1. People transfer learning with ease by learning abstract and decontextualized concept.	1. People transfer learning with difficulty, needing both content and contextualized learning.
2. Learners are receivers of knowledge.	2. Learners are active constructors of knowledge.
3. Learning is behaviouristic and involves strengthening of stimulus and response.	3. Learning is cognitive and in a constant state of growth.
4. Learners are blank slates, ready to be filled with knowledge.	4. Learners bring their own needs and experiences to learning situations.
5. Skills and knowledge are acquired best, independent of context.	5. Skills and knowledge are best acquired with realistic contexts.
6. Rigid and unchallenged	6. Assessment must take more

assessment procedures.	realistic and holistic forms.
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Source: (Garbinger, 1996:667).

According to Myers (2003) even though, instructivism has been labelled *rote memorization*, *'factory model teaching, producing automatons incapable of thinking for themselves* and *mere facts*, the debate on the efficacy of constructivism for all situations is still perpetuated. For instance, Sparrow, Sparrow and Swan (2000) argue that due to the large classes present in the university system and the focus which a powerful student-centred model demands, 'compromises and variations in emphasis between student-centred and teacher-centred strategies incorporating negotiated and non-negotiable content with flexible delivery modes may be a way forward'. Therefore, in strengthening this view, Peters (2000:12-13) suggests some changes for the university, among which are:

- Teaching must be made into an essential task of the university that is taken up in the first place by all university teachers;
- Because academic education and further education stretch over complete adult life, universities must admit and look after adults of all ages;
- Due to the increase in the number of students, and the impossibility of the traditional approach to cater for them, a different – and cheaper – teaching and learning system is necessary, which will enable many more people to obtain undergraduate and postgraduate education;
- In order to achieve the highest degree of flexibility and to be able to cope more easily with the different life situations of students...learning must be separated from prescribed locations and times; and
- Emphasis should be more on learning than teaching.

#### **2.4.3.3 Delivery modes in conventional education**

The delivery mode in the conventional education has been largely print-based - due to the lecture method adopted for teaching. According to Laurillard

(1993:109), 'print is easily the most important educational medium...because of its logistical rather than pedagogical advantages' and it has the key advantage of being 'controllable by the student'. However, 'it has the disadvantages of failing to be interactive, adaptive or reflective thereby necessitating *a number of design features* like 'learning objectives, in-text questions and activities, and self-assessment questions' (Pg 110). Nevertheless, according to Tsolakidis (2000:2), the conventional education has not been static as there 'is a constant evolution in its field, produced by various educational reforms', hence, the move towards the use of audiocassettes, audio-vision, television and video (Laurillard, 1993). Interestingly, the development of the Information Computer Technology (ICT), has led to better interactive and adaptive resources (See Section 2.4.3.2 for the description of these media).

Presently, there is the adaptation of multimedia resources in higher education. However, views on this differ.

#### **2.4.3.4 Delivery modes in distance education**

According to Bates (1993:213-214), media refers 'to the generic forms of communication associated with particular ways of representing knowledge' and in distance education, 'the most important four media are: text, audio, television and computing'. The modes of delivery have led to the term *generation* which has been used to denote their historical occurrence (Garrison, 1993; Garrison & Archer, 2000; Holmberg 2000; Peters, 1998). The concept *three generations* was first identified, and used by Garrison in 1985, which he later developed in 1989 (Garrison & Archer, 2000). As said by Peters (1998:11), Garrison (1993) with the concept *generations*, has brought to light the two common features of distance education, namely the: 'high degree of accessibility and the quality of each interactive learning and teaching process'.

#### **Generation one**

The generation one refers to both the One-Way - ancillary media - and the Two-way communication - which Garrison (1993) depicts as correspondence - which includes: print (delivered through the mail); audio- and videocassettes, audiographics (which may also support two-way communication) examples of which are facsimile, slow-scan television, compressed tele-writing and video text; laser videodisc and broadcast (which includes radio and television). However, in view of the improvement in communication (Garrison & Archer, 2000), Garrison (1993) updated this definition to: *slow asynchronous (Generation 1) with individual instruction as its learning mode, delivered through the postal system, and its message types (two-way communication) include originally written language and still images; spoken language and moving images that are added by mailing of audio cassettes.*

According to Rowntree (1992) and Moore and Kearsley (1996), print is the most common form of medium presentation in distance education. In the words of Rowntree (1992:105), 'print has been the basis of distance learning, ever since Johann Gutenberg invented movable type in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century'. Also, Bates (1993: 213) explains that in spite of the fact that more influential institutions made use of other media, such as the television and audio, 'at the end of 1980's, the vast majority of distance education throughout the world was still primarily print-based'. The Generation One was, until very recently, the best-known form of distance education. According to Moore and Kearsley (1996:78-79), 'print materials are relatively inexpensive to develop and can be distributed easily via the public mail or private delivery services'. Supporting this view, Adekanmbi (c2004) writes that, 'The continued use of print in Africa (and many developed countries) has been due to its cheapness and easy adaptability' – it has as its characteristics the permission of great economies of scale through industrialized methods of producing standard course packages (Peters, 1998), and the individualization of learning (Garrison & Archer, 2000:181). However, Moore and Kearsley (1996) are of the opinion that this mode is passive.

Irrespective of its shortcomings, Adekanmbi (c2004) explains that ‘there is a continued general romance with print...’ and ‘the transformation in its context is now made better in terms of better prepared texts, high quality material development processes and enhanced desktop development practices’. Buttressing this, UNESCO (2001:33) states that, ‘printed materials continue to be a mainstay of distance learning provision, even for programmes like the United Kingdom Open University’s PGCE which has a major ICT element. Print plays a variety of roles, either as lead or supporting medium, and is valued for its durability, convenience, low cost, familiarity and suitability for combining with a variety of other media’.

Furthermore, Paul (1990) is of the opinion that this mode of delivery helps *democratisation of education*, which the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (2003) describes as ‘education being made available, regardless of the constraints of time and place, to many adult learners who could not afford the time or expense of studying full-time, to many who have had to carry on working, and to many who could not travel to classes or who could not access technology or technological support services to support learning’.

### **Generation two**

Next is the Synchronous generation, - which Garrison and Archer (2000) termed *Generation 2* - with individualized or group learning; and its delivery mechanism is the telecommunication system (both wired and wireless) and its message types (two-way communication) which can be: spoken language only; still images (supplemented by audio-graphics) and moving images (supplemented by video-conferencing); and various modes (some involving a student group using computer conferencing). *The synchronous generation is delivered through telecommunications systems combined with networked computers (usually) or fax machines. For its Message Types (two-way communication), it uses originally written language (originally through networked computers); still images (supplemented by graphics files and facsimile); spoken language (supplemented*

as audio files) and moving images (supplemented as video files). These establish the prediction by Bates (1993:213) of over a decade ago that 'by the year 2010, this will have changed in most developed countries...'

The Generation Two improves on the first by overcoming the 'tyranny of distance' because according to Taylor (2001),

*'It involves the use of highly-developed and refined teaching-learning resources, including printed study guides, selected readings, videotapes, audiotapes, and computer-based courseware, including computer managed learning (CML), computer assisted learning (CAL), and interactive video (disk and tape).'*

Also, Holmberg (1995:79) explains that recordings on audio and videocassettes '... have become a second very common medium' because students often feel that 'they provide a certain closeness to reality and have something of an enactive character'. Commenting on this, Moore and Kearsley (1996:83) state that they 'have become very convenient and cost-effective ways to disseminate instructional materials'. However, writing on the use of radio and television, Holmberg (1995) cautions that expectations of these media are often exaggerated as they do have their drawbacks, which include: the inability of students to reflect on what is being listened to without really losing track of the programme, their costs, and their use in areas that lack electricity. All these become issues - especially in the developing countries, as the majority of the recipients of distance education are from the rural areas.

### **Generation three**

Interestingly, the *generation three* is described as being so attractive that it has posed a challenge to conventional (face-to-face) education, as it combines the strengths of both first and second generations (Garrison & Archer, 2000:182), and compensates for the short-comings of the first two by encouraging better group learning through recent developments in software (Bates, 1993). According

to Moore and Kearsley (1996), *these include teleconferencing, audio-conferencing, audio-graphics, two-way videoconferencing, computer conferencing and computer-based instruction*. A good example of audio-conferencing is the University of Wisconsin – Madison Extension’s creation of the Education Telephone Network (ETN) in order to extend the campus to the entire state (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

### **Generations four and five**

However, it is worth noting that Taylor (2001a:200) brings a divergent view to this concept by separating the technologies and tagging them *generation four*, which is based on *on-line delivery over the Internet and promises to combine the benefits of higher quality CD-ROM, based on interactive multimedia (IMM)*, and the emerging *generation five* which involves the use of *automated response systems and intelligent object database* - a derivation of the fourth generation, based on the further exploitation of new technologies. In other words, this aims to capitalize on the features of the Internet and the Web [E-learning] (Taylor, 2002). According to Learning Circuits (2006), E-learning is a term that covers a wide set of applications and processes, such as Web-based learning and virtual classrooms among others, and is becoming irresistible to students, politicians and the business community (Taylor, 2002). Simultaneously, it has been predicted that this would ‘reduce the tuition costs and thereby engender economies of scale capable of increasing access to education and training activities on a global scale’ (Taylor, 2001b). A foreseen additional advantage is the improvement in the quality of service to students (Taylor, 2001b).

But, generation four and five drawbacks are not totally different from the second-generation two delivery mode, as they are too sophisticated to be used in developing countries of the world. According to Adekanmbi (c2004), challenges facing ‘the use of new media include the cost; inadequate personnel to monitor them; and the seeming inability to replace damaged equipment’. Also to this list, Khan (1994:s.a.) adds ‘educational conservatism, lack of manpower, the cargo

cult mentality, educational imperialism and lack of adequate co-operation among those who have it'.

Interestingly, Ljosa (1996:183) does not agree with the *popular notion* that tends 'to look at the development of distance education as a succession of generations of technologies and forms' because the term 'implies that other forms (generations) of distance education are obsolete and will not survive'. Though some technologies may become obsolete and the structures associated with them vanish (Ljosa, 1996), not all can become obsolete in the nearest future. Hence, it has been contended that the most common form of distance education at present and in the future is and will be a mix of ingredients from all generations. In other words, each generation does not fade out, but all are and will be interwoven.

Deductively, one cannot but agree with authors who stress that changes in the modes of delivery in distance education has greatly influenced the mode of delivery of conventional education - with positive effect. For instance, in many dual-mode universities, materials used for distance education are also being used for conventional education. This shows that institutions have the choice of media and Holmberg (1995:84) is of the opinion that 'in distance education the selection possibilities are often limited for financial and other reasons'.

However, in further considering the learning environment, Lewis (2002:11) advises higher education institutions to analyse their markets ( both present and future), to consider the kind of learning environment needed to meet these needs cost-effectively...thereby not just focusing on only *technology*, but also on all other aspects of the learning environment, including:

- Curricular (defined not just in terms of content but also the methods by which students learn);

- Role of teachers and other staff (new roles and skills will be needed, new posts created, and the barriers between existing roles will be blurred as team-working is increasingly used;
- Physical and virtual learning environments (universities' estates will need adapting, with more open access learning or resources centres, more flexible spaces for learning, and arrangements for supporting students whose contact with campus are solely electronic; and
- Learning material in a range of media, serving a variety of student needs and going beyond mere transmission of information, with special consideration of the role of electronically transmitted material.

Therefore, according to Lewis (2002), there is the need to involve students more in their learning as the emphasis in higher education on curriculum content moves students into a passive role: absorbing information (the basis of the traditional lecture).

## 2.4.4 Output in higher education

### 2.4.4.1 Introduction

Output in higher education has diverse meanings. For this study, however, it refers to the *performances or outcomes of students* in their respective courses and *dropout rates* as these relate to both distance and conventional education. All over the world, these two aspects are understandable concerns for 'academicians, students, parents, and college administrators' (Leppel, 2002:433). According to the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (2003) and Woodley (2004), reasons for these concerns include: market forces controlling educational system, funding and benchmarking. To this list, Leppel (2004:433) adds 'shrinking enrolment due to demographic composition'. Therefore, governments have shown serious commitments to this by making it clear that institutions/courses with high attrition rates will no longer receive funding.

However, it has been emphasised that the term *dropout* should not just be used derogatorily as *wastage*; *attrition* and *student mortality* (Woodley, 2004). This is because this word can be ambiguously used. Hence, Tinto (1975) is of the opinion that distinction should be made between *academic failures*; *voluntary withdrawal*; *transfer* and *delay*. Also, Fraser and Nieman (1995:20) use the terms: *draw backs* to describe students ‘who begin with their studies but abandon them after the first attempts’; *non-starters* as those ‘who enrol, but fail to take up their studies in practice’; and *failures* as those ‘who eventually fail the final examination’. Other expressions for the term in research include: *withdrawal*; *abandonment* or *discontinuation*; *persistence/completion* and *retention* (Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, 2003). Giving reason for this caution, Tinto (1975:90) explains that the results of these are ‘seemingly contradictory findings’. While Peters (1992) explains that those dropouts from the system often re-register at a later stage.

Ironically, research (Leppel, 2004:438) has established there is a connection between the performances of students and their attrition rates as these ‘are influenced by many of the same variables’. Therefore, discussion in this section will portray this, as student output is investigated in relation to both modes of delivery.

#### **2.4.4.2 Output in conventional education**

Literature abounds in support of the fact that output in terms of the performance of students and attrition rates are better in conventional education (Kirkwood, 1989; SAIDE, 1995, 1996; Perraton, 2000). For instance in South Africa, the success rate of conventional education in 2000 was put at 73%, as opposed to 58% in distance education (Subotzky, 2003). Nevertheless, the South Africa University Vice-Chancellors Association [SAUVCA, now Higher Education South Africa (HESA)] (2004) asserts that the low throughput rate is a national concern, even at residential universities, as data from the Department of Education (DoE, 2002b) reveals that of the 630 000 national student enrolment for the year 2000 –

2001, only 14% of the learners completed their studies. Lamenting this situation, Leppel (2002:433) explains that, 'it takes four students who leave prior to their sophomore year to produce as much tuition revenue as one student who stays for four years'.

Several variables affecting the persistent rates and academic success of conventional students have been researched. These include:

- Social and academic integration (Spady, 1970, 1971; Tinto, 1975, 1993 & 1997; Bean, 1980);
- Complex interplay of factors involved in the social and academic integration (Cabrera, Nora & Casteneda, 1993);
- Age (Grosset, 1991);
- Motivation (Talbot, 1990);
- Approach to studying (Meyer, 1990; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001);
- Academic literacy (Amos & Fischer, 1998);
- Time management (Lahmers & Zulauf, 2000);
- Peer culture (Gainen, 1995);
- Quality of teaching (Bartz & Miller, 1991);
- Student support structure (Kleemann, 1994);
- Race and ethnicity (Attinasi, 1989; Hu & St. John, 2001); and
- Financial factors (St. John, 1990; Long, 1998).

All the above, and more besides, have been found to have profound effects on persistent rates of students in higher education. While commenting on the unreliability of pre-enrolment factors to predict success in higher education, Fraser and Killen (2005) are of the opinion that 'the fact that so many post-enrolment factors can be important is one reason why previous academic success, particularly at school, is often not a strong predictor of success in higher education'.

However, Leppel (2004:434-435) comments that ‘many studies on persistence are based on data from a single institution’ hence, there is the need for ‘a national-level data’ gathering drive, to aid formulation of appropriate policies.

#### **2.4.4.3 Output in distance education**

Even though distance education is a welcome phenomenon (Eaton, 2001), according to Parker (1999:1), ‘with the growth of distance education has come the problem of exceedingly high attrition rates’, which Baath (1982) and Yule (1985) explain can be between 50% and 53%, while Carter (1996) gives the same as exceeding 40% in some institutions. In addition to this problem is the relatively high failure rate (Fraser & Nieman, 1995).

As this is cause for concern, various studies have been conducted on reasons for this prevailing situation. Scholars like Altmann & Armbasich (1982); Sweet (1986); Cooper (1990); Cooper (1990); Eisenberg & Dowsett (1990); Ehrman (1990); Astin (1991); Dille & Mezack (1991); Iwai & Churchill (1992); Killen, (1994); Powell & Woodley (1995); Kerka (1996); Martin (1996); Uba (1997); Parker (1999); Shin & Kim (1999); Morgan & Tam (1999); Fraser & Lombard (2002); The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (2003) and Fraser & Killen (2005) have conducted research into this phenomenon. Variables such as gender, age, locus of control, grade point average, inappropriately designed studies, lack of formative assessment, student support system; the perceptions of lecturers and students; and mode of delivery have all been researched.

Various findings have resulted from this research, and these have been corroborative and, according to Tinto (1975:99-103), the following factors could be possible reasons for this phenomenon:

- Lack of academic ability;
- Certain personal characteristics such as impulsiveness, lack of emotional bonds and lack of flexibility;

- Poor achievement at school;
- Lack of goal commitment and ambitious occupational aims;
- Poor academic integration;
- Poor social integration with other students, university teachers and administrative staff;
- Lack of contact with the university as an institution;
- Time passed between acquiring a university entry qualification and first registration;
- Professional and family obligations, and activities in the social, cultural and political spheres;
- Choice of wrong subjects; and
- In the case of younger students, the low socio-economic status of the parents and low interest in the student's education.

Along with the above, according to the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (2003), is the 'low rate of entry and persistence among the socio-economically disadvantaged in tertiary education generally'. Hence, according to Yorke (1999:22) universities have been advised to make efforts to assist such 'students accommodate to the demands of higher education'.

While writing on students' performance, Fraser (1993:32) gives the following reasons for poor student's performance at distance teaching institutions:

- The application of face-to-face modes and models of instruction to distance teaching;
- Poor and even non-existent in-service training of lecturers in distance teaching and theory;
- The use of outdated distance and contact teaching strategies;
- The application of pedagogical instructional theory to adult education;
- The structuring of a distance teaching package according to the didactic principles which apply to contact teaching and not to distance teaching;

- The over-exposure of learners to content which enhances surface learning and inhibits a deep-level approach to learning;
- A lack of confidence in the ability to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant material, and the inadequacy of the text in guiding the student in such decision-making; and
- Poor knowledge of the theory underlying adult learning, and the lack of skills in applying the theory of practice.

Supplementing the above, Sherry (1996) gives the inability of students to take responsibility for their studies and the inability of institutions to take into consideration the learning preferences of students (Marshall, 1991; Sherry, 1996). Further, Galusha (1997), while explaining the factors that contribute to high attrition rates in distance education, gives the following, which are based on research attempts:

#### Student Barriers

- Insecurities about learning due to personal and school related issues;
- Perceived lack of feedback or contact with the teacher;
- Lack of support and services such as providing tutors, academic planners and schedulers, and technical assistance;
- Feelings of alienation and isolation; and
- Obtaining study materials and borrowing library books.

#### Faculty Barriers

- Lack of staff training in course development and technology;
- Lack of support by the faculty;
- The threat to tenure and human resource staffing;
- Respecting the academics of distant courses; and
- Teacher's acceptance of distance learning programmes.

### Organizational Barriers

- Infrastructure and technology problems;
- Lack of organizational and administrative support;
- Funding;
- Lack of institutional leader's commitment; and
- Inadequate telecommunications facilities.

### Course considerations

- Course standards;
- Curriculum development and support;
- Course content;
- Course pacing;
- Poor assessment of students' performance; and
- Poor quality of material.

Various studies (Sheets, 1992; Chou, 1994; Marrs, 1995; Bullen, 1996; Wood, 1996; Oaks, 1996; Galusha, 1997) have been conducted into all the above to verify and confirm their effects on students' performance. However, Parker (1999:2) while criticizing most research, is of the opinion that 'studies ... [are] generally focused on a single variable or a limited combination of variables', and, while sifting out unimportant predictors in her study, discovered that 'a student's locus of control and source of financial assistance may act as predictors of their non-completion in distance education'.

Nevertheless, the good news is that guarding against these pitfalls, when preparing and effecting distance education programs, serves to reduce these barriers to learning – sometimes completely eradicating them. For instance, Fraser and Nieman (1995:132-135), recommend the following, which are outcomes of a research attempt:

- Teaching for diversity;

- Flexible administrative policy;
- Contributions of year mark to final promotion mark;
- Development of students' language proficiency (where required);
- Instructional media should have explanatory and exposing functions, and should be suitable;
- Quality subject structure and course design;
- Quality student support structure;
- Flexibility in student learning;
- The need for training of lecturers teaching at distance teaching institutions; and
- Creation of cooperative learning opportunities.

Also, McGivney (2003) identifies motivation, having a supportive family or partner and financial support as contributing factors to persistence.

Hence, it has been argued that in distance education high attrition rates, is not as a result of it being inferior to conventional education. Research (Kabal & Friedel, 1990; Souder, 1993; Freeman, 1995; Mortensen, 1995; Gubernick & Ebeling, 1997; McKissack, 1997; Sonner, 1999; Tucker, 2001) has been conducted into this issue and according to Tucker (2001), 'while distance education may not be superior to or better than traditional face-to-face education, it is just as good as traditional education'. However, such studies have been advised to be all embracing in their focus by not just paying attention to the performances of the students (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999).

In conclusion, Hellman (2003) advises that:

*'If face-to-face instruction is a more effective way of reaching (and retaining) students, particularly the most marginalized, then planners at some point may have to set aside their romance with technological solutions and return to the basic task of building a corps of qualified and dedicated teachers who can reach those, according to signs we already see, who will inevitably be left behind in the computer revolution.'*

But, on the other hand, would it not be better to discover methods of continued appropriate support, that no group with specialised needs be left to fall behind? Advancement in technology, which is influencing our whole way of life, waits for no one.

## **2.5 Issues of convergence in distance and conventional education**

In the view of SAIDE (1996), the major difference between distance and conventional education is usually with regard to the delivery of the syllabus; conventional education takes place with the teacher being physically present for most of the time. However, it has been contended that the convergence between distance and conventional education has caused approaches to teaching distance students to have tremendous effect on approaches to teaching conventional students (Thompson, 1999; Harry & Perraton, 1999; Antony & Gnanam, 2004).

There is no gainsaying the fact that ICT has had and is still going to have a tremendous impact on the issue of convergence of higher education. In the words of Adekanmbi (c2004) 'a gradual merger of ways is being experienced in institutions, which have distance education units as well as students in the formal settings who are being allowed to use materials developed for Distance Education units; the involvement of a wider section of university and college staff in the writing, editing and general development of materials and in the modularization of programmes in the conventional departments'. According to King (2001:55), 'one clear consequence of the new technologies is that the range of teaching options available on and off campus, which have represented almost polar opposites, will blur substantially'. Furthermore, this has led to the use of the broad-based term *Distributed Learning*, which Antony and Gnanam (2004:144-145) have suggested 'very soon may replace the usage of the distance education because distance is too restrictive a concept'.

However, there are divergent views on the use of the term *convergence* and the meaning it conveys. For instance Badat (2005:189) is of the opinion that ‘assertions that distance education and face-to-face methods used in education delivery are *blurring* as a consequence of technological developments are conceptually flawed. According to him (Badat, 2005), the added complexity of a few educational strategies using ICT that cannot be categorized simply as either distance or face-to-face is no reason to suppose that historically germane distinctions do not retain their validity. Therefore, in this section, attempts will be made to investigate through literature how ICT has impacted on the convergence of both distance and conventional education.

In the words of Smith and Webster (1997:99), gone are the days when ‘the word *university* readily evokes an image of changeless tradition: ancient buildings and unworldly intellectuals surrounded by students whose chief interests are dining clubs, sports, and old school ties.’ According to Barnett (2000:107), ‘in an age of super complexity there can be no fixed borders in the university. Borders, boundaries and demarcations: these necessary elements of institutional and social life have perpetually to be on the move in the post-modern university’.

Badat (2005:188) explains that ‘today, there is a wide diversity in higher education provision, with the revolution in ICT, especially facilitating the emergence of new modes of provision. Alongside the traditional so-called contact education or face-to-face education, distance education, and correspondence education are to be found what are described as open learning, multimedia education, online learning and e-learning’. Writing on the hybridisation of higher education, Lewis (2002:5) explains that, ‘a number of pressures have challenged higher education to review their provision in the direction of greater openness’ and these are:

- Continuing stakeholder demands for accessible provision;

- Increasing diversity of students in higher education, and in particular the involvement of new groups;
- Recruitment pressures on institutions
- Need to maintain quality; and
- Increasing resource constraints on higher education institutions.

Still, views on the driving factors of technology in education differ. For example, King (2003:2) is of the opinion that 'developments may well be driven by technologists and business interests, rather than educators'. According to Badat (2005:188), 'not infrequently, the champions provide good fodder for the critics because of the unfortunately grandiose and sometimes almost naïve claims they make on behalf of the new modes of provision'. Also, according to Kumar (1997:29), 'the function of teachers and university libraries is the most under threat in the information age. The personal quality of teaching is of course precious, and is one line of defence. But it is no longer as strong a line of defence as it used to be, in these days of large classes and mass education'.

Apart from the above, another issue raised according to Lewis (2002:6), is 'the ironical demand by students who are supposedly learning full-time, on campus ... because full-time students are now behaving like part-time distance learners, funding their way through university to pay fees and living expenses'. Several case studies (examples of which are Lisewski, 1994; Harrigan & Wade, 1995; Perry, 1995; Whitehead, 1995; Perry & Simpson, 1996; Bashir, 1998) have been carried out, and according to Lewis (2002), they 'provide further analyses of these pressures and of the responses higher education institutions are developing in response'.

Already, Peters (1993), as cited by Powell, McGuire and Crawford (1999), has shown earlier concerns for the *new age* student which he referred to as the *generation three* student, and he predicted that they will be more democratic, 'having increased freedom of education/ training choice'. Thus they contrast two

student archetypes not necessarily due to *empirical exactness*, but because both 'have in the past informed, and continue currently to inform, education planning and decision-making across educational systems'. The older archetype is described in the table below:

**Table 2.2: Student archetypes**

CHARACTERISTIC	CONVENTIONAL	NON-CONVENTIONAL
Age	Under 24 years	25 years and older
Labour-force participation	Not in the labour force	In the labour force
Life Roles	Student role is primary role	Student role is one of several competing life roles
Prior learning	Secondary-school education only	A variety of related formal and experiential learning
Need for credentials	Essential	May be important but not essential.
Time and place of Study	Able to study at institutionally set time and place	Constrained by locations, competing job, and family and community obligations.
Educational providers	Single institutions	Seek out multiple educational providers.
Financial support	Largely public	Largely private

Source: Powell, McGuire & Crawford (1999:90)

However, Wallace (1996) suggests the appearance of a *blurring* of the characteristics of both students. Commenting on this, Powell, McGuire and Crawford (1999:11) concur that this phenomenon has given rise to the *contemporary student*. Reasons given by them include:

- Conventional students delay their entry into higher education because they need to earn money in order to bear the cost of their education.
- Many [students] opt to remain working as they have other adult responsibilities.

- Non-conventional students are ‘driven by economic necessity to strive for programme credentials’.

Though contemporary students do bring some of the needs of the old student archetype into the learning situation, additionally, ‘they bring different needs to the higher-education systems’ – they challenge the *value added* to their education and *delivery methods* that serve the purpose. Therefore, the table below has been proposed as the summary of the characteristics of the contemporary student:

**Table 2.3: The contemporary student**

Characteristics	Typical Profile
Age	18 years and older
Labour-force participation	Part-to full-time participation
Life role	Must balance competing work, family, community and study obligations
Need for credentials	Very important
Time and place of study	Constrained by locations, job, family and community and community obligations
Financial support	A combination of Public, private and employer support.
Programmatic needs	Largely student-and employer-driven.

Source: Powell, McGuire & Crawford (1999:90)

In conclusion, the researcher supports the opinion of Badat (2005) in believing that no amount of technological development can eradicate conventional education. And, in contrast to this, distance education too has come to stay. Therefore, it is necessary to recognise that both forms of education will cater for diverse groups in society – and, indeed, not for the same groups of people. As long as there is the younger generation, older people who – when younger – had been denied access to an education, those who want to advance in their careers

and the demand by employers of labour for skill improvement, distance education – irrespective of the form it takes – will always be relevant to society.

## **2.6 Implications of literature review findings on the study**

From the literature review of the research and writings of various scholars, and the evidence of what can be seen, some facts can be deduced:

First, there is already a paradigm shift in the idea of the university being a place. As earlier presented in Section 2.2.1., it is now regarded as both ‘a place and a process’ (Pister, 1999). Hence, as argued by Barnett (2001), it can be concluded that it is no longer a site of knowledge, but a site of knowledge possibilities. Therein rests the case for distance education.

Second, according to Saba (2001), ‘by [the] early 1970’s there was considerable evidence that the medium of communication is not as much of a factor in distance learning as the quality of instruction...’ Hence, the focus of this study, as earlier emphasised in Section 1, is not on which of the two modes is the better one, but how distance education be improved upon, where necessary. In other words, distance education is here to stay; rather, the focus is on what way greater quality can be built in to the program that will alleviate the misgiving attitude people feel toward it - despite the drawbacks and limitations identified in Section 2.3.5.

Third, is the social question of enabling a larger number of the population to gain access to an education, who due to one reason or another, are denied such access. According to Christensen (2003:6), ‘current consensus is that higher education is in a state of crisis...as they are struggling to adapt to changes brought about by expanding globalization, increasing diversity in student populations, increasing market forces on educational systems, and continuous advancement in technology and artificial intelligence’. Strengthening this fact is Duderstadt (2002b:8), who states that, ‘there are 30 million people in the world

today who are fully qualified to enter a university but for whom no university place is available. Within a decade there will be 100 million university-ready people'. Therefore, the question is: how will the university enable a larger number of the population to gain access to education without distance education? But more importantly, is the question of what quality of access will be given to students?

Lastly, it is expected that with the masses being given quality access to education, the problem of high attrition rates in distance education would, of necessity, have be attended to.

## **2.7 Summary**

In this chapter, attempts have been made to analyse the concepts: distance education and conventional education as related to their distinctive features, theoretical paradigms, practices, achievements and drawbacks. Most importantly, a working definition was provided for each of these concepts as they impact this study. In addition to this, the current state of the three indices of assessment: access, delivery mode and output were clearly elucidated, including some of the divergent attitudes people have toward them. The *blurring* debate and its direct influence on higher education were discussed. Finally, the implications of the findings of this literature review were explained as they pertain to this study.

In conclusion, Chapter Three will focus on these indices of assessment as they relate to the South African higher education system.

# CHAPTER 3

## A LITERATURE REVIEW OF DISTANCE AND CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION REVIEWED IN TERMS OF ACCESS, DELIVERY AND OUTPUT

### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter Three is a follow-up on the thoughts on education focused upon in the previous chapter, but concentrates on the South African context. A thorough literature review is made of available materials on the three indices under review, namely: *access*, *delivery* and *output*, and the chapter, presents a brief history of the development of South African higher education. This is then followed by a study of the status-quo of distance and conventional education, as it is today. This is imperative in understanding the background to this study and the relative importance of the three chosen indices. According to Elliot (2005:69), 'Few countries can rival South Africa in the complexity of its higher education system and the demands it currently faces for radical, long-term tertiary-sector reform'.

Also, a brief background of the University of Pretoria, South Africa, is given for the same purpose. Focus is placed on the current state of the Bachelor of Education (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy program, which is presented as a dual-mode format. This enables one to place side-by-side the practices of this institution with the policy and practice of higher education in South Africa as a whole.

## **3.2 Distance and conventional education in South Africa: Policy and practice**

### **3.2.1 Historical development of higher education in South Africa**

According to Goduka (1999:2) ‘...no one can understand the present without a critical understanding of the past. Nor can we know what kind of future we are building without knowledge of the past and the present.’ Tracing the historical development of higher education in South Africa will help one to understand the importance of the three indices of review for this study, namely: *access*, *delivery* and *output*. Cooper and Subotzky (2001:1) state that ‘the history of higher education in South Africa is a very underdeveloped sub-field at present, and more in-depth studies are required before a full picture can emerge’. However, perusing through available literature one gets an impression of the major historical developments.

Before 1918, the University of the Cape of Good Hope (UCGH) was the only university that existed in South Africa. It served as the examining and degree-granting body for various university colleges (Behr, 1988; Cooper and Subotzky, 2001) Examples of such colleges at that time were the South African College in Cape Town; Victoria College of Stellenbosch; Natal University College; Grey College in Bloemfontein; University of South Africa (UNISA), which originally conducted examinations only (see Section 3.2.3) and Transvaal University College in Pretoria, to mention but a few. It is nevertheless interesting to note that degrees that were conferred were based on English models (University of

London) and according to Bocher (1973:62), 'It was, until Union, almost exclusively an English institution (for one of the major pre-requisites for its candidates was the ability to write in [the] English language). The Dutch language was for long an optional subject, placed at the Matriculation level on a par with French, German and Bantu languages'. However, between 1873 and 1918 various events happened locally and internationally that changed this picture and in time all these colleges became full-fledged universities.

Though segregation within South African higher education preceded 1948, Urch (1992:159) explains that the leadership of the National Party 'solidified through law what already had been put in place by the White minority'. This, according to Cooper and Subotzky (2001), gave rise to the *homelands* system, which had great influence on higher education. This, they explain, led to the Extension of University Education Act of 1959 which provided for the establishment of separate higher education for the Blacks, Colored and Indian groups. These were located in specific rural areas: the University College of the North (Xhosa and South Sotho); the Northern Transvaal (Sotho, Venda and Tsonga); the University College of Zululand (the Zulu and Swazi); the University College of the Western Cape (Colored) and the University College, Durban (Indians). All these colleges later became full-fledged universities and others were later added to their number, to make 21 universities in South Africa. This number, critics say, is the highest for any country in the world with the same population as South Africa.

The universities were separate from the technikons that emerged in the 1960s for both whites and blacks. Commenting on this emergence, Marcum (1982:216) states that 'this new form of advanced education is different from anything that has existed in South Africa before' and its difference lies in the fact that the 'technikons are mainly providing practically oriented education'.

According to Urch (1992:160), the goals of education were made clear by the Bantu Act of 1953, as it was meant 'to prepare the youth for life in a totally

separate community' and 'special higher educational institutions, including universities, were to be established that would prepare a small group of Africans for service and leadership roles in their own community'. This, according to Herman (1998:41), gave the whites 'privileged access to a free and compulsory schooling system, in addition, many were able to afford prestigious private schooling' for decades and its effect became reflected in the high pass rate in exams and the number of matriculants that entered the higher institutions at that time.

Lamenting on this, Goduka (1999:86) states that as expected 'inequalities in the education system have resulted in degrees of educational disadvantage'. Complementing this is the fact sheet released by the South African Race Relations on a survey that reveals that in 1992 the matriculation pass rate of Africans was 42%; Colored, 86%; Indians, 95% and 98% for the Whites. Reasons for this are diverse and Goduka (1999) gives the teacher–pupil ratio as being better in the white schools, and better-qualified teachers as some of the examples to support these differences. Corroborating this, Herman (1998:41) gives '... poor teaching conditions, under-qualified teachers, inadequate facilities and no compulsory education system, coupled with educational boycotts and revolts in black education as having contributed to poor matriculation results for students ...' Hence, according to Mncwabe (1999) higher education faces three facets of crisis, which are: credibility, relevance and provision.

It was to this scene that the new democratic government in South Africa came in 1994. It is no wonder that some of the largest and most challenging issues in South African education and training are equity, access inclusion and quality (King, 1988). Therefore, the new government was saddled with the responsibility of redressing the situation. At the commissioning a National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE), Nelson Mandela, the first truly democratically elected President of the Republic of South Africa, challenged this committee to 'preserve

what is valuable and to address what is defective and requires transformation’ (NCHE: 1996:1).

In relation to this study, the above events over the decades have helped to create a large educational gulf between the whites and other races in South Africa, thus leading to inequality in every area of life. If distance education has been identified as one of the tools to bridge this educational divide, it suffices to say interest should be focused on identifying gaps in practices that may be responsible for it still not being accorded the same respect as conventional education. The researcher hopes this study will proffer suggestions for the lapses identified in distance education in order to enhance the quality of the delivery. In other words, the focus of this study goes beyond identifying which mode is better, an aspect of criticism already levied against such studies (Section 1: 2).

### **3.2.2 Conventional education in South Africa: policy and practice**

Much literature abounds on the present efforts being made to normalize the previous situation of South African higher education. In the words of Sedgwick (2004), this is a situation ‘which left scars ... that run deep and which will take many years before they are fully healed’.

According to Jansen (2001:42), ‘Until 1990 ... the State maintained control of education policy in ways that were bureaucratically centralized, racially exclusive and politically authoritarian’. In support of this, Badat (2005) states that, ‘In South Africa, social inequalities were and are deeply embedded in and reflected in every area of social life. The higher education *system* was fragmented, and institutions were differentiated along the lines of race and ethnicity, which led to ...serious contemporary under-representation of [the] black ...’ Painting this gloomy picture, Pretorius and Lemmer (1998:viii) further explain that ‘... South Africa has probably the most developed and well-supplied system of education and training in Africa ...’ while its teeming black adult populace ‘are functionally

illiterate and... [the] majority of learners attend school in circumstances that can be compared to the most impoverished on this continent’.

From the report of the National Commission on Higher Education established in 1995, it was acknowledged that the system as it was then is limited in its ability to meet the demands of the new South Africa. Therefore, a transformation of the higher education system was proposed (SAIDE, 1996), and higher education in White Paper 3 1997 ‘*A Program for Higher Education Transformation*’ has as one of its purposes:

*‘...to meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes throughout their lives.’ (DoE, 1997: 7)*

Higher education was identified as ‘a key allocator of life chances ... for achieving equity in the distribution of opportunity ...’ (DoE, 1997:7) It was identified that educational institutions were required to focus on ‘increased and broadened participation, responsiveness to societal interest and needs, and co-operation and partnership in governance.’ (DoE, 1997:10)

Consequently, two goals of education are:

- To improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the system.
- To promote the development of a flexible learning system, including distance education and resource-based learning system on [an] open learning principle (DoE, 1997:13–14)

Against this background, a program-based definition of higher education was given:

*‘Higher education comprises all learning programs leading to qualification higher than the proposed Further Education and Training Certificate or the current Standard 10 (grade 12 – researcher’s comment) Certificate.’ (SAIDE, 1996:17)*

Presently, according to Sedgwick (2004), there are twenty-one universities in South Africa, which comprise the traditional universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities, and there are fourteen (14) approved private institutions. Various bodies such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), National Qualifications Framework (NQF), Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), all play major roles in overseeing and implementing the country's policies on higher education.

### **3.2.3 Distance education in South Africa: policy and practice**

The University of South Africa (UNISA) is regarded as the 'first full-fledged autonomous distance teaching institution in the world' Guri-Rosenblit (1999:4). Its roots can be traced back to the University of Cape of Good Hope, established in 1873 (SAIDE, 1995) but it originally conducted examinations only (Peters, 1998). By 1946 it commenced work in distance education and was officially established in 1962 (Holmberg, 1995) as a full-fledged correspondence university (SAIDE, 1995). It is important to note that during the apartheid era in South Africa, UNISA remained as an open university to all races, which gave the first democratic elected President Nelson Mandela (while in prison) the opportunity to study Law at the university through the distance mode. With the largest number of students in South Africa, it is presently laboring to adapt its practices to modern trends in all areas (Peters, 1998).

In addition to this, residential universities and technikons, such as University of Natal, the then Rand Afrikaans University and University of Pretoria operate as dual-mode institutions. As in other African countries, the teaching profession has also benefited from distance education in South Africa. For instance according to the Department of Education (1996), about '130 000 students (nearly one third of South Africa's teachers) were enrolled in teaching at a distance in 1995', and the number has never ceased increasing. Buttressing this, Latchem and Robinson

(2002:29) state that, 'Distance education and training is widely used around the world, in both small and large countries and in a variety of contexts'.

From as early as 1906 the private sector has also participated in the provision of distance education, with some institutions operating as dual-mode institutions or purely as correspondence colleges (SAIDE, 1994). Though 'many domestic private institutions have entered into partnerships with international counterparts to offer their programs in South Africa', the government moved to stop this practice in order to protect the 'public institutions from international competition', a move that has been described as unfortunate (Gordon, 2005).

There are also other corporate distance education providers such as ABSA Bank Training Centre, First National Bank Staff College, and AGN Power Matric sponsored by SANLAM, etc. (SAIDE, 1996). Presently in South Africa, according to Daves et al. (2004), there are 'over 65 institutions providing distance learning in higher education'.

In South Africa, distance education and open learning have been identified as the only feasible means of meeting the needs of the vast numbers of people denied equal educational opportunity under the repressive regime (SAIDE, 1996:8). It has also been identified as having the possibility of being instrumental in 'addressing the enormous imbalances in skills and experience between different sectors in the community' (Bosman & Frost, 1996). Furthermore, it has been concluded that, 'Distance education is clearly emerging as an important vehicle for skills development' (Gordon, 2005).

Hence, all higher education institutions were encouraged by the government to also employ distance education, to increase public access to an education. Though 'earlier legislation allocated a *seat* or geographical area which limits their area of activities' this was changed because of the need to remove constraints on the universities and to meet the expected explosion in the number of students

wishing to enroll at institutions of higher learning. (UP, 2002). However, the expected increase never came, and this helped create great competition between the universities. Consequently, government saw the need to protect institutions that are solely distance teaching in nature by restricting subsidies for distance education programs in other institutions. Therefore, it was decided to regulate the provision of distance education in conventional education institutions by stating that, 'no new programs would be approved unless they address identified national and/or regional needs or overlap with programs offered by the distance education institution ...' (DoE, 2001)

Daves, et al. (2004) in criticizing the move of the government are of the opinion that this is contradictory as this has 'limited the growth of innovative distance education.' For instance, Bosman and Frost (1996), state that UNISA's correspondence model 'has received criticism that the curricula focus on teaching rather than on learning and that students learn to pass an examination, rather than to acquire the competencies needed to be effective in their work.' This is because 'the heightened need for distance education comes at a time when the nation's traditional distance education model is being recognized as outmoded, but also when advances in technology present tremendous opportunities for creating better replacement models for distance learning'; therefore, 'the Department of Education will first have to determine internally what the government's position is on distance learning and their recommended distance education model before it can attempt to develop a comprehensive plan and set of actions for the nation' (Daves et al. 2004).

Currently, the face of distance education in South Africa reflects the changing pattern of the modes of delivery. According to Daves et al. (2004), 'the new model incorporates the provision of learner support through a variety of mechanisms, including learning centers with audio-visual and computer assisted support'. This change, according to them, is due to the following factors:

- The developments in Information Technology (IT), which allow for different modes of delivery;
- The need for greater cost-efficiency to deal with increased enrolments without having to increase staff or build infrastructure;
- Competition from private higher education providers and
- The government's public stance that distance education has a crucial role to play in expanding access, diversifying the body of learners in South Africa and enhancing the quality of instruction within economic constraints.

Challenges facing distance education in South Africa have also been identified. South Africa Global Distance Education [SAGDEN] (2001) observed that there is still a problem in the area of distance education curriculum, which is reflected more in the area of '... the quality of course design and the quality of instruction, than on technology itself'. Commenting on this, the Department of Education (DoE, 2001:61-62) laments that:

- These programs are often based on poorly designed materials and rely on a single mode of delivery that is inappropriate to the student.
- A number of programs have been developed and used on the Internet that are no more than e-mail versions of poorly written correspondence texts. Emphasis has always been on minimizing costs rather than developing a quality program.
- There is little evidence of creative use of multi-media modes of delivery or research-based approach to curriculum design, development and delivery.
- A lack of research into the needs and contexts of students, appropriate modes of delivery and new methods of assessment undermine the quality of the programs.
- The relevance of programs is open to question. In most cases, a small range of programs are on offer because and are largely chosen for their profitability rather than because they meet the needs of the students and develop the knowledge and skills required by employers.

Other challenges identified by Daves et al. (2004), include ‘limited infrastructure and resources along with the problems of learner preparedness, antiquated learning systems... and access which are all critical barriers to the effective growth of distance education’. Thus, concerns on quality by government, learner support services, cost-efficiency and effectiveness of programs become more understandable. Government has since instituted quality assurance and benchmarking mechanisms in order to ensure quality in higher education (DoE, 2000).

### **3.3 Brief historical development of the University of Pretoria**

According to the University of Pretoria (2002a), ‘the Pretoria branch of the Transvaal University College (TUC) was the forerunner of the University of Pretoria’. Coetzee and Geggus (1980) and Cooper and Subotzky (2001) shedding light on this, explain this college was one of the various University Colleges that examined and granted degrees through the University of the Cape of Good Hope, which later became affiliated to University of South Africa (UNISA). In 1902, the Normal College for the training of teachers was established in Pretoria and it adopted a new name – the Transvaal University College (TUC) (UP, 2006e). As a university college, it commenced its activities in 1908 with classes in the Arts and Sciences as part of the TUC with its seat in Johannesburg (UP, 2006e). However, on 4 March 1908, it became officially known as the Pretoria Centre for of the Transvaal University College, and according to Coetzee and Geggus (1980:21) was later ‘incorporated as the University of Pretoria by Act No. 13 of 1930’, an independent institution apart from the Johannesburg institute (UP, 2006e).

In 1931 the newly constituted University of Pretoria resumed classes with 65% of the student body being Afrikaans speaking and 32% of the classes offered were conducted in Afrikaans, though it was only in September 1932 that it began operating as a university that served white Afrikaners exclusively (Boucher, 1973; UP, 2006e). This status quo of serving the few privileged of such race persisted

until the wind of political change blew on the country. Commenting on this, Pistorius (2002b) explains that the constitutional changes in South Africa had immense effect on all tertiary institutions, with no exception to this university. Shedding further light on this, Smit (2002b:2) states that, 'The changes that the University of Pretoria faces and its endeavor to search for solutions cannot...be dissociated from national and international trends'.

However, according to Pistorius (2002b:1), 'the university purposefully strove towards serving the country and all its inhabitants and to equip them for the future'. Therefore, one could say, presently it is confident of its ability to adapt and contribute innovatively to the future of higher education in the country (Smit, 2002b).

### **3.4 Access issues in South African higher education**

#### **3.4.1 Access in distance and conventional education in South Africa**

Various scholars have tried to define the term *access* and it can generally be assumed to mean '*opening opportunities for people to attend college who were once excluded*' (Herman & Mandell 1999:16; Holmberg, 2002:81). This exclusion depends on a number of reasons, such as an inability to afford the cost and because circumstances do not permit students to attend studies full-time, which was previously the characteristic of conventional education.

Equally, Holmberg (2002:81) sees it as giving a second-chance to its clients. A trend towards massification of higher education due to an increase in population, increased demand for skilled work in the labour market and an increase in the political power of ordinary people, are reasons that have been given to explain the need for increased access to learners (SAIDE, 1996:32; Braimoh, 2003:3). In the words of Gourley (1999:85) factors such as 'economic necessity or democratic principle, ...changes in the labour market accompanying a trend away from goods production to service, and a rise in educational requirements

for jobs in key sectors of a developing global economy' all influence the need for access.

According to De Vuyst (1999:100), 'Education throughout the centuries has been a system controlled by the ruling groups in the society'. Gourley (1999:90) in agreement with this view stresses that universities, for many years, have been 'the elite institutions – bearers of a particular canon and reproducers of a particular class or meritocracy in the society'. Such was the situation in South Africa before the advent of democracy that put blacks, who are in the majority, in power. 'During apartheid, South Africa maintained disparate higher education systems organized along racial lines, with vastly inferior institutions catering to black students' (Sedgwick, 2004).

Van Onselen (1997:14), a popular South African historian, giving a deeper insight into the South African situation states that:

*'When these two...facts – the preponderance of young people and their social commitment to the extended family – are inserted into context of acute rural poverty, low economic growth, unemployment rate of 35 percent, large – scale underemployment, and a rapidly changing education system, there are consequences which extend well beyond the mere quantitative dimensions envisaged in proposed 'massification' of tertiary education... For thousands of South Africans, access to tertiary education has become the difference between having a roof over your head and being homeless, between being fed half of the year or starving, between owning some clothing and being decked out in rags, and between social commitments by sending home small amounts of cash to your family, or joining ranks of those who are fully unemployed.'*

Even though views on this comment differ, Gourley (1999:89) feels that his arguments 'point to a cluster of problems related to access that will continue to beset universities, especially in Second and Third World countries...' Sharing this view, the National Plan for Higher Education (2001) states that '...education is pivotal to economic prosperity, assisting South Africans – personally and

collectively – to escape the *poverty trap* characterizing many of our communities’. Buttressing this further, the Human Sciences Research Council (HRSC, 2000), explains that graduate unemployment is low in South Africa and that graduates with a bachelor’s degree earn 125% more than those with only a matriculation result.

Gourley continues ‘The view that educational attainment has a major influence on a person’s life chances lies behind many post–World War II efforts to increase access to universities and to make universities more reflective of the demographics of their catchment’s areas’. Hence, the continual challenge to transform the South Africa higher education system by increasing ‘access for the country’s black citizens, who represent a majority of the nation’s population, but a minority of those who attend and graduate from university’ (Daves et al. 2004). The Education White Paper 3 (1997) buttressed by the National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa (2001) promises to:

*‘Promote equity of access and fair chance of success to all who are seeking to realize their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities.’*

In view of this, conventional education institutions in South Africa, according to CHE (2004) ‘have for the last ten years – and in some cases longer – addressed themselves to admission strategies...that widen access to higher education and facilitate the academic development of students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds’. These, according to CHE, include *special* or *alternative* admission requirements as well as recognition of prior learning (RPL). To this list Herman (1998:43) adds ‘work-study programs and special loan scheme for those who cannot normally afford to pay for tuition; academic support programs and bridging courses (especially in science) for those who entered university with marginal matriculation results or who have problems with language proficiency in English;

while some universities run summer and winter schools for matriculants and offer career counseling services’.

However, citing Gelderbloem (1996:16), he laments that ‘these initiatives are costly and limited in range, and solutions to the problems of access and equity do not lie solely at the door of the university’. Hence, he identifies three major controversies and paradoxes concerning the issue of access and equity in the country:

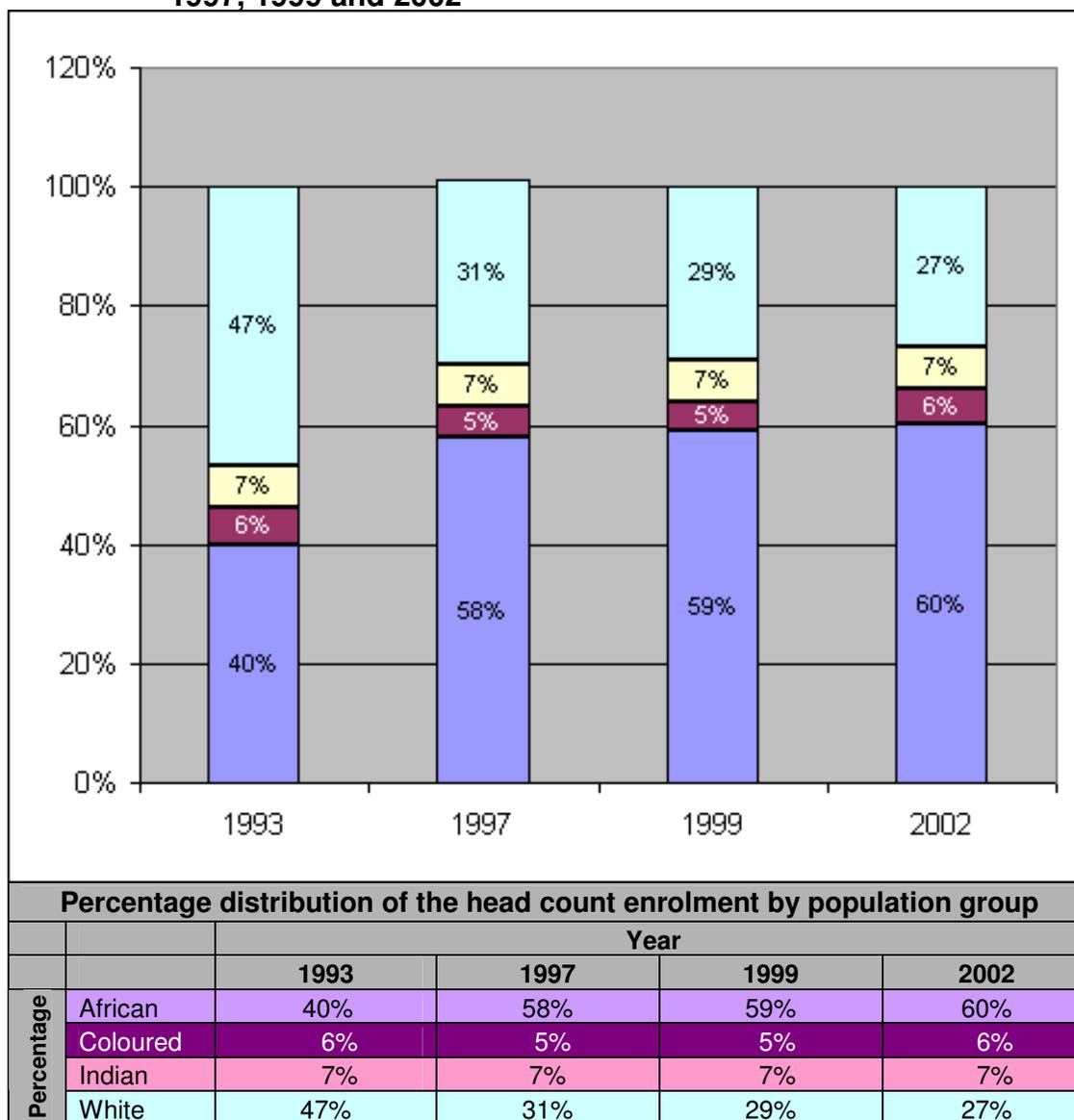
- The unlikelihood of the state providing for large capital funds needed to sustain programs geared towards admitting more students from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Due to the issue of relevance, Gelderbloem fears that laying greater emphasis on science and technology might be at the cost of the human sciences, where most of the disadvantaged students are concerned;
- If universities are supposed to maintain excellence, then lack of selection will affect this.

Efforts are also being made in these areas with regard to distance education. A collaborative body called the Confederation of Open Learning Institutions of South Africa (COLISA) and other distance learning partners, according to Daves et al. (2004) ‘...have launched two projects of particular note...’ targeted at providing ‘...distance learning tools in areas where no university or technikon exists’. A potential already identified to redress the question of access in South Africa is distance education. Thus, it has given the educational opportunity to several people who remain outside the walls of the conventional classroom (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999:20). Furthermore, one cannot but agree with Daves et al. (2004) who state that, ‘distance education ... provides for the enrolment of large numbers of students ...’ a vital factor ‘to the new group of tertiary level students in South Africa’.

What has made distance education become a force to be reckoned with are the changes taking place globally, which are affecting information and communications technology. According to the National Plan for Higher Education (2001a), at the centre of these changes is the notion that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, knowledge and the processing of information will be the key driving forces for wealth creation and thus social and economic development. These have caused a situation where the delivery of both distance and conventional education are compared to each other, to establish a redress and refining process within their respective delivery. Consequently, convergence of distance and conventional education is believed to 'encourage increased access as there will be a range of modes of study (Garrison, 1993:239; Tait & Mills, 1999:4). Also, learners will be able to change from full-time to part-time, class-based to home-base study.

Presently, it would appear that the changes within higher education in South Africa are beginning to reflect the goal of the government in this regard to some extent (Cloete & Bunting, 1999; National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa, 2001a) as Figure 3.1 below suggests:

**Figure 3.1: Gross participation rates in public higher education in 1993, 1997, 1999 and 2002**



Sources: Adapted from Cloete and Bunting (2001); DoE (2004)

From the figure above, it can be noted there has been a sharp increase in the participation rate of African learners from 40% in 1993 (before the advent of democracy) to 60% in 2002. However, the sharp decline in White learner participation in public higher education should not go unnoticed, which decreased from 47% in 1993 to 29% in 2002. Various reasons have been given for this, among which is the White learner movement to overseas or private institutions

(Cloete & Bunting, 2001). Also, it can be noted there is no change in the percentage distribution of both Colored and Indian learners.

Buttressing the facts mentioned above, the Department of Education (DOE, 2001) notes that 'African student enrolments increased from 191 000 to 343 000 between 1993 and 1999 i.e. by 152 000 (or 80%). Thus in 1999, African students constituted 59% of the total head count enrolments in higher education'. SAQA (2004) reveals that by 2001 almost 60% of all graduates were Black learners. This, according to Cooper and Subotzky (2001) is revolutionary. Citing the example of the University of Port Elizabeth, which changed from being 62% White in 1995 to being 87% Black in 1999 Cloete (2002) proposes that, 'these demographic changes must be some of the most remarkable in the world during the 1990s'.

Though it is the goal of the South African government to redress the imbalances of the past, the researcher still tends to lean toward the caution expressed by Herman (1998:41) that 'it is necessary to proceed with caution and realism when planning to remove past disparities' because 'uncoordinated open admission and affirmative action policies could lead to massive enrolments of educationally disadvantaged students, which may create unforeseen problems if the needs of students cannot be addressed in the teaching and learning programs of universities'.

Herman and Mandell, (1999:17) have brought another wrinkle to the *access debate* by claiming that increasing access has more than numerical consequences. Both argue that 'making educational opportunities more accessible to those it excluded, does not ultimately make the system fair' (Herman & Mandell, 1999:19). Although increased access is the goal (Daniel, 1996) education will have then become 'diminished and commoditized services of corporate agendas' (Reading, 1997; Shumar 1997). Therefore access shows two faces: invitation and exclusion (Herman & Mandell, 1999:22). The term *Mega*

*University* has been used to refer to large universities behaving like businesses because they operate in entrepreneurial and competitive ways (Tait & Mills, 1999:3; Daniel, 1996). This may eventually deny several people access to higher education.

Quality is another issue that has been raised on the question of access and equity in South African higher education. As earlier alluded to, Herman (1995) sees universities as being left in the cold and facing some dilemmas which are:

- The tendency to relegate institutions of higher learning that admit a majority of the disadvantaged students to a lower status; and
- The rapid increase in the enrolments of black students have led to large class sizes, leading to the question of quality as resources are being stretched beyond limits.

Gamede (2005:6-7), in a recent study reveals that 'increased access to education has not resulted in quality output'. Echoing this view, the Minister of Education, Pandor (2005), stresses that 'higher education is further challenged to promote equity without compromising quality' because 'indeed, quality is central to any redress or equity strategy'.

In other words, access is not only limited to greater increase in the number of students. An important question should be: How many students really have access to technology? (A question that is particularly relevant to studies through distance education.) (Skilbeck, 2001) The next question to ask is: At whose expense does access come? (Chambers, 1997) This depicts that those who are being given access, may eventually be locked out of the system (Rumble, 2001). To this researcher this is a major issue that must be continually addressed, if there is to be sincerity about increased learner access. In the next chapter the issue of quality will be focused on, to discover the South African policy on these issues is, and the extent to which this policy is being implemented.

### **3.4.2 Access in distance and conventional education at the University of Pretoria**

At present the student profile at the University of Pretoria reflects that many changes have been implemented in relation to learner access – in view of the fact that the institution was formerly ‘a mainly white Afrikaans university’ (UP, 2005). In other words, these changes have made it ‘a national university in the true sense of the word, accessible to all South Africans’ (UP, 2005).

Presently, the university’s ‘student profile places it in a unique position as... one of the largest Black residential universities in the country’ (UP, 2005). Besides this, ‘more than 29 000 students – of whom 95% were black – were enrolled in the university’s distance education programs, (and most of them can be found mostly) in the Faculty of Education’ (UP, 2005) According to Melck (2002), the Distance Education Unit at the university, through its programmes ‘provide [an] access route to the university for students who would otherwise not have been able to enrol’.

The table below shows a summary of student numbers that were registered at University of Pretoria between 1994 and 2006, as per race group:

**Table 3.1: Race profile of students at the University of Pretoria 1994 – 2006**

	WHITE		COLORED		INDIAN		AFRICAN		TOTAL	
1994	21 500	89.06%	218	0.9%	160	0.7%	2261	9.36%	24139	100%
1995	21 119	81.49%	236	0.91%	321	1.23%	4239	16.4%	25915	100%
1996	20 041	77.19%	256	0.98%	397	1.52%	5266	20.3%	25960	100%
1997	19 494	74.96%	246	0.94%	547	2.10%	5717	22%	26004	100%
1998	19 370	72.59%	274	1.02%	684	2.56%	6356	23.9	26684	100%
1999	19 145	71.64%	270	1.01%	866	3.24%	6442	24.1%	26723	100%
2000	20 032	71.30%	325	1.15%	1031	3.66%	6705	23.9%	28093	100%
2001	20 862	68.91%	408	1.34%	1235	4.07%	7767	25.7%	30272	100%
2002	21 848	67.92%	472	1.46%	1395	4.33%	8448	26.3%	32163	100%
2003	22 464	66%	502	1%	1625	5%	9605	28%	34 196	100%
2004	22 977	59%	589	2%	1683	4%	13714	35%	38 963	100%
2005	22 960	60%	646	2%	1 708	4%	13185	34%	38 499	100%
2006	23 060	60%	684	2%	1 684	4%	12961	34%	38 389	100%

Source: University of Pretoria (2005d; 2006d)

The above table indicates that since 1994, the year when South Africa entered a new phase in its political history, there has been a steady growth in the number of enrolments of the African students (Blacks) and other races. This is in view that the University of Pretoria was, historically, a *White* institution. There is a change in the former race-pattern. For instance, the headcount of the total student enrolment of African students in 1994, was 2 261 (or 9.36%) of 24 139 students. However, by 2002 this figure had risen to 8 448 (or 26.26%) of 32 163 students and by 2006 this figure had risen still further, to 12 961 (34%) of 38 389 students. Also, it is interesting to note a continual drop in the enrolment of White students. In 1994, the total of White students was 21 500 (or 89.06%) of 24 139 students. However, by 2006 this figure had dropped to 23 060 (60%) of 38 389 students.

Though this trend may be attributed to the efforts of government as achieved through its revised policy regarding student access to education, to Cloete and Bunting (2000:20), 'the system will be an equitable one only if [black student] performances match those of other students'.

### **3.5 Delivery in South African higher education**

#### **3.5.1 Delivery in distance and conventional education in South Africa**

Cloete (1998) predicts that higher education in South Africa will face a demand for greater flexibility in modes of delivery. The three driving forces identified for this by Morrison and Oblinger (2002) are technology, diversity of students and learning. Jansen (2004:1), who proposes that one of the ten 'most important changes in higher education' is 'the changing models of delivery...' corroborated this.

Previously in South Africa, the conventional education institutions delivered instruction mainly through face-to-face contact, largely depending on print as a mode of delivery. According to Burke (2002) the print medium is the most

common form of delivery not only at the conventional institutions, but also in traditional distance education. In the latter it serves as *correspondence courses* (DEC, 2004; Jansen, 2004), while it serves as lecture/tutorial notes in the former.

Expanding on this further, CHE (2004) states that 'the issue of teaching and learning delivery models is critically influenced by so-called *new media* (especially the Internet) and the opportunities and challenges these offer higher education'. Various scholars (DoE, 2001; CHE, 2004; Jansen, 2004) are of this same opinion, and explain that this has led to the convergence of distance and conventional education. According to Broere and Kruger (2004) 'Many higher education institutions in South Africa, have already progressed from traditional contact education to a mixed mode form of delivery, in which dynamic interaction occurs between ICT and *face-to-face* lecturing'. Butressing this, Jansen (2004:14) states that the present situation in South Africa is that in which conventional institutions start to 'offer a range of alternative modes of delivery...' and '... create a complex of instructional opportunities and resources that complemented the formal lectures or seminars' that has led to various kinds of distance education.

Consequently, South Africa Global Distance Education (SAGDEN, 2001) states that, 'there are now a wide variety of technologies available, including broadcast radio and television; audio and video tape; interactive audio and video teleconferencing and computer and Internet technologies' being used by distance education providers. Added to this list by Jansen (2004:14) is the exploration of 'the potential of mobile phones', which are owned by many students. For instance, according to the Distance Education Unit of the University of Pretoria (2006), about 99% of the Distance Education students possess a cell phone. However, these changes should not be alarming. This is because 'developments in South African higher education have closely mirrored international trends' (CHE, 2005).

Daves et al. (2004) cite some institutions in South Africa that have effected changes in their modes of delivery. For instance,

- UNISA recently launched the first phase of its Internet based *Students On-line* service, which enables students who have Internet access to communicate with their lectures and fellow students using e-mail and have controlled access to records and library holdings.
- Some contact institutions have also designed distance education courses to supplement classroom instruction.

An example of this, according to Broere and Kruger (2004:4), is the University of Johannesburg – formerly known as Rand Afrikaans University – where the driving forces that have led to changes in the delivery in higher education have brought about the development of an ‘integrated multi-modal teaching and learning strategy’.

