

# **Managing student transition from conventional to open schooling: a case study of Namibia**

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# **Managing student transition from conventional to open schooling: a case study of Namibia**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**Philosophiae Doctor**

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Pretoria  
April 2017

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this PhD thesis to my late grandmother,  
Kerete Kaengombe Murangi,  
who raised me with care and love for me to  
become someone in life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Above all, I thank the Almighty for leading, directing and protecting us in whatever we do. Mission accomplished.

---oOo---

## ETHICS STATEMENT

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“The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that he/she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria’s *Code of ethics for research and the Policy guidelines for responsible research*”.

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Heroldt Vekaama Murangi

30 April 2017

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I, **Heroldt Vekaama Murangi**, declare that this thesis titled *Managing the transition from conventional to open schooling: a case study of Namibia*, which I hereby submit for the degree Philosophiae Doctor in Education Management and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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Heroldt Vekaama Murangi

30 April 2017

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## DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITOR

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### To whom it may concern

I confirm that I edited the following Ph D thesis: *Managing the transition from conventional to open schooling: a case study of Namibia* by H V Murangi for language and technical aspects.



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## ABSTRACT

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The provision of school equivalency programme through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has gained momentum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through the establishment of open schools. Open schools has now become a model of choice for many young people and adults who do not want to pursue their secondary education journey through the conventional delivery system. Additionally, shrinking financial resources have made it impossible for governments especially in the developing world to expand education through the conventional system. Pityana (2007) claims that ODL is key in advancing the development agenda of many nations through programmes that accommodate the less privileged members of the society such as women, the unemployed, repeaters, out-of-school youth, disadvantaged and the displaced. Although open schools have made progress in increasing access, low throughput rates and high dropout rates remain the key challenges.

The purpose of this study was therefore to explore the experiences and perceptions of learners when migrating from the conventional school system to the open and distance learning in general, and to Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) in particular. This study was driven by the assumption that change in the learning environment might be the most influential factor on learners' ability to integrate into the new distance learning environment. The study mainly focused on the senior secondary (Grade 12) learners who transferred from the formal schools to NAMCOL to upgrade their grades.

Moore's (1883) theory of transactional distance and Tinto's (1997a) theory of academic and social integration were used as the reference theoretical framework. The applicability of the two theories was assessed and compared with the findings of the study. A multi method research design was applied in data collection. The results of the study identified a gap between the learners' expectations and the high ODL expectations and its demands. The learners in the study displayed a marginal understanding of the ODL mode of delivery. The study established certain factors that impede or accelerate the integration process and also identified technology mediated services as well as capacity building for staff as measures to facilitate learner integration in the ODL mode of delivery. The study reaffirms that meeting learners'

academic, social and psychological needs are important for successful learner integration. The findings have implications for policy makers, ODL practitioners and learners on the development of the most effective measures of increasing learner integration into open schools.

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**Keywords:**

- Conventional School System
- Learner Integration
- NAMCOL
- Open Schools
- Open and Distance Learning

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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BOCODOL	Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
ICT	Information Communication Technology
JSC	Junior Secondary Certificate
NAMCOL	Namibian College of Open Learning
NSSC	Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEP	Secondary Education Programme
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics

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# CHAPTER 1

## THE BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right for all citizens as articulated in several international conventions and declarations. These include the 1948 Universal Declaration for Human Rights, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education, the 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education for All, the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on the Education for All and the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (Bergström, 2010; Christie, 2010). The United Nations Member States replaced the Millennium Development Goals with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and goal 4 of the SDGs reaffirmed the right of education to all by stating its aim as to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (Le Blanc, 2015). Yet, education at secondary school is beyond the reach of many young people; especially in sub-Saharan Africa where the region’s Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at this level of education is reported at 27% compared to the world average of 56%. For example, GER in countries such as the Central African Republic, Niger, Somali and Tanzania is as low as 6% (UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), 2011).

Furthermore, sub-Saharan Africa enrolment at the primary school level increased from 54% to 70% between 1999 and 2006 (UNESCO, 2009). This increase could be as a result of governments’ commitments to implement universal primary education. Although this increase is a significant achievement in the attainment of universal primary education, it has put pressure on the provision of education at secondary school level (UIS, 2010). The dimension of this problem is articulated Rumble and Koul's (2017) study commissioned by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) which showed that only 47% of junior secondary phase learners in Namibia find a place at senior secondary levels and one in three proceed to secondary school. This shows that the expansion experienced in secondary schools has not been matched by adequate resources to accommodate learners migrating from primary schools each year in Namibia. To address the lack of space in conventional schools, countries such as Namibia and Botswana, have responded to the problem of access to secondary

education and implemented a complementary open schooling system (Butcher, & Associates, 2007). Open schooling refers to the provision of school level (primary or secondary) education through the use of distance learning methods (Butcher, 2003; Phillips, 2006). According to Phillips (2006), open schooling bridges the gap in education provision at school level caused by numerous factors, such as shortage of teaching personnel, insufficient physical infrastructure and shrinking budgets due to the growing demand for education. The provision of education through open and distance learning (ODL) provides access to education where otherwise it might not have been possible to study through the conventional school system (Mitra, & Hendrikz, 2009). The Southern Africa Development Community (2004) reaffirmed that distance education, also known as open and distance learning (ODL), is the key to improve access and to reduce the inequalities in the provision of education. Therefore, in the context of this study, ODL is a system of providing flexible education through the distance mode of delivery. Open schooling is a component of ODL focusing on school level education.

After Namibia's independence in 1990, the demand to expand access to education at all levels was immense in order to address the imbalances of the colonial past during which education was not accessible to every Namibian (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993). The increasing demand for education through the conventional system would require a substantial amount from the national operational budget, which is not sustainable (Ministry of Higher Education, 1999). To fulfill this demand, distance education has been seen as the most practical way to address the education gap, including redressing gender imbalances, increasing access and enhancing quality in a cost-effective manner because of distance education's potential to reach many more learners than is possible through the conventional system (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993).

To bridge the education gap at all levels in Namibia, a study was commissioned to explore the expansion of distance education in the country. The study recommended the establishment of a distance education institution that will deliver all publicly supported programmes through distance education at school level (Kamupingene, Van der Westhuizen, Tjjenda, Wessels, Dodds, Hudson, Kinyanjui, & Mayo, 1992). Subsequently, the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) was established

in 1997 through government legislation. The college became fully operational as a semi-autonomous institution in April 1998. Other similar models of providing school-equivalency programmes through distance education include the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) (Tau, & Gatsha, 2009) in Southern Africa, National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in India Perraton (2005), Open Access College in Australia (Schocroft, 2009) and the Vancouver Learning Network in Canada (Gauthier, 2009).

NAMCOL's mandate is to upgrade the educational levels of adults and out-of-school youth through open and distance learning (ODL) programmes in the areas of professional, vocational and general education (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 1997). Its core business has always been its secondary education programme (SEP) to enable those that were denied the opportunity for education at this level to pursue the Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) and the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC). The JSC is the third year of the junior secondary phase; NSSC is the exit level of the school career. In addition to the SEP, the College offers a range of tertiary level programmes at certificate and diploma levels in professional disciplines as well as technical vocational education and training programmes. A high percentage of learners joining NAMCOL for the SEP are those who did not meet the minimum requirements to be integrated into the formal system or to pursue further studies at the institutions of higher learning. On average learners are repeating two subjects, for one to expect a better performance than their school-based counterparts. This has not been the case since the institution's inception. Over the years, NAMCOL has experienced a relatively large proportion of learners scoring low passing grades (D-G grades<sup>1</sup>) and recorded a higher number of ungraded entries (failures). For example, the 2012 national examinations showed 18.3% of ungraded subject entries (failures) for NSSC compared to 6.9% NSSC ungraded subject entries recorded by their counterparts in the conventional system (Ministry of Education, 2012: 4-5).

NAMCOL is the largest educational institution in Namibia in terms of learner intake and recorded a learner intake of 33,642 learners in 2013 (NAMCOL, 2013). The

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<sup>1</sup> Each grade carries a particular weight, with A –grade being the highest and represents 7 points and the lowest grade (G-grade) represents 1 point.



physical learners at secondary level equates to 41% of Namibia's secondary school population, of which the NSSC and the JSC equate to 47% and 35%, respectively, of learners enrolling for the same levels in conventional schools (Murangi, 2009). Thus, the institution can be classified as a mega-school because of its intake of more than 30,000 learners (Daniel, 2010). In 2016, enrolment rose to around 38 000 learners (NAMCOL, 2016). This is an increase of 9% over the period of three years.

A standardised national curriculum is followed in conventional schools and at NAMCOL, allowing learners to write the same examinations as their school-based counterparts (Murangi, 2009). NAMCOL follows a blended learning approach in its course delivery. This means that learners receive a full set of self-instructional learning resources and are also provided with a range of academic support, including face-to-face sessions. Although the definitions of blended learning slightly vary, in a nutshell it refers to a combination of course delivery models. Blended learning refers to distance learning systems that combine the strengths of synchronous (face-to-face) and asynchronous (text-based) learning experiences (Chen, & Yao, 2016; Garrison, & Kanuka, 2004; Picciano, Dziuban, & Graham, 2013; Rovai, & Jordan, 2004; So, & Brush, 2008).

This study explores the experiences and perceptions of learners during the transition period from the conventional schooling to open and distance learning and seeks to establish whether this change influences learners' adaptation to the new learning environment. Darlaston-Jones et al. (2001); Jones and Krumsvik (2008) refer to transition as the "change of condition intertwined into all life courses". The transition phase is a critical stage in the learner's school career. Cohen (2012) asserts that transition is challenging and requires both social and academic support. Taylor (2010) posits that students are at risk of alienation during the transition phase. There is a dominant perception that learning and teaching can only occur if there is face-to-face interaction between the teacher and the learner, and when this engagement is taking place in a classroom situation. Those transferring from the conventional system to an ODL environment often embrace that belief. It is therefore vital for ODL researchers and practitioners to understand learners' experiences and perceptions in the change of learning mode to be able to develop appropriate learner support models. This study is based on the assumption that learners find it hard to adjust to the new learning

environment because of the challenges that they experience during the transition from the conventional learning system to the ODL mode.

## 1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The growth of NAMCOL has been phenomenal over the years. However, NAMCOL learners in the school-level education programme do not perform as well as their counterparts in the traditional formal schools (SAIDE, 2005; Murangi, 2009; SAIDE, 2011). This study is driven by the notion that change in the learning environment might be one of the factors having the greatest impact on learners' ability to integrate into the new distance education learning environment. The new learning environment expects the learners to acquire independent learning skills and demonstrate the capacity to cope with self-directed learning. In most cases learners lack the required learning skills for distance education because they are accustomed to depending on someone from early childhood and throughout their school career.

During their years of schooling, these learners became used to a typical classroom environment known for its regular dialogue and interaction between the teachers and learners and among learners. They are conditioned to respond in a certain way because of their previous learning experiences of dependence on the teacher. As they enter the new learning environment, they expect a similar pedagogical approach. This kind of situation is contrary to the distance learning environment where the opportunities for face-to-face contacts are limited because of the geographical or locational separation of the learner from the teacher (Rovai, & Downey, 2010). Learners who are accustomed to the physical presence of the teacher may experience isolation and loneliness in a distance learning environment. In the traditional classroom, these learners are highly dependent on the teachers; when they join the ODL environment, they are expected to become more independent and exercise a high degree of self-discipline. ODL environment expects learners to adjust to the new teaching and learning environment where the teacher acts as a mere facilitator. There is sometimes a mismatch between learners' expectations and what institutions have to offer. Frequently learners have to face the course content on their own which can be daunting. The same view is held by Qakisa-Makoe (2005) who notes that students entering higher education are required to study independently and have to adopt new approaches of studying through distance learning. Beldarrain

(2006) refers to the change in learning mode from conventional to open and distance learning as a radical shift in both instructional design and pedagogy.

The distance learning environment becomes a new and an unknown environment where both the students and teachers perform completely different roles. This change of learning environment entails a shift in the traditional student-teacher relations. The teachers should modify their approach to teaching and to adopt a new mode of teaching in order to accommodate the students. The teacher has to move away from the traditional lecturing approach and to perform a more mentoring, tutoring and facilitating role (Galusha, 1998). The purpose of this study is to establish how learners cope with the transition from conventional to the distance mode of learning. The study will also explore the influence of transitional experiences on learners' integration into a distance learning environment.

The main research problem is: What are the experiences of the learners during the transition period from the traditional classroom mode of delivery to the open and distance learning?

This study aims to assist NAMCOL in particular and the open schools in general to develop a better understanding of the learners' transition challenges. Better understanding of learners' experiences when moving from one mode of delivery to another will inform the development of new policies and strategies within open schools to support learners to integrate more effectively into the open school environment. If the transition process is well managed in open schools, it may lead to improved learner retention and ultimately in terms of the pass rates.

### **1.3 RATIONALE**

The rationale of this study is based on the researcher's experience as a practitioner in the ODL system. The researcher has served NAMCOL in various capacities: for two years as a regional manager responsible for programme implementation in the regions, then for nine years as deputy director and currently as the Director since 2007. The researcher observed over the years that people in leadership positions tend to judge and shift the blame to the learners for poor performance without investigating other root causes. There is an assumption that learners joining

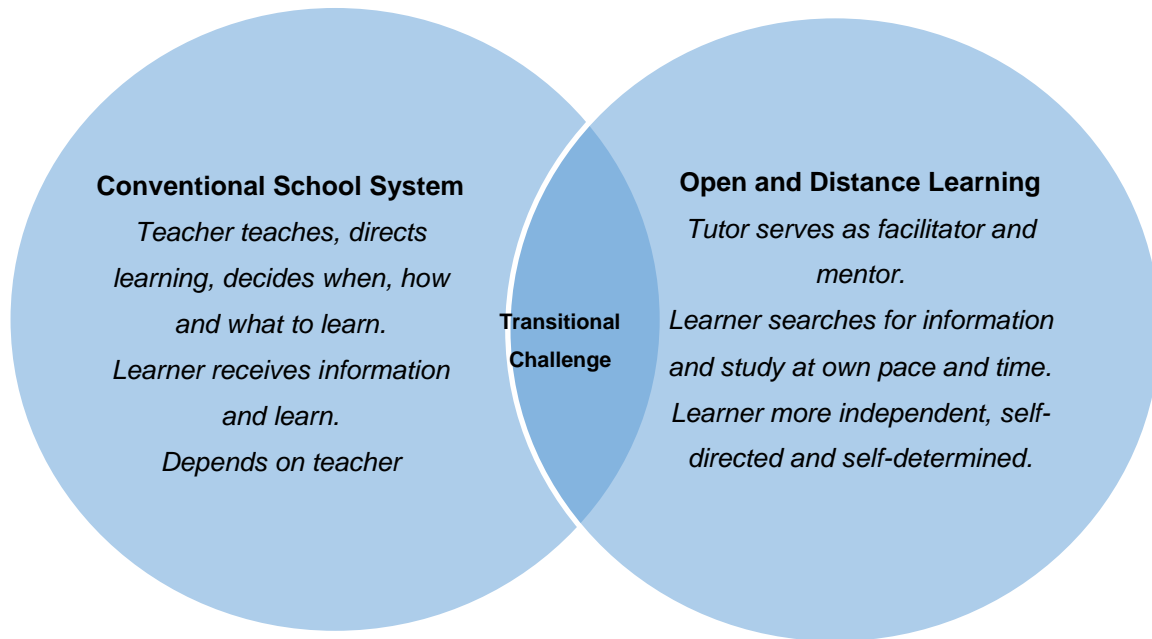
NAMCOL from the conventional system will perform better because they are repeating few subjects in schools. However, some fail to appreciate and acknowledge that several of these learners may struggle to adjust to the new mode of delivery because of their past learning experiences. NAMCOL has commissioned several studies to examine the effectiveness of the learner support services and how they could be improved; however the college continues to experience relatively low pass rates. The researcher believes that transition from the traditional classroom teaching to open learning, puts considerable pressure on the learners and this may eventually affect their academic performance.

This study is motivated by two related factors: the large number of learners who migrate from the conventional school system to NAMCOL annually; and the relatively poor performance of the learners which creates a negative perception of the quality of NAMCOL programmes. Since the results for NAMCOL learners are poorer than those of their counterparts studying through the conventional schooling system, NAMCOL is perceived as offering education of low quality (SAIDE, 2011; Murangi, 2009). Generally, course completion and retention rates in conventional face-to-face institutions are higher than in distance learning programmes (Carr, 2000). Because of the standardised curriculum and the fact that the learners sit for the same national examinations as their peers in the conventional system, many stakeholders compare the performance of NAMCOL learners with those in the conventional schools and they view this comparison as fair (Murangi, 2009). Although the institution serves as a 'safety net' for those learners who do not succeed in the conventional system, this important role tends to be overshadowed by the lower learner pass rates attained. The researcher is of the opinion that if transition from conventional to open schooling is studied more carefully, it will assist open schools to serve learners more effectively as both the learners and NAMCOL would have a better understanding of the process that the learners undergo.

Furthermore, NAMCOL is funded on a per-subject enrolment formula basis and the government as the main funding agency is exerting pressure on the institution to perform better. Though funding is input-based per full-time equivalent, the value for money spent is measured against the learners' outputs. Learners come to NAMCOL with high expectations of better academic achievement in examinations. The quality

of education offered is benchmarked against the number of learners achieving good grades. In the 2012 national examinations both NAMCOL and the conventional system learners achieved 80% and above in graded entries (refers to G-grade and above); however more than 20% subject entries of learners in the conventional system achieved better grades (C and above) compared to 7% achieved by NAMCOL learners. Despite the high percentage in graded entries, the College is faced with the challenge of pushing through as many learners as possible to achieve the desired higher grades that will ultimately enable them to proceed to the next level in their school career (Murangi, 2009: 9). NAMCOL has been instrumental in increasing the number of learners but is also experiencing unsatisfactory throughput rates. NAMCOL has managed to increase its learner intake from 28,297 in 2007 to 38,960 in 2016 which is an increase of 27% (NAMCOL, 2016). Low pass rates has a negative effect on institutional reputation.

The state of learner performance, despite the comprehensive learner support model adopted by the institution, has prompted the researcher to establish how the learners cope with the transition from the traditional classroom environment to a new mode of open and distance learning. The study will therefore examine the extent to which the transition from the conventional school-based system to an open and distance learning system affects students' integration into the new learning environment. The change from the conventional school system to ODL mode is illustrated in Fig. 1.1. The diagram attempts to conceptualise a distinction between the traditional school environment and the distance learning environment. The diagram shows that the conventional school system follows the pedagogical approach to learning where the teacher directs learning, while learning in an ODL environment is meant to be self-directed and student centred. In an ODL environment, the learners are more autonomous as well as self-determined. Therefore, the different pedagogical approaches might have direct influence on the learners' adaptability from one delivery system to another.



**Figure 1.1: Distinction between the conventional school system and the ODL mode**

#### **1.4 PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The main purpose of this research study is to explore the learners' experiences when transferring from the conventional mode of delivery to open and distance learning. This study intends to make a contribution to the knowledge base of ODL because most ODL institutions are confronted with the challenge of low pass rates and this can be attributed to many factors. Transition from one mode of delivery to another poses considerable challenges to learners and this change may have an impact on the learners' integration into the new learning environment of ODL. Understanding the dynamics involved in this transition will assist NAMCOL handle learners more effectively and therefore prepare them for academic success.

Though a substantial amount of research has been done on the transition, the literature review undertaken by the researcher did not identify much published literature that has examined in detail the transition from conventional school programmes to ODL school-level programmes. In addition, the researcher did not come across any deep study on the transition from conventional to ODL in the Namibian context. Generally, ODL at school level is a relatively new field especially in the Southern Africa Development Community region; therefore research in the area has received less attention than other levels of education. Sir John Daniel remarks that little research is done on ODL at school level and advocates for more research

in the area (Latchem, 2012). Furthermore, Brindley (1995a) remarks that most research in the discipline of distance education focused primarily on access and availability of learning opportunities but less attention was given to research on learner experiences.

The gap in research for open schools necessitates a research study in this particular area, noting also that not much research has been done for school-level programmes in Namibia, the SADC region and internationally. Dodd, Kirby, Seifert and Sharpe (2009) expressed the view that little is known on the impact of the distance education experience at the secondary level on the post-secondary education system. A recent study on distance education at school level in Southern Africa by Gatsha (2010) explored the impact of learning support on the academic performance of distance learners in Botswana who enrolled for the secondary school-leaving certificate. Other studies were commissioned by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and focused on financing open schools, using NAMCOL and the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in India as case studies (Greville, 2006; Vivier Ed, 2007). The research studies at school-level mentioned above, although critical, do not touch on the element of transition from conventional to ODL. Hence, this enquiry is significant in its contribution to the limited body of knowledge.

Most empirical research has focused on transition from secondary school level to higher learning (Thompson, 1997; Msila, 2006; Kember, 2007; Barron, & D'Annunzio-Green, 2009; Cross, & Carpentier, 2009; Kirby, Sharpe, Bourgeois, & Greene, 2010; Cross, & Carpentier, 2009; Galusha, 2011; Wilson, Bialk, Freeze, Freeze, & Lutfiyya, 2012; Elffers, & Oort, 2013). This study therefore, has the potential of expanding on the existing knowledge on learner experiences and challenges during the transition stage. As much as ODL practitioners argue that ODL at school level is as good as the conventional system, there is an urgency to substantiate this claim with more research in order to expand knowledge on the challenges learners experience during the transition stage and possibly suggest corresponding mitigating measures. It is therefore important to note that apart from building on the existing literature on transition, the researcher will be able to develop a transition model for school level ODL programmes unique for Namibia. A reasonable approach for this study is to explore practical ways of integrating learners into the institutional settings because



secondary education is a very critical stage in the education system as it links the school to higher education and to the labour market. This study intends to fill this gap in the body of knowledge particularly in the context of distance education in Namibia.

The government of the Republic of Namibia has introduced accountability measures against which state funded institutions are measured. One such measure is to improve the performance of learners in the junior and senior secondary phases. The focus over the last couple of years from government has shifted from access to learner success. The outcome of this study is of significant value to administrators and policy makers at government level as it will enable them to develop policies and guidelines for ODL in general and for open schools specifically to support the provision of ODL. These policies will ensure that ODL provision is not affected by changes in government and will enable funding for ODL institutions (Du Vivier, & Ellis, 2009).

Additionally, the study may contribute to a better understanding of learners' experiences and perceptions during the transition stage. The findings may require open schools to reconsider some institutional policies and strategies to serve learners better to cope with the challenges of transition. Open schools may consider alternative strategies, such as developing a learner support guide that focuses on learner integration into an ODL system at school level. Better management of the transition by learners and the College may in turn lead to improved learner retention and pass rates.

The study is also of value to the learner as the primary beneficiary of programmes. Administrators of open schools may use the results of the study to advise new entrants of programmes through the development of strategies designed to enhance learner integration into open schools.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Research questions serve various purposes: to assist with the focus of the study; to direct how the study should be conducted (methodology); and to establish what is already studied on the same topic (Maxwell, 1998).



The main research question is:

What are the experiences and perceptions of learners during the transition period from the traditional classroom mode of delivery to open and distance learning?

Sub-questions:

- What are the different role players' understanding of the ODL mode of delivery?
- What are the experiences of learners during the transition period?
- How do learners adjust and adapt to distance mode of learning?
- What factors facilitate or hinder learner integration during transition stage?
- What strategies should be put in place to enhance learner integration into distance learning?
- At what stage/period do learners fully integrate into the new ODL mode of delivery?

## **1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of the learners during the transition period from the traditional classroom mode of delivery to the open and distance learning mode.

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To assess the different role players' understanding of the ODL mode of delivery.
- To explore the experiences of learners during the transition process.
- To establish how learners adjust and adapt to the distance mode of learning.
- To establish the factors that facilitate or hinder learner integration during the transition stage.
- To establish the strategies that should be put in place to enhance learner integration into distance learning.
- To determine the period/stage when learners fully integrate into the ODL delivery mode.

## 1.7 CLARIFICATION AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

**Open Schooling:** The Commonwealth of Open learning (COL) defines open schooling as “the physical separation of the school-level learner from the teacher, and the use of alternative teaching methodologies, to bridge the separation and deliver the education and training” (Phillips, 2006). According to Daniel (2010), open schools can either be complementary or an alternative to conventional schooling with the former offering the same curriculum as used in the conventional system and the latter offering a different but relevant curriculum. In the context of this study, open schooling refers to the provision of same level secondary education curriculum to adults and out-of-school youth through the use of a variety of distance learning methods.

**Open and Distance Learning (ODL):** In the view of Rumble (2012), open learning is any provision of education where restrictions to students are minimised and where the student is at the centre of learning; distance learning refers to the teaching and learning process where both the student and teacher are separated in space and time. Mitra and Hendrikz (2009) refer to ODL as the “philosophy of a constraint free learning situation, adopting a methodology of organising learning experiences at a distance using multi-media and information technology”. In this study, the concept open learning refers to the philosophy and principles that allow students’ access to an open, flexible and learner centred form of education by attempting to remove the possible barriers to learning; the concept distance learning refers to the methodology of learning. Therefore, ODL refers to the delivery of an open, flexible and learner-centred form of education which applies the distance learning mode of delivery.

**Learners:** In this study learners refer to adults and out-of-school youth who enrol for study opportunities in open schools. The term learner and student have been used interchangeably throughout this document.

**Blended Learning:** This refers to a combination of course delivery model such as face-to-face instruction and technology mediated instruction (Graham, Woodfield, & Harrison, 2013; Staker, & Horn, 2012). In the context of this study the main emphasis is on the use of self-instructional materials, face-to-face support and multimedia which includes audio, video and interactive computer-based lessons (Murangi, 2009).

**Learner Support:** Definitions on learner support vary. Tait (2000) refers to multiple uniformed services offered to all students to complement the course materials. In this context, learner support refers to a variety of support services provided by an institution to help students to fully integrate into a learning environment and that enhance academic performance.

## 1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is a case study that explores the experiences and perceptions of learners during the transition period from the traditional classroom mode of delivery to the open and distance learning mode. The researcher has identified two theories that are of direct relevance to this study, namely Tinto's theory of social and academic integration and Michael Moore's theory of transactional distance (Moore 2013; Tinto 1997b). Tinto's theory of social and academic integration provides a comprehensive framework to address the objective of learners' integration into the distance learning environment. On the other hand, Michael Moore's theory of transactional distance is relevant in addressing the objectives that relate to learners' experiences when transferring from the traditional classroom mode of delivery to ODL, and in particular to an open school environment. Although these theories are more developed for students in a conventional teaching and learning environment, the researcher believes that the two identified theories shed light on how NAMCOL learners adapt to or integrate into the distance mode of delivery.

Tinto's integration model serves as a point of departure for this research. Tinto (1997b) theorises that academic and social integration are instrumental in determining student success which is measured in terms of persistence and course completion. Tinto (1997b) posits that "students are more likely to persist when they are either academically or socially integrated or they can even more likely to persist when both forms of integration occur". However, while Tinto acknowledges that both forms of integration are important, he further posits that academic integration appears to be a more critical form of involvement (Tinto, 1997b). The model suggests that for learners to fully integrate into the institution, they progress through three phases, namely; separation, transition and incorporation (Tinto, 1997b). The first phase occurs when learners enter the new learning environment. At this stage, they feel isolated and find it difficult to relate and connect to the new environment. It takes learners

some time to adapt to the new learning environment. The second phase is the transition stage where learners start feeling connected to the institution and when there is a high degree of acceptance of the new learning environment and the abandoning of previous engagements. The final phase is incorporation, which refers to learners' full integration into the new learning environment. The lack of integration may lead to isolation and ultimately to early withdrawal, dropout and poor performance. Deil-Amen (2011) asserts that any disconnect between the student and the institution of learning can hinder commitment from the side of the student and lead to withdrawal.

The auxiliary objectives of this study are to establish the factors that facilitate or hinder learner integration during the transition stage and to determine the period/stage when learners fully integrate into the new learning environment. Tinto's theoretical framework is relevant for the current study because it will be applied to explain how learners integrate successfully into the new environment and at what stage in the academic year they integrate. In the context of this study, NAMCOL receives on an annual basis a high proportion of learners from the conventional schools who have no experience of studying through distance learning. As these learners enter this new environment, they may experience some isolation because they are now separated from their former school mates and the entire school community. It will take them some time to start establishing new relationships with fellow learners who may also experience the same form of isolation. They also need to establish new ties with head of centres, tutors and NAMCOL officials. In addition to the social elements, they also need to engage with the new learning experience that requires a more independent form of learning. The method of teaching will change from being directed by the teacher to a more facilitating and mentoring type of approach where the learner is the central agent for directing his or her learning.