With this *blurring* of the demarcation between the delivery of both distance and conventional education, comes the idea of *multi-modal teaching and learning* or *blended learning*. Blended learning, according to DEC (2004), refers to ‘the use of more than one delivery method in a single course’. In the view of Jansen (2004), the ‘*pure* institution of types of the 1980s, are a thing of the past’. Thus, he has predicted that ‘the changing demands on institutions and the new opportunities offered by technology might eventually erode the certainties of institutional typologies in the coming decades’. However, there may not be cause for alarm since in South Africa ‘the key issue is to ensure that all graduates are equipped with the skills and competencies necessary to function in modern society, in particular, computer literacy, information management, communication and analytical skills’ (DoE, 2002:2). Previously echoing this are Wilkinson, Wilkinson and Guillaume (2000) who state that ‘there...seems to be agreement that higher education institutions will need to make adjustments to their academic structures, to their methods of teaching, and to the systems by which they deliver

their courses in order to meet new challenges'. Presently in South Africa there is hardly any higher institution that is not offering the multi-modal approach of delivery.

However, according to CHE (2004:100), views on the rush to implement information and communication technology (ICT) differ. Some feel this has to do with *profit motives*; others are of the opinion 'that ICT is the tool of a *network society*' which will be used to 'accelerate the production of knowledge' and with which 'South Africa should be seeking to narrow the digital divide between itself and other nations and...widen access to higher education; while those who stand aside have been warned that they *will find it harder to survive*'.

As pleasing as all these developments are, problems have been identified with the advent of improvement in information communication and technology. For example, Burke (2002) warns that 'Low income, minority and underrepresented students are likely to be among those who may not have access to the technology or have the technological experience necessary to take advantage of the education courses'. And he asks the question: 'Will these circumstances create a divide between the *technology rich* and the *technology poor*?' Also echoing this fear is Wills (1999:10), who feels that 'If the digital divide is not tackled it will entrench existing exclusion for generations'.

The above becomes important in view that South Africa as a nation is in the process of redressing inequalities and injustices of the past, is faced with the dilemma of the socio-economic status of its teeming Black population, which it seeks to empower through educational opportunities.

### **3.5.2 Delivery in distance and conventional education at University of Pretoria**

One of the goals of the University of Pretoria is striving to create ‘flexible life-long learning opportunities...through developing [students’] ability to adapt to the rapidly changing environments of the information era’ (UP, 2003:1). Hence, programs are developed, teaching methods applied and student learning stimulated in such a way that ‘information (retrieval and processing) and computer literacy skills, for example, the ability to use and integrate computer technology and solutions in an efficient and effective way’ (UP, 2003:2) are developed.

As expected, paradigm shifts that have taken place in higher education have impacted on the education policy of the university and these, according to its Education Policy – Discussion Document (UP, 2003:5), include shifts from reproductive learning to productive learning; behaviorism to constructivism; teacher-centered to student-centered; teaching-centered to learning-centered; conveying content to facilitating learning; content-based to outcomes-based and content-based evaluation to outcomes-based assessment. These have serious implications for all aspects of the teaching activities at the university. However, it should be borne in mind that these have also been influenced by two key factors, which are:

- The increasing availability and development of technology (whereby the limitations of place and time for study are eliminated) and
- The need of learners to take greater control over their own learning environments, while at the same time being in a position to exercise greater freedom of choice, in respect of the teaching-learning environment in which they prefer to study.

These, according to the discussion document, imply ‘flexible delivery systems that can make provision for ... contact tuition, paper-based tuition, technology-

supported tuition, resource-driven learning, so called *open learning* and different combinations thereof' (UP, 2004:7). Therefore, the framework for its education model divides the teaching-learning environment into four broad categories:

- An education environment primarily characterized by contact tuition;
- A study environment primarily characterized by paper-based study support;
- A technology-supported teaching-learning environment and
- An environment where the nature of the program demands that the student receives specialized and centralized practical training in a contact environment.

Of all the above, the unit of study for this research, the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy, generally focuses on contact tuition and the paper-based study support. As at the time of this investigation, only the Faculty of Education, Distance Education Unit of the university was offering this mode.

For the last few years, however, the education model the university employs has striven to bring about an innovative integration of all the delivery in a flexible learning environment, whenever possible. Its facilitation of learning, among others, 'provides appropriate academic and administrative support, which includes: quality facilitation of learning by lecturers, tutors and teaching assistants, academic information services, properly developed outcomes-based study material and tutor support' (UP, 2003:11).

## **3.6 Output in South African higher education**

### **3.6.1 Output in conventional and distance education in South Africa**

In South Africa it is an established fact that there is high attrition rate in higher education. The first table below reflects the rates of completion of distance and conventional education at the University of South Africa (UNISA), (SAIDE,

1994:7-8; Perraton 2000: 101) in the 1980's, while the second table (DoE, 2005) reflects that this trend still persists:

**Table 3.2: Graduate Success Rates of Selected Programs in South Africa (1980s): UNISA**

<b>Degree</b>	<b>Enrolled</b>	<b>Graduated by 1992</b>	<b>Graduate %</b>
<b>B.Com 1984 enrolments</b>	4160	465	11
<b>B. Com 1985 enrolments</b>	4658	418	9
<b>B.Sc 1984 enrolments.</b>	1139	54	5
<b>B.Sc 1985</b>	1319	68	5
<b>Graduated after 5 years:</b>			
<b>B.Ed 1984 enrolments</b>	379	139	36
<b>B.Ed 1985 enrolments</b>	615	224	36

Sources: SAIDE (1994: 7-8); Perraton (2000)

**Table 3.3: Graduate % at conventional universities in South African universities (2002)**

<b>Universities</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Historically Black Universities</b>	12
<b>Historically White Universities</b>	21
<b>Normative efficient throughput</b>	20 – 30

Source: Department of Education (DoE, 2004)

The first table above reflects the graduate rates of students studying at UNISA, the highest being 11% for the distant education courses, and 5% for its lowest. The second table above reflects the graduate rates of students studying through conventional education, which has 21% as the highest, and 12% as the lowest. And further buttresses the fact that there is a higher attrition rate among students studying through distance education.

A recent report released by the Department of Education (DoE, 2005:37) reflects that this trend still persists, as reflected in the table below:

**Table 3.4: Summaries of key graduation rates in public higher education (2002)**

<b>INSTITUTIONS</b>	<b>Undergraduate And Diplomas</b>	<b>Master's Degrees</b>	<b>Doctoral Degrees</b>
<b>Historically Black Universities</b>	12%	12%	11%
<b>Historically White Universities</b>	19%	20%	13%
<b>UNISA</b>	19%	20%	13%
<b>Averages for Universities</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>13%</b>

Adapted from DoE (2004:38)

The table above reflects that the average graduation rate for the undergraduates in public higher education in 2002 was 15%, for master degrees the average graduation rate was 18% and for doctorate degrees the average graduation rate was 13%. However, contrary to the pictures presented above, the Department of Education (DoE, 2004:38), states that the benchmark in the National Plan of

Education expects 'at least 75% of any cohort of students entering a program to complete ...' their studies.

However, the high attrition rate in South African higher education (Perraton, 2000; Killen, Marais & Loedolff, 2003), is not peculiar to the country. According to Mckenzie and Schweitzer (2001), it is a popular phenomenon in countries that have refocused their higher education 'from elitism to mass opportunity'. Goduka (1996:27) in attempting to give reasons for this in South Africa cites a diversity of abilities, attributes and backgrounds that give students a variety of expectations, needs and academic potential. Buttressing this, Wood (1998); Paras (2001); Tait, Van Eeden and Tait (2002); Killen, Marais and Loedolff (2002) explain that many students are ill-prepared for study at university or are unable to cope with its demands and a significant number never graduate. In support of this, Ravhudzulo (2003) in a recent study in Limpopo, the Northern Province discovers that most of the teachers enrolled in a professional development course through distance education dropped out of the programme. Reasons given for this, among others, include 'the planning and organisation of the distance education institution, the tutorial package, the availability and provision of sufficient support and resources, and time required for the study'. On the other hand, Ntshoe (2002:7) gives the long-term plan of the government to increase the participation rate in higher education from 15% to 20% as another reason for high attrition in distance education.

According to the National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa (2001), 'though it is an undisputable fact that the demographic composition of the student body is changing and is beginning to reflect the composition of the population ... [the] high attrition rate is still a source of concern'. This is more so among the black students. Lamenting on this, the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor (2005) stresses that 'In particular, the success and graduation rates of Black students are still lower than their counterparts...' Shedding further light on this, the South African Institute of Race Relations – SAIRR (2001) emphasizes that '...

graduate outputs are dropping...as 120 000 students drop out each year, *wasting* R1 3 billion in taxpayer subsidies...' According to the National Plan for Higher Education (2001a:31) 'these funds would go a long way not only in financing the expansion of the higher education system, but also in providing the much-needed funds for redressing the inequalities of the past'. To the government 'Increased access is meaningless if students do not succeed in their studies' (DoE, 2001:43).

Hence, many higher institutions are improving their teaching and learning strategies which, according to CHE (2004:100-101), include 'bridging, foundation or extended curriculum programs that facilitate a special focus on building skills for academic study, expanded tutorial systems, and other forms of support such as mentoring'. Punching a hole in the debate, Killen and Fraser (2002:1) assert that, 'to knowingly admit students who, for whatever reason, have no chance of academic success would be immoral'. However, the Council for Higher Education (2005) in a recent report encourages higher institutions to '... continually strive to design curricula that enable students from poor learning backgrounds to realize their potential, while also identifying early those who will not succeed in higher education, and providing them with meaningful exit points'.

Therefore, the policy framework has as one of its goals to 'promote...fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realize their potential through higher education...' It is the aim of the government to 'increase the number of graduates by at least 10 000 a year over the next five years, i.e. from 90 000 to 100 000' (SAIRR, 2001), hence Killen, Marais and Loedolff (2003:147) 'highlight the need for universities to take a fresh look at why many of their students fail and what they can do to improve the chances of success of all students'.

According to Riggs and Riggs (1990), common predictive measures used for admitting students into higher education are school matriculation results and standardized tests, but Killen, Marais and Loedolff (2003:148) explain that they

seem to be limited in potential. Hence, Van Eeden, De Beer and Coetzee (2001:171) admit that forecasting students' performance in higher education is 'currently complicated by pressure to ensure that students represent the different racial groups in the country'.

Studies abound in South Africa on reasons for the high attrition rate in higher education and factors predicting the success and failure of students (Killen, 1994; Goduka, 1996; Amos & Fischer, 1998; Bargate, 1999; Paras, 2001; Van Eeden, De Beer & Coetzee, 2001; Fraser and Lombard, 2002; Killen and Fraser, 2002; Killen, Marais & Loedolff, 2003; Ravhudzulo, 2003; Fraser & Killen, 2005). These range from: motivation, students approach to studying, psychological factors, students academic literacy, students' time management, peer culture, students' belief in their own ability, student support system of each university, inappropriately designed study guides to lack of formative assessment.

In order to alleviate these problems, the government is ready to address the underlying factors that hinder success and is focusing on three areas: 'the funding of academic development programs, improving the quality of schooling and student financial aid' (DoE, 2001: 43). In addition to these, the government came up with institutional efficiency benchmarks with which all institutions are expected to comply. Table 3.5 below presents these benchmarks:

**Table 3.5: Benchmarks for graduation rates**

QUALIFICATION TYPE	GRADUATION RATES	
	Contact	Distance
<b>Up to 3 – years: undergraduate</b>	25%	15%
<b>4 – years or more: undergraduate</b>	20%	10%
<b>Postgraduate: up to honors</b>	60%	30%
<b>Masters:</b>	33%	25%
<b>Doctoral:</b>	20%	20%

Source: Department of Education (2001:23)

The benchmarks provided above reflect:

- Graduation rates of 25% for the contact education course, and 15% for the distance education course – for studies on the 3-year undergraduate level;
- Graduation rates of 20% for the contact education course, and 10% for the distance education course – for studies on the 4 year undergraduate level.
- Graduation rates of 60% and 30% respectively – for the studies on the Honours level;
- Graduation rates of 33% and 25% respectively – for studies on the Masters level;
- While a graduation rate of 20% is reflected for both study modes. – for studies on the Doctorial level.

From the above, it is clear that the *output issue* is an important aspect of any educational system. Even though redress of past inequalities in education is a main focus of the government, with increased access to education for the population becoming a reality, this aim will be defeated if students do not succeed in their studies. Further research is necessary, that focuses on improving the chances for student study success. This study will investigate what efforts are being made by this university to comply with these benchmarks.

### 3.6.2 Output in distance and conventional education at University of Pretoria

The output patterns at this university may not be different from that of the rest of South Africa, as presented above (Section 3.6.1). While interpreting the tables below, care should be taken to note of the following:

- Summary of student numbers takes each student into account once, irrespective of the number of courses registered for;
- Output in this context refers to only the graduation rates and does not consider the module score or the speed of progression of each student (see Section 2.4.4).

**Table 3.6: Student numbers per race group and graduate Success rates – University of Pretoria 2001 – 2005**

Year	ENROLMENTS					GRADUATES				
	White	Colored	Indian	African	Total	White	Colored	Indian	African	Total
2001	20 862	408	1235	7 767	30 272	5 153	86	269	3 888	9 396
2002	21 848	472	1395	8 448	32 163	5 320	110	313	4 136	9 879
2003	22 464	502	1625	9 605	34 196	5 702	105	396	3 062	9 265
2004	22 977	589	1683	13 714	38 963	5 548	112	387	4 628	10 675
2005	22 960	646	1708	13 185	38 499	5 727	164	421	5 302	11 614

Source: University of Pretoria (2006d)

**Table 3.7: Graduate success rates (%) – University of Pretoria 2001 - 2005**

Year	Enrolment	Graduate Rate	Percentage
2001	30 272	9 396	31%
2002	32 163	9 879	31%
2003	34 196	9 265	27%
2004	38 963	10 675	27%
2005	38 499	11 614	30%

Source: Adapted from University of Pretoria (2006d)

From the Table 3.6 and 3.7 above, one will notice a gradual improvement in the number of enrolments of the African students, but despite this, Cloete and Bunting (2001) lament the state of output rates of African students in which serious inequities still exist. According to them, African students are not spread equally across programmes and their performance within programmes has not matched those of other students. On the other hand, their progressive graduate success rate should be noted. Also of importance are the (almost) fixed graduate success rate of the Colored and the Indian students. According to the South Africa University Vice-Chancellor Association (SAUVCA, 2004 – now HESA), the low throughput rate is a national concern.

However – when considering the benchmarks set by the government, which could be assumed to be 26% – based on all programs (see Section 3.6. above), the University of Pretoria could be regarded as fairing well in its output rate. But the question still remains, what percentage of the graduates are African students, clustered in distance education programs (most of which are in the humanities)? All these aspects considered and in view of the university's historical background, the researcher is of the opinion that credit should be given to this institution for progress already made in this regard; however, the situation can be further improved upon and, with the policy of continually making learning opportunities accessible to students, this will surely be realized.

## 3.7 Distance and conventional education at the University of Pretoria, South Africa

### 3.7.1 Introduction

The University of Pretoria is one of the traditional universities in South Africa and has progressed much in establishing itself as a leading institution of higher learning. Its vision is to develop:

*'A world class, truly South African, centre for rational, critical and innovative scholarship in the basic and applied sciences, technology, economic sciences, humanities, arts and culture' (UP, 2005)*

In striving to achieve this ideal, the university provides holistic, quality education by:

- Creating intellectually stimulating flexible, long life learning opportunities;
- And employing innovative teaching methods. (UP, 2003:1)

Also, the institution is locally relevant in that it promotes '... equity, access, equal opportunities, redress, transformation and diversity' (UP, 2003:4).

Though the university has no intention of 'moving from the essentially residential nature...towards a distance teaching institution, it aims at developing flexible delivery modes using appropriate technologies so as to position the university's teaching activities...towards achieving maximum benefits' (UP, 2004). Shedding further light on distance education at the university, Melck (2002) explains that there is 'definitional differences made...between (paper-based) *distance education* and –electronically supported – *flexible learning*, due to the existing subsidy formula'. Hence, it is necessary to accentuate the fact that the focus of this study is on the former, which as earlier said was as at the time of this investigation, was only offered by the Faculty of Education, Distance Education Unit. However, some scholars argue that 'there are currently no hard definitions

with which one can categorize courses unambiguously as *paper-based distance education* as all courses use some paper-based materials (books)'.

The university formerly offered distance education through three initiatives: Satellite Campuses, the Tele-teaching Project and the National Colleges Project (SAIDE, 1994:33-34). The first initiative had the aim of bringing educational opportunities closer to the communities using distance education, with occasional face-to-face tuition; the second initiative reached out to schools with the focus of preparing them for Matriculation examinations – telephone lines were combined with this. And through the last initiative the university provided students with a wide-range of university-accredited courses (SAIDE, 1996:113). However, the agreement with the National Private Colleges was discontinued due to the fact that the university did not have control of the programs. Thus, the University of Pretoria was faced with the dilemma of either discontinuing distance education or creating a new policy on the programme (Hendrikz, 2004). It chose the latter course of action, and the Distance Education Unit was born in the Faculty of Education in April 2002, with the emphasis on quality in education (SAIDE, 2006).

As the Department of Education suggested (White Paper on Education 3, 1997), the University of Pretoria, with the aid of 'faculties that are potentially involved in distance education', identified niche areas of concern. Therefore, in order to meet the requirements of the new National Qualification Framework for Higher Education, the university (UP, 2005) developed three new world-class programmes:

- The *Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)* in Education Management and *Special Needs Education* – these replaced the Further Diploma in Education (FDE). These qualifications serve as an admission qualification for the other program.

- *B.Ed. (Hons) in Education Management, Law and Policy*; a postgraduate qualification and students, after obtaining this qualification, can enroll for the Masters degree in Education.

Distance education at University of Pretoria is limited to these few courses that are administered by the Faculty of Education, which is currently the largest contact education campus in South Africa, with more than 16,000 students (UP, 2005). In addition, it is interesting to note that ‘no other Faculties currently use distance education methods’, even though the university has a flexible delivery mode with many on-line programs based on WebCt. The postgraduate course, the focus of this study, is being run concurrently with the same programme for the conventional students.

### **3.7.2 The BEd (Hons) education management, law and policy study programme**

#### **3.7.2.1 Introduction**

One of the courses run concurrently by the Faculty of Education as a distance and conventional course is the ‘Bachelor of Education’ (BEd). However, the program ‘Bachelor of Education Honours – BEd (Hons) – was implemented in 2003 as a postgraduate study program (UP: 2004a and 2004b).

#### **3.7.2.2 Its Purpose**

According to the university’s Programs brochure (2004b:15), ‘it aims at equipping the teaching staff and education managers at all levels of education, education management, education policy, and education law.’

#### **3.7.2.3 Admission**

The minimum admission requirements into both the distance and conventional modes of this course are the same and should be one of the following:

- A Bachelor's degree and a teacher's Diploma;
- A four-year composite degree in Education;
- An M + 4 teacher's Diploma or an M + 3 teacher's Diploma and a Further Diploma in Education (FDE) or an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) or
- Another academic qualification considered by the Dean to be sufficient for admission to a specific package. However, it will not be recognised for educational purpose. (UP, 2004a: 40-41; 2004b:15)

However, admission into the distance education study program is open to some extent because students can 'enrol at anytime during the year as the date of enrolment is determined by the academic cycle' (UP, 2004b:7). Another point of difference is the administration of each, which is run by different staff units.

#### **3.7.2.4 Duration**

According to the Regulations and Syllabi (2004a:41), 'the program extends over a period of at least two semesters full-time or four semesters part-time (i.e. the distance mode)'. However, study must be completed within eight semesters. For the distance education, the program has been divided into four blocks each of three modules, and students may complete it in a minimum of four years and maximum of five years (UP, 2006).

#### **3.7.2.5 Curriculum**

The curricula for both distance and conventional modes of the course are the same. It is made up of three modules, which are the *Fundamental*, *Core* and *Elective* modules. Each module is made up of twelve (12) courses totalling 60 Credits.

### **3.7.3 Special features of the Bachelor of Education (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy study programme, at University of Pretoria**

Certain special features of both modes of education to be found at the University of Pretoria are expanded upon below:

#### **3.7.3.1 Student support**

The university places high priority on student support services as ‘a philosophy of pre-care and post-care forms the foundation of student support and development, as well as guidance programmes which comprises an annual academic orientation programme for first-year students; extended programmes that make provision for learning development where necessary and tutor and mentor support’, (UP, 2003:14) among others. It is important to note that student support has been identified as a supreme quality assurance mechanism in distance education (SAIDE, 1996; Johnson, 1999; Carnwell, 1999, 2000; LaPadula, 2003).

Hence, the Distance Education Unit developed tutorial letters as a means of support through which communication with the students is maintained. According to its Tutorial Booklet (UP, 2006c:3), ‘these letters provide academic information regarding study methods, assignments and guidelines on how to complete assignments, preparation for contact sessions and specific guidelines for answering examination questions’. Other learner support interventions include SMS messages, an academic enquiry service (Section 3.7.3.4) and correspondence (UP, 2004, 2006).

#### **3.7.3.2 Contact sessions/discussion classes**

The facilitation of learning for the conventional form of the *BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy* is contact tuition, as students are physically present to receive lectures. This is often ‘supported by study material (preferably electronic)’ (UP, 2003:6). Conversely, venues for contact tuition with distance learners are scattered all over the *educational catchment area* of the institution.

These lecture tours are presented during the first two weeks of January and the June/July school holidays, as these specific students are educators. These contact sessions, according to the Tutorial Booklet (UP, 2006c), are meant to give the students an opportunity to meet their lecturers, enrich their learning experiences and enable them to ask questions. Though attendance is not compulsory, the students are encouraged to attend, as history has proven that these sessions have a positive effect on their studies.

### **3.7.3.3 Tutorial letters/study guides and readers**

It is of interest to note that students from both modes of delivery use the same learning materials (the implications of this in relation to the quality of the program will be discussed in the course of this study). At least two letters are sent to the distance education students per module before an examination, aimed at directing, guiding and assisting the students in their studies (UP, 2006c). This also applies to the contact modules where study guides form part of the tutorial package.

### **3.7.3.4 Short Message Service (SMS)**

The use of Short Message Service Technology (SMS) is well developed at this university, and according to the Annual Review (2005c:111), 'Students of the University of Pretoria can now also receive their examination results via an SMS service...' However, this service is especially relevant to the distance education students, as the majority of them are far removed from the university campus. It is used to communicate to the students, important information as well as encouraging them in their studies. This service has been implemented in partnership with MTN (SAIDE, 2006). Conversely, the conventional students have direct access to the facilities of the university but may also make enquiry over the telephone.

### **3.7.3.5 Administrative letters**

The different administrative units of both modes of delivery use administrative letters to 'inform students extensively about administrative and logistic issues' (UP, 2004). According to the Admin Booklet (UP, 2006b), its purpose to the distance education students is to provide them with all the administrative information needed for the program and this may include: the academic cycle and how it works, important dates, learning materials, tutorial booklets, assignments, contact sessions, examinations and website information. Also, administrative enquiries can be made by post, telephone and fax (UP, 2006b).

### **3.7.3.6 Examinations**

Various examination options exist at the university, which can be in the form of open- or closed-book, among others. All conventional students for the programme sit for their examination at the school campus in June and November (except for unique reasons) (UP, 2004a). However, their distance education counterparts sit for theirs in March/April and September/October in about 80 examination centres, scattered throughout the country, to 'enable students to write at a venue near their home' (UP, 2004b) because the enrolled students, who happened to be mostly educators, would then be on holidays.

It is important to note that 'an examination centre assumes responsibility for the arrangements in respect of supervisors during examinations, the occupation and utilisation of examination halls and the handling of students' question papers and examination scripts on the main campus, as well as all alternative venues/examination points' (UP, 2003:10-11). According to the discussion document on the Framework Assessment Policy (2005:3), 'opportunity is created for main examinations, supplementary, re-examinations...and other extraordinary examinations as are required from time to time'.

### 3.7.3.7 Assessment

The University of Pretoria is committed to Outcomes-based Education; hence, assessment at the university is based on the *continuous assessment* approach, wherein 'students are assessed regularly during the teaching phase'. Its nature '...is usually formative', but with '...summative dimensions' (2005:1). It also includes self-assessment by students.

According to the Instructional Policy – Draft (2003:10), 'assessment practices at the university are aimed at promoting student learning' by helping to:

- Determine whether the student has achieved the learning outcome.
- Guide students' learning in the desired direction (educational impact).
- Certify competence in the light of social responsibility. (UP, 2005:1)

Therefore, it is based on the following guidelines, among others:

- They are subject to internal and external validation and moderation.
- Students are fully informed of all the requirements regarding their assessment in the context of the programme. Clear guidelines are provided in the study guides.
- Students receive constructive feedback on conclusion of assessment opportunities. They have the right of access to their marked question papers and the right to appeal.

Students are fully informed of all the requirements regarding their assessment in the context of the programme. Clear guidelines are provided in the study guides. For instance, the distance education students' formative assessment is often based on the assignment format which 'is compulsory and it is a pre-requisite to write the examination. Students who do not do the assignments will not only lose 30% of their final examination mark, but will not be allowed to write examinations...' (UP, 2004b:2). Assessment serves as confirmation of the

degree to which students have achieved their learning outcomes and students receive constructive feedback on conclusion of assessment opportunities. (UP, 2003:11)

### **3.7.3.8 Quality assurance**

In order to ensure and promote quality education, the Instructional Policy – Draft (UP, 2003:14-15) *strategic benchmarking criteria*, which include Quality assurance and its role players, forms the University of Pretoria’s education model and recognition of prior learning and work experience (RPL) among others are used continually by the university. These ‘are continually adapted towards education excellence and are continually monitored by line managers with a view to the identification of deficiencies, trends and strengths’. Due to its importance to this study, Chapter Four will focus only on quality issues, as they relate to higher education and the practices at the university, for both modes of delivery (See Section 4.2.3).

### **3.7.3.9 Learning materials/ tutorial materials**

As previously mentioned (Section 3.7.3.3), students from both modes of delivery use the same learning materials. However, to assist the distance education students, any learning materials sent to them contain the complete content of the program and there is no need to purchase any additional textbooks, as extracts from referenced textbooks are provided with the learning materials (UP, 2004). However, according to the Tutorial Booklet (2006), students are advised to purchase one or two of the reference books mentioned in their study guides, since they may need to refer to them in their educational practices. On the other hand, distance education students who live close enough to the university campus, like their contact education counterparts, have access to the campus library.

### **3.7.3.10 Electronic version of learning materials and study information**

With effect from '2004...all registered distance education students are' able to access all learning materials on the university's website. The information includes 'tutorial letters, learning guides, administrative letters and examination information.' (UP, 2004).

### **3.7.3.11 Library services and computer laboratories**

Though the available written material on distance education is notably silent on the aspects of how library services and computer laboratories can be made available to distance education students, the researcher is interested in discovering the methods distance education students, who live a distance from the university, may also have their needs in these respects catered for. For instance, the Department of Information Technology on the main campus of the university controls the centralised computer laboratory centre on Groenkloof Campus – where the Distance Education Unit which is the focus of this study is situated. This centre makes many computers available to the conventional students on an ongoing basis, while the distance education students have access to them only during the two periods of contact tuition, held during January and June/July. This becomes important when considering the question of quality in distance educational study programmes.

With this postgraduate course being offered as it is the University of Pretoria becomes a dual-mode institution that offers full-time residential academic programmes and distance education academic programmes (Reddy, 1993:240; Braimoh, 2003:21). Attitudes toward institutions having *mixed mode* or *dual mode* differ, because some view such institutions as being weak in policy and quality (Tait & Roger, 1999:2).

All the above have serious implications for this research, as past studies into such situations have revealed that resistance to distance education is mostly in regard to the quality of many activities performed in the name of distance

education (NEA, 2000). Therefore, the scrutiny of the quality assurance in higher education as related to South Africa, in general, and this Distance Education Unit, in particular, become important. The researcher hopes that findings from this study will expose gap(s), as the two study programmes are placed side-by-side, for scrutiny, and that this will better direct the efforts made by the Distance Education Unit of this university in bridging identified problems.

### **3.8 Summary**

Chapter Three discusses the literature review of distance and conventional education as presently found in the South African higher education system, which is assessed in terms of three indices, namely: *access*, *delivery* and *output*. This is done while mindful of the implications of the literature review of the international perspectives already discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2) of this study.

Finally, Chapter Four will focus on the issue of quality assurance in higher education, which will then serve as the criteria of assessment for the investigation and findings of this study.

# CHAPTER 4

## A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DISTANCE AND CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION IN RELATION TO ACCESS, DELIVERY AND OUTPUT

### **4.1 Introduction**

The notion of quality is as old as creation itself, in the sense that human beings are rationale beings that can place value on things as it suits them. Therefore, defining this term could prove difficult and elusive (Sahney, Banwet & Karunes, 2004). Within higher education, in the words of Barnett (1992:1), ‘... quality is one of the three central issues, alongside those of access (how can we get more students into the system?), and funding (how can we pay for them, if we do?)’. This became an issue in the 1960s and 1970s when some governments adopted the view that although education had expanded to reach more people, it had not led to wealth and social equality (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 1989). This dilemma has, according to scholars (Arcaro,

1995; Avdjieva & Wilson, 2002; Bornman, 2004; Sahney, Banwet & Karunes, 2004; Telford & Masson, 2005; Firdaus, 2006), evolved to become the single most important issue in education, business and government today. Therefore Chapter Four is devoted to defining what the terms *Quality* and *Quality Assurance* imply in relation to higher education, thereby arriving at a working definition of these terms for the purposes of this study.

Quality, as it relates to *access*, *delivery* and *output* – the three chosen indices of assessment for this study – is elucidated, while linking this to the conceptual framework of education in South Africa today. Additionally, a definition of quality assurance as it applies to both distance and conventional higher education, in general, and South Africa, in particular, is also provided. This then leads on to a review of quality assurance as it exists at the University of Pretoria, for both distance and conventional education.

Lastly, the overall purpose of considering this theoretical evidence is to arrive at a definition of the parameters that determine quality in higher education. (This chapter must be read in conjunction with Chapter Two (Sections 2.2 and 2.3), in which the distinctive features and practices of higher education in both distance and conventional education have been highlighted.) It is the researcher's aim to compare the practices followed in the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy programme of the University of Pretoria with the parameters identified through this study. This will then lead to a comparison of the practices in the two modes of education, determining to what extent distance education complements the practices of conventional education at this institution.

## 4.2 The concept of quality in relation to this study

### 4.2.1 “What the Hell is Quality?” (Ball, 1985)

The above question, though asked over two decades ago, is still relevant today. The question of quality in higher education is not new (Green, 1994) and it is a general concern not limited to a specific part of the world. The review of literature (Ball, 1985; Gibson, 1986; De Weert, 1990; Berdahl, Moodie & Spitzberg, 1991; Bradley, 1993; Harvey & Green, 1993; Green, 1994; Riley, 1994; Arcaro, 1995; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Welch, 2000; Saleh, 2001; Williams, 2003; Bornman, 2004) reveals that there is no consensus among many on the definition of quality in terms of education.

According to Harvey & Green (1993:10), ‘Quality, like *liberty, equality, freedom* or *justice*, is a slippery concept.’ To Steyn (2000) ‘it seems to be an enigmatic concept’ while to Riley (1994) the definitions are maybe *illusory*. In fact, we all have an idea of what it is, but we may not be able to define it. A major reason for this, according to Welch (2000:5), is because ‘... notions of quality are inextricable from the dominant set of values and form of culture in a society – which means that constructions of quality are socially indexed – they change over time, and vary according to political and cultural context’. Reiterating this, Ibtisam (2000:64) cites the words of the Palestinian spokesperson, Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi, to show what quality means to them (the Palestinians):

*‘Unequivocally, in our dictionary there is no quality under occupation except in the quality of our resistance to it and active rejection of all its imperatives and implications.’*

Also writing on the question of quality in education in China, Price (2000:100) states that ‘... *Quality* education has been, and still is, seen in narrow class terms, in the privileging of particular subjects; in Europe, until recently, the

languages and (reconstructed) cultures of ancient Greece and Rome’. According to Little (2000:223), in the Papua New Guinea context ‘... *Quality* has tended to be equated to *Standard* or the outcome of a cycle of education as measured by performance on national examinations’. Hence, in the comments of Harvey and Green (1993:11) ‘... linking an activity to quality may serve to validate or justify it irrespective of what the notion of quality might mean’. In its relative term, this means that quality can imply anything as long as it suits its users – which can be dangerous. Therefore, one is tempted to conclude that the definition of the term is multi-faceted, and what appears to be quality to one person may not necessarily be quality to another. Does the idea of quality in education equate with the adage that ‘One man’s meat is another man’s poison’?

In an attempt to explain the traditional concepts of quality as it relates to education Astin (1985:25-59) uses the term *excellence*, which may refer to *reputation*, resources, outcomes, and content. Commenting on this later, Dooris and Mortimer (1991:98) explain that ‘the ultimate test of how well an institution performs would, by this definition, depend not on the characteristics of the students *admitted*, but rather on their intellectual and personal development *while* they are students’.

Writing on the same issue Green (1994:13) states that ‘the traditional concept of quality is, firstly, associated with the notion of providing a product or service that is distinctive and special, and which confers a status on the owner or user’. In other words, many resources are expended on it, thus making it elitist in nature (Barnett, 1992). Secondly, according to (Green, 1994:13) ‘... there is the notion of quality as a conformance to a specification or standard ...’ which is a yardstick for measurement.

The researcher thinks an understanding of these traditional concepts helps one to appreciate the shifts earlier noted in higher education by Barnett (1992:5), which are:

- A shift from a system enjoyed by the few to a system in which a large proportion participates and in which an even larger proportion of the population now feels it has claims;
- A shift from higher education which has been essentially part of the cultural apparatus of society, so relegating its finishing-school aspects as it has become a force of production in its own right;
- A shift from higher education being a personal and positional good, to being more of a wider social good, having a general societal value;
- A shift from higher education being valued for its intrinsic properties, to its being an instrumental good, especially for economic survival amidst expanding world markets;
- A shift from the culture characterized by the formation of personal life-world projects, to one dominated by the formation of public and strategic policies, so displacing what we might term the educational project of higher education.

All these points mentioned above reflect our diverse conceptions of higher education, which may be viewed as *the production of qualified manpower* – whereby students are seen as the output; as *a training for a research career* – in which the definition of higher education is given by the academia; as *the efficient management of teaching provision* and as *a matter of extending life chances* – which in turn show our different approaches to the idea of quality.

In addition to this, Barnett (1992) looks into two approaches: the philosophical and the sociological approach. The first can be said to lean towards the ‘emotive theory’, which reflects the attachment of the term to something that evokes positive feeling. (To this definition the researcher feels inclined to add ‘...in its

user’, as there may be disagreement on what is positive or negative.) The second approach reflects some social forces that lead to rival definitions of quality.

Another defining attempt to note is Green (1994:15-16), who identifies the following definition as having been adopted by the users in higher education: quality as *fitness for purpose*; quality as *effectiveness in achieving institutional goals*; and quality as *meeting customer’s stated or implied needs*.

It can be argued that all the above has one stymied in the attempt to define quality, and Frazer (1994:103) notes that ‘It is strange that, although there is clearly a consensus that quality in higher education is important, there is no agreement either between, or within countries about what is meant by quality’. Segers and Dochy (1996) also support this view. According to De Weert (1990), ‘increasing debate in enhancing quality in higher education has not kept pace with a better understanding of this concept’. Steyn (2000:9) writes ‘a literature survey indicates that the majority of authors define quality as *continuously meeting and exceeding the needs of customers*’. Unfortunately, according to scholars (Vroeijenstijn, 2001; Sahney et al. 2004), in higher education there is no consensus on whether *the customer* is the institution, the student, the future employer, or the society. On the other hand, Dickson, Pollock and Troy (1995:63) observe that ‘Education may be unique in the sense that it is difficult for the customer to assess the quality and relevance of the service’ – this is more so for the students.

Hence, Barnett (1992:7) argues for the term *quality* by identifying its two dominant and rival concepts, which are communicative and instrumental, that have stemmed from two concepts of higher education as something of ‘... value and propriety in the academic world, wherein the attitude of the academic is ... self-justificatory ...’, and as ‘... the issuing of products, with inputs and outputs’.

The communicative concept Barnett (1992:7) sees as deficient, in that it ‘focuses only on the interests of academics as researchers and not as educators’. Commenting on this, Zemsky, Barblan and Green (1993) explain that the university sees itself as a kind of ‘veto-organisation’; while Ajayi, Goma and Johnson (1996:172) argue in support of the idea that it is not possible for a university to be ‘a republic of sovereign faculties’. Though universities must enjoy some degree of autonomy Frazer (1994:102) is of the opinion that they ‘... must be accountable (not merely financially) to society, to employers, to students, and to each other ... as they exist to generate new knowledge and to safeguard and transmit the cultural heritage’.

Citing Mayor (1993), Ajayi, Goma and Johnson (1996:172) lament that ‘it should not be surprising that, unless the universities themselves introduce an effective quality control mechanism, others will be tempted to do it for them’. However, as noted by Williams (2003:14), ‘like any major producer of goods or services, higher education institutions must obviously take account of their customers’ wishes, but they must also be prepared to promote their own vision of what customers, individually and collectively, will appreciate from a longer term perspective’.

The second concept – the instrumental concept – according to Barnett (1992:8), ‘takes [as] its point of departure the values and interests of the external world, both as to the purposes of higher education and as to the means by which its quality ought to be assessed and improved’. But, unfortunately, the internal nature of higher education is neglected. However, as implied by several authors (Barnett, 1992; Williams, 2003) and in the researcher’s opinion, the two concepts should be complementary.

From the forgoing, one can identify the protagonists in the quality debate as the government, the academia, the students, together with their parents, the taxpayers and the employers of labour (Bornman, 2004; Sirvanci, 2004; Telford &

Masson, 2005). All these now play a major role in defining what quality education is and signal several quarters from which concern for quality emanate (Frazer, 1994; Green, 1994; Stubbs, 1994; Sahney et al. 2004; Sirvanci, 2004).

Thus, in Britain and in most parts of the world, according to Williams (2003:1), 'the idea that institutions subsidized by government must carry out certain functions led to a rapid growth of *enterprise* and *entrepreneurialism* as universities ... learned the art of survival in this new world'. In the opinion of Guskin and Marcy (2003:29), 'higher education has come under close scrutiny for its use of financial resources...because it is a huge business which costs taxpayers and students immense amounts of money, and in part because its product – student learning – has been questioned by employers and governing bodies, and it is not subject to systematic outcome measures'. In William's (2003:4) words: 'to be enterprising has undertones of boldness, resourcefulness, originality, creativity and imagination ...' However, views on the university operating as an enterprise differ and much attention on the implications of this for this study has been dealt with in Chapter Two (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.2.2.).

Taking all into consideration, there is no gainsaying the fact that quality is very important in higher education (Firdaus, 2006). Corroborating this Wilkinson, Wilkinson and Guillaume (2000) explain that there '... seems to be agreement that higher education institutions will need to make adjustments to their academic structures, to their methods of teaching and to the systems by which they deliver their courses in order to meet new challenges' of which quality seems to be a major one. Ljosa (1995) concludes by expressing the view that rigidity and lack of innovation on the part of any teaching institution will have a serious impact on the quality of their teaching.

#### 4.2.2 Working definition of *quality* in relation to this study

The main focus of this study, as already elucidated in the introduction (Chapter 1, Section 1), is to focus on the issues of *access*, *delivery*, and *output* as they relate to both distance and conventional education. Therefore, a working definition of quality for this study should embrace these three indices.

A review of all the definitions given in this study presents these major trends in the definitions of quality:

- The development of the human talent (Astin, 1985);
- The embracing of both communicative and instrumental views (Barnett, 1992);
- A conformance to a specification or standard (Green, 1994);
- The goals, process and extent of achievement of an institution (Baume, 1990; Frazer, 1994; Segers & Dochy, 1996) and
- Complete goal fulfilment that involves process and input factors leading to visualized outcome (De Weert, 1990; Sahney et al. 2004) and
- Continuously meeting and exceeding customers' needs (Steyn, 2002).

Having perused available literature on the concept, the researcher is of the opinion that each scholar should try to come up with a framework on what quality should mean, which will be governed by the purpose of the study – a view also supported by scholars (Green, 1994; Bornman, 2004).

Hence, quality in relation to this study implies:

*'The conformance of an institution's goals, process and input factors, and evaluation systems to the needs specified by their clients (the government, the students, the financiers and the employers of labour) in relation to what the institution too deems fit as relevant to the specified needs'.*

Hence, from this definition, all the indices namely: *access*, *delivery* and *output* – can be deduced.

Firstly, an educational institution should not exist if it cannot align itself with the major aims of the country's government of the day. For instance, higher education has moved from the *elitist* system into a *mass* system, thereby opening up access to many people who have previously been denied educational opportunities. However, the institutions should not be silent on insisting that quality in education be maintained, thereby ensuring that the government also live up to their responsibility of sufficiently supporting the system financially, to safeguard this. This will involve the government supplying input factors which, according to De Weert (1990:59), '... usually refer to resources necessary for institutions to carry out their functions: financial, qualified staff, technical and administrative equipment'. There is still the unsettled question of 'Who pays for the education, after the doors to learning have been opened wider than before?' Academics are troubled about the standard of education falling should the available resources – which formerly were meant to be used by fewer students – now be spread out to the maximum, to facilitate the learning of the masses.

Secondly, the students' needs as determined by the employer of labour, must also be taken into consideration. There is no point in offering programmes that will not attract students. The appropriate phrase suggested by many scholars, when defining the term *quality*, is *fitness-for-use* (Steyn, 2002). In addition to this is the aspect of student participation in determining how best the institution can help them meet their (i.e. the students') goals, in relation to the process of education itself (Bornman, 2004; Lomas, 2004). According to Omachonu, Ross and Swift (2004), all the processes in any organisation determine how customers see quality.

The third consideration is that of the financier of the education who, according to Weller and McElwee (1997), expects a return on investment.

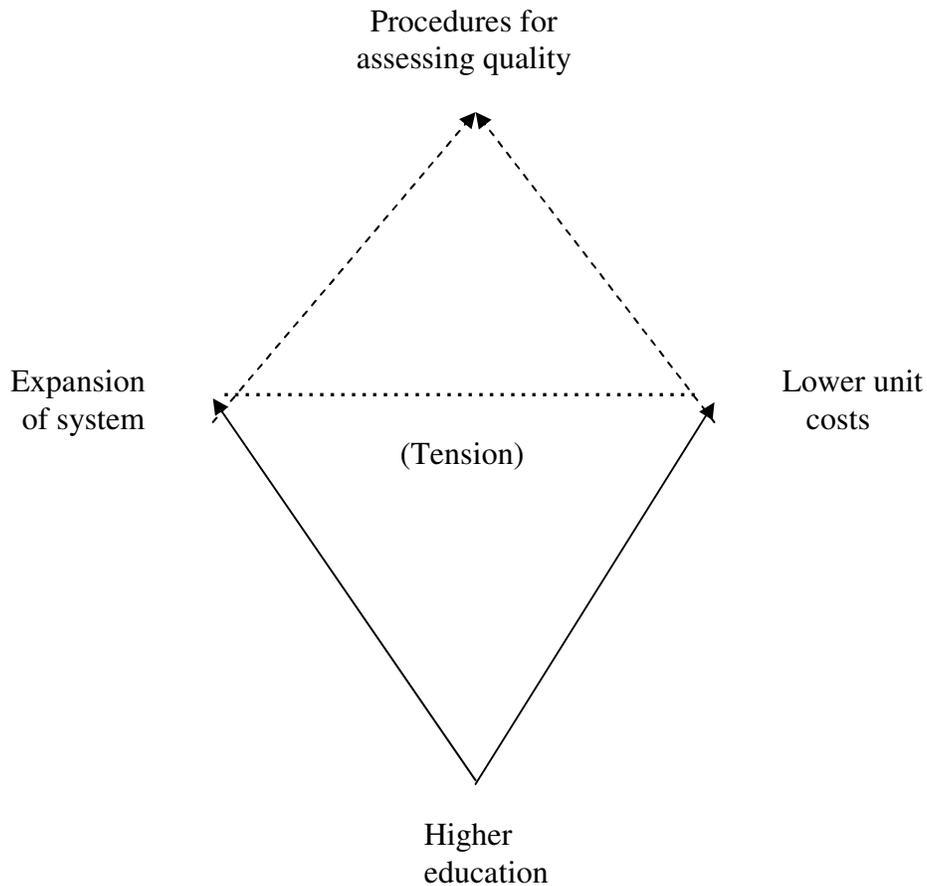
The three points mentioned above highlight the need for quality in access and, which invariably affect the quality of students' output.

### **4.2.3 Quality in relation to the three indices of assessment in this study**

#### **4.2.3.1 Quality and access issues in higher education**

A major trend that has contributed to growing governmental interest in establishing policy mechanisms to ensure quality and accountability in higher education is mass higher education (El-Khawas, De-Pietro & Holm-Nielsen, 1998). For instance, in South African higher education, there has been a chronic tension between widening participation, and quality and standards, which has continuously been a key developmental dilemma (Scott, 2003). According to Barnett (1992:1) 'there is ... a possible conflict of interest between expansion and diminishing unit costs', and this he represents in Figure 4.1, shown below:

**Figure 4.1 The quality gap in higher education**



Source: Barnett (1992: 2)

Figure 4.1 depicts the idea that as educational resources are being stretched in the directions of expansion – to serve a higher student number – and the *squeezing* of resources – to lower unit costs – doubts about the quality of the products delivered by the system emerge (Barnett, 1992; Green, 1994). It is generally believed that the same resources are being expended on an increased number of students, since the government is continually faced with dwindling available finances to expend on education.

However, access to higher education might not necessarily mean having access to equal quality opportunities. To Astin (1985:80) such a definition is inadequate and ‘any adequate definition must take into consideration the quality of the opportunity itself’. Therefore, to Astin (1985:82), ‘equality of access relates to the number of available places’ and also extends to the question of whether ‘... students have equal access to the best opportunities [for them] regardless of race, gender, income, social class, or other personal qualities’. For instance, Eisemon and Holm-Nielsen (1995) present an irony in the case of Brazil, where ‘the private universities ... have become the government’s instrument for expanding access’ (where approximately 72% of the higher education students are enrolled), but they generally are provided a lower quality of education. According to Riley (1994:3,15) ‘quantity and equality are interconnected: not separate entities but inseparable features of any good education provision’, hence ‘...the notion of quality should also embrace a concept of equal opportunities, which is focused not just on outcomes but on processes – how students experience and participate in the education system’. Echoing this, Ajayi, Goma and Johnson (1996:205) explain that ‘equality of educational opportunity must mean being provided with the necessary tools to develop one’s own special talents to the point of excellence’.

Conversely, focus can be placed on the many implications inherent in the issues of access and quality. Some of these include the social background of parents – which could negatively affect students’ performance – and choice of institutions and/or courses. This has led to what some people have tagged ‘the under-prepared student’ (Astin, 1985) who, if correctly assisted, has the potential to succeed (Clark & Plooy, 2003). Examples of such successes are to be found in the remedial courses organised by universities. In support of this Berdahl and Spitzberg (1991:165) explain that another way of judging quality is what is known as *value-added*, which means that ‘an institution that admits students who are of lower academic qualification, but helps them to gain in knowledge and skills’ will be regarded as an institution of quality. But are institutions accepting of all

students and is such assistance provided free of charge? Therefore, the question arises: even in cases where students have access to schooling – do they really have access to knowledge?

According to Morrow (1993/4), physical access is not the same as epistemological access. Echoing this view, Millard (1991:67) laments that even ‘though legislation can mandate affirmative action; can impose penalty for discrimination in admission, hiring and promotion; and most important can provide assistance for students who need it’, yet ‘... the way students are treated in classrooms, are counselled, are encouraged to persist, and are made to feel an integral part of the programme and institution cannot be legislated’. Of relevance here is the issue of student support services, which have been identified as a key to success in distance education, but which in most cases the student is often far removed from.

Another burning issue is that of the student loan scheme, which has received much criticism, based on the fact that students are indebted even before they even find employment, when such employment is not assured. Therefore, attitudes toward the question of access to equal quality education differ, as some view it is utopian – which will be too expensive to attain (Astin, 1985).

On the issue of technology in education, Clark and Plooy (2003), citing the expression, *Everyone is invited* – the slogan of Samsung, a computer and equipment manufacturing giant – lament that many students (both of distance and conventional education) are prevented from participating in equal quality educational opportunities as a result of the non-availability of technology to them. According to Lelliot, Pendlebury and Enslin (2000), the promises of information and communications technology (ICT), though ‘come couched in the language of access and equity’ and is ‘appealing both to social justice and to efficiency ... [but they] are both false and misleading...because the prerequisites for an

educationally sound and inclusive access to ICT can be met by very few African countries at present’.

Lastly, Zirkle (2004) advises that there is the need for institutions to ‘continually evaluate non-instructional areas such as registration, advising library and media resources, and technical support, to determine if barriers exist that may keep students from accessing courses and programs’. These thoughts are even more applicable to students in distance education study programmes.

#### **4.2.3.2 Quality and delivery in higher education**

Delivery in higher education have previously been influenced by the form, which the particular institution or the course it is running (be it distance or conventional education). However, with the advent of technology, there has been a *blurring* in the modes of delivery, as there is a *borrowing* between the systems – especially from distance education to conventional education. According to Ragan (1999), gone are the days when time, location and pace of study were the measuring indicators for quality of education. However, there is the need to ensure the quality of the education provided irrespective of the form.

Clark and Plooy (2003), while commenting on the use of technology in higher education, emphasize that ‘technology on its own is not sufficient to create an effective learning environment’ as ‘the human factor is still needed to provide an opportunity for learners to critically engage with the course material’. Hence, Chickering and Gamson (1991:5) propose the following principles for good educational practice:

- Encouragement of student-faculty contact;
- Encouragement of co-operation among students;
- Encouragement of active learning;
- Gives prompt feedback;
- Emphasizes time-management on task;

- Communicates high expectations and
- Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Commenting on these principles, Clark (2003) explains that the above listed set 'is generally accepted as the most succinct and comprehensive and is based on research of teaching in higher education institutions'. Therefore, irrespective of the mode of education and the facilities of technology, lecturers must be well trained in pedagogical matters (Christie, 2001; Zirkle, 2004), as these go a long way in determining the quality of the delivery.

Another important issue noted by scholars (Ramsden & Dodds, 1989; Van Niekerk & Herman, 1996) is that evaluation of the quality of a learning programme must not rest solely on feedback from the lecturers, but must involve the learners, as the recipients and cause for the study programme.

#### **4.2.3.3 Quality and output in higher education**

An important element in *output*, in relation to quality, is the performance of students or the achievement of students. However, an element of output should also extend to include the non-completion rate of students, as many drop out of the educational system before they complete their courses. In the words of Ramsden and Dodds (1989:13), 'data concerning the outcomes and processes of student learning are possibly the most significant type of evaluation data and there can be no substitute for this type of information'. According to Yorke (1999:1) the non-completion issue in higher education – an evasive concept – is sometimes political as 'there is a general international perception that economies are best served by maximizing non-completion ...'

According to Scott (2003:45), in South Africa 'there are major concerns about the differentials in quality and standard across the sector and whether graduates are acquiring appropriate skills [and] in the absence of a mature national quality

assurance system, deficiencies and prejudices cannot be addressed, to the detriment of equity and development’.

Citing various research findings, Yorke (1999) groups reasons for student non-completion of courses as: course factors, institutional factors, study environmental factors, personal blame and motivational factors. Expatiating on these further, the following are given:

- Poor quality of teaching;
- Unsupportive academic culture;
- Financial difficulty;
- The demands of other commitments;
- Being a working-class student;
- Low-academic entrance qualification;
- Students’ lack of interest or commitment;
- Wrong choice of programmes; and
- Unmet students’ expectations.

It is fascinating to note that the reasons given above may lead to both failure and non-completion of study programmes. Buttressing most of the factors expressed above, Scott (2003:49) laments that ‘educational development work in South Africa has produced substantial evidence that the generally poor performance of students from disadvantaged groups is not due to shortage of talent, but has to do with the incapacity of the existing higher education structures and approaches to cater for diverse educational background’.

Also commenting on this, Antony and Gnanam (2004) explain that what becomes important, especially in relation to distance education, in which physical classrooms may not necessarily be important, is the access of students to the supportive and intellectual input of counsellors, among others. However, according to Yorke (1999:110), improving access has its implication – which is:

'the opening-up of higher education cannot be accomplished without risk of non-completion'. Suggestions that have been given on correcting this challenge include: improvement of teaching and learning by institutions, enacted policies for higher education, student application through their own commitment and improving advice to prospective students (Yorke, 1999; Telford & Masson, 2005).

Another interesting aspect to the debate, which is of importance to the issue of quality, is that even pass rates of students may not necessarily prove the quality of learning of students. According to Ramsden and Dodds (1989:52), 'evidence from research into tertiary student learning strongly suggests that inappropriate assessment encourages students to adopt learning strategies aimed narrowly at anticipated examination questions' and it is not surprising that 'students may graduate with fundamental misconceptions of physical and social phenomena'. Therefore, quality assessment has been advised.

From the above, there is no gainsaying the fact that, the quality level of the delivery, as it relates to their processes, contributes greatly in determining the performances and overall achievements of students.

### **4.3 Conceptual framework: the move from situational to transactional**

McMillan and Schumacher (1984:11) define theory, as an 'explanation, a systematic account of relationships among phenomena'. Expanding further, Garrison (2000:3) states that, it is a 'coherent and systematic ordering of ideas, concepts and models with the purpose of constructing meaning to explain, interpret and shape practice'. Though the theoretical field of distance education is just developing, attempts have been made by scholars to provide some theories. Major ones are: Independent Study (Wedemeyer, 1971); Industrial Production Model (Peters, 1993); Guided Didactic Conversation (Holmberg, 1989);

Transactional Distance Theory – TDT (Moore, 1990); Concept of Control (Garrison, 1989) and Collaborative Educational Perspective (Henri, 1992).

Interestingly, the majority of these have been modified to reflect the continual changes within the practical application of distance education, while many require further research. Giving one of the major reasons for this shift, Garrison (2000:2) explains that previously emphasis in distance education was on ‘structural constraints (geographical distance)’, but is now shifted to ‘transactional issues (teaching and learning)’.

However, the Transactional Distance Theory (TDT) is of particular interest to this study. Reasons for this are:

Firstly, according to Peters (1998:29) ‘the concept...is a significant contribution to distance education pedagogies’ as it again proposes that the essential distance in distance education is transactional, and not spatial or temporal (Gorsky & Caspi, 2005).

Secondly, it goes a long way to determine the quality of the delivery applied to teaching and learning. With the move to the constructivist approach (Fraser & Lombard, 2002; Garrison, 1996), the student assumes the responsibility of constructing knowledge and the more this is aided, the better for students. As a result of this, constructivists, with the aim of improving the quality of education, have suggested the term *transactional distance* and studies have revealed that it ‘applies not just to distance education, but to any educational setting’ (Bischoff et al. 1996). This is all the more relevant as the differences between both forms of education are *blurred* with the advent of technology.

Moore was the first to moot the idea of *transactional distance* in 1972, but did not tag it to education as such till 1980 (Stirling, 1997). According to Moore (1996), the term ‘*transactional*’ has its roots in John Dewey and he (Dewey, 1938:43)

states that, 'An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and...his environment...The environment...is whatever conditions interact with personal needs...to create the experience ...'. In support of this Stirling (1997) refers to it as denoting 'the special nature of the relationship between the learner and the instructor during learning'.

In an attempt to explain the concept, Moore (1993) defines it in relation to interaction in an instructional program, 'as a function of dialogue, structure, and learner's autonomy'. According to him (Moore, 1993), it is pedagogical, not geographic, and necessitates 'special organizations and teaching procedures'. Since then, several authors have lent their voices to its definition. Peters (1998:28) refers to it as 'communication of mental distance'; Boyd and Apps (1980) cited by Moore (1996:22) explain that, 'it connotes the interplay among the environment, the individuals and the patterns of behaviours in a situation'. And above all, Rumble (1986), cited by Moore (1996) and Mueller, (1997) explains that, 'in any educational programme, even in face-to-face education, there is some *transactional distance*' (TD). Moore (1996), on his part, indicates that *transactional distance* is a continuous and relative variable because it exists in varying degrees.

Transactional distance is related to teaching and learning, and it involves three variables: Dialogue, Structure and Learner's Autonomy. Dialogue, according to Moore (1996:23), 'is developed by teachers and learners in the course of the interactions that occur when one gives instruction and the other responds'. But he makes a distinction between *dialogue* and *interaction*, which are sometimes used interchangeably - only the former has the positive qualities. Therefore, the relationship becomes 'purposeful, constructive and valued by each party'. It is worthy to note that the nature of the medium of delivery has a direct effect on the extent and quality of the dialogue, and 'transactional distance will be overcome depending on the extent of this variable'. Young and Marks-Maran (1999), in their

studies, add that when dialogue is neglected attention becomes shifted on the 'one who knows (the teacher)' from the 'one who does not know (the learner)'.

On the other hand, 'Structure' refers to the ways in which the teaching programme is designed, and it usually reflects 'the rigidity or flexibility of the programme's educational objectives, teaching strategies and evaluation methods which in turn determines to what extent each learner's differences is taken into consideration' (Mueller, 1997). In support of this, Garrison, (2000) states that it 'reflects the course's design and is largely a function of the teaching organization and communication media'. Therefore, as dialogue increases, structure decreases, and this is given as:

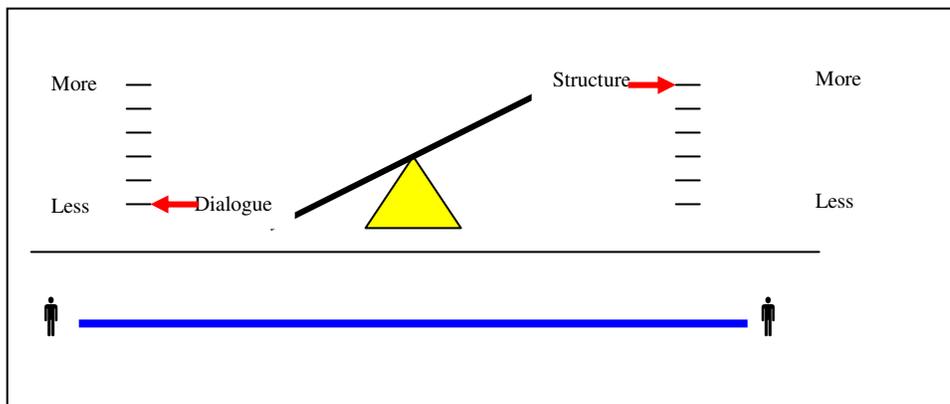
-  $S + D$  *Less distant*

-  $D + S$  *More distant*

Where 'S' depicts Structure and 'D' dialogue  
(Moore, 1996; Stirling, 1997)

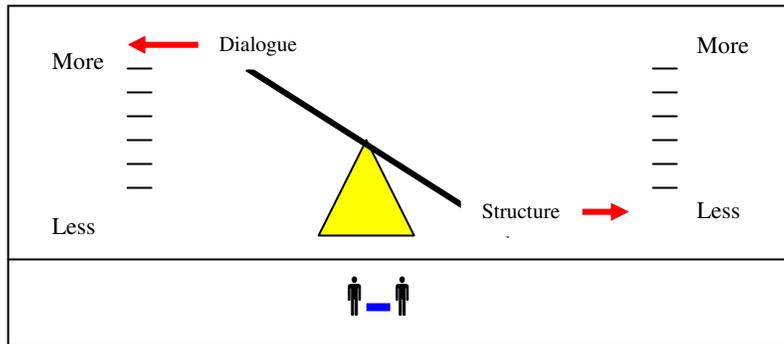
The figures below explain this concept:

**Figure 4.2: More structure, less dialogue**



Source: Encyclopaedia of Educational Technology (2004)

**Figure 4.3: More dialogue, less structure**



Source: Encyclopaedia of Educational Technology (2004)

The Third dimension is the Learner's Autonomy, which Peters (1998:48) refers to as 'a state of affairs in which a person is no longer the object of educational guidance, influences, effects and obligation, but the subject of his or her own education'. However, because learners have been trained to be dependent on the school system, autonomy becomes difficult and teachers are obligated to assist learners to attain this (Moore, 1996). Therefore, according to Moore (1991:5) 'the greater the transactional distance (TD), the more autonomy the learner has to exercise'. As said by Mueller (1997), 'the interactive nature of the medium is the major determinant of dialogue in the teaching-learning environment, and by manipulating the communications media, dialogue can be increased, and thus transactional distance reduced'. However, Garrison (2004:9) is of the opinion that there is a need to clarify the confusion around whether structure and dialogue are variables, clusters or dimensions.

Attempts have been made to verify the concept *transactional distance* (TD) by Saba (1998), who later added the dimensions of the variables of learner and instructor control (Saba & Shearer, 1994). Their findings revealed that there are patterned relations between transactional distance, dialogue and structure. Transactional distance increases when dialogue decreases and structure increases (Sterling, 1997). Bischoff et al. (1996) concurs by acknowledging that electronic mail has effect on transactional distance, which reduces when dialogue

is increased. Further evidence comes from Amundsen (1996:64) that 'the hypothesis that the more distant the programme, the more autonomous the learners who will choose to participate was tested... and found to have some positive effects'. Even though Gorsky and Caspi (2005:9) are of the opinion that the theory 'was never a valid scientific theory', but suggest it could be approached philosophically, still, Garrison (2004:9) states that 'clearly, Moore's work remains one of the most appealing and well known theories of distance education ... even though more macro level theoretical work is required ...'

Finally, this concept in its essence highlights the importance of the quality of the in distance education. The unit of study for this research is wholly based on the *print* mode of delivery (Section 3.5.2). Hence, it is part of the focus of this study to investigate the transactional quality inherent in this, at this institution. According to Garrison (2004:12), 'while distance education has relied heavily on print, only recently have distance education theorists begun to recognize the unique characteristics of text-based communication and realize that such communication may impact the facilitation of learning outcomes in different ways'.

#### **4.4 Ensuring quality in higher education**

'We are all responsible for quality.' (Barnett, 1992:117)

Since quality has become a great issue in higher education, then ensuring it becomes imperative. For instance, in the United Kingdom, funding of higher education is attached to quality as being one of its criteria. This is, however, not just limited to the western world, but has spread to other parts of the world (Williams, 2003: Thune, 2005). Therefore, according to Segers and Dochy (1996:116), 'the university, unlike before, is required to justify itself, its purposes, its methods of attaining those purposes, its allocation of precious resources, its priorities and its responsibilities to the individual and to the society'. However, according to Pond (2002), though technology and dissolution of educational

hierarchy have led to ‘accessibility, flexibility and in some cases, [reduced] cost, it also creates further challenges for quality assurance and accreditation’. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on its definition. But another aspect brought to the debate is by Saleh (2001), who is of the opinion that ‘quality control and quality assurance, together with the assessment of quality system (that is, the monitoring evaluation and audit of procedures) are overlapping functions in regulating how an organization or venture works’.

Several attempts have been made to define the term *Quality Assurance*. Segers and Dochy (1996:119) define the concept in educational settings as ‘... the intention and activities planned to assure quality’. In the same vein, Lim (2001:13) defines it as ‘all the policies and processes directed to ensuring the maintenance and enhancement of quality’. The Centre for Quality Assurance (CQA), Malaysia (2002), when regarding quality assurance in higher education, refers to it as ‘the totality of systems, resources and information devoted to maintaining and improving the quality and standards of teaching, scholarship and research as well as students’ learning experience’. Citing Smit, Wilkinson and Buchner (1999:2), Wilkinson, Wilkinson and Guilluame (2000:2), give the amalgamated definition of quality assurance compiled from a number of different sources in this table:

**Table 4.1: Amalgamated definition of quality assurance**

Policies	that will	ensure	That the	Teaching	Is	Maintained
Attitudes		assure	quality of	Scholarship		Enhanced
Means / Actions		confirm		Education		
Procedures		guarantee				
A system		demonstrate				
Attention		certify				

Source: Wilkinson, Wilkinson and Guillaume (2000:2)

For quality to be ensured in any setting there is the need for it to be integrated into the system. According to Prasad and Antony (2004), institutionalizing and internalizing the quality assurance processes is the key to sustenance of the system. This has led to the term *Total Quality* (Lewis & Smith, 1994) with various synonyms: *Total Continuous Improvement* (Horwitz, 1990) and *Total Quality Care* (Barnett, 1992), to give few examples. In an attempt to clarify this definition, Lewis and Smith (1994:29) refer to *Total Quality* as ‘... a set of philosophies by which management systems can direct the efficient achievement of the objectives of the organisation to ensure customer satisfaction and maximise stakeholder value ... [thereby becoming] a way of life for doing business for the entire organisation’. Also, Barnett (1992:117) refers to *Total Quality Management* (TQM) as ‘... an attempt, a strategy, to produce an institution-wide commitment to quality assurance’. On the other hand, Scurr (1990:17) sees, *Total Quality Management* (TQM) as ‘continuously meeting agreed customer requirements at the lowest cost by releasing the potential of all employees’. According to Steyn (2000:11) ‘quality management focuses on the continuous improvement of all

processes on all levels and views no process as perfect', hence, 'achieving quality is a journey and not a destination'.