Tinto's three phases of separation, transition and incorporation are applied in this study to determine the various stages NAMCOL learners are going through and at what stage they fully integrate into the institution. The study also determines how the learners integrate socially and academically by applying Tinto's model in the analysis of data. There is therefore, a need through this study to have a clearer understanding on how these learners experience the transition before they fully integrate into the

institutional academic and social structures. Tinto's model of academic and social integration assisted the researcher to establish the elements that connect the student to the academic life of the institution and what other relationships exist outside the confinement of the physical face-to-face environment. This theory is of great importance to shed light on factors that hinder or facilitate their integration into the new ODL mode.

A second theory relevant for this study is Michael Moore's theory of transactional distance which was built on Wedemeyer's theory on independent study (Wedemeyer, 2009) but which introduces the element of student autonomy. Moore theorised that the transaction in distance education occurs between the teachers and students in an environment where both are separated from each other (Moore, 2013). Dialogue, structure and learner autonomy are key variables that determine transactional distance, according to Moore. He argues that if the level of dialogue and structure are decreased the students tend to become more autonomous and independent. Students who experience a greater level of autonomy are likely to cope studying on their own with less support because they tend to be more independent, self-determined and self-directed. According to Moore's theory the separation between the student and the teacher affects the learning and teaching process. In instances where the student assumes a high degree of autonomy, the teacher performs more of a supportive role.

In the context of this study, the vast majority of students come from an environment which is characterized by a high degree of dialogue and structure, thus making them more dependent. However, at NAMCOL there is a low degree of dialogue and high structure, hence learners are required to take a more independent approach to learning. Dialogue refers to the communication between the learner and teacher or between learners themselves while structure refers to learning resources and other support systems put in place to facilitate or enhance learning. In conventional schools there is regular communication between the learner and teacher, whereas at NAMCOL the communication is decreased and structure is maximised to encourage more independent learning.

The study therefore uses Moore's variables of dialogue, structure and autonomy to determine the level to which the learners react to these variables. Do learners prefer to be autonomous, self-directed and self-determined or do they prefer to be independent by demanding both the high degree of dialogue and structure as it was the case in the formal schools. In analysing the experiences of the learners during the transition period, the three elements of Moore's transactional theory was used to make sense of the findings.

## **1.9 AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This part of the research focuses on the approach that was followed in terms of research design, study population, data collection and data analysis methods. All empirical research falls within a particular paradigm or philosophy.

The research design for this study falls within the Interpretivism/constructivism and positivism paradigms. The interpretivist paradigm is based on the assumption that social reality is created through subjective experiences of people in an environment (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2007; Patton, 1990; Vrasidas, 2000). This particular philosophy is more about having an in-depth understanding on how people experience a particular phenomenon, how they perceive and create meaning of their world. On the other hand, the positivism paradigm has its roots in physics and the worldview is defined through natural laws and research seeks to generalise findings. Positivism is quantitative in nature, data are mostly gathered through the use of survey instruments and the data are analysed statistically. In the context of this study, some quantitative data were collected through the use of a questionnaire. The researcher therefore is of the firm belief that these two paradigms are appropriate for this research to obtain with an in-depth understanding of learners' experiences and their perceptions when they transfer from the traditional mode of delivery to open and distance learning.

The research design in this study is a case study that focused on exploring and explaining the experiences of NAMCOL learners during the transition from the traditional classroom environment to open and distance learning. This case study is more exploratory and descriptive of nature because the researcher's interest was to explore what the students have to say about their experiences or perceptions when transferring from one mode of delivery to another. The case study is the most

appropriate research design because of the researcher's interest in obtaining an in-depth knowledge and understanding on the learning experiences and perceptions of learners during the transition stage. The in-depth investigation produced a deeper understanding of the phenomena that contributed to the development of a theory to support learners in transition from conventional to the ODL mode at secondary school level within the Namibian context.

The population selected for this study comprised mainly NSSC learners who are transferring from the conventional schools to NAMCOL to improve their grades in order to advance to the next level of their education career or seek employment. The other category of the population consisted of tutors who are responsible for facilitating learning at Tutorial Centres, heads of Tutorial Centres and regional Area Coordinators responsible for monitoring of Tutorial Centres. The main participants (the learners) included: those having the benefit of attending weekly tutorials (also referred to as contact learners); those only attending face-to-face support sessions during school holidays because of work, family and other commitments (referred to as non-contact learners); and those learners who successfully completed their studies with NAMCOL in 2013. These graduates were selected because of their personal experience of success since the researcher was also interested in establishing how learners adapt to the new mode of learning.

The participation of the main participants, that is, the current or former learners was vital for this inquiry because of the perceived assumption that they had experienced the transition process either positively or negatively because of the migration from the conventional school system to NAMCOL. The other participants were selected because of their close contact with the learners in one way or another. The researcher opted to include a diverse group of participants in the collection of data in order to obtain rich and trustworthy data.

The study applied both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The participants were selected from four Tutorial Centres and regional offices in the NAMCOL's southern and northern regions. The researcher carried out purposeful sampling to identify the centres from which the participants were drawn. Two centres were identified in terms of urban and semi-urban/rural settings respectively and two



centres of which one was from a semi-urban/rural setting were selected from each region. Purposeful sampling was identified for the selection of centres on the assumption that the participants attached to these centres are knowledgeable and informed about the research topic. The same sampling technique was used to select the participants for the interviews. Creswell (2012); Neuman and Kreuger (2003); Patton (1990) explain that purposeful sampling is used when the selection of the participants is based on their expertise or experience of the phenomenon to be investigated. In the completion of a questionnaire by the learners, a simple random sampling technique was used. Probability sampling allows for the generalisation of the findings to the target population (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). Fifty (50) learners from the total number of learners attached to the four Tutorial Centres were randomly selected from computer generated lists. The total number of registered learners were divided by 50 to show the subsequent number for selection. For example, in the case of Hage Geingob centre, N=916 learners registered and the researcher randomly selected the first learner on the list and thereafter every twentieth learner until 50 (n=50) learners were selected. In the case where some learners were not present, the same formula was used to select other learners for participation. Other participants such as area coordinators, heads of Tutorial Centres, tutors and those learners who had already exited the system were purposefully selected because of the low numbers.

For triangulation purposes, the research applied a multi method design by blending and integrating both the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods, data sources and researchers to ensure rich data and enhance the validity of the findings (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Fenech Adami, & Kiger, 2005; Heale, & Forbes, 2013; Mukherji, & Albon, 2009). This study applied both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in order to augment each other. Qualitative methods are important when detailed information is sought about the lives, perspectives and beliefs of a particular group or individuals (Briggs, Morrison, & Coleman, 2012; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). According to Maxwell (1998), the qualitative approach is appropriate for research where the participants express their experiences, where the researcher needs to understand the context in which the participants operate, and where the researcher needs to identify unanticipated phenomenon and understand



the process of the events which occur. On the other hand, quantitative methods are mostly structured, questions are pre-determined and the focus is on the testing of hypotheses (De Vos et al., 2011). The blending and integrating of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods ensured that the researcher could reap the benefits of both methods and neutralise the flaws of the methods (Hussein, 2015). This approach was appropriate for this inquiry because of the researcher's belief that whilst some areas under investigation might lend themselves to qualitative enquiry, a quantitative investigation was more appropriate for other areas. Thus, in this study there was methodological as well as data triangulation. This approach allowed a better understanding of the phenomenon through the use of multiple data collection techniques.

The instruments used to collect data were questionnaires, the interview schedule and document review. The first phase of data collection included the questionnaire that was administered to collect the initial data and the key issues which emanated from the findings of the quantitative approach were used to collect data through the semi-structured interviews. Two types of paper-based questionnaires were administered. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions. Because of the nature of the study, the researcher did not formulate a hypothesis for the study. According to Rowley (2014) a questionnaire is widely used to "collect data from large number of people and to be to count the frequency of occurrence of opinions, attitudes, experiences, processes, behaviours, or predictions" (p.4). A questionnaire was administered to 250 learners who were on the programme (n=250) from the total number of more than 25 000 students registered in 2015 while 10 former students (n=15) completed the same questionnaire. The second questionnaire was administered to 28 heads of centres, tutors and area coordinators (n=28). The advantage of using this instrument was that it could reach a large number of participants in a fairly short period of time. One of the drawbacks of the questionnaire is the participants' lack of understanding of some questions which could lead to incorrect answers. The researcher therefore took cognisance of the fact that completing a questionnaire might be a new experience for some participants, especially the students. Therefore, the researcher and research assistants were involved on site in the administration of the questionnaire. Prior to data collection, a pilot study was conducted with a smaller group similar to the population sample who

participated in the main research to enable the researcher to test the validity and reliability of the instrument.

The second phase of the data collection which was more qualitative in nature and comprised 22 individual semi-structured interviews (n=22) of which 14 (n=14) were for the three different categories of learners (contact, non-contact and graduates) while 8 interviews (n=8) were conducted for the area coordinators (n=2), heads of centres (n=2) and tutors (n=4). Additionally, two focus group discussions were held with learners at the two Tutorial Centres one in each region. Interviews were tape recorded and where possible immediately transcribed. The final phase of the data collection process included the review of some key documents. Document review is important because sometimes what people say through other methods of data collection differs from the information packaged in documents. Research through documentary analysis is an important way of complementing other data collection methods. Briggs et al. (2012) refer to documentary research as a type of interpretative research that describes, interprets or explains what has occurred. The documents that were reviewed included monitoring and evaluation reports, attendance registers and previous research studies. The researcher looked for issues relevant to the research study, categorised and interpreted them in terms of emerging themes. This study's principal objective was to assess the experiences of learners during the transition stage. To some the transition might be a complex matter and they may opt to withdraw completely or partially from studies. According to Tinto (1987), learners who fully integrate with the academic institution are likely to persist. It was therefore imperative to review learner attendance registers to establish the percentage of students withdrawing from the programme.

## **1.10 DATA ANALYSIS**

The data was analysed by using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. The data collected through the questionnaires was coded and entered into a quantitative database for computational analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data. The researcher did the analysis with the assistance of a statistician from the University of Namibia. Analysis of data using SPSS enabled the researcher to employ descriptive and standard

statistics, such as frequencies and percentages. Tables, graphs and charts were developed to present the results.

Analysis of qualitative data was done as the data collection process unfolds. Creswell (2013) recommends this practice of ongoing analysis of qualitative data as fieldwork takes place. The advantage of analysing data during the process of data collection is that data analysis through qualitative methods is an on-going process and should happen simultaneously with data collection and report writing (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were recorded after permission had been obtained from the participants followed by the transcription and coding of data before it was entered into the database. Qualitative software, AtlasTi was used to assist with the data analysis. The researcher had not used the software before but solicited support from a qualitative researcher from the Namibia University of Science and Technology who was conversant with the software.

### **1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Research is based on mutual trust, respect and honesty between the researcher and the participants. Ethical concerns should be taken care of at every stage of the research design. Ethics in research constitutes moral principles, rules and expectations that the researcher should adhere to when engaging with the participants in the research study (Pickard, 2007; De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2011). Voluntary participation, confidentiality, debriefing of participants and anonymity were some of the ethical issues with which the researcher complied. From the onset, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights to participate or to withdraw any time, how the data would be recorded and how and when the findings would be shared with them. Since participation was voluntary, consent forms were signed by the participants to give them the assurance of anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any given point. Pseudonyms were used instead of real names in the presentation of data. Additionally, permission to engage the participants in the study and to have access to student data was granted by the Chairperson of the NAMCOL Governing Board. Moreover, the researcher's met the University of Pretoria's ethical requirements and got ethical approval before data collection. The researcher collected data with the help of two

research assistants to eliminate any element of intimidation since he sits in a position of authority in the institution.

### **1.12 DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Although more than 25 000 learners who enrolled for the NSSC programme annually are products of the conventional system, this particular study was delimited to the 2014/15 NSSC intakes and those who graduated from the College between 2013 and 2014 academic years. Secondly, the study involved the participants who were attached to the college's two regional offices while the college has adopted a four region structure. In addition, the researcher is currently an employee of the institution and might have his own personal preconceived ideas on challenges learners experience during the transition stage.

Strategies to reduce possible bias and subjectivity were external peer review and member checking. Further, an audit trail was kept throughout the entire research process through keeping of notes of interviews and maintaining audiotapes for recorded interviews. The transcribed interviews were printed and submitted to a few selected participants to verify the authenticity of the transcripts. Additionally, the researcher used one prominent ODL expert to review the research work during the entire research process. Finally, the study supervisors who scrutinized the work are also instrumental in limiting researcher bias.

### **1.13 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

To achieve trustworthiness, increase rigor and enhance quality and credibility of the study, the researcher used a variety of strategies throughout the research process. Data collection is an evolving process and one key strategy is for the researcher to have a prolonged engagement with the participants to cross-check various issues and for the participants to get accustomed to the researcher. The data collection process was spread over a period of four months and the last two months were more intensive because the interviews were conducted during that period. The extended period of time is important because the participants may reveal critical and sensitive information they did not give during the initial phase of the data collection process. A field journal was kept throughout the entire research process to reflect new ideas,

thoughts, challenges and to enable the researcher to modify the manner of collecting data if necessary.

Triangulation is another key strategy to enhance credibility. Different types of triangulation exist, that is, triangulation of data methods, data sources, investigators and theoretical triangulation (Patton, 2002). Multiple data collection methods (interview, questionnaire and document analysis) were used. Triangulated sources included the different categories of participants. In terms of theoretical triangulation the findings were tested against Tinto's theory of student integration and Moore's theory of transactional distance. To diversify the research approach, the researcher collected data with the help of two research assistant to assist with data collection and analysis.

To decrease misinterpretation of data and recognise participants' experiences in the research process, member checking strategy was used whereby some of the transcribed information obtained through interviews were cross-checked with the participants. Additionally, the entire research process and findings were exposed to peer examination whereby the researcher used people with expertise in research to review his work.

#### **1.14 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

Chapter 1 provides the background and context of the study. The research problem, significance and the rationale for the study are discussed in detail and the research questions and objectives are clearly stated. The research design, methodology and strategies to enhance credibility of the study, ethical considerations and significance of the study are also briefly discussed.

Chapter 2 focuses on a literature review of the historical perspective on the provision of open and distance learning internationally and in the Namibian context. In addition, the purpose of this chapter is to present a comprehensive review of the research on influence of transition on student integration. Applicability of Tinto's theory of student integration and Moore's theory of transactional distance are assessed and compared to the findings.

Chapter 3 presents the research paradigm, research design and methods used to collect data. Justification for using the particular data collection instruments, data analysis, trustworthiness and credibility of the study as well as ethical issues are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the data analysed through the quantitative data collection method. This chapter presents descriptive statistics, primarily by frequencies and percentages.

Chapter 5 focuses on the analysis of data obtained through the interviews as well as data from the review of documents.

Chapter 6 serves to draw a comparison between the data from the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The findings of the study measured against the empirical literature discussed in one of the previous chapters are presented. Tinto's theory of student integration and Moore's theory of transactional distance are applied to make sense of the findings.

The final chapter summarises the research study with key findings, discusses the implications for practice and make recommendations on possible areas for future research. A transition model for ODL learners pursuing a school equivalent programme is also presented.

## **1.15 SUMMARY**

This chapter introduces the research study and deals with background and context of the study. It gives a general perspective on the importance of education provision through ODL and also places the study in the context of NAMCOL. The research problem, significance and the rationale for the study as well as research objectives and questions are clearly articulated. It further gives a brief description of the research design and methodology, data analysis process, ethical considerations as well as the delimitations and limitations of the research process. The strategies to ensure credibility and quality of the research process are also explained. A brief synopsis of the theoretical framework that underpin the study is included in the chapter. The chapter concludes with the layout of the thesis.

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## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the research on students' experiences in the transition from the traditional classroom-based mode of delivery to Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Furthermore, the chapter gives a brief general overview on the discipline of ODL as a vital and mainstream delivery mode of study. A comparison will also be drawn between the conventional mode of delivery and distance learning. The chapter also presents the conceptual framework based on two theories: Tinto's theory of academic and social integration (1975) and Michael Moore's theory on transactional distance (1993).

From the literature reviewed, it appears that the topic on transition from the traditional classroom teaching to ODL at school-level has received little scholarly attention, especially at institutions, which predominantly use print as the primary teaching medium. Sir John Daniel attests that little research is done on ODL at school level and advocates for more research in the area (Latchem, 2012). This view is corroborated by Dodd, Kirby, Seifert, and Sharpe (2009) who also acknowledged that little is known about the impact and experience of distance education at the secondary level in the post-secondary education system. Because of the limited research in the area, the review of literature mainly focuses on transition from high school to higher education, which is relevant for this investigation, as experiences relating to transition at any level of education are unavoidable. Mdakane (2011) asserts that transition into the university life is not different from the transitions students have already experienced in the school career. Hence, experiences within these transitional modes may shed light on experiences that may be similar to those of ODL transitioned students.

The chapter concludes by reviewing the international perspectives on students' experiences and perceptions during transitional processes, the demands of transition and the management of the transition processes.



## 2.2 OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL)

### 2.2.1 TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF ODL

The concepts “Open Learning (OL)’ and Distance Education (DE)” overlap in practice, and for this reason they are interpreted differently by different ODL scholars and practitioners. To some ODL practitioners, researchers and scholars these concepts OL and DE are used interchangeably as synonyms. Open learning refers to the philosophy of education that removes or minimises possible barriers to learning while distance education refers to the methodology or mode of delivering education and training beyond the conventional classroom setting via print, audio, video and computer technologies and where the learner is in control of the learning process (Butcher, 2003; Pityana, 2008; Race, 2008; SAIDE, 2004). Notable researchers and scholars associate distance education with the geographical separation of students from their teachers (Guri-Rosenblit, 2005; Pityana, 2008; SAIDE, 2004; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2003). The term distance education appears to be too restrictive because much emphasis is on the separation between the student and the teacher. Because of these limitations, the concepts ‘open’, ‘distance’ and ‘learning’ are connected to each other through a commonly used acronym ‘ODL’, which means Open and Distance Learning. There is a symbiotic relationship between these concepts. According to Pityana (2008), ODL embraces evolutionary changes due to the rapid technological changes. Other definitions include the one by Mitra and Hendrikz (2009) who refer to ODL as a free learning environment that has adopted distance education methodology and which uses multimedia and information technology. Similarly, in the views of Moon, Leach, and Stevens (2005), ODL combines the approach of open learning with the distance mode of delivery. This implies that because of the evolutionary processes ODL went through due to technologies and developmental changes, one cannot single out one particular definition, but one should try to define ODL within a particular context. Defining ODL within the context of a particular study is more appropriate than attempting to adopt a definition which may not fit a particular situation.

Though institutions endeavour to embrace the concept ODL, they are still challenged to embrace openness in programme delivery. The flexibility and openness within the ODL systems are becoming invisible. Butcher (2007) argues that some ODL



institutions are more closed than open because they fail to address the diverse needs of students due to lack of effective support systems and poor management. These views are substantiated by Belawati, Baggaley, and Dhanarajan (2010) who argue that many ODL institutions do not necessarily embrace open learning as they apply strict admission rules and reduce openness. In the context of this study, there are also certain shortcomings in terms of the degree of openness at NAMCOL. The college has to comply with certain requirements that were put in place by the National Examinations, Assessment and Certification Board of Namibia. Students are required to register for a certain number of subjects depending on whether they are taking the subject(s) for the first time or repeating the subject(s) and also they have to register for tuition and examinations during specific periods for the year. For example, first-time takers (attempting subjects for the very first time) are not allowed to take more than three subjects for the year, although re-sit candidates (repeating subjects) are allowed up to a maximum of six subjects. The way ODL is being practised by some dedicated ODL institutions is no different from the education provision in the conventional system; therefore ODL institutions need to revisit their policies in order to embrace openness and flexibility in programme delivery.

Despite its challenges ODL has become popular and is no longer being viewed as a mode of delivery for failures or repeaters but as a mode of choice to many young people and adults who prefer not to pursue their educational career through the brick and mortar system. It increases access and creates opportunities for a diverse group of people, such as women, out-school-youth, the marginalised or less privileged, the displaced and others whose circumstances deny them the opportunity to attend the conventional system (Baloyi, 2012; Butcher, 2007; Gatsha, & Evans, 2010; Granger, & Bowman, 2003; Hannay, & Newvine, 2006; Latchman, Salzman, Gillet, & Bouzekri, 1999; Owens, Hardcastle, & Richardson, 2009; Phillips, 2006; Pityana, 2007). ODL liberates students as time and space factors no longer inhibit them to continue with their studies. Geographic location, job commitment, financial constraints and family responsibilities are no longer factors that prevent students to pursue their dreams. ODL helps students to cross the boundaries created through the traditional brick and mortar institutions. According to Potter (2013), ODL eliminates and reduces situational, dispositional and institutional barriers because of its potential to accommodate people with reduced mobility such as those with physical disabilities,

inmates and those that are displaced because of war and natural disasters. Advancing the same view, Pityana (2007) points out that ODL can be very instrumental in advancing countries' development agendas through programmes that are meant to address the plights of the less privileged social groups such as women, the unemployed, repeaters, out-of-school youth, the disadvantaged, and the displaced. This implies that ODL could be the panacea to address the many educational challenges that the conventional system is unable to tackle. In the context of Namibia, some citizens were denied the opportunity to study by the previous colonial regimes as a result of displacements caused by the liberation struggle and therefore the ODL mode creates an opportunity to bridge this gap.

This study will focus on ODL in the Namibian context. Geographically, Namibia occupies an area of more than 824 000 square kilometres and because of its vastness, it is highly unlikely for the conventional system to accommodate all prospective students who have the desire to advance their educational career through the different sectors of the education system. ODL has the potential to address the training and educational needs of the less privileged groups in Namibia such as the San, Ovahimba and Ovaherero who never had the opportunity to attend the conventional schools because of their nomadic lifestyles.

Furthermore, the pressure on governments to address the growing demands of providing educational opportunities at all levels necessitates the expansion of education through ODL. ODL takes advantage of the limitations of the conventional system of expanding education at all levels. The enormous financial resources required to provide education through the conventional mode, which many developing nations can no longer afford, present a golden opportunity for ODL to offer affordable quality programmes. This mode of education delivery is viewed as a viable, affordable, quick and effective method of providing education and training (Africa, 2014; Brindley, 1995a; Pityana, 2008).

This enquiry is a case study in Namibia on the transition from the conventional to open schooling. ODL in Southern Africa has gained substantial ground because the system has been in existence for more than 50 years with the establishment of one of the leading higher education ODL institutions, namely the University of South Africa

(UNISA) in 1946. Other provisions of correspondence education in the 1960's and 1970's to cater for those that were denied opportunities to education because of colonialism include among others the Botswana Extension College (1973), Malawi Correspondence College (1964) and the Swaziland International Education Centre in 1974 (Young, Perraton, Jenkins, & Dodds, 1980).

### **2.2.2 EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

Distance education has undergone an evolutionary process over a number of decades. The rapid technological innovations and developments that have taken place over the years have put distance education at the forefront of educational expansion. As a result of technological developments, distance education has gone through fundamental transformation in terms of pedagogical approaches, starting from the simple postal correspondence through print media, to correspondence by telephone, to slightly improved correspondence with audio and then video, to broadcasting, to distance education using a blended delivery mode, and finally to internet online delivery using the web (Hannay, & Newvine, 2006; Heydenrych, & Prinsloo, 2010; Lou, Bernard, & Abrami, 2006; McKee, 2010; Taylor, 2001; Taylor, 1995). What is common throughout the evolutionary process in all generations is the separation between the teacher and the student (Heydenrych, & Prinsloo, 2010). Some literature has identified only three generations of distance education, the first generation being the correspondence teaching or what Cleveland-Innes and Garrison (2010) refer to as "teaching through text"; the second generation involves multi-media teaching which integrates print-based materials with video, audio and minimal use of computers; and the third generation focuses more on the use of interactive information technology (Anderson, & Dron, 2010, 2012; Guri-Rosenblit, 2005; Sumner, 2000). According to Sumner (2000), the first generation is more individualistic and isolates students because of its one-way communication while the later generations present two-way communication possibilities because they emphasize the interaction between the parties. Given the background above and the way ODL is currently being implemented at different institutions, it appears that the different types of generations are complementary to each other because each generation has its own unique values.

Despite its evolution over the years, it appears that the delivery of ODL provision in developing countries, including the SADC region, falls predominantly within the first three generations because print remains the primary mode of delivery supplemented with other technologies. Belawati et al. (2010) express the same view. There are serious attempts at various ODL institutions in the region to move towards internet online delivery, however the full utilisation of technology is posing a considerable amount of challenges because of high costs related to hard and software, lack of internet facilities, low bandwidth, inaccessibility of technology, unreliability of power supply and the lack of human resources to provide technical support to institutions and students. ODL delivery at NAMCOL falls within the first three generations. NAMCOL follows a blended-learning approach in course delivery. Students receive self-instructional learning resources, which are supplemented with technologies such as radio, television and a little online content in few selected subjects. The current state of ODL provision in the SADC region in general and Namibia in particular where ODL falls predominantly within the first three generations calls for ODL institutions to seriously enhancing ODL delivery through the use of technology. The shrinking financial resources would make it impossible in the near future to deliver ODL through print media. There is a need to consider low cost devices that would not require sophisticated software and internet connectivity. We tend to bring the challenges of technology to the forefront rather than to find solutions to implement ODL through the use of technology. ODL institutions may become obsolete should they fail to apply technology in course delivery.

### **2.2.3 THEORIES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

The evolutionary process of distance education led to the development of various theories to substantiate research in the field. Keegan (1996) classified distance education theories into four categories: the first category includes theories of independence and learner autonomy, the second category includes the theory of industrialization of teaching, the third category includes the theory of interaction and communication, and the final category attempts to define distance education through a combination of theories of communication and the philosophy of education. The first category of theories includes Wedemeyer's (1975) theory of independent study and Moore's (1993) theory of transactional distance. The second category includes Peters' (1994) industrial production model. According to Peters (1994), distance

education is a system of industrialisation based on division of labour and mass production to ensure effective delivery of the system and realise economies of scale and cut cost. The third category of interaction and communication includes Holmberg's (2005) theory of “guided didactic conversation” which underlines the importance of communication between the learner and the instructor, either directly or indirectly through well-developed self-study materials. Finally, Perraton’s theory of distance education combines existing theories of communication and philosophies of education (Simonson, Schlosser, & Hanson, 1999). Though all these theories of distance education were developed by different scholars over time, what is common amongst the theories is to place the learner at the centre of the learning process.

The traditional theories of Holmberg, Wedemeyer and Moore put the learner at the centre of the education process while other theories by Keegan, Peters, Garrison and Anderson put much emphasis on the structure of distance education and how it affects the teaching and learning process (SABA, 2013). In this study, the researcher sought to understand the experiences of learners during the transition from the traditional school system to an open and distance learning mode of delivery, therefore the researcher found Moore’s transactional theory more appropriate. These learners are migrating from the traditional school system where they were exposed to a high degree of dialogue (interaction) with a teacher to an environment that requires high degree of autonomy because the teacher is not always readily available. Thus, the inquiry is based on the premise that this transition might pose some challenges to these students as the level of interaction with the teacher decreases. ODL is not a static delivery mode it has evolved over a number of years. Learner population is diverse and has changed with time and the focus is now on the provision of ODL at all levels, unlike in the past where emphasis was on the provision of this mode of delivery at tertiary level. This suggests that there is need for more research in this field from different perspectives.

#### **2.2.4 POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES AND DRAWBACKS OF ODL**

ODL has emerged as a viable, vital and mainstream delivery mode of study which has evolved over years because of its rapid and unprecedented growth. The education sector’s challenge of addressing the increased access for education and training opportunities makes adoption of the ODL mode inevitable. For years, it has

served millions of learners at various levels in the education system, predominantly at secondary school level through the establishment of various open schools but also through open universities elsewhere in Africa. The provision of education through the conventional stream alone at whatever level is not possible as resources are too scarce to invest more in infrastructure (Pityana, 2008). This state of affairs is evident in many developing countries. The conventional system is stretched and cannot cater for the large number of adults and out-of-school youth. Galusha (1998) asserts that ODL providers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century face the challenge of a fast growing diverse learner population. The greatest advantage of ODL is its flexibility as it allows those in employment and with family responsibilities to perform these multiple tasks while studying. Certainly, ODL has transformed millions of adults and young people around the globe who could not be catered for through the conventional system because of work, family commitments, geographical location or other factors. Some researchers claim that ODL has moved a step ahead of the conventional face-to-face mode because of its affordability and flexibility to allow students to study conveniently and independently and to balance their commitments and studies (Ali, 2011; Butcher, & Rose-Adams, 2015; Hannay, & Newvine, 2006; Hossain, 2010). The emergence of this flexible mode of delivery implies that education cannot be confined to the four walls of the classroom but it can be delivered anywhere and at any given time.