In the words of Steyn (2000:8-9), 'literature reveals that there is a growing interest in the application of quality management (QM) philosophy to the education sector' and this 'can constitute a significant part of an initiative to restructure and continuously improve all education processes for the benefit of all stakeholders in general and learners in particular' because quality, according to McIlroy and Walker (1996:134), is defined under the circumstance 'by the expectations and the perceptions of the end users'. Hence the statement: 'we are all responsible for quality' – from the porter, to the most senior person in the institution. This, according to Wilkinson, Wilkinson and Guillaume (2000) implies that there is a measure of control involved in quality assurance. Nonetheless, McIlroy and Walker (1998:133) are of the opinion that '... application of business solutions to educational problems is contentious', as some believe that *business* has *no business* in education while others claim there are some benefits (Thune, 2005).

Purposes of assuring quality, which can be assessed both externally and internally, as given by Brennan and Shah (2000), are accountability and improvement. While commenting on this, Lomas (2004:158) is of the view that the 'two major approaches to quality improvement are quality assurance and quality enhancement', but he also asserts that 'in order to embed quality, quality enhancement rather than quality assurance provides a surer way forward'. Therefore, several countries now have standards for both internal and external quality assurance. For instance, according to Thune (2005:6), the European standards for quality assurance within higher education institutions include 'policy and procedures for quality assurance; approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards; assessment of students; quality assurance of teaching staff; learning resources and student support; information systems and public information'.

However, Wilkinson, Wilkinson and Guillaume (2000:2) lament that ‘it is not easy to find universally accepted criteria, and it is likely that there will be differences of view among countries...and even within countries ...’ which may be determined by ascertaining from which perspective the quality is being determined. Corroborating this, El-Khawas, DePietro-Jurand and Holm-Nielsen (1998:s.a.) explain that:

*‘There are wide differences among countries in their approaches to quality... Argentina, for example, has introduced quality assurance mechanisms that depend on an enhanced information and evaluation system and new rules for funding the universities. Many countries have developed accreditation systems, while others have established evaluation committees or centres that carry out cycles of external review. In many countries, independent bodies have been established, often a single national agency but sometimes, as in the Netherlands, Mexico, or Romania, separate agencies are responsible for different types of institutions, regions or purposes’.*

Buttressing this is the experience of India in 1994, as narrated by Prasad and Antony (2004), which established ‘... the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), as an autonomous body to assess and accredit institutions of higher education and its unit thereof ...’

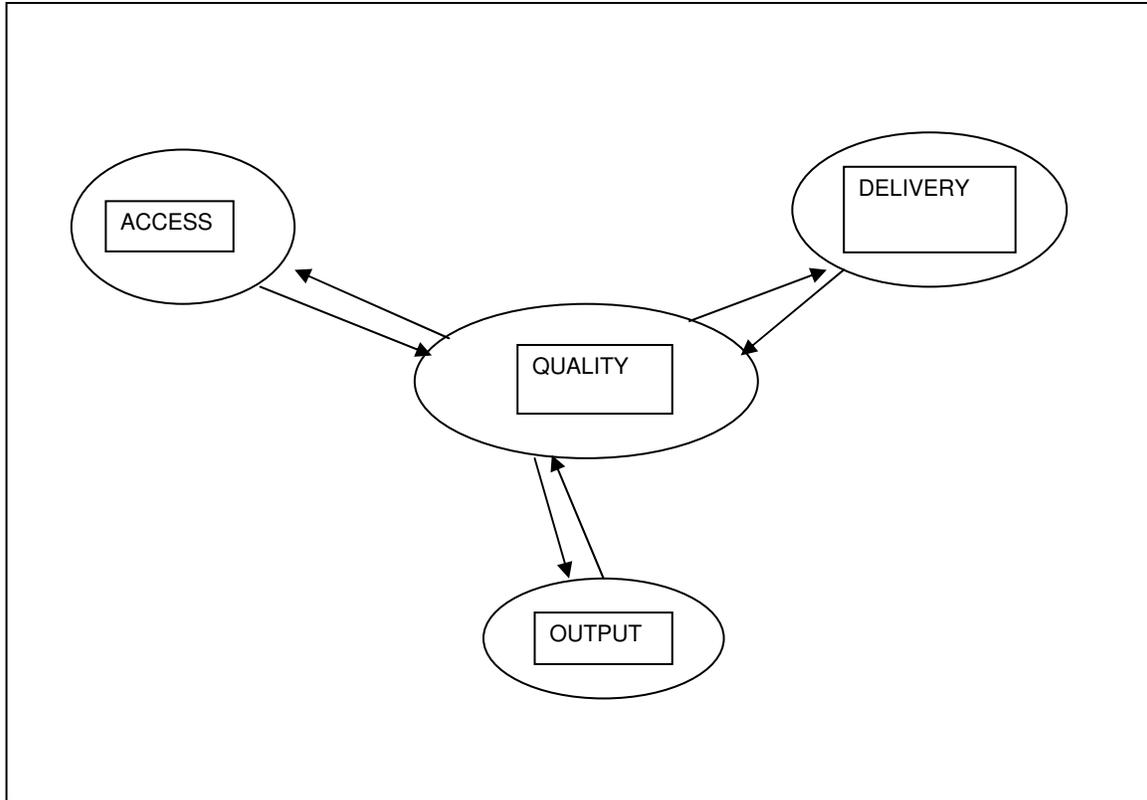
Though debates on the forms of quality assurance rage on in international settings and within individual countries (El-Khawas, DePietro-Jurand & Holm-Nielsen, 1998), Barnett (1992) identifies three approaches which clash – these are: Peer Review, Performance Indicators and Judgements of the Market. Nonetheless, it is of interest to note that in spite of all the hullabaloo on quality assurance, there have started to emerge areas of consensus, which El-Khawas, DePietro-Jurand and Holm-Nielsen (1998) refer to as *consensus elements of quality assurance*, which are as a result of ‘wide-scale cultural borrowing among countries’. Some of these are semi-autonomous agencies; explicit standards and expectations, self-study by institutions; external review and public reporting.

#### **4.4.1 Rationale for ‘quality assurance’**

It is obvious Africa, most especially, has not been spared the crisis in higher education which, according to Ajayi, Goma and Johnson (1996:145), ‘... includes diminishing financial resources, stagnation and deterioration of physical resources with their debilitating impact on human resources (deficient teaching staff and brain drain)’. Supporting this, El-Khawas, DePietro-Jurand and Holm-Nielsen (1998:s.a.), lament ‘... the fiscal constraints faced by many countries, coupled with increasing demand, [that] has led to overcrowding, deteriorating infrastructure, lack of resources for non-salary expenditures, such as textbooks and laboratory equipment, and a decline in the quality of teaching and research activities’. However, at the centre of all these is the issue of quality which directly impacts on the issues of access, and output.

All over the world there is tension between government concern to make higher education more accessible to their people, and the funding of such. According to Barnett (1992) higher education is capital-intensive, thereby leading to *the squeezing of resources*, which eventually lead to the question of educational quality. This is because inputs (such as staff, library facilities, research, etc) are affected, which will in turn determine the state of the delivery modes, and eventually, student dropout and completion rates, and the eventual output. Therefore, it can be deduced that at the centre of these three indices of assessment is the issue of quality, as represented in Figure 4.4. below:

**Figure 4.4: The impacting nature of quality on access, delivery and output**



In this figure, quality is depicted as being central to the issues of access, delivery modes and output. In a society where the extension of access to higher education for the general population is the norm, the governmental policy for such access will be reflected in the policies of the institutions of higher learning. Of additional interest is the level of 'epistemological access, in which one is interested in finding out the access of the students to quality learning which is influenced by a number of factors depending on the level of development of such countries: the qualification of academic staff members, such being employed in only one full-time job; the presence of adequate physical, electronic and administrative support services; appointment and promotion of staff is based on academic merit and not on political or social connections; and the presence of a

fair degree of academic freedom' (Lim, 2001). All these are major issues, especially in developing countries.

Lastly, is the question of the quality of the, which should reflect the goals of the institution and the process followed to attain those goals, which in turn affect student output. Hence, the inclusion of quality as a determining factor to test the end product of the educational process. There is thus interplay between quality and the three chosen modes of assessment for this research study.

## **4.5 Understanding quality assurance in higher education**

### **4.5.1 Introduction**

According to Brennan and Shah (2000:2) the concept of 'quality in higher education was not invented in the 1990s and it [higher education] has always possessed the mechanisms for this', which include: 'the qualifications necessary for students to gain admission...and subsequently get a degree; the qualifications necessary to be appointed to an academic post or to achieve promotion to professor...and evaluation through peer review of research and publications' to mention, but a few. If these factors had not always been present, how could it have been possible for universities, over the past one and a half centuries, to have produced much research and scholarship, and trained and educated people? (Trow, 1994) Therefore, in this section, a cursory glance will be taken at quality assurance across the globe and its operation in South African higher education, in general, and at the University of Pretoria, specifically.

#### **4.5.2 A global view of quality assurance in distance and conventional education**

According to Pond (2002), the traditional mainstays of quality assurance have been 'physical attendance, contact hours, proctored testing, formal academic credentials for instructors/trainers, library holdings, and other factors [which] are often impractical or simply irrational in today's educational reality'. However, society is dynamic and, as a result, institutions of higher learning are incessantly called to question as to their relevance to the society and the need for accountability. In the words of El-Khawas, De-Pietro-Jurand and Holm-Nielsen (1998), 'complex questions about how to measure educational quality are gaining new urgency because of two recent developments: the widening use of educational technology and the burgeoning interest in global delivery of educational services' – therefore, the need to scrutinize teaching methods in higher institutions.

According to Antony and Gnanam (2004:154) 'the indicators of quality and good practices for the traditional institutions are generally well understood and accepted', which as earlier said involves different efforts by diverse countries. In support of this, the Centre for Quality Assurance (CQA), Malaysia (2002), explains that universities have traditionally used several mechanisms to ensure the quality of their programs. Also, in India, Antony and Gnanam (2004:15) elaborate that:

*'The National Assessment and Accreditation Council – the national quality assurance agency – promotes good practices that are generally accepted by academia. In the Indian context, computer facility with easy access to even non-computer science students is seen as a mark of 'quality learning resources' in a traditional institution. The open access system in the library with on-line library facilities is considered a good practice under the management of learning resources. A traditional quality institution is expected to have a functioning counselling centre and a placement office. Student seminars and projects are aspects to be encouraged under avenues of learning.'*

In addition to this in the United Kingdom, according to Williams (2005), once approved, higher education institutions 'have unlimited powers to award own degrees and other qualifications' as such 'there is no programme accreditation system' because they are self-accrediting. Going further on this, Williams (2005) explains that presently, the new quality assurance landscape in the United Kingdom, 'puts responsibility for assuring quality and standards clearly within institutions; places certain obligations on institutions and requires institutions to publish full, accurate and verifiable information about quality and standards for students and others (not just put out a prospectus)'.

Equally, in the United States, Eaton (2001:10-11) explains that 'the government accepts the principle of self-regulation in the determination of higher education quality – and the related principle of institutional autonomy – while the higher education community undertakes to assure the government that federal higher education funds (for student aid and other purposes) are expended effectively and accountably'.

Another example is the Romanian higher education, which has as its focus institutional management as a means to quality, and according to the World Bank (1996) its 1995 Education Law, has given rise to *buffer organizations* that are semi-autonomous. These are the National Council on Accreditation and Academic Evaluation, the National Council on Academic Titles and Degrees, the Higher Education Financing Council and the University Research Council. All these mechanisms are being strengthened through periodic review of programs, standards and procedures and competitive grants as incentives for research, among others.

Nonetheless, even though the issue of quality has always been important to educators, according to McIlroy and Walker (1996), '... pedagogical issues have tended to take precedence over the broader institutional and economic systems

within which education occurs’, thereby leading to a narrow focus which separates pedagogy ‘... from the systems within which learning takes place’. Therefore, it has been advised that ensuring quality in higher education should involve the whole process.

It can be said that ensuring quality in higher education is a dynamic process because of the various changes that have been identified as encompassing society, which invariably affects institutions of higher learning. Some of these have been identified by the Centre for Quality Assurance [CQA] (2002) as ‘mass education, ... democratization of higher education which has led to a higher number of students and institutions, increased internationalization of the labour market, international mobility of teachers, researchers, students and competitive educational programs...’ Buttrressing these, Brennan and Shah (2000) identify the expansion of higher education systems, its diversification – which have led to further arrays of institutions, programmes and students – and the internationalization of higher education, now involving greater student and staff mobility. These suffice to say that further changes are expected which will enable higher education to be relevant to any situation it meets, since society is not static.

On the other hand, according to Saleh (2001), quality is often used in open and distance learning ‘in relation to course materials and services to indicate their *fitness for the purpose intended*’, which, he laments, is contentious, as there are many stakeholders with diverse interests to be satisfied in distance education. As well, Clarke et al. (2004) identified three equally important areas: curriculum and its assessment; handling of coursework and assignments; and liaison with students. However, whatever this term may refer to in distance education, the concern for quality becomes important in view that this mode of education is still the singularly most important means of making education accessible to millions, who for one reason or the other have been formerly denied access.

According to UNESCO, the Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (2004), 'Quality assurance in open and distance learning is essential because in some countries, the distance mode of learning has not been fully accepted'. This is a major motive for this study. Also, Black (1992) explains that there is ample evidence to show that lack of faculty support for distance education has been largely due to the question of quality. Hence, UNESCO (1998) and Alsunbul (2002) suggest that it is high time distance education moved from focusing on its importance and justification, to encompassing quality.

However, Antony and Gnanam (2004:149) are optimistic that 'with technological developments and adequate awareness about ensuring quality there is a growing consensus that distance education can be made very effective'. On the latter, applying the Total Quality Management (TQM) approach to distance education according to McIlroy and Gnanam (1996) will lead to better focus on the learners; *customer satisfaction*; better retention rates; fewer customer defections; increased staff morale; attract others to the quality service of the institution; help to re-define *academic freedom* as *academic responsibility*; and encourages potential savings in costs. These, in essence, enhance the educational objectives of any institution. According to Wolcott (1995:41), a constant danger in distance education is that students – the unseen, who Steyn (2000:8) describes as *faceless* – may become invisible to the instructor. In the words of Steyn (2000:9) these faceless students are a most important category of customer. This is because their subjective views are very important information (Van Niekerk & Herman, 1996; Bornman, 2004; Lomas, 2004; Sahney et al. 2004) and as a result, continual and conscious efforts must be made to improve the learning process, the quality of experience and the way it is delivered (Greenwood & Gaunt, 1994; Wolcott, 1995; Steyn, 2000; Telford & Masson, 2005).

Going further on the issue of quality assurance in distance education, the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (2004) says that though

the debate of ‘... whether quality assurance measures for distance education institutions need to be more stringent than that of traditional schools’ still rages on, providers of distance education should not be treated with *kid’s gloves*. This is because they may then never receive the respect they so much desire.

However, it can be said that there is no consensus on what criteria should be used to determine quality in distance education, though Antony and Gnanam (2004:151) are of the opinion that there appears to be a growing consensus on using the same basic methodology for both traditional and distance education. Nevertheless, there is disagreement on the extent of modification needed (Antony & Gnanam, 2004). Therefore, each country often comes up with various criteria guiding the practices of distance education in its locality. All over the world, research shows that quality is ensured through either external or internal control or both, as determined by each country (SAIDE, 1996; National Association of Distance Education Organisations of South Africa (NADEOSA), 2003; CHE, 2004).

Of relevance to this study, is the review of literature commissioned by The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association (NEA), and carried out by The Institute for Higher Education Policy on Distance Education, that reveals many gaps in education, especially in the area of quality (Antony & Gnanam, 2004). Some of these are:

- The unidentified significant administrative issues affecting quality in distance education;
- The notion of access and how to define quality of access in distance education;
- The best ways to improve the access and the quality of access;
- The definition of good learning experience defined and with reference to whom and what;

- The issue of technology replacing human contact without significant loss of quality and
- The view of quality assurance agencies on the distinction between traditional programs and the distance education programs.

According to Antony and Gnanam (2004:150-158) 'These questions ... are not as simple as they look ... and they indicate that even after many decades of pilot projects, deliberations and field experience in distance education, assuring the quality of distance education is an uncharted area for many quality assurance agencies'. In fact today, it appears as if research addressing quality in distance education is still inconclusive, as there is still much to be done (NEA, 2000b).

Nevertheless, the UNESCO Pacific-Asia Regional Bureau (2004) is of the opinion that even though '... there are aspects of distance education that need special attention in terms of quality assurance', still 'the general mechanisms for assuring quality in conventional higher education are applicable to distance learning institutions'. In support of this, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA] in the United Kingdom (1999) identifies the following areas of importance:

- System design;
- Program design, approval and review;
- The management of program delivery;
- Student development and support;
- Student communication and representation;
- Student assessment.

Corroborating this, a study by the National Education Association (NEA) (2000b), identified about 45 benchmarks in literature, and some selected institutions, and

these were narrowed down to seven – as most were often overlapping. These are:

- Institutional support;
- Course development;
- Teaching/learning process;
- Course structure;
- Student support;
- Faculty support; and
- Evaluation and assessment.

Also, writing on this in an earlier report, Perraton and Hulsmann (1998) suggest the following aspects of quality assurance: ‘Policy development and management’, ‘Staff development’, ‘Service provision’, and the ‘Process of distance education’.

A synthesis of all of the above reveals that benchmarks for quality in distance education focus on the same issues, though emphasis on each may differ from institution to institution and from country to country.

Another area of interest, is that questions posed concerning distance education now test and raise fundamental issues on the hitherto nature of higher education (Eaton, 2001; UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2004; Antony & Gnanam, 2004). As a result, Eaton (2001:9, 11) has predicted that these challenges can ‘alter the traditional faculty role, what we mean by *higher education institutions* and what we mean by a college degree’, while politically it challenges agreement about ‘safe delivery of student aid, what counts as higher education quality and the effectiveness of self-regulation’.

While comparing distance and conventional learning quality assurance strategies in the United States, Phipps, Wellman and Merisotis (1998) in their report explain that ‘what seems to be strikingly different is the process for quality review in

distance learning programs...’ this reveals emphasis on the administration less than the faculty. Thus, ‘the quality assurance process...appears to be less process-driven, where there is a high value placed on consultation, consensus building and dialogue, and more oriented to *bottom-line* or market-oriented results’.

Furthermore, El-Khawas, De-Pietro-Jurand and Holm-Nielsen (1998) have predicted that ‘over the next decade, an increased number of institutions can be expected to offer distance learning, and with much higher numbers of students enrolled’. These in turn will pose serious implications for quality assurance agencies as ‘a greater number of providers of distance learning must be monitored...and an increasing number of students will be seeking recognition for distance-based courses to fit a greater variety of study objectives’. Adding another dimension to this is Pond (2002), who argues that at the end of the day there may be the need to focus also on the ‘instructor rather than the institution’.

To aid in accreditation and quality assurance in higher education, irrespective of the mode of delivery, Pond (2002) summarises the identified new paradigms in comparison to the old, as depicted in Table 4.3 below:

**Table 4.2: Old versus new paradigms for accreditation and quality assurance**

Old Paradigm	New Paradigm
Teacher/Institution Centred	Learner Centred
Centralized	Local
Hegemonistic	Deferential
One Size Fits All	Tailored
Closed	Open
Us Versus Them	Collaborative
Quantitative	Qualitative
Prescriptive	Flexible
Time as Constant/Learning as Variable	Learning as Constant/Time as Variable
Teacher Credentials	Teacher Skills
Consolidated Experience	Aggregated Experience
Regional/National	International/Global
Static	Dynamic
Single Delivery Model	Distributed Delivery Model
Process	Outcomes
Infrastructure	Services

Source: Pond (2002)

In conclusion, one can deduce that a persistent problem to be focused on for the general acceptability of distance education is strongly related to the issue of quality. If as already argued by Antony and Gnanam (2004) that the advent of technology will go a long way to solve the problem of quality in distance education, the present state of technology information in Africa raises several questions as to how quality can still be ensured. For instance, in regard to the whole of the African continent, South Africa is the only country that is advanced in computer technology. Wilkinson and Guilluame (2000) submit that ‘...cyber education will not pass the test...’ However, in relation to the Distance Education

Unit – the focus of this study – which is purely paper-based in nature, one should be interested in assessing what qualifies for a quality paper-based distance education, in relation to conventional education. It is hoped and believed that the findings from this study will aid in drawing attention to the issue of quality in distance education, thereby adding positively to the body of literature in this regard.

### **4.5.3 Quality assurance in distance and conventional education in South Africa**

*'The fact that we work and live in the Third World does not mean that we must settle for a Third World education' (Jansen, 2004).*

One of the increasing challenges faced by higher education all over the world is that of quality assurance (Weir, Kulski & Wright, 2005). Unfortunately, the pressure for this is extreme in African countries because, according to the Independent Task Force inaugurated by the UNESCO and the World Bank (World Bank, 2000:10),

*'Higher education systems in the developing countries are under great strain. They are chronically under-funded, but face escalating demand – approximately half of today's higher education students live in the developing world. Faculty is often under-qualified, lack motivation, and is poorly rewarded. Students are poorly taught and curricula underdeveloped...Quite simply, many developing countries will need to work much harder just to maintain their position, let alone catch up.'*

All the issues raised above hinge on quality in higher education. According to Brennan and Shah (2000:36) 'traditionally, universities have emphasized self-collegial-accountability and self-improvement'. Hence, quality is associated with excellence and striving for perfection (Pretorius, 2003). Little wonder that South African higher education institutions, according to Smout and Stephenson (2001:2), have a long history of '*trying to do things properly*, of being concerned that graduates should be of high quality', however, 'modern quality assurance...

is a relatively new concept ...' Staying on this topic, Smout and Stephenson (2001:2) explain that 'traditional approaches to ensuring *appropriate* standards relied heavily on comment from peers and was applied mainly to the content of courses, in the external review of examination papers (normally at first degree level and upwards) and in the use of external examiners for masters and doctoral theses'.

Describing the nature of this period, which is also corroborated by Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997) and Wilkinson, Wilkinson and Guillaume (2000), Smout and Stephenson (2001:2) state that 'wide variations in quality characterized the higher education sector and doubtless there were also variations in quality within institutions'. For instance, the older institutions known today as the *historically white* or *historically advantaged* institutions are well established with standards that can compare favorably with other institutions of higher learning of the world. In comparison to this, the *historically black* institutions are backward in terms of resources that would have aided the building up of their reputation (Smout & Stephenson, 2001). This occurred despite opposition to the idea of establishing separate higher education facilities for Whites and Blacks by many (Smout & Stephenson, 2001) but this state of affairs did not start changing until the advent of democracy.

In South Africa, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996:9) identifies that 'A key challenge for higher education is to enhance the quality of higher education programs'. Even though this country has been identified as the most developed African country in terms of educational development, it is yet being faced with its own challenges. This is because, according to Fourie (2002:3), economically 'South Africa is in the danger of losing all credibility in terms of world-class competitiveness and is currently ranked only seventh in Africa and 37<sup>th</sup> in a listing of 56 countries worldwide'. Buttressing this, the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2004c:18), on its tenth anniversary states that, 'It has been eminently clear to policy-makers that an inability to compete globally will

increasingly marginalize the South African economy, have profound effects on its rate of growth, and negative consequences for the social well-being and stability of South African society'. Therefore, Weir et al. (2005), explains that 'responses in terms of quality assurance are essential' as higher education has been identified to play a major role in economic development.

Reasons for the demand for quality in higher education in South Africa are not different from those in other parts of the world. However, according to Pretorius (2003:129), '... a further dimension is added by the climate of political and social change ...' As expected, the dawning of democracy initiated many changes in the country, from which the education sector was not exempt.

In the words of Hall et al. (2001:4), 'developments in quality assurance in South Africa have followed general trends while avoiding – for the most part – the excesses of a compliance regime'. Prior to 2001, attempts had been made to formalize quality assurance. An example is the Certificate Council of Technikon Education (SERTEC) set up in 1986 to oversee the issue of quality assurance in the technikons. Though the Committee of University Principals (CUP) have long been concerned with enhancing quality in universities, according to the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2004c:144), '... quality standards remained fully within the autonomous ambit of individual universities'. Later, in 1996, the South Africa Universities Vice-Chancellors (SAUVCA – now HESA) set up the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU). However, in 1999, this unit was disbanded to make room for the establishment of the Higher Education Qualifications Committee (HEQC, 2005).

According to Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997:28) qualification structures for higher education have been previously separate and parallel, and these 'have hindered articulation and transfer within institutions and programs, both horizontally and vertically' thus, the need for 'a single National Qualifications Framework (NQF), for all educational settings' (Van Huyssteen, 2002). The

South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) – responsible for overseeing the establishment of the NQF – was established in 1996, and it has two arms: the National Standards Bodies (NSBs) – which are in turn responsible for establishing Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) – and Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) – which are responsible for defining standards in education. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) is also expected to register with SAQA as the Education and Training Quality Assuror for higher education (SAIDE, 1996).

A cursory look at all the important documents concerning education, issued by the government through its relevant bodies, expose emphasis on quality as a major focus on the transforming higher education:

### **The National Qualifications Framework Bill**

The National Qualifications Framework Bill, which was passed by parliament in 1995, has, among others, this main objective:

- To enhance the *quality* of education and training (1995:3).

### **White Paper on Education and Training (1995)**

The objectives of the White Paper on Education and Training (1995) have, among others, as their focus to ‘contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and in particular address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, Southern African and African contexts, and uphold vigorous *standards of academic quality*’ (White Paper 1:14).

### **National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE, 2001)**

Drawing from the above, the National Plan for Higher Education has as part of its priorities to:

- Link improvements in efficiency to improvements in *quality*. (DoE, 2001:16)

Consequently, White Paper 1 on Education and Training (1995:21) defines the principle of quality in terms of ‘maintaining and applying academic and educational standards, both in the sense of specific expectations and requirements that should be complied with, and in the sense of ideals of excellence that should be aimed at’. Continuing on this, the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001a:26) explains that pursuance of quality by the nation cannot be divorced from what is uppermost in the South African higher education: the issues of redress and equity, as quality is central to these issues. According to the Council on Higher Education (2004c:148), in spite of ‘... the efforts made by SERTEC, the QPU, and professional bodies and the advent of SAQA, a gap still existed between the broad intentions of national policy on quality issues ... and the individual quality approaches of higher education institutions as they had taken shape – or failed to take shape – in the course of years, and in the absence of congruent quality assurance frameworks’. Hence, the reason for the establishment of a national quality agency in 2001, known as the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), which defines quality as fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation (HEQC, 2001), with emphasis on the former. It has as its focus the promotion of quality, auditing its mechanisms, and accrediting higher education programs (CHE, 2005).

Even though this body may not necessarily replicate what happens in education in other parts of the world (due to social differences), it is not too different from them. However, considering the focus of the HEQC, it becomes clear that the South African higher education quality is based on two elements: accountability and improvement (Pretorius, 2003). Commenting on the definition of quality by the HEQC, Pretorius (2003:132) is of the opinion that the ‘focus on fitness for purpose jeopardizes the intentions of the new system’ because ‘higher education no longer has the luxury to adopt such limiting quality definitions’. The reason for this, according to Biggs (2001:222), is that ‘the definition implies retrospective

quality assurance, which makes a summative judgment on what has already been done and makes a summative judgment against external standards' that amounts to an accountability exercise, with a managerial agenda, which may eventually damage teaching (Bowden & Marton, 1998). Continuing on this, Pretorius (2003:132), likening the situation in South Africa to what happens in other parts of the world, laments that 'the new system...is limiting in that it considers the quality of the services provided – but not the institutions in totality'. Therefore, institutions may be lured to adopt a piecemeal approach to quality.

However, writing from a contrary view, Botha (2000:11) is of the opinion that a more detailed analysis of two reports, the Report of the National Higher Education Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996) and White Paper 3, '... reveals a strong emphasis on quality as value for money', and not 'quality as transformation', which is ironical in view of the transformation which the country's higher education is passing through. Therefore, commenting on Singh's (2000), exploration of the eventual optimal symbiosis for South Africa, Botha (2000:11) insists that 'it will remain a major challenge to find an optimal *symbiosis* ... in the system between the need for excellence and the need for redress and equity'.

Even though the government, through various documents and subsequent establishment of various bodies, reveals its commitment to *quality*, it was made clear from the onset that the responsibility for ensuring quality, lies solely on the institutions, as the various bodies are only meant to help ensure quality (CHE, 2000b; CHE, 2004c). Therefore, the South African University Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA – now HESA) came up with proposals. Commenting on these proposals, the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2000a:23) states that:

*'Much of what was proposed was in accordance with international trends. The South African University Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA) was of the view that ownership of the quality assurance system should rest with the universities rather than with the government or an independent body in order to gain acceptance by the universities and credibility with the stakeholders'. (CHE, 2000a:23)*

However, with the establishment of the HEQC, it is expected that all these frictions will to be eliminated. While commenting on the roles expected of this body in gaining credibility, Smout and Stephenson (2001:10) suggest that, it must

*'Take action quickly and sensitively...develop a unified approach across the sector and to ensure adequate and on-going funding for its activities. The HEQC should be seen to be useful, helpful and developmental. It must demonstrate the benefits of quality assurance clearly and simply, and strive to develop capacity within institutions. Above all, it must not be seen as a policeman... program accreditation should be secondary priority as it is more important to get quality-assurance systems in place at the institutional level and give these a chance to take effect '.*

Also, Pretorius (2003:134) advises that this body not just to emphasize 'fitness for purpose' but to rather 'emphasize quality improvement throughout all facets of institutions and...aim to resolve quality problems in an integrated way'. Going beyond this, Botha (2000) sees as challenging, the need for this body to conceptualize and implement the symbiosis (that is the need for excellence and the need for redress and equity) in the creation of an effective and appropriate higher education quality assurance system.

However, the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2004c:237) identifies the following as critical issues and challenges confronting higher education in South Africa:

- Effective and operational links between planning, funding and quality assurance;
- Determining quality standards in a system in flux;
- Guarding quality assurance against *checklist compliance*;
- Engaging academics and students in the quality assurance process; and
- Institutionalizing quality management and continuous improvement in higher education institutions.

But, it is important to note that currently, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) is developing a quality assurance framework and criteria based on:

- Fitness of purpose based on national goals, priorities and targets;
- Fitness for purpose in relation to specified mission within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity;
- Value for money judged in relation to the full range of higher education purposes set out in the White Paper; and
- Transformation in the sense of enhancing capabilities of individual learners for personal development, as well as the requirements of social development, and economic and employment growth. (CHE, 2005)

Also, not to be left out of the quality issue, are the private providers of higher education. For instance, the World Education News and Reviews (2003) reports that 'The Council on Higher Education (CHE) has recently issued new regulations on quality assurance standards and registration requirements for private institutions of higher education and training to legally operate in the country'. As a result of this, many institutions that are operating under international benchmarks have been forced to close down.

However, of great importance, which has not yet surfaced in the South African quality debate, is the issue of student perception of quality. According to Lewis (2002:9), students are being sensitized to this in the United Kingdom as 'they are making use of publicly available information on quality ... and are making more demands once they are enrolled'. Furthermore, Lomas (2004) asserts that there is merit in asking students what they think of the academic service that is being provided and whether they consider it to be of a high quality. Therefore, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (2002) has recommended the results of such surveys to be a prime source of information on the quality and standards of higher education.

On the other hand, there is not much gainsaying the fact that distance education can improve the quality of educational provision, but the quality of much distance education programme is a source for concern (CHE, 2004d). According to Du Plessis and Van Der Merwe (2005) even though much of the distance between the lecturer and the student in distance education has disappeared, 'the suspicion that distance education is inevitably of lower quality still lingered on'. This statement, made currently, can help one to understand the reason why a decade ago the Department of Education identified the need for a project to investigate norms and standards for distance education.

According to the Council on Higher Education (2004:142), 'In 1994, there was only one legal mechanism to regulate distance provision'. The Correspondence Colleges Act (Section 2 of Act No 59, of 1965) made provision for the establishment of a Correspondence College Council and was intended to maintain the integrity of private correspondence tuition'. Unfortunately, the Act was not relevant to the majority of distance education provided by the dedicated distance education institutions (CHE, 2004d). Unfortunately this Act was not relevant to the majority of distance education provided by the dedicated distance education institutions (CHE, 2004d).

Describing the state of distance education in the country in 1994, the International Commission on Open Learning and Distance Education used this expression:

*'What in South Africa is called distance education is essentially correspondence education. With very little assistance other than from study materials, extra-mural students sit an institution's examination and, depending on their success, proceed toward the completion of certificates, diplomas, or degrees. Considered as distance teaching, virtually everything depends on the quality of the study materials prepared by lecturers in each institution for student use'. (SAIDE, 1995:xxi)*

Corroborating this, a report by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA 1996:1), states that 'Distance education in South Africa is characterized by rapid expansion, inadequate provision of infrastructure and support for students, and rapidly growing interest from overseas providers of distance education in running their programs in South Africa'. In addition to these, the National Council on Higher Education (NCHE) observed that there are the problems of low throughput rates, lack of tutorial and learner support systems (DoE, 1996). Most of these allegations were also corroborated by Badat (2005). Hence, the Ministry of Education concludes that 'there is much work to do to re-focus institutional missions, modernize courseware, improve students support, and to undertake essential efficiency reforms and cost effective planning so that quality of provision is improved' (DoE, 1997:27). Therefore in 1996, the Centre for Educational Technology and Distance Education in the department of Education contracted a research team to develop a document titled *A Distance Education Quality Standard Framework for South Africa*, with the aim of correcting observed anomalies (CHE, 2004d).

While commenting on the state of things, Badat (2005b:200) laments that they 'made a strong case for transformation of all distance institutions in South Africa away from current practices of inaccessible texts with little or no student support towards more pedagogically sound approaches'. Thus, with the establishment of SAQA, various bodies that have related functions to distance education began to emerge. Some of these are:

#### **The National Association of Distance Education Organizations (NADEOSA)**

This association has as its main aim to 'provide a forum of South African Organizations who are committed to an affordable, cost effective and quality learning environment in which learners are empowered to become self-sufficient members of society' (SAIDE, 1996:25).

#### **National Open Learning Agency (NOLA)**

This agency is currently located within the Department of Education, as an institute for 'research and development activities as they relate to the promotion of a lifelong, open learning development' (SAIDE, 1996:25).

### **Confederation of Open Learning Institutions in South Africa (COLISA)**

This confederation, according to SAIDE (1996:25-26) is 'a confederal structure meant to serve as a basis for collaborative ventures in a number of areas, including: finance and resource applications; academic development; technology application; and the provision of joint core programs and courses'.

According to SAIDE (1996:56), the format chosen to express standards for distance education in South Africa was borrowed from the Scottish Vocational Educational Council (SCOTVEC) with aspects drawn from various elements of standards. It is expected that further indicators would be adapted and developed on each element, in order to make them relevant to different institutions and programs. As a result, both the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), and the Council on Higher Education advised the 'review of the quality of distance education programs in contact institutions as a matter of priority' (DoE, 2001a:68), and the 'development of a clear policy directive, including conditions and criteria for the continued provision of large-scale distance education programs by traditionally contact institutions' (CHE, 2000:44). Interestingly, by October 2001, the distance education criteria were adapted for all education and training provision by the South African Qualifications Authority (NADEOSA, 2003).

In closing, mention must be made that, according to NADEOSA (2003), the changes in distance education both in South Africa and internationally, the combining of much research into this, and the emphasis which the HEQC places on quality, have necessitated a review of many criteria with regard to distance education. Even though the criteria remain essentially the same, and are not

entirely different from quality assurance processes across the world (see Section 4.5.3), they are now more comprehensive and represent criteria as agreed upon by the South African distance education community (NADEOSA, 2003). These criteria (see Appendix 3) are what providers of higher education in South Africa are guided by and the University of Pretoria (where the Distance Education Unit which is the focus of this study is to be found) is no exception. In conclusion, all the instruments (see Chapter 5, Section 5 and Appendixes 4-12) used for this study were geared towards ascertaining the extent the practices of distance education at this university conform to the revised criteria.

#### **4.5.4 Quality assurance in distance and conventional education at the University of Pretoria**

Interestingly, a cursory look at the status quo of quality assurance in South African universities reveals each university having in place its own Quality Promotion Unit (QPU), with explicit quality assurance policies, mechanisms and practices being overseen by dedicated offices, and even making these public. Policy statements of various universities in South Africa can be accessed on the Internet. In support of this approach, Alt (1998:8-9), advises that 'self-evaluation is the cornerstone of quality assurance in higher education ... [and] a rewarding culture of striving for improvement will be encouraged if [this] becomes a natural way of life'.

Subsequently, and according to the website, the University of Pretoria (UP, 2005a) 'is committed to delivering education of a *superior quality*' hence, it has as elements of its mission statement to:

- Provide *excellent* education in a wide spectrum of academic disciplines; and
- Be committed to *effective, efficient, caring* and innovative approaches to teaching, research and community service; client-centered management and administration; and good governance.

Therefore, in pursuance of these lofty goals, in 2000 a unit for Quality Assurance was established ‘to monitor the different processes at the university as a means of ensuring the quality and relevance of the academic offering on the one hand, and the promotion of standards of service provision on the other’ (UP, 2005a). This is in contrast to its former approach. According to Hall et al. (2000), formerly quality assurance rested in the office of the Vice-Chancellor with a ‘system of departmental self-evaluation that began in 1993, and which was revised in 1999’. Each faculty had a committee, while an academic staff member represented each department.

However, presently, the Unit for Quality Assurance has two broad functions and these are to liaise with both national and international bodies. For instance, ‘it is responsible for liaising with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Board for Higher Education, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and the sub-committees of the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA – now HESA) ...’ On the other hand ‘its activities include curriculum development, education innovation, modular outcomes-based program development, validation processes for new programs, department self-evaluation processes, the external evaluation of departments, external examination and student feedback regarding modules...and directs the project to identify and plan current and future research focus areas at the university’ (UP, 2005a).

However, it is of interest to note that some of its functions are delegated to academic environments, and ‘at this level, the quality of programs is regularly benchmarked against the programs of leading institutions in the educational field, while departments and faculties also perform self-evaluation’ (UP, 2005a).

Even though all the university’s programs were registered with the Unit for Quality Assurance by June 2000, nevertheless, presently, ‘a comprehensive

survey has commenced to determine the scope of additional national and international accreditations for this university's qualifications'.

As earlier discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.7.1), the University of Pretoria previously offered distance education study programmes in partnership with National Private Colleges but this relationship was later discontinued, as the university felt it had no control of the programmes. This is because the university is focusing on providing the same quality of learning for distance education as that of conventional education. Therefore, according to the university's Regulation and Syllabi (UP, 2004), the Distance Education Unit was established within the Faculty of Education. It is believed that distance education study programmes will be well managed by this unit.

In relation to this concern by the faculty, the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), in a draft report released in 2002, observed that there was 'currently very little quality assurance carried out in the faculty' (SAIDE, 2002:22). Therefore, this Institute explained that there was an urgent need to establish quality criteria for:

- Course materials;
- Materials development processes;
- Course delivery; and
- Assessment processes and products.

This, according to SAIDE (2006:55), the university fulfilled by having in place 'an annual review instrument used by the unit to review the overall quality of its programs ... which are based on the quality criteria for distance education ...' as earlier discussed in Section 4.5.2, to continually assess the current state of distance education within the unit, and plan for the future. Presently, through its Distance Education Unit, the university ensures quality by focusing on: effective student support systems, providing adequate contact sessions and effective use

of assignments, tutorial letters, Short Message Service (SMS), administrative letters, and providing better student assessments and learning materials.

To close, mention must be made that during the course of this study and in the words of SAIDE (2006:1), the Institute received an e-mail request from the Manager of the Distance Education study programme, requesting them to assist the unit 'with the conducting of a quality assurance audit of the non-academic operations' of the program 'with a particular focus on student support administration'. The task of the panel encompassed: the reviewing of available documentation, interviewing relevant stakeholders, and observing processes and facilities with a view to evaluating against national and international standards (SAIDE, 2006) already discussed in Section 4.5.5. It is the researcher's hope to compare the findings and the recommendations of this panel – relevant to this study – to research findings in the latter part of this work.

From the foregoing, it is clear that even though quality in higher education in South Africa has improved considerably, judging from its past, there is no gainsaying the fact that there is still much room for improvement. One can be tempted to agree with Smout and Stephenson (2001:11) that 'the end of quality has certainly not been reached in South African higher education ... indeed, it could be said that it is merely beginning'. In the same vein, Badat (2005:202) states that 'unless serious attention is paid to the quality of distance education provision and programs, equity of opportunity and outcomes of historically disadvantaged South Africans will be compromised as students graduate with underdeveloped knowledge, competencies and skills'. Who knows whether in time it will be possible to have students at the main campus of a university, who – having seen the quality of the distance education study programme offered at their institution – will rather opt for it? (Du Plessis & Van Der Merwe, 2005)

#### **4.5.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, even though there is no agreement on the concepts *quality* and *quality assurance*, there appears to be a growing consensus on using the same basic methodology for ensuring quality in both modes of delivery. However, each country has its own criteria and various bodies responsible for ensuring quality, and in South Africa, as in most parts of the world, the responsibility of having quality mechanisms in place has become the sole responsibility of institutions of higher learning.

#### **4.6 Summary**

In this chapter, an in-depth study was made of the issue of quality assurance in distance and conventional education in higher education. This was done with special attention to the three indices of assessment chosen for this study, namely: *access*, *delivery* and *output*, and the conceptual framework in which this study is grounded. This is followed by a more detailed study of the present issues concerning quality in South African higher education, in general, and the state of these matters at the University of Pretoria, within the distance and conventional education study units, in particular.

In Chapter Five the research design and the methodology employed for this study will be discussed.

# CHAPTER 5

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Five, the research design adopted for this study is discussed and justified, revolving round the research paradigm and the data collection practices. The research methodology and the data analysis procedures are also explained. In addition to these, the validity, reliability and ethical issues are elucidated, as they apply to this study.

The research design chosen for this study is the pragmatic approach, in which both qualitative and the quantitative methods are applied. The reason for this decision is that similar studies are usually only quantitative in nature and, as earlier referred to in Chapter 1 they are criticised for being too narrow in their focus. It is also the researcher's belief that using both methods will complement the other's strengths and weaknesses. However, both methods were used with focus on the conceptual framework: Transactional Distance (Chapter 4, Section 4.3).

## **5.2 Research design in a paradigmatic context**

### **5.2.1 Research paradigm**

In the words of Guba (1990:17), a research paradigm refers to a ‘basic set of beliefs that guides action’. Reinforcing this, Bryman (2001:446) explains that, a paradigm is ‘a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted’. Hence, this work has been guided by the researcher’s belief that both traditional paradigms – i.e. the qualitative and the quantitative approaches – can be combined to result in the mixed-method research approach (Bailey, 1994).

#### **5.2.1.1 The qualitative approach applicable to the investigation**

According to Bryman (2001:264) ‘qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification’. Therefore, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:106) citing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) explain that:

- The natural setting is the principal source of data;
- The data are descriptive;
- There is a concern for processes rather than simply with outcomes;
- Data are analysed inductively rather using prior categories;
- Data are presented in terms of the respondents rather than researchers;
- Seeing and reporting the situation through the eyes of participants;
- Respondent validation is important; and
- Catching meaning and intention are essential.

#### **5.2.1.2 The quantitative approach as it applies to the investigation**

On the other hand, Cresswell (2005:39) has described the quantitative approach as ‘a type of educational research in which the researcher decides what to study, asks specific, narrow questions, collects numeric (numbered) data from

participants, analyzes these numbers using statistics, and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased manner'. Mertens (1998:60) also explains that, 'most quantitative research is of two types: studies aimed at discovering causal or correlational relationships and descriptive studies that use quantitative data to describe a phenomenon'.

Therefore, Cresswell (2005:41) identifies its characteristics as the following:

- An emphasis on collecting and analysing information in the form of numbers;
- An emphasis on collecting scores that measure distinct attributes of individuals or organizations;
- An emphasis on the procedures of comparing groups or relating factors about individuals or groups in experiments, correlational studies, and surveys.

However, scholars (Mertens, 1998; Seale, 1999; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Keasley, 2004; Cresswell, 2005) have observed the development of the pragmatic approach in which the qualitative and quantitative paradigms are mixed.

### **5.2.1.3 The pragmatic approach as it applies to the investigation**

The researcher's paradigmatic beliefs have led to selection of the mixed-methods approach to research for this study, in the belief that research methods can be merged, depending on their relevance to answering specific research questions. Describing the *mixed-method* 'as the third research paradigm in educational research' and as both 'important and useful'. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:14-17) define it as 'the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study'. However, views on this

differ. According to Bryman (2001:444), there are two major reasons for discouraging its use and these are:

- The idea that research methods carry epistemological commitments; and
- The idea that quantitative and qualitative researches are separate paradigms.

However, Punch (2005:240) is of the opinion that 'at a general level, the reasons for combining are to capitalize on the strengths of the two approaches and to compensate for the weaknesses of each approach'. Therefore, the researcher's aim is to combine both in a way that the two research methods will complement each other's strengths (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

In the mixed-methods approach, though, either of the two approaches may be given priority under the *Sequential Transformative Strategy*, yet the researcher's chosen dominant status is the QUALITATIVE method (QUAL) with less emphasis on the *quantitative* (quan) application. While differentiating among the sequential strategies of the mixed-method approach, Creswell (2003:216) writes that the *Sequential Transformative Strategy* adopted for this study differs from others because it 'has a theoretical perspective to guide the study'. The researcher's aim for this strategy is to employ the method that will best serve the theoretical perspective [conceptual framework] (Creswell, 2003) which in this case is the *Transactional Distance Theory (TDT)*. This has been discovered to be becoming increasingly relevant to explaining the quality issue with regard to higher education, regardless of the mode of delivery (Section 2.3.4). Therefore, both methods, in their sequence, have been described by Brannen (2005) as *addressing complementary aims*.

Lastly, the case study method, which has been described as 'essentially a research in depth rather than breadth' (Verma & Mallick, 1999:81), has been chosen to enable the researcher to have a detailed description of the issues at

hand (Creswell, 1998). Therefore this study essentially stemmed from the traditional *naturalism* of qualitative study, by which the researcher seeks to understand social reality on its own terms (Bryman, 2001), thereby placing less emphasis on the quantitative research strategy.

## **5.2.2 Data collection strategies**

### **5.2.2.1 The use of a questionnaire to collect data**

The questionnaire to be used for this study comprised open- and closed-ended questions – a mixed questionnaire (Johnson & Turner, 2003). According to Beins (2005), ‘the open-ended questions allow the respondent to provide a richer assortment of information because the responses are not structured ahead of time by the researcher’ while ‘the closed-ended questions provide response categories for the respondents to select from’. Contributing to this, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:255) assert, ‘It is the open-ended responses that might contain the *gems* of information that otherwise might not have been caught in the questionnaire’. Further, it puts the responsibility for ownership of data much more firmly into the respondents’ hands. It also catches the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour, which are the hallmarks of qualitative data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

This choice of questionnaire format was decided upon because some questions were designed to elicit fixed responses from the respondents – for example the biographical information – while the others were designed to give the respondents freedom to express themselves. All the respondents were learners from the Distance Education Unit of the University of Pretoria, the subject of this study.

## **5.2.2.2 Interviews**

### **5.2.2.2.1 Use of one-to-one interviews to collect data**

The one-to-one interview has been described as ‘a powerful method of data collection because it provides one-to-one interaction’ between the interviewer and the interviewee (Tashakkori & Teddlie. (1998:102). Also, Punch (2005:168) describes it as ‘a very good way of accessing people’s perceptions, meanings, and definitions of situations and constructions of reality’. However, the following have been cited by Oppenheim (2003) as its disadvantages: it is more expensive than a questionnaire and this cost factor affects all aspects of it and the problem of briefing the interviewee, who may have problems understanding the concept.

Nevertheless, this tool has to its advantage the following: its ability to allow an in-depth probe and the high response rate (Oppenheim, 2003). Hence, the researcher was afforded the opportunity to interview: Administrators, the Instructional Designer, Module Coordinators, Course Presenters and certain students who – for one reason or the other – have discontinued their studies. These participants were chosen from among the employees and students of University of Pretoria, from both Distance and Conventional Education study programmes.

### **5.2.2.2.2 Use of telephone interviews to collect data**

The telephone interview is also a way of conducting interviews. However, it is characterised by lack of direct contact – one of the positive attributes of the one-to-one interview strategy. But making a strong case for this method, Berg (2003) asserts, ‘researchers have found that, under certain circumstances, telephone interviews may provide not only an effective means for gathering data, but in some instances – owing to geographic locations – the only viable method’. Therefore, taking a cue from this, the researcher opted to use this mode of interview because most of the learners that have discontinued their studies on the BEd (Hons) programme – especially the learners in the distance education

study programme – stay in locations a great distance away from where the researcher lives.

In agreeing to the disadvantage already raised against this mode, Berg (2001:83) explains that the researcher has to depend solely on ‘verbal messages and cues’ in the absence of ‘visual cues’. Furthermore, Berg (2001:83) advises that the following should be guidelines for conducting a telephone interview:

- The researcher must establish legitimacy;
- He/She must convince the potential subject that it is important for them to take part in the research;
- He/She must carefully assure that the information obtained is sufficiently detailed to contribute meaningfully to the study.

#### **5.2.2.2.3 Using focus group interviews to collect data**

According to Morgan (1997:18), the focus group interview is a ‘carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment’. Buttressing this, Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1990:135) assert that this form of interview can produce ‘a more diversified array of responses and afford a more extended basis...for designing systematic research on the situation in hand ...’ In addition to this, it permits ‘joint construction of meaning’ Bryman (2004:346). Commenting on this, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:288) assert that, ‘it is from the *interaction* of the group that the data emerge’ because ‘the participants interact with each other rather than the interviewer, such that the views of the participants can emerge – the participants’ rather than the researcher’s agenda can predominate’. As a result of this, the role of the interviewer changes from that an interviewer to that of a facilitator, moderator, monitor and recorder of the group interaction (Krueger, 2003; Punch, 2005).

Commenting on their nature, thereby accentuating their strengths and weaknesses, Morgan (1988:19) explains that, 'their contrived nature is both their strength and their weakness: they are unnatural settings yet they are very focused on a particular issue and, therefore, will yield insights that might not otherwise have been available in a straightforward interview; they are economical on time, producing a large amount of data in a short period of time, but they tend to produce less data on interviews with the same number of individuals on a one-to-one basis'. Also, Kitzinger (1995) adds that 'the downside of such group dynamics is that the articulation of group norms may silence [the] individual voice of dissent ... and the presence of other research participants also compromises the confidentiality of the research session'. Janis (1982) develops on this by adding 'the groupthink phenomenon', which makes it difficult to distinguish between the views of individuals from those of the group. Other researchers also add the pollution of an individual's true response (Carey and Smith, 1990; Asbury, 1995; Carey, 1995). Therefore, care should be taken to give attention to minority opinions, as in all qualitative analysis (Kitzinger, 1995).

The groups chosen for the group focus interviews consisted of:

- Six Module Coordinators – though eight were invited to participate, to guard against those that might not be able to make the interview. (It had been recommended to the researcher that the group size be between 6 and 10 participants.); and
- Four tutors (Patton, 2002; Krueger, 2003).

Buttressing this, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:288) comment that a group that is too small exerts a disproportionate effect, while when too large 'the group becomes unwieldy and hard to manage; it fragments'.

For this research study, the choosing of the module coordinators was guided in that they were all involved in the coordination of all six modules, all of which the

participating learners have completed. The four tutors who were chosen work under similar circumstances. This, Kitzinger (1995) wittingly refers to as 'naturally occurring'. Likewise, the researcher sought the help of a colleague (who fulfilled the role of assistant moderator) to help with the recording of the interview, take notes throughout the discussion and gave the researcher feedback after the interview. This was done because it would have been impossible for the researcher to moderate and focus on the interview at the same time. According to Bryman (2004), this dividing of attention can become hazardous to the process of the interview, if not well managed.

The net result of this mode of interviewing led to getting multi-faceted responses from the participants who contributed from their wealth of experience.

### **5.2.2.3 Documents and document analyses**

While referring to documentary data, which could be qualitative or quantitative in nature, Punch (2005) explains that these can be used in case studies in conjunction with other instruments of research. It can be noted that the documents collected for this study were both qualitative (e.g. policy documents and outcomes of quality assurance review) and quantitative in nature (records of performances of learners from both delivery modes in the BEd (Hons) study programme (the unit of analysis). These were obtained from the Department of Administration, of the University of Pretoria.

## **5.3 Research methodology applied during the investigation**

### **5.3.1 Data collection procedures**

#### **5.3.1.1 Sampling**

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998:61), a sample is a 'unit of observation/analysis (who or what is being studied)' and it has been generally agreed upon that there are two major types of sampling in research, which are

*probability* and *purposive* sampling techniques (Bryman, 2004). Often, each technique is determined by the quantitative (probability sampling) or the qualitative (purposive sampling) nature of the study. However, Kemper, Stringfield and Teddlie (2003:277) are of the opinion that 'any study, whether single method or mixed methods can use any of a variety of sampling techniques to answer the research question under study'. Furthermore, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:91) explain that 'judgements have to be made about four key factors in sampling: the sample size; the representativeness and parameters of the sample; access to the sample and the sampling strategy to be used'.

#### **5.3.1.1.1 Purposive sampling**

Therefore, in order to answer the questions raised by this study, purposive sampling has been selected because the study does not aim to generalize the findings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Defining this method of sampling, Punch (2005:187) explains that 'it means sampling in a deliberate way, with some purposes or focus in mind' and in the words of Patton (1990:169), 'the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth'. By asking some questions, Miles and Huberman (1994:34) give a checklist on sampling in qualitative research and these are:

- Is the sampling relevant to your conceptual frame and research questions?
- Will the phenomenon you are interested in appear?
- Does your plan enhance generalizability of your findings, through either conceptual power or representativeness?
- Can believable descriptions and explanations be produced - ones that are true to real life?
- Is the sampling plan feasible, in terms of time, money, access to people and your own work style?
- Is the sampling plan ethical, in terms of such issues as informed consent, potential benefits and risks, and the relationship with informants?

Buttressing this, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003:279-280) assert that ‘although purposive sampling techniques are commonly associated with qualitative methods, purposive sampling can be used within studies with either a qualitative or a quantitative’. Expatiating further, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:102) describe this technique as ‘targeting a particular group, in the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population; it simply represents itself’.

For this study, the purposive sampling technique was applied to the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy study programme, of the University of Pretoria. Reasons for this include the following:

- The university has the history of running dual-mode educational programmes;
- The programme is concurrently offered as a Distance and Conventional Education study programme;
- The university lays claim to quality and it is known for its standard of excellence; and
- Curiosity, to find out if same quality applies in both modes of delivery, bearing in mind the view that distance education is often regarded by many as a second-best option.

This research study was applied on specific groups of learners:

- Final-year students were targeted from the Conventional Education study programme, which is a 2-year programme;
- While learners from Study Blocks 2 to 4 from the Distance Education study programme, were targeted. (Block 2 refers to students not enrolling at the university for the first time.)

This was done to get the views of learners who were not new to this programme, and who had already at least completed some of the relevant modules.

### **5.3.1.2 Pilot application of the research instruments**

In the words of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:260), a pilot application has several functions, principally to increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire. Writing on the piloting of a questionnaire, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:260) list amongst others to:

- Check the clarity of the questionnaire items, instructions and layout;
- Gain feedback on the validity of the questionnaire items, the operationalization of the constructs and the purposes of the research;
- Eliminate ambiguities or difficulties in wording;
- Gain feedback on the type of question and its format;
- Check the time taken to complete the questionnaire;
- Check whether the questionnaire is too long or too short, too easy or too difficult, too unengaging; too threatening, too intrusive, too offensive;
- Identify redundant questions;
- Identify commonly misunderstood or non-completed items and
- Try out the coding/classification system for data analysis.

#### **5.3.1.2.1 Pilot application of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire was piloted on students from the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy Distance Education study programme, who came to the university for the first contact session in 2005. These students were Block 2 students, who were registered at the university at least for the second time. (Block 1 students would not have had the experience needed for the research and therefore would not have been able to give much needed information.)

There were 109 students registered for this particular class, of which – on the day the questionnaire was piloted – 70 students were in attendance. Forty questionnaires were returned to the researcher, after the students had spent 30 minutes in answering the questions. This exercise highlighted five questions that were found to be ambiguously worded – posing two questions in one, without

properly allowing for this. These poorly worded questions were reworded – by separating the clashing items – with the assistance of the study supervisor and the statistician, whose advice was sought after the questionnaire items were determined.

#### **5.3.1.2.2 Pilot application of one-on-one of the interview schedule**

The researcher's plan was to pilot the interview schedule, as was done with the questionnaire. However, this schedule, fortunately, turned out to be valid from the start of the investigation. Therefore, the pilot interviews that had been conducted were subsequently accepted as *final interviews*, and these included: interviews conducted with students over the telephone, course presenters, and with the course administrators.

#### **5.3.1.3 Final application of the data instruments**

##### **5.3.1.3.1 Final application of the questionnaires**

Gaining access to students from the Conventional Education study programme proved to be problematic, as some the lecturers concerned with lecturing this group declined to allow the researcher access to relevant students, saying that the number of available contact hours they enjoy with their students is already severely limited. Therefore, sparing 30 minutes of their allotted teaching time would not be possible. However, the researcher gained access to the relevant students for this study with the assistance of the coordinator of the study programme for the Conventional Education Unit.

A total of 45 copies of the questionnaire were subsequently distributed among these students, of which 25 copies (56%) were returned – later it was discovered that one questionnaire was returned uncompleted. However, due to the small number of students involved in the B.Ed. (Hons.) Conventional Education study programme, the researcher visited the class again, to encourage the other 20 students – who had not completed and returned the questionnaire – to do so.

Three more copies were subsequently collected, bringing the total of completed questionnaires returned to 27 (60%).

Conversely, a week after the pilot application had been conducted with them, copies of the newly validated questionnaires were distributed among learners from the Distance Education study programme. For this final application, a total number of 230 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to students in the following way:

- Block 2 – 100 copies;
- Block 3 – 80 copies; and
- Block 4 – 50 copies.

The researcher subsequently collected a total of 100 (43.47%) completed questionnaires from these students. (On the same day 98 copies were collected and the following day 2 copies were collected with the assistance of the class leaders).

#### **5.3.1.3.2 Final administration of one-to-one and focus group interviews**

The interviews with the respondents were each 45 minutes to 1 hour in duration and was also recorded electronically, in agreement with suggestions by Heritage (1984:238) in that this:

- Helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews;
- Allows more thorough examination of what people say;
- Permits repeated examinations of the interviewee's answers;
- Opens up the data to public scrutiny by other researchers;
- Therefore, helps to counter accusations that an analysis might have been influenced by a researcher's values and biases; and

- Allows the data to be reused in other ways from those intended by the original researcher.

A total number of 25 individual interviews were conducted with:

- One Policy maker, who happens to be the person in charge of the quality assurance of the whole faculty;
- Three Administrators, two of whom are responsible for dealing directly with both Distance and Conventional Education students, while one from the Distance Education Unit acts as a link between the administrative staff and the course presenters;
- One Instructional Designer (as students from the two modes of delivery use the same learning materials);
- Ten Course Presenters;
- Ten students who have discontinued their studies (Five from each mode of delivery);

A total number of two focus group interviews were conducted with:

- Four Tutors, who are in charge of some modules in both departments;
- Six Module Coordinators responsible for the first 6 modules applicable to this study.

Finally, all the respondents that participated in both the quantitative and qualitative research instruments were included in the sample because they were involved in the study program, fulfilling diverse roles. It is the researcher's hope that through careful application of the collected data, the wealth of knowledge to be extracted from their collective experiences will contribute to the quality in the outcome of the investigation.

### 5.3.1.3.3 Conducting the telephone interviews

While conducting the telephone interviews, the researcher adopted the following procedure:

- To first call each respondent to introduce her self and explain the purpose of the contact – this was to build rapport with them;
- Another date that was convenient for the student was agreed upon for each interview;
- Another call was made to each respondent, as a reminder on the appointment; and
- In the meantime, the researcher prepared an electronic device to record each telephone interview – for review purposes;
- The interview was conducted, as per appointment;
- Lastly, each respondent was again called and the researcher expressed her appreciation for their time and input.

### 5.3.1.4 Keeping field notes

The researcher kept field notes, to aid in recording observations and reflections perceived during the data collection period. For instance, on 6 March 2006, after my interview with a course presenter, the following note – of a moment that was not part of the electronically recorded interview – was recorded:

*'We reflected together on the need for the university to change the time of exams for distance education students because they are mostly teachers, who are busy towards the time of school exams, which happens to clash with the university's exam's time-table. She feels very strongly about this.'*

The field notes aided the researcher to reflect deeply on the issues that emanated from these interviews, which led to further interviews with the respondents. The field notes were recorded and saved in the *memo* unit of the Computer Assisted Data Analysis Software (*Atlas.ti*), and can be accessed on the CD-ROM that accompanies this thesis.

## 5.4 Data analysis procedures

It is known that the research design chosen for a particular study influences the data analysis procedures and for this study this is no different. Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003:352-353) define the fundamental principle of the mixed-method analysis approach, which was chosen for this study, as ‘the use of quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques, either concurrently or sequentially, at some stage beginning with the data collection process, from which interpretations are made in either a parallel, an integrated, or an iterative manner’.

### 5.4.1 Data analysis of the response to the questionnaire

The quantitative approach was adopted for the questionnaires. However, the data received was first reduced to a form that could be analysed. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:265), this is referred to as ‘Data reduction ... that generally consists of coding data in preparation for analysis ...’ Writing on this, Oppenheim (2003) defines *coding* as the ‘name given to the process of developing and using classifications for the answers to each question’. This, as the number of respondents was relatively small, the researcher did manually. The completed copies of the questionnaire were later taken to the statistician for computer analysis.

The questions posed were both closed and open-ended – the closed-ended questions had been pre-coded, while the open-ended questions were post-coded, as codes were developed only after the filling of the questionnaires (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

### 5.4.2 Data analysis of the one-to-one and focus group interviews

This involved transcribing and analysing the data garnered from the interviews.

#### **5.4.2.1 Transcribing of the one-to-one and focus group interviews**

According to Kvale (1996:166) 'the prefix *Trans* indicates a change of state or form; transcription is selective transformation' hence, the interview data was transcribed from audiotape to text. However, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:281), caution that 'it is unrealistic to pretend that the data on transcripts are anything but already interpreted data'. Therefore, this led to the analysis of the transcribed text with the help of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, CAQDAS (*Atlas.ti*).

#### **5.4.2.2 Analysing the transcribed interviews**

##### **5.4.2.2.1 Data analysis of the transcribed one-on-one interviews**

To Rubin and Rubin (2005:201) 'data analysis is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations that are the foundation for published reports' and 'it entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interview to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative'. However, the researcher opted to use computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) because:

- It is compatible with the chosen analytic approach;
- It was easy to master – the researcher had used the software while working as a Research Assistant in the department;
- The programme (*Atlas.ti*) is continually upgraded by the company;
- It has good quality tutorials (Hardy and Bryman, 2004); and
- The department offered of the use of the technology to the researcher.

According to Hardy and Bryman (2004:532) 'code-and-retrieve software focuses on relationships between codes and data' and it is simply a way of doing things differently, but not necessarily better. But coming from a different school of

thought, Kelle (1998) sees it as being of great assistance to the qualitative researcher, who has to deal with large volume of generated data, which Miles and Huberman (1994) describes as data overload.

Using the software, according to Rubin and Rubin (2005), involves identifying relevant quotations, codes (that were formed from the questions posed), the concepts and themes interviewees frequently mentioned, the concepts and themes indirectly revealed, concepts and themes that emerge from comparing interviews and new concepts and themes that emerged from previous concepts and themes, and finding relationships among codes in order to answer the research questions.

Therefore, the interview responses were first coded. The codes assigned were based on some developed categories, which Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest should resemble the original data, to aid the work of the researcher. The coding also enabled the identification of themes that emerged from the data (Hardy & Bryman, 2004).

#### **5.4.2.2.2 Data analysis of the focus group interviews**

According to Kitzinger (1995) 'Analysing focus groups is basically the same as analysing any other qualitative self-report data', and both Catterall and Maclaran, (1997) have lamented the lack of attention to analysis in literature. However, Kitzinger (1994) and Catterall and Maclaran (1997) warn there is the need to be cautious when using the CAQDAS computer software. This is because researchers see the group interaction as an essential part of the interview, and the coding and the retrieval systems involved in a computer-assisted analysis may result in the loss of this vital communication process.

Therefore, Catterall and Maclaran (1997) have suggested the use of *on-screen* and *off-screen* coding, which involves combining computer-assisted analysis with memos to integrate 'the moving picture as well as the snapshots' (Catterall and

Maclaran (1997). For this reason field notes were taken during the course of the focus group interviews, which were later combined with the on-screen coding (*Atlas.ti*).