Although governments advocate and advance the Education for All agenda, it has not been possible to offer learning opportunities to all citizens through the conventional system. Daniel (2010) urges governments to consider alternative ways of delivering quality education at a much lower cost. He advocates the creation of new open schools and the expansion of current open schools as the alternative way of addressing the bottlenecks at secondary level caused by the achievement of universal primary education (Daniel, 2010). The same sentiments are expressed by Pityana (2008) who claims that ODL benefits from the economies of scale because institutions increase its learner intake without necessarily expanding its physical and human resources. To the contrary, the conventional system requires additional infrastructure and staff as the number of students increase. For example, NAMCOL serves a student population of more than 40 000 with a full-time staff complement of just slightly over 100 and nearly with the same infrastructure it had when it served less than 30 000 students.



ODL students can now easily study away from the conventional institutions because of its convenience and flexibility. The working class can study while earning a salary to pay for their own studies and supporting their own families. This view is supported by Pityana (2008), who claim that as people compete for limited resources and perform multiple tasks, ODL offers the solution for people to retain their jobs and at the same time maintain families, which is impossible during full-time studies at a conventional institution. Moore and Kearsley (2005) maintain that ODL has become popular because of some of these benefits, such as increasing access, cost-effectiveness, balancing inequalities as well as adding an international dimension to the education experience.

Many nations face the challenge of unqualified or under qualified teachers, who depend heavily on good learning resources to facilitate learning. Students are left unattended to and their teaching and learning times are disrupted due to teachers' absenteeism, which is aggravated by the increased rate of HIV/AIDS and other life threatening diseases. The self-instructional learning materials developed by ODL institutions for their students can be used in the conventional system to assist the students in the absence of the teachers. NAMCOL is also developing self-instructional learning materials that have been approved for use in government schools. Thus, ODL mode is the practical form of education delivery to address many of the challenges experienced in the delivery of education through the conventional system.

Despite its rapid growth and its significance in education delivery, this ODL mode of delivery is placed at the periphery and does not receive the recognition it deserves especially in developing countries. The contribution of ODL is more noticeable in developed countries than in developing countries (Nage-Sibande, & Van Vollenhoven, 2012). There is still a huge task ahead as advocates of the system are confronted with the challenge of changing the perception of those who believe that ODL is second-class compared to the conventional face-to-face delivery model. There are several reasons why people show less respect for ODL. High dropout rate and low pass rates if compared to the conventional face-to-face system are some challenges facing ODL and contribute to its unpopularity and may cause reputational damage to the institution. Bullen (2007) claims that less attention is given to dialogue because of the lack of regular interactions between students and between students

and instructors as one of its drawbacks. Baloyi (2012) expresses the view that the delivery mode has been very instrumental in increasing access but not successful in achieving satisfactory throughput rates. For example, NAMCOL recorded a drop-rate of 9% for learners on the senior secondary programme in 2013 (NAMCOL, 2013). Rumble and Koul (2007) attribute the dropout rate at NAMCOL to the lack of motivation, isolation of learners from the institution and the fact that the learners find the method of study difficult. There is no single institution that wants to be known for high dropout or low pass rates. Although dropout and pass rates are not key elements for this study, it will establish whether or not the transition to the new delivery mode has a negative influence on students' level of persistence. Considering the background above, ODL institutions should now shift their focus of increasing access to achieving better educational outcomes or to address both simultaneously.

The lack of enabling policy environment at national and institutional levels to advance the ODL agenda may be one of the reasons for the poor recognition of this mode of delivery. Gokool-Ramdoo (2009); Moore (1993) refers to lack of national ODL policies (or policy deficit) as a key dimension of transactional distance.

Many times ODL practitioners fail to capitalise on the positive attributes of this unique mode of delivery and behave and react like those in the conventional system who look down at this mode of delivery. At times they lack the drive and vigour to convince people to believe in ODL. ODL will only take precedence over the conventional system if practitioners of the system take a proactive rather than reactive approach in ODL delivery.

### **2.2.5 IS ODL DIFFERENT FROM THE CONVENTIONAL DELIVERY SYSTEMS?**

Learning at a distance differs from the conventional classroom learning experiences and therefore a new teaching and learning paradigm should be adopted for distance learning (Dzakiria, 2005). A secondary objective of the study is to determine how the learners transferring from the conventional system adapt to this mode of study. It is therefore imperative to have a clear understanding of the pedagogy that underpins ODL and be aware how different it is from traditional classroom-based delivery. Scholars distinguish three approaches to learning; pedagogy, which is interpreted as teacher-led education, andragogy which is the alternative to pedagogy and which is



interpreted as self-directed learning; and finally heutagogy which refers to self-determined learning (Bhoyrub, Hurley, Neilson, Ramsay, & Smith, 2010; Blaschke, 2012; Conner, 1997; Hase, 2009; Hase, & Kenyon, 2000, 2007; Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014; Manning, 2011). Initially education was known for the traditional teaching and learning interaction between the student and teacher. In the traditional pedagogical approach to learning the teacher is regarded as the holder of all knowledge; he/she decides what needs to be known and how skills and knowledge should be passed on to the student. Through the pedagogical approach, there is little room for students' self-directedness and self-determination. Blaschke (2012) claims that the heutagogical approach has the potential to develop lifelong learners who can survive in this competitive global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through this approach the students are more autonomous and self-determined. These different pedagogical approaches might influence students' adaptability from one delivery system to another. Learners who migrate from conventional schools to NAMCOL have now to deal with the opposite of what they used to. The tutor in this new environment expects that learners should do more on their own and come to the learning environment with subject content they find problematic or cannot follow. In the conventional schools, the learners receive textbooks and are supported and directed by the teachers on where to find the important aspects in the syllabi. Students record notes, which predominantly form part of the aspects required for assessment.

In the distance-learning environment, learners receive self-instructional materials covering the whole syllabi and students are expected to work through the entire materials independently and discuss problem areas with the tutors and/or their fellow learners. The self-instructional materials replace the tutor and classroom which are not always readily available. One secondary objective of this study is to establish how NAMCOL students adapt to the new learning environment. The use of self-instructional materials for most of their learning is a new and daunting experience for these students. The researcher's view in this study is that independent, self-directed and self-determined learning is only possible if there is paradigm shift in the way the teachers in the ODL environment conduct themselves. For teachers to embrace this, they should first be oriented to understand the dynamics of ODL in order to direct, tutor and mentor learners for the latter to become independent. The unfortunate current state of affairs in the context of this study is that NAMCOL is using formal

education teachers for its tutorials and their conventional pedagogical approach does not encourage independent, self-directed and self-determined learning.

The current conventional classroom system is known for the pedagogical approach to learning while ODL is geared towards andragogy and heutagogy. In the pedagogic model, the teacher takes the central point and directs learning by determining what the learner should learn, how to learn and when to learn. There is less opportunity for the student to take any decision with regard his or her own learning. This approach to learning is contrary to the other two approaches to teaching and learning where students move from a state of dependence to a more self-directed or self-determined approach to learning. Students who are self-directed or self-determined bring vast experience to the learning environment, show eagerness to learn, exhibit a high degree of internal motivation and their experience becomes the main resource to learning (Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014; Lieb, & Goodlad, 2005; Mdakane, 2011; Merriam, 2001; Mezirow, 1981; Ross-Gordon, 1991; Ross-Gordon, 2003). Distinctive features of distance education are learner-centredness, flexibility in learning, provision of learner support, cost-effectiveness and the promotion of a lifelong learning culture (Butcher, 2003; SAIDE, 2004).

The key principle that underpins ODL from the conventional system is the geographical separation of the learners from the institutions which provide the service. ODL departs from the notion that teaching and learning can take place and be nurtured without requiring teachers and learners to be at the same place and at the same time (Africa, 2014). Students in ODL have a greater degree of control of their own learning and are active in the learning process (Brindley, 1995a; Granger, & Bowman, 2003). This implies that the learner is the central agent of the learning process, unlike in the conventional system where learning is directed by the teachers and the learner performs a more passive role.

ODL success depends on support systems and available resources at institutions to facilitate teaching and learning without students being in the same venue at the same time (Lentell, 2012). ODL should empower students to become more independent, self-directed and self-determined. ODL follows a constructivist approach to learning as it views knowledge as mentally constructed through the interaction between the

student and external objects such as technology and other factors mediating the learning experience (Tenenbaum, Naidu, Jegede, & Austin, 2001). Likewise, Barr and Tagg (1995) indicate that the new paradigm to learning is rooted in the constructivist pedagogy which entails the active engagement of learners in the learning process. On the other hand, the conventional system is characterised by the behaviourism pedagogy where learning is directed by the teacher and learning occurs through the behavioural change of learners (Johnson, Corazzini, & Shaw, 2011; Nawaz, & Kundi, 2010).

Unlike the conventional system, which is more individualistic and centred around the teacher, ODL follows a collective approach where staff members in different departments work together for a common goal. In the view of Rumble (2006), a successful distance education model is grounded in effective learner support, good quality materials, effective logistical and regulatory operating systems. These operating systems have to function as one unit to be effective. The different components in an ODL system are fully integrated since each component influences every other component. ODL is based on the division of labour in the design, development, and delivery of programmes and places the learner at the centre of the learning system (Lentell, 2012). Whereas success in the conventional system depends heavily on the efforts from the teachers, success in ODL depends on strong institutional support since the learners are far away from the teachers. The institution has to reach out to learners wherever they live unlike in the conventional where all the learners are in close reach.

According to Guri-Rosenblit (2005), ODL equates to homework given to learners to do on their own with less work in class whereas in the conventional system the emphasis is more on classwork and less on homework. Pyari (2011); Simonson et al. (2003); Wedemeyer (1975, 2009) advance the view that distance learning is different from the conventional system because of these three features, learner autonomy, distance between the teacher and the learner, and the structural differences. The system is based on the pedagogical approach of student-centredness and changing from conventional classroom teaching and learning to self-study using self-instructional materials. Students in a distance learning environment can either study at the same time but at different venues or can study independently anywhere and

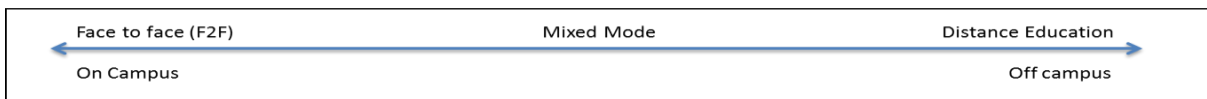
anytime. However, despite the geographical distance, with advancing technology, students can still communicate with teachers and amongst each other at the same time while at different locations (synchronous) or asynchronously at different times (Dzakiria, 2005; Simonson et al., 2003).

Wedemeyer dismissed the notion that teaching and learning only takes place through the institutionalised relationship where the teacher and learner share the environment at the same time (Deil-Amen, 2011). Holmberg's theory of independent learning or what he refers to as "guided didactic conversation" places the student at the centre of learning and the teacher plays a prominent role in the learning process as a coach only (Garrison, 2000; Holmberg, 1985; Pyari, 2011). An issue that is under investigation through this study is to determine how learners become aware about the urgency of changing their attitude and how they cope after changing from the conventional mode of study to ODL. This study wants to establish how the learners transferring from the conventional to distance education are coping with the elements of autonomy, distance between teacher and student, and the structural changes as advanced in various theories. At times, most learners who are engaging with distance education are considered mature adults who are capable of coping with the studies on their own; this is not always the case with the NAMCOL learners. Above 70% of registered learners are below 24 years of age (NAMCOL, 2013). Though ODL places the learner at the centre of the learning environment that does not imply that the teacher/tutor should take the backstage. Interaction, even though irregular, between the learner and teacher is paramount for the learner to succeed. In the context of this study, these learners were accustomed to frequent interaction between themselves and the teacher; therefore the lack of any interaction may be detrimental and could lead to withdrawal and low pass rates.

SAIDE (2014) illustrates the different types of education provision on the continuum in Fig. 2.1. The distance education mode of delivery is on the extreme end of the continuum. The figure shows that when there is greater separation between the teacher and student, the more the education leans towards distance education, and when there is lesser separation and more direct contact between the student and teacher, the more the education leans toward the conventional face-to-face delivery mode. The vast distance between the two modes of education delivery may have an

influence on students transferring from one system to another. Students transferring from conventional to the distance learning mode may have to deal with a change of mind set during this transition period. This particular issue will be explored through this study. Ideally, education provision should move more towards the midpoint of the continuum since the elements of face-to-face mode of delivery and the ODL mode of delivery are equally important for teaching and learning to effectively take place. However, this is quite a challenge in practice because both the students and teachers on the extreme ends of the continuum are accustomed to a particular teaching and learning style. Students who were accustomed to a large component of face-to-face teaching have to adapt to independent learning which is heavily required in distance learning and rely on fewer face-to-face tutorials. NAMCOL has to ensure that both the learners and tutors understand the principles of ODL mode of delivery.

### Spatial or geographic distribution of teachers and learners



**Figure 2.1: Different types of education provision (SAIDE, 2014)**

This connotes that both the traditional and distance form of learning have strengths and weaknesses, and that practitioners should capitalise on the strengths of the two systems to serve learners better.

## 2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Education provision through the various modes of delivery is a dynamic process and has to keep abreast with technological changes. Due to the diverse nature of education provision, scholars have developed various theories to substantiate their research. Tinto's theory of social and academic integration and Michael Moore's theory of transactional distance are complementary in this study and also provide critical analysis of the findings.

### 2.3.1 TINTO'S STUDENT INTEGRATION MODEL

Tinto's integration model serves as a solid point of departure for this research. The main purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of students during the transition from the conventional to distance learning. Additionally, a specific objective of this study is to establish how students adapt to the distance-learning mode. This study offers us the opportunity to validate Tinto's model of student integration. Tinto (1975) saw an analogy between Durkheim's theory of suicide and college student dropout (Durkheim, Simpson, & Spaulding, 1952). Durkheim asserts that when people are less integrated into the society, they are more likely to commit suicide, and the likelihood of suicide increases when the moral (value) integration and collective affiliation are lacking (Tinto, 1975). Tinto has applied Durkheim theory to the college environment and developed the student integration model.