#### **5.4.2.3 Memoing**

According to Glaser (1978) cited by Miles and Huberman (1994:72) 'a memo is the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding...it can be a sentence, a paragraph or a few pages...it exhausts the analyst's momentary ideation based on data with perhaps a little conceptual elaboration'. This was an aspect of the software used for the analysis, and it was put to good use, as it gave further insight into the interview schedules. For instance, during the early interview sessions, a response from an interviewee prompted one of the questions later asked during the focus group interview with the module coordinators.

#### **5.4.2.4 Document analyses**

Document analyses with regards to this investigation concerned logical and quantitative analysis (which in this case encompassed the comparison of the performances of students, and the enrolment, throughput, and dropout rates). Inferential statistics – which included both chi-square and Fisher's exact tests – was applied to the performances of students from both modes of delivery, with the purpose of comparing their performances in terms of the pass and failure rates. On the other hand, descriptive analysis of student enrolment, throughput and dropout rate was done.

##### **5.4.2.4.1 Statistical analysis of the empirical data**

According to Borg and Gall (1979:428) a statistical test is 'used to determine whether two frequency distributions differ significantly from each other'. Two of such have been used in this study, and they are the chi-square and Fisher's exact tests, which Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), refer to as non-parametric tests. As indicated by Bryman (2004), the first is applied to

contingency tables, to establish how confident we can be that there is a relationship between two variables in the population. On the other hand, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) and (Steyn, 2005) explain that the latter is useful only in a case where there is a two-by-two contingency table, that has made it applicable to only the tables that are of this nature in the study. Besides, the chi-square test can apply to all tables, and it can also be used when the sample size is small, which is the case of this study (Steyn, Smit, Du Toit & Strashem, 1994). Also, both tests have been combined in order to ascertain the reliability of the exact probabilities, and to strengthen the evidence of the statistically significant relationships between the two groups (Steyn, Smit, Du Toit & Strashem, 1994; Wikipedia, 2007).

Therefore, the level of significance was described as ( $\alpha$  value is  $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, both afforded the researcher the opportunity to provide a statement of probability of occurrence – the null hypothesis (Mertens, 1997) (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.2). Lastly, the Phi coefficient was applied, to test for the practical significance (effect-size) of the rates compared ( $w = 0.1$  small-effect; 0.3 medium effect; 0.5 large effect). According to Bryman (2004:235), the ‘Phi coefficient, is used for the analysis of the relationship between two dichotomous variables’. Thus, the effect sizes as applied to the statistical analysis indicated whether the relationship between the pass and the failure rates of the two student groups under investigation, was weak, moderate or strong (See Chapter 6, Section 6.3.2).

## **5.5 Enhancing the validity and reliability of the study**

As earlier stated, this work is largely qualitative in nature. Hence, the researcher opted for a gradual process of validation, which was built into the work from the beginning. (An alternative work method may have only enabled evaluation of the research study at the end of the process, which would have prevented adjustment/alteration of the evaluation criteria before the end of the evaluation process. The researcher believes this would have rendered this study invalid and

unreliable.) According to Morse et al. (2000), there is the need to refocus the agenda for ensuring vigour by placing responsibility 'with the investigator rather than external judges of the completed product'. Therefore, the following elements were included in the research procedure to ensure the validity and the reliability of the study:

### **5.5.1 Validation of the study**

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:105), 'earlier versions of validity were based on the view that it was essentially a demonstration that a particular instrument... measures what it purports to measure; however, more recently validity has taken many forms'. Elaborating more on this statement, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), stress that validity is required in both qualitative and quantitative studies, but it is a matter of degree rather than an absolute state. For instance in the quantitative method, there is a measure of standard error, which is inbuilt and has to be acknowledged, while the qualitative method, is faced with the subjectivity of the participants. However, Kvale (1995) explains that 'validation comes to depend upon the quality of craftsmanship in an investigation, which includes continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings'. All these were taken into consideration at every stage of this study, to ensure the overall validation of the instruments applied during the investigation.

#### **5.5.1.1 Content validity**

Even though there are different types of validity, of chief importance to this study is the content validity. In the words of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:109), this form of validity stresses 'the instrument must show that it fairly and comprehensively covers the domain or items it purports to cover'. Supporting this view, Punch (2005:97) explains that it 'focuses on whether the full content of a conceptual definition is represented in the measure'. Hence, both the qualitative and quantitative instruments applied in this study were content validated.

#### **5.5.1.1.1 Content validation of the interview schedule**

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:105), the content validation of qualitative research can be addressed 'through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness ... of the researcher'. Therefore, the interview schedules for administrators, module coordinators, tutors and students (who discontinued their studies with the university) were validated by ensuring the following:

- The selection of appropriate research methods and instruments in order to answer the questions raised;
- The question items of the interview (see Appendixes 4-12) schedules were based on relevant reviewed literature in Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4. Amongst these were studies by Black (1992), Garrison (1996), Dhanarajan (1997), Saba (1998), Herman and Mandell (1999), Phipps (1999), Aluko (2000), Diaz (2000), Garrison and Anderson (2000), Johnson et al. (2000), Holmberg (2001), Lockee, Moore and Burton (2001), Makin (2001), Hellman (2003), Braimoh (2003), and Suen and Parkes (2004) which pointed out that distance education is a welcome relief in higher education because of its potential to give access to those that have been deprived educational opportunities. However, aspersion is still being cast on this mode of delivery due to the impression that a lower quality of education is offered and often leads to poor performances of students and higher attrition rates. Therefore, it becomes necessary to confirm the validity of this impression, which – in spite of landmark advances achieved in its delivery since its inception – still persists.
- The relevance of the choice of participants involved in the study, through whose eyes the data was received (see Section 5.3);

- The plentiful, in depth description of the data gathered that were substantiated with the findings from the literature reviewed on the phenomenon (see Chapters 2, 3, 4, 7 and Chapter 8, Section 8.4.2);
- The distancing of the researcher's personal views from the data collected; and
- The triangulation effected on the findings (see Section 5.5.2.1).

#### **5.5.1.1.2 Content validation of the questionnaire**

As said by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:105), the content validation of a questionnaire might be improved through 'careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatment of the data'. Therefore, this was implemented through:

- The application of purposive sampling that involved the careful selection of the participants in the study to have a fair representation (see Section 5.3.1.1.1);
- Ensuring that the formulated questions were a fair representation of the wider issue under investigation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000). (See the literature review chapters 2 – 4); and
- The application of relevant statistical treatment of the data (see Section 5.4 and Chapter 6).

Furthermore, the table below presents the process followed in selecting and developing questions for the questionnaire:

**Table 5.1: Guidelines on question formulation for the questionnaire**

QUESTIONS	REASONS	PROBING QUESTIONS
<b>A. BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS</b>		
1. What are the characteristics of the students admitted into both programs?	To collect data on characteristics of students attending both modes of delivery.	a. Sex / Gender b. Age Range c. Campus / Learning Centre d. Conventional Student / DE e. Occupation f. Home Address / Venue g. Distance of home to university / Learning Centre
<b>B. QUALITY OF ACCESS</b>		
1. What are the qualifications of the students admitted into both programmes?	To determine which route students took to be admitted into the programme.	a. What is your highest qualification?
2. How are students without the minimum entry requirements admitted into the programme?	To assess what access students not meeting the minimum entry requirements have to learning opportunities.	a. Did you attend any remedial class before, during or after starting this programme in order to help you cope with your course?
3. What orientation (initial) program is in place for admitted students?	To investigate the level of preparedness given to students.	a. Was there any orientation programme provided by the university? b. Did you attend such programme? c. When was this? d. What activities were involved?
4. What student support services are available to students?	To investigate the availability and quality of student support services.	a. What non-instructional support does the university provide? b. Are there academic advising services available to you? c. Please give examples of such services that are available to you. d. How often do you make use of such services? e. In what other areas do you think you will need counselling?
5. What instructional technology (such as face-to-face, audio cassettes, video cassettes, computer technology, radio or television) is available to students and to what extent does	To ascertain the type of technology is/are available to students and its/their quality?	a. What instructional technology (such as face-to-face, audio cassettes, video cassettes, computer technology, radio or television) is available to you when you are studying, attending lectures or when doing an assignment? b. Why did you choose to follow a Conventional or a Distance Education programme? c. Do you think this mode of delivery (Conventional or Distance Education) suits you?

this aid learning?		d. Why? e. What impact will the completion of this programme have on your job?
<b>QUALITY OF DELIVERY MODES</b>		
1. How do students rate the study guides and courses in terms of attraction, learning objectives, motivation, interactivity, content, structure and meeting needs?	To determine the effectiveness of study guides in contributing to learning.	a. How is study guides distributed? b. How will you describe your study guides in terms of the following: - Relevance to personal objectives - Challenging / interesting or boring - Tone (conversational / unfriendly) - Language (simple / difficult / illustrative) - Exercises (adequate/ inadequate) c. Do they contain course goals, performance objectives, grading and evaluation criteria grading rubrics, and examples of good student work in the syllabus? d. Do they encourage analysis, synthesis, application and evaluation?
2. In what way do the course guides and readers accommodate different learning styles and learning preferences of the students?	To discover how well the study guides and the readers accommodate different learning styles and learning preferences of the students.	a. As a student, have you ever completed a learning style assessment questionnaire? b. Are you aware of your own learning preferences?
3. How easily are the residences accessible to DE students coming in for contact sessions?	To assess the availability of the residences to DE students during their contact sessions, and what their quality is.	a. Where do you stay during the contact sessions? b. If you stay on campus, how will you describe the residences?
4. What is the quality of the contact sessions in terms of organisation, preparation for students' resumption, attendance of lecturers, lecturer-student relationship and student-student relationship?	To evaluate the quality of the contact sessions for DE students in terms of organisation, preparation for students' resumption, attendance of lecturers and students, lecturer-student relationship, student-student relationship, and the use of the library facilities.	a. How often are you expected to attend classes / contact sessions? b. What means is available for ensuring students' attendance at contact sessions? c. Are lecturers available to teach students? d. Do you have the opportunity of meeting your lecturers? e. When and how often? f. How do you contact them when not on campus (as DE students)? g. How do you access the library when not on campus? h. On the other hand, how do you get books when not on campus? i. How do you meet with other students for learning when not on campus? j. Do the contact sessions meet your immediate needs and expectation?
<b>QUALITY OF OUTPUT</b>		

<b>STUDENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS; THEIR SATISFACTION WITH THE ENTIRE PROGRAMME AND REASONS; AND POSSIBLE SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT</b>		
<p>1. How do students rate the strategies used for their assessment?</p>	<p>To evaluate the strategies of assessment.</p>	<p>a. Is your assessment formative (done gradually) or summative (done once)?            b. How long does it take for you to get feedback on your assessment?            c. Is specific time tied to the submission of your assignments?            d. What are lecturers' views on the method of assessment?            e. How do you rate your lecturers' expectation of your performance?            f. Are you satisfied with the method of your assessment?            g. Suggestions?</p>
<p>2. What reasons can be given for students' high / low performance and dropout rates?</p>	<p>To proffer reasons for students' high / low performance and dropout rates.</p>	<p>a. What is your comment on the quality of teaching?            b. Is the academic culture supportive of your learning?            c. Please explain.            d. What financial difficulties concerning your studies do you have?            e. Is there any financial aid for your study?            f. What is your view on this?            g. What other commitments affect your studies?            h. In what way does your job affect your studies?            i. How well committed are you to your studies? Please explain.            j. Do you feel you have made a right or wrong choice of programme?            k. Give reasons.            l. What are your expectations of this programme that are yet to be met?            m. What advice (orientation) were you given upon admission?            n. Do you think this mode of delivery (Distance Education) suits you?            o. Why?            p. What impact will the completion of this course have on your job?</p>
<b>STUDENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS; THEIR SATISFACTION WITH THE ENTIRE PROGRAMME AND REASONS; AND POSSIBLE SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT</b>		
<p>1. How do students rate the performances of both on- and off-campus lecturers?</p>	<p>To determine the quality of both on- and off-campus lecturers involved in the learning experiences of the students.</p>	<p>a. Are there opportunities for staff-student appraisal?            b. When last was this done?            c. What format does this take?            d. How do students rate this format?            e. How do students rate both on-and off-campus lecturers?</p>

<p>2. What is the effectiveness of administration in relation to the programme?</p>	<p>To determine the effectiveness of administration in relation to the programme.</p>	<p>a. How do students rate the administrative staff?  b. In what way do you think their attitude to their work affect your studies?  c. How well does necessary information get to you?  d. Please give examples of information passed to you?  e. When and how do you contact the administrative staff?  f. Is there a specific time allotted to this?  g. Do you have names of members of staff to contact?</p>
<p>3. How satisfied are students with the quality of the programme under investigation? What are the reasons, and what possible suggestions do they have on how the programme can be improved?</p>	<p>To ascertain the satisfaction level of students, reasons for this, and what possible suggestions they may have on how the programme can be improved.</p>	<p>a. As a student, are you satisfied with the entire programme? Please give reasons.  b. Kindly list five suggestions for the improvement of the programme?</p>

See Appendix 4 for a copy of the questionnaire.

In order to arrive at the formulated questions in the questionnaire, strict attention was paid to the literature reviewed for this investigation, from which ideas for questions were gleaned. The questionnaire is divided into five sections, and validated in the following ways:

Firstly, in Section A (questions 1 - 9) the questions are designed to obtain biographical information from the student participants. According to scholars (Peters, 2000; Cloete & Bunting, 2001; Carnevale, 2002; Doug, 2002; Cloete, 2002; Randolph, 2003; Daves et al. 2004; Gordon, 2005; Labuschagne & Mashile, 2005; Mostert, 2006), adult students are often females, who have been previously denied education for some reason, and who are more involved with family and social commitments; are in their middle age; are mostly in the teaching profession or related fields; and are often attracted to a program due to its quality. However, it has been asserted that, due to paradigm shifts within higher education, there is already a *blurring* in the nature of students who partake of

distance and conventional education study programmes. Thus, the questions were designed to ascertain the extent the demographic characteristics of the students at this university correspond with the findings of literature covering this topic.

Secondly, in Section B (questions 10 – 23) the questions are designed to gather information on the quality of the access provided for students admitted into the BEd (Hons) study program at this university. Ideas for the formulation of these questions were borrowed from the works of Morrow (1993/4), Carnwell (1998), Herman and Mandell (1999), Stark and Warne (1999), Council for Adult and Experiential Learning [CAEL] (2000), Harrington, Laster, Stennet, and Carnwell (2001), Qurashi, Morton and Antosz (2002), Jansen (2004), Gamede (2005), HESA (2005), Mostert (2006), and Raphael (2006), who are all of the opinion that access goes beyond merely admitting students into a study programme, as it also involves access to non-instructional support, that they may complete the program and succeed on it. Therefore, these questions were meant to ascertain the extent to which the access given to students from the two educational modes could be defined as *true access*; and the extent to which such access differs between each delivery mode.

Thirdly, in Section C (questions 24 – 55) questions are formulated on teaching and instructional strategies, from ideas that were generated during the literature review of scholars like Chickering and Gamson (1991), Spady and Marshall (1991), Holmberg (1995), Perraton and Hulsmann (1998), Killen (2002), McKnight (2000), Goold and Rimmer (2000), Logan and Thomas (2002), Kelsey and D'souza (2004), Lomas (2004), Moore and Kearsley (2005), and Williams (2005). Findings from their works reveal that having structure supports in place; students' meeting with their lecturers for support; and being involved in staff-student appraisal always greatly affects the quality of the learning experiences of students, which then affects their performance and throughput rate.

Review of literature on these matters also presents the importance of other factors, like: the quality of the tutorial materials; identifying learners' learning styles and preferences, assessment method(s) adopted by the institution; contact sessions; library facilities and the quality of the administrative services. One of the objectives of this study is to compare the quality of the learning experiences for students from both delivery modes.

Fourthly, in Section D (questions 56 – 66) the questions focused on other possible factors that could affect the performance of students. The ideas for the formulation of these questions were gleaned from the works of Tinto (1975, 1993, 1997), Fraser and Nieman (1995), Galusha (1997), Uba (1997), Aluko (2000), Diaz (2000), Tresman (2002), Braimoh (2003), Givney (2003), Leppel (2004), HESA (2005), Louw (2005), who all confirm that the throughput rate of students studying through distance education is often lower than that of students studying through conventional education. However, they assert that there are reasons for this disparity. Of interest to note is that some of the scholars had identified gaps in past comparative studies that had failed to explain these divergences. Therefore, it became part of the focus of this study to investigate some of these factors, which include: availability of funds to distance education students, and whether the student made a correct choice of study programme in the first case.

The last section, Section E (questions 67-69) deals with student satisfaction levels with the study program as a whole, reasons for their impression, and possible suggestions to improve the programme. Ideas for the formulation of these questions were gleaned from past research efforts (Frazer, 1994; Green, 1994; Wolcott, 1995; Bornman, 2004; Lomas, 2004; Sahney, 2004; Sirvanci, 2004; Du Toit, 2005; Telford & Masson, 2005; Welch & Reed, 2005) which indicate that students are the protagonists in higher education. Therefore, they are in the best position to define quality in higher education, assess its quality, and bring valuable changes to the services rendered to them through their suggestions in these matters.

### **5.5.2 Reliability of the study**

Gone are the days when reliability is the sole pre-requisite of quantitative research methodology (Brock-Utne, 1996; Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000) – as it has also become an important aspect of qualitative research methodology. According to Punch (2005:95) ‘reliability is a central concept in measurement’ and ‘it basically means consistency’. Buttressing this Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:117) assert that, ‘reliability is essentially a synonym for consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents’.

Therefore, this aspect was also built into this research study, by:

- Choosing the relevant unit of study, respondents and interviewees, and the instruments of data collection and data analysis;
- Piloting the questionnaire and interview schedules before their final application (Silverman, 1993);
- Ensuring a good rapport between the researcher and the interviewees; and
- Using structured questions for the interview schedules (Oppenheim, 1992).

Hence, it is this researcher’s opinion that if the same instruments were to be applied to the same respondents, given the same situation and analysing in the same way, the findings of that study will still be consistent with the findings of this study.

#### **5.5.2.1 Triangulation and crystallization as parts of the research design process**

According to Cresswell (2003:196) ‘triangulation is one of the means of validating the accuracy of findings’ in research, and it involves the use of ‘different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to

build a coherent justification for themes'. Also in relation to this study, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) assert that a major advantage of the mixed-methods analysis approach is that the researcher is able to compare and contrast the data from both methods, which furthermore builds the confidence of the researcher. Giving a summary of the definitions of the concept *triangulation*, Tobin and Begley (2004:394), write that 'all definitions of the different types of triangulation state that it involves *two or more* theories, methods, approaches, instruments or investigators providing data on [the same] topic'.

However, it has been advocated that the term *crystallization* should be used instead of *triangulation* in qualitative research (Janesick, 2000), yet according to Tobin and Begley (2004), little has been written about crystallization, therefore, they lament that the concept needs further clarification. Nevertheless, Richardson (1994:522) asserts, that 'crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know'.

Therefore, given the context of this research study, which is the application of the mixed-methods analysis approach, the researcher submits that her choice of research design will enable the combining of both the quantitative and qualitative research methods (each with its instruments that could be regarded as varied sources of information – see Section 5.2.2), and to compare, for instance, the results of the completed questionnaires with those of the interviews, which, hopefully, would lead to in-depth descriptions of the findings of this investigation (see Chapters 6 and 7), synthesizing them with the emerged new body of knowledge (see Chapter 8). Buttressing this, Tobin and Begley (2004) explain that all these combined instruments 'can be so numerous as to constitute crystallization ...' that enables one to obtain a more complete picture of a complex phenomenon.

### 5.5.3 Transferability and generalizability of the study

According to Byrne (2001) *transferability* is used to judge the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other contexts, while – in the words of Polit and Hungler (1991:645) – *generalization* is the ‘degree to which findings can be generalized from the study sample to the entire population’. As earlier explained, in this mixed-methods comparative study, the qualitative component is more dominant. Therefore, Brannen (2005) advises that ‘it may be more appropriate to use the criteria by which such research is judged ...’

Unfortunately, one of the serious allegations levied against the qualitative inquiry, is its inability to generalise the findings from such research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Hardy & Bryman, 2004; Punch, 2005) mostly because of the small samples involved (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, 1993; Yin, 1994) and because such studies are often difficult to replicate Myers (2000). Therefore, it may not be possible to generalize the findings from this study. For instance, one would be cautious in generalizing the findings as a ‘perfect reflection’ of the practices of both modes of delivery at the university or any other university with similar programmes.

However, Myers (2000) argues that even though partial generalizations may be possible to similar populations, however, it should not be the primary concern of qualitative research because of the following:

- The knowledge generated by such research is significant in its own right; and
- Problems related to sampling and generalizations may have little relevance to the goals of the study, as it is meant for understanding the issues raised in-depth.

Therefore, the researcher submits that the goals of a research methodology should determine the extent the studies involved could be generalized. This, Sato

(2000) while drawing upon Cornfield and Tukey (1956) and Shulman (1988) describes as building *an inferential bridge* by seeking overarching principles that apply to all cases, thereby generalizing the experiences of the participants involved in the investigation.

#### **5.5.4 Limitations**

Some of the challenges faced during this study were:

Firstly, the researcher experienced a problem with gaining access to the full-time students for the unit of study selected. (Lecturers were reluctant to allow time for this exercise, complaining that the contact hours allocated for teaching their modules were too few to be lost.)

Secondly, collecting the completed questionnaires from the full-time students was a challenge. (The students felt they had no spare time to complete the questionnaire, as their contact hours for lectures were specially arranged to accommodate the fact many of them also had full-time employment.)

Thirdly, the problem of arranging all the appointments for the many interviews that had to be conducted – this was easy in some cases, while it was almost impossible in other cases. (For instance, almost all the students that had discontinued their studies lived a great distance away from the researcher, who had to change the format of the interview schedule to accommodate conducting the interview over the telephone.)

Fourthly, despite using computer software to assist with the data analysis, the task of transcribing the data from all the interviews conducted for this research study was daunting, as each interview had to be transcribed verbatim. In addition to this, having used computer software to record the data, the researcher was not immune from being involved in the data analysis process.

Lastly, the researcher realised she had created too many codes and, during the coding process, this situation was corrected.

## **5.6 Ethical issues**

The need to be sensitive to moral issues in research cannot be over-emphasized. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:49) 'each stage in the research sequence, may be a potential source of ethical problems ...' however, ethical issues must be interpreted in the light of the research context and of other values at stake. Therefore, conscious effort was made to ensure fairness in the following areas:

### **5.6.1 Ethics during the data collection process**

- The Head of the Distance Education Unit enabled the researcher to gain access to the Distance and Conventional Education study programme students. The first was arranged in writing, while the other was arranged verbally and the managers of both study programmes gave their approval for the conducting of this investigation. (See Appendix 1 for the copy of the letter);
- The informed consent of the student participants – for the questionnaire and interviews – was gained after the essence and potential benefits of the research study were explained to them. After the participants had completed the questionnaire, an individual appointment then had to be arranged for a later date and the need for using a tape recorder during these interviews was explained to them;
- Upon the request of the researcher, the Heads of Administration for the Distance and Conventional Education Units gave their permission that information on students that had withdrawn from the BEd (Hons) programme could be released, for use during the interview to be conducted with them over the telephone.

### **5.6.2 Ethics during the data analysis and interpretation processes**

One of the challenges faced by any researcher when conducting a qualitative inquiry is the inability to distance his/her personal views from the study during analysis. However, during this process, care was taken to guard against this:

Firstly, the questionnaire data was edited before reducing the data. This was done in order to identify and eliminate errors discovered (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000).

Secondly, privacy, anonymity and the confidentiality of the respondents was maintained. For instance, respondents to the questionnaire were not required to supply their names, while pseudonyms instead of real names were used during the interviews (see Chapter 7).

### **5.6.3 Ethics during the process of writing and disseminating the research**

Firstly, it is the researcher's intention to report exact findings and not falsify the data that will emerge from this study.

Secondly, the findings will be written in a simple language, which will easily be understood by readers. This will start with the procedure of the study, that is made explicit and transparent (Sato, 2000), which, hopefully, will ease the process of arriving at an in-depth description of the data.

Thirdly, it is the researcher's goal to make a report, containing a summary of the research findings of this study, available to the University of Pretoria – the custodian of the Distance Education Unit that was the subject of this study.

## **5.7 Summary**

In Chapter Five, the research design and methodology to be used for this study was clarified, including the data analysis process. The ethical issues that affected the process of this study were also commented on.

In conclusion, Chapter Six will reveal the findings of this study with regard to quality, as it relates to the three chosen indices for this study, namely: *access*, *delivery* and *output*. The probable implications of these findings for Distance Education study methods are also considered.

# CHAPTER 6

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE QUANTITATIVE DATA

### **6.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Six the feedback from the data collected for this investigation is discussed. As explained in Chapter 5 (Section 5), the mixed-method research design is the chosen data collection strategy for this study. Hence, this section illustrates and explains the analyses of both methods with specific reference to the quantitative research method.

### **6.2 An overview of the quantitative data**

All second-year students enrolled for the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy study programme for 2004, at the University of Pretoria, were requested to complete the questionnaire. Forty-five students from Conventional Education were each handed a copy of the questionnaire, of which 27 were

completed and returned to the researcher (constituting a 60% return), while 270 students from Distance Education were handed a copy of the questionnaire, of which 144 were completed and returned to the researcher (constituting a 53% return) (see question 4). From the data collected for this study, a great difference between the numbers of students for each delivery mode can be observed. A major reason for this is the low number of students registered for the contact study programme. (This state of affairs was, initially, a source of concern for the researcher, but – having no other source of information to work with – she made peace with this situation.)

In the course of a second interview with the Project Manager of Distance Education Unit – regarding the BEd (Hons) study programme – it was revealed to the researcher that there is a steady trend of an increase in the student number in Distance Education, accompanied by a corresponding decrease in the student number of Conventional Education. (Possible reasons for this will be highlighted in the course of this study.)

In addition to this, this marked difference between the student numbers from Distance and Conventional Education caused the researcher to avoid (in most cases) percentage calculations, as this caused these calculations to become less significant, resulting in huge deviations - causing a large drop or increase in raw scores.

It must be noted, in cases where the difference in relation of the two delivery modes was not significant enough a table was not drawn up to represent these responses. (This at times, is the case, which may be connected with the fact the programme under review is for post-graduate study and that all the students were adults.) However, a conscious effort was made to make descriptions presented as clear as possible.

Finally, the Chi-square test was applied on student examination scores that had been provided by the Department of Administration, of the university, to assess whether divergences between scores of students from the two delivery modes can be detected. The essence was to establish the quality of the learning experience which all these students were exposed to, as they were to be awarded the same certificate on successful completion of their studies. However, this study focused on only six modules, which all the respondents had completed as at the time of this investigation.

### 6.3 Statistical analysis of the data

#### 6.3.1 Analysis of the quantitative investigation

##### 6.3.1.1 Frequency analyses (Descriptive analysis)

##### 6.3.1.1.1 Biographical information

##### a) Gender (question 1)

**Table 6.1: The gender of respondents in the investigation (n = 172)**

Program Gender	Conventional Education (Numbers)	%	Distance Education (Numbers)	%	Total No.	Total %
Male	12	46%	46	32%	58	34%
Female	14	54%	98	68%	112	66%
<b>Total</b>	26	100%	144	100%	170	100%

Missing Frequencies: 2

Table 6.1 presents the following information:

- There were 12 (7.06%) male Contact Education students, as opposed to 46 (27.06%) male Distance Education students who participated in this investigation.
- There were 14 (8.24%) female Contact Education students, as opposed to 98 (57.65%) female Distance Education students who participated in this investigation.

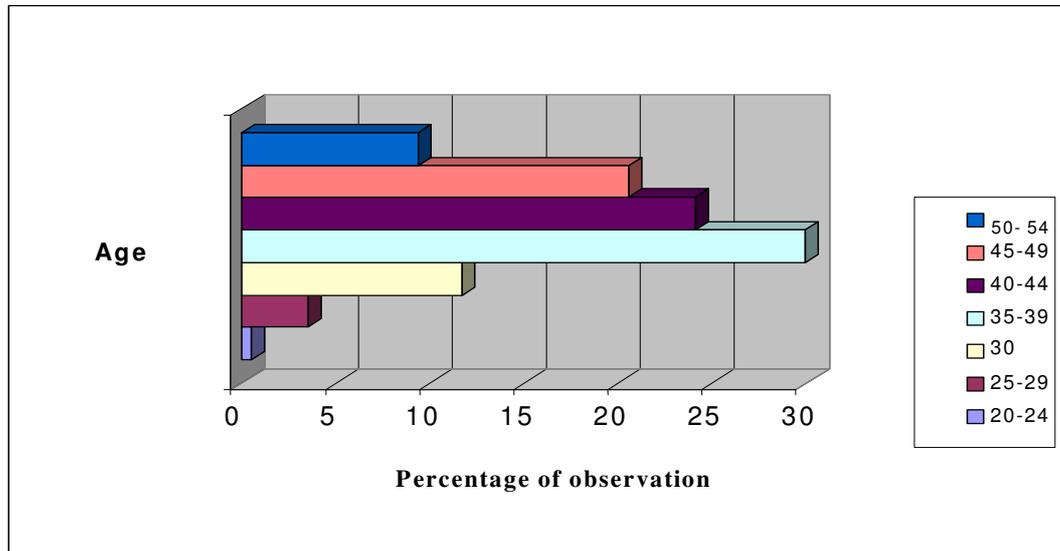
From this, one may conclude there are significant differences between male and female who study through distance education. Also, this may support the claim that distance education students tend to be female (DoE, 2004; NCE, 2003; Randolph, 2003), with teaching as a career, as opposed to their male counterparts, who tend to have non-teaching careers. However, another possible reason for this situation may be that women in most parts of Africa, have been traditionally denied formal education and are now seizing the opportunity opened to them to study (Pityana, 2002; Carnevale, 2002).

#### **b) Age of students respondents in the investigation (question 2)**

For this question, the possible age categories of the respondents were: 20 - 39 and 40 - 54. (Investigation revealed that having more than two age categories caused the groups to splinter, especially as the group from Contact Education involved in this study was small - which had the effect of causing a large percentage deviation with the addition or loss of a single frequency.)

The histogram below indicates the distribution of age of the respondents:

**Figure 6.1: Histogram of the age of student respondents (n = 172)**



Missing Frequencies: 2

The histogram presented above reflects the age of the majority of the students enrolled in the BEd (Hons) study programme, (a post-graduate degree course) which falls within the early adulthood to middle adulthood categories, an observation supported by (Labuschagne & Mashile, 2005). This could be attributed to most of them being employed and having family responsibilities. Buttrressing this, statistics on the profile of students from Distance Education received from the Department of Administration of the Distance Education Unit, of the University of Pretoria, confirmed that the age of the majority of these students fall within these same age group categories (UP, 2006a).

In the same vein, in the United States it has been predicted that the overall college enrolment for the periods 2001 to 2011, will be characterised by the expectation that 58% of the students are to be female, and 38% of the students are expected to be over the age of 25 years (Randolph, 2003).

### **c) Main venue of discussion classes (question 3)**

A total of 86 students (54%) responded to this question – an above average percentage – from both modes of delivery.

- Of this total, 12 students (41%) were from Distance Education, who attended their discussion classes at the Groenkloof campus (i.e. the Faculty of Education);
- However, of the remaining Distance Education students, 74 students (46%) attended discussion classes at various learning centres that have been created by the university.

This might suggest that most of the students on this program were registered for the distance mode, a trend that has already been highlighted in Section 6.2. Also, it can be noted that the provision of decentralised learning centres has been identified as one of the features of Distance Education at this institution (Mostert, 2006).

### **d) Occupation of the respondents who participated in the investigation (question 5)**

In response to the question of supplying information on their profession, practically all the 170 respondents (99%) indicated they were educators by profession, except for two (1%), who worked in related fields. This is understandable as the B Ed (Hons) study program was specifically designed for educators (see Section 3.7).

Reflecting this, findings from this study support present research that ‘many distance learners are different from traditional undergraduates in that they are already in professions’ (Doug, 2002) and ‘being economically active’ (Labuschagne & Mashile, 2005). See also (NCE, 2003; UP 2006).

**e) Distance travelled to the university/learning centre (questions 6 & 7)**

The students were asked what return distance (in kilometres) they travelled to the university or learning centre for lectures/discussion classes. (It was thought that this could serve as a motivational factor for the successful completion of programmes, which adults enrol for.)

- The maximum distance (in kilometres) which the Conventional Education study programme students travelled to lectures was 480 km. (The majority of these students are from the environs of Gauteng Province, where the University of Pretoria is situated.)
- The maximum distance (in kilometres) travelled by the Distance Education study programme students was 1000 km. This may be connected to the students being from all over South Africa – a large area. Also, among the respondents was a student from Botswana (a neighbouring country), who regularly covered the 700 km to attend contact sessions. (This indicates that the university's student catchment area goes beyond the borders of South Africa.)

According to NCE (2003), students who live 10 or more miles from the institution where they were enrolled, were more likely to participate in Distance Education than students who live closer to the institution.

**f) Reasons for commencing studies with the university (question 8)**

Since the focus of this study is largely on quality as it relates to *access*, *delivery* and *output*, the reason for student commencement of studies with the university was asked. Responses of students from both modes of delivery were grouped together because the indicated difference in their reasons was minimal. Table 6.2 below presents these reasons:

**Table 6.2: Reasons for commencing studies with the university (n = 172)**

Reasons	Conventional Education	Distance Education	Total	Missing Frequencies
Availability of money/bursaries/grants	3	11	14	158
Quality of the Program	85	16	101	71
Status of the university in South African context	2	15	17	155
Nature of the given program	3	34	37	135
On recommendation	6	11	17	155
Proximity	1	1	2	170
Others	2	8	10	162

Table 6.2 indicates a total of 101 students, commenced studies with the university on the basis of the ‘quality of the programme’ – which proved to be the most indicated reason. Other reasons provided, listed in descending order of popularity, are:

- ‘Nature of the given programme’ – 37 students;
- ‘Status of the university in the South African context’ and ‘on recommendation’ – 17 students, respectively;
- ‘Availability of money/bursaries/grants’ – 14 students;
- ‘Others’ – 10 students; and
- ‘Proximity to the university’ – 2 students.

Reasons provided by students under the category of *Others* include:

- ‘To develop myself’;
- ‘To be an MP someday.’
- ‘Broaden my horizon.’ And
- ‘Direct relevance to occupation’.

All of these have been placed under the heading: “Personal” reasons.

From the above, it may be suggested that students may be drawn into a study programme of a particular institution for various reasons, chiefly the quality of the program (Peters, 2000) and, secondly, that the university is probably living up to its goal (see Section 4.6). This is also supported by the item ‘quality of the program’ in the questionnaire, having the lowest missing frequency (71).

**g) Highest qualification of the respondents who participated in the investigation (question 9)**

The question on the highest qualification obtained by the respondents was bi-modal, as it centres around two distinctive groups. The first group was tagged *Graduate* and these students were in possession of:

- a Baccalaureus and a teacher’s diploma (BA+HED);
- Baccalaureus degree only (BA); and
- A 4-year composite degree in Education [BA (Ed)] degrees.

The second group was tagged *Non-Graduate* and these students were in possession of:

- A 4-year teacher’s diploma (M+4);
- 3-year teacher’s diploma (M+3); and
- A Further Diploma in Education (FDE) or an Advanced Certificate in education (ACE);
- And other possible qualifications.

It is expected that responses from this question will later facilitate the final analysis when determining student academic readiness for commencing this study programme.

Table 6.3 below reveals students' responses to this question:

**Table 6.3: Highest qualifications of respondents, who participated in the investigation**

Groups	Distance Education	%	Conventional Education	%	Total	%
Graduates	31	23%	5	19%	36	22.5%
Non-Graduates	102	77%	22	81%	124	77.5%
<b>Total</b>	133	100%	27	100%	160	100%

According to Table 6.3, it may be seen that:

- In the Graduate category – only 31 students (23%) from Distance Education are graduates. This situation is reflected in the Contact Education respondents, of whom 5 students (19%) are graduates. This indicating a total of 36 graduates (22.5%).
- In the Non-Graduate category – The majority of the students from both modes enlist under this category – with 102 students (77%) from Distance Education and 22 students (81%) from Conventional Education, giving a total of 124 students.(77.5%).

The diverse range of qualifications that allow student access to the BEd (Hons) study program reflects the policy of open access that the University of Pretoria extends to adult students.

In addition to this, in the interviews the researcher conducted with the course presenters of the different modules in the study programme, it was highlighted that the diverse range of entrance qualifications affected student performance. It was also asserted that students in the *Graduate* category generally performed better than those in the *Non-Graduate* category. Explanation given on this by the course presenters was that students in the first category have undergone the

rudiments of what a degree study programme involves (since the particular study programme under consideration is a post-degree programme). Conversely, students from the second group have had less exposure to these rudiments. However, these assertions will be examined in the latter part of this research study.

#### **h) Ethnic characteristics of students**

One of the areas of interest for this study is the ethnic issue, as it relates to South Africa. After the Apartheid era, government policy was adjusted and practice was legislated to extend the possibility of learning to the previously disadvantaged groups in this country (See Section 3.4). Therefore, through this study, one expects to observe the extent to which the University of Pretoria has adhered to this policy.

Research for this section is based on documents provided by this university that reflect the ethnic characteristics of students involved in the B Ed (Hons) study programme, from Distance and Conventional Education. Table 6.4 presents the race profile of the students that were enrolled in the program from 2003 – 2006:

**Table 6.4: Ethnic characteristics of BEd (Hons) Education, Management, Law and Policy contact and distance education students (2003 – 2006)**

RACE	2003				2004				2005				2006				Grand Total
	Contact Education		Distance Education		Contact Education		Distance Education		Contact Education		Distance Education		Contact Education		Distance Education		
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	
<b>Blacks</b>	226	80%	4 070	97%	249	68%	3 106	97%	215	69%	3 464	97.6%	176	70%	5 001	98.3%	16 507
<b>Coloured</b>	7	3%	27	1%	7	2%	26	1%	5	2%	15	0.4%	7	3%	42	1%	136
<b>Indian</b>	0	0%	30	1%	2	1%	34	1%	5	2%	45	1%	3	1%	19	0.4%	138
<b>White</b>	48	17%	34	1%	105	29%	21	1%	84	27%	26	1%	66	26%	24	0.5%	408
<b>Total</b>	281	100%	4 161	100%	363	100%	3 187	100%	309	100%	3 550	100%	252	100%	5 086	100%	17 189

Source: University of Pretoria, 2006d

The table above indicates between 2003 and 2006 a total student number of 17 189 registered for the BEd (Hons) study programme, and that:

- The majority of the students enrolled during this period were Black (African) – with a total of 16 507 (96%). (However, it may be noted that of this number 15 641 students (95%) were enrolled for the Distance Education delivery mode.);
- The Coloured student number was 136 (1%);
- The Indian student number was 138 (8%); and
- The White student number was 408 (2%).

Furthermore, these figures corroborate, as established in the literature review (see Section 3.2.3), the importance of making higher education accessible to Black South Africans, who form the majority of the population – a problem that was created during the apartheid era (SAIDE, 1996; DoE, 2001; Cloete, 2002; Daves et al. 2004; and Gordon, 2005). When one considers its historically-white background, the university has clearly fulfilled this objective. However, Cloete and Bunting (2001: 21) are of the opinion that ‘one sign that inequities still exist within the system (i.e. the country’s education) is that large proportions of African students are clustered in distance education programs (most of which are in the humanities) within historically white universities’. Nevertheless, it is the researcher’s belief that the question of inequities might take a while to sort out yet.

### **6.3.1.2 Discussion of the findings in terms of the main research question and related sub-research questions**

The main research question for this study is:

*'What is the comparison between the impact of distance and conventional education on the performances of learners in a postgraduate BEd (Hons) degree program with specialization in Education Management, when assessed in terms of access, delivery and output?*

And from this question, emerges the first part of sub-research question 2, which this section attempts to answer (Section 1.3):

*'What are the demographic and ethnic characteristics of students who choose distance education as preferred mode of delivery above other forms of teaching...?*

Therefore, the following points have been established through the questions:

Most students involved in the BEd (Hons) Distance and Conventional Education study programmes at the University of Pretoria are:

- Black (African), who:
  - As a population group, were denied access to formal education during the apartheid years.
  - Presently, forms an estimated 79.5% of the total population of the country (Statistics South Africa, 2006).
  - The University of Pretoria operates an *open door* admission policy system when it comes to its admitting students.
  - Lastly, distance education delivery is a means of opening up access to education for many learners (section 2.4), as a large percentage of the respondents for this study were enrolled.
- Female adults who, traditionally, have been denied formal education to an even greater extent than their male counterparts, and are often more responsible for family commitments (Carnevale, 2002; Pityana, 2002; Randolph, 2003).

- Adult students who are in their middle age (Labuschagne & Mashile, 2005).
- They are mostly found in the teaching profession or related fields (NCE, 2003; Labuschagne & Mashile, 2005) and
- They are attracted to the program because of its quality, which suggests the university is reputed to offer *quality* education (Peters, 2000).

However, further implications of these matters for this study will be investigated during the latter part of the study.

#### **6.3.1.1.2 Factors determining the degree of extension of access to students enrolled for the distance and contact study programme under investigation**

Questions in this section further examine the issue of access, already raised in Section 6.3.1.2 above. It has been argued that merely extending access to students previously denied such access may not necessarily depict fairness to these students, who are regarded, these days, as *clients* who contribute much financially to the concept of 'open access' (see Section 2.4.2.2). Hence, it is necessary to ascertain how 'open' the access indeed is. And lastly, it must be noted that in this instance, data on both Distance and Conventional Education have been combined as all the students used the same learning materials. However, distinction has been made where it was noted that the data would be useful for comparison and where conclusion could be drawn in relation to the research question(s).

#### **a) Orientation for newly enrolled students (question 10), attendance of programme (question 11) and time of programme (question 12)**

Table 6.5 reflects both raw and percentage scores of the availability of the orientation program for newly enrolled students on the BEd (Hons) study program:

**Table 6.5: Orientation for newly enrolled students (n = 172)**

Response	Distance Education		Contact Education		Grand Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Yes	51	37.5%	22	85%	73	45%
No	85	62.5%	4	15%	89	55%
<b>Total</b>	136	100%	26	100%	162	100%

Missing Frequencies: 10

A high percentage (62.5%) of students from Distance Education replied negatively to the question of whether there was an orientation programme for newly enrolled students. Conversely, the majority (85%) of students from Contact Education responded positively to this question.

This is understandable as tutorial letters sent to students from Distance Education by the university often served as their *orientation programme* (see Section 3.7.3), while students from Contact Education physically attended such a programme on the campus.

In relation to this, Table 6.6 represents the number of students who attended and did not attend the orientation programme:

**Table 6.6: Attendance of orientation program by newly enrolled students (n = 172)**

Response	Distance Education		Contact Education		Grand Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Yes	37	29%	17	65%	54	35%
No	93	71%	9	35%	102	65%
<b>Total</b>	130	100%	26	100%	156	100%

Missing Frequencies: 16

From Table 6.6, it is evident that 71% of students from Distance Education did not attend the orientation programme for newly enrolled students, buttressing the fact that their tutorial letters served as their orientation, as it contained all necessary information (see Table 6.4). (It is thought the group of distance education students, who responded positively to this question, might have accepted that course presenters and available management staff who addressed students on the first day of the contact sessions were presenting an orientation programme. However, it must also be noted that attendance at these contact sessions was not compulsory.)

Conversely, 65% of students from Contact Education responded positively, indicating that they did attend such an orientation programme.

In answer to the question on when the students had attended the orientation programme, the response was January and February 2005.

#### **b) Activities involved during orientation programme (question 13)**

Activities involved in the orientation programme, as indicated by the students included:

- Welcome speech by the Dean of the Faculty
- Introduction of facilitators of the modules
- Introduction to courses by the faculty staff
- Introduction to administrative staff present at the program
- Lectures on study habits in order to guide the students

However, it should be noted that most of these responses were from the students from Conventional Education. The students from Distance Education indicated the tutorial letters served as their orientation programme, though some students also indicated the welcome talk when meeting with their course presenters for the first time, served as their orientation.

These questions were posed to ascertain how prepared students were for the BEd (Hons) study programme, as this may have a direct bearing on their performance and the throughput rate. Buttressing this, Raphael (2006) in a recent study has highlighted the importance of the *Orientation Program* in order to familiarise students with the system.

**c) Provision of non-instructional support<sup>1</sup> (question 14)**

To this open-ended question, the majority of the respondents were students from Distance Education, and were of the opinion that – apart from teaching – the university did not provide non-instructional support (such as toll-free phone support and counselling). Their comments on this ranged from *None* to *Not aware*. However, some students were of the opinion the university did provide such support, through the *tutorial letters* that were sent to the students on a regular basis, *study guides* and *constant contact* (e.g. through telephone technology).

Literature (Carnwell, 1998; Stark and Warne, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Moreland and Carnwell, 2000; Carnwell, 2000; Harrington et al. 2001) abounds on the importance of non-instructional support for adult learners, more so in distance education, and particularly for women students – whose responsibilities are divided to include the running of a home – with emphasis on the possible disastrous effects in its absence (HESA, 2005).

**d) Provision of academic advising services (question 15) and examples of such services (question 16)**

Table 6.7 presents the student response to the question whether or not they believed the university provided sufficient academic advising services for students:

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<sup>1</sup> A distinction has been made between academic advising services and non-instructional support, which refers in the context to services such as toll-free phone support and counselling services (see Sections 6.3.1.1.2(b), (d), (e), (q) and (s)).

**Table 6.7: Provision of academic advising services (n = 172)**

Response	Distance Education		Contact Education		Grand Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Yes	66	56%	12	67%	78	58%
No	51	44%	6	33%	57	42%
Total	117	100%	18	100%	135	100%

Missing Frequencies: 37

In response to the question on whether students were aware the university provided them academic advising services, 66 students (56%) from Distance Education and 12 students (67%) from Contact Education confirmed they were aware of this. Examples of such services given by students included:

- Information Booklets,
- Tutorial Letters,
- Contact Sessions (which afforded students concerned to meet with lecturers and administrative staff),
- Library Services and access to the Internet (by a few of them).

Conversely, it must be noted that 51 students (44%) from Distance Education responded negatively – their comment was mainly that they were not aware of the provision of such services – while 6 students (33%) from Conventional Education agreed with this statement (which might suggest that some students from the former group, did not take pains to familiarise themselves with the ‘Tutorial Booklet’ as there was ample evidence that this contained advice on for instance, study skills and general tips (UP, 2006c), buttressing the positive response.

Nevertheless, Raphael (2006) has asserted that ‘excellence in education means much more than course delivery. An entire support and academic services must go hand in hand...’ with it.

**e) Frequent use of academic advising services (question 17) and areas of need for counselling (question 18)**

The frequent use of academic advising services was divided into three major categories: 1. 'More than twice a year'; 2. 'Twice a year'; and 3. 'Less than twice a year'. From the findings,

- thirty-two (32) students from both Distance and Conventional Education made use of these facilities more than twice a year ;
- 29 students did so twice a year; and
- 20 students did so less than twice a year.

This shows that in general students understood the importance of the academic advising services and made use of them.

However, it is suggested that when students do not make use of such services or where the institution does not pay much attention to this, these students are often lowly motivated (Qurashi, Morton & Antosz, 2002).

With reference to the question asked in this section, the students identified the following areas in which they needed counselling:

- Career counselling,
- Studying,
- Time management,
- How to write examinations and complete assignments.

Students' response here could be an indication that the Distance Education Unit might need to start thinking of more creative ways to bring these to students or it might be that the respondents need the 'personal touch' with the institution, not just with the text. This becomes an issue because the items listed above have been identified as possible problem areas that students from Distance Education

especially struggle with (Radloff, Fox & Herrman, 1997; Van Schoor, Mill & Potgieter, 2002; Mostert, 2003; Mostert, 2006).

**f) Reasons for choice of mode of delivery by both distance and contact education students (question 19)**

According to Doug (2002), not all students are suited to distance learning. Therefore, this question requesting their reason for this choice of mode of delivery is of importance. Students from Distance and Conventional Education record they made their choices for the following reasons:

- Acquiring further knowledge
- Better qualifications
- Affordability of the program
- Full-time job
- It suits their nature
- Convenience
- Family and
- Remuneration improvement

These reasons were understandable as most students on the BEd (Hons) study program are middle-aged and have social commitments (e.g. family and employment).

Research on the profile of students that register for adult education programs supports this finding (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning [CAEL], 2000).

**g) Suitability of mode of delivery to students (question 20) and reasons for the suitability (question 21)**

Of the response to this question, 90% of the students from Distance and Conventional Education responded in the affirmative. Reasons given for this high response from the Distance Education students included:

- ‘Enough time on students’ hands to read, do assignments and pass examinations
- ‘Undisturbed full-time jobs and families,’
- The ‘program was inexpensive’;
- ‘Location of the university’ and
- ‘Opportunity to acquire more knowledge’.

Conversely, not all the Distance Education students felt this way, as 16 such students felt they have made a wrong choice in the mode of delivery - citing ‘lack of contact with other students’ as the reason for this.

Another aspect identified by certain students from Distance Education was a major problem of ‘loneliness’ (McKnight, 2000; Mostert, 2006) – this was despite endeavours by institutions to bridge the gap between the two delivery modes. This is an implication in relation to the main research question raised for this study, which will be addressed in the latter part of this study.

#### **h) Types of instructional technology available to students while studying (question 22)**

It has been suggested that instructional technology in higher education can enhance ‘more flexible access to university study’ and ‘choice for students’ (McCann et al. 1998), both of which have a direct bearing on the question of what type of technology is available to students enrolled for the program while studying. Therefore, Table 6.8 represents the types of instructional media available to students while studying, attending lectures or answering assignments.

Additionally, it can be noted the term *Local Students* refers to the Distance Education students, who live within a range of 50 km from the University of

Pretoria, and attended lectures on the Groenkloof Campus; while the term *Distant Students* are those students who attended classes off this campus.

**Table 6.8: Raw scores of the types of instructional technology available to students while studying (n = 172)**

Media	DISTANCE EDUCATION				CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION	
	Local Students (within 50 km range)		Distant Students (beyond 50 km range)		Yes	No
	Yes	No	Yes	No		
Print	28	1	64	13	16	0
Audio	7	12	8	41	1	4
ICT	5	12	19	37	11	2
Radio	10	9	17	35	3	4
Television	9	9	18	35	3	4

Missing frequencies:

Print	V42	50
Audio	V43	99
ICT	V44	85
Radio	V45	93
Television	V46	93

The available options were:

- Print,
- Audio Cassettes,
- Computer Technology (ICT),
- Radio; and
- Television.

A total of 108 students from Distance and Conventional Education – of whom 64 students (59%) were from among the *Distant Students* group of Distance Education students – indicated the category *Print* media as their main learning technology during their studies.

Reasons for this are connected with:

- Firstly, the fact that most students from Distance Education were from rural areas, and had no access to modern technology. For them, this forced the programme to be entirely print-based. For instance, recent statistics on the technology profile of enrolled students from Distance Education indicated that only 10% of the students had access to ICT (i.e. Internet and E-mail) (UP, 2006a).
- Secondly, the Distance Education Unit of the University of Pretoria (probably due to the first reason) relies heavily on first and second generation delivery modes (see Sections 2.4.3.2 and 3.5.2). But the question arises: to what extent does this impact on student performance? This aspect will be critically assessed in the summary and conclusion section (Section 8) in the latter part of this study.

**i) Impact of completion of programme on students' future job expectations (question 23)**

Responses (from participants from both modes) received, suggested the following as students' future expectations of the impact of the completion of the programme on their job:

- 'Drive for knowledge',
- 'Understanding new challenges',
- 'Promotional prospects',
- 'Improved management skills',
- 'Better remuneration', and
- 'Better opportunities'

These factors were the motivating thoughts for all the students and they expected these factors to accrue unto them at the completion of the BEd (Hons) programme.

This study supports the understanding that adult learners have well defined goals and are motivated (Dibiase, 2000). However, there is a need to examine the extent these motivational factors actually contribute to the success of students and to the completion of their studies (HELP, 1999; Labuschagne and Mashile, 2005). Further references will be made to these assertions in relation to the research question(s) in the latter part of this study.

### **6.3.1.3 Discussion of the findings in term of the first and second sub-research questions**

Stemming from the main research question (See Section 6.3.1.2 on page 240.) are the sub-research questions 1 and 2 (which was partially answered in Section 6.3.1.1.1):

Sub-research question 1

*Why is distance education often seen as being inferior to conventional education when assessed in terms of access, delivery and output?*

Sub-research question 2

*'...To what extent does educational technology (in the modes in focus) extend access to students?'*

In an attempt to answer these sub-research questions, the students were questioned on their attitudes to several aspects related to the study programme under review (See Section 6.3.1.1 [2a – i]). Their responses include the following:

- That the university has an *orientation programme* available for Conventional Education students enrolling for the BEd (Hons) study programme for the first time, and that the University of Pretoria also provided their distance counterparts with *tutorial letters* to serve as the main tool for fulfilling this function. However, the majority of the Distance

- Education students may have not regarded these letters as fulfilling that role. Nonetheless, this process has been regarded by Raphael (2006) as being important to familiarising students with the educational system within their chosen study programme at the university. This is done to guard against low-morale, and explain the study programme prepared for them;
- That most of the distance education students might not have put to good use the “tutorial letters” given to them by the university, which made them feel that the university did not have in place, non-instructional support while some agreed that the university did so through the *tutorial letters*. Unfortunately, in literature it has been asserted that the lack of this could have disastrous effects on student performance and their completion rate. Both of which are directly related to sub-research question 1, as the low-completion rate of students from Distance Education is one of the major reasons why it is regarded as inferior to conventional education;
  - In relation to the point above, students identified some areas of need for counselling (*career, studying, time management and guidance on examinations and assignments*). Interestingly, these elements have been identified as possible problems that adult learners struggle with (Van Schoor, Mill & Potgieter, 2002; Mostert, 2006);
  - That the institution made *academic advising services* available to the students – which most made use of. This was because students had access to *tutorial letters, information booklets, and contact sessions*, which all result in motivating students highly (Qurashi & Antosz, 2002);
  - Students on the program had diverse motivational factors for enrolling for the BEd (Hons) study programme, which ranged from *acquiring further knowledge to remuneration improvement*, to mention but a few; and most of the factors were related to the impact of the completion of the programme on their jobs. Related to this was that a high percentage of these students were of the opinion their choice of delivery mode suited them; and, lastly

- The instructional technology provided by the institution – largely print-based – gave students access to higher education. (Most of the students enrolled for the BEd (Hons) study programme were from rural areas and would otherwise not have had access to such education had the university not adopted the policy to provide distance education studies.)

Nevertheless, the researcher will critically evaluate the implications of these findings in the latter part of this research study.

#### **6.3.1.3.1 Provision and assessment of teaching and instructional strategies available to distance and contact education students at the University of Pretoria**

In this section, questions are posed about the teaching and instructional strategies available at the University of Pretoria, to investigate the quality of the learning experience which students from Distance and Conventional Education were exposed to, and especially ascertain whether there existed any difference between the qualities of the learning experiences of students from each mode.

Hence, it was with care and focus that the researcher recorded student responses, to maintain an accurate description of these responses that were, in their turn, descriptive in nature (See Section 5.2.2.1). Simultaneously and where it was discovered this would greatly assist in the answering of the related research question(s), distinction has been made between responses of students from Distance and Conventional Education. The researcher believes this section is of special importance, as the University of Pretoria is known for its stance on quality (see Section 4.6) and students from both delivery modes have asserted that *quality* is their main reason for enrolling with this university (Section 6.2.1.1.1 -f).

**a) Punctuality of lecturers at the start of classes (question 24)**

One hundred and sixty-two students (99%) from both modes of delivery responded in the affirmative to the question of regular attendance and punctuality of lecturers at the start of class sessions. This perhaps reflects the attitude toward responsibility held by the university and its lecturers involved in the teaching programme. The researcher believes this aspect has contributed much to support the definition of the term *quality* as defined by the university.

**b) Meeting with lecturers for support (question 25), regularity of the meeting (question 26) and methods of contacting lecturers (question 27)**

A large percentage of students from Distance and Conventional Education (80%) had the opportunity of meeting with the lecturers for support (this tallied with their response to questions 16 and 17 – Section 6.3.1.1.2). However, many of those that answered in the negative (18% out of the remaining 20%) were, in the main, students from Distance Education who lived a great distance from the university, a situation that only permitted them opportunity to meet with their lecturers during the contact sessions. And as attendance at these sessions was not compulsory, it was only when these students made the effort to attend the contact sessions that such contact was possible.

Interestingly, one of the main reasons indicated by the students for commencing their studies with the University of Pretoria was belief in the *quality* of education delivered by the institution (Section 6.3.1.1.1-f) – this is part of what makes for quality (Holmberg, 1995; Stark & Warne, 1999; CAEL, 2000; Kelsey & D’souza, 2004).

On the regularity of these meetings, the following became evident:

- 31 students (20%) from both modes met with their lecturers *once* in a year for support;

- 91 students (59%) met their lecturers *twice* in a year. (However, it must be noted that Distance Education students formed the majority of the respondents (18% out of 20% and 57% out of 59% respectively), who had contact with their lecturers during the biannual contact sessions.);
- Four students (3%) from both modes met them *thrice* a year;
- While 19 students (12%) met with their lecturers 'more than thrice a year'. However, it is interesting to note here that 7% of the students in this last group were contact students on the campus.

Conversely, it can be noted that 9 students (6%) from both modes indicated that as at the time of this investigation they had yet to meet their lecturers. Interestingly too, the majority (6%) of these students (6%) were the *Distant* Distance Education students.

Divergences in the frequencies of students in meeting with lecturers for support becomes clearer when one understands that the Conventional Education students had better advantage simply because of their proximity to the campus. Conversely, students from Distance Education only had this opportunity during their contact sessions. It is hoped that during the course of this analysis, probable implications of this in relation to the quality of the learning experience provided for the students will be investigated. In relation to this Table 6.9 represents the methods of students' communication with their lecturers:

**Table 6.9: Methods of contacting lecturers (as indicated by respondents) based on an open-ended question**

Methods of Contact	Distance Education		Total	Conventional Education	Total
	Local	Distant			
Telephone	33	68	101	19	120
E-mail	1	3	4	7	11
Fax	1	10	11	2	13
SMS	0	1	1	0	1
Personal Visits	3	8	11	0	11
Never	5	13	18	0	18
TOTAL	43	103	146	28	174

To the question on the methods students used to contact their lecturers, 120 students (69%) from both modes of delivery contacted lecturers over the *telephone*. (This aspect was supported by 68 students (39%) of the *distant* Distance Education category.) This contrasted greatly to the other possible methods of contact, largely due to the students living a distance from the university - a high percentage (98%) of which, according to a recent survey conducted by the Distance Education Unit of the university, having access to telecommunications as at the time of this investigation (UP, 2006a). Other less popular methods of contact cited by students included E-mail; *Fax* (used mostly by contact students who resided in urban areas); *SMS* and *Personal Visits*.

Further to this, approximately 10% of the students indicated they *never* contacted their lecturers, providing reasons that included: 'I don't know how', '... no means of contact', '... I don't know them before the sessions' and 'It is difficult' because 'it's costly'.

However, literature abounds with the necessity and the value of contacting faculty members (McKnight, 2000; Kelsey and D'souza, 2004). Further implications of all these findings will be investigated in the latter part of this study.

**c) Staff-student appraisal (question 28) and time of such appraisal (question 29)**

In response to the question on whether they were provided opportunity to assess their lecturers, 122 students (75%) from both modes of delivery answered in the affirmative, while 40 (25%) answered in the negative. In addition to this, distance education students' responses to the second question showed that assessment took place at the end of each block when they met with their lecturers for the last time (See the CDROM submitted with this thesis for copies of the appraisal form for both modes of delivery).

Student overall impressions of their lecturers is reflected in Table 6.10.

**Table 6.10: Time of staff-student appraisal given by students from both modes, based on an open-ended question**

Time	Respondents	Percentage
0 – 3 months	27	23%
4 – 6 months	70	61%
7 -9 months	6	5%
10 – 12 months	11	10%
1 year+	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	115	100%

Appraisal of lecturers by students has been touted as an important aspect of quality assurance in higher education, as the students are one of the stakeholders in the learning process, and more so because they are directly at the receiving end of such services. This is supported in literature by Perraton and Hulsmann, 1998; QAA, 1999; Lomas, 2004; Williams, 2005; Ekong et al. 2006.

**d) Method of staff-student appraisal (question 30) and rating of such method (question 31)**

In responding to this open-ended question, those who agreed that periodic appraisal of lecturers did take place, terms such as *assessment sheets*, *questionnaire* and *evaluation forms* were used to describe its format. However, Table 6.11 represents the rating of staff-student appraisal:

**Table 6.11: Rating of staff-student appraisal method by students from both modes**

Remark	Distance Mode	%	Contact Mode	%	Total	%
Poor	5	5%	2	9%	7	5%
Fair	17	15%	2	9%	19	14%
Good	63	56%	16	73%	79	59%
Excellent	27	24%	2	9%	29	22%
<b>Total</b>	112	100%	22	100%	134	100%

As can be seen from this table, students from Distance and Conventional Education evaluated the staff appraisal method in the following way:

- 7 students (5%) rated the method as *Poor*,
- 19 students (14%) rated it as *Fair*,
- 79 students (59%) affirmed it was *Good*, and
- 29 students (22%) as *Excellent*.

All in all, the researcher is of the opinion that an overall rate of 81% (i.e. combining *Good* and *Excellent* rates) approval by the students affirmed the method as acceptable. As earlier said, involving students in this type of appraisal, may be regarded as good practice at ensuring the quality of a study program (Lomas, 2004).

**e) Completion of learning style assessment questionnaire (question 32) and knowledge of personal learning preferences (question 33)**

Students from Distance and Conventional Education were asked questions on whether they had completed any *learning style assessment questionnaire* provided by the University of Pretoria and whether they were aware of their own study preferences – to understand whether the university had taken these into consideration in the course of preparing their learning materials. According to Logan and Thomas (2002), the knowledge of this becomes handy when writing such materials.

Tables 6.12 and 6.13 reflect the responses on the completion of learning style assessment questionnaire by students from Distance and Conventional Education:

**Table 6.12: Completion of learning style assessment questionnaire (n = 172)**

Response	Distance Education		Contact Education		Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Yes</b>	58	42%	16	64%	74	46%
<b>No</b>	79	58%	9	36%	88	54%
<b>Total</b>	137	100%	25	100%	162	100%

Missing frequencies: 10

In response to the question on whether they had completed a learning style assessment questionnaire, 74 students (46%) from Distance and Conventional Education confirmed they had done so, while 88 students (54%) responded negatively to the question. However, it should be noted that students' responses to further question on this (see Table 6.13) suggested that it was not the university that carried out this assessment.

**Table 6.13: Knowledge of personal learning preferences (n= 172)**

Response	Distance Education		Contact Education		Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Yes	102	64%	21	13%	123	77%
No	33	21%	4	2%	37	23%
<b>Total</b>	135	85%	25	15%	160	100%

Missing frequencies: 12

Conversely, it could be deduced from Table 6.13 that 123 students (77%) were aware of their personal learning preferences, while 37 students (23%) were not aware. This suggests that the majority of those that knew about their learning preferences probably did so not through the assistance of the university, but through other means, not unconnected with their teaching profession.

Additionally, Goold and Rimmer (2000) have stressed that learning preferences have been identified as having some influence on the effectiveness of teaching and pedagogical materials.

**f) Method of student assessment (question 34)**

In response to the question of methods applied for student assessment, 89 students (61%) from Distance and Conventional Education affirmed that the university applied the formative assessment method, while 57 students (39%) also identified that the university applied the summative assessment method. From this, one could say that both methods were used for the students. Also, further evidence from the Tutorial Booklet showed that the university employed the self-assessment method (UP, 2006c).

This is in line with the suggestion of Mostert (2006:17) that there is always the need for 'continual formative assessments to allow the learner to determine his/her preparedness to write the summative' examination.

**g) Length of time for feedback on assignments and examinations (question 35 a & b) and Due date for the submission of assignments (question 36)**

In response to the question on the average length of time they waited for feedback on assignments and examinations, student responses ranged from *1 week* to *18 weeks*. However, 52 students (34%) indicated *4 weeks* (with 44 of these students (29%) being from Distance Education). Conversely, 11 students (48%) from Conventional Education indicated *2 weeks*. Possible reasons for the differences are explained later.

Furthermore, Table 6.14 represents student responses to the question whether due dates for submission of their assignments or not:

**Table 6.14: Attachment of due dates to submission of assignments (n = 172)**

Response	Distance Education		Contact Education		Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Yes</b>	109	69.43%	18	11.46%	127	81%
<b>No</b>	26	16.56%	4	2.55%	30	19%
<b>Total</b>	135	85.99%	22	14.01%	157	100%

Missing frequencies: 15

From Table 6.14, it is indicated that 127 students (81%) from Distance and Conventional Education agreed that due dates were often supplied with their assignments. (Further breakdown of this, indicates that 69.43% of this number were students from Distance Education, while 11.46% were students from Conventional Education.) Conversely, 30 students (19%) disagreed that due dates were often supplied with their assignments. (Further breakdown of this, indicates that 16.56% of this number were students from Distance Education, while 2.55% were students from Conventional Education.)