According to Tinto, students are likely to withdraw if they are not fully integrated or if they display values different from the values of the institution they are attached to (Christie, & Dinham, 1991). Although Tinto's model was developed for the conventional college environment, the researcher's opinion is that the model is appropriate and can be applied to any learning environment. Tinto (1982) admits that his theory cannot explain everything and it is necessary to modify his model when applied to students outside the conventional learning environment. Sweet (1986) attempted to apply Tinto's model to a distance learning context. He alluded to the fact that quality communication between the student and teacher in distance education settings is an effective form of social integration (Bernard, & Amundsen, 2008). Hence, the researcher's decision to apply Tinto's model as an appropriate model to address the element of student transition from the conventional delivery mode to the ODL mode.

Tinto's model suggests that the college is made up of social and academic systems and for one to fully integrate into the college environment, a reciprocal relationship between the two systems is important. Academic integration occurs when there is connection between the student and the intellectual life of the institution, while social integration refers to the relationship and connections with peers and the institution but are outside the boundaries of a classroom (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2010). Institutions of learning should become a second home to the students. If students

develop negative attitudes towards the institutions, they are likely to fail in meeting their educational goals. Karp et al. (2010) posit that institutions should provide adequate structured opportunities through information networks and other social channels to facilitate full engagement with the institution and to increase the persistence rate.

According to Tinto's model, for students to fully integrate into the institution, they progress through three phases, namely; separation, transition and incorporation (Tinto, 1997b). Similarly, Pryor, Taneja, Humphreys, Anderson, and Singleton (2008) claim that for any change to take place, a person should leave the present and move to the future and put necessary measures in place for any change to become a reality and successful. During the first phase, the individual is separated from the past associations and there is a drop in interactions between the individual and the members of the group, be it teachers or fellow students. As learners are entering the new learning environment, they feel isolated and are reluctant to connect to the new environment. It takes students some time to adapt to the new learning environment. McGivney\* (2004) reaffirms that the challenge of settling in and integrating into the life of the institution can lead to early withdrawal (p.40).

In the context of this study, the majority of students joining the college are from the conventional system and have to overcome the challenge of adjusting to the distance-learning mode of study in order to be incorporated into this new environment. Learners' ability to adjust and adapt to the new environment will have an influence on learners' persistence or withdrawal from the institution (Woodley, de Lange, & Tanewski, 2001). Those who are unable to divorce from their previous engagements are likely not to be able to make the transition to the new environment. Students go through a social and emotional transplantation process during the separation stage (Woodley et al., 2001).

The second phase is the transition stage. At this stage, learners start connecting to the new environment by learning new ways and by acquiring knowledge and skills required to adapt to the new learning environment. At this stage, there is a high degree of acceptance to the new learning environment. The individual abandons the old engagements and establish new personal bonds. Learners need strong support



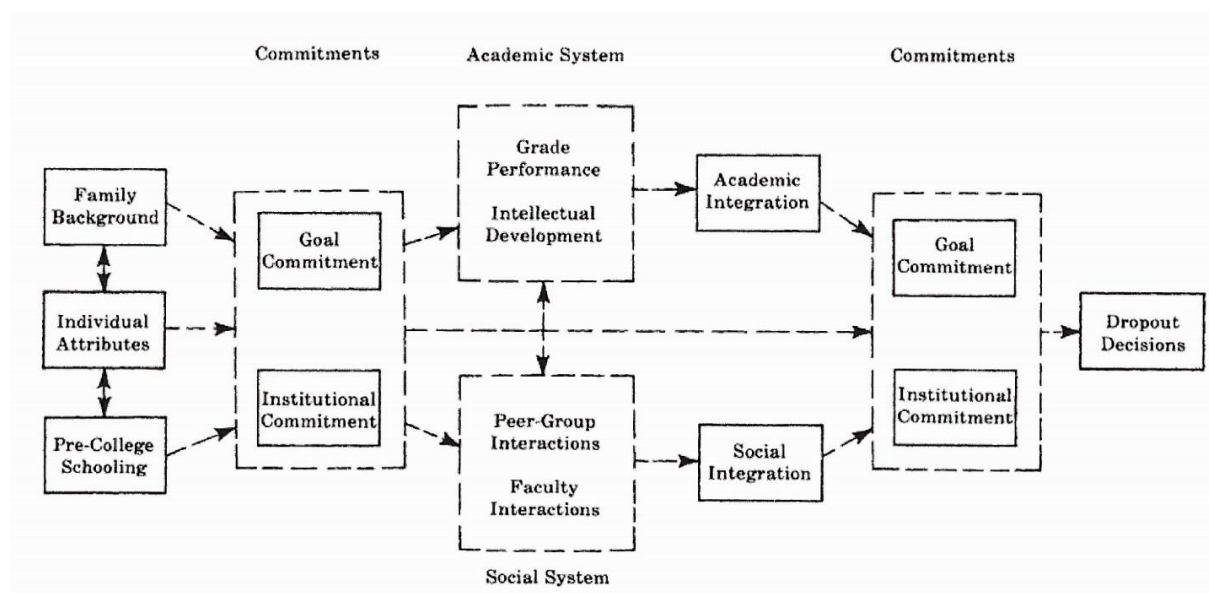
which include academic counselling to avoid any early withdrawals before they attempt to adjust to the new environment or new pedagogical approach to learning. It is at this stage of transition that students joining NAMCOL from the conventional system should start showing appreciation and understanding of the ODL system at early stages of learning. Tinto's model is not specific in terms of the timeframe for students to start connecting to the institution; it varies from student to student. The study will further establish how long it takes for the connection to take place and whether students' characteristics and attributes such as prior learning experience have any influence on this.

In the final incorporation phase, the individual interacts freely with members of a new group. At this stage, the individual fully integrates into the new learning environment. Tinto (1988) posits that the "individual leaves the old environment (separation), enters the new environment (transition) and takes up residence in a new environment (incorporation) (p.441). The movement from a familiar to an unknown new environment makes learners feel isolated, argues Tinto. The change in learning environment has severe implications on those entering the new environment for the very first time as this environment's social and academic orientation might be completely different from the previous one. Tinto's theory argues that the lack of integration leads to isolation and disconnectedness between the student and the institution and that is likely to lead to withdrawal (Deil-Amen, 2011).

According to Tinto (1997), students join the new institution with a variety of attributes, such as, prior learning experience, family and work commitments. These attributes may have an impact on whether students complete their studies or withdraw from the new environment. They also join a new institution with certain expectations. Tinto (ibid) was of the opinion that students find it difficult to make transition from secondary to post-secondary settings as they move away from the familiar established social networks. However, students are more likely to remain with the institution when they are either academically or socially integrated. The higher the degree of integration, the greater the commitment to the institution and to the goal of completion (Tinto, 1975).



Tinto's model argues that students who fully integrate within the institutions are likely to succeed because their expectations will be met; those that find it difficult to integrate are most likely to withdraw. The degree of commitment may influence the learner's ability to fully integrate into the social and academic aspects of the college. Withdrawal in the context of this study does not necessarily refer to complete withdrawal, but failing to attend contact sessions or submit assignments and sit for the national examinations. Tinto (1975) views the process of student integration between the individual and the academic and social systems as longitudinal. Individuals join the new learning environment with certain characteristics, pre-learning experiences and family backgrounds. These characteristics and attributes have a great deal of influence on goal and institutional commitment. The student commitment to the goal of attaining the qualification and the commitment to the institution determines whether the individual will remain in the programme or drop out. If the student is less committed to his or her personal goal of completing the qualification and also shows less commitment to the institution, the likelihood for early withdrawal is high. Tinto's theoretical model presented in Figure 2.2 below:



**Figure 2.2: Tinto's Conceptual Model for Dropout from the College (Tinto, 1987)**

The study's auxiliary objective is to establish factors that contribute to the different learning experiences as well as to determine challenges experienced during the transition period. Tinto's theoretical framework is relevant for the current study because it will be applied to explain how learners integrate successfully into the new environment and at what stage in the academic year they integrate. Dodd, Kirby,

Seifert and Sharpe (2009) used Tinto's person-environment fit theory to explore the impact of high school online experience on students' performance and persistence in the first year of university and found that persistence was more tangible and withdrawal lower for those that completed online distance education courses in high school (p.6).

Although Tinto's model is relevant for this research, it has been critiqued by other researchers. However, Sweet (1986) validated Tinto's model in an ODL environment. Sweet refers to social interaction as the quality of communication between the student and the tutor (Bernard, & Amundsen, 2008). Several modifications were also made to Tinto's model. For example, Baker and Siryk (1999) distinguished academic, social, personal and emotional adjustment and attachment as important for academic integration. Schmidt et al. (2010) provide an alternative to Tinto's integration theory. They valued more time for self-directed learning activities as key to improve performance rate. Their theory focused more on the learning process itself rather than student perception of integration. Another critique is that Tinto's model was developed for full-time on-campus students, an environment which does not fit distance education students (Kember, 1995) due to the different social environments. Kember's model is based on the premise that adults who are studying at a distance or on a part-time basis have to cope with various social demands and therefore social integration leads to academic integration. According to Kember, the academic success of students in a distance learning environment depends on social systems such as support from family members, fellow students, employers and friends (Kember, 1995). Despite the few critiques of Tinto's model and the various modification to it, the researcher believes that this model is appropriate as those entering NAMCOL are of college entering age and only join the institution to improve on their grades to proceed to the institutions of higher learning. Should they have been successful in the conventional system, they could have joined the higher institution environment the same year and at the same age.

The researcher argues that, following the analysis of the findings of this study, one should identify pertinent issues relevant to school level education that have not been uncovered by other researchers. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of students during the transition period by examining

the relevance of the various variables as proposed in Tinto's model among the students who have gone or are currently going through the NAMCOL Grade 12 programme. Tinto's three phases of integration, namely separation, transition and incorporation, which students are going through may also be applicable to those entering NAMCOL. These students are from the conventional school setting, and as they enter the college, it is obvious that they will experience separation from the former school mates and the entire school family. These students have established relationships over the years. For some these relationships started as early as pre-primary phase and continued through the junior primary, junior secondary and senior secondary phases. At the end of the senior secondary school career their long lasting relationships will be cut short: some students will proceed to the next level through tertiary education, or seek employment, while others who do not do well will approach NAMCOL or private providers to improve their grades. They have to start new relationships with fellow students and tutors. Because studying at a distance is a completely new environment and experience they may feel isolated. At the beginning they might not have someone to share their experience with, whether positive or negative. Unlike in formal schools where these learners spend quite a substantial amount of their time with fellow learners and teachers, at NAMCOL these learners meet fellow students and tutors only on the occasions when they come to the study centres for contact sessions. Thus, it may take some time to engage in new relationships. Forming new relationships can also be lengthy process especially for those students that are opting for the non-contact mode of study as they mostly meet the tutors and fellow students during the one week vacation workshops held during the May and August school holidays. The transition stage can also be challenging. At the beginning of each academic year students are orientated through the orientation workshops held at all Tutorial Centres to integrate them into the new learning environment. Part of the orientation workshops' objective is for learners to get to know each and to meet tutors.

The final phase of incorporation for NAMCOL students occurs when they are fully integrated into the new environment and can with ease participate in activities such as submission of assignments, attending tutorials and participating in class. However, some NAMCOL learners do not get to the second or third phases of integration because of early withdrawals. Some do not participate in any further activity as they

do not return to the College after registration. Given this background, the researcher maintains that Tinto's model on student integration can serve as a solid foundation for the study. Tinto's model of student integration is best fit to address the following three study objectives:

- To establish how learners adjust and adapt to the distance mode of learning;
- To determine the period/stage when learners fully integrate into the new ODL mode of delivery;
- To establish the factors that facilitate or hinder learner integration during the transition stage.

Although Tinto's theory is relevant for this study, it also has its own drawbacks. The model places much emphasis on the academic and social aspects and pays less attention to the cultural and emotional aspects that may also influence learners' integration into the institution. According to the researcher, attitude is also an aspect that can determine whether a learner will fully integrate or withdraw from the institution. If the learner joins the institution with a positive attitude toward his/her studies, that learner is more likely to succeed compared to the learner who has adopted a negative attitude. Furthermore, Tinto's model does not stress the interactions between the student and family, parents, employer and communities which are also important for integration. The study also looked at a number of factors beyond those found in the Tinto's model.

### **2.3.2 MICHAEL MOORE'S THEORY OF TRANSACTIONAL DISTANCE**

According to Moore (1993), transaction in ODL happens when there is a relationship between the teacher and student in an environment where both are separated from each other by space and time (p.22). Transactional distance does not necessarily refer to the geographical distance between the teacher and learner, but refers to the development of a particular form on interaction between the two parties because of the geographical separation (Giossos, Koutsouba, Lionarakis, & Skavantzios, 2009). Transactional distance is more a psychological and communication distance that need to be bridged by the student and teacher (Moore, 1993). This separation between the two parties can influence the learning and teaching process. According to Moore, interaction, which can be either synchronous or asynchronous, is core in any distance-learning environment. Three forms of interaction were identified by

Kearsley (1995), and Moore (1989): interaction between the students and teachers, interaction between learners themselves, and the interaction of learners with the learning content. Williams and Williams (2011) also claim positive interactions with teachers engage learners in positive learning. In the traditional learning environment much emphasis is placed on the classroom-based interaction between the students and teachers (Anderson, 2003). This study also attempts to establish the perceptions of students in terms of these various interactions as described by Moore. In the context of this study, all three forms of interaction are evident, however much emphasis is on the interaction between the students and learning content. All students are given self-contained study materials and are expected to work through the study materials for most of the time on their own. The interaction with the teacher/tutor is not regular as in the conventional school; hours to meet the tutors are limited. Also, the teacher in this environment performs a completely different role, that of facilitating learning rather than following the traditional pedagogical approach. Student-student interaction is limited because students are not confined to the environment as in schools and particularly boarding schools; instead they have to walk some distances to get to the Tutorial Centres. The schedule at some Tutorial Centres provides for an opportunity for students to engage less because they have walk to their various destinations in the evening, in certain instances as late as 22:00 hours.