In response to the question on the feedback times for examinations, students indicated the range of *1 week to 20 weeks*. It can be noted that the majority of the students from Conventional Education indicated *1 week*, while majority of the students from Distance Education indicated *4 weeks*. In addition to this, only one student from both modes indicated *20 weeks*. However, for instance, dates when distance education students would get feedback on these had been set in the Tutorial Booklet (Up, 2006c).

Responses to the first question showed that the university attached due dates to the submission of student assignments, while the divergences in the time of feedback of examinations may be connected with the fact that there are about four ways through which distance education students could access their results: via an MTN line; Short Message Service (SMS) technology; the WebCT; and via postage (which might not exclude delays in the postal delivery system; the distance of affected students and possible lapses from both students and the administrative system (see UP, 2006c). This aspect was addressed in the qualitative session (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.2). Conversely, students from Conventional Education were always on campus to check their results, thereby leading to prompt feedback.

Nevertheless, attaching due dates to assignments and providing prompt feedback on these assignments and examinations have been identified as an essential part of a quality assurance system (Chickering & Gamson, 1991; QAA, 1999; CAEL, 2000; Chickering & Erhmann, 2003; Clark 2003; Ramsden, 2003; Codde, 2006). This assists student motivation (Davis, 1993). All these factors are directly related to the throughput rates of students.

**h) Student comments on high expectations of lecturers in relation to their achievement (question 37)**

In response to the question on whether the students experienced high expectations of lecturers in relation to their achievement, 141 students (86.5%)

from Distance and Conventional Education indicated they knew what their lecturers' expectations were in terms of their achievement, while 22 students (13.5%) did not know. According to scholars (Spady & Marshall, 1991; Killen, 2002), each learning experience must be guided by clarity of focus, which must be well articulated to the recipients (Davis, 1993; Willis & Kissane, 1997).

**i) Students' satisfaction with the method of their assessment (question 38) and possible suggestions on it (question 39)**

Table 6.15, represents student satisfaction level with the assessment method applied:

**Table 6.15: Students' satisfaction with method of their assessment (n = 172)**

Response	Distance Education		Contact Education		Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Yes	116	71.61%	22	13.58%	138	85.19%
No	22	13.58%	2	1.23%	24	14.81%
<b>Total</b>	138	85.19%	24	14.81%	162	100%

Missing frequencies: 10

From Table 6.15, 138 students (85%) from Distance and Conventional Education were satisfied with the method of assessment applied by the university, while 24 students (15%) indicated otherwise. Nonetheless, attention should be drawn to the fact that 22 students (13.58%) out of the 24 students (19%) dissatisfied with the method of assessment were from Distance Education. This situation may well be connected with the comments provided by students to the next question answered below.

Continuing with this question, students from both modes gave the following comments and opinions, providing possible suggestions to improve the method of assessment (question 39):

- Learning materials should be dispatched on time to allow students to embark immediately on their studies,
- The need to meet lecturers before dealing with assignments,
- Lecturers should mark assignments so that students could identify problems before the examinations,
- Students should be given an opportunity to write supplementary examinations.
- Feedback should be sent on time,
- Transparency is expected of lecturers,
- Students should be given more time for assignments,
- Access to past question papers.
- Better weighting for assignments,
- Review of exam questions (should be simpler because of 2<sup>nd</sup> language speakers) and dates (which often followed too closely)

Though many of the students from Distance and Conventional Education were basically satisfied with the method of assessment applied by the university, it is the researcher's opinion attention should be paid to the few dissenting voices because they too are *customers* having needs to be satisfied. Nevertheless, one of the students felt that 'some students do not do assignments up until after the contact sessions, [thus] fabricating excuses for late submission'. This suggests that some of the reasons for student dissatisfaction may be connected with their own faults. This aspect formed part of the focus of attention during the interview sessions with management (See Chapter 7, Section 7.3.3.3).

**j) Distribution of tutorial materials to students from both modes (question 40)**

Table 6.16, represents the opinions of students from Distance and Conventional Education, regarding the way study guides and readers were delivered to them by the university:

**Table 6.16: Raw scores of the distributions of tutorial materials to respondents from both modes (n = 172)**

Possible means of distribution	Yes			No			Grand Total
	DE	CE	Total	DE	CE	Total	
By post	139	5	144	0	5	5	149
Electronically	1	2	3	17	4	21	24
Personally collected	5	16	21	16	1	17	38
Faxed	0	2	2	19	4	23	25

Key: DE = Distance Education students. CE = Conventional Education students

Missing frequencies:

By Post	V75	23
Electronically	V76	148
Personally collected	V77	134
Faxed	V79	147

Table 6.16, indicates 139 students from Distance Education – of which 100 students were from the *distant* group – received their study materials by *post*. The high missing frequencies indicated suggests that the *post* still is the main means of distributing study materials to Distance Education students, especially those located in rural and sub-urban areas (Adekanmbi, c2004). Conversely, most students of Conventional Education (16 out of 17) collected their study materials personally. Another means of collection – only indicated by students from Conventional Education – was *Fax*.

### k) Didactic qualities of the tutorial materials (question 41)

The phrase *didactic qualities inherent in a learning material*, refers to a learning material being used as an aid to ‘create desirable conditions that will facilitate effective self-learning’ (Rahman, 2006). Therefore, in measuring such quality of the learning material supplied to the students of the BEd (Hons) study programme, the attitude of the students to questions in this section (i.e. questions 41 – 44) were vital, as students from both modes of delivery used the same study

materials. Table 6.17, represents the student rating from Distance and Conventional Education with regard to their attitude toward the didactic quality of their tutorial materials:

**Table 6.17: Opinions of combined distance and conventional students regarding the didactic qualities of the tutorial materials (n = 172)**

Didactic Qualities	Respondents' Views on Quality of Readers							
	Poor	%	Fair	%	Good	%	Excellent	%
Relevance to Personal Objectives	0	0%	23	15%	99	64%	33	21%
Challenging	0	0%	11	7%	90	59%	51	34%
Interesting	1	0.7%	24	16%	88	58.67%	37	24.67%
Language	1	0.7%	23	15%	88	57.89%	40	26.32%
Illustrative (Adequate examples)	4	3%	40	27%	73	48%	34	22%
Adequate exercises	1	0.7%	22	14%	88	58%	41	27%
Tone (Conversational)	1	0.7%	38	25%	87	58%	24	16%

Missing frequencies:

Relevance to personal objectives	V79	17
Challenging	V80	20
Interesting	V81	22
Language	V82	20
Illustrative	V83	21
Adequate exercises	V84	20
Tone	V85	22

From Table 6.17, it can be deduced that most students from Distance and Conventional Education rated the readers provided by the university as *Good* (though with varied percentages) in regard to didactic quality. This was followed – in reducing number – by ratings of *Excellent* and *Fair* – while a minor group rated them as *Poor*. (The high missing frequencies indicated for this question are connected with the fact that some students did not respond to all aspects of this question.)

Although this response suggests a relative high student acceptance of the didactic quality inherent in the study materials (a bonus for the university), there may still be benefit in considering the views of the minority, so that the university may consolidate the materials used in the Distance and Conventional Education study programmes – especially as the number of students attracted to the distance education study program is constantly increasing (See Section 6.2).

**I) Content, goals and objectives of tutorial materials (question 42)**

Table 6.18, provides a description of the content of the study readers, as perceived by students from Distance and Conventional Education:

**Table 6.18: Content of tutorial materials as provided by respondents from both modes of delivery (n = 172)**

Content	Respondents' Views						Missing Frequencies
	Always		Sometimes		Never		
	DE	CE	DE	CE	DE	CE	
Course goals	115	16	14	2	3	0	22
Course objectives	114	16	15	2	3	0	22
Grading and evaluation criteria	99	14	29	3	6	1	20
Grading rubrics	59	9	39	6	28	2	29
Examples of good student work in the syllabus	44	4	31	7	53	5	28

Keys: DE = Distance Education. CE = Conventional Education

Table 6.18, represents that the majority of students from both Distance and Conventional Education described the readers as *always* providing: course goals, course objectives, grading and evaluation criteria and the grading rubrics. However, the study readers were rated low for not containing 'examples of good student work in the syllabuses. The high missing frequencies were the result of

students not responding to all the items in the question. This is in spite of the selected items having been identified as good tools in assessing the quality of tutorial material (Clarke, 2001).

However, it should be noted that most of the students who responded to the last item of the question were Distance Education students. (This may be an indication that the readers did not meet all the needs of these students.) According to Moore and Kearsley (2005), ensuring that students have met learning outcomes is very important and attending to the above mentioned factor will assist in achieving this aim.

**m) Achievement of cognitive skills in the tutorial materials (question 43)**

**Table 6.19: Average percentages of achievement of cognitive skills (n = 172)**

	Respondents' Views		
	Always	Sometimes	Never
Analysis	80%	18%	2%
Synthesis	73%	22%	5%
Application	82%	17%	1%
Evaluation	80%	17%	3%
Total Average Percentage	79%	18%	3%

Missing Frequencies: Analysis V91 27  
 Synthesis V92 28  
 Application V93 25  
 Evaluation V94 26

As their responses were similar, Table 6.19, represents the combined views of students from Distance and Conventional Education, on the achievement of the cognitive skills listed in the question. An average percentage was found for each item:

- An average of 79% - a good majority - of the students indicated that their readers *Always* encouraged them in the achievement of cognitive skills;
- 18% indicated they were *Sometimes* so encouraged,
- While only 3% said *Never*.

Research has shown that quality ‘...teaching begins with careful design of courses, materials and learning activities, [which] focus on high level cognitive skills’ (Cavanaugh and Cavanaugh, 2004).

**n) Extent of students’ dependence on tutorial material for study (question 44)**

Table 6.20 reflects the extent of dependence on readers by students from both modes of delivery:

**Table 6.20: Extent of students’ dependence on tutorial materials for study (n = 172)**

Respondents’ Comments	DE	%	CE	%	Total	%
To a large extent	107	78.7%	12	71%	119	77.7%
To some extent	28	20.6%	5	29%	33	21.6%
Not at all	1	0.7%	0	0%	1	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>100%</b>

Missing frequencies: 19

In responding to the question on the extent to which these students depended on tutorial materials for study, the following replies were indicated:

- ‘To a large extent’ – Most of the students indicated they were dependent on the tutorial materials to a large extent. (78.7% of the students from Distance Education and 71% of the students from Conventional Education indicated this.)

- 'To some extent' – A few students indicated they were to some extent dependent on the tutorial materials (20.6% of the students from Distance Education and 29% of the students from Conventional Education indicated this.).
- 'Not at all' – Only a minority of the students indicated they were not at all dependent on the tutorial material (0.7% of the students from Distance Education and 0% of the students from Conventional Education indicated this).

This was a major indication that the BEd (Hons) study programme was mainly print-based.

**o) Accommodation of students during classes/contact sessions on the campus (question 45) and its description (question 46)**

The response of students to this question of accommodation during classes was as follows:

- Students from Conventional Education indicated that 91% of them attended class from *Home* – which could refer to living with relatives/friends. (Their classes were conducted every fortnight, on the weekend.)
- Students from Distance Education indicated that 70% of them attended contact sessions from *Home* – which could refer to staying over at relatives/friends. The remaining 30% of these students made use of *Hotel* accommodation during these sessions.

It can be noted that no category was provided for the campus residences in the questionnaire, as it was the policy of the university (as at the time of this investigation) not to provide accommodation for students involved in this study programme.

During a post-interview with the policy maker, the researcher discovered that the university did not have the capacity to cater for accommodating the possible thousands of students that were admitted each year into the Distance Education study programme. It was also discovered that a previous arrangement with hotels in the area to provide a shuttle service to the campus for students was discontinued due to student complaints of high charge increases by these hotels for this arrangement.

However, campus accommodation was available to students from Conventional Education of the Faculty of Education, and this had been offered to a few of the younger, full-time BEd (Hons) students. The possible implications of these matters will be considered in the latter part of this study.

**p) Attendance requirements expected from students for attending distance and contact sessions (question 47)**

The majority of the students from Conventional Education indicated their unhappiness at being expected, by the University of Pretoria, to have a class attendance of 100%, while their Distance Education counterparts were encouraged (but not compelled) to attend two contact sessions for the year. In reply to this, the Distance Education study programme manager indicated possible lack of funds for the students from Distance Education who lived a great distance away from the campus and who had personal commitments to attend to, as reasons for the implementation of this policy. However, he went on to emphasise that it had been the observation of the university, over the years, of the probability of students who did attend such sessions performing better academically than those students who did not attend. He concluded this statement by saying that research in this regard was still in progress as at the time of this investigation.

Nevertheless, personal contact in education has been described as very important, and which may be ‘...severely and sometimes permanently

compromised' (Knight, 2000:2) if not consciously maintained. Hence, it has been advised that adequate contact sessions should be provided in distance education. The relevance and implications of all these matters will be critically investigated in the latter part of this research study.

**q) Availability of library books to students for further reading while not on campus (question 48)**

In response to this question on the availability of library books to students for further reading while not on campus, 96 students (70%) from Distance Education indicated they received their books through the *post* when not on campus, while 14 students (82%) from Conventional Education collected their books personally. This becomes understandable as the latter group of students attended classes on the campus, while the former group of students were scattered in different centres across the country. However, according to the Distance Education Unit manager, the university provided adequate readings within the learning materials, – to aid, especially, the students from Distance Education in their studies. But the researcher feels that this did not negate the possibility of students wanting or needing to do additional reading.

According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2004), it should be expected that library resources at an institution of higher education be sufficient to meet the needs of all its students, irrespective of their location. The possible effects of these findings will be discussed in the latter part of this research study.

**r) Contact with other students while on campus (from the contact students) or off campus (from distance education students) (question 49)**

In responding to this question on whether students ever contacted fellow students, the following response was given:

- 15 students (11%), who were all from Distance Education indicated that they never contacted their colleagues;
- 4 students (3%) from both delivery modes contacted other students through *E-mail*;
- 2 students (1%) did so through *fax*,
- 95 students (61%) of them made contact over the *telephone*, which sometimes involved the sending of *SMS messages*.

Even though Moore (1989) has suggested that student-to-student interaction is very important to success in their studies, there are currently mixed attitudes toward this matter (Kelsey & D'souza, 2004).

**s) Rating of the quality of the services of the administrative staff to students (questions 50-55)**

The establishment of excellent administrative services, to support the teaching within an institution, has been regarded as a central aspect of quality in higher education (Perraton and Hulsmann, 1998; QAA, 2006). Therefore, it is important to involve the students in rating the services rendered by the administrative staff of the University of Pretoria, especially as the students were at the receiving end of such services. Tables 6.21 – 6.25 reflect the impression of students from Distance and Conventional Education on these matters – and where necessary – these have been separated to not impair the validity of the findings of this study.

**Table 6.21: Rating of the quality of the services of the administrative staff to students (n = 172)**

Student Ratings	DE	%	CE	%	Total	Total %
Poor	6	4%	0	0%	6	4%
Fair	14	11%	2	11%	16	10%
Good	69	51%	13	72%	82	54%
Excellent	46	34%	3	17%	49	32%
Total	135	100%	18	100%	153	100%

Missing frequencies: 19

Table 6.21, indicates the student response to the question of rating the quality of services provided by the administrative staff at the University of Pretoria:

- 46 students (34%) from Distance Education rated this aspect as *Excellent*, as did 3 students (17%) from Conventional Education – with a total average of 32%;
- 69 students (51%) from Distance Education rated this aspect as *Good*, as did 13 students (72%) from Conventional Education – with a total average of 54%;
- 14 students (11%) from Distance Education rated this aspect as *Fair*, as did 2 students (11%) from Conventional Education – with a total average of 10%;
- 6 students (4%) from Distance Education rated this aspect as *Poor*. As no Conventional Education students supported this category, the total average is also 4%.

All in all, the researcher is inclined to agree with the 86% of the total student body, who perceive the quality of the services rendered by the administrative staff of this university as *Excellent and Good*.

To buttress this, Table 6.22 provides an indication of how regularly necessary information got to students from Distance and Conventional Education.:

**Table 6.22: Opinions of students regarding the flow of regular information (n = 172)**

Respondents' Ratings	DE	%	CE	%	Total	Total %
Rarely	7	5%	3	17%	10	6%
Often	29	21%	8	44%	37	24%
Always	102	74%	7	39%	109	70%
<b>Total</b>	138	100%	18	100%	156	100%

Missing frequencies: 16

Table 6.22, indicates the student response to the question of their opinion with regard to the flow of regular information (concerning, for example, contact sessions and examinations):

- 102 students (70%) from Distance Education indicated that they *always* received necessary information on a regular basis, and 7 students (39%) from Conventional Education gave same response – with a total average of 70%;
- 29 students (21%) from Distance Education indicated that they *Often* received necessary information on a regular basis, and 8 students (44%) from Conventional Education gave the same response, with a total average of 24%;
- 7 students (5%) from Distance Education indicated that they *Rarely* received necessary information on a regular basis, and 3 students (17%) from Conventional Education gave the same response - with a total average of 6%.

It can be noted, 103 students (81%) of Distance and Conventional Education felt free to contact the staff *Anytime* or *When needed*. Of these

- 13 students (10%), from Distance Education did so during *Contact Sessions*;
- 4 students (3%) only during registration,
- 1% of the students *Rarely* contacted the staff,
- 5% of the students *Never* contacted the staff.

In response to the question of the methods the students use to contact the administrative staff of the university, the following responses were received from students from Distance and Conventional Education:

- 112 students (84%) contacted staff by *telephone*;
- 16 students (12%) contacted staff through *personal visits*;
- 2 students (1.50%) contacted staff by *Fax*,
- 1 student (0.75%) contacted staff by *SMS messaging*, while
- 2 (1.50%), who were only distance education students had not contacted them at all as at the time of this investigation.

Furthermore, Table 6.23 indicates whether a specific time was listed as to when students from Distance and Conventional Education could contact the administrative staff:

**Table 6.23: Listing of a specific time as to when to contact administrative staff (n = 172)**

Respondents' Remarks	Distance Education		Conventional Education		Grand Total	Total %
	Total	%	Total	%		
<b>Yes</b>	57	43%	12	71%	69	46%
<b>No</b>	77	57%	5	29%	82	54%
<b>Grand Total</b>	134	100%	17	100%	151	100%

Missing frequencies: 21

From this table the following is indicated:

- 77 students (57%) from Distance Education were not aware of such a listing, while 5 students (29%) from Conventional Education agreed with this – with a total average of 54%,
- 57 students (43%) from Distance Education and 12 students (17%) from Conventional Education were aware of such a listing – with a total average of 46%.

Nevertheless, the “Admin Booklet” (UP, 2006b) for the distance education students showed that this was indicated, and the researcher’s earlier observation

about students not availing themselves of given information seemed to be justified.

In reflecting on this matter, scholars have proposed that prompt response to students' enquiries greatly enhances the quality of service provided by an institution (Perraton & Hulsmann, 1998; Council on Higher Education Accreditation [CHEA], 2002; NADEOSA, 2003; Antony & Gnanam, 2004). However, the researcher is of the opinion that the posting of a listing of specific contact times that students may consult when needing to consult with the administrative staff of the university will further enhance the quality of service provided by this institution.

**Table 6.24: Availability of names and contact details of staff to students (n = 172)**

Respondents' Remarks	Distance Education		Conventional Education		Grand Total	Total %
	Total	%	Total	%		
<b>Yes</b>	75	54%	15	83%	90	58%
<b>No</b>	63	46%	3	17%	66	42%
<b>Grand Total</b>	138	100%	18	100%	156	100%

Missing frequencies: 16

Further, as indicated in Table 6.24:

- 90 students (58%) from Distance and Conventional Education had specific names of staff to contact, while 66 students (42%) indicated otherwise.

A plausible explanation for the high positive response from students from Conventional Education (83%) may be attributed to these students frequently being on the campus, in contrast to students from Distance Education (54%) whose collective response to this aspect tended to be negative. Allied to this matter, a senior administrative staff member admitted, in the course of an

interview, that the Distance Education Unit was short staffed as at the time of this investigation. Nevertheless, the researcher is of the opinion that making available names and contact numbers of staff members does assist students in the course of their studies.

**Table 6.25: Linking of members of staff to specific tasks (n = 172)**

Respondents' Remarks	Distance Education		Conventional Education		Grand Total	Total %
	Total	%	Total	%		
Yes	103	79%	17	100%	120	81%
No	28	21%	0	0%	28	19%
<b>Grand Total</b>	131	100%	17	100%	148	100%

Missing frequencies: 24

In addition to this, Table 6.25 indicates that of the 148 students who responded to this question, 81% linked members of the administrative staff to specific tasks or functions, while the 19% who did not agree with this aspect were all from Distance Education.

While writing on the issues discussed above, QAA (1999) has observed that a quality run administrative system is essential for the success of students, especially when dealing with distance education. The implications of these findings will be discussed in the latter part of this study.

#### **6.3.1.4 Discussion of the findings in terms of the third research question**

Most of the questions posed in the questionnaire that was completed by students of Distance and Conventional Education, focused largely on *teaching and instructional strategies* of the University of Pretoria, as these students perceived them. Most of the questions were also worded in such a way to extract in-depth, qualitative information on each element of the question. The sub-research question below applies to this section:

### Sub - Research Question 3

*‘To what extent does the quality of learning experience in Distance Education compare with that of Conventional Education in general and, more specifically, at the University of Pretoria?’*

Subsequently, student responses revealed the following:

- A large percentage of students from Distance and Conventional Education indicated that their lecturers were always present and punctual at the start of classes, and that they then had opportunity to meet their lecturers for academic support. However, it was revealed that students from Conventional Education had an advantage over their Distant Education counterparts in that – as they were always on campus – such contact could be enjoyed as necessary, while students from Distant Education could only enjoy such contact during the contact sessions, which were not compulsory to attend.
- Students from Distance and Conventional Education often contacted their lecturers over the *telephone*, while others did so through *personal visits*”, *SMS*, *E-mail* and *Fax*. However, some of the students, mainly from Distance Education, never did.
- According to the majority of the students from Distance and Conventional Education, the university regularly conducted *student-staff appraisals* at the end of each block/module, by means of a questionnaire. The researcher is of the opinion that student involvement in this exercise is an excellent move towards measuring the quality of the learning experiences of the students.
- Most students from Distance and Conventional Education indicated they had never been given any *learning style assessment questionnaire* to complete, by the university. However, a high percentage of students from both groups were already aware of their personal learning preferences, which the researcher assumed was due to their teaching experience.

- However, the issue here – for the researcher – was, in what way could the university utilize this information to its advantage, when preparing learning materials for study programmes, as students from both delivery modes used the same study materials – a decision by the university which the researcher supports. The application of this information could also indicate added quality, which the university is known for.
- Many of the students from Distance and Conventional Education indicated that the university used both the *formative* (which also included self-assessment by the students), and summative methods of assessment as assignments formed part of the final year mark. Additionally, many agreed that *due dates* were tied to the submission of their assignments, on which they received prompt feedback. However, the time varied when it came to the students from Distance Education and the researcher assumed that this may be connected with delays in postal delivery. In addition, most of the students from both delivery modes were of the opinion that the method of assessment was acceptable, but did offer some suggestions for improvement in this. It may be mentioned here, though, that one student was of the opinion that reasons for delay in assignment submission might not have been due to either the fault of the university or the postal system, but the fault of the student.
  - Many students from Distance and Conventional Education had knowledge of the high expectations of their lecturers in relation to their performance. (This will later be corroborated with the interviews with the course presenters in Chapter Seven.)
  - All students from Distance Education, who responded to the question on the distribution of tutorial materials, indicated they received these by postal delivery. While few students from Conventional Education received their tutorial materials through this channel, as they collected the tutorial material personally from the university. This suggested that the postal delivery system still remained an important means of distributing tutorial

- material to students from Distance Education, especially in a print-based form.
- Most students from Distance and Conventional Education were of the opinion their tutorial materials were *good* with regard to didactic qualities, content and development of cognitive skills. However, some students indicated that they were not *illustrative* enough, as adequate ‘examples of good student work’ were not provided. The researcher is of the opinion that this observation – even though from a minority group – should present a challenge to the university, as the majority of students from both delivery modes indicated they depended heavily on their tutorial materials for study purposes.
  - As none of the BEd (Hons) students from Distance or Conventional Education had ever stayed in the campus residences, they could not give any description of these facilities. It was noted that the policy of the university was, as at the time of this investigation, to not provide accommodation for students enrolled for this programme, as the campus facilities were inadequate to accommodate the ever increasing number of enrolled students for this study programme. However concessions had been made in a few cases, when younger BEd (Hons) students, who were studying full-time, were permitted to stay on campus. Probable implications of these matters, especially for students from Distance Education will be discussed in the latter part of this study.
  - With regard to the matter of not staying on campus, the majority of the students contacted other students by telephone, while some (who were all students from Distance Education), never did contact other students.
  - Even though all students from Conventional Education were expected to attend all their lectures, students from Distance Education were encouraged to attend contact sessions. However, attendance at these contact sessions was not compulsory. Reasons such as lack of funds and family commitments were given for this policy decision. However, a tendency of better academic performance for students who did attend

- these sessions had been noticed by management of Distance Education and was being researched as at the time of this investigation.
- The majority of students from Distance Education received library books by *post* while students from Conventional Education collected library books personally. It was observed that though the university provided adequate reading matter in the tutorial readers, this did not exclude the possibility some students still wanted access to further library services. The implications of these matters will be discussed in the latter part of this study.
  - The services of the administrative staff were rated as *good* by most students from Distance and Conventional Education; with many of the students being of the opinion that they unusually received the necessary information in good time. Also, the majority of the students felt free to contact the staff at anytime assistance with their studies were needed, and when they did so, most of them made contact over the telephone. However, while some students were of the opinion they had no specific names of staff to contact, the majority of students from Distant Education and all students from Conventional Education were of the opinion that members of the administrative staff were linked to specific tasks. The implications of all these matters will be investigated in the latter part of this study.

#### **6.3.1.4.1 Student performance**

In this section students from Distance and Conventional Education were asked questions related to aspects that highlighted factors impacting on their study performance and affected their chance of completing the BEd (Hons) study programme. This is important in relation to the low throughput rates of students from Distant Education study programs (Louw, 2005) and a major reason why aspersion is still cast on it by many people (Aluko, 2000; Diaz, 2000; Braimoh, 2003), and is also a main motivational factor for this research study (see Section 1.2). The findings from the responses of the students are discussed below:

**a) Comments on quality of contact teaching (question 56), supportive educational practices (question 57) and reasons for such views (question 58)**

In answering the question on the quality of contact teaching students from Distance and Conventional Education offered the following responses:

- students 27% from Distance and Conventional Education referred to it as *Excellent*;
- 46% of the students referred to it as *Good*;
- 17% of the students referred to it as *Fair*
- 10% of the students referred to it as *Poor*. (13 of the 15 students who responded in this category were from Distance Education.)

Describing ways in which such practices supported their studies, students' comments ranged from *explanation by the lecturers, helps in my assignments and knowledge, influences the pass rate to encouraging*. Conversely, students' comments on the last point ranged from *some lecturers read the text; some are rude*"; *irrelevant themes at contact sessions to tiredness during contact sessions*.

**Table 6.26: Respondents' impression of the supportive nature of the educational practices at the university (n = 172)**

Respondents' Remarks	Distance Education		Conventional Education		Grand Total	Total %
	Total	%	Total	%		
Yes	126	93%	15	100%	141	93%
No	10	7%	0	0%	10	7%
<b>Grand Total</b>	136	100%	15	100%	151	100%

Missing frequencies: 21

In response to the question of student impression of the supportive nature of the educational practices at the university, are represented in Table 6.26 in which the following is revealed:

- 126 students (93%) from Distance Education and 15 students (100%) from Conventional Education believed that the educational practices at the university such as teaching and support were supportive of their learning;
- 10 students (7%) from Distance Education did not support this opinion.

It is of interest to note that all the students who were unhappy with the supportive nature of the educational practices at the university were from Distance Education – an aspect that may be related to the feeling of alienation often experienced by distance education students (Louw, 2005; Mostert, 2006). Also, responses recorded in this section supports previous research that identifies that interaction with the faculty is beneficial to students' success (Kelsey & D'souza, 2004).

**b) Financial difficulties (question 59), financial aid from the university (question 60) and views on availability and non-availability of financial aid (question 61)**

Table 6.27 represents the response of students from Distance and Conventional Education to the question on whether they had financial difficulties in their studies:

**Table 6.27: Respondents' feedback on financial difficulties with regards to their studies (n = 172)**

Respondents' Remarks	Distance Education		Conventional Education		Grand Total	Total %
	Total	%	Total	%		
Yes	76	56%	9	56%	85	56%
No	60	44%	7	44%	67	44%
<b>Grand Total</b>	136	100%	16	100%	152	100%

Missing frequencies: 20

From Table 6.27, it is evident that:

- 56% of the students from Distance and Conventional Education were struggling with funding their studies. However,
- 44% indicated they were not struggling. Reasons for this could be deduced from Table 6.28 below:

Comments received from students in regard to difficulties of funding their studies included: that they were ‘in the dark’ on the availability of funds (5%); that the situation was stressful, discriminatory, and demotivating – especially as they knew of other students who withdrew from their studies due to financial difficulties.

**Table 6.28: Raw scores of forms of financial aid from the university  
(n = 172)**

Forms of financial aid	Respondents						
	Yes			No			Grand Total
	DE	CE	Total	DE	CE	Total	
<b>Bursary</b>	7	3	10	66	7	73	83
<b>Grants</b>	0	0	0	63	7	70	70
<b>Loans</b>	69	7	76	48	4	52	128
<b>Others</b>	1	1	2	33	2	35	37

Missing frequencies:    Bursary    V124    89  
    Grants    V125    102  
    Loans    V126    44  
    Others    V127    135

From the Table 6.28, it is evident that the majority of the students from both modes did not receive any financial aid from the university towards their studies. Likewise, no student enrolled for the program had access to *grants* from the university. However,

- 10 students (12%) from Distance and Conventional Education had access to bursary funding;
- 76 students (58%) had access to loans from the government through EDU LOAN - a private company that provides financial assistance to students whose parents are permanently employed.
- While only 2 students (5%) were financially responsible for their studies or had access to loans from the Department of Education.

The implications of these findings would be discussed in the latter part of this study.

Nevertheless, according to Higher Education South Africa (HESA, 2005), lack of financial support has been identified as one of the causes of low throughput rate in higher education, which is directly relevant to this section. Therefore, the South Africa University Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA, 2004) has advised that more funding be made available to alleviate this problem.

**c) Other commitments affecting students' performances (question 62) and students' commitment to studies (question 63)**

Apart from financial difficulties confronting students, other commitments affecting their studies (as indicated by students from both modes), were: *pressures from jobs* (for instance, the respondent from Botswana lamented that days of contact session often collided with schools days in his/her country), *family life*, *lack of time* and *journeying to the university*. Nevertheless,

- 96 students (72%) from both modes regarded themselves as being *very much* committed to their studies in spite of their tight schedules;
- 26 students (20%) regarded themselves as being *much* committed;
- 10 students (8%) regarded themselves as *partially* committed; while
- 1 student (1%) from Distance Education indicated *Not at all* committed.

From the already identified profile of adult learners involved in this program (Section 6.3.1.1.1), it can be deduced that:

- Firstly, this category of students have other commitments impinging on their studies (apart from finance) (CAEL, 2000); and
- Secondly, they needed to be extra-motivated to study, a view already expressed by Smith (2006).

However, some were still committed in spite of their tight schedule.

**d) Students' impression on having made the right or wrong choice of programme (question 64) and reasons for such impression (questions 65)**

Table 6.29 reflects the impression of students from Distance and Conventional Education on having made the right or wrong choice of study programme. This question was posed because *wrong choice of programme* has been identified as one of the reasons for low throughput rates in higher education but more so in distance education study programmes (Givney, 2003).

**Table 6.29: Respondents' impression on choice of program (n = 172)**

Respondents' Remarks	Distance Education		Conventional Education		Grand Total	Total %
	Total	%	Total	%		
<b>Yes</b>	127	98%	16	100%	143	99%
<b>No</b>	2	2%	0	0%	2	1%
<b>Grand Total</b>	129	100%	16	100%	145	100%

Missing frequencies: 27

From Table 6.29, it is evident that an exceptionally high number of the respondents (99%) indicated that they were convinced they had made the right choice of study programme which they were involved in, while only 1% felt otherwise.

The following were the reasons given by the first group:

- *relevance of the program to their jobs;*
- Others saw themselves as *achieving personal goals* ;
- While others regarded themselves as *being an inspiration to their children and colleagues.*

Higher Education Loan program (HELP, 1999) has described these motivational factors as intrinsic, which help students to cope more with pressures they might experience.

On the other hand, the reason given by the only respondent who felt he/she had made the wrong choice of study was: *“I was more interested in the learning process of the child, rather than the policies”*. Possible reason(s) for this would be considered in the latter part of this study.

**e) Student expectations of the program yet to be met by the university (question 66)**

The following is a list of some of the expectations of students from Distance and Conventional Education, some of which could be directly linked to suggestions for improvement on the programme (Section 6.3.1.1.5 - b):

- Introduction of more relevant courses (e.g. 'a component on independent schools')
- Linking the program to teachers' upgrade
- Improvement of the quality of contact sessions
- Motivation from all lecturers and
- Preparation for higher degrees

### 6.3.1.5 Discussion of the findings in terms of the fourth sub-research question

Research sub-question 4 has been found to be *partially* relevant to this section:

Research sub-question 4

*‘...What factors are responsible for the divergences observable in the output rates (that is both dropout rates and performances) of students registered in both modes of delivery?’*

Attempts were made through the questions posed in the questionnaire to investigate factors that contribute to student throughput rates and affect the completion or non-completion of their studies. Subsequently, the following was established from the findings:

- The majority of the students from Distance and Conventional Education regarded the quality of teaching offered during the BEd (Hons) study programme, offered by the University of Pretoria as being very good, in that the educational practices supported their learning. However, the researcher is of the opinion the university could still find the negative comments made by students useful, to further enhance its quality image.
- Most of the students from Distance and Conventional Education did not receive financial aid from the University of Pretoria. However, a small number of them had access to bursary funding; the majority of these students had taken out study loans, while only a minority group was financially responsible for their studies. This highlights the need to support higher education students financially, as many of these students had to cope with the financial burden on their own or drop out of the study programme, issues which become very relevant to this study.
- There were other commitments directly affecting students from Distance and Conventional Education, such as pressure from jobs and family commitments, amongst others. Nevertheless, the majority of these

students were highly committed to their studies, despite their tight schedules. Consequently, it is suggested that adult learners had a need to be highly motivated - especially those studying through the distance mode. Also, a very high majority felt they had made the right choice of course; and

- There were still unmet expectations students had of the university, as presented by the students, which, if considered, could be of benefit to the University of Pretoria.

#### 6.3.1.5.1 Quality assurance process for students

Students from Distance and Conventional Education were asked questions in this section to give them an opportunity to be involved in the quality assurance process at this institution. The researcher is of the opinion that whatever information was gathered in this study could be useful to the university, as the findings may greatly complement the efforts made by the staff to enhance the quality of the teaching programme on offer. Table 6.30, represents the satisfaction levels of the respondents to the teaching programme:

#### a) Students' satisfaction with the program (question 67) and reasons for satisfaction (question 68)

**Table 6.30: Respondents' satisfaction levels of the program (n = 172)**

Respondents' Remarks	Distance Education		Conventional Education		Grand Total	Total %
	Total	%	Total	%		
Yes	123	92%	12	86%	135	91%
No	11	8%	2	14%	13	9%
<b>Grand Total</b>	134	100%	14	100%	148	100%

Missing frequencies: 24

In responding to the question of student satisfaction levels with the study programme, the following was indicated:

- 135 students (91%) from Distance and Conventional Education indicated their satisfaction with the entire programme; while only
- 13 students (9%) from both study programmes indicated they were not satisfied.

Giving reasons for their satisfaction, these students indicated: *good organization, good administration, qualified lecturers, relevance of the program to their present job and knowledge creation*. However, students from Distance Education indicated *high failure rate and lack of link between contact sessions and exams* as reasons for their dissatisfaction with the study programme, while students from Conventional Education indicated: *irrelevant modules and problematic module(s)* as reasons for their dissatisfaction with the study programme.

#### **b) Suggestions for the improvement of the program (question 69)**

Students from Distance and Conventional Education made the following suggestions to aid in improving the entire study programme:

- Bring contact sessions nearer to students by increasing the number of centres (e.g. reopening Hammanskraal campus and Free State – irrespective of the number of students – and opening a satellite campus in KwaMhlanga). Also mentioned was that many students arrived home very late in the evening and were tired to attend lectures the next day.
- Reduction of high registration and tuition fees.
- Provision of bursaries and subsidies.
- Provision of relevant materials for those in management positions.
- Applicability of what is learnt to the classroom situation.
- Addition of cassettes and DVDs to be used as teaching aids, because the support provided was not enough.
- Proper binding of learning materials.

- Provision of computer literacy classes.
- Provision of more contact sessions (e.g. conduct Saturday on a monthly basis) while some requested a reduction of contact hours and days.
- Programme should be more flexible.
- The need to guide against administrative lapses (e.g. the data from some registration forms were not captured onto computer before the exams, therefore some students could not write exams).
- Module designers to be available to students when needed.
- Provision of handouts.
- Feedback on assignments to be given on time.
- Guidance to be provided.
- Adequate time for the preparation of examination by shifting exam time from April to June.
- The need for knowledge on the scope of the examination and access to past examination question papers.
- Better pass rate and opportunity to write supplementary exams.
- More qualified and experienced lecturers
- The need to cluster certain modules because some of the modules seem to be repetitive.
- Provision of a library for students from Distance Education.
- Provision of accommodation (especially for students travelling a great distance to lectures).
- Management of the programme to consolidate the improvement made in 2006.
- University's newsletter and student cards to be made available to students from Distance Education.
- Wider advertisement of the program was recommended, as there were many others who could still benefit.
- Lecturers should be more representative of all races (if available).
- The Dean to avail himself to students on the first day of the contact sessions.

Implications of these suggestions for this study, in conjunction with reports from the qualitative interviews, would be given in the latter part of this study.

### **6.3.1.6 Discussion in terms of the first, third and fourth research questions**

Since the questions posed in this section referred to the overall impression of students of the entire program, the researcher is of the opinion that these responses have further toadied in consolidating findings on sub-research question 4 (see Section 6.3.1.5).

The following can be deduced from the findings in this section:

- The majority of the students were satisfied with the overall study programme, emphasising good administration and qualified lecturers, to mention but a few; and
- The students gave many suggestions for further improvement of the BEd (Hons) study programme.

On the findings in this section, students' perception has been touted as being essential to measuring the quality of a program, which helps the university to not only compete for a high calibre of student and also to retain them (Du Toit, 2005). Also, Welch and Reed (2005:25) suggest that findings such as these 'can be used among other things for staff development, curriculum improvement and increasing learner access'.

Finally, all the responses given by the students have contributed to discovering the answer to sub-research question 1:

Research sub-question 1

*'Why is distance education often seen as being inferior to traditional education when assessed in terms of access, delivery and outputs?'*

All the issues raised above contribute greatly to improving the quality of a study programme. However, the implications of all these findings will be discussed in the latter part of this study.

### **6.3.2 Statistical comparison between the pass and failure rates of the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy students**

#### **6.3.2.1 Introduction**

This section reports on the comparisons of the performances of students from Distance and Conventional Education, the analysis of the data collected and the discussion of the findings. Firstly, the comparisons were based on the six study modules, each with its own code – as assigned by the management of the university – to assist in administrative purposes. These codes are presented in Table 6.31, followed by the pass and fail scores (Table 6.32), on which the comparisons were based.

The purpose of the comparisons was to report on the statistical significance between the scores of students from both modes that participated in the investigation. First, the chi-square test and Fisher's exact test – in which the level of significance was described as ( $\alpha$  value is  $p < 0.05$ ) - were applied to these figures to test whether there is a significant relationship in the pass and fail rate between the two modes of delivery. In addition, the Phi coefficient was used to test for the practical significance (effect-size) of the rates compared ( $w = 0.1$  small-effect; 0.3 medium effect; 0.5 large effect). All these have been reported on to ascertain the reliability of the exact probabilities (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.5).

**Table 6.31: Comparison of the codes of the BEd (Hons) modules taken by contact and distance education students, who participated in the investigation**

Modules	Mode of delivery	
	Contact	Distance
Financial Management in Education	FBO 730	FMO 711
Human Resources Management in Education	MBE 711	HRE 730
Foundations of Education Research	NME 715	NME 731
Education Law	OWR 730	OWR 721
Policy Studies in Education	PSE 722	BSO 730
Theories of Education Management	OWT 730	TEM 711

Also in this section, the chi-square tests were calculated to assess possible differences between the pass and fail scores of students from Distance and Conventional Education respectively. (These were based on the 2005 and 2006 examinations because, as earlier discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.7) as the BEd (Hons) study programme at the Distance Education Unit was still being developed as at the time of this investigation.) In addition to this, the data revealed that students from Distance Education had more than one entry point for the examinations (i.e. April and October), while the students from Conventional Education had one entry point (October). A possible reason for this was because the former normally had two entry points of admission, while the latter only had one. Table 6.32, represents the scores upon which the tests were based:

**Table 6.32: Examination statistics of BEd (Hons) students from distance and contact education who participated in the investigation between 2005 to 2006**

<b>CONTACT MODE</b>										
<b>MODULE</b>	<b>2005</b>					<b>2006</b>				
	Number that wrote	Pass	Pass %	Fail	Fail %	Number that wrote	Pass	Pass %	Fail	Fail %
<b>FBO 730</b>	66	54	81%	12	19%	12	6	50%	6	50%
<b>MBE 730</b>	76	63	83%	13	17%	23	15	65%	8	35%
<b>NME 715</b>	153	136	88%	17	12%	129	107	83%	22	17%
<b>OWR 730</b>	66	61	92%	5	8%	58	45	78%	13	22%
<b>BSO 730</b>	51	48	94%	3	6%	51	51	100%	0	0%
<b>OWT 730</b>	70	52	74%	18	26%	11	5	45%	6	55%
<b>DISTANCE MODE</b>										
<b>MODULE</b>						Number that wrote	Pass	Pass %	Fail	Fail %
<b>TEM 711</b>										
April 2005						345	228	66%	117	34%
October 2005						357	278	78%	79	22%
April 2006						479	393	82%	86	18%
<b>HRE 711</b>										
April 2005						419	306	73%	113	27%
October 2005						523	303	58%	220	42%
April 2006						771	601	78%	170	22%
<b>FMO 711</b>										
April 2005						355	273	77%	82	23%
October 2005						461	387	84%	74	16%
April 2006						659	409	62%	250	38%
<b>NME 731</b>										
April 2005						333	290	87%	43	13%
October 2005						313	219	70%	94	30%
April 2006						488	400	82%	88	18%
<b>OWR 721</b>										
April 2005						358	272	76%	86	24%
October 2005						494	351	71%	143	29%
April 2006						709	553	78%	156	22%
<b>PSE 722</b>										
April 2005						341	259	76%	82	24%
October 2005						343	326	95%	17	5%
April 2006						451	410	91%	41	9%

The rates from the two entry points for the distance mode (2005), were firstly calculated as one entry examination point for each mode, and compared with the scores from the single entry point of the distance mode.

However for 2006, the scores were compared as a single entry point, because the scores of only one entry point were ready for the distance mode as at the time of the investigation. Thus, the hypothesis for these tests is:

*Ho: There is no significant difference between the pass rates of distance learners as compared to the pass rates of contact students, who participated in the investigation.*

Furthermore, the section ends with the discussion of the findings, which include comparison with the findings of similar studies, speculations as to possible reasons for the divergences in student performances and comparison of findings with governmental policy documents. Finally, the implications of these findings for this study would be discussed in the latter part of this study (see Chapter 8, Section 8.5).

#### **6.3.2.2 The use of statistical calculations to compare the pass and the failure rate of students based on the six modules under investigation**

Tables 6.33 and 6.34 represent the results of the chi square tests when applied to the 2005 examination result of modules FBO 730 (Contact Education) and FMO 711 (Distance Education) respectively:

**Table 6.33: Comparison of pass and failure rate on Financial Management in Education between contact and distance students at the 2005 examination (n = 882)**

	STUDENTS		<i>P</i> value <sup>2</sup>
	Contact (FBO 730)	Distance (FMO 711)	
Pass	54 (82%)	660 (81%)	
Fail	12 (18%)	156 (19%)	
Total	66	816	
Chi-square			0.8523
Fisher's exact test			1.0000
Phi-coefficient (effect size)			0.0063

From Table 6.33, out of the 66 students from Contact Education that wrote the examination for module FBO 730 in 2005, 54 students (82%) passed while 12 students (18%) failed. Conversely, 816 students from Distance Education wrote the examination of the same module (FMO 711), 660 students (81%) passed while 156 students (19%) failed. The chi-square test of the rates shows that there is no significant difference between the pass and the fail rates of students from both modes of delivery because ( $p < 0.8523$ ), while Fisher's exact test is 1.0000. Also, the effect size of the test is small ( $w < 0.3$ ). Therefore the hypothesis is accepted as the percentages of the performances of students from Distance and Contact Education were at par.

However, Table 6.34 presents a different picture entirely, when the tests of the rates for the single entry point for students from Contact Education, were compared with the two entry points of examination for students from Distance Education.

<sup>2</sup> The  $\alpha$  value for the chi-square test is 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Effect-size ( $w = 0.1$  small-effect; 0.3 medium; 0.5 large). This applies to Table 6.33 to Table 6.50.

**Table 6.34: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Financial Management in Education between contact (one entry point of exam) and distance (two entry points of exam) students at the 2005 examination (n = 882)**

	STUDENTS			P value
	Contact (FBO 730) [October]	Distance (FMO 711) [April]	Distance (FMO 711) [October]	
Pass	54 (82%)	273 (77%)	387 (84%)	
Fail	12 (18%)	82 (23%)	74 (16%)	
Total	66	355	461	
Chi-square				0.0389*
Phi-coefficient (effect size)				0.0858

\*  $p < 0.05$   
( )  $w < 0.1$  (small effect)

From Table 6.34, of the 66 students from Contact Education who wrote the 2005 examinations, 54 students (82%) passed, while 12 students (18%) failed. This, in comparison to the students from Distance Education, representing that 273 students (77%) and 387 students (84%) passed the examination in April and October 2005 respectively, while 82 students (23%) and 74 students (16%) failed in the same examination session. According to the chi-square test ( $p < 0.05$ ), there is a statistical significant difference between the three groups, that lies in favour of the contact group. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. However, the effect-size, is small ( $w < 0.1$ ), which means that there is no practical significance difference between the performances of students from both modes.

**Table 6.35: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Financial Management in Education between contact and distance students at the 2006 examination (n = 671)**

	STUDENTS		<i>P</i> value
	Contact (FBO 730)	Distance (FMO 711)	
<b>Pass</b>	6 (50%)	409 (81%)	
<b>Fail</b>	6 (50%)	250 (19%)	
<b>Total</b>	12	659	
<b>Chi-square</b>			0.3939
<b>Fisher's exact test</b>			0.3885
<b>Phi-coefficient (effect-size)</b>			0.0329

From Table 6.35, it is evident that 12 students from Contact Education wrote the examination; 6 students (50%) passed while 6 students (50%) failed to pass. Conversely, of the 659 students from Distance Education who wrote the examination, 409 students (81%) passed and 250 students (19%) failed to pass the examination. In addition to this, both chi-square and Fisher's exact tests ( $p < 0.05$ ) shows that there is no statistical significant difference between the pass and the failure rates of students from Distance and Contact Education, who sat for the same exam in 2006. This is because the  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is 0.3939. Also, the effect size is medium ( $w > 0.05$ ), which shows that there is a practical significant difference between the two groups. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. However, the high performance of students is in favour of students from Distance Education.

In Tables 6.36 and 6.37 below, the chi square tests for the scores of MBE 730 (Contact Students) and HRE 711 (Distance Students) examinations for 2005 are presented respectively:

**Table 6.36: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Human Resources Management in Education between contact and distance students at the 2005 examination (n = 1018)**

	STUDENTS		P value
	Contact (MBE 730)	Distance (HRE 711)	
Pass	63 (83%)	609 (65%)	
Fail	13 (17%)	333 (35%)	
Total	76	942	
Chi-square			0.0012*
Fisher's exact test			9.691E-04
Phi-coefficient (effect-size)			0.1012

\*  $p < 0.05$   
 ( )  $w > 0.1$  (small effect)

From Table 6.36, statistics reveal that, of the 76 students from Contact Education that wrote the examinations in 2005, 63 students (83%) passed, while 13 students (17%) failed. In contrast to this, of the 942 students from Distance Education, 609 students (65%) passed, while 333 students (35%) failed to pass the examination. Statistically, this reveals that the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected because there is a statistical significant difference between the population groups as  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) for both the chi-square and Fisher's exact tests are less than 0.05. Additionally, the effect size is small ( $w > 0.1$ ) showing there is no practical significant difference between the two groups. Nonetheless, this indicates that the students from Contact Education performed better in the examination than the students from Distance Education.

Continuing to compare the same examinations, but at two entry points for Distance Education, and one for Contact Education, Table 6.37, represents that of 76 students from Contact Education, 63 students (83%) passed, while 13 students (17%) failed to pass the examination. Conversely, of the 419 students from Distance Education who wrote the examination in April, 306 students (73%) passed, while 113 students (27%) failed to pass the examination. Additionally, of

the 523 students from Distance Education who wrote the examination in October, 303 students (58%) passed, while 220 (42%) failed to pass the examination.

**Table 6.37: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Human Resources Management in Education between contact (one entry point of exam) and distance (two entry points of exam) students at the 2005 examination (n = 1018)**

	STUDENTS			P value
	Contact (MBE 711) [October]	Distance (HRE 730) [April]	Distance (HRE 730) [October]	
Pass	63 (83%)	306 (73%)	303 (58%)	
Fail	13 (17%)	113 (27%)	220 (42%)	
Total	76	419	523	
Chi-square				0.0001*
Phi-coefficient (effect size)				0.1829

\*  $p < 0.05$   
( )  $w > 0.1$  (small effect)

Statistically, this reveals that the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected since  $p$  value is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the groups thereby showing there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Also, the effect size is small ( $w > 0.1$ ), which reveals that there is no practical significant difference between the two. However, the students from Contact Education did perform better during the examination.

**Table 6.38: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Human Resources Management in Education between contact and distance students at the 2006 examination (n = 794)**

	STUDENTS		P value
	Contact (FBO 730)	Distance (FMO 711)	
<b>Pass</b>	15 (65%)	601 (78%)	
<b>Fail</b>	8 (35%)	170 (22%)	
<b>Total</b>	23	771	
<b>Chi-square</b>			0.1490
<b>Fisher's exact test</b>			0.2003
<b>Phi-coefficient (effect-size)</b>			0.0512

In continuing with this study, in Table 6.38, the calculations for the tests for the same modules, described above, (but for the 2006 academic year) for students from both modes are presented:

From Table 6.38, of 771 students from Distance Education that wrote the examination, 601 (78%) passed, while 170 (22%) failed. Conversely, of 23 students from Contact Education who wrote this examination, 15 students (65%) from Contact Education passed, while 8 students (35%) failed. The statistics reveals that the null hypothesis is accepted, because  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) for both the chi-square and Fisher's exact tests is greater than 0.05, which shows there is no statistical significant difference. However, the effect size is small ( $w < 0.1$ ), indicating there is no practical significant difference between the test rates of the two groups. However, the test results indicate the students from Distance Education performed better in the examination.

Table 6.39, represents the calculations for NME 715 (Contact Students) and NME 731 (Distance Students) for 2005:

**Table 6.39: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Foundations of Education Research between contact and distance students at the 2005 examination (n = 799)**

	STUDENTS		P value
	Contact (NME 715)	Distance (NME 731)	
Pass	136 (89%)	509(79%)	
Fail	17 (11%)	137 (21%)	
Total	153	646	
Chi-square			0.0044*
Fisher's exact test			0.0042
Phi-coefficient (effect-size)			0.1007

\*  $p < 0.05$   
 ( )  $w > 0.1$  (small effect)

From Table 6.39 above, of 153 students from Contact Education who wrote the examination, 136 students (89%) passed, while 17 students (11%) failed. Conversely, of 646 students from Distance Education who wrote the examination, 509 students (79%) passed, while 137 students (21%) failed. Both chi-square and Fisher's exact tests indicate that  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is less than 0.05. This means that the null hypothesis is rejected, because there is a statistical significant difference between the two groups, which lies in favour of the contact students. Also, the effect size is small ( $w > 0.1$ ).

Additionally, Table 6.40, reveals that of 153 students from Contact Education, 136 students (89%) passed, whereas 17 students (11%) failed the examination. Conversely, of 333 students from Distance Education that wrote the examination in April, 290 students (87%) passed, while 43 students (13%) failed. And of 313 students from Distance Education that wrote the examination in October, 219 students (70%) passed, while 94 students (30%) failed. From the chi-square test, it can be deduced that the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected as the  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is less than 0.05, showing the contact students performed better. Also, the

effect size is small ( $w > 0.1$ ) as it falls within the small and the medium range indicating no practical significant difference between the two modes.

**Table 6.40: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Foundations of Education Research between contact (one entry point of exam) and distance (two entry points of exam) students at the 2005 examination (n = 799)**

	STUDENTS			P value
	Contact (NME 715) [October]	Distance (NME 731) [April]	Distance (NME 731) [October]	
Pass	136 (89%)	290 (87%)	219 (70%)	
Fail	17 (11%)	43 (13%)	94 (30%)	
Total	153	333	313	
Chi-square				0.0001*
Phi-coefficient (effect size)				0.2195

\*  $p < 0.05$   
( )  $w > 0.1$  (small effect)

Additionally, Table 6.41 shows the calculations for the same modules, but for the 2006 academic year:

**Table 6.41: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Foundations of Education Research between contact and distance students at the 2006 examination (n = 617)**

	STUDENTS		P value
	Contact (NME 715)	Distance (NME 731)	
Pass	107 (83%)	400 (82%)	
Fail	22 (17%)	88 (18%)	
Total	129	488	
Chi-square			0.7962
Fisher's exact test			0.8972
Phi-coefficient (effect-size)			0.0104

From Table 6.41, it can be seen that Chi-square calculations for NME 715 and NME 731, reveal that in 2006, of 129 students from Contact Education wrote the examination, 107 students (83%) passed, while 22 students (17%) failed. Conversely, of 488 students from Distance Education, 400 students (82%) passed, while 88 students (18%) failed. From the results of the test, it can be seen that both chi-square and Fisher's tests indicate a  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) that is greater than 0.05, indicating no statistical significant difference. Also, the effect size is small ( $w < 0.2$ ). Deductively, it means that the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) cannot be rejected, because performances of students are at par.

**Table 6.42: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Education Law between distance and contact students at the 2005 examination (n = 918)**

	STUDENTS		P value
	Contact (OWR 730)	Distance (OWR 721)	
Pass	61 (92%)	623 (73%)	
Fail	5 (8%)	229 (27%)	
Total	66	852	
Chi-square			0.0005*
Fisher's exact test			2.017E-04
Phi-coefficient (effect-size)			0.1144

\*  $p < 0.05$   
( )  $w > 0.1$  (small effect)

Table 6.42, represents the calculations for OWR 730 and OWR 721 (2005) of students from Distance and Contact Education:

From Table 6.42, 66 students from Contact Education who wrote the 2005 examination, 61 students (92%) passed, while 5 students (8%) failed. Conversely, of the 852 students from Distance Education who wrote the examination, 623 students (73%) passed, while 229 students (27%) failed. Both chi-square and Fisher's exact tests indicate that the  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected because there is a

significant difference when the performances of students from both modes were compared, which revealed that the contact group presented a better overall examination result. Further, the effect size is small ( $w > 0.1$ ) showing no practical significant difference between the two groups.

**Table 6.43: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Education Law between contact (one entry point of exam) and distance (two entry points of exam) students at the 2005 examination (n = 918)**

	STUDENTS			P value
	Contact (OWR 730) [October]	Distance (OWR 721) [April]	Distance (OWR 721) [October]	
Pass	61 (92%)	272 (76%)	351 (71%)	
Fail	5 (8%)	86 (24%)	143(29%)	
Total	66	358	494	
Chi-square				0.0007*
Phi-coefficient (effect size)				0.1264

\*  $p < 0.05$   
( )  $w > 0.1$  (small effect)

Table 6.43 represents the pass and failure rates for students during the 2005 academic year and shows calculations on OWR 721 (contact students), and OWR 730 (two entries for distance students). Of 66 students from Contact Education: 61 students (92%) passed, while 5 students (8%) failed. Conversely, of 358 students from Distance Education who wrote examinations in April, 272 students (76%) passed, while 86 students (24%) failed. Of 494 students who wrote the October examination, 351 students (71%) passed, while 143 students (29%) failed. It is shown that the  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is less than 0.05 indicating there is a statistical significant difference between the two groups of students. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected, as the higher performance lies in favour of the contact group. Also, the effect size of the tests is small ( $w > 0.2$ ).

Conversely, Table 6.44, represents the pass and failure rate of students during the 2006 academic year and shows that of the 66 students from Contact Education who wrote the examination, 45 students (78%) passed, while 12 students (22%) failed. Conversely, of the 709 students from Distance Education who wrote the examination, 553 students (78%) passed, while 156 students (22%) failed. The results of both the chi-square and Fisher's exact tests indicate that the  $p$  value ( $p > 0.05$ ) is greater than 0.05, which means there is no significant difference, showing student performance for the two groups are on par with each other. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. However, the effect size is small ( $w < 0.1$ ), indicating that the significance of difference is not practical.

**Table 6.44: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Education Law between contact and distance students at the 2006 examination (n = 767)**

	STUDENTS		<i>P</i> value
	Contact (OWR 730)	Distance (OWR 721)	
<b>Pass</b>	45 (78%)	553 (78%)	
<b>Fail</b>	12 (22%)	156 (22%)	
<b>Total</b>	66	709	
<b>Chi-square</b>			0.9421
<b>Fisher's exact test</b>			0.1000
<b>Phi-coefficient (effect-size)</b>			0.0026

The calculations for BSO 730 (contact students) and PSE 722 (distance students) in 2005 are reflected below:

**Table 6.45: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Policy Studies in Education between contact and distance students at the 2005 examination (n = 735)**

	STUDENTS		P value
	Contact (BSO 730)	Distance (PSE 722)	
<b>Pass</b>	48 (94%)	585 (86%)	
<b>Fail</b>	3 (06%)	99 (14%)	
<b>Total</b>	51	684	
<b>Chi-square</b>			0.0869
<b>Fisher's exact test</b>			0.0994
<b>Phi-coefficient (effect-size)</b>			0.0631

Table 6.45, represents the pass and failure rates of Policy Studies, for the 2005 academic year and indicates that of the 51 students from Contact Education who wrote the examination, 48 students (94%) passed, while 3 students (6%) failed. Conversely, of the 684 students from Distance Education who wrote the examination, 585 students (86%) passed, while 99 students (14%) failed. Further, both chi-square and Fisher's exact tests indicate that  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is greater than 0.05, which shows that there is no statistical significant difference, as students' performances are on par with each other. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. In addition, the effect size is large ( $w > 0.5$ ), indicating that the significant difference is very practical.

Conversely, as represented in Table 6.46, calculations for the same module, but calculated as two entry points for Distance Education, reveals that of 51 students from Contact Education, 48 students passed, while 3 students (6%) failed. Conversely, 341 students from Distance Education, who wrote examinations in April, 259 students (76%) passed, while 82 students (24%) failed. And of the 343 students who wrote the October examination, 326 students (95%) passed, while 17 students (5%) failed. According to the results of both chi-square and Fisher's exact tests,  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is less than 0.05, indicating there is a statistical significant difference between the two groups, with the contact students

performing better. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Also, the effect size is small ( $w > 0.1$ ).

**Table 6.46: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Policy Studies in Education between contact (one entry point of exam) and distance (two entry points of exam) students at the 2005 examination (n = 735)**

	STUDENTS			P value
	Contact (BSO 730) [October]	Distance (PSE 722) [April]	Distance (PSE 722) [October]	
Pass	48 (94%)	259 (76%)	326 (95%)	
Fail	3 (6%)	82 (24%)	17 (5%)	
Total	51	341	343	
Chi-square				0.0001*
Phi-coefficient (effect size)				0.2737

\*  $p < 0.05$   
 ( )  $w > 0.1$  (small effect)

Further, in Table 6.47, the calculations for the same modes in 2006 are presented:

**Table 6.47: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Policy Studies in Education between contact and distance students at the 2006 examination (n = 502)**

	STUDENTS		P value
	Contact (BSO 730)	Distance (PSE 722)	
Pass	51 (100%)	410 (91%)	
Fail	0 (0%)	41 (09%)	
Total	51	451	
Chi-square			0.0246*
Fisher's exact test			0.0148
Phi-coefficient (effect-size)			0.1003

\*  $p < 0.05$   
 ( )  $w > 0.1$  (small effect)

From Table 6.47, represents the rates of student performance for Policy Studies in Education, and indicates that: of the 51 students from Contact Education who wrote the examination in the 2006 academic year, 51 students (100%) passed. Conversely, of 451 students from Distance Education, 410 students (91%) passed, while 41 students (9%) failed. From these, both the chi-square and Fisher's exact tests indicate that the  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is less than 0.05, indicating that there is a statistical significant difference between the performances of the two groups, which lies in favour of the contact group. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. Also, the effect size is small ( $w > 0.1$ ).

Tables 6.48, and 6.49, Indicates the calculations for Theories of Education Management (OWT 730 and TEM 711) in 2005, however with two and three entry points respectively:

**Table 6.48: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Theories of Education Management between contact and distance students at the 2005 examination (n = 772)**

	STUDENTS		P value
	Contact (OWT 730)	Distance (TEM 711)	
Pass	52 (74%)	506 (72%)	
Fail	18 (26%)	196 (28%)	
Total	70	702	
Chi-square			0.6942
Fisher's exact test			0.7801
Phi-coefficient (effect-size)			0.0142

Table 6.48, indicates that of 70 students from Contact Education, 52 students (74%) passed, while 18 students (26%) failed. Conversely, of the 702 students from Distance Education, 506 students (72%) passed, while 196 students (28%) failed. Further, both chi-square and Fisher's exact tests indicate that there is no statistical significant difference between the performances of the two groups, as the  $p$  value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is greater than 0.05, indicating their performances are on a

par with each other. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. In addition, the size effect is small ( $w > 0.1$ ), showing that there is no practical significance of difference.

Table 6.49, indicates that of the 70 students from Contact Education, 52 students (74%) passed, while 18 students (26%) failed. Conversely, of the 345 students from Distance Education who wrote the April examination, 228 students (66%) passed, while 117 students (34%) failed. Additionally, of the 357 students from Distance Education who wrote the October examination, 278 students (78%) passed, while 79 (22%) failed. The calculations show that the  $p$  value of 0.0021 is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected because there is a statistical significant difference between the performances of the two groups in favour of the contact group. Also, it has a small effect size ( $w > 0.1$ ).

**Table 6.49: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Theories of Education Management between contact (one entry point of exam) and distance (two entry points of exam) students at the 2005 examination (n = 772)**

	STUDENTS			P value
	Contact (OWT 730) [October]	Distance (TEM 711) [April]	Distance (TEM 711) [October]	
Pass	52 (74%)	228 (66%)	278 (78%)	
Fail	18 (26%)	117 (34%)	79 (22%)	
Total	70	345	357	
Chi-square				0.0021*
Phi-coefficient (effect size)				0.1263

\*  $p < 0.05$   
 ( )  $w > 0.1$  (small effect)

The calculations for the same module, but for 2006, are presented in Table 6.50:

**Table 6.50: Comparison of pass and failure rates on Theories of Education Management between contact and distance students at the 2006 examination (n = 490)**

	STUDENTS		P value
	Contact (OWT 730)	Distance (TEM 711)	
Pass	5 (45%)	393 (82%)	
Fail	6 (55%)	86 (18%)	
Total	11	479	
Chi-square			0.0021*
Fisher's exact test			0.0078
Phi-coefficient (effect-size)			0.1388

\*  $p < 0.05$   
 ( )  $w > 0.1$  (small effect)

Table 6.50, represents the pass and failure rate of students that wrote the Theories of Education Management examination, during the 2006 academic year. Of 11 students from Contact Education, 5 students (45%) passed, while 6 students (55%) failed. Conversely, of the 497 students from Distance Education, 393 students (82%) passed, while 86 students (18%) failed. Further, both chi-square and Fisher's exact tests indicate that the  $p$  value of 0.0021 is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected as the tests show there is a statistical significant difference between the performances of the two groups, which lies in favour of the distance group. In addition, the effect size is small ( $w > 0.1$ ), showing there is no practical significance of difference.