The transactional distance in an ODL environment is a function of three variables namely “dialogue, structure and learner autonomy” (Giossos et al., 2009; Moore, 1993; Schlosser, & Simonson, 2009). These variables determine transactional distance. Moore's (1993) definitions of the three variables are depicted below:

- *Dialogue is a purposeful, constructive, and positive interaction that is valued by each party. Each party in a dialogue is a respectful and active listener, each is a contributor, and builds on the contributions of the other party or parties (p24).*
- *Structure refers to the rigidity or flexibility of the programme’s educational objectives, teaching strategies and evaluations methods. Structure looks at the extent to which educational programmes respond to students’ needs (p.26).*
- *Learner autonomy is the extent to which the learner in the teaching and learning relationships determines the goals, learning experiences and*

*evaluation decisions of the learning programme (p.31). To what extent the learner takes control over the learning process?*

The dialogue does not necessarily refer to a mere discussion between the teacher and student, but dialogue in the educational context where there is an understanding and cooperation from the teacher to solve students' problems. It refers to dialogue in more qualitative terms rather than focusing on the frequency of communication. Again, the theory looks at the structure in more qualitative than quantitative terms. To what extent do the educational goals, teaching techniques and assessment procedures address the educational needs of the students? In the context of this study, dialogue refers to the interaction which takes place between the tutor and learner at weekly Tutorial Centres, during the vacation workshops or any other interaction between the parties beyond the classroom environment. Similarly, structure refers to the learning resources that the learners receive and other support services put in place to enable learners to achieve the desired educational outcomes.

The wider the transactional distance, the more the responsibility is placed on the student (Garrison, 2000). The distance between the teacher and the student lead to the latter assuming a high level of independence and the teacher performing more of a supportive role. In distance education the teacher responds to the student unlike in the conventional system where the student reacts to the instructions of the teacher. Moore posits that there is a strong bond between the three variables, dialogue, structure and student autonomy. As the structure increases and dialogue decreases, the transactional distance increases and learners tend to be more autonomous. On the other hand, the more the dialogue and the lower the structure, the transactional distance becomes shorter. According to Moore (1993), most distant programmes have low dialogue and low structure while the least distant has a high dialogue and high structure. Though literature claims that the distance between the teacher and learner leads to a high level of learner autonomy, the researcher has slightly a different view on that notion. In some instances, the distance can be devastating especially for learners at school level studying through NAMCOL because they are accustomed to the traditional way of learning. Instead of these learners assuming a high degree of autonomy and independent learning, they may end up withdrawing from the course because of frustrations of engaging in an unfamiliar mode of learning.



Moore's theory advances the view that autonomous students cope well with less dialogue, and those heavily dependent on the teacher prefer more dialogue and sometimes well-structured learning materials. Autonomy is associated with a high degree of responsibility and self-directedness. This transactional distance occurs when there is a gap in communication between the teacher and the student due to geographical distance. This transactional distance can be reduced or bridged through well-developed instructional materials and increased interaction between the parties. Success in distance education programmes depends on the institution facilitating dialogue between the teacher and the student as well as the structure of the learning materials. The use of ICT can also be used to bridge the transactional distance. Tutorials, study groups, induction programmes or vacation schools and conferencing through telephone, video and computer are some of the measures of personal support used by distance learning institutions to narrow the transactional distance (Richardson, & Long, 2003). If there is a higher degree of distance where students are studying completely on their own without institutional support, Moore describes this kind of situation as a programme without dialogue and structure. Because the teacher and student are separated in time and space, the learner is compelled to accept a high degree of responsibility. Although Moore argues that transactional distance can be bridged by narrowing the communication gap between the teacher and learner through constructive dialogue as well as through well designed learning resources, the researcher would add to his view that through this dialogue the learner should be able to comprehend and articulate the content in the study guides. Otherwise, it will be a meaningless dialogue.

Students who join NAMCOL for the first time come from an environment characterised by a high degree of dialogue and structure, thus making them more dependent. At NAMCOL, however, there is a low degree of dialogue and high structure, hence students are required to take a more independent approach to learning. The expectation that the students will become independent learners is farfetched to some due to their previous learning style developed over a couple of years. As for the structure, there is reasonably high degree of structure because of the study packs received by students which contain the self-instructional materials, assignments, examinations and other relevant documents required to achieve the learning goals. Students have to engage with the self-instructional materials on their own. However,

the level of learner intellectual capacity required to comprehend the content is not certain. In analysing the experiences of the students during the transition period, the three elements of Moore's transactional theory were used to make sense of the findings. The researcher maintains that the theory of transactional distance is appropriate to answer the following research questions:

- How do learners adjust and adapt to the distance mode of learning?
- What factors facilitate or hinder learner integration during the transition period?
- What is the influence of transition experiences on learners' integration into distance learning mode?

Through this study the researcher established whether ODL students demand a high degree of dialogue, structure or both and how these variables identified by Moore influence their adaptation to the new environment.

## **2.4 STUDENT TRANSITION**

Perry and Allard (2009) describe "transition as a process or period in which something (or someone) undergoes a change and passes from one state to another, and from one activity to another" (p.75).

### **2.4.1 THE CHANGE IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Any learning environment whether formal, informal or non-formal can play a significant role in the life of student. Each environment has its own advantages and challenges. It can either contribute to the success of the student in the learning process or impede success. The narrow perception that teaching and learning only occur if this interaction between the teacher and the student takes place in a traditional classroom environment is regrettable. Lane (2009) describes the traditional school setting to an environment that is characterised by a triangular relationship or interactions between the teachers, learners and learning resources.

The school environment is highly structured and not very flexible because teaching occurs at a fixed time and place with the teacher performing the leading role of talking and directing while students listen and take notes (Msila, 2006; Shachar, & Neumann,



2003). Paolo Freire (2009) refers to this traditional form of education as the banking approach to learning. Student is viewed as an empty vessel that needs to be filled by the teacher. The teacher deposits knowledge into the student who is viewed as someone who does not know anything. According to Freire (2009), students are not given the opportunity to acquire knowledge but are required to memorise the content narrated by the teacher (Freire, 1972).

Freire's (2009) banking model of education depicts the following characteristics:

- the teacher is in charge of the teaching process and the students absorb the learning content;
- the teacher is the holder of all knowledge and the students are empty vessels;
- the teacher is a creative thinker and the students are thought about;
- the teacher speaks and the students listen attentively;
- the teacher directs and decides while the students comply;
- the teacher is the subject of the learning process while the students are mere objects;
- the teacher does not differentiate between the authority of knowledge and his or her own professional authority, which she or he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students.

Any change in life is accompanied by challenges. The learners joining NAMCOL from the conventional system have acquired particular study habits in schools, which may be difficult to lose. These learners join NAMCOL with certain expectations of the institution and its staff. In a study conducted by SAIDE (2014), students demanded to be taught the same way they were taught in the conventional learning environment. They demanded more tutorial sessions, tutors, full-time teachers and classrooms. Because of this confusion between conventional and ODL, the study suggests that NAMCOL should play a critical role in making learners understand and appreciate the differences between the two modes of learning. Learners should understand that the tutorial support session is a small component of the full scope of support services given to the learners in a distance learning environment. In the conventional settings, the face-to-face tutorial is the dominant component of the learning process.

According to Brindley (1995b), some of these expectations are unrealistic and put pressure on the ODL institutions to address the diverse learning needs of the students with limited resources and insufficient infrastructure. One such expectation is the traditional form of teaching and interaction (Taylor, 2010). Parents and the general public also demand that the College should increase its contact sessions, since there is the general perception that more contact sessions will lead to improved results. While impractical, these are not unrealistic demands, as learners' prior learning experiences were moulded in a certain way in formal schools. The demand for more contact sessions by learners and parents at NAMCOL is consistent with findings of a study conducted in Botswana. In the latter, Gatsha and Evans (2010) found out that the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi distance learners in Botswana indicated that they wanted to be taught in the same way as in a public school. Similar sentiments are expressed by Kember (2007) in a study at the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) where students demanded more lectures since they found it difficult to study on their own and to learn from discussions. The OUHK students were introduced to a new method of teaching and learning inconsistent with their beliefs. A study by Baloyi (2012) on the support services of the ABET students at UNISA revealed that almost all students interviewed felt that tutorial sessions increase success and they indicated that they wanted to see teachers teaching them. Similarly, Jaggars (2014) found that some students at the Teachers College at Columbia University prefer face-to-face learning above online learning to maintain connections with peers and teachers. The findings of these studies are likely to add value to this study since the contexts are similar.

The fact that learners prefer the conventional face-to-face mode of learning shows a tension that exists between students' expectations and the distance education mode of delivery pursued by the College. This has great potential to constrain the transition process. It is imperative to explore transitional experiences and challenges rather than simply assume that learners are able to cope and adjust to the new learning environment. The demand for more face-to-face interactions in an ODL environment is evidence that some learners are not yet confident confronting the learning content on their own. That requires a review of support systems to address the demands of the learners.

The evolutionary process of distance education requires change in the traditional roles of students and teachers. This change of learning environment entails a shift in the traditional student-teacher relations. The teacher should move from the traditional lecturing approach and perform more of a mentoring, tutoring and facilitating role (Galusha, 1998). This new approach to teaching is described by Msila (2006) as transformational teaching as students move away from the conventional approach. This view is supported by Taylor (2010) who claims that both the teacher and student should be oriented towards the new student-centred approach. In any teaching and learning environment, the teachers and students become accustomed to a particular learning model. It is daunting to change from a familiar teaching and learning style to a new type of teaching or learning. The change to a new environment calls for independent learning, which is entirely unfamiliar to students due to their prior background. Students need to adjust and adapt to a new teaching and learning environment and should also master new learning skills (Allen, Bourhis, Burrell, & Mabry, 2002). Price, Richardson, and Jelfs (2007) support the change of the teaching model in the distance learning environment to match the requirements of the student. The different roles that the teacher and learner need to perform in this new environment implies that the success of ODL does not only depend on the learner's contribution but also on the teacher's inputs and how comfortable and conversant he/she is in approaching this new mode of delivery.

In the context of this study, full-time teachers from the conventional schools are recruited to support the students. These teachers are not formally trained to assist distance learning students and they may show little sympathy for these learners joining NAMCOL from the conventional system. The teachers may lack the experience to handle ODL learners as they have never experienced distance learning before. At the beginning of each year NAMCOL teachers are trained and encouraged to follow a facilitative teaching model; however, some find it difficult to apply this model and prefer the traditional teaching model they are used to in the conventional schools. Although ODL requires the teachers to change from the traditional way of teaching to a more learner-centred approach to learning, at times tutors spend most of the time lecturing rather than engaging learners in a dialogue. This view is corroborated by Mdakane (2011), and Tenenbaum et al. (2001) who claim that teachers prefer to employ traditional teaching methods even if they are familiar with ODL principles.

Although ODL requires a substantial amount of self-study, it does not necessarily imply that learners study entirely on their own. However, what matters is the frequency of face-to-face intervention between the student and teacher. Latchman et al. (1999), and Price et al. (2007) support the importance of interaction between the teacher and student in an ODL environment which they regard as two-way, not one-way as is typical of the conventional learning situation. The presence of the tutor in the distance learning environment sustains student motivation and promotes student autonomy (Price et al., 2007). However, regular face-to-face intervention is not always feasible in ODL settings due to students' schedules determined by work, family and other commitments.

Freire (2000) sees education as a political process where the teacher and the student should engage in a kind of dialogue. Thus, students do benefit from the limited contact sessions. This view is confirmed in a study that reviewed the roles and functions of NAMCOL in which stakeholders who were consulted indicated that the College should set up its own physical infrastructure including hostels facilities and also considering appointing own full-time teachers (SAIDE, 2011). This shows the general public's misunderstanding of how learning takes place through distance education. This view was reaffirmed in a study by SAIDE aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of learner support services at the NAMCOL. Learners demanded more tutorial sessions and full-time teachers (SAIDE, 2014). These views held by the learners showed that they did not fully differentiate between distance learning and conventional school system. Learners and all stakeholders should understand that learning can take place anyway, anytime and in any setting and that learners should assume a different role when changing from one learning environment to another. Mitra and Hendrikz (2009) express the view that because of the new learning theories and the rapidly changing technology, learning is no longer driven at institutions but is self-directed though the use of distance learning methodologies. Taylor (2010) identifies "decreasing reliance on face-to-face teaching, increasing reliance on student self-management and independence and increasing reliance on information communication technologies" as three features of what he refer to as flexile learning environment. Some scholars use the term heutagogy to explain how learning should take place in distance education.

“In a heutagogical approach to teaching and learning, learners are highly autonomous and self-determined and emphasis is placed on development of learner capacity and capability with the goal of producing learners who are well-prepared for the complexities of today’s workplace” (Blaschke, 2012).

Despite the fact that students and teachers are expected to perform different roles, a study by Richardson (2003) which was aimed at identifying issues students face in the initial transition to the university show that students continue with learning habits developed at school though they are required to become independent students. It remains a daunting task for learners to relinquish the learning habits they are used to during the education and to adopt new ones.

According to Bullen (2007), a preferred learning style makes students feel comfortable. Bullen (2007) reports on a study on student participation in online university distance education which revealed that those students who identified themselves as shy introverts find it difficult to participate in the traditional campus-based classes characterised by competition among the verbally skilled. Students migrating from the conventional school system may therefore experience the new learning environment differently because of diverse learning styles.

The underpinning philosophy in ODL is that learners can be assisted to acquire knowledge on their own and the tutor is a mere facilitator in the learning process. In this environment the students should be at the forefront by taking the role of facilitating own learning. Students engage in the learning process at a time and place convenient to them rather than at a time which is convenient to school (Hannay, & Newvine, 2006). For many of NAMCOL learners, ODL remains an unfamiliar territory because of their previous teaching and learning experience.

Students join ODL with vast number of experiences and attributes they have gained over the years. ODL institutions should draw on these experiences and consider each individual student as a critical learning resource. The life experiences, attributes and perspectives they bring to the learning environment serve as reservoirs for learning (Imel, 1998). Students are expected to display these kinds of attributes as they enter this new learning environment, which is sometimes becoming a daunting task to them.

Throughout their school career, these students are accustomed to learning directed by the teacher and find it extremely difficult to display self-directedness and independent learning, which are key attributes of ODL. The role of the teacher and the student is interchangeable because both can learn from each other (Imel, 1998). Students might experience the shift in the pedagogical approach to learning differently. Contrary to this, a study by Hannay and Newvine (2006) comparing the perceptions of students in different learning environments showed that students were more motivated and disciplined to study in a distance learning environment than in a traditional learning environment (p.6).