### 6.3.1.7 Discussion in terms of the fourth research question

Of relevance to this section is a part of the research sub-question 4, which deals with the performances of students from both modes:

Research sub-question 4

*'What divergences are observable in the output rates (i.e. performances) in both distance and conventional education and what factors are responsible for these?'*

From Tables 6.33 to 6.50, it can be deduced that both the chi-square and Fisher's exact test, which are meant to measure the level of significant difference (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.5.), show that of the eighteen (18) tables, half of them indicate *no significant difference* between the pass scores of students from Distance and Conventional Education, as  $p$  value is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Conversely, the other half shows that there is *a significant difference* between some scores.

While perusing through available literature on past comparative research on student performances in Distance and Conventional Education, even though there had been instances of significant differences, yet, tests have usually shown that there is *no significant difference* between the performances of the students (Meyer (2002); Zhao et al. (2004). For instance, of the 355 comparative studies which Russell (1999) reviewed, no significant difference was found in the performances of students from the two groups. In other words, this indicates that the achievement of students from Distance Education could be as good as their counterparts (Meyer, 2002). Other studies in support of this include Nielsen and Totto (1993); Newlands and Mclean (1996); Sonner (1999); Spooner et al. (1999); Carr (2000); Johnson et al. (2000); Scoech (2000); and Magagula and Ngwenya (2004).

However, according to some recent studies by Shachar and Neuman (2003) and Bernard, (2004), a higher achievement by students from distance education have been recorded, as can be seen from Tables 6.35, 6.38, 6.46, 6.49 and 6.50. Giving possible reasons to support this, Magagula and Ngwenya (2004) cite Holmberg (1982), Perry and Rumble (1987) and Keegan (1990), who suggest that 'off-campus learners receive more direct learner support services through face-to-face tutorials than on-campus learners', which was the case of distance education students from the unit of study under investigation as some interviews revealed (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2). Echoing this, Machtmes and Asher (2000), and Zhao et al. (2004) predict better improvement of distance education

students as time goes on. In their own study in 2004, Magagula and Ngwenya are of the opinion that distance education students will always perform as good as their contact education counterparts, as long as they are provided with appropriate support services.

Lastly, the researcher is of the opinion that attention should, never the less, be drawn to cases in which students from Distance Education whose performance was lower than that of their contact education counterparts. According to Mostert (2006), a possible reason could be the low academic level of students before enrolling for a particular study programme. However, this might probably be related to the political history of the country, in which many *Blacks* were denied access to quality education (see Chapter 3, Sections 3.2 and 3.4). Also, it was revealed during the interviews, that lack of access to, for example – and for the purpose of this study – a law library (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1) for students from Distance Education, could be a possible reason for lower academic performance, and which could also be regarded as a form of support. In addition, considering the nature of conditions under which students from Distance Education study – as people having full-time jobs, family and social commitments – Van Schoor et al (2002) suggest poor time management as a possible reason for low academic performance. (This factor could be substantiated in that students from Distance Education requested help in this area.)

Finally, the last section in this chapter will deal with enrolment and graduation rates of students from Distance and Conventional Education.

### **6.3.3 Descriptive analysis of the enrolment, throughput and drop-out rates of both contact and distance education students enrolled for BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy (2002 – 2005)**

#### **6.3.3.1 Introduction**

In accordance with one of the objectives of this study, (see Chapter 1, Section 1.4), this section deals with the comparison of the enrolment, throughput and

drop-out rates of students - from Distance and Conventional Education – who have discontinued their studies in the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy study programme. This study covers the range of 2002 to 2005, and is based on the available data gathered during the course of this investigation. All the data on Distance and Conventional Education were based on the number of students that enrolled and completed within the shortest possible period for the study programme. It was also to keep this section separate from the comparison of the pass and failure rates dealt with earlier because the researcher was only interested in comparing the rates of enrolment, throughput and output from the data supplied by the Department of Administration, of the University of Pretoria, for both modes. Therefore, no statistical tests have been carried out.

As earlier discussed (see Chapter 1., Section 1.2; and Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3), literature abounds on the fact that the throughput rate of students from distance education is low in comparison to their contact education counterparts (Tinto, 1975; Carter 1996; Galusha, 1997; Perraton, 2000; Fraser & Lombard, 2002; Fraser & Killen, 2005). This is unfortunate and this has accounted for the main reason for the general impression that the former is not as good as the latter, especially in relation to quality.

In this section an endeavour is made to present the state of these matters at the University of Pretoria, by comparing and discussing findings from perused literature, and the benchmarks for throughput rates as approved by the government. However, the researcher had difficulty in joining the tables because of the different points of entry for both enrolment and examination for the two groups. In addition, there was no data available on the students from Contact Education of the same study programme in 2002.

Finally, it is important to note that according to one of the interviewees (P4 – see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.3.2), it might be too soon at the stage of this investigation to compare the throughput rates of Distance and Conventional Education, since

the offering of the BEd (Hons) study programme through Distance Education only started in 2002, meaning it was still at its developmental stage. But this study would be incomplete should this section be omitted, thus necessitating the comparison, deductions and the researcher has taken care not to be assertive when comparing and discussing aspect of this study, which have mostly been based on speculations.

Therefore, Tables 6.51 and 6.52 below should be interpreted as follows:

- In comparison to their Contact Education counterparts, the students from Distance Education had two registration periods in an academic year.
- They also had two examination opportunities, which accounts for some level of *openness* of the program and students could finish the 5-year programme within a minimum period of 2 years having written examinations at four entry points.
- Thus, it is possible to find in the table students who had completed their studies in a minimum period of two years; a minimum period + 1 other examination entry point; a minimum period + 2 examination entry points; a minimum period + 3 examination entry points and a minimum period + 4 examination entry points.
- These were added up to give the annual throughput rates of the students, but it also means that as at the time of this study, some students were yet to complete their cycle (i.e. minimum + 4 examination entry points), thus accounting for incomplete data of the students from Distance Education (see Table 6.52 below).

Nevertheless, though approaching the problem carefully, the researcher endeavoured to compare the enrolment and the throughput rates of the two groups.

**Table 6.51: Enrolment and throughput rates of BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy contact education students (2003 – 2005)**

Year	Enrolment	Graduated	Percentage
2003	123	4	3.25%
2004	184	74	40.2%
2005	144	65	45.1%

Adapted from University of Pretoria (2007)

**Table 6.52: Enrolment and throughput rates of BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy distance education students (2002 – 2004)**

Registration Period	Enrolled	Minimum		Minimum +1		Minimum +2		Minimum +3		Minimum +4		Grand Total of Graduation	Total Percentage
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%		
Apr 02 - Sept 02	654	56	9	50	8	34	5	52	8	32	5	224	34%
Oct 02 - Mar 03	625	57	9	52	8	58	9	42	7			209	33%
Apr 03 – Sept 03	639	19	3	73	11	52	8					144	23%
Oct 03 – Mar 04	452	54	12	63	14							117	26%
Apr 04 – Sept 04	402	55	14									55	14%

Source: University of Pretoria (2007b)

Table 6.51 indicates that of 123 students from Contact Education that enrolled in 2003, only 4 students (3.25%) graduated within the 2-year period meant for this programme. Conversely, from Table 6.52, of 654 students from Distance Education that enrolled between April and September 2002, 224 students (34%) graduated. Similarly, this higher throughput rate by students from Distance Education was also repeated in April – September, 2003 period as Table 6.52 reveals that of 625 students from Distance Education, 209 students (33%) graduated within the minimum time ( + 3 examination entry points). In comparison, this shows a higher throughput rate amongst the students from Distance Education.

When placed side-by-side, the national benchmark of an expected 60% throughput rate for a Contact Education study programme, and an expected 30% throughput rate for a Distance Education study programme (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6.1), one might conclude that student performance in the Contact Education group for the period under review was much lower than the expected benchmark. Conversely, the student performance rate from Distance Education went beyond the benchmark for the study programme (34% and 33% respectively). This is despite the fact that complete data on student performance from Distance Education were yet to be available as at the time of this investigation.

Interestingly, this is a contrasting picture to the belief people generally have – locally and internationally – in regard to the expected throughput rates of students from the two delivery modes. Possible reasons for this are:

- The availability of support facilities for students from Distance Education,
- This may include quality learning materials,
- Good assessment methods,
- Motivation by supportive family or partner, and
- Constant communication between the university and the students, amongst others (Fraser & Nieman, 1995; McGivney, 2003; Shachar & Neuman, 2003; Bernard, 2004; Magagula & Ngwenya (2004).

However, Table 6.51 shows that by 2004, there was a sharp increase in the throughput rates of students from Contact Education. Of 184 that enrolled, 74 students (40.2%) graduated, which shows a higher performance rate than that of students from Distance Education (117 students (26%) of 452 students graduated during October 2003 – March 2004; and 55 students (14%) of 402 students graduated during April – September, 2004). However, it should be borne in mind that the students from Distance Education students, unlike their Contact

Education counterparts, were yet to reach their maximum completion time as at the time of this report.

Similarly, as shown in Table 6.51, in the 2005 academic year there was a sharp improvement in the throughput rate of the students from Contact Education. This was because of the 144 students that enrolled, 65 students (45.1%) graduated. The main reason for this phenomenon might be that, as the country emerges from its dismal political past, the academic level of prospective students is gradually improving, which subsequently leads to improved performance by the students from Contact Education, also bearing in mind that they now often have the support they need (Bornman, 2004; Mostert 2004). Unfortunately, as at the time of this investigation, no data for the same period was available for the students from Distance Education, as students were yet to complete their study cycle.

Nonetheless, one could agree with the prediction of scholars (Machtmes & Asher, 2000; Zhao et al. 2004) that should Distance Education maintain its performance and steadily improve on it, the possibility of attaining as good a result (Sonner, 1999; Carr, 2000; Scoech, 2000; Meyer, 2002) or even a better one in comparison to Contact Education.

In addition, Tables 6.53 and 6.54 below also show the drop-out rates of enrolled students from both modes of delivery:

**Table 6.53: Drop-out rates of the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy contact education students (2003 – 2005)**

Year	Enrolled	Drop-out	Drop-out %
2003	123	2	1.63%
2004	184	9	4.89%
2005	144	8	5.56%

Adapted from University of Pretoria (2007)

**Table 6.54: Drop-out rates of the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy distance education students (2002 – 2005)**

Registration period	Enrolled	Drop-out	Drop-out %
April 2002 -.Sept 2002	654	74	11%
Oct 2002 – Mar 2003	625	68	11%
Apr 2003 – Sept 2003	639	88	14%
Oct 2003 – Mar 2004	452	66	15%
Apr 2004 – Sept 2004	402	57	14%
Oct 2004 – Mar 2005	634	90	14%

Source: University of Pretoria (2007b)

In considering this matter, a comparison of the drop-out rates of students from Distance and Contact Education indicate that the drop-out rate of the distance group was higher throughout the periods under investigation, which – unfortunately – has been found to be the norm (Subotzky, 2003; Leppel, 2004). For instance, in 2003, of 123 students that enrolled for the Contact Education course, the number of drop-outs was 2 students (1.64%). In considering the drop-out rate for students from Distance Education, the following is to be found: of 654 students that enrolled between April and September 2002, the drop-out rate was 74 students (11%); of 625 students that enrolled for the between October 2002 – March 2003, 68 students (11%) dropped out, and out of 639 students for April – September, 2003, 88 students (14%) dropped-out of the study programme.

Similarly so, the trend in the drop-out rates for Distance Education continued for the following years: of 452 students registered for October 2003 – March 2004, 66 students (15%) dropped-out; of 402 students registered for April – September, 2004, 57 students (14%) dropped-out; and of 634 students registered for October 2004 – March 2005, 90 students (14%) dropped-out., was not different when compared to the drop-out rates of 2004 and 2005 for Contact Education, which

was 9 students (4.89%) of 184 students registered; and 8 students (5.56%) of 144 students registered, respectively.

### **6.3.1.8 Discussion of the findings in terms of the fourth sub-research question**

Of relevance to this section, is the second part of the fourth sub-research question of the main research question, which investigates the divergences observable in the drop-out rates of students from both modes of delivery:

Research sub-question 4

*‘What divergences are observable in the output rates (i.e. dropout rates) in both Distance and Conventional Education and what factors are responsible for these?’*

The data concerning these students that was relevant to this study was made available by the Department of Administration, of the University of Pretoria, was compared, and the findings of the study have been highlighted under each table. However, the overall findings indicate that the throughput rate of the students from Distance Education was as good as that of the students from Contact Education and was even, in some cases, better (see Tables 6.51 and 6.52). Some of the possible reasons for this were given as good assessment method and motivation by supportive family or partner.

Similarly, comparison of the drop-out rates of students from both modes indicated that the rate of the students from Distance Education was higher than the rate of the students from Contact Education (see Tables 6.53 and 6.54). In reaction to this trend, various scholars have proffered possible reasons for this, which range from lack of academic, financial and family support; low academic level of students; low motivation on the part of the students; job and family responsibilities; ill health and HIV/AIDS amongst others (Fraser & Nieman, 1995; Sherry, 1996; Galusha, 1997; McGivney, 2003; Mostert, 2004). Conversely, it

has been argued that the high attrition rate in Distance Education, is not as a result of it being inferior to its conventional counterpart Tucker (2001), but has, rather, other underlying factors, some of which have been cited above.

Lastly, the researcher hopes to compare these quantitative findings with the findings from the qualitative interviews in the latter part of this study.

## 6.4 Summary

In Chapter Six, the findings, analysis and interpretation of the quantitative data have been presented, which included,

- Firstly, the descriptive analysis of findings in the responses from the questionnaire given to students registered for the BEd (Hons) study programme;
- Secondly, inferential statistics of the performances of students from Distance and Conventional Education, applied to test the level of significance of the scores, and
- Thirdly, a comparison of the enrolment, graduation and dropout rates of students from Distance and Conventional Education.

In Chapter Seven, the findings from the qualitative interviews with key role players will be reported on and interpreted. This is in the hope of deepening understanding on possible reasons for the findings of this chapter, and synthesizing both these reports in Chapter Eight.

# CHAPTER 7

## PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESULTS

### **7.1 Introduction**

Chapter Seven reports the research findings of the qualitative aspect of this study. The method has been included in order to report the situation through the eyes of the participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) thus, emphasizing words rather than numbers (Bryman, 2000). Therefore, the data were collected through structured one-on-one interviews with administrators, course presenters, and one-on-one telephone interviews with students who had discontinued their BEd (Hons) studies with the University of Pretoria (see Appendixes 5 – 10). Data was also collected through focus group interviews, with tutors and module coordinators (see Appendixes 11 - 12), all of which aided in eliciting diverse views on answers to the research questions.

Further, this study focused on the students because they have been identified as key role players in the education sector, and have been described as the inputs, processes and outputs of the educational program (Sahney, Banwet & Karunes, 2004). In addition, since they were involved in the programme under study – i.e. the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy – they were in the best position to give relevant information needed for this study.

The findings of this chapter were complimented by the results of a questionnaire (see Appendix 4) that was completed by the students that contained questions formulated to highlight the three chosen indices of assessment of this study, namely: *access delivery* and *output* (see Chapter 6 for these findings). Therefore, these indices have been identified as major themes, from which other themes were developed, with corresponding sub-themes. Table 7.1, reflects the summary of the main themes, with their sub-themes:

**Table 7.1: Summary of the main themes and sub-themes**

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES
<b>1. Quality of access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Opening up of equal opportunities for learners</li> <li>➤ Selection of instructional technology for the programme</li> <li>➤ Relevance of the technology</li> <li>➤ Reasons for the choice of technology</li> </ul>
<b>2. Quality of delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ In-service training for both academic and administrative staff</li> <li>➤ Approaches to delivery modes in the programme</li> <li>➤ Permanent and part-time teaching staff recruitment</li> <li>➤ Language policy and its suitability to students</li> <li>➤ Learning materials</li> <li>➤ Faculty and administrative support to students</li> <li>➤ Learner-learner interaction</li> <li>➤ Contact sessions and classes</li> </ul>
<b>3. Quality of Output</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Expectations of student performance</li> <li>➤ Assessment methods for students</li> <li>➤ Marking of scripts</li> <li>➤ Length of feedback on assignments/exams</li> <li>➤ Impression of learner performance</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Library facilities</li> <li>➤ Accommodation during contact sessions and classes</li> </ul>
<b>4. Quality assurance process for conventional and distance education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ University's vision on quality and awareness by key role players</li> <li>➤ Staff development</li> <li>➤ Academic's involvement in distance education</li> <li>➤ Incentives and rewards to academic staff involved in distance education</li> <li>➤ Marketing of the programme under investigation</li> <li>➤ Academic's involvement in Distance Education research and identified niche areas of research needs</li> <li>➤ The university's commitment to Distance Education</li> </ul>

Lastly, the focus of Chapter Seven is:

- An overview of the qualitative investigation applied in this study,
- A presentation, analysis and interpretation of the qualitative investigation and the results as they relate to each of the qualitative instruments used to collect the data.
- Lastly, the summary of these findings and the conclusion of this chapter, are given.

## 7.2 An overview

The main aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which Distance Education is inferior to Conventional Education, when assessed in terms of *access*, *delivery* and *output*. Therefore, focus was placed on defining the term *quality*, a 'slippery concept', but one which has been identified as the most important issue in education, and its benefit to society in relation to government expenditure, is continually questioned (El-Khawas, De-Pietro-Jurand & Holm-Nielsen, 1998; Guskin & Marcy, 2003). The protagonists of quality in higher education are the government, the academics, and students, with their parents, the taxpayers and the employers of labour.

Though, Distance Education has been accused of focusing on a narrow idea of quality, and having no consensus on its criteria (Antony & Gnanam, 2004), a synthesis of all definitions shows that benchmarks for quality assurance in both Distance and Contact Education focus essentially on the same issues, though emphasis on each well may differ. In South Africa, even though there are various bodies to ensure quality in higher education, ownership of this quality rests solely with the institutions (CHE, 2000a & b; CHE, 2004; HEQC, 2005). In view of this, the University of Pretoria, in its mission policy, is committed to delivering education of superior quality; hence, terms, such as *excellent*, *effective*, *efficient* and *caring*, are used in its mission statement (UP, 2005a). Consequently, the criteria of quality assurance, with their indices, as provided by National Association of Distance Education Organisations of South Africa [NADEOSA] (2003), guided the development of the instruments used in this study (see, Appendix 3 for the criteria and indices).

Subsequently, through the interviews, this study assessed the quality of access provided for the students and the extent to which the choice of technology adopted by the university extended this access to the respondents in the BEd (Hons) study programme. From literature conclusions were drawn in relation to *quality* as the indices of assessment for this study would be focusing on this term.

Furthermore, comparison was drawn between the quality of learning experience to which students from both Distance and Contact Education were exposed under the same study programme. Factors that may have contributed to possible divergences observable in the output rates of students on the study programme were probed. Lastly, included in this study was the quality assurance process adopted by the University of Pretoria, the extent to which members of staff and the students that formed part of this study were informed of this process and their possible involvement in it.

All these were done with focus on the conceptual framework adopted for this study, which was the ‘Transactional Distance Theory’ (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.4) that was first mooted by Moore in 1972 (Stirling, 1997), and according to Moore (1996) it has its roots in much of the work done by John Dewey (1938). Even though it is a distance education theory, the researcher used it because:

- Firstly, this study focuses essentially on distance education as a mode of delivery.
- Secondly, the theory greatly aids in determining the quality of delivery applied to teaching and learning, and with the move to the constructivist approach (Fraser & Lombard, 2002; Garrison, 1996), the researcher concurs that the students on the programme under investigation assume the responsibility of constructing knowledge and the greater the support for this, the better for the students.
- Thirdly, the program is purely paper-based for both modes of delivery.
- Fourthly, Bischoff et al. (1996) have suggested that the term *transactional distance*, ‘applies not just to distance education, but to any educational setting’.
- And lastly, the researcher is of the opinion that this theory inevitably brings together the three indices of assessment chosen for this study, namely: *access*, *delivery* and *output*, because the quality of access provided for students would be reflected in the quality of the delivery, which would eventually affect the quality of the output.

However, in order to avoid *data overload* (Miles and Huberman, 1994), a computer programme – assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) – was used to manage and make sense of the data collected. This enabled the identification of relevant quotations in the interviewees’ responses; formed codes from the question items; examined and compared concepts and themes that emerged from their responses; and established relationships among the codes

(Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Lastly, full transcripts of all interviews can be accessed on the CD attached to this thesis.

## **7.3 Presentation, analysis and interpretation of the qualitative investigation**

### **7.3.1 Assessment of the quality of access and its extension to students from both modes of delivery**

A literature review carried out for this study as related to the term *access* (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.2) revealed that:

- The view of *elitism* in education is no longer relevant all over the world, since the economic strength of a nation depends on how many of its citizenry have access to quality education, thereby having redemptive purposes, and promising social inclusion and cohesion (Gourley, 1999; Morley, 2000; Subotzky, 2001).
- It is evident that Distance Education is rooted in the language of *social justice* and *equity, access* and *educational opportunity* to previously disadvantaged people (Nuan, 1996), which was the case with many Black South Africans before the advent of its nascent democracy (Subotzky, 2001).
- Opening up of access may not necessarily connote giving access indeed, thus leading to various forms of access (Morrow, 1994; Jansen, 2001; Gamede, 2005; Cele & Brandt, c2005). Also, it has some implications, such as the ratio of educators to students (Singh, 2001); cost, and the technology divide (Lewis, 2002; Hellman, 2003).

Based on the issues raised above, the interviewees were requested to provide information on what instructional technology was selected for the BEd (Hons) study program, reasons for its choice, and its relevance to all the students on this

program (see Sections 7.3.1.2 and 7.3.1.3). This deepened the insight on the historical background for opening up access to this programme for students (see Section 7.3.1.1).

#### **7.3.1.1.1 Reasons for opening up access to the study programme for distance education students**

According to Jansen (1990:3), South African educators have been ‘educationally disempowered and politically marginalized to a very large extent’. Hence, to all the administrators, module coordinators and course presenters interviewed, this could best describe the main reason for the commencing with the BEd (Hons) study programme as a Distance Education study programme, at the University of Pretoria. As expected, the advent of democracy in South Africa led to a great call for *access* to university education for people who were previously denied such access. However, it was obvious people could not leave their jobs and apply themselves to further education; hence the need to ‘take the university to the student’. Secondly, according to Module Coordinator 1 (MC 1) during the focus group interview, there was the great need to upgrade the qualifications of educators. To this, MC 5 reported as follows:

*‘It’s more of addressing the need ...as it presented itself in terms of trying to uplift, probably the quality of educators in the far distant areas. And most of the problems that were noted then, I think were due to the matriculation pass rate. The pass rates were low’. P22, 22:26 (36-37)*

Third, MC (P22) quipped that,

*‘Also given the nine provinces, some of the provinces are not serviced by higher education. It’s unreasonable to expect students from those provinces to attend contact education. We need to reach out to them ...’ P22, 22:26 (26:32)*

<sup>1</sup> P22 refers to the 22<sup>nd</sup> interview (as P22 in Atlas.ti program); 22:26 refers to code 26 in the 22<sup>nd</sup> interview, while the subsequent figures refer to the line number of the verbatim quotation. This applies to every other page.

These quotes buttress, firstly, the fact earlier noted by Sedgwick (2004) that during the past political era, South Africa maintained disparate higher education systems for the different people groups, which forced the newly democratically elected government to open up access to include all people that had been previously denied (Education White Paper, 1997; National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa, 2001). Secondly, all academics support the view that past denial of access to education often leads to open access under a new political dispensation (Herman & Mandell, 1999; Holmberg, 2002; Braimoh, 2003).

Therefore, according to Participant 4, this influenced the development of a business plan, to establish a committee, to embark on a research project, to determine the needs in the education environment in South Africa. It was through this channel that the management of the University of Pretoria decided there was indeed a need, and established that there would be enough students interested in enrolling for the BEd (Hons) study programme to make the offering of this program viable. This, according to him, would enable the university to optimize economies of scale (Rumble, 2001).

However, according to the same interviewee, the university had been involved in distance education prior to 2002, but that it *'...was within a different model with an external service provider and that didn't go well for us in many ways'* PD 4, 4: 2 (6: 25). Therefore, the university authorities concluded that halting the provision of distance education totally, *'... would not solve the education crisis in S.A' if it only has... contact mode support for further training of teachers'* P4, 4:2 (6: 25). Thus in other words, the university authorities agreed with the principle that the government has identified distance education as a means of redressing past inequities (Daves et al. 2004). According to P4, the University of Pretoria then went through all the necessary, but tedious,

processes of course approval, to be in a position to implement the BEd (Hons) study program as a distance education course. (This process involved the specific course lecturers, the department, the faculty, the Senate, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and finally to the Department of Education (P4).)

### **7.3.1.2 Facilitating ‘access’ to distance education students on the program and assessing the equality of the ‘access’ given to enrolled students from both modes**

In order to facilitate access, the pre-requisite for the program according to Participants 1, 4 and 5 includes one of the following:

- M + 3 (which refers to a three-year teacher diploma + a further diploma);
- M + 4 (a four-year teacher diploma);
- B.A, Bachelor of Arts degree (a 4-year degree program); or
- An Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE).
- In addition to this, the university also admitted students in terms of the RPL (recognition of prior learning) policy. This according to participant 4, however, would have to be decided by a selection team, with the final decision resting with the Dean of the Faculty.

All the above requirements are in line with the guidelines given by the Department of Education and the National Plan for Higher Education (2001), on admission policy into the program.

Also, MC 3 in the focus group interview with module coordinators described the admission policy this way:

*‘In a certain sense, there’s openness in enrolling students for ACE or Honors. In the preliminary requirements, there’s no screening ... It is an equity type of thing. Anybody can do it; once you meet the minimum requirements, you can try it. We do not look at how much did you get from the previous degree. It’s a type of open degree ...’ P22, 22:30 (304:304)*

Even though there is an element of openness inherent to the programme itself – since enrolled students had the opportunity to choose when to write the exams – students were expected to complete the study program within a reasonable time frame. And Participant 4 summarized it, as follows:

*“Any institution with respect will not allow a student to continue infinitely to try and be successful. So we sat down and evaluated the program to check what is realistic with regard to the cut off date or the maximum period of time and when a student arrives at that point we communicate to him you are de-registered, you need to apply afresh if a student has done nothing in four years we will not allow him again because there is no proof and record that this student will stay serious, but if for an example you have a student who has passed four modules of the six but he could not finish in that time, we will tell him you register again and we will give you recognition of what you have done and you can continue with these two. So it is not an absolute cut off for everybody, for some it will be we will not host students that don’t perform academically”. P4, 4:9 (63:64)*

This appears to clarify the differences between distance education and open learning, which, according to scholars, enjoy a very high degree of flexibility (Rowntree, 1992; UNESCO, 2001; Holmberg, 2002; Commonwealth of Learning of Learning (COL), 2004). In support of this, Bates (2005) asserts that it is rare to find both openness and distance combined, and there is no teaching system that is completely open. This can also continue to suggest that there is equality in relation to the access provided for students, which is in relation to the admission policy of the institution, since as many prospective students as possible would be able to enroll for the study programme (Mabokela, 2006). Furthermore, Firdaus (2006) in a recent study suggests that students perceive *access* as the most important determinant of service quality in higher education, which may be connected with students’ reasons for enrolling for the study programme (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.1-f).

Another important aspect related to equality of access, is the language policy of the university, which must be in line with the Language-in-Education policy of the country (DoE, 1997). Describing language of learning at the University of Pretoria, Participant 3 described the BEd (Hons) study programme as a full English program, even though, according to the university's policy (see Chapter 3, Section 3.7), students were allowed to present assignments and write examination in Afrikaans.

Shedding further light on this, Participant 7 had this to say:

*'Well, its okay. I mean that's the only language that could be reasonably practicable for all South Africans, especially in academic and especially, giving the history of South Africa. And it's expected and assumed that because of their status, probably, they are proficient in at least one of the official languages and one of them is English. Because I know for sure, they could be proficient in their mother tongue, but the material is not written in their mother tongue'.*  
P7, 7:9 (93:109)

Nonetheless, this has possible serious implications for the students, as described by Participant 10, when commenting on this

*'No and Yes... I don't think so. If you talk to them, you can clearly see that they don't have the same background knowledge. And if I can be honest, and I think I must be honest with you, I can say that the rural people, they have a huge backlog in all skills - reading skills, skills that you need to...note-making skills, all that kind of skills. They really have a huge back-log. But the students from Pretoria, from Jo'burg or Durban, they really have an advantage'.*  
P10, 10:4 (21:37)

However, this did not rule out the fact that presenters of courses helped students who struggled with some concepts by speaking in the local language or calling on the help of other students to come to their aid (P13; P14). Reasons for this was explained by Participant 13

*'Oh because with this distance education, since most of them are educators, at least they can communicate in English, however some are still struggling because you know that this system of moving from ACE to BEd., there is a big gap compared to those students who are really moving from junior degree to Honours from those who come from ACE to BEd; they struggle a lot'. P13, 13:11 (93:109)*

Unfortunately, this does not necessarily suggest a peculiar problem with the University of Pretoria, but presents the true picture of what struggles tertiary institutions are currently facing, bearing in mind the past political events of South Africa. Even though government policy encourages teaching in local languages, nonetheless, Granville et al. (1998) are of the opinion that this lofty goal has to wait for the future. Conversely, Mqgqwashu (2004) is of the opinion the implications for the country in the global setting are so great that the country has much to lose, therefore making this wish sound a mirage.

When one considers the comments of Morrow (1993/4), Jansen (2001) and Gamede (2005), one cannot but agree with Herman and Mendel (1999), who said earlier that opening up access to all people, may not necessarily make the system fair. Consequently, Participant 11 (P11, 11:4 [15: 19]; P11, 11:3 [12:13]), citing the example of a module had this to say:

*'I will say availability of a library is in my case very important because law is not education; it's not an easy subject and they don't have that opportunity in the rural areas...to go to the law library. You know law library differs from a normal library you can't go there and take a book away. They can't borrow the books from a law library because it is an expensive material and it's not available everywhere. You have to go and sit there, and work there. You can't take a law report home you can make a copy... that you can do. But they don't have that opportunity. And you know that is a very difficult problem to solve. That is because there is no law library in the rural areas. The opportunities are not equal that is for sure, not because of the university's fault but because of the non-availability of such in the rural areas'.*

This in essence meant that there were some students that had an advantage over others; a fact attested to by Participant 12, considering the fact that some of them had exposure to computer technology, by the virtue of the locations of where they worked and lived. Buttressing this point, Participant 14 explained:

*'To be honest they don't have equal access because some of them are staying far in the rural areas, whereby they travel kilometres to go and get an ordinary library, unlike those who are doing full time here at the campus. They have access to the media centre; they have access to the computers. They can search for information easily compared to those who are out there'. P14*

This goes on to confirm the Internet crisis faced by Africa because, according to Laaser (2006), Africa has approximately 1% of worldwide Internet users, with nearly half of them situated in South Africa, and 70% of these are mostly in the major cities.

### **7.3.1.3 Choice of instructional technology by the university, reasons for the choice and its relevance to enrolled students**

According to Bates (2005:6), 'if an institution is deliberately selective in its students, it has more flexibility with regard to choice of technology'. This can best summarize course of action implemented at the University of Pretoria, as it targeted a specific group – before implementing the BEd (Hons) study program. Thus, all the administrators, course presenters and module coordinators interviewed for this study agreed that the main instructional technology selected for the programme was print-based.

However, during the contact sessions, this was supplemented with the use of transparencies (P13 – course presenter 8), handouts (P15 – course presenter 10) and group interaction (P13 – course presenter 8) among the students. Giving a reason for this choice, MC 1 explained that the target population of the BEd (Hons) study programme often did not have access to electronic materials, which

placed a new challenge on the efforts of the university. In support of this, some Course Presenters (P7, 9, 12 and 13) said that, *'Most of them are computer illiterate; they don't have access to the Internet. You can't tell them to go and do research on the Internet, in fact some don't know the Internet'* (P7, 7:4 (16:17)); *'Because all of them do not have access to it. We can't send them video or something because most of them won't be able to use that.'* (P9, 9:3 (12:13)); *'They can all read and it's a postgraduate course.'* [P10, 10: 4 (21: 37)]; *'Yeah this is relevant, I mean another problem is that most of the rural areas we are visiting don't have resources so the only thing accessible to them is the print; they are stuck with the print...'* (P12, 12:2 (12:13)); *'...in the certain group that I have now, I believe it does because there is visual, there is auditory, there is group interaction. I think it does cater for all of them'* (P13, 13:3 (26:13)).

All of these comments buttress what one of the administrators (Participant 4), said of the university, when analysing the audience before it decided on the instructional technology for the program, and according to Lewis (2000), this often enables providers to identify what kind of learning environment, they have and how they can meet the needs.

However, citing a module as an example, Course Presenter 6 (P11) is of the opinion that its relevance to especially the students from Distance Education was to a certain extent, and this was the way he explained it:

*'I will definitely say they are relevant to the learners to a big extent. The only way they could not be relevant to the learners could be the distance. It would be much easier for a learner in Pretoria to go to the legal library and to have a legal report printed and to study that legal report in full. I only have an extract in my examples. Learners in the rural areas don't have that opportunity. I think they have a problem because if you talk about a law library they can't imagine. You can't even tell them you can go to the law library and see how it is with the system of getting law reports of each court case in South Africa. The learners here can go there, but they don't have that opportunity.'* P11, 11:3 (12:13)

Nevertheless, *print* has been identified as one of the four most important media in higher education – in spite of the advancement of technology – and it lies within the *first generation* of delivery in Distance Education (Laurillard, 1993; Garrison and Archer, 2000; Holmberg, 2000; Taylor, 2001; Bates, 2005). Also, in view of the profile of the students registered for the BEd (Hons) study programme, there was, up till the present time, no alternate choice for the university to take, than to provide the technology already available to the students. Further, it would continue with seeking a solution to the problem of assisting the students, especially with the specific module mentioned.

### **7.3.2 Comparison between the quality of learning experience of students from both modes and its impact on possible divergences in their output rates**

In their study on quality of learning experiences, Neumann and Neumann (1993) identified five components, which are resources, content, learning flexibility, student-faculty contact and involvement. Therefore, Bates (2005) suggests that opportunities for interaction have to be consciously designed in relation to distance education study programmes. This ranges from student-faculty contact to student-student contact. Also, according to McDonald (1996), ‘the aim of delivering ... high quality learning experiences for students is a central part of every university’s mission, and its achievement is crucial to the success of the institution’. Therefore, interviewees were asked questions on the delivery to compare the quality of the learning experiences of students from Distance and Conventional Education.

#### **7.3.2.1 Program adaptation to distance education, challenges faced by module coordinators and how they coped**

As earlier explained in Section 7.3.2, the BEd (Hons) study program was implemented due to a number of reasons, which included the democratic winds of change that blew over South Africa and the national need to improve the level of teachers. However, according to the Module Coordinators, they had to cross a

number of hurdles to make this vision a reality, all which buttress the view of the Council on Higher Education (CHE 2004d) that the production of high quality learning resources is complex, time-consuming and expensive. For instance, Module Coordinator 6 (MC) (P21) gave the following insight, which was supported by MC 4:

*'I think the biggest challenge with distance education is one of communication, in trying to simulate the contact situation in a distance mode. How do you communicate with the students, and how do they get hold of you? And in that regard, specifically, that touches on the whole field of distance education. In distance education, the essence is, how do you present your learning material in such a way that it is accessible to the students? How can the student respond to the material? Is the material interactive? But also a major challenge is to provide feedback on the work that the students have submitted, to be meaningful; and it's very difficult if you have a thousand students - to do so, on a one-on-one basis'.*  
P22, 22:4 (42:65)

In addition to this, MC 7 mentioned the limited influence she felt she had on course presenters, as it was impossible to be in several places simultaneously to monitor their presentation. Also, MC 6 highlighted the problem of language proficiency in English, which was not just a problem with students from Distance Education, but the entire student populace. This was also related to comprehension, academic and analytical reading. In addition to this, MC 3 and MC 6 emphasised the challenges (with support from the other MCs), and aired a compelling reason that in the old teacher training, students were not exposed to rigorous academic process, but only covered the school syllabus. Invariably, this signalled under preparedness of the students. According to Nash (2005), under-preparation of higher education students contributes to low throughput rates, which often characterizes distance education study programmes. Therefore, institutions have been advised to introduce generic skills and pre-orientation courses (Grayson, 1997; Carr, 2000; Tresman, 2002).

Nevertheless, the module coordinators coped with their challenges in various ways. For example, one of the Module Coordinators (P21) described below how he and his colleagues handled the challenge concerning the study materials:

*'The challenge of the study material we addressed by having people from outside to consult on these, and secondly, we had a system of critical readers. When the study materials were prepared they were sent out to at least two critical readers, who made comments and recommendations and then those are people, who are mostly experienced in distance education, and we tried to make our study materials student-friendly by having lay out and design experts to do that'. P21, 21:5 (65:91)*

On the language issue, another coordinator added

*'The last one we are in the process for, for this contact session is in July on having language proficiency test for the ACE students, who are attending the contact sessions, and to see more or less at what level we are, and what type of language proficiency support we can provide for our students as part of the materials package sort of toolkit or something. There are number of issues that we can deal with within the context of language proficiency, but then, you must know what the average level of your students is.' P21, 21:5 (65:91)*

Also, during same interview, Module Coordinator 1 promised that this same gesture would be extended to the BEd (Hons) study programme. According to Herman (1998) and Nash (2005), one of the ways to assist students in this area is through the introduction of bridging courses.

In addition to all the above, the ten course presenters interviewed agreed that there was no difference between the modes of delivery except that the university lecturers had to transport overhead projectors, transparencies and handouts to different centres, in order to assist their presentation.

### 7.3.2.2 Assessment of learning packages sent to distance education students

Learning packages sent to Distance Education students included:

- Administrative booklets,
- Tutorial letters,
- Study guides, and
- Learning materials.

According to Participant 3 (an administrator), one of the ways that enrolled students from Distance Education were introduced to the University of Pretoria, was through the tutorial letter, which contained all information that students needed while on the study programme. Therefore, another administrator (Participant 6) felt that the letters and the learning materials acted as a support system for the students, and describing the learning materials, which interestingly were used by students from both modes, she said:

*'It depends on what sort of learning material, what kind of pedagogy you want to follow in the way you have designed the material and the way you can go - more constructive or instructive - or whatever, depending on what is more appropriate. But with distance materials whatever theory you follow it must be interactive because the students has to take ownership of their own learning to a certain extent, even in an instructive model of teaching. And that ownership and independent learning has to be stimulated in the materials; that can be done in various ways'. P6, 6:7 (57:61)*

This was also corroborated by other administrators (P1 and P3). According to P1,

*'It's an academic conversation between the lecturer who wrote the tutorial letters and the students. When you walk into the classroom for the very first time and you want to introduce the modules and yourself to your students, so what you do, we now write that in our first tutorial letter. We tell them about the assignment, we give them the assignment and you give them the due date for the assignment; you tell them about the contact sessions, you tell them on how to prepare for the contact session. And then the last tutorial letter they get is how to prepare for the exams; how to study and what is the format of the paper, how marks are allocated and types of questions that could possibly be asked. So it's a sort of academic support'. P1, 1:4 (73:80)*

According to one of the administrators (Participant 6), the learning materials were used by both Distance and Conventional Education students, due to their quality, as *"... we have been trying to look at the quality of the Distance Education materials. Yes, it is because in the distance materials, everything is documented, everything comes under the spotlight in a way; and in that case it's easier to lift the standards of things like the materials in Distance Education"* P6, 6:15 (128:144). Further reasons given by other administrators (P2 and P3) were that the same academics were the ones in charge of both study programmes and the same qualification would be earned by the students upon completion of their studies. In addition, the study materials were written by module coordinators, and were at times written by a single author and at other times co-authored between them, and they were given autonomy when writing the learning materials. Yet there was no gainsaying the fact that this was still controlled as according to an administrator, *"Autonomy has limits...when it is in the learning programme it's got to fit into the programme ..."* P6, 6:5 (30:40).

Explaining further on how the materials were written, MC 4 said that

*'... there is a home team for the distance education that is available to assist the staff to adapt the content which they know and which they can put together, to adapt this content to be interactive or to become reader friendly; to also cater for all language levels of the learners, and also to develop the materials in such a way that it is interactive. So you constantly provide the outcomes and assessment tasks for case studies so that they engage with the materials not only in a theoretical way, but also in a practical way with an implementation format'. P2, 2:2 (9:16)*

This process according to the interviewee involved coordinators coming together to decide what would be in each module, with assistance on language editing (P2). According to an administrator (P6, 6:18 [176:189]), the *look and feel* format, which had a certain benchmark, margin, font and icons had been chosen for writing the study guides used by the students. Buttressing this, Van Kierk (2004) is of the opinion that distance focus has shifted to the production of quality learning material.

Describing what audience analysis involved, the administrator continued that '[It meant] ...*constantly getting more information about the students profile in terms of many things, because that informs you about who they are*' P6, 6:3 (15:25). She also affirmed that this was conducted and according to her, the process included a situation '*... where stakeholders or students or somebody informing the people who are writing the course what the needs are*' P6, 6:3 (15:25). According to CHE (2004d), there are no quick fixes and cheap options of developing quality learning materials as the process involves the provision of the necessary expertise, adequate financial resources, time and supportive organisational structure. However, according to the same interviewee, no attempts have yet been made on discovering the learning styles and learning preferences of students from the two educational modes. Ironically, scholars have stressed the importance of both, as this knowledge will enrich the effectiveness of learning materials (Goold & Rimmer, 2000; Logan & Thomas, 2002).

Interestingly, most of the Course Presenters, expressed their satisfaction and acceptance of the materials because, according to one, it was of '*a high standard as students had more than enough materials to work with*' (P8). Another said that it was '*clear, easy to understand and easy to follow*' (P9). In addition, some students who had discontinued their studies with the University of Pretoria indicated in the telephone interviews (P16, 17 and 19), that they were satisfied

with the language level of the learning materials. Despite this, the researcher persisted in asking other interviewees questions directly related to the relevance of the materials to the level of the enrolled students. For instance, mentioning two modules, an administrator (P6) confessed that the interactivity level of some modules might be found wanting. However, she – together with other Course Presenters – was of the opinion that the standard of the materials could still be improved (P6; P7; P11), while another Course Presenter (Participant 8) described her experience of this manner by adding:

*'... Sitting in front of 50-60 odd learners and they are not even able to understand the study guide that we have issued them... So how do you go from a study guide, which is the least difficult part, because that's your information guide, how do you go from that to a textbook that not even master students can understand that well?'*  
P12, 12:6 (68:91)

Furthermore, two Course Presenters were of the opinion that the materials for the modules they present were due for revision (P10; P13). Interestingly, one of the administrators (Participant 6), who in an attempt to differentiate between the good and the bad study materials buttressed this:

*'I think some are worse than others and others are better than others. Those that are worse will be revised in the instructional designing again. And what is wrong with them -I think is the one where particularly the students have a thick reader and the guide has minimal guidance... the guide has to take them through quite complicated readings using difficult language. I think the good ones are really very good between 7 or A, and they encourage the students to do innovative things.'* P6, 6:18 (176:189)

As a result, one of the Course Presenters (Participant 10) suggested that a cue should be taken from another university's material, as it was better on the particular module he referred to. This highlights the importance of collaboration, which has been suggested as a means for institutions to drastically reduce the cost of learning material production and producing of quality resources (CHE, 2004d).

In addition, Course Presenter 8 suggested that students wishing to be enrolled at the university should be required to join other prospective students 'on a pre-study course...' because, she thought, this should be a preliminary step to their admission as they would be better prepared for what to expect in the study programme. This supports Bornman's (2004) view that the country has a high illiteracy ratio, due to its political history. Furthermore, Mostert et al. (2004) has described the low academic level of students as a major contributing factor to students from distance education delivering poor output rates. In support of this, the module coordinators also indicated the problematic situation of the low academic level of the students before coming into the study programme (especially in this case, when one considers the case found in South Africa, where student teachers, under the apartheid system, were not exposed to scholastic work) (MC 6). This further supports what the instructional designer (P6) and course presenter 7 (P11) meant by referring to the low academic level of the students coming into the study programme, which could eventually lead to persistent failure of students. To buttress this, one of the students that had discontinued expressed her pain of failure as in this way:

*'I started this program 2003... completing my modules, doing my assignments, and I used to get ninety something, sixty something percentages. But, but when writing the exams, I failed. I could only uh, afford to get only three modules out of the eleven that I did by 2004, hence I decided to deregister... Maybe they were difficult or maybe I've got a negative attitude or maybe when I'm writing the exams I become so nervous or what, I don't know'. P19, 19:1 (4:54)*

The last part of this statement buttresses Van Schoor et al.'s (2002) view on the role, which academic anxiety plays in students from Distance Education delivering low throughput rates.

In addition, one of the Course Presenters (P12) suggested that course presenters needed to be trained to teach students from rural back grounds, saying: *'the other thing might also be to have lecturers that are good in their*

*fields; they have to know their work, but they also have to have consideration for their students as well. I'm saying this with a lot of love to all my colleagues but many of them are brilliant in their fields. They are exceptional researchers of this or that, but some of them struggle to understand how to facilitate learning in the classroom'* P12, 12:6 (68:91). This according to her was because students from the two delivery systems differed, which was fundamental in deciding the way to approach the two groups of students. According to her, the issues above became important in view of the enormous effects on both the presenters and students because, in her words *'It takes away my teaching time; the students become frustrated because the gap between where they are, what they have to learn is too big and not all the lecturers can actually facilitate that gap all too well. Even myself, I struggle with it. Maybe I don't know how they would feel about it, but I would like to understand a rural person's life even better'* P12, 12:6 (68:91). Nonetheless, this echoes Ravhudzulo's (2003) view on the need for academics to be familiar with and understand the process of student learning, especially in relation to Distance Education.

However, bringing another aspect to the discussion, Course Presenter 10 (P14) was of a different opinion, as he did not view the study materials to be as difficult to comprehend as students like to complain, but rather that students lacked commitment to their studies, as they did not often make enough time for this. This highlights the issue raised by Telford and Masson (2005:108) that, except students *'perform their participatory co-production roles effectively, the desired outcomes of the service provision are unlikely to be realized'*. Another comment in support of this was made by a Course Presenter (Participant 7), who said that *'The language of the study materials is not too high; the thing is the level of the learners that is too low'* P7, 7:13 (118:137). Supporting this, one of the administrators (P6) explained that *'Our students' writing skills are probably poor in the nation'* P6, 6:13 (95:102).

Additionally, during the focus group interview with them, the tutors also identified this problem, and were of the opinion one of the roles they played was to act as a bridge between the module coordinators and the students, as one of them (Tutor 2) commented, *'I think there's also the language thing because lot of students, English is not their mother tongue. There's Zulu; there's Afrikaans; there's this and that. Because it's difficult if you can't understand what somebody is trying to say, and you're not a mother-tongue speaker. So it's very difficult because it's already a second language'*. P23, 23:13 (386:387). However, all the interviewees agreed that not all the students were at this level. Nevertheless, research shows that tutors play a major role in student success with their studies (Castles, 2004; Lentell & O'Rourke, 2004; McCracken, 2004).

According to an administrator (Participant 6), attempts were continually made to obtain feedback from the students on the learning materials – both formally and informally – and as a result a number of study guides had already been changed in line with requests from students (P6). Also, the programme *'... is going to go through some revision process, and when that happens... which is going to start this year then, there will be reinstruction designing mainly in this module so that there will be interactivity for that'* P6, 6:8 (63:67). In adding to this, the Module Coordinators (P22) commented that action would be implemented to rectify address this aspect.

Action was being implemented to assure the quality of the study guides and learning materials and, according to an administrator (Participant 6),

*'When they are in the course development process, one of the steps I have mentioned is that they go to critical readers, which means, it is the subject matter experts in that field in Distance Education, but this is a formative evaluation. They then give us their feedback on what they think. Then very often they get piloted on the contact students, small group of contact students, before we finally use them in the final version. We have also taken some of our guides to the South African Institute for Distance Education, which have given us summative evaluation. So we have support for our guides'*. P6, 6:14 (104:126)

Additionally, according to her, there must be continual formative evaluation and learning materials should be evaluated every five years.

Another area of interest on learning packages was the postal delivery time needed for these and other relevant information to be delivered to students. This highlighted the responsibilities of the administrative section, and, according to P5, the normal time span for this process was a maximum of twenty (20) days. The reason was because they had to go through the postal delivery system, which was not always reliable. For instance, a telephonic interviewee (P16), whose friend and she had both discontinued their studies with the university, lamented that

*'There is yet another one; he also cancelled because on the day of writing exams. He went for the exam, and there was this confusion between, he did not receive examination papers or what, I don't remember what it was and then they said that he could not write on the day of the examination when he was to go in. They wanted a letter showing the confirmation, and he did not receive that letter and he could not be allowed to write. And so on the day he came back and then never followed up on the remaining two papers. And so he cancelled as a result'. P16, 16:12 (236:252)*

However, this may imply that blame should be shifted onto the Department of Administration, of the Distance Education Unit, which may be due to a number of factors, such as inadequate staffing. This is important as it has been identified as a major aspect of ensuring quality (NADEOSA, 2003; Mostert, 2006). But, Course Presenter 10 (P15) explained that

*'I think some of the things are also the students, they contribute to a sum of problematic areas because you may find that there were some of the slips that they were supposed to reply to and post back to the universities, but they don't. That's the problem, some have relocated and they never inform the university. I think students contribute towards some of the logistical problems'. P15, 15:25 (242:252)*

This is in agreement with Telford and Masson's (2005) view earlier discussed (see Section 7.3.2.2).

### **7.3.2.3 Contact session and attendance during classes as a means of faculty-student support**

A reason the university created contact sessions for students from Distance Education to attend, was to bring students from the two delivery systems to the same level upon completing the study programme. However, according to some administrators, attendance was not compulsory (P1, P4 and P5), and to Participant 8, the onus fell on the students to decide whether to attend these sessions.

According to the Course Presenters, the university changed the contact hours of distance education students from three sessions of two hours for each module, to 12.5 hours spread over five days – an arrangement that pleased the course presenters, as it presented opportunity to spend longer time with the students and on the modules. One of them (P7) was of the opinion that the university had '*gone the extra mile*' in providing the opportunity of contact sessions for the students from Distance Education, and that the decision to utilise this opportunity would be left with the student. However, according to one of the modal managers, there were no fixed rules with regard to the attendance of classes for students from Contact Education and the same rule applied to students from Distance Education attending contact sessions. Attendance was not compulsory (P4 & P21) and on attendance of the classes by contact students, which took place regularly on a bi-monthly basis (i.e. every second Friday), one of the administrators and a Module Coordinator (Participant 2) put it this way:

*'For the contact students we don't have a policy which requires them for a certain percentage of attendance, because it's a post graduate degree. We first try to motivate them. And I must say that they are aware of the importance. So it's very seldom that you have students who miss more than one or at max 2 of the assignments. Yes, so they come and they know that if they don't come, it's difficult to catch up'. P2, 2:11 (96:100)*

She also had this to say on the distance students:

*'The distance, because it's not compulsory for them to attend the contact sessions, they can choose not to attend. So we have about 65% of attendance to the contact sessions. For the other students, we have just completed the research project last year to find out why is it that some do not attend, and the reasons were varied. Some mentioned cost as they live far from the venues and they are scattered all over the country. They also mentioned family problems. In general the reasons were varied. So we could not pinpoint one reason for students not attending. But it is also interesting that the research didn't show huge differences between those who attended and those who did not attend in terms of final results/ performance'.  
P2, 2:11 (96: 100)*

Nevertheless, Course Presenter 2 (P7) felt that attendance at the contact sessions contributed positively to student performance – which research carried out by the unit almost at the end of this study confirmed. However, the manager cautioned that there might be other plausible reasons for this. On the other hand, one could say that this was a way of improving the faculty-student contact, which Labuschagne and Mashile (2005) described as part of the motivational factors for students from Distance Education. Nevertheless, one of the implications for this is that the financial burden rested on the students, which was the issue, raised by Chambers, (1997) and Rumble (2001) on who pays for the cost implications of opening up access.

Also, according to an administrator (Participant 2), the university often sought formal and informal feedback on the contact sessions, both of which the institution viewed as important. This was because, in her words:

*'I get all the feedback from all the presenters because, like I said, my office is like a hub, so all the contract workers come to me when they have a problem, so I get all this from them, what happened and so it's informal feedback but we view it as very important feedback. So they come and tell me about the students, what were the problems there and among the presenters what were the problems'.  
P2, 2:11 (198:199)*

Above all, Participant 3 (expressing an impression supported by all the module coordinators) was of the opinion that the students from Distance Education had better opportunity when compared to their contact counterparts due to the increase in the number of contact hours during the contact sessions. This is in contrast to the generally accepted impression of what happens in distance education programmes. However, this was not without its drawbacks, as she described it below:

*'I think the distance, at this moment the only disadvantage is that I would say during the contact time they not necessarily see their own lecturer, because we have to sub-contract to assist you with the contact, so although we have all the processes in place to quality assurance, students might still feel they don't see the real person. For the contact students they see the lecturers less hours but always they have permanent appointed lecturers'. P3, 3:26 (176:183)*

Related to this matter, one of the suggestions offered by certain students from Distance Education to improve the study programme was that some of them would appreciate new educational centres being created closer to their homes. However, P3 was of the opinion that students had the option to exercise and choose between studying through Distance or Contact Education.

#### **7.3.2.4 The university's use of SMS technology as a means of support**

Presently, according to Ramos (c2007), SMS technology has evolved from just being a communication symbol to being a means of educational intervention and, even though comprehensive research into the effectiveness of this technology as an educational aid has not been concluded in many countries, some educational institutions have begun using it for this purpose. In the case of enrolled students on this study programme, research shows that over 98% of them have access to this technology. According to one of the administrators (Participant 4), the Distance Education Unit, at the University of Pretoria, had started using SMS

technology, and were presently further exploring its promise as an educational aid:

*'What we do is we present available technology that students have, and that is cell-phone extensively in our program, and we use it via technology. We have integrated comprehensively SMS support for not just administrative purposes but also for academic purposes. We have a very specific private project running on that aspect. We are in a process to introduce now a new process where students can get additional reading materials from the library if they want, and the process works like this; the academics identify the important articles or part of a book that students can read as additional reading, if they want to and that can be ordered for and the students can order that from the library; they pay for them obviously and that is how we take the library to the students'. P4, 4:23 (260:298)*

Shedding further light on the SMS project and explaining further on the probability of its usage, further placing all students on par with one another, one of the administrators (Participant 6) explained that due to the limited technology profile of the students from Distance Education,

*'... that's why we are looking at various things that we can do with cell-phones, which we are quite actively doing and quite actively finding out and testing. Also, all of them have it, and I am involved in a project at the moment in which we are looking at how we can go quite deep into academic interventions through cell phones. Again trying to make the learning environment more interactive as it can allow them to build their objectives; doing many of the things that perhaps one cannot do so easily with text, because it is a text-based programme. As for us, anything that is based on any kind of e-learning cannot work'. P6, 6:9 (69:73); P6, 6:20 (203:204)*

Furthermore, the technology had enabled the university to send messages to the students, which according to an administrator (P24) varied between reminder of assignments, confirmation of receipt and postage of assignments, informing them of the track number, and complimentary greetings. All these according to her were meant to motivate and support the students. Also, students from Distance Education made contact with the administrative staff mostly by phone,

as P24 explained, her department received about 20 000 calls per month. She concluded by explaining that all the necessary information for contacting the staff was contained in the administrative booklet. Nonetheless, Nash (2005) is of the opinion that these interactions can be time-consuming and difficult for faculty to sustain, especially with larger class sizes - which was the case with the student populace enrolled on the BEd (Hons) study programme.

Continuing with this thought, a Course Presenter (Participant 15) offered another example (relevant to students of the contact mode), which afforded the students regular interaction with the lecturers:

*'... as compared to the one I'm lecturing now, I feel this one was an advantage because you keep in contact with the lecturers, you write class tests, you are given assignments and you can even make an appointment to come and discuss some of the things face to face with the lecturer, the one who lectures and even designed the material and who also marks the examination. So, I think this one has an advantage, more than the distance one, because with the distance one normally you are very far from the university'. P15, 15:27 (278:294)*

In support of this, Kelsey and D'souza (2004) have stressed the importance of interactions between faculty and students, which must be continually encouraged in Distance Education.

#### **7.3.2.5 The use of learner-learner support mechanism**

All the course presenters explained that they encouraged learner-learner interaction as the students had a lot to gain from such interaction. For instance, Participant 6 described how she went about encouraging learners, which was the practice with most of the course presenters:

*‘Normally I make a point that in every session of those two hours, there is a group up. You have a group up before the end of the two hours, where I give them something on different books to work and brainstorm and come up with answers or citation, creative citation of solving problem. So I give them like twenty minutes to work as a group and then you give the group the pointer, who is the leader, now the group leader represents their decision and then when other groups – I normally divides them into five groups – when the other groups ask questions, now the whole group respond – not necessarily the group leader – so that one makes them interact with each other’. P6, 6:16 (148:149)*

However, a Course Presenter (Participant 10) had a very different opinion about this class interaction, and explained he never did this, as he left students to use their own discretion. Another reason he gave was that, as the country has a large landscape, and students might be separated by hundreds of kilometers, this often made it difficult. Interestingly, even though much has been said about the possible positive effects of student-student interaction on student learning (Moore, 1989; Holmberg, 1995; Biner et al. 1997), research indicates its positive contributions to this matter, is presently inconclusive (Kelsey & D’souza, 2004).

#### **7.3.2.6 Counseling facility as a means of support**

However, it cannot be denied that students from Distance Education at times needed counseling, and this has been identified as a problem that some students from Distance Education struggle with (Qurashi, Morton & Antosz, 2002). According to an administrator (P3), the students from Contact Education, in comparison to students from Distance Education, had these facilities at their finger tips. Although, the same interviewee then explained that at times staff members who had a counseling function also traveled to some of the contact sessions. However, students were expected to phone in to the university to discuss their problems. But some students who had discontinued their studies lamented the cost of these telephone calls (P17 and P18), and the fact that no specific administrative staff member was attached to specific function (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1-s) made it all the more difficult to find the necessary help.

This suggests that the University of Pretoria did not have a separate counseling department in place, for the assistance of the students from Distance Education. Earlier, LaPadula (2003:120) has observed that 'support readily available to on-campus students is lacking for distance learners and creating further isolation that can be discouraging and lead to failure'. And in support, Nash (2005) asserts that offering these services only if the student comes to campus is counterproductive to distance education.

### **7.3.3 Examination of other factors that may be responsible for possible divergences in the output rates of students**

Even though the neglect of all the important issues raised above could lead to possible divergences in the output rates of students (which in this study refers to student performance and withdrawal from the study programme), from the two modes of delivery, nonetheless, there were other issues that were highlighted during the answering of the questionnaire by the students, and in the course of the interviews, the researcher finds difficult to exclude from this discussion. The major reasons are the following:

- Research has shown that poor output rate is more prevalent in distance education than in its conventional counterpart, and this has been the most singular reason why aspersion is still being cast on its quality (Fraser & Nieman, 1995; Parker, 1999; Aluko, 2000; Perraton, 2000; Braimoh, 2003; Louw, 2005).
- From available literature, one can conclude that though reasons for this trend in both modes are vast and diverse (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1997; Saba, 1998; Diaz, 2000; Lahmers & Zulauf, 2000; Hu & St. John, 2001; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Potgieter, 2002; McGivney, 2003; NADEOSA, 2003; Antony & Gnanam, 2004; HESA, 2005; Labuschagne & Mashile, 2005; Mostert, 2006; QAA, 2006; Raphael, 2006), they are not essentially different.

Therefore, this qualitative section was introduced into this study to present and discuss the in-depth responses from interviewees on possible reasons for divergences in the output rates of students from the two educational systems, and which ultimately lead to students discontinuing with the study programme.

### **7.3.3.1 Assessing non-provision of ‘accommodation’ during contact sessions**

In view of what literature has revealed, as indicated above (7.3.3), some administrators were asked questions on the issue of *accommodation*, to probe further some of the suggestions offered by students from Distance Education, in answering the questionnaire, on how the BEd (Hons) study programme could be improved (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.5-b). In the course of the interview, an administrator (Participant 1) confirmed the plight of the distance education students during contact sessions:

*‘It’s one of those issues that I am aware of and I know that they do have problems about it. But it’s not one of the issues that, that we can supply them with’. P1, 1:19 (209:222)*

Also, according to another administrator (P1) – who was supported by P4 – it was not the policy of the university to provide accommodation for students from Distance Education during the contact sessions. However, university residences were available to willing students from Conventional Education, who wished to join the contact session – a statement that was supported by P3. However, most contact students on the BEd (Hons) study programme had no need of this support. The reason for this being that there was not much difference in the profile of the students on the two study programmes (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.1-b and Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1.3) as this study has already established that they were all working-class students, married and who had family and social obligations. Regardless of this, during the contact sessions some schools made private arrangements with the students, but unfortunately this option was not applicable to all students from Distance Education, as many venues could not cater for this possibility.

Further, during a follow-up interview with her on 21 January 2007, she (P1) confirmed that at the inception of the BEd (Hons) study programme, the university had offered to assist these students by making arrangement with nearby hotels. However, the practice was discontinued as students complained about the hike in prices, due to the added arrangements for a shuttle service from the hotel to the contact session venue.

In further explaining the university's position, Participants 1 and 4 said that many students were in the residences during the holidays, for practical work and summer school, while sometimes maintenance work was performed at these times. Moreover, the residences could only house less than 5 500 students, and there would always be students who could not afford to pay for accommodation for five days. As well, it was explained that there were also no premises in other locations to house students from Distance Education. Again, this boils down to the question raised by Rumble (2001) of who pays for the cost of opening up access. In addition to this, if student opinion about this was strong enough, there was the possibility of this resulting in their being lowly motivated during contact sessions.

### **7.3.3.2 Expectations and impression of students' performances by administrators, module coordinators and course presenters**

According to Spady and Marshall (1991), Willis and Kissane (1997) and Killen (2002), there have been found to be a correlation between having high expectations of student performance, and sharing these expectations with them. Therefore, during the interviews, some of the Administrators, all the Module Coordinators and all Course Presenters were questioned on the expectations of the study programme and how well students were performing. In support of this, the entire corps of Course Presenters believed in motivating the students and part of what they did when dealing with the students was to share the high expectations they had of their performance.

Also, according to an administrator (Participant 4), the programme was too young to pass comment on the overall performance of the students from Distance Education. The course was only implemented in 2002, but, he promised, some data would be available for assessment by October 2006 – and these have been included in the quantitative section of this study (see Chapter 6, Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3). Giving reasons for the unavailable data then, he said it was because the programme was flexible, and learners had four years in which to complete it. However, when further asked to comment on distance learners' performance, the interviewee said, *'But in any case the success rate is quite satisfactory and that is the truth'* P4, 4:25 (300:331).

However, views of the Course Presenters were diverse on this. For instance, one of them (Participant 10) explained that there was a huge difference between the performances of learners from the two modes, due to the fact that the students from Contact Education – as well as some of the students from Distance Education – who stayed in cities had better exposure to learning aids. Also, the issue of academic literacy was raised, and this has been described as one of the contributing factors to low output rates and eventual withdrawal of students from Distance Education (SAUVCA, 2001 – now HESA; Mostert, 2003). Supporting this, the interviewee attested to the fact that it had been discovered that those with the initial university degree often performed better than those without it, and this was also stressed by the Module Coordinators (P22).

In the same vein, literature indicates there is a link between student performance and withdrawal from a study programme, and its relevance to their jobs (Galusha, 1997). On this, the course presenters said that students sometimes gave feedback on their experiences of the relevance of their studies to their job situation. And one of them put it this way:

*'Alright, that is something that differs in different position and we have found out that our students are doing Education Management qualification...they know about Management, they know how to do things, and they can impress people in the interview. So we have found out that many of our students, who have read Education Management and even in the BA (Honours) programs have been promoted; a large percent of teachers have been promoted ... And we have some students doing their doctorate degree now' P1, 1:31 (307:308)*

All these are possible signs that relevance of the programme to students' learning often lead to strong motivation, as they can easily relate to what they are being taught, which is an essential part of adult education (CAEL, 2000).

### **7.3.3.3 Assessment method(s) employed by the university and length of feedback on assignments**

According to Mostert, Makola and Munondi (2004), continual formative assessments help motivate students from Distance Education, and allow them to determine their preparedness to write the summative assessment. To this aim, at the University of Pretoria, a formative form of assessment was applied, in which students were expected to submit two assignments, (the topics of which were included in the tutorial letters; and these topics were periodically reviewed – P3), as part of the final year mark. In addition, the students were also allowed to carry out self-assessment. This was confirmed by all the Course Presenters as well as certain students (P16, P17, and P19) – who had discontinued their studies with the university – in telephone interviews. In addition to this, one of the administrators (P6) explained that initially the submission of assignments had not been compulsory, but that this had been changed to become necessary for gaining entry to the examination. While, according to another administrator (Participant 3), students did not need to obtain a pass mark for these assignments, nevertheless, the assignments amounted to 30% of the final year

mark, and students that did not do well in these assignments may struggle to pass the module.

In relation to this, according to an administrator, external markers – referred to as *contract workers* (P2) – were appointed at the University of Pretoria, who might not necessarily be Course Presenters for either the Distance or Conventional Education study programmes, and who could also be tutors (P4). This was also, confirmed by the Tutors during the focus group interview conducted with them (P23). One administrator mentioned that contract workers who were not working to rule had their contracts discontinued (P4). However, each module coordinator was expected to train them, and also work closely with them (administrators - P4; P5). According to another one (Participant 2), these were mostly educators, who possessed Masters or Doctorate degrees, and they could also be retired professors. In addition to this, they had to have a background in the field of Education Management.

Of interest too, was the process established for dealing with dissatisfaction in the assessment process, as students were free to request access to their scripts – a process that also applied to students from Contact Education (administrators - P2; P4).

In reply to a question based on student complaints on the length of time taken to provide feedback on assignments, one of the administrators (P1) explained that it normally took ten days to mark the scripts (claims also supported by P2, P3 and P10). However, she added, one could not actually predict the postal delivery system, so the students had to wait, and this has been described as *factors beyond the control of the institution* (Nash, 2005). Nevertheless, and as earlier mentioned, one of the administrators (Participant 4) went on to indicate that students could also share part of the blame for the late feedback, by explaining that they did not normally adhere to the assignment submission date.

Nevertheless, prompt feedback is seen as a great motivating factor for adult learners, more so for those that are a distance from the institution, and a factor in determining the quality of education given to students in general (Chickering & Ehrmann, 2003). Further, Bates (2005) describes it an important component of interaction, and the essence of the students receiving early feedback was to help them identify their mistakes before the examinations. In line with this, a course presenter (P8) explained, they dealt with this issue by sending students tutorial letters indicating common mistakes made by students. However, this might not solve this particular problem as well as the course presenters were hoping as students hinted they would still prefer to get feedback on their own work (see Chapter 6, Section 6.5.1.1.1-b).

What's more, during the course of the interviews, it was revealed that not all the course presenters were assignment markers (P10, 12 and 13) – and the impression of the course presenters in this regard was then sought. The reason for probing this matter more deeply was because students had already hinted in their response to the questionnaire that they were of the opinion that it was not their presenters that were the assignment markers (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.2-i.). However, the interviewees were also of the opinion it would be better for them to be involved in this aspect of their students learning process, and in their own words responded with, *'I know it would help me to get feedback from the learners'* (P11); *'I think it's a disadvantage to the distance learners'* (P12); *'It is problematic because some students come to complain'* (P13); *'I won't feel happy if I'm not involved, because I won't know what is happening after my teaching'* (P14); *'It would enable us to directly see how our students are performing'* (P15). Continuing with the thought, the interviewee explained that the module coordinators trained and gave markers criteria to follow. They were also monitored by them. This was also supported by the Module Coordinators (P22). Therefore, it was expected that discrepancies should be drastically reduced, but at the same time, the views of the students could not be ignored.

Another issue raised by students from Distance Education in responding to the questionnaire (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.5-b) was the request that the university authorities should allow them to write supplementary exams, just as their contact counterparts may do, and that the exam period for Distance Education should be changed to a time in the year, when they – as educators – were less busy with school activities (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.5-b). In response to this, an administrator (Participant 1) explained that it was not as if the students did not receive all relevant information on time but one just discovered it was impossible to satisfy everybody, as the complaints were so diverse. While acknowledging that she knew students from Distance Education had requested permission to write supplementary examinations, she stressed instead of this, the students were given opportunity to write examinations twice in a year as time was insufficient to issue the results for these students and still register them for supplementary examinations.

#### **7.3.3.4 Provision of library facilities**

According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2004), it is expected that library facilities be extended to students, irrespective of their location. Therefore, library facilities were also extended to students from Distance Education who lived a great distance away from the University of Pretoria, to bring them on a par with those students that lived closer to the Faculty of Education, and their Conventional Education counterparts, who were in a position to visit the library at anytime, and an administrator (Participant 1) described it this way, *'Everything that they need, to be able to be successful, we provide them in their packages, and we will also have now a new system which is called the Library Collection Policy'* P1, 1:3 (55:71). According to her, the module coordinators would have to identify some articles or some chapters of a book that were relevant to studies in their module. Staff at the university would deal with the copyright issues, while the students would pay for these copies. This, according to another administrator (P4), would be in addition to the learning materials, that normally contained all the necessary information for any given

assignment, and an additional five books, that have been included with the cost of the study programme. However, this has cost implications for students, a point also stressed by P4, especially considering the fact that they did not have access to bursaries (see Section 7.3.3.5).

On a final note, though laudable attempts were being made by the institution, it would be wrong to disregard that at times students still want to visit the library, to do extra reading. For instance, a student that had discontinued her studies, during the telephone interview said, *'I used to come to Groenkloof library. I had to come for information hence my assignments were best because I used to go deeper. I liked to make good assignments'* P19, 19:6 (221:237).

#### **7.3.3.5. Students' lack of funds as a possible contributing factor to low output rates**

One of the most important factors that have been identified as a possible reason for discontinuation of students from distance education was lack of money (CAEL, 2000; SAUVCA, 2004; HESA, 2005). It was confirmed by one of the administrators (P4) that there was not enough funds available to cover all the students at the university as bursaries. Therefore, the students from Distance Education had the least chance of partaking in a study programme. This was despite the fact that information was given to these students in the tutorial letters on this that stated that they could apply for financial assistance. However, according to P4, the chance of them qualifying for such assistance remained very slim due to a couple of reasons:

- Firstly, there were many needy students among students from Conventional Education, whose needs often took priority; and
- Secondly, the academic achievement of students from Conventional Education was generally higher than that of students from Distance Education.

Inevitably, students were forced to take an EDULOAN (see Section 6.3.1.1.4-b). According to one of the telephone interviewees (P15), the fees charged by the university were too high, which eventually forced them to apply for study loans. However, views on this among the students differed, as others were of the opinion the loan took care of the problem and only became an issue to certain students when repaying this loan (P18) – because of other financial commitments. In retrospect, it has become evident that cost implications are allied to most of the issues raised in other sections of this study.

### **7.3.3.6 Poor health of students**

Another important reason highlighted by students for the discontinuation of their studies with the university, was the poor state of their health, as indicated by some of the responses from the telephone interviews: *'I had sugar diabetes. I had high blood pressure'* P17, 17:3 (74:87); *'It was difficult for me to study because from time to time I would be hospitalised'* P18, 18:1 (27:43); *'I withdrew because I was sick...throat problems'* P21, 21:1 (20:27). This, according to an interviewee, may well be connected with pressure of his job and his age, as he explained: *'Then I said no, the work is too much for me, never. I'm also a principal to the school. Then at school, I'm forced to manage and after I must go and read. Then I said I must stop. I am 53 years old'* P17, 17:3 (74:87). Another one added, *'I think there is nothing wrong with the University of Pretoria. The only problem I had was the overload. You know heading a school is not a child's play'* P17, 17:12 (181:195). It is the researcher's belief that all these excuses were connected with the age of the students (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.1-b).

In support of this, MC 1 added *'... the stark reality of this is in the latest statistics on the drop-out amongst our students. It's actually that the students who drop out, a very large percentage die. And the two main reasons are violence and violent crime and also HIV / AIDS'* P22, 22:20 (295:330). Unfortunately, HIV/AIDS related illnesses happen to be a national problem, as a media statement released by the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC, 2005) reveals that mortality

due to HIV-prevalence is common among educators in the country. Also, Du Plessis (2005) confirms that statistics on violent crime in the country is very disturbing.

### **7.3.3.7 The use of tutors for the modules under investigation**

Furthermore, one of the administrators (P4), introducing the topic of the role of the tutors, which should be a normal practice for all the Distance Education modules in the study programme, and he explained:

*'We have a tutor system and each module co-ordinator that is the academic head for a specific module in a programme must identify and select tutors for his programme and that is a tutor team that he builds. Whenever necessary they give academic support to students that are referred to them by the module co-ordinators'. P4, 4:11 (72:92)*

According to Galusha (1997) and Miller (2002), students from Distance Education need tutors to enable them to complete their courses on time. However, all the module coordinators (P22) for the 6 modules under investigation indicated they did not make use of this system. (In this regard, the researcher is of the opinion that there was a gap between what could be expected, and what the actual practice was.) However MC 3 and MC 4 explained that at times they experienced a problem in finding good students to serve as tutors, as – at that level – experience in the field of study was also required. Nevertheless, the Tutors – drawing on examples from when they were students – stressed the value of having tutors to turn to, while studying. In closing these comments, the tutors explained that many times their jobs went beyond the academic lives of the students.

Even though, the manager of the distance program later asserted that there were service providers available to the students (who happened to be the course

presenters). Nevertheless, the researcher is of the opinion that since these were only available during the contact sessions, they could not possibly have been able to fulfil the roles of tutors to the students.

Interestingly, a myriad of problems were added to this list, of which detailed discussion is not possible in this study, and according to Nash (2005), this is beyond the control of the institution. This includes, *'job promotion, new job responsibilities, pregnancy, parental responsibilities, divorce, traumatic experiences of life (e.g. death in the family and hijacking), students, who continually shopped because they did not take their degrees as academic degrees, but entered the program for esteemed values'*. P22, 22:20 (295:330). Others according to MC 2 might be *'one or two odd instances, where you have a problem with either bad mail delivery or communication mishap along the way and it cannot be resolved'*, P22, 22:20 (295:330); an incidence, which is quite rare.

Finally, it can be noted that none of the ten students interviewed telephonically, that discontinued their studies, did so due to language level of their learning materials and lack of library facilities, as they said the learning materials and other books in their packages were sufficient for their assignments, while they were on the BEd (Hons) study programme (P16 and P17). This might go on to buttress what two of the administrators (P3 and P4) said on supplying the students with everything needed for their assignments. Also, none withdrew due to lack of family support or isolation.

#### **7.3.4 Quality assurance at the university, awareness by members of staff (full-time and part-time) and students, and their involvement**

In view of the stance taken on quality in education, by the University of Pretoria, and the newly accepted definition for what the concept of *quality* in a quality distance education study programme should mean for South Africa (see Appendix 3 and Section 7.2.1), the interviewees were questioned on how this

factor created awareness for all key players, in the extent of their involvement in the BEd (Hons) study programme. This becomes important in view of the fact that most research acknowledges that stakeholders have expectations and that these serve as a standard or reference point to evaluate the performance of an organisation (Abdullah, 2006).

#### **7.3.4.1 Awareness of the quality stance of the university by all key players and their involvement**

An important aspect in the quality assurance process is the management of a study programme creating quality awareness among the staff, and according to one of the administrators (Participant 1) everybody working on the programme was involved, as this aspect was well communicated to all and sundry. According to another administrator (Participant 4), the university had a holistic view of quality, as it affected everything the institution did, and he put it this way:

*'The whole issue of quality assurance is not something like a product that you take off the shelf, and you use it and you put it back on the shelf again, until you think you need it again. It is part of a philosophy; it is part of a managerial style; it is part of a teaching style and administrative style. It is the way we do things. It's to deliver as far as possible a high quality service to the students' P4, 4:4 (33:40).*

According to him, this approach involved ensuring the quality of the learning materials and their delivery, the efficiency of the academic and administrative staff, the quality of the contact session and the examination centres. For instance, he hinted that the Department of Administration of the Distance Education Unit would be undergoing a major appraisal, which was due to be conducted by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), during the time of this investigation.

With regard to this matter, Course Presenters were asked if they were aware of the stance the university on quality in education. According to them, many of

them were aware because they were told about the importance of maintaining the university's image. However, a few course presenters were not sure how this worked (P9 & P14). Also, some course presenters were of the opinion they were not directly informed, but admitted that certain practices – for instance the evaluation forms given to them and the students at the end of each contact session (see the CD Rom for copies of these) – provided an idea of what this entailed (P11, 12 & 13). However, P11 suggested it might have been because they were not employed on a full-time basis at the institution, and indicated it would be a wonderful idea to really be involved in this aspect of university life. Conversely, some course presenters were of the opinion there was not enough feedback given to them by the university authorities (P13). On this, Avdjieva and Wilson (2002) suggest the development of feedback mechanisms based on continuous assessment and reflective evaluation.

In addition to this, it was indicated by an administrator (P4) and one of the Course Presenters (P13) that the university gave a feedback questionnaire to the students, as was confirmed by students (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.3.1-c and d). In this feedback questionnaire the students assessed each module, the performance of module coordinators and presenters at classes and generally commented on their impression of the each contact session. This means that students were involved in the evaluation process. This supports the remarks of Lomas (2004:163) that *'there is merit in asking the students what they think of the academic service that is being provided and whether they consider it to be of a high quality'*. Also, many of the staff interviewees felt the students were very poor in time management, as they have discovered that many never opened their materials before attending the contact sessions. Needless to say, Van Schoor, Mill and Potgieter (2002) and Mostert (2006) explain that poor time management often causes many students to be involved in only surface learning. Buttressing this, in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.1.1.2-e), students had already hinted that they needed counselling in time management.

The researcher discovered that there was no student representative structure in place for students from Distance Education, as was the case with students from Conventional Education. On this, P1 (1:27 (277:287) explained, *'No, we don't have anything like that because we are part of the faculty, and the students are part of the student body of the faculty. So it means that the structures are all in place and because most of the students are so busy and so structured to do this. They are all full-time teachers that they don't want to have any other commitments'*. Another reason given by P3 was that students were scattered all over the country.

Even so, according to P1, some students from Distance Education had once been invited and sponsored to partake in a distance education review process. Nevertheless, a follow-up interview with the manager revealed that a plan was in the pipeline to allow students to choose representative(s) from each group, who would be meeting at various contact session centres. It is the belief of the researcher that this would go a long way in giving the much needed voice to the distance students.

Further, all the module coordinators were involved in a continual quality assurance process, which also involved reviews (MC 3). According to MC 1 and an administrator (P4), the process with the coordinators, involved having appropriate mechanisms in place, which included moderation of examination papers, giving necessary academic support to students, travelling to centres to present contact sessions, visiting examination centres and analysing examination results to identify and solve problems that may have occurred.

All the above supports Bornman's (2004) claim that self-evaluation is a basic component of quality assurance procedures. Despite this, it bothered the researcher that even though staff interviewees referred to how they were involved in ensuring quality in whatever activity they were involved in, they could

not – except for management – say in particular what the vision on quality at the University of Pretoria is.

#### **7.3.4.2 Staff development**

In a study conducted by Avdjieva and Wilson in 2002, part of their findings revealed that professional development is an integral part of institutional planning. According to an administrator (Participant 4), members of the administrative staff were not spared constant upgrading in their specific field, as the institution employed extensive training sessions for staff members in various training programmes, which were funded by the university. These included Microsoft and Project Management, and this was approached in two ways: *'in the sense that a colleague can identify his own short-comings, or we can identify the short-fall of the staff member'* P4, 4:21 (227:249).

However, mention must be made that, even though Participant 1 asserted administrative staff members were coping with the workload of the Distance Education Unit, another administrator (Participant 5) confessed that they were labouring under great pressure, due to the ever increasing number of the Distance Education students on the BEd (Hons) study programme, and that the university, as at the time of this investigation, was in the process of employing more permanent administrative staff. A possible implication of this being that, at times, student enquiries were not promptly responded to, as explained by one of the students that had discontinued her studies with the university. Consequently, it was not really possible to assign specific duties to specific members of staff.

In addition to this, the development of permanent academic staff was also important to the university. On this score, one of the administrators (P3) (3.5, [30:34]) explained that all the staff members belonged to one association or the other, *'where they constantly attend conferences and workshops'* (P3), (3:5, 30-34). Related to this, was the training of the module coordinators in relation to their roles; which, according to P1 and P4, included, managing the modules and

training the course presenters to ensure that the same teaching would be conducted in all the centres, and in the writing of learning materials and study guides. Also in the words of P4 “*there are some of our colleagues that are much more experienced than others, so we actually have peer group training*” (P4), (4:18, 165:175).

However, one of the Course Presenters (Participant 13) brought in another dimension of training needed for academic staff members that would be involved in Distance Education:

*‘Maybe I don’t know how they would feel about it, but I would like to understand a rural person’s life even better. Even if they teach me a couple of Zulu words for certain English phrases, whatever it is. Because that gets the students going, if you go into their level and work with them, then they are with you’.* P13, 13:7 (84:91)

As could be expected, the twelve (12) academic staff (the module coordinators on the BEd (Hons) study programme) could not cope with the workload involved in Distance Education, because the centres were too many, and were widespread through the country (P3). Therefore, as already hinted at by Participant 1, course presenters were contracted and trained by the coordinators to lecture during contact sessions, and the drive to find suitable candidates who met the requirements, to be trained as course presenters was an ongoing phenomenon. The requirements included: a Master’s or a Doctorate degree in Education Management and practical teaching experience – most course presenters were teachers and retired professors. Buttressing this, all course presenters confirmed the training they were exposed to, which occurred before presenting any contact sessions. Reasons for this, according to Participant 8, included that students differed, and the course presenters had to be updated on adjustments or improvement to learning materials.

Even though the majority of the ten (10) course presenters displayed an interest in Distance Education, some of them were thus involved because they had

passion for their subject areas, not necessarily because they were interested in Distance Education as a mode of delivery. Therefore, Participant 10 with strong emphasis said:

*'No...no...no, distance education is not my area of interest. For me it's not a very satisfying way of teaching because you see the students once for five days, and then you receive the assignments and you mark the assignments. And you send the assignments back, there's no narrow contact. There's no link between you and the students. You are seeing them, but you are not going to mark his assignment. Perhaps you are going to mark other venue's assignments'. P10, 10:14 (117:127)*

#### **7.3.4.3 Academic's involvement in distance education**

According to Wolcott and Betts (1999), one of the truisms of distance education is that teaching a Distance Education course involves a considerable amount of work, but, unfortunately, faculty support in distance education is most often limited to technical and instructional design support (Gates, 2000). In addition, research (Wolcott & Betts, 1999) indicates that faculty is often divided as their reasons for interest in the Distance Education differ. With this background information, Module Coordinators were then asked to explain how they got involved in Distance Education and whether they were at all interested in this mode of delivery. There was a long pause.

This signalled there may be some deeper issues involved with this aspect, which encouraged the researcher to probe further. Most of them then confirmed that, within the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria, if you were appointed as the coordinator for the Contact Education module, then you were automatically considered qualified to be drafted into the Distance Education teaching program, irrespective of your interest. For instance a coordinator said, *'It just landed in my lap'* (P22), 22:17 (203:223). Another coordinator (MC 5) at the interview wittingly said, *'Now, you want some politics'* (P22), 22:17 (203:223), which resulted in laughter from everybody.

Shedding more light on this issue, MC 2 explained that at the inception of the Distance Education Unit, there were discussions as to whether the department should be divided between the two delivery modes or operate as one unit. However, this matter was not further attended to and a solution never materialized. Furthermore, in responding to their attitudes concerning this matter, the coordinators (P22), 22:18 (225:257) engaged each other in the following dialogue, to suggest that there was no consensus on this:

#### MC 2

*'If you say that, you definitely assume that there is such a big difference between contact and distance that we must make a choice. But I think in my case, the development of the material and the support that we have, and the type of students we have on campus are so much similar, that I don't treat them differently. I am using the same study materials and very much the same method of teaching'.*

#### MC 3

*'How the content is developed is a function of the university and you support academic, whether it's a contact teaching or a distance teaching as the need arises. You need for instance, the expertise for specific field. This is academic...and the mode of delivery is something you can give him orientation and training. That is the first thing. But there's a down-side in the sense that what happens then is your focus on the field of specialization in the research, for which you do not have a dedicated distance education unit in the university. The research needed in terms of distance education, it doesn't get the attention it should'.*

#### MC 4

*'To answer your question I can go with what MC 2 said. The university does provide us enough support, so your role is mainly coordinating the presenters, coordinating the marking. It is a little bit extra, but for the whole thing, you need to develop a module whether for distance or contact. So for myself coming also from a distance education institution, I don't think it really makes such a big difference, as long as you are able to manage your team effectively. Also, what MC 3 said is very true ...'*

MC 6

*'For me there are two angles to your question. The one is the whole issue from the academic perspective and second, from a specialized field of distance education. I have been in distance education prior to joining the university, so I have an interest in that respect and one can see how the whole field evolved in South Africa, because you can't transfer the overseas module directly on the South Africa situation, it can't work. But something that I personally find fascinating is, to what extent in terms of your academic work, to what extent does your work in the distant education board, impact on the contact mode and vice versa?'*

The researcher observed that Coordinator 7 – who had earlier said that the mode of delivery just landed on her lap – was silent at this point, and had to be prompted for her answer to this question. According to her, the mode was not her area of interest, as she struggled with working round the administrative aspects, which were not necessarily administrative.

However, on this, a management member explained that

*'I think it's not any force to do something by distance education. I also have to do research. I don't have a choice; it's part and parcel of your job. When I said I accepted this job, I should have realized or should have been told that you are responsible for this before you accepted the post. So it's part and parcel of your job description as everything here. There are three issues which I think are important. First of all, you get the support to develop yourself, to develop yourself scholarly so to progress and it also helps you in your research in the sense that you have a wide sort of target group, which you could use in order to do some research. We also have the Distance Education Unit; they can order all the information all the statistics that you need in order to be able to do this research. And then, I think it is also something that to develop you professionally in the sense that if you have done this, you will be promotable because you have more expertise than somebody else'. P1, 1:8 (116:123)*

The impression the researcher deduced from this interaction was that there existed a gap between job expectations and job roles. This was because one of the administrators (P4) also then added *'It is the Head of Department that needs*

*to make the necessary changes to job description so that it fits staff members'* P4, 4:20 (185:225).

#### **7.3.4.4 Incentives and rewards to academics involved in distance education**

McLean (2006) is of the opinion that there is little or no attention given to the totality of the experience of teaching at a distance, and what the impact is on a social or personal level from the faculty perspective. Nevertheless, giving incentives to academics is seen as a sort of direct motivation for the academe involved (Wolcott & Betts, 1999). Therefore, the views of module coordinators and relevant administrative staff were sought on what incentives and rewards they received at the university, and what their impression were. Firstly, all the module coordinators present at the focus group interview (P22) confirmed that there were no incentives for them, and diverse views were given by those concerned. For instance, P3 during a one-on-one interview said

*'We felt that in comparison with other universities that we are getting a bad deal because in other universities, lecturers are involved with contact session learners, you do your normal research work and you write your publications. But here you actually have two jobs, and there are no incentives'. P3, 3:7 (45:58)*

However, this had been brought to the notice of the university authorities, and the response had always been the same, as earlier explained by Participant 1, and Participant 4 shed more light on the university's stance:

*'It is a very sensitive and problematic area, though I don't necessarily agree with the university on this matter, but I understand its position. I think there are many staff members that feel that they need to get extra remuneration sort of for this work. We don't expect you to work more because we make additional staff available. So if we make more staff available, then the number of hours that you are supposed to work still needs to be within the framework of the labour law of South Africa. But if the university did not make any additional staff members available then one could have argued'. P4, 4:20 (185:225)*

Suggesting possible reasons for this sort of feeling, MC 4 quipped

*'I think the only time that people really think about a possible incentive, is when they use their family time in (January or whatever) to do the contact sessions, while other lecturers, who are not involved in distance education can then take leave. But I agree with MC 7. It's not about incentives. It is part of the job, but I think sometimes people think they have more duties than others that are not involved'. P22, 22:19 (259:290)*

This, in essence, may mean that the university authorities did not feel obligated to make incentives or rewards available for academics involved in Distance Education, but there are implications for this. For instance, MC 4 cited one of these as she said, *'What is happening is that lecturers spend too much time in distance education and therefore their academic careers and academic quality of research in their field gets less time because of involvement of the same lecturers in both worlds'* P22, 22:19 (259:290). Therefore, this staff interviewee was of the opinion that it was important the university began considering a change of stance on this matter.

In essence, one may want to conclude that lecturers from Contact Education saw themselves as being forced into a Distance Education work mode, as expressed by another coordinator *'I think in a way, people who are really working in distance education here, to my knowledge, they are really not interested in it. But they are being forced to do it'* P22, 22:19 (259:290). One of the serious implications of this could be academics having low morale (Wolcott & Betts, 1999), the result of which could affect the whole study programme.

#### **7.3.4.5 Marketing**

According to Snyder (2003), nothing should stop an institution that is searching for growth opportunities, especially if it possesses unique competencies in unique areas and offers study programmes in high-demand career areas, not to dabble into Distance Education. However, marketing plays a major role in advertising such programmes. For advertising the BEd (Hons) study programme, the

university contracted an organisation to inform prospective students about the programme. This was done throughout the country. However, course presenter 7 was of the opinion the University of Pretoria could improve on its efforts.

This aspect of improving the marketing strategies was also suggested by students from Distance Education while giving suggestions for the improvement of the BEd (Hons) study programme in responding to the questionnaire distributed to them, before the interviews were conducted, as they were of the opinion many prospective students were yet to be informed about this programme (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.15-b). Nevertheless, the distance education manager was of the opinion that the unit as at then did not want to offer less quality education to its clientele; therefore, extending its admission base would only be a plan for the future.

#### **7.3.4.6 Academic's involvement in distance education research and identified niche areas of need**

Views on the relationship between teaching and research are diverse (Lomas, 2004). Nonetheless, there is no gainsaying the fact that it exerts a positive influence on teaching (Andresen, 2000) and can also help develop a collaborative relationship between the lecturer and the student, and lead to the formation of a learning community (Lomas, 2004). It also helps to identify gaps that exist between theory and practice. Hence, the module coordinators and the presenters were taken up on their involvement in this important aspect of academic life.

According to the coordinators, only a small group of the academe had ever been or was presently involved in research in Distance Education as at the time of this investigation. For instance, MC 1 and MC 3 had done research on the motives for students registering for distance education studies with the university, the management aspect of the B.Ed (Hons) study programme and establishing

reasons for possible divergences in student performance. And according to P3, the reasons were varied. In addition, MC 6 was last involved in research in this field, six years ago. Additionally, of all ten (10) course presenters interviewed, only one person (P10) was once involved in distance education research, in which she assisted a module coordinator. On the other hand, two of them were of the opinion they never thought they could manage such a research project (P12 and P15).

From the response of the staff interviewees, it appeared that there was indeed a great need for research on Distance Education, at the University of Pretoria, which was confirmed by the coordinators. And the reason for this state of affairs was, as noted earlier, their workload being too heavy, especially with regard to their dual role as lecturers for both Distance and Conventional Education (MC 4). However, according to MC 3, there was a focus area of research for Distance Education, but it was in its developmental stage as at the time of this investigation (MC 3). Although some of the coordinators were involved with this committee, according to (MC 6), their involvement was minimal.

Adding to this, two major areas of research need were identified by the coordinators, not just to be limited to the university, but the country as a whole. And these were to understand how distance students interacted with their learning materials and the maintenance of their own academic reading.

#### **7.3.4.7 University's commitment to distance education**

The staff interviewees were asked to comment on their view of the level of commitment of the university authorities to Distance Education, especially in comparison to Conventional Education. All ten course presenters were of the opinion, based on visible signs, the university authorities were committed to Distance Education. For instance, Participant 10 noted that the increased hours for the contact sessions for students from Distance Education had placed these

students at an advantage over the students from Conventional Education – which would be contrary to people’s impression. She also added that:

*‘If I see all the money that they spend... okay, they get a lot of money, but they also spend a lot of money on the Distance Education. Because they have to hire the venues; they have to buy airplane tickets to the different venues; they have to pay you as a lecturer. So it’s a lot of money that’s involved, and they don’t want to throw that money into the waters’.* P10, 10:34 (313:314)

As at the time of this investigation, the Distance Education Unit was the fastest growing unit in the Faculty of Education, and P24 described it this way, *‘We only started in 2000 with 800 students, but we have about 10 000 students and we are actually the biggest faculty of the university’* P24, 24:12 (52:56). Nevertheless, it seemed as if there was more work to be done in the area of sensitising the faculty members to this mode of delivery, as she added that *‘sometimes if you talk to people on the campus about distance education, they look you in the eye and they don’t know what you are talking about’* P24, 24:12 (52:56).

#### **7.4 Summary and conclusion**

In Chapter Seven, the three chosen indices of assessment – namely, *access*, *delivery* and *output* – against which the B.Ed. (Hons) study programme was assessed, along with corresponding sub-themes were discussed with relevant staff members (both part-time and full-time), and students that had discontinued their studies with the university. These discussions were conducted in response to the answers provided by the telephone interviewees, the interview schedules, and in relation to student responses to the research questionnaire (See Chapter 6, Section 6).

In this chapter it was also revealed that the University of Pretoria adapted the BEd (Hons) study programme in response to the call from government to provide equal educational opportunities to those who have been previously denied such access, and to aid in the upgrading of the educational level of school teachers in

this country. Yet, it has been discovered that merely opening up such access does not necessarily make the system fair to all.

Further, in this chapter it was revealed that in spite of the special profile of the students enrolled for the BEd (Hons) study programme, and the need to balance the economics of scale, the University of Pretoria endeavoured to provide a quality learning experience for them. Nonetheless, there is still much to be explored and expanded upon in this regard, since an open market exists for this programme. However, there appears to be a gap between what the university's intentions and what was being practised within the Faculty of Education, especially in relation to the dreams and aspirations of the university. As well, there is the dire need for further research on Distance Education, in relation to the level of involvement by the academics and their interest in this field, and incentives and rewards for academe, that need serious attention.

And lastly, to close this study, in Chapter Eight, the findings of this study (i.e. both the quantitative and qualitative research processes) will be integrated, and recommendations for the implementation of the theory and practice gleaned from this study will be offered.

# CHAPTER 8

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY – TOWARD THE CULTURE OF QUALITY DISTANCE EDUCATION IN DUAL-MODE INSTITUTION IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the summary of the main findings, conclusions, recommendations and implications of the study. The conclusions are based on the summary of the problem statement, research questions and aim of the study, its main findings, which are based on both quantitative and qualitative research instruments, and the main findings from the literature review. In this section, the main research findings will be discussed in the light of the conceptual framework adopted for this study, which is the Transactional Distance Theory, and *quality*, as research shows that the latter has been responsible for the aspersion still cast

on distance education – though there has been much improvement in this area (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2).

The researcher's main reasons for choosing the Transactional Distance Theory for this study are:

- firstly, it focuses on the relationship between three concepts in learning, which are *dialogue*, *structure* and *learner autonomy*, irrespective of the mode of delivery;
- secondly, the level of the interaction of these variables determines the quality of the delivery modes; and
- thirdly, though only a distance education theory, research shows that the theory is applicable to both distance and conventional education, since the move toward constructivism indicates that students take responsibility for the construction of knowledge, and according to Bates (2005), both students from Distance and Contact Education spend more time interacting with their learning materials, than with the lecturers (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.4).

Therefore, it suffices to say, the number of relationships (between the earlier mentioned variables) built into the learning materials, used by students from the two delivery modes involved in this investigation would go a long way to determine, the quality of education the students were provided. All the research instruments are attached as Appendixes (4 - 12).

## **8.2 Summary of the problem statement, research questions, aim of the study, and other chapters**

This section is referenced on **Chapter One** of this study, and a cursory look at literature revealed that Conventional Education is the universally accepted approach for knowledge acquisition (Tsolakidis, 2000). Similarly, Distance Education is nothing new to the world (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999:3-6; Holmberg,

2001:9), and is currently employed across the globe as a means to meet the ever escalating demand for higher education – and African countries are included in this drive – to which this study is particularly relevant (Bollag, 2001; Braimoh, 2003).

However, the latter has not been wholly accepted due to a number of allegations levied against it, which may include:

- 'Lack of contact with other students which can have a significant effect on learner's motivation' (Suen & Parkes, 2004) – the result of isolation caused by the student and teacher being separated by geographical distance (Barnes, 1995; George, 1999);
- 'Success in distance education requires [a greater] degree of self-motivation and self-discipline than is necessary for learning' which students are not adequately prepared for (Keen, 1999); among others.

Therefore, it is being regarded as a second best option (Mendels, 1998; Reich, 1999; Stencil, 1999; Aluko, 2000; Braimoh, 2003). This awakened a continual urge within the researcher to discover the reasons for this still being the case. And in investigating this burning issue, decided to focus this work on drawing a comparison between Distance Education, as a mode of delivery, and its contact counterpart; in terms of *access*, *delivery* and *output*. These three chosen indices of measurement are highly relevant to South Africa at this time, as efforts are being made to redress the past injustices in education, a legacy of apartheid, through democracy (Daves et al. 2004).

For this investigation, the researcher chose the mixed-method research approach, which is viewed as an element in a researcher's toolkit (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), to develop an answer to the main research question:

*What is the comparison between the impact of Distance and Conventional Education on the performances of learners in a postgraduate BEd (Hons) degree study program with specialization in Education Management, Law and Policy, when assessed in terms of access, delivery and output?*

Emanating from this is the main aim of this study, which is to investigate and compare the impact of Distance and Conventional Education on the performance of learners in the BEd (Hons) programme - with specialization in Education Management, Law and Policy - which is a postgraduate programme, assessed in terms of *access, delivery* and *output* at the Faculty of Education, of the University of Pretoria. The Distance Education programme is administered concurrently with the Conventional Education programme, as a dual-mode programme.

**In Chapter Two**, literature is reviewed of Distance and Conventional Education in terms of access, delivery and output. This review revealed diverse views on the concepts under investigation, which caused the researcher to develop working definitions of these concepts for the purpose of this study. Further, the distinctive features, practices, achievements and drawbacks of both modes of delivery were highlighted. In addition, it also highlighted convergence issues in higher education and the implications of literature findings for the study. Furthermore, current practices in distance and conventional education revealed the move from instructivism to constructivism (Garrison, 1996; Fraser & Lombard, 2002) and situational to transactional (Moore, 1993, 1996). The researcher chose to focus on Moore's *Transactional Distance Theory*, as it is related to teaching and learning, and focuses on the relationship between *dialogue, structure* and *learner autonomy*. Research reveals that this theory is also applicable to conventional education (Mueller, 1997), as it determines the quality of the delivery modes and communication media (Young & Marks-Maran, 1999; Garrison, 2000).

In **Chapter Three** the literature review, begun in Chapter 2, is continued but is focused on the policy and practice in South African higher education, for distance and conventional education. This aided in highlighting the progress already made in correcting injustices in education in South Africa and the challenges facing both delivery modes, with emphasis on distance education. Also, attention was drawn to the three chosen indices of assessment of this study, namely: *access*, *delivery* and *output*, as they related to education within the country – in general - and the University of Pretoria – specifically. In supporting this, a brief historical development of the University of Pretoria was traced, as this had direct impact on the issue of access, as part of the focus of this study. Lastly, mention was made of the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy programme, which was administered concurrently as a distance and conventional study programme, highlighting its special features.

Since *low quality* has been identified as the main reason for the lukewarm attitude many people have toward distance education, in **Chapter Four** the global, national and local issues with regards to quality assurance in both modes of delivery are discussed. Emphasis was also placed on *quality*, as it related to access, delivery and output. Even though literature findings revealed that quality has been tagged a *slippery concept*, thereby making a global acceptable definition impossible, the present pressure on higher education to shift from quantity to quality in education is forcing the system to be continually reviewed with regard its stance on this aspect. This study revealed that the University of Pretoria had not been left out of this race, thereby causing it to focus on holistic quality education, which also impacted on the BEd (Hons) programme, the focus of this investigation.

In **Chapter Five** the research design and the methods used to collect the needed data to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this study were explained. This involved the use of structured one-on-one interviews – some of which were conducted over the telephone, – focus group interviews and a questionnaire, which were first piloted before their final application, to ensure

their validity and reliability. The researcher also tested the possible divergences between performances, throughput and drop-out rates of students from both modes of delivery. The interviews were used to get insightful information from policy makers, managers and other relevant administrative staff, course presenters, module coordinators, tutors, and students who had discontinued their studies with the university. Further, the questionnaire was used to elicit information from students from Distance and Conventional Education. Field notes were kept to support the recorded information (see the CD-ROM submitted with this thesis). Also discussed was the data analysis process of each instrument.

In **Chapter Six** the analysis and interpretation of the quantitative data was presented. This was done with the help of tables (where applicable), and a descriptive analysis of each question item. Student response to the questionnaire elicited information on access to the BEd (Hons) programme, teaching and instructional strategies, student performance and the quality assurance process for students. Also, both chi-square and Fisher's exact tests were applied (where applicable) to student scores to test for possible divergences in the performance of students from both modes of delivery, while the effect sizes were reported through the application of the Phi coefficient. In addition, the throughput and drop-out rate of students from the two delivery modes were compared.

In **Chapter Seven** a detailed presentation, analysis and interpretation of the qualitative method was presented. The findings of the interviews were explained in relation to access, delivery and output. Information on the quality of the access provided for students – with reference to the relevance of the instructional technology adopted by the institution – and the quality of their learning experience – which invariably had direct influence on their output – was gathered. Lastly, the quality assurance stance of the university, the extent to which role players were encouraged to participate in this, and their involvement in its process was discussed.

Finally, in **Chapter Eight** a review of all the preceding chapters is highlighted, the main research findings in relation to the *transactional distance theory* are discussed, recommendations for future policy and practice, and suggestions for further research in relation to Distance Education are offered, and, finally, the methodology applied to this study and its contributions to the body of knowledge and its limitations are reflected upon.

### **8.3 Summary of the main findings from the literature review**

According to Baker, Frisbie and Patrick (1993), definitions of conventional education are not particularly different from one another, as they essentially give the idea of a geographical location (Hagel, 2000; Lewis, 2002), thus making the teacher and the student present most of the time. However, Barnett (2002) is of the opinion that various factors such as the demographic nature of the student body and technology, among others, have to some extent changed the conception of *the university as a place*. This goes on to suggest that in most countries, universities are faced by unprecedented challenges of rapid technological and societal changes, volatile increases in the significance of distance education and open learning, chronic financial difficulties; and the quest for quality, to mention but a few (Peters, 2000). Nevertheless, concerning the future of the university, Pister (1999:236) submits that ‘universities will continue to represent all three attributes of place, process and paradigm’. Therefore, the working definition of conventional education adopted for this study is “*The mode of education in which the teacher and the learners often meet face-to-face at the same time and place*” (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3).

But mention must be made of the fact that this mode of education is often regarded as superior to its distance counterpart (Tsolakidis, 2000). However, the disadvantages of conventional education highlighted by scholars include its conservative nature and reluctance to change (Evans & Nation, 2000) and its encouragement of passive learning, ignoring individual differences and learner needs (Johnson et al. 2000), which is as a result of lecture presentation to a large

number of students (Garrison & Anderson, 2000), to mention but a few. These have caused Pister (1999) to submit that the conventional education delivery mode has not fitted all institutions.

In comparison, the distance education form of delivery is now a common phenomenon all over the world (Srivastava, 2002), which is described as the mode of transferring higher education to its recipients but which still benefits from the planning, guidance and tuition of tutorial organization (Holmberg, 1993; QAA, 1999; the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), 2004). However, to this definition, scholars have added the use of technology that mediates communication between students and facilitators (Holmberg, 2001; Taylor, 2001; Rekkedal & Qvist-Eriksen, 2003), which has led to the term *generations* of technology (Garrison, 1993; Garrison & Archer, 2000; Taylor, 2001, 2002). Of these, the *print* medium is the most common (Garrison & Archer, 2000).

According to Lewis (2002) distance education developed because the needs of certain groups of people (such as stay-at-home mothers, the disabled, prisoners, those with paid jobs, and even employers of labor) were not being recognized and met by conventional higher education methods. It is to this mode that African countries are forced to turn (Dlamini, 1998; UNESCO, 2001; Braimoh, 2003; Magagula & Ngwenya, 2004), chiefly in the light of the possibility of distance education providing educational opportunities to its teeming populations. From the above, distance education, for the purpose of this study, is defined as “*The mode of delivery in which the teacher is separated from the learners, thereby necessitating the use of artificial communication that encourages interaction among teacher/learners and learners/learners*”.

Nevertheless, despite these benefits, distance education has not been spared its share of criticism, which has stemmed from the fear people have of the system’s inability to encourage deeper understanding of learning materials, the possible

irrelevance of the distance teaching mode to some courses, which thereby encourages a higher drop-out rate among these students, possible lack of academic and relational support for academics and students, the negative effects of non-availability of library services on studies, and its cost implications (Lowe, 1997; AFT, 2000; Hellman, 2003), which all depict aspects of *quality* in education. Nonetheless, Badat (2005) concludes that, 'high-quality distance higher education can be immensely valuable [for] public and social good'.

Further, mention must be made of the fact that changes taking place in higher education have established *paradigm shifts*, which are rooted in theoretical underpinnings that are affecting both modes of delivery (See Chapter 1, Section 1.2). Chiefly among these are the shift from the *instruction paradigm* to the *learning paradigm* (Gwyer, 1997; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Fraser & Lombard, 2002; Pacific Crest, 2004), and *access* – that has become a political issue (Herman & Mandell, 1999) because of the obvious effect of higher education on determining the wealth of a nation (Daves et al. 2004; Duderstadt, 2002a). All these have, to some extent, led to the convergence of distance and conventional education (Tait & Mills, 1999).

According to Duderstadt (2002a), 'since knowledge has become not only the wealth of nations, but the key to one's personal prosperity and quality of life, it has become the responsibility of democratic societies to provide their citizens with the education and training they need, throughout their lives, whenever, wherever, and however they desire it, at high quality and at an affordable cost'. This statement sums up the essence of this study, and the researcher's choice of the three indices of assessment, namely: *access*, *delivery* and *output*, against which distance and conventional education have been compared. Past research (Garrison, 1996; SAIDE, 1996; Perraton, 2000; Dhanarajan, 2001) reveals that the delivery mode of a form of education and its quality are directly related to access that invariably determines the throughput and output rates.

Further to this, according to Clark (1999), comparative research into contact education and its distance counterpart dated back to about seventy (70) years or more. Unfortunately, the acceptance of distance education has not changed much in spite of the work of ‘three generations of educators and media specialists’ (Clark, 1999:viii). However, the perusing of available literature reveals that *quality* (which is a slippery concept to define), was the main reason for the low acceptance of this mode of delivery (Black, 1992; Garrison, 1996; Jelfs, 2001; Aluko, 2000; Clarke et al. 2004). Hence, it has been advised that attention should be focused on quality, as it relates to distance education.

Reflecting this, gaps that have been identified in past comparative studies include failure to adequately define and differentiate between both forms of education, lack of taking into consideration other factors that affect the failure or success of students, lack of focus on the total academic study programme and inadequate explanation of reasons for the higher dropout rates of distance learners, and the quantitative nature of most research in this area, among others (Ehrmann, 1995; Saba, 1998; Phipps, 1999; Lockee, Moore & Burton, 2001; Diaz, 2000).

However, as earlier noted, it is not the interest of the researcher to focus on “Which method is better?” (Diaz, 2000), but on what possible discrepancies exist in distance education, when compared to its contact counterpart, which have resulted in an attitude of scepticism toward it. And what suggestions can be proffered on this.

#### **8.4 Summary of the quantitative and the qualitative investigations**

This section has been included to focus attention on the main findings of this study of the comparison of the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy program in a dual-mode setting. Further, the findings in relation to the indices of assessment, as identified at the beginning of this study (see Chapter 1,

Section 1.2), were discussed. To follow are summaries of the findings from the application of the quantitative and qualitative research instruments:

#### **8.4.1 Summary of the findings of the quantitative investigation**

The following findings were identified based on the quantitative research instruments, which consisted of the questionnaire – that was given to students to be answered – and data provided by the university – on the enrolment, throughput and graduation rates (see Chapter 6) of BEd (Hons) study programme students, from Distance and Conventional Education.

##### **8.4.1.1 Main findings from student responses to the questionnaire**

###### **8.4.1.1.1 Main findings in terms of access to the BEd (Hons) study programme and the university**

In all, 275 students from Distance (230) and Conventional Education (45), who were all registered for the B. Ed. (Hons) study programme, responded to the research questionnaire. Analysis of these documents delivered the following information:

- The biographical information revealed that majority of the students (17,189) enrolled on the B. Ed. (Hons) study programme between 2003 and 2006 were *Blacks* [Africans] (16, 507 - 95%), who were mostly enrolled for the Distance Education programme. Also, the ages of most of the respondents that participated in this study (170) were within the early adulthood and mid adulthood (ages 35 – 39) range, and of these students 112 (66%) were female. In addition, 99% of these students were educators, while the remaining 1%, worked in related fields. Of the 170 students, 110 indicated that their choice of the University of Pretoria was determined by the *quality* of this programme. Furthermore, 36 students (22.5%) were university graduates, while 124 students (77.5%) were non-

graduates that possessed diplomas and Advanced Certificates in Education.

- As could be expected, students from Contact Education were presented an orientation programme, to introduce them to the B. Ed. (Hons) programme, while students from Distance Education had a tutorial booklet, which supplied all necessary information.

#### **8.4.1.1.2 Main findings on the quality of the learning experiences of students from both modes of delivery**

Further responses received from the students to the questionnaire revealed the following information:

- The media technology for Distance and Conventional Education was indicated as *print*. Most of the students registered for the BEd (Hons) programme were from the Distance Education group, and lived in areas far from any institution that could provide them access to higher education. Further, this accounted for most of the students from Distance Education receiving their tutorial materials by *post*.
- Further to this, most of the students from Distance Education indicated that the university did not provide non-instructional support (i.e. free-toll telephone support and counselling) over and above teaching. Consequently most students indicated this as an area of need. In contrast, most students from both groups indicated that academic advising services were provided, which they frequently made use of. Further, the students on this programme indicated diverse motivating factors for having made their choice of delivery mode.
- A large percentage of the students from Contact Education indicated they had the possibility of meeting with their facilitators as such need presented itself. However, most students from Distance Education, especially those living a great distance from the University of Pretoria (Education campus), did not have this opportunity, except during contact sessions. In addition to

- this, certain of these students complained about the cost of phoning in to the university, to consult with their lecturers.
- All the students indicated they were provided the opportunity to appraise all aspects of the BEd (Hons) programme (which appraisal included course presenters, administration and the contact sessions), and most students were of the opinion the method of appraisal was *fairly good*.
  - The majority of the students (56%) from Distance and Conventional Education indicated they had never completed any learning style or learning preference assessment questionnaire that was provided by the University of Pretoria. However, many of these students (77%) indicated they were already aware of their personal learning style (probably due to their profession – teaching).
  - 120 students (75%) from Distance and Conventional Education affirmed that the formative assessment method of evaluation was applied at the University of Pretoria, as they had to complete assignments by pre-specified due dates. In relation to this, many students from Contact Education indicated a general 2-week wait for feedback on assignments, while the students from Distance Education indicated a general 4-week wait for feedback on assignments. In relation to this, 141 students (86.5%) from both delivery modes affirmed that the lecturers conveyed to them a high expectation of their performance, and 138 students (85.19%) were satisfied with this method of assessment. Nonetheless, the majority of the students still offered suggestions for improvement in this area.
  - Mixed feelings were expressed by students from Distance and Conventional Education on the quality of some of their tutorial materials, and question items on these were based on the didactic qualities of the materials; their content, goals and objectives and achievement of cognitive skills. Further, the majority of the students specified that they mostly depended on these tutorial materials for study purposes.
  - No provision of accommodation was made for students from Distance Education during the contact sessions; an aspect these students indicated

- made the attendance to this part of the study programme tougher – a matter they hoped the university could assist them with. It was noted, however, attendance at these contact sessions was not compulsory. Conversely, most students from Conventional Education usually attended classes so did not need additional support through these contact sessions.
- The students from Conventional Education had access to library books, while their Distance Education counterparts received learning materials that contained sufficient information for their study purposes; however, they could borrow library books – for extra reading purpose - from the library, at their own cost.
  - The majority of the students from both delivery groups rated the services rendered by the administrative staff of the university as *good* (82 - 54%); while 49 students (32%) indicated these as *excellent*; 16 students (10%) indicated *fair*, and a very number of low 6 students (4%), indicated *poor*. Additionally, other ratings included the flow of regular information, listing of specific time to contact administrative staff and availability of names and contact details of staff to students, in which student opinion varied.
  - Lastly, 135 students (91%) indicated they were satisfied with the BEd (Hons) programme; nonetheless, there were still many unmet expectations, as could be deduced from the many suggestions provided by the students for the improvement of the programme (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.5-b).

#### **8.4.1.1.3 Main findings in terms of other possible factors influencing student output**

In relation to the above issues, further possible factors that might have affected student output are enlisted below:

- Most of the students regarded the educational services rendered at the University of Pretoria supportive of their learning. However, there were a few negative comments offered.

- Many of the students, who participated in this investigation, did not have access to financial aid – and many received financial assistance through EDULOAN, a system whereby the student repaid advance loans against their salary. The majority of these students indicated having difficulty with coping to cover the monthly repayment amount.
- While other commitments directly impacted student focus on their learning, many were of the opinion they were still committed to their studies, in spite of these. In addition, many of these students were of the opinion they had made the right choice of programme.

#### **8.4.1.1.4 Main findings on student performance, the throughput and the dropout rate data collected from the university administration**

- It was indicated in Chapter 6, Section 6.3.2 that performances of students from the two delivery modes were much the same, as there were instances where students from Distance Education performed as well as their contact counterparts.
- Comparison of the dropout rate of students from the two delivery modes indicated the rate from Distance Education was higher (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.3). However, there was an indication of a slight improvement in this rate for Distance Education, and – as the BEd (Hons) programme was still at its developmental stage – it was decided it was too early to judge this budding trend with certainty.

#### **8.4.2 Summary of the findings from the qualitative investigation (see Chapter 7)**

##### **8.4.2.1 Main findings in terms of access to the BEd (Hons) programme and the University of Pretoria**

- Upon receiving the policy statement of the government (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1) to extend access of learning opportunities to the teeming populace in South Africa, the Faculty of Education, at the University of

Pretoria, identified the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy programme as one of the niche areas to develop and aid in meeting this need. In relation to this, findings of this study revealed that, even though this university – just a few short years prior to the time of this research study being conducted – was a predominantly White university, most students who enrolled for this programme were Black.

- Certain geographical areas of South Africa, which were not well served by other universities, were targeted by the University of Pretoria, thereby extending its student catchment area far and wide into rural areas, and even beyond the borders of the country. This decision determined the choice of instructional technology.
- The adopted instructional technology was *paper-based*, which was relevant to all enrolled students on the BEd (Hons) programme, thus bringing all students onto a par.

#### **8.4.2.2 Main findings on the quality of the learning experiences of students**

- The Distance Education programme was borne out of the Conventional Education programme; but the birthing process was not without its challenges, which the module coordinators coped with, with the aid of the Faculty of Education.
- Ultimately, the learning materials that were developed for the Distance Education Unit were also used by Conventional Education – the major reason for this was the *quality* of the newly developed learning materials.
- To enable the necessary support for the students from the Distance Education Unit the Faculty of Education introduced the conducting of contact sessions, the use of SMS technology, and encouraged learner-learner and faculty-student support. The module coordinators and the course presenters had high expectations of student performance that was communicated to the students, to motivate them.

- As the students from Distance Education did not have direct access to the library facilities at the University of Pretoria, as their contact counterparts did, the module coordinators enriched the readers that were to be used by these students, by attaching sufficient study material that students could use for completing the assignments. However, other options were made available to these students in the form of extra books being added to the learning package, and lists of articles and other books that they could order from the campus library – for a fee – and the option of visiting the campus libraries was still available to students who lived close enough to the university. Nonetheless, many of these students lived in remote areas of South Africa, where there were no universities nearby. And many also indicated they had no access to Internet facilities, and the modules could then not be supported using this technology.
- It was noted there was no provision made at the University of Pretoria for a separate counselling unit for the students from Distance Education, though they could access that which was available to their contact counterparts over the telephone. Some students were of the opinion that phoning was expensive and staff from the university admitted it would be impracticable for students to travel to the Faculty of Education for this purpose.
- Other factors among the findings that could impact on the performance rate for students from Distance Education were poor health, and the absence of tutors for the six modules under investigation.

#### **8.4.2.3 Main findings in terms of the quality assurance process at the university**

- The policy and attitude toward quality assurance adopted at the University of Pretoria was the holistic approach, and this was communicated to all involved in the process of delivering this study programme, as well as the stakeholders. Towards this aim, all staff members were developed. Additionally, students from Distance and Conventional Education indicated

*quality* of the BEd (Hons) programme as the main reason for their enrolling with the university in this course.

- All academics at the Faculty of Education who were involved in teaching the modules that formed part of the Conventional Education BEd (Hons) programme were automatically drafted into teaching the Distance Education programme, an additional task which some asserted they were not prepared for before accepting employment at the university. So, to an extent, these staff members felt compelled to be involved in the distance mode.
- Further to this aspect, there were no additional incentives or rewards for teaching staff being involved in Distance Education, which some lecturers felt was necessary, as was the case with other dual-mode institutions.
- There was an enormous need for further research in distance education. However, a committee had been instituted to investigate this need, but only a few of the module coordinators were involved in this committee, but only on a superficial level.
- Some student interviewees were of the opinion stronger attention could be focused by the University of Pretoria in the area of marketing the BEd (Hons) programme, as many potential students within the rural student catchment areas of the Faculty of Education, were still excluded from this programme, through ignorance of its possibilities.
- Lastly, all the course presenters involved in the BEd (Hons) study programme were of the opinion the University of Pretoria was strongly committed to all aspects of the Distance Education Unit, as reflected by the physical efforts and financial investment that went into the planning and implementation of this programme.

## **8.5 Analytical reflection on the main research findings: a synthesis of the indices of assessment**

### **8.5.1 Introduction**

The three chosen indices of assessment for this study are, namely: *access*, *delivery* and *output*. Prior to this section, these three aspects were investigated as separate entities (see Chapters 2 and 3.). However, in this section the researcher will be critically reflecting on them, to synthesize her findings. In addition, the interrelatedness of the roles they play when comparing Distance and Conventional Education will be highlighted and possible reasons that are the basis for the ever persistent view that many people have of the former mode of education being inferior to the latter will be discussed, or whether such thinking is based on a fallacy. This is more so because research has established the delivery mode of a form of education and its quality are directly related to access, which also impact on the throughput rates (Garrison, 1996; SAIDE, 1996; Perraton, 2000; Dhanarajan, 2001). Finally, certain aspects of the recommendations of the SAIDE (2006) – that reviewed the operational systems of the Distance Education Unit of the University of Pretoria – will be referred to toward the end of this report.

### **8.5.2 Towards a better understanding of access**

While investigating the B. Ed. (Hons) programme, a major objective for the researcher was to determine the extent *access* to higher education is provided for many people that had been previously denied such access, as well as determine the *quality* of the access provided (see Chapter One, Sections 1.3 and 1.4). In regarding these aspects, focus was placed on three areas:

- The choice of instructional technology used by the University of Pretoria,
- The reasons for this choice, and
- The relevance of the instructional technology to the BEd (Hons) students.

However, this discussion will include other related factors that were highlighted during the course of this study.

Based on the findings from the quantitative and qualitative research instruments applied in this study, one could say that the call by government (Education White Paper (1997); National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa (2001)) to provide access for higher education for all South Africans, the majority of whom such access was previously denied, was gradually being yielded to (Cloete & Bunting, 1999; Sedgwick, 2004). Besides, the University of Pretoria (previously a University for Afrikaans speaking South Africans), together with other South African universities (CHE, 2004), is currently involved in this vision, as English is now the medium of lecturing and examining thousands of students.

According to scholars, higher education has moved from its former position of *elitism* to *massification* (Gourley, 1999; Pond, 2002), due to a number of factors:

- Firstly, it has opened up opportunities to mature students and has eased entry barriers (Smith & Webster, 1997).
- Secondly, it has increased the political power of ordinary citizens (Brimoh, 2003). And
- Thirdly, it does not only hold the key to one's personal prosperity and quality of life, but has been found to hold the key to the wealth of a nation (Duderstadt, 2002a; Morley, Unterhatler & Gold, 2003), among other reasons.

In relation to this, it has been discovered that distance education has come to stay, and according to Nuan (1996), it is unavoidably connected to the issues of social justice, involving equity for groups, and personal liberation. Therefore, in South Africa, it has been identified as being able to redress past inequities (Daves et al. 2004).

To buttress the facts above, this study revealed that the rural student catchment areas of the University of Pretoria – for the BEd (Hons) programme – stretched across South Africa. This was the result of a deliberate decision and the ensuing survey revealed areas of the country that were not yet provided with access to university education. In view of this, Bates (2005) is of the opinion that the university, in essence, has limited its choice of technology – which was, in this, case *print* – to provide equal access to students coming into the programme. Nevertheless, findings from this study reveal that these students, though, could identify with the choice of media, but there still existed some gaps, which Hellman (2003) referred to as the *digital divide*. This was despite the fact that the University of Pretoria, in playing its part fully, within the possible available means, of bringing all students to the same level, included all necessary information needed by the students from Distance Education to cope with their studies, in the tutorial materials (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.2). Many module coordinators and course presenters were of the opinion there was a difference between students from the two delivery modes who had access to other technologies, from those who did not. Included in the more privileged group were:

- The students from Contact Education who had greater exposure to modern facilities, such as computer technology,
- Along with students from Distance Education who were privileged to work in schools that owned some of these facilities, and
- Students who could access libraries from other universities, as they lived closer to their campus (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.3.4).

However, Smith and Webster (1997a) earlier warned that there might be paradoxes, which might lead to *the coexistence of greater inclusion alongside greater exclusion*. For instance, the findings of this study showed that there was equity in terms of the access provided for students, as admission into the BEd (Hons) programme was open to a large extent, which could be interpreted to mean *greater inclusion*. This was because diverse and the same entrance

qualifications were recognized for the Distance and Conventional Education study modes, which also included recognition of prior learning (RPL). Nonetheless, shedding further light on the *greater exclusion*, Morrow, (1993/1994); Herman and Mandell (1999); Jansen (2001) and Gamede (2005) are of the opinion that opening up access, may not necessarily mean true access, since many factors have to be considered when it comes to the issue of access. This situation causes Morrow (1993/4); Jansen (2001) and Gamede (2005) to make a distinction between epistemological access and physical access, which go a long way to determine the quality of the access provided for learners.

Of importance among these factors are the availability of *non-instructional support* (which in this context, referred to toll-free telephone support and counselling), and *academic advising services* for enrolled students in any given study programme. Scholars (Carnwell, 1998; Johnson, 1999; Moreland & Carnwell, 2000; Harrington et al. 2001; HESA, 2005; Raphael, 2006) have continually stressed the importance of both, as their absence can have terrible consequences on students. Concerning these aspects, findings from this study revealed that only students from Conventional Education had access to non-instructional support, such as *counselling*, while the majority of students from Distance Education responded negatively to the questions concerning the availability of these services (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.2-c). Certain students identified areas of need for counselling, which included *career counselling, studying, time management, and how to write examinations and complete assignments*. Regrettably, these are already identified areas of challenges for students in distance education (Van Schoor, Mill & Potgieter, 2002; Mostert, 2006). Conversely, the majority of the students indicated that they had better access to *academic advising services*, which resulted in them being better motivated within their studies (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.2-e). However, in this instance, the students from Distance Education were expected to phone in to the university, which meant additional expenses for – a cost some

of them complained about. Subsequently, they rarely phoned for academic advising (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.6).

For this reason, scholars (Grayson, 1997; Carr, 2000; Mantetjie, 2001; Tresman, 2002) suggest putting some structures in place, which include:

- Academic development,
- Diagnostic assessment,
- Effective learner support systems,
- Work-study programs,
- Special loan scheme, and
- Bridging courses for those with marginal matriculation results, and
- Those students who have problems with language proficiency in English, among others.

As at the time of this investigation, the University of Pretoria had not fully explored all these aspects. Unfortunately, Gelderbloem (1996) laments, these initiatives are expensive and more funding will be needed for sustainability of the institution, which will have to be geared towards admitting more students from a disadvantaged background, and, as lack of selection may affect the maintaining of excellence at universities, thereby making the quality of the access given to students become questionable.

In relation to this, is that prospective students that were unemployed, and who then could not pay the tuition fees, were not admitted into the programme. This, in a way, indicates that access to the programme was restricted to only those that could afford the payment of fees. Supporting this, Pityana (2006) – in an address at the official launch of the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) on 27 March – praised the great improvement in the area of access to higher education for all, though he laments that many South Africans are still excluded from the higher education loop. Related to this, the picture on the international

scene is not entirely different. For instance, USA Funds (2007) expresses the fear that 'despite the enormous investment of public resources, financial barriers to higher learning persist for many academically qualified low-income students', a state that 'remains at approximately the same level it was more than 30 years ago'.

This leads to the issue of EDULOAN, a loan scheme which many enrolled students applied for. Findings from this study (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.4-b) revealed that out of 152 students from the two delivery modes, 85 students (56%) were struggling with financial difficulties related to their studies. (This is in contrast to the other 67 students that did not indicate such difficulties despite being on the same loan scheme). Further, only 10 students had access to bursary funding, while only 2 students could afford the payment of their study fees. (From this one can see that in a sense students were forced to make use of the loan scheme.) This situation caused Pityana (2006) to assert that one of the consequences of low funding 'is that students' fees have increased in order to match the funding shortage'. Unfortunately, responses of students to the questionnaire indicated complaints about high study fees (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.5-b). This, among other factors, according to USA Funds (2006) often signals the lower probability of students completing their studies, and low motivation to study (Qurashi, Morton & Antosz, 2002).

Finally, the tutorial packages especially developed and compiled to suit their extraordinary needs (with extra textbooks included), were sent to students from Distance Education, as described by one of the administrators (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.2), who suggested that because of this extra service, this group of students paid higher tuition fees – as the university endeavored to encourage parity between the two delivery modes, despite the physical and digital divide, as far as was possible. And in reviewing all these statements, the researcher joins forces with Chambers (1997) to ask the question, 'Who pays for the cost of opening up access?'

According to Cele and Brandt (c2005) and Scott (2003), there must be way to get round increasing access to education for all people, while not losing credibility in the face of financial *stinginess* on the part of government. Though the financial budget of the South African government for 2007 reflects that the lion share has been allocated for education purposes, and, according to the Finance Minister (South Africa Information, 2007), R700 million of this budget has been set aside for bursaries – to encourage young people to train as teachers – however, little or nothing has been mentioned about the positive contribution Distance Education could lend to this situation. It is hoped that the government, when apportioning the budget monies allocated for education, would look into these critical issues.

### **8.5.3 The quality of student learning experience in relation to the *delivery***

Another objective of this study was to compare the quality of the learning experience of students from Distance and Conventional Education. On this issue, the application of both quantitative and qualitative research instruments revealed that students from both delivery modes used the same learning materials, which were initially developed for the use of the Distance Education programme. According to one of the staff interviewees, the main reason for this decision by management included the quality of the newly developed learning materials. The module coordinators were responsible for both delivery modes, and the students would be writing the same examination, and would later be awarded the same certificates upon completion of their studies. The researcher's opinion on this is that the decision signifies assent to the quality of the learning materials used on this programme. This buttresses Van Kierk (2004) who noted that attention in distance education has shifted to the production of quality materials. In addition, while writing on the real quality measure for learning materials, Duval (2005) asserted that 'quality is not so much a characteristic of a learning object, but rather a characteristic of how that subject is used in a particular context ...'

Further investigation revealed that apart from the learning materials, tutorial letters, study guides, and relevant articles and textbooks were also sent to

students from Distance Education as part of their learning package. For these students, the tutorial letters served as their orientation to the University of Pretoria and the BEd (Hons) programme – as they contained all necessary information and could be likened to the orientation programme of the students from Conventional Education. According to Raphael (2006), orientation programmes are necessary to familiarize students with study programmes. On this matter, the researcher thinks there is a need for the institution to become more creative in conveying this aspect to students from Distance Education. This is necessary inasmuch as many course presenters noted that most students from Distance Education sometimes never opened their learning materials before arriving for contact sessions, which could suggest that these students had little or no knowledge about the expectations of the BEd (Hons) programme (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.2). Thus, it has been suggested by scholars (Grayson (1997); Carr (2000); Tresman (2002) that universities could introduce pre-orientation courses. Conversely, the researcher concurs with Telford and Masson (2005) that except students also play their expected roles within the educational system, it will be difficult to realize the goals of a programme, no matter the efforts of the institution concerned.

As earlier noted, the University of Pretoria, after its initial survey, settled for *print* as the medium of delivery for the BEd (Hons) programme (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1.3), and after this decision, the medium was suitable to provide access (Bates, 1995; Lambert & Williams, 1999) to all students from both Distance and Conventional Education, irrespective of where they lived. As maintained by Diaz and Cartnal (1999) and Goold and Rimmer (2000), one of the ways to make learning materials more effective is to discover the learning styles and learning preferences of students, and to take these into consideration when designing the learning materials. However, findings from this study indicated that the University of Pretoria was yet to assess these important aspects (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.3.1-e and Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.2). According to Logan and Thomas (2002), individual differences should be of particular interest

to providers of distance education because there is usually no teacher readily available to explain, adapt or tailor the materials to an individual's need, as the need arises.

In addition, even though the majority of the course presenters indicated their satisfaction with the quality of the learning materials, there were, nonetheless, mixed attitudes toward this (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.2), which was due to inadequate interactivity, and the language difficulty level of some of the materials. Corroborating this, response of students to the questionnaire revealed the same impression (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.3.1-l & m), and this should be a major source of concern because the majority of students from the two delivery modes mainly depended on these materials for their learning (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.3.1-n). In the opinion of Curtis (1997:10), 'quality in teaching and learning in higher education depends substantially on making learning resources and activities as interactive as possible'. Though, the plans were being formulated at the university for the review of the learning material (a step also confirmed by the review committee (SAIDE, 2006), Tam (2000) emphasizes that 'it is no longer sufficient to provide distance learners with pre-packaged self-instructional materials where there is very little opportunity for student choice and interaction'.

Allied to this matter, another possible source of assistance could be the collaboration among universities with similar teaching programmes, which has been recommended for the purpose of managing production cost and improving the quality of such materials (Rockwell, Furgason & Marx, 2000; CHE, 2004d). Nevertheless, according to the conceptual framework that guided this study – the Transactional Distance Theory (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.4), the more students are concerned about the quality of their tutorial materials, the more alienated they will feel, thus increasing the *transactional distance* between them and the lecturers (Moore, 1991, 1996; Saba, 1998; Young & Marks-Maran, 1999).

Of relevance, are the organizational issues, among which are the *administrative structures* that Lambert and Williams (1999) regard as being critical to the long-term success of any given study programme. Though students rated the administrative services at the Faculty of Education as *good*, they felt there were areas needing serious attention. An example is the late delivery of tutorial packages and other necessary information to students from Distance Education due to delays in the postal delivery system, (which the staff viewed as beyond their control), yet there is no gainsaying that there is the need for the provision of adequate staffing, to then assign specific staff to specific roles, to for instance, efficiently attend to the 20,000 calls per month received by the office (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.3.1-j and Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.4; SAIDE, 2006). Unfortunately, provision of adequate staffing is closely allied to the *quality* of a study programme (NADEOSA, 2003; Nash, 2005). However, one must acknowledge the possible impact of these matters on students, since they were expected to have received their tutorial packages in good time and at times there might be no prompt response to student enquiries.

Part of what defines a *quality* learning experience is the support structure which an institution has in place. Apart from the non-instructional and non-academic support services earlier discussed, it was revealed that the Distance Education Unit, of the University of Pretoria, made use of Short Message Service (SMS) technology, contact sessions and library services to enhance the learning support provided for students. The use of SMS technology to augment education is not new in the academic world (Ramos, c2007; Pabiaco, 2000; Mariano & De LA Rosa, 2004; Nonyongo, Mabusela & Monene, 2005; Riordan & Traxler, 2005; Mbarika & Mbarika, 2006; Kajumbula, 2007).

For instance, it has been found to enhance communication between students and the university, and scholars are exploring its benefits still further, with no exception to the University of Pretoria. Statistics as at the time of this investigation revealed that 98% (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.4) of the BEd

(Hons) students possessed mobile phones (even though the majority of them lived in rural areas of South Africa). Citing one of the advantages of this technology, and referring to the university as a point of reference for others to emulate, Nix, Russell and Keegan (2007) gave the example of the university, in which in 2002, 58% of enrolled students responded to a reminder for registration as opposed to the normal expected percentage of below 40%. Likewise, findings of a recent study on the effectiveness of SMS technology at Makerere University, Uganda, revealed that students who participated in the study were of the opinion there was improved communication between them and the university, and, as a result, they felt connected to the institution (Kajumbula, 2007). However, still of great concern here, is the Internet crisis faced by Africa, as only 1% of the worldwide Internet users are on this continent, while half of this percentage are in South Africa, with 70% found mostly in the major cities of the country Laaser (2006). In contrast to this, as at December 2005, European countries are fast approaching the 100% range (Nix, Russell & Keegan, 2007).

Further supporting the university's teaching efforts, contact sessions at the University of Pretoria have come to be regarded as an integral means of learning support for students from Distance Education. According to scholars (Holmberg, 1995; Kelsey & D'souza, 2004; Labuschagne & Mashile, 2005), faculty-student contact is regarded as a major part of the motivational factor for distance education students, and this should be as solid as that of the contact mode (Thompson & McGrath, 1999; Nixon & Leftwich, 1999; Fender, 2001). Buttressing this is a study conducted in 2002 by Fender on student and faculty issues, which revealed that a concern of faculty members was 'lack of interaction with students'. Sadly, investigation of this situation for the BEd (Hons) students revealed that the students from Contact Education availed themselves more of this opportunity than their Distance Education counterparts. Research conducted through the Distance Education Unit, of the Faculty of Education, is inconclusive – at this stage – as to whether students that attended the contact sessions performed better than those who did not (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2.3), but it

was later confirmed that this had positive effects on students' performances during a follow-up interview with the manager of the program. However, I think one might be cautious in drawing a conclusion that this was the sole reason why such students performed better. Mention must be made here that a possible reason for students from Distance Education being reluctant to attend the contact sessions was the non-provision of accommodation during the contact session period, a need students had, but which the faculty could not meet – for logistic reasons (see Chapter 7, Section 7. 3.3.1).

In relation to this is the attitude toward learner-learner support, on which research on its impact on students from distance education is inconclusive, as scholars are divided on this (Moore, 1989; Holmberg, 1995; Biner et al. 1997; Kelsey & D'souza, 2004). Nonetheless, this was an important aspect identified by the B. Ed (Hons) students from the Distance Education Unit, as most often they could not make contact with other students – thereby forcing them to struggle alone with, for example, the completing of assignments (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.3-s).

In addition, scholars have identified tutoring as another way to encourage students from distance education to finish their programs on time (Galusha, 1997; Miller 2002). But findings from the investigation for this study indicated no tutors (for both modes) had been identified for any of the six modules under investigation (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.3.7). However, it appeared that the service providers (i.e. the course presenters) employed by the Distance Education Unit seemed to be playing this role, but to the researcher, this could not have been as effective since majority of them had contact with the students mainly during the contact sessions. As indicated by Moore and Kearsley (2005), it helps provide students with individualized instruction, improves their completion rates and achievement, although these would depend on the nature of the course, the tutor and the student. Though module coordinators expressed doubts at locating suitable candidates to appoint to this position for each module, due to

the experience required at this level, but the researcher is of the opinion that the Faculty of Education should establish a process of training to *grow* the required tutors (Moore, 2005).

The last support mechanism to be mentioned here is the library facility provided by the university. According to Buchanan (2000) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2004), it is the responsibility of universities to go the extra mile to meet the needs of distance education students. Though this study revealed that efforts at the University of Pretoria were extended to meet this need – by including in tutorial packages destined for use by students from Distance Education all that was regarded as necessary for success in their studies – nevertheless, one cannot overlook that the students from Contact Education, along with certain of the students from Distance Education, that had access to libraries would be at an advantage over the others. A particular instance relevant to this study was the incapacity of students from Distance Education to access a library of law, a facility not located in the rural areas. And to complicate the issue, most of them also had no access to the Internet (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1.2). The researcher is of the opinion the time is right for the University of Pretoria to consider ways to diversify in this area.

Findings from this study revealed the University of Pretoria adopted three forms of assessment: self-assessment; formative and summative methods, in which students were given assignments, and the marks were part of the final mark. On this, Mostert, Makola and Munondi (2004), are of the opinion that this motivates distance education students, and prepares them for writing the summative assessment. However, according to Clarke et al. (2004), assessment at a distance can be problematic. This becomes clearer, if one remembers that, due to the special nature of the students from Distance Education that participated in this investigation (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.1-e. and Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1.3), the aid of electronic assessment software could not be made use of by the Faculty of Education, since most of these students had no access to the

Internet, which could have been instrumental in combating the problem of late delivery of submitted assignments to the administration of the faculty and late feedback on assignments to students because of erratic delivery of the general postal system (a factor that was beyond the university's control). An implication of this situation was that students may not receive feedback on their assignments in good time to prepare for examination. To combat the effect of this situation, Module Coordinators indicated they attached comments, highlighting general problems students experienced in answering the assignments, to tutorial letters. To this Dindsdag, Armstrong and Neil (2000) emphasize it is more encouraging for students when they receive feedback on their own work.

An advantage of using assessment software when grading student assignments is *consistency*, in that it erases the inherent problem with having different markers (Dindsdag et al. 2004). Unfortunately, this research application revealed students were of the opinion there was a difference between those who taught them and marked their assignments – which might well have been the result of inconsistency on the part of the markers (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.2-i), who were usually employed by the University of Pretoria on a contract basis, and were also trained by the Module Coordinators (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.3.3). Course Presenters that participated in this study all wished they could be involved in the marking of the scripts, since this would place them in a position to identify the areas of weakness of their students. Furthermore, Clarke et al. (2004) advise that is advantageous when the same marker is used to mark assignments for both full-time and part-time students, though caution the burden on these individuals could be significant.

#### **8.5.4 *Output* in relation to student performance, throughput and drop-out rates**

Connected to the entire discussion above, are the performance of students from Distance and Conventional Education, their throughput and drop-out rates. Interestingly, the SAIDE (2006) committee also recommended that the Distance

Education Unit of the Faculty of Education, at the University of Pretoria, evaluate the academic performance of students from both delivery modes. In this study, a number of factors were considered under the *output* rate of students from both modes, which included: *student performance in the six modules under investigation*, and their *enrolment, throughput and dropout rates* (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.4 and Chapter 6, Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3). There is no gainsaying there is still the general impression that conventional education – as opposed to distance education – is automatically of a better quality, which happens to be the main motive for this study (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2). However, this research effort highlighted interesting facts from the quantitative section of this study – in spite of all the challenges already mentioned above, some of which are still so because of the African setting of this country.

Findings from the comparison of student performance indicated that the performances were mixed, as there were instances where students from Distance Education performed as well as their Conventional Education counterparts. Also, each, in turn, performed better than the other in some cases (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.2). The fact that the students from Distance Education can perform better (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.2; Tables 6.35, 6.38, 6.46, 6.49 and 6.50), confirms past research on this (Shachar & Neuman, 2003; Bernard, 2004). However, according to literature on such comparative studies, the conclusion had mostly been of the order of *no significant difference* (Nielsen & Totto, 1993; Russell, 1999; Carr, 2000; Meyer, 2002; Magagula & Ngwenya, 2004; Zhao et al. 2004), indicating distance education student performance can be on par with their contact education counterparts.

Findings from this study also support research (Spady & Marshall, 1991; Fraser & Nieman, 1995; Willis & Kissane, 1997; Killen, 2002; Chickering & Ehrmann, 2003; McGivney, 2003; Shachar & Neuman, 2003; Bernard, 2004; Bornman, 2004; Mostert 2004; Magagula & Ngwenya, 2004; Bates, 2005) on the following

aspects as possible reasons for better performance of distance education students:

- Better academic support,
- Quality learning materials,
- Good assessment method,
- High expectations of student performance shared with them,
- Motivation by supportive family or partner, and
- Constant communication between the university and the students, amongst others (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.3.2).

Looking into the future, scholars are of the opinion this situation would even be further improved upon with time (Machtmes & Asher, 2000; Zhao et al. 2004). Conversely, reasons for a poor performance rate of distance education students are similar to the reasons for a higher drop-out rate, as mentioned below.

On this matter, findings revealed an expected situation (Subotzky, 2003; Leppel, 2004), in which the drop-out rates of students from Distance Education were higher than their contact counterparts (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.3). As earlier indicated (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2), this situation has been used by many people to determine the *quality* of a programme, thereby becoming the main reason why aspersion is still cast on this mode of delivery. Perusing available literature indicates there are diverse reasons for this (Fraser & Nieman, 1995; Sherry, 1996; Galusha, 1997; SAUVCA, 2001 – now HESA; Scalese, 2001; Van Schoor et al. 2002; McGivney, 2003; Mostert, 2003; Mostert, 2004; Mostert, 2006).

Further, findings from this study, confirm the following as possible reasons for this continuing trend:

- Low level of preparation of students coming into a given programme,

- The problem of language proficiency,
- Poor time management that results in surface learning,
- Lack of motivation,
- Ill health (which is in line with the age brackets of distance learners, and HIV/AIDS scourge and its related illnesses, which are rampant among educators in this country),
- Lack of funds,
- The level of crime, and
- The status of distance learners in society (job promotion, new job responsibilities, pregnancy and family commitments)

(See Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.2-e and Chapter 7, Sections 7.3.2 – 7.3.3).

Notwithstanding, and in agreeing with Tucker (2001), the researcher is of the opinion that the higher drop-out rate of students from distance education should not be taken out of context, but must be interpreted in line with other factors, some of which have been cited above – a gap in literature that acted as a strong motivation for this study (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2).

### **8.5.5 Critical reflection on the main research findings on the quality assurance process at the university**

Finally, justice would not be done to this reflection without mentioning what quality assurance process the University of Pretoria had already put in place. According to Harman (2001:1), quality assurance refers to ‘systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by higher education institutions and systems in order to monitor performance against objectives, and to ensure achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements’. Therefore, Abdullah (2006) is of the opinion that key role players in higher education have expectations that should serve as standards or a reference point to evaluate the performance of institutions. Of utmost importance is how far awareness is being created on this, and the extent to which the stakeholders are involved in this.

Firstly, this investigation revealed that the university had instituted a staff-student appraisal system, through which all students had the opportunity of assessing both administrative and academic structures (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1.1.2-c). On this, Lomas (2004) asserts that it is very advantageous as it serves as a way of allowing students a voice, while helping the institution to be accountable toward its clients. In addition, it exposes areas in need of improvement, which was the case in this study, as many changes have been made based on past evaluation (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.4.1). However, some of the contract staff (Course Presenters) were of the opinion this process should also involve them, and should involve feedback mechanisms, which – Avdjieva and Wilson (2002) suggest – should be continuous and evaluative. In addition, the module coordinators were involved in the quality review process that included moderation of exam papers, giving necessary academic support to students, going to centres during contact sessions, visiting examination centres and analysing examination results, to identify and solve problems that might have occurred in the examination (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.4.1). In support of this Bornman (2004) asserts that self-evaluation is a basic component of quality assurance procedures.

Secondly, the university encouraged staff development, in which both academic and administrative staffs were continually kept abreast of relevant happenings in their various job roles; and contract staff members were not excluded from this policy. This has been identified by Avdjieva and Wilson (2002) as an integral part of institutional planning. However, in a Delphi study conducted amongst distance educators by Rockwell, Furgason and Marx in 2001, it was revealed that distance education teacher competencies are a great concern, as research that identifies effective teacher competencies, teacher training needs, and the types of support instructors need, is very high. Supporting this, there is a clarion call for further training of course presenters, not only in andragogy, but also in adjustment to rural living, where most of them were sent for contact sessions (see Chapter 7,

Section 7.3.4.2). This becomes important as distance education often causes the role of the faculty to change (Beaudoin, 1998; Berge, 1998; Schifter, 2000).

Strongly linked to this, is whether distance education is really an area of interest of those involved in it. According to Wolcott and Betts (1999), there is often no consensus on reasons for faculty involvement in distance education, and there is insufficient research into this (Schifter, 2000). For instance, this study showed that the majority of the Course Presenters were involved, not necessarily because they had a passion for distance education, but rather for their modules, while some saw it as an opportunity to make extra income (see Section 7.3.4.2). In addition, there appeared to be a gap between job expectations during appointment interviews and actual job roles (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.4.3). This could encourage academics involved in distance education see themselves as being coerced in this, which could result in low motivation, hence keeping them from giving their best efforts to the work at hand (Wolcott & Betts, 1999).

Shedding further light on this, McLean (2006) is of the opinion that more attention should be given to the totality of the experience of teaching at a distance, and what the impact is on a social or personal level from the faculty perspective. Therefore, scholars (Olcott & Wright, 1995; Wolcott, 1997; Schifter, 2000) have dabbled into *research on reward* systems of institutions, which Wolcott (1997) emphasizes would depend on faculty culture. However, findings from this study revealed that module coordinators felt that the institution should emulate other universities in the area of reward systems on their involvement in distance education (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.4.4). Unfortunately, according to Schifter (2000), one of the major barriers reported in the literature on faculty members wanting to participate in distance education has been inadequate compensation.

Flowing from this chain of thought is the involvement of the academics in research. Firstly, attention should be drawn to the large number of part-time teaching staff who did not participate in research. And secondly, since, there was

a gap between job expectations and job roles of the full-time staff, many of the module coordinators were of the opinion they were being torn between two worlds. This was because they had no time for research in their own fields, and consequently, creating a dearth in distance education research. According to Lomas (2004), there is no consensus on the symbiotic relationship between teaching and research. Nevertheless, its benefits cannot be denied, which include collaborative relationship between lecturers and learners, and the development of a learning community (Andresen, 2000; Lomas, 2004). Therefore, some of the area needs for distance education identified by the module coordinators were student interaction with learning materials, and academic reading (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.4.6).

### **8.5.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, many of the staff participants in this research study were of the opinion the university was seriously committed to Distance Education, in view of the amount of money continually invested in it, and the expansion within the Faculty of Education (See Chapter 7, Section 7.3.4.7). Nevertheless, there are areas that need serious attention, which cannot be neglected. Most of these could be deduced from the reflection already done above, and additional suggestions made by all participants, which included firstly, more aggressive marketing strategies, as there was a ready market waiting for the university to be exploited (although this, according to the manager during a follow-up interview, might be impossible for now, as the university would always want to provide quality education, thus limiting its coverage to what it could properly look after); and secondly, creating more awareness among faculty members on the presence of the Distance Education Unit within the Faculty of Education, which happened to be the largest faculty in the University of Pretoria (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3.4.7).

In the next section, suggestions are proffered and recommendations made based on a reflection of finding noted in this section.

## **8.6 Suggestions, recommendations, and implications of this study regarding equity of access, student learning experiences from distance and conventional education, and student output**

The following suggestions and recommendations are made based on the findings of this study:

### **8.6.1 Recommendations and implications for policy and practice**

#### **8.6.1.1 Ensuring equity of access to distance and conventional education**

Firstly, *equity in access*, which the government of South Africa is currently advocating, by encouraging access of higher learning to people previously denied such access, would be meaningless to most people, if certain pertinent issues are not attended to. Therefore, in this study the following recommendations are advocated:

- *The screening of prospective candidates for admission to studies should be carried out, not to disqualify them, but to ascertain what recommendations should be made in regard to modules that could best assist them – especially for those that do not have their first degree, as these students have been found to be struggling the most in their studies. It is expected that this would further help the university to identify possible students at low-risk of completing their studies.*
- *Attention should promptly be focused on generic study courses that would assist in bridging the gap between present student performance and the performance expected of them for this postgraduate level course.*
- *The present decision of the government to introduce bursaries into teacher education is laudable, as this aspect has been identified as being at crisis*

*point in the country. However, this gesture should also be extended to distance education. This is especially in view of the expenses involved in upgrading their qualifications, which many teachers currently have to bear through their salaries.*

However, the implication of these recommendations is that:

- Firstly, the government must increase the subsidies allocated to distance education teacher study programmes, also making bursaries available to these students, as is done for their contact education counterparts. This would reduce the financial burden of these students and even though there is a government loan scheme in place, repaying the loan out their salary is difficult.
- Secondly, on the part of the University of Pretoria, there is a need to develop generic study courses – in certain identified areas, to assist certain students – to bridge the educational gap, so that all students who complete the BEd (Hons) programme may be on a par with one another.

#### **8.6.1.2 Ensuring the quality of the learning experience of students in relation to performance, throughput and drop-out rates**

- *The introduction of pre-orientation study programmes, which should be decentralized to cover the rural student catchment areas, is very important to prepare distance students for the expectations of the BEd (Hons) programme.*
- *There is urgent need to review the identified learning materials that were below the expected standard, to lessen the transactional distance between students from Distance Education and their facilitators. The reviewed materials should encourage more dialogue and offer less structure.*
- *In addition to this, it is necessary to conduct a survey of the learning preferences and learning styles of students, which would go along way in helping the instructional designer of the relevant learning materials.*

- *There is a need to supplement the printed learning materials, adopted by the University of Pretoria as the main teaching media for the BEd (Hons) programme, with audio and video tapes, as requested by certain students from Distance Education.*
- *A tutoring system need be implemented: Since the decision by the University of Pretoria to target rural areas as the student catchment area for the B. Ed. (Hons) study programme, practical steps need be taken to implement a tutoring system.*
  - *Firstly, tutors should be appointed for all the applicable modules; and not just the service providers.*
  - *Secondly, the module coordinators should train these tutors up to standard, specifically to serve the distance education programme.*
  - *Thirdly, these tutors need not be concentrated on the Faculty of Education campus alone, but could be past students from both this university and other universities, who meet the necessary requirements, and who live in areas where the students are situated.*
  - *Fourthly, these will, of necessity, be people that understand the academic terrain of the rural areas, and life there.*
- *A counseling centre need be established to serve the students from Distance Education specifically. It is a matter of urgency that attention be paid to this area, as despite all the necessary information being contained in tutorial letters – on issues such as time management and writing of assignments – there is no gainsaying that students from Distance Education need to be motivated more strongly, to combat the effect of student isolation. Therefore, a separate department need be dedicated to counseling these students. This should go beyond allocating a few members of the administrative staff to taking telephone calls, as part of their daily duties. It is impossible for the staff to cope with the number of calls received each day from these students; some aspect of their duties must definitely suffer. Call centers should be introduced for this purpose.*

*In addition, some counselors – as with the course presenters – could also travel to contact sessions to be of service to the students. These counselors could also be employed on a contract basis.*

- *Decentralized library facilities could be established, to allow for these facilities to be nearer to students from Distance Education. Even though these students may live far from the main library on campus, whatever assistance could be rendered to them in this respect would still be better than having no access to these facilities at all.*
- *It is necessary to encourage learner-learner interaction, especially during the contact sessions and after the examinations.*
- *All the course presenters, together with the contracted markers, should be involved in the marking of student scripts, as this will aid the presenters in allowing them to have first-hand feedback on student performance, which could lead to them identifying their own weaknesses, thus providing a chance to improve on these.*

Unfortunately, some of the implications of these would also have to do with availability of funds. For instance, money will be needed to extend library facilities to these students. On the other hand, the university could enter into collaboration with identified universities running similar a similar study programme, to save on costs, and improve on the learning materials. Also, parastatals can be approached with the request to open a call centre for the benefit of students from Distance Education, which would take care of both academic and non-academic support needs of these students. For example, TELKOM could also be approached to establish a toll free number for this purpose. Allied to this, when registering with the university, these students will be required to indicate their willingness to allow the exchange of phone and fax numbers, and e-mail addresses (where applicable) with other students. This could also be facilitated by them filling in *sharing forms* (Clarke et al. 2004). Lastly, experiments with tutoring models, which would have to be researched, to determine the one best suited to the needs of the situation.

### **8.6.1.2 Ensuring the quality of the learning experience of students in relation to performance, throughput and drop-out rates**

- *The introduction of pre-orientation study programmes, which should be decentralized to cover the rural student catchment areas, is very important to prepare distance students for the expectations of the BEd (Hons) programme.*
- *There is urgent need to review the identified learning materials that were below the expected standard, to lessen the transactional distance between students from Distance Education and their facilitators. The reviewed materials should encourage more dialogue and offer less structure.*
- *In addition to this, it is necessary to conduct a survey of the learning preferences and learning styles of students, which would go along way in helping the instructional designer of the relevant learning materials.*
- *There is a need to supplement the printed learning materials, adopted by the University of Pretoria as the main teaching media for the BEd (Hons) programme, with audio and video tapes, as requested by certain students from Distance Education.*
- *A tutoring system need be implemented: Since the decision by the University of Pretoria to target rural areas as the student catchment area for the B. Ed. (Hons) study programme, practical steps need be taken to implement a tutoring system.*
  - *Firstly, tutors should be appointed for all the applicable modules; and not just the service providers.*
  - *Secondly, the module coordinators should train these tutors up to standard, specifically to serve the distance education programme.*
  - *Thirdly, these tutors need not be concentrated on the Faculty of Education campus alone, but could be past students from both this university and other universities, who meet the necessary requirements, and who live in areas where the students are situated.*

- *Fourthly, these will, of necessity, be people that understand the academic terrain of the rural areas, and life there.*
- *A counseling centre need be established to serve the students from Distance Education specifically. It is a matter of urgency that attention be paid to this area, as despite all the necessary information being contained in tutorial letters – on issues such as time management and writing of assignments – there is no gainsaying that students from Distance Education need to be motivated more strongly, to combat the effect of student isolation. Therefore, a separate department need be dedicated to counseling these students. This should go beyond allocating a few members of the administrative staff to taking telephone calls, as part of their daily duties. It is impossible for the staff to cope with the number of calls received each day from these students; some aspect of their duties must definitely suffer. Call centers should be introduced for this purpose. In addition, some counselors – as with the course presenters – could also travel to contact sessions to be of service to the students. These counselors could also be employed on a contract basis.*
- *Decentralized library facilities could be established, to allow for these facilities to be nearer to students from Distance Education. Even though these students may live far from the main library on campus, whatever assistance could be rendered to them in this respect would still be better than having no access to these facilities at all.*
- *It is necessary to encourage learner-learner interaction, especially during the contact sessions and after the examinations.*
- *All the course presenters, together with the contracted markers, should be involved in the marking of student scripts, as this will aid the presenters in allowing them to have first-hand feedback on student performance, which could lead to them identifying their own weaknesses, thus providing a chance to improve on these.*

Possible implications of the above include the need to conduct a survey among academic staff, to assess the level of personal interest of the staff, and discover those that are passionate about teaching in distance education. Allied to this, is the necessity of indicating the expected roles of the academics during job interviews. Further, a leaf should be borrowed from other dual-mode universities, to ascertain what rewards and incentives they have in place, and adopt that which will best suit the academic culture of the University of Pretoria. In addition, the management of the Distance Education Unit needs to invite to students to offer suggestions on establishing a Distance Education student representative body, and suggestions on how this should be managed. Since written submitted assessments form the main support of this mode of delivery and learners rely heavily on the feedback they receive on their assignments (Dindsdag et al. 2000), there is the need for more intensive workshops for assignment markers.

### **8.6.2 Recommendations for future research**

Interestingly, most of the recommendations made on further research enlisted in this section are issues that the researcher herself would like to investigate and provide answers to in the future. Based on the findings of this study further research needs to focus on the following areas:

- More mixed-methods research should be conducted into comparative studies of this nature. Past comparative research has been accused of focusing only on the quantitative research method, which does not identify reasons for poor performance, low throughput and drop-out rates of students from Distance Education (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2).
- There is the need for a repeat of this study, but on a larger scale at the unit of study in order to make its findings more generalizing.
- Comparison of this nature should be extended to at least two universities that offer the same programme. However, this would need researchers collaborating on the task as the workload would be too great for an individual to cope with. This would expose these researchers to quality

assurance issues in different settings, which may make generalisation of findings possible.

- Further research is needed in the area of ensuring the quality of a study programme, especially in a rural setting and in an African context.
- There is the need for research into the possibilities for making the tutoring system work for students from rural areas.
- There is also the need for research into the extending of library services to rural areas.
- Research is needed into the academic reading done by students enrolled for distance education study programmes in comparison to their distance education counterparts.
- Research is needed on an in-depth *student satisfaction survey*, and the outcomes should be made public. This is important to sensitise students to quality assurance issues.
- Lastly, the researcher proposes further research into the application of the conceptual framework for this study, namely: the *Transactional Distance Theory*, to the whole issue of maintaining a culture of quality within higher education.

## 8.7 Reflections on this study

### 8.7.1 Reflections on the methodology adopted for this study

The researcher was not disappointed by her choice of the mixed-methods research approach, as it helped to bridge, to some extent, a gap already identified in comparative research of this nature. Nevertheless, she found she was very comfortable with the qualitative method of inquiry, while she struggled with interpreting the tables - especially those where statistical tools were applied. Therefore, she is of the opinion that a study module be introduced at the University of Pretoria that would enable PhD students to cope better with this challenge, irrespective of their background.

Additionally, one of the disadvantages of the focus group interview was highlighted during the course of this investigation - it is easily possible to tag a *lone voice* as the *black sheep* of the group, hence care is necessary to continually encourage such people to still contribute effectively to the discussion. Also, the researcher discovered that though telephone interviews are good when interviewees are removed by space, it nevertheless becomes impossible to fully interact with participants, as could be the case in a face-to-face interview where it is easily possible to read people's emotions.

On the whole, the researcher has benefited from the methodology, as it kept her focused on her philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, which she still recommends to other students because of their potential. Nevertheless, many times during its application, she felt as if she was being torn between two worlds. This was because the mixed-method research approach is time-consuming and expensive to apply.

### **8.7.2 Contributions of the study to the body of knowledge**

The researcher hopes this research study has helped provide pertinent information to the University of Pretoria on the differences between the performances of students from Distance and Conventional Education – an area of concern, which the SAIDE (2006) review committee, toward the end of this research process, called on this institution to investigate. In addition, the researcher hopes it will further buttress there are numerous factors affecting the performance, throughput and output rates of students from Distance Education. Further, the researcher suggests that, based on the findings from this investigation, scholars be more cautious in taking issues out of context, especially when comparing Distance and Conventional Education.

Allied to this process, was the use made of the computer software *Atlas.ti* for the data analysis, which the researcher experienced as an eye opener and an

exposure, she would suggest, that should be experienced by other qualitative researchers. The software helped manage the large volume of collected data, a task that would have been nigh impossible to deal with manually. The programme made data usable, no matter the volume. Contrary to a belief many people have, at no time did the researcher feel alienated from the study – as, in fact, the software demands of one all that has to bring in into the study.

Besides, the software made it possible for the researcher to make available the full transcripts of all the interviews conducted, as these can be accessed on the CD-ROM submitted as part of this thesis. This, she believes will help ensure audit trial, thereby contributing to the reliability of the research instruments used.

In addition, she concurs with Clarke et al. (2004), that ‘there is no one area of distance learning that can be singled out as the most important in terms of quality assurance’. It is her hope that serious attention will be paid by, especially, institutions of higher learning in African to areas that have been identified as needing improvement and improvisation in this mode of delivery. Hopefully, this will improve the performance, throughput and drop-out rates of students involved in distance education, thus making it better.

Lastly, findings from this study has strongly confirmed the importance of the relationships between *Dialogue*, *Structure* and *Autonomy* (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3) in learning materials written for, especially, students from distance education, which has been highlighted by past research. This, Moore (1973) tagged the *Transactional Distance Theory – TDT*, and it becomes important in view that the medium of delivery for the study programme here under investigation is *print*, and more so because evidence emerged from this study to confirm the necessity of improving this aspect, at the University of Pretoria. This is because the true distance in distance learning is not geographic, but refers to the cognitive distance between learner appreciation of reality and the comprehension of the primer put to the table. This causes it to become

imperative to increase the inherent dialogue of a learning material, and correspondingly reducing the structure.

Therefore, the researcher agrees with scholars (Holmberg, 2001; Fraser & Lombard, 2002) that constructivism, in which a learner constructs his or her own knowledge by individual interaction with the subject matter, should be uppermost in the minds of instructional designers. This is more so important because according to Bates (2005), irrespective of the mode of delivery, students spend more time interacting with their learning materials than with the lecturers. Hence, knowing the learning preferences and learning styles of students, and reducing the structure in learning materials, by increasing the dialogue become crucially important.

However, the researcher believes this model should not just apply to the learning materials, but to the totality of a given study programme. As findings in this study suggest that from the onset of admitting students into a given study programme, there is some *distance* that needs be reduced to ensure equal access to all students; which will in turn determines the *quality* of the learning experience of students, and, eventually, the output. The researcher hopes this study will raise critical questions about new applications for this theory.

### **8.7.3 Limitations of the study**

Even though the researcher's main reason for choosing a mixed-methods research approach was to gather an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, she discovered some aspects of this study were not properly covered, as she would have wanted. For instance, she would have loved to get deeper insight into certain answers to questions posed to students in the questionnaire, in which open- and closed-ended questions were deliberately mixed. It was discovered the majority of the students avoided answering certain open-ended questions, while the majority answered only the closed-ended questions they felt would be easier for them to answer correctly.

Also, it might be difficult to generalize the findings from this study to the entire aspects of the programs under investigation, and other dual-mode teaching institutions. This goes on to suggest that further investigation even at the unit of study still needs to be carried out in order to have a wider picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Nonetheless, the researcher believes these findings could provide a platform upon which similar institutions, especially in the African setting, could model their study programmes.

As well, gaining access to the contact students was problematic and their small number in comparison to their distance counterparts was almost discouraging. However, this was sorted out by the Statistics Department of the university.

Lastly, the researcher strongly believes this study has not provided all the answers to probing questions raised in this research effort, hence her suggestions on further research, to continually broaden the boundaries of knowledge.

## 8.8 Concluding thoughts

Findings of this study offered a range of information on factors that could be responsible for divergences in the performance, throughput and output rates of students on the BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy programme, at the Faculty of Education, of the University of Pretoria. This was done by comparing the Distance and Conventional Education teaching programme based on *access*, *delivery* and *output*. Some of these findings agree with earlier research findings in the literature. Also, it adopted the *Transactional Distance Theory - TDT* developed by Michael Moore in 1972, to ascertain the *quality* of the program, since perceived lack of quality has been identified as the main reason why aspersion is still cast on this mode of delivery (Clarke et al. 2004).

These findings confirmed those of other research, in that distance education has been identified as a tool of redressing past inequalities in higher education, in South Africa, and – in response to this – many universities, including the University of Pretoria, have implemented study programmes relevant to this end. Even though equal access to higher education is the focus in the country, it would appear that little is being said about financially supporting students in distance education programmes.

Furthermore, after an initial survey on providing access to higher education for people previously denied such access, the University of Pretoria made incursions into rural areas of South Africa, where the impact of university education was not available. However, this limited the choice of technology, for this specific purpose, to *print* – as the management at the university viewed this technology as relevant to students coming into the two delivery modes of the programme. Though the institution, through the learning materials used by these students endeavored to bring all these students on to a par – by including all necessary information in the tutorial package for the students from Distance Education – there were still gaps. This was due to a number of reasons, such as:

- The exposure of students from Contact Education – along with certain students from Distance Education – to, for example, ICT, which gave these students access to the Internet.
- In addition, some students lived nearer to the university campus, and could then access the library facilities.

Even though *far away* distance education students could borrow library books, there was the problem of delays in postal delivery, an aspect that was beyond the control of the university.

Further, various factors that determine the quality of the learning experience of students was investigated, the finding of which suggests the following:

- Firstly, Module Coordinators, Course Presenters and the Instructional Designer indicated that there was the need to review some of the learning materials and study guides used by students, as many could not relate to them due to, for instance, their language proficiency. As at the time of this report, the university was already busy with this to reduce the transactional distance between the relevant modules and students.
- Secondly, of importance is the use of support mechanisms offered at the university. Students could phone in to make administrative and academic enquiries. However, these findings revealed that there was an inadequate number of administrative staff, resulting in an incapability to allocate specific tasks to specific staff of the university, thereby reducing the possibility of attending properly to the 20,000 calls received monthly by the Distance Education Unit. It is believed that opening up a call centre, for the use of the students from Distance Education, would assist in this area. Allied to this, there was the problem of the cost of phoning in, an aspect which students lamented on, and consequently, distance education students rarely phoned in for academic support. Conversely, their contact counterparts could access the necessary support at anytime.

Furthermore, the results of this investigation revealed there were no tutors for any the six modules under investigation (except for the service providers, who only attended to distance students during the contact sessions). Unfortunately, module coordinators believed there were no suitable candidates with the experience to cater for this need. Nevertheless, the role of tutors cannot be overlooked, especially to the benefit of distance education students. The researcher is of the belief that, since the decision made at the university to make incursion into the rural areas, tutors (not service providers that were available only during the contact sessions) would benefit these students, not just on academic matters but for emotional support also. In relation to this, students from Distance Education also had no access to counseling facilities, as did their

Contact Education colleagues. So, there is also a need to establish a separate counseling unit, specifically for the students of the Distance Education Unit – these counselors need not be employed on a permanent basis, and could also serve these students at the call centre.

Further, the university made use of SMS technology to be in a position to continually communicate pertinent information to students, and to foster a sense of belonging. Literature indicates that though there is much research to still be done on this its potentials are yet to be fully tapped. Also, contact sessions were introduced to aid the support given to students from Distance Education. Unfortunately, not all these students availed themselves of this opportunity, while many of the students from Contact Education usually only attended their bi-monthly classes. However, a reason for this may be that accommodation is not officially supplied for the students in the outlying centers – though, in exceptional cases, where there is such an arrangement in place, it is empowered by the concerned venues and not the university authorities.

In addition, the university used three forms of evaluation: self-assessment; formative; and summative (in which students were expected to submit assignments as part of their final year mark), in which students were expected to submit assignments, the result of which would serve as part of their final mark for the year. Allied to this, contract workers, some of whom were course presenters, were employed to mark student assignments and examination scripts. However, these findings demonstrate a need to include all course presenters in this service, and simultaneously provide more intensive training for these presenters, to enable them to identify gaps in their module presentations through student feedback, thus putting the presenters in a position to improve on their teaching efforts. Of relevance here is to note that academic performance by students from Distance Education could compare favorably with that of their Contact Education counterparts. Nevertheless, the throughput and drop-out rates of students from Distance Education were still on the high side. Also, various factors – some of

which were confirmed by past research – were identified as being responsible for this.

Moreover, to monitor, review and ensure the *quality* of the BEd (Hons) programme, a student-staff appraisal system, in which students were provided opportunity to appraise all facets of the programme, was employed at the University of Pretoria. This was done through a questionnaire, and – to the credit of the university – some vital changes had been made based on these findings. Also, the management, module coordinators and course presenters, admitted regular attention was paid to staff development, but which could be further improved upon. However, findings revealed that not all academics involved in the activities of the Distance Education Unit really had an interest in this mode of delivery. Therefore, some members felt they were coerced into such participation, and lamented a gap in the job responsibilities, as they were discussed during job interviews, and as to what was later expected of them. Therefore, it is advised Heads of Department investigate this matter.

On the other hand, a possible reason for this attitude among the academics, according to the module coordinators, was that no adequate incentive and reward system was in place at the University of Pretoria. This situation, in their opinion, had to be investigated as a matter of urgency. Also highlighted was a need for an improvement in the marketing strategy applied at the university, a responsibility that was contracted out to an agent.

Above all, it appeared as if there were no prominent discrepancies that could be found between the two modes. One could assume that this was because both modes were guided by a similar underpinning philosophy, which drove the ethos of the programs that impacted on the instructional design.

Finally, though the concept *quality in education* is slippery in its definition, there is no gainsaying the fact that, for any provider of higher education to be relevant to

its students, this term has to be understood from the viewpoints of all the stakeholders. This will empower the institution to maintain its integrity and, simultaneously, meet the expectations of the people involved in the process. Hopefully, each person will contribute only the best of their ability to this process.

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10 November 2004

The Project Manager

BEd (Hons) Education Management, Law and Policy

[Contact and Distance Education Programs]

Faculty of Education

University of Pretoria

Groenkloof Campus

PRETORIA

Dear Sir / Madam,

#### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH

I would like to seek permission to conduct a research in the Faculty of Education on the tentative title “A comparative Study of Distance and Conventional Education at the University of Pretoria Assessed in Terms of Access, Delivery and Output”.

I hope to employ the mixed-methods approach design, which would necessitate the use of relevant faculty’s documents, and the participation of both staff and students involved in the programs.

I would be very grateful if my request is granted.

Yours faithfully,

Ms Ruth Aluko.

Student Number: 24406903

May 01, 2006.

The Module Coordinators  
Department of Education Management, Law and Policy  
{Conventional and Distance Education Programs}  
Faculty of Education  
Groenkloof Campus  
University of Pretoria

Dear Sir / Madam,

#### REQUEST TO ATTEND A FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

My name is Ruth, and I am a PhD student in the Curriculum Studies Department. My supervisors are Prof. Fraser and Dr Hendrikz. I would like to seek your assistance to participate in a **Focus Group Interview**, which I would kindly request that you attend within the next two weeks.

The research is titled: A Comparative Study of Distance and Conventional Education Programs at the University of Pretoria Assessed in Terms of Access, Delivery and Output. The interview is meant for Module Coordinators of the BEd (Hons) – contact and distance education programs. Its main purpose is to get diverse views on some issues, which generally impact on quality. The following will be considered:

1. The friction between opening up access into higher education and the quality of the program.
2. Quality and delivery modes.
3. Involvement of contact staff in a dual mode institution.
4. The quality process and the involvement of key players.
5. High drop-out rates in distance education.

Kindly note the final date agreed upon by all:

**Date: 15 May 2006**

**Time: 10.30am**

**Venue: F202**

Thank you for your assistance.

Ruth Aluko.

Below are brief descriptions of each criterion (NADEOSA, 2003), which have guided the development of the instruments:

#### Policy and Planning

- ❖ Clear mission statement by the provider
- ❖ Policy statements (with evidence of implementation of various important aspects of the mode of delivery), strategic plans, slogans or mottoes that are aligned with the mission, goals and principles of the educational provider.
- ❖ Rationale for the use of distance education.
- ❖ Explicitly designed systems for administering and teaching learners, which should have been in place prior to the commencement of the program.
- ❖ Published statement of the educational provider's commitment to learners and how this will be measured.
- ❖ Equal opportunities for all learners, staff and other clients.

#### Learners

- ❖ The development of a learner profile that identifies the characteristics of the expected students.
- ❖ The management of information system that provides for the tracking of student performance, which can also be used to determine completion and throughput rates.
- ❖ Learner information is used to design programs, courses, materials learner support, and counseling services that are flexible and that are learner-centered.

- ❖ Mechanisms are in place for promoting access to learners from marginalized groups, inter alia, through the provision of academic development programs.
- ❖ Tutors have access to information about their learners and contribute to the collection of such information.

#### Program Development

- ❖ Program planning (developed in terms of a needs analysis; is part of the provider's mission and plans; a publicly accessible description of the qualification the program leads to and the admission requirements amongst others and a careful analysis of the most appropriate technologies to support the learners with).
- ❖ Program approval by the relevant bodies.
- ❖ Program curriculum containing the outcomes, teaching and learning strategies and assessment methods, and integration of the courses.
- ❖ Open admission, which recognizes prior learning (RPL) with sufficient learner support systems (e.g. access or bridging courses, additional units within existing courses, or increased face-to-face support).
- ❖ Numbers of enrolled learners match the capacity of the staff and the administrative.
- ❖ Clear procedures for quality assurance and dissemination of review findings for utilization of staff development, curriculum improvement and increasing learner access.

#### Course Design

- ❖ Course planning (designed with national, learners and employers' needs in mind); choice of media and technology matches course aims, outcomes, learner needs, capacity to access and use the

technologies, amongst others, and a stated language policy in line with the national language policy and that of the learners.

- ❖ Course curriculum with carefully planned content, teaching and learning strategies and assessment to aid achievement of learning outcomes; learner support forms that are built into the course design, and teaching, learning and assessment activities that encourage critical thinking and independent learning.
- ❖ Necessary guidance and training regarding aspects of distance education and a timetable for the regular revision and updating of courses to ensure quality assurance.

#### Course Materials

- ❖ Quality course materials, which support learners in achieving learning outcomes; learner friendly introductions, linking and summarizing passages that provide coherence; accurate, up-to-date and relevant course content; appropriate language level; relevance to learners; an unfolding argument format; intellectual engagement of learners and easy-to-use course materials (e.g. content pages and graphic illustrations).
- ❖ Provision for personal evaluation by the learners.
- ❖ Periodical review of materials with the contributions of learners and tutors.

#### Assessment

- ❖ An integral part of the teaching and learning process.
- ❖ The level of assessment matches that of the level of the expected qualification.
- ❖ A range of formative and summative assessment tasks and methods that ensure the valid assessment of all learning outcomes.

- ❖ Training of part-time tutors involved in assessment to ensure fairness and reliability.
- ❖ Consistent and accurate marking procedures; clear procedures to receive, record, process and turn around assignments in a way that will be beneficial to learners.
- ❖ An appeal system for students that complain about fairness.
- ❖ Security of assessment results and their availability to all stakeholders (students inclusive)

### Learner Support

- ❖ Academic support that encourages learners to participate in 'communities of learning' (e.g. peer support sessions and tutorials/contact sessions); inclusion of academic support in the design of course materials; consideration of travel time and expense for learners during contact sessions; training of tutors in order to be able to analyze and assist learners with difficulties; teach and give constructive feedback on assignments; and provision of individual academic support by telephone, appointment, or online.
- ❖ Counseling support that gives access to learners with personal difficulties/ advice related to their study before, during or after the program.
- ❖ Administrative support in which staff concerned are trained to be helpful, clear and consultative; clear obligations of learners and the provider are made known at registration; learners' access to facilities (e.g. library).
- ❖ Monitoring of learner performance for necessary intervention; monitoring of tutors/mentors at contact sessions; feedback from learners, tutors/mentors for the review of courses and programs; accommodation of learner structures (e.g. student representative councils and faculty associations).

## Human Resource Strategy

- ❖ Division of labor amongst functional responsibilities; small number of full-time academic staff, but sufficient number of tutors; sufficient administrative and technical staff; training, monitoring and development of staff, and appropriate workload.
- ❖ Effective human resource systems.

## Management and Administration

- ❖ Accountability and governance structures that involve staff, students and external stakeholders.
- ❖ Management of communication that favors stakeholders in the program (e.g. prompt attention given to enquiries, applications and complaints).
- ❖ Well managed curriculum, information, facilities and equipments, and finances.

## Collaboration Relationships

- ❖ This involves partnerships with public and private institutions, governmental and non-governmental educational providers, stakeholders and/or community structures as well as agencies or providers outside the country.

## Quality Assurance

- ❖ Ensuring that the day-to-day activities of the provider align with its missions, goals, principles and policies in relation to national and/or regional priorities.

- ❖ Internal quality assurance systems as laid down by relevant quality assurance bodies.
- ❖ Involvement of staff, students, and other clients in the process of quality assurance and quality review.

#### Information and Marketing

- ❖ Effective and accurate promotion of the education and training services of the educational provider.

#### Results

- ❖ The fulfillment of the provider's mission and meeting the goals of each program in cost-effective ways that have positive impact on society and meet the needs of the clients.

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QUESTIONNAIRE FOR BOTH CONVENTIONAL AND DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Kindly complete the following personal information by crossing the number in the appropriate box.

Respondent number

1.

Gender:	
Male	1
Female	2

V1    1-4

V2  5

2.

Age:	
20-24	1
25-29	2
30-34	3
35-39	4
40-44	5
45-49	6
50-54	7
55-59	8
60+	9

V3 6

3. Which of the following would you regard as your main venue normally attended for lectures?

Locality:	
Campus	1
Learning centre	2

V4  7

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4

Type of student:	
Conventional	1
Distance Education	2

V5	<input type="checkbox"/>	8
----	--------------------------	---

5. Occupation .....

.....

.....

.....

V6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9-10
----	--------------------------	--------------------------	------

6. Home Address .....

.....

.....

7. Distance of Home to University or Learning Centre (in kilometres)

.....

8. What was the reason for you to commence your studies with the University of Pretoria?

Money/Bursaries/Grants	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of the programme	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Status of the university in SA context	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Choice of a given programme	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
On recommendation	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Proximity of the university	6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	7	<input type="checkbox"/>

V7	<input type="checkbox"/>	11
----	--------------------------	----

**SECTION B**

**ACCES TO THE PROGRAMME AND THE UNIVERSITY**

9. What is your highest qualification?

Baccalaureus degree and a teacher's diploma (BA+HED)	1
Baccalaureus degree only	2

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V8	<input type="checkbox"/>	12
----	--------------------------	----

4-year composite degree in Education (BA(Ed))	3
M+4-year teacher's diploma	4
M+3-year teacher's diploma and a Further Diploma in Education (FDE) or an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)	5
Any other (specify)	6

10. Did you attend any introductory class before or after starting this programme in order to help you cope with your course?

Yes  No

11. Please explain. ....

.....

12. Was there any orientation programme provided by the university?

Yes  No

13. When was this? .....

14. What activities were involved? .....

.....

.....

15. What non-instructional support (such as counselling) is provided by the university, apart from direct teaching?

.....

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16. Are there academic advising services available to you?

Yes  No

17. Please mention such services that are available to you.

.....

.....

18. How often do you use of such services?

Always	1
Often	2
Rarely	3

v9

13

19. In what areas do you think you will need counselling?

.....  
 .....

20. What instructional technology (such as print, audio cassettes, computer technology, radio or television) is available to you?

.....  
 .....

21. Which of them do you actually make use of?

.....  
 .....

22. Give reason(s) for your choice of instructional technology?

.....  
 .....

23. Why did you choose to become a Conventional or Distance Education student?

.....  
 .....

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SECTION C:

TEACHING AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

24. Have you ever been given the opportunity to assess your lecturers on the quality of their teaching?

Yes  No

25. When last was this done?

0 – 3 months ago	1
4 – 6 months ago	2
7 – 9 months ago	3
10 – 12 months ago	4
1 year+	5

V10  14

26. How is this normally done?

.....  
.....

27. How do you rate this method of assessment?

Poor	1
Fair	2
Good	3
Excellent	4

V11  15

28. How is the readers distributed to you?

.....

29. How is the study guides distributed to you?

.....

30. How will you describe your study guides in terms of the following?

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
--	------	------	------	-----------

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V12  16

	1	2	3	4
Relevance to personal objectives				
Challenging or interesting				
Tone (conversational or unfriendly)				
Language (simple or difficult)				
Illustrative (adequate examples)				
Adequate exercises				

Please answer 'Yes' or 'No' to questions 31 to 35.

31. Do your study guides contain the following?

	Yes	No
Course goals		
Performance objectives		
Grading and evaluation criteria		
Grading rubrics		
Examples of good student work in the syllabus		

32. Do your study guides encourage the following?

	Yes	No
Analysis		
Synthesis		
Application		
Evaluation		

33. Do you depend on only your reader for your study?

Yes  No

34. As a student, have you ever completed a learning style assessment questionnaire?

Yes  No

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35. Are you aware of your own learning preferences?

Yes  No

36. Where do you stay during the classes / contact sessions?

.....  
.....

37. If you stay on campus, how will you describe the residences?

.....  
.....

38. How often are you expected to attend classes / contact sessions?

.....

39. When on campus, are lecturers available to teach you?

Yes  No

40. Do you have the opportunity of meeting your lecturers?

Yes  No

41. When and how often?

.....  
.....

42. How do you contact them when not on campus?

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.....  
.....

.....  
.....

43. On the other hand, how do you get books when not on campus?

.....

44. How do you meet with the other students for learning when not on campus?

.....

Please tick one of the boxes.

45. Is your assessment formative (done gradually)  or summative (done once)  ?

46. How long does it take for you to get feedback on your assessment?

.....

47. Is specific time tied to the submission of your assignments?

Yes  No

48. Do you know what your lecturer expects from you?

Yes  No

49. Are you satisfied with the method of your assessment?

Yes  No

50. Any suggestions?

.....  
.....

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Empty box for office use.

51. How do you rate the administrative staff in terms of the services they provide?

Poor	1
Fair	2
Good	3
Excellent	4

V13	<input type="checkbox"/>	17
-----	--------------------------	----

52. How well does necessary information get to you?

Rarely	1
Often	2
Always	3

V14	<input type="checkbox"/>	18
-----	--------------------------	----

53. Please give examples of information passed to you.

.....

.....

54. When and how do you contact the administrative staff?

.....

.....

55. Is there a specific time allotted to this, for example, is there a specific time when you have to contact staff?

Yes  No

56. Do you have names of members of staff to contact?

Yes  No

57. Are the members of staff linked to specific tasks or functions?

Yes  No

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----------------

SECTION D:

STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

58. What is your comment on the quality of contact teaching?

.....  
.....

59. Are the educational practices at the university supportive of your learning?

Yes  No

60. Please explain.

.....  
.....

61. Do you have any financial difficulties concerning your studies?

.....  
.....

62. Is there any financial aid for your study?

Yes  No

63. What is your view on this?

.....  
.....

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64. What other commitments affect your studies?

.....  
.....

65. How well committed are you to your studies? Please explain.

.....  
.....

66. Do you feel you have made a right or wrong choice of the programme which you are currently doing?

Yes  No

67. If your answer is 'Yes', please give reason(s).

.....  
.....

68. What are your expectations of this course that are yet to be met?

.....  
.....

69. What advice (orientation) were you given upon admission?

.....  
.....

70. Do you think this mode of delivery (Conventional or Distance Education) suits you?

Yes  No

71. Why?

.....  
.....

72. What impact will the completion of this course has on your job?

.....

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.....

SECTION E:

QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS FOR CONVENTIONAL AND  
DISTANCE EDUCATION

73. As a student, list five (5) things you place importance on in relation to the quality of this programme you are following.

- i. ....
- ii. ....
- iii. ....
- iv. ....
- v. ....

74. Are you satisfied with the entire programme?

Yes  No

75. Please explain your response.

.....  
.....

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR ADMINISTRATORS (Policy Makers)

### SECTION A:

#### QUALITY AND ACCESS:

1. How does the faculty ensure equal opportunity for all learners (CE & DE) coming into this programme?
2. Why do only some programmes have access to DE mode of delivery while others are being excluded?
3. Is it a question of providing service or making money?
4. How would you balance the conflict between student numbers and quality delivery?

#### QUALITY AND DELIVERY MODES

5. How are lecturers and administrators recruited for this programme? In case of Distance Education, do you regard experience in this field for both lecturers and administrators as a necessity? What qualifies a lecturer for DE modules?
6. What relevant in-service training is available to both module coordinators, tutors and administrators, and when last was this carried out?
7. Were lecturers trained on writing study guides and when last was such training given? What other support is available to lecturers on this? Is 'expert cluster' available in the faculty and what are its functions? What incentives are available for lecturers involved in DE program and why do they need this?
8. Do Conventional and distance Education learners use the same learning materials? Why / Why not?
9. What instructional technology is available to learners enrolled for this programme? What is the yardstick for determining this and how do you ensure that learners have equal opportunity?
10. What is the policy of the faculty on assignments for CE and DE? Are assignments in the learning materials often reviewed for both modes of delivery? When last was this?

11. What is the role of administrators during contact sessions for distance learners and normal sessions for conventional learners? Are they expected to attend contact sessions and why / why not?

## QUALITY AND OUTPUT

12. What are the expectations of this programme and how far do the exam questions measure this? In what way is the academic culture supportive of learners' learning?
13. What is the language policy of the university for this programme and how are learners and lecturers made aware of this?
14. Who are the markers for both CE and DE learners' scripts for assignments and examinations? Are there discrepancies? Why are there discrepancies? Do you think this may affect the output of distance learners? Please explain your response.
15. Kindly comment on the fees charged for this programme? In what way does the government / university subsidize these? Is there any funding provided for learners who struggle financially? If yes, what information is made available to learners on this? If no, what is the authority doing about this?
16. What is the policy of the university on accommodation for both CE and DE learners? How are learners made aware of this? If there are discrepancies, what are the reasons?
17. How are lecturers and administrators monitored?

## QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS FOR CE & DE

18. What is the university's vision on quality? Kindly explain the process in place for ensuring this in both CE and DE.
19. What monitoring procedures are in place to ensure that all policies are
  - (a) Implemented
  - (b) Evaluated and
  - (c) Amended as and when necessary?
20. Are learners, lecturers and administrators aware of the university's policy on Quality Assurance and how are each made aware of this? In what ways are staff and learners involved in Quality review?

21. How do you go about the approval for the courses and how are programmes of study evaluated?
22. What student support services are in place and what information is available to learners on these?
23. What learner structures (e.g. Student Representative Council and faculty association) are available to learners and staff and how are they represented?

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR ADMINISTRATORS (11) (Those in the office directly dealing with learners)

### SECTION A:

#### QUALITY AND ACCESS

1. Do you know what the entry requirements are for this programme?
2. At what point does your work start on this programme? Please explain your response?
3. What process do students go through during registration? What packages are sent to learners who have been admitted for this programme and how long do these take? How long does it take students to receive their learning materials after registration had taken place?
4. Is there an orientation programme for admitted learners and what are the activities involved? How is the attendance of learners ensured at such activities?
5. What non-instructional support does the university provide for learners who are admitted into this programme? Please explain. Are learners aware of this and how are they encouraged to make use of such support?

### SECTION B

#### QUALITY AND DELIVERY MODES

6. Are you acquainted with the instructional technology available to learners who enrolled for this programme? What is the yardstick for determining this?
7. How does your office ensure the speed, accuracy and reliability of delivery of course materials?
8. How often are learners expected to attend classes / contact session? What means is available for ensuring learners' attendance at contact sessions?
9. What library facilities are available to CE and DE learners while on and off campus?

10. Do lecturers in both modes of delivery have access to learners' information?
11. How does necessary information get to the learners? Please give examples of such. How do learners contact the administrative staff and are there specific names of members to be contacted for specific tasks?
12. What are the roles of administrative staff during contact sessions for distant and conventional learners? Do they attend during contact sessions? Why / Why not?
13. Is there any liaison between administrative and academic staff regarding the structure, function and delivery of the programme? Please explain.
14. Does the Distance Education Unit have the capacity to process the large number of mail effectively? Explain.

#### SECTION C:

##### QUALITY AND OUTPUT

15. What are the procedures to receive, process and turn around assignments?
16. What processes are involved in learners' registration for examinations, writing the exams and marking of the scripts?
17. How do you get the examination feedback across to the learners? Do you have the manpower or mechanical power to cope with the large number of learners' results? Explain.

#### SECTION D:

18. What type of in-service training have you undergone on your job role and when last was this?
19. Are you aware of the university's vision on quality? Please explain your response.
20. Are you involved in the Quality Assurance process and review of the faculty? In what way are you involved in this?
21. Please comment on the university's commitment to Distance Education.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ADMINISTRATOR 3 (The staff that deals with contract staff)

1. What is the role you play in the Distance Education Unit?
2. At what point does your work start on the BEd (Hons) program? Do you deal with only the distance education learners since the conventional ones use the same learning materials?
3. What training have you received before commencing this job” Are you currently being trained?
4. What role do you play during the contact sessions?
5. What are the processes to receive process and turn around assignments and scripts?
6. How long does it take for the turn around of assignments and scripts?
7. Who are the markers of both scripts? Are they the same as those that present the modules? If they are not, how does this work?
8. What is the liaison between you, the course presenters and the module coordinators?
9. What is the number of scripts, which you handle? How do you cope, seeing that you are the only one in this office?
10. What challenges do you face on this job and how do you cope?

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR COURSE PRESENTERS

### QUALITY AND ACCESS

1. What instructional technology do you use for this module? How is this integrated into the course design?

### QUALITY AND DELIVERY MODES

2. When last did you undergo in-service training related to teaching, learning and assessment in the department where you teach? Please give examples.
3. When last did you undergo in-service training applicable to the distance education and/or contact teaching module?
4. Do you teach both Conventional and Distance Education learners? Please compare both approaches in terms of delivery and outputs? What is your workload like and how does this impact your teaching?
5. How were you recruited to teach Distance module(s)? Is DE your area of interest?
6. Have you ever been assessed by your learners and when last was this? What format does this normally take? Please comment on this.
7. Do CE and DE learners use the same study guides? Why/ Why not?
8. When last were the courses evaluated? Are you happy with the frequency and the way the readers are being reviewed?
9. Were you trained on writing study guides? When last were you given the training and what other support is available to you during this period?
10. Do you make use of Instructional Designers and what is the relationship that exists between you and them?
11. What value does the instructional designer of the FoE contribute to the development of the study guides? Are you happy with the study materials you are using for this module? Please, give reasons for your response?
12. What 'expert cluster' is available within the faculty and what is its function?

13. What incentives / rewards are available to you for your involvement in DE?
14. Apart from when you teach your learners, what other interaction takes place between you? Do you have access to their records? How do they contact you? When is this and how often?
15. How do you encourage learner-learner interaction?
16. Kindly explain the assessment process used for the learners. How long does it take for learners to get feedback on assignments and examinations? How often do you review the assignments?
17. What are your expectations of your learners' performance? How do you make these known to the learners?
18. What are your lingering frustrations concerning DE / CE?

#### QUALITY AND OUTPUT

19. How do you rate learners' performance in comparison to different modes of delivery? Please explain.
20. To what extent do you think your module has contributed to the academic and professional development of your learners?

#### QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS FOR CE & DE

21. Are you aware of the Quality Assurance stance of the faculty over this programme? Kindly explain what this entails.
22. What is your involvement in the QA process and review?
23. Please comment on the university's commitment to both approaches (i.e. CE and DE).
24. Have you ever carried out any research on DE or published any of your findings (based on your involvement in DE programmes) in any research journal? If yes, kindly elaborate on this.

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR LEARNERS THAT DISCONTINUED THE PROGRAMME

### **Main Question: What were the reasons for your decision to discontinue the programme?**

#### Possible Probing Questions

1. Were you academically 'ripe' to proceed with this programme when you enrolled?
2. Do you think the distance between where you live and the university / study centre affected your decision? How did this affect you?
3. Do you feel you made the right choice of study at that time? Please explain.
4. How satisfied were you with the following facilities which the university provided:
  - Orientation
  - Tutorials
  - Library
  - Support System
5. How did their availability and non-availability affect your studies and your decision to leave the program?
6. What kind of assessment was used for you while at the university? What impact did this have on your decision to withdraw from the programme?
7. What family support did you enjoy during the programme?
8. Did you experience any language barrier during this programme? Please explain this and its effects on your decision.
9. How expensive was the programme and how did you cope with the expenses (financial responsibilities of the programme? Was it the fear of running into debts that made you discontinue?
10. Could you describe your state of health during the program? Did it have to do with your decision to leave?
11. Did you feel isolated during the programme? What support did you receive from the tutors and lecturers?

12. Did you communicate your decision to leave to the university? Why?  
Why not?
13. What was the response of the university?
14. Have you started your programme elsewhere? What plans do you have  
to your studies with the university or elsewhere? Why / Why not?

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER(S)

1. Could you briefly explain what your job entails?
2. Kindly explain the process of programme development and course design of the BEd (Hons) (EM) programme.
3. Do you carry out audience analysis? What does this involve and what is its significance?
4. Do single authors or team of authors write all learning materials? Why / Why not? To what extent are authors given autonomy on the content of the learning materials?
5. How is academic support, built into the design of the course materials?
6. What is the choice of media and technology for this programme? Do you think all students have equal opportunities to this choice? How is this choice integrated into the curriculum design?
7. Have you ever carried out any evaluation of learners' learning styles? If yes, what was the involvement of learners in this? How do you cater for different learning styles of the learners during the course of designing the learning materials?
8. If no, what is your view on the consideration of different learning preferences of diverse learners using the learning materials?
9. What assessment methods do you employ in order to help learners achieve the outcomes?
10. How do you ensure the relevance of the language level to the learners?
11. Is there any evaluation carried out on the learning guides? What process does this take? When last were the modules evaluated?
12. What has the outcome of your evaluation led to? Have there been minor or major revisions? Please explain.
13. Are your suggestions being taken into consideration when assessing a given tutorial text? In what ways are these reflected?
14. Do both CE and DE students use the same study guides and learning materials and why / why not?

15. What value do you contribute to the development of study guides and learning materials?
16. How interactive are the learning materials? Please explain.
17. How would you rate the learning materials given to students in the modules prescribed for the programme?
18. Is the format for the designing of course materials consistent? Please explain your response.
19. How would you explain the relationship between you and the academic member(s) for whom the design is being conducted?
20. What in-service training is available to you and when last did you attend such training?

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TUTORS - FOCUS GROUP 1

1. How were you selected to become a tutor? Why do you think you were selected, and how has this helped you?
2. What pre-training program did you undergo before starting the job? Has there being any further training for you?
3. Kindly describe what your job entails.
4. How do you see your role? Is your work limited only to the academic life of the learners? Please explain.
5. What is your understanding of quality and how will you describe the quality of this program?
6. From a student's point of view, in what way does your work enhance or complement the academic program you are involved in?
7. What are the expectations of the module coordinators from you, and what are those of the students? Are there tensions between these expectations? Please explain.
8. What are the most prominent problems you have to deal with, and how do you handle this?
9. Is there any forum for feedback? How does this reflect in the learning materials or on the learners' performances?

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR MODULE COORDINATORS – Focus Group 2

1. What roles do you play as module coordinators and how do you do these?
2. Why have you adapted the BEd (Hons) program to fit the DE mode of delivery? What were the challenges involved and how have you coped with this?
3. How does the university ensure equal opportunity for all learners (CE & DE) coming into this program? How will balance the conflict between student numbers and quality?
4. Do you teach both CE and DE learners? How did you become involved in DE? Is DE your area of interest or do you just see it as just been part of your duties? Please compare both approaches in terms of delivery and outputs.
5. What incentives / rewards are available to you for your involvement in DE? Why do you think this is necessary or not?
6. What relevant training have you undergone on this program? Are you currently been trained? What other support is available to you in the faculty?
7. What do you think are the possible reasons why learners withdraw from the program?
8. What are your lingering frustrations concerning each of these delivery modes?
9. Are you aware of the quality assurance stance of the faculty over this program? Kindly explain what this entails. What is your involvement in its process and review?
10. Have you ever carried out any research on DE or published any of your findings (based on your involvement in DE programs) in any research journal? Kindly give reason(s) for your response.