According to Qakisa-Makoe (2005), learners in an ODL environment are not only physically separated, but also emotionally and socially separated; support from the institution breaks this separation so that learners can maximise the learning experience. A large proportion of NAMCOL learners have spent a relatively long period in the traditional classroom-based environment. The vast majority of learners lack the experience to study through distance education and might find it challenging to cope with the subject content on their own without proper guidance. Learners may lack the required skills necessary to cope with distance learning.

These learners are used to what Jones and Iredale (2010) refer to as traditional didactic pedagogy where knowledge is imparted to passive individuals with a low level of participation. In the traditional didactic pedagogy model there is unlimited interaction and students reproduce what they are being taught. This pedagogical approach to learning is what Bullen (2007) refers to as dialogical teaching style and Jones and Iredale (2010) refer to as enterprise education pedagogy which advocates for action and an experiential learning style. In the new learning environment, although face-to-face remains highly valued for learners in ODL settings to succeed, it is not as regular as in the conventional settings. Additionally, the approach to face-to-face support in an ODL environment is different because the teacher is no longer required to follow the traditional teaching approach but takes a more facilitative role of guiding and directing the learner as well as connecting the learner to the institution.

Emphasis in an ODL environment is no longer on the dialogue between the student and the teacher, but the student should pay much attention to the structure put in

place to facilitate learning. The students should engage intently for most of the time with the instructional self-study materials issued to them, which have been developed in such a way that they substitute the tutor since the contact sessions with tutors are limited. In fact, these learning resources serve as a substitute for the tutor who is not readily available. Moore (1993) alluded to the fact that the more the structure and lower the dialogue, the more the responsibility for learning is placed on the student. Hence, the lack of experience of studying through the distance mode of learning can be frustrating to some and that might impede learners from fully integrating into the new learning environment. The lack of integration might ultimately affect their academic performance as well. Some scholars argue that students do not only adjust academically but also socially and culturally (Engle, 2007; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). A robust learner support system is a prerequisite to enable these students migrating from the conventional system to ODL to cope with the new mode of learning. Literature show that learning support is vital for learners in the ODL environment to succeed (Dzakiria, 2005; Potter, 2013; Qakisa-Makoe, 2005; Rowntree, 1992; Rumble, 2000).

## **2.5 FACTORS THAT HINDER OR FACILITATE LEARNER INTEGRATION**

Any change in life can be very unsettling (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). This same view is also corroborated by Hertel (2010) who states that transition to college can be a stressful experience in a student's life. According to Pauley (2011), the student's ability to adjust to a new environment can be linked to several affective domains, namely, motivation, locus of control and satisfaction (p.45). Furthermore McInnis, James, and McNaught (1995) express the view that for some students the transition can be challenging and intimidating. Gardner (2013) also alluded to the fact that students entering college for the first time struggle during this major transitional time even if they are emotionally or academically prepared. To the contrary, transition in life can also create valuable opportunities for growth and change (Hicks, & Heastie, 2008). This view is supported by Dzakiria (2005) who claims that the new approach to learning can either be accepted by learners to enhance learning or impede learning. Perry and Allard (2009) reassure students that what they are feeling or experiencing is a normal part of any transition experience.



Thompson's (1997) study on the attrition and persistence of distance learners revealed that the low level of communication with tutors and non-constructive, negative and demeaning comments on the assignments are some of the reasons for withdrawal in the course. This shows that transition can have a positive or negative influence on the learning process. Where transition impedes learning, ODL institutions should enhance their support systems to assist learners to cope with the transition. Furthermore, where transition supports or enhances learning, ODL institutions should not become complacent but should continue improving support systems to enable learners to achieve better educational outcomes.

Students enter the new distance-learning environment with little knowledge of what is required. During the transition period, students are more vulnerable as they are not well equipped to cope with the demands of the new environment. Although distance education is meant to increase access by removing or minimising unnecessary barriers to learning, ODL practitioners overlook the fact that students are confronted with new demands of adapting to the environment and adjusting to novel ways of learning. Although independent learning in distance education is encouraged, moving from one mode of delivery to another is an enormous change for some students. What exacerbates the matter is that the frustrations and isolation the learners experience when engaging in distance learning are not grasped by the tutors because they are also products of the conventional system. Transition is an enormous change for students at middle-age who are pursuing school equivalency programmes through ODL. Learners feel insecure and isolated due to the new environment and they are likely to be frustrated (Baloyi, 2012).

According to Tinto (1987, 1999), the transition from high school to university can place high demands on students and can be stressful. Qakisa-Makoe (2005) maintains that many black students in South Africa are from families where they are the first generation to engage in higher education and as they enter the higher education distance learning environment for the first time, they have to confront complex learning materials on their own and adopt new approaches to learning. Adjusting to the new ways of learning is daunting, especially with no support in the home. In the context of this study, the NAMCOL learners may also experience lack of support at home because ODL is often a new concept to their parents because of their prior



training experience through the traditional school system. Also, some parents have not received any formal training and thus cannot assist their children. The negative perceptions of ODL may contribute to lack of support for learners pursuing studies through this mode of delivery.

Transition to a new environment can be met with excitement or anxiety depending on the prior learning experience (Elffers, & Oort, 2013). A study on students' educational attitudes on transition to post-secondary education by Elffers and Oort (ibid) reveals that students who do not succeed are more skeptical about the prospects of the second opportunity. The students are often discouraged by the failure of the first attempt. The findings of Elffers and Oort (2013) are relevant to NAMCOL learners since the majority of learners who enrol for ODL courses did not succeed in passing their exams during the first attempt in the conventional system and might also be pessimistic of succeeding through ODL where the teacher is not always present to assist. Thus, prior experience has the potential to undermine students' confidence to succeed.

Distance education learners are exposed to and have to confront experiences such as isolation, insecurity, greater self-discipline and alienation in the distance learning environment (Dzakiria, 2005; Kember, 2007; Morgan, 2013; Mowes, 2005; Potashnik, & Capper, 1998; Qakisa-Makoe, 2005). Wilson, Bialk, Freeze, Freeze and Lutfiyya, (2012), when sharing their experiences during transition to post-secondary education learners cited exam anxiety, coping with assignments, adjustment to university life and developing relationships with peers as challenges during the transition stage. Other challenges of transition in post-secondary education are time management, study skills and ability to cope with the challenges of higher education (Barron, & D'Annunzio-Green, 2009; Mdakane, 2011). Managing study time is also cited by McGivney (2004) as a reason for non-completion of distance education studies. Talbot (2010) also highlights a lack of self-confidence, self-discipline, time management, perseverance and a balanced learning style as key attributes that affect distance education learners and contribute to stress in the transition process. Romero (2011) refers to study time which is in direct competition with other commitments that challenge students in ODL settings. The lack of intrinsic motivation amongst learners at secondary school level is cited by Murphy and Rodríguez-Manzanares (2009).

Unlike students at conventional institutions who have a pre-determined number of mandatory sessions to attend, in a distance learning environment the onus to attend lies with the student. A distance education student can determine own study time as well as the pace at which he/she studies. As a result, some distance learning students lack the discipline to manage own study time. In the case of NAMCOL, not all learners attend the tutorial sessions arranged for them because the sessions are not mandatory.

A case study by Makoe (nd) which sought clarity on student support at Unisa found that the culture of autonomous and independent learning is challenging to students because of poor institutional support. Dzakiria (2005) reaffirms that studying at a distance is a complex process and is different from studying in the conventional setting because challenges students encounter differ from one student to another and the degree of complexity also differs. Thus, the institution has to provide support to a diverse range of learners. A study by Potter (2013) assessing support services at three Canadian dual mode institutions indicated that insufficient communication with the instructors and among the students themselves led to a sense of isolation which hindered students' academic progress. How to start as a distance student, the delivery approach and potential effects of distance study were areas which require further study (Potter, 2013). This shows the importance of first acquainting students to the new environment to enable them to cope.

One of NAMCOL's recent studies revealed that some stakeholders claimed that ODL is not suitable for students in the secondary education programme because they perceive them as immature and lacking in motivation and self-discipline (SAIDE, 2011). For this reason, stakeholders suggested parental support and the implementation of a structured monitoring systems at centres similar to what is used in schools. Simonson et al. (2003) remark that those who are younger in age are likely to pose challenges to the tutor, because their engagement in a distance learning setting is not by choice but because of lack of access to traditional face-to-face classes. To some extent this may be true of some younger NAMCOL learners who did not attain the required academic competencies to proceed to the next level. Some of these students fall in the age range of below 18 years. This view is confirmed by the recent tracer study conducted on former Grade 12 NAMCOL students, where

more than 50% of the respondents revealed that the College should increase its face-to-face tutorial sessions (SAIDE, 2012). Findings of the tracer study indicated that learners wanted a system which resembled the conventional system mainly because they were unfamiliar with the experience of directing their own learning. A study by Guri-Rosenblit (2005) clearly showed that students in ODL demand more face-to-face interaction with tutors despite additional learning resources provided in the form of self-instructional study materials and multi-media content. The views expressed in the preceding text concur with the study by Potter (2013) which indicated that students who have experienced both conventional and distance study preferred the traditional mode of delivery.

Baloyi (2012) found that the lack of reading, writing and listening in an academic context are key challenges faced by ODL students. Rekkedal as cited by Galusha (1998) maintained that students with prior learning experience in distance education are more likely to continue with their studies than those with exclusively conventional experience because the former have developed the skills to cope with distance learning problems. Additionally, Morgan (2013), and Simonson et al. (2003) are of the same view that prior learning experience impacts on the current situation and some students engaging in distance learning for the first time may show some discomfort.

One of this study auxiliary objectives is to establish how the students adapt to the distance learning environment. Do the new intakes joining NAMCOL for the first time adapt well to this new environment in comparison with those with prior learning experience of studying through distance education and vice versa?

The literature shows the general lack of understanding of the unique nature of ODL on the part of the learners. ODL institutions should therefore have an understanding of challenges learners experience during the transition period. Study habits acquired through the traditional mode of learning might pose potential challenges to learning for some students engaging with studies through distance learning. Although there is an assumption that adult learners are motivated and ready to study at a distance, they sometimes lack the skills necessary for ODL.

ODL institutions should explore how to creatively and proactively equip learners with skills relevant for them to adjust easily to the new unfamiliar environment. An intensive programme orientating students on the elements of distance education is a measure that may help students to cope during transition period. Additionally, to address the psychological needs of the students, academic counselling at an early stage may also assist students to adjust easily to the new ODL mode of delivery.

## **2.6 STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES DURING THE TRANSITION**

Woosley and Miller (2009) attest that transition experiences may have different effects on different outcomes as students may experience it differently, either positively or negatively (p.5). Some learners, depending on their characteristics, take advantage of ODL and make success of their studies (Zhao, Lei, Yan, Lai, & Tan, 2005). The study by Cross and Carpentier (2009) aimed at establishing factors contributing to the poor performance of new students from historically disadvantaged social groups in South African higher education found that black male are less successful than their female counterparts because they do not complete the course within the minimum prescribed study period. The study revealed intensity of work, rhythm of progress and the degree of independence as contributing factors affecting students during transition. Students have difficulties adapting to the new environment, as they are confronted with the academic text in English, and as they continue to approach their studies with the same attitudes they had in secondary schools. This finding is closely related to learning transition for newly enrolled ODL students in general and learners from the formal schools entering NAMCOL in particular. Due to the high degree of independent study required at NAMCOL, it is understandable if some find it challenging to integrate into the new learning environment and to expect the same arrangements they had in formal schools.

As revealed through the findings in the study by Cross and Carpentier (ibid) lack of proficiency in English is a challenge which is compounded by the fact that most of the time these learners have to confront the course content on their own. For example, in the context of this study, out of the 13 482 learners who sat for NSSC English Second Language national examination in 2012, only 1 940 scored a D-grade or higher (Ministry of Education, 2013). Lack of proficiency in the English language is also a constraining factor to smooth transition.

Chikoko's (2010) study focused on the experiences of part-time first year Master of Education students in the Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Chikoko (ibid) observed withdrawals without reason during the first semester of the first year and that prompted the researchers to investigate how students experienced part-time study at the faculty. Mixed feelings on the timing of contact sessions were reported. Some students reported that weekday afternoons were suitable while others reported exhaustion following a day's work. This showed that the timing of contact sessions impeded students from integrating into the institutional culture. Although students acknowledged that they managed to study on their own, the element of collaborative learning was lacking since they lived long distances apart. The dependency syndrome was evident in the demands of students to have access to reading materials at the beginning of the semester.

In another study on transition, Leese (2010) focused on the early experiences of first year students who were studying full-time in an early childhood programme at the Wolverhampton University. The study aimed to explore whether cultural capital and habitus have any impact on the learning experiences of new students during the transition to higher education. Though students expressed mixed feelings on the transition difficulties, the vast majority expressed their concern about becoming independent learners in the new solitary environment. Students demanded more structured activities on campus to engage with lectures or other students to enable them to fit into the university learning environment especially in the first semester. The study proposed an appropriate student support system to enable students to cope with the transition difficulties during the earlier stage of their studies. The findings of this study by Leese (ibid) recognised interaction as a critical element in distance education to increase student achievement. Dialogue or interaction with tutors or fellow students is essential for students to succeed in ODL (Kearsley, 1995; Lentell, 2004). Positive interaction with peers can lead to a sense of belonging which promotes persistence and academic achievement (Locks et al., 2008). If the various interactions have been proven as critical for the success of ODL, what can be said about interaction for the freshman who was never exposed to this mode of study? Furthermore, the issue of student support in distance education is widely recognised as vital for ODL students to succeed (Tait, 2000; Rumble, 2000; Mills, 2003; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2003; Mowes, 2005; Daniel, 2010; Galusha,

2011; Moore, 2013). Tinto (2005) mentioned commitment, expectation, support, feedback, involvement and learning as key conditions for first year college students to succeed. Institutions of learning should have an understanding of the character and diversity of first year students, according to Tinto (ibid). Understanding the student profile assists ODL practitioners to devise appropriate support strategies to enable learners to cope with the transition challenge.

In a study by Mdakane (2011) on student satisfaction amongst ODL Bed Hons students at the North West University, the element of isolation came out strongly. Students complained about doing assignments on their own without sharing ideas and thoughts with fellow students. Any student entering a new learning environment is joining with prior knowledge and experiences. There are also certain expectations in terms of what to gain from the learning experience. Although the students from Mdakane's study were studying through the distance learning mode, they tended to demand things typical of the conventional system. Some students felt that the facilitators should direct learning by telling them what to do, including explanations on the assignments. The students struggled to study independently, felt isolated and unsupported, thus led to additional stress and frustration (p.127). The element of isolation also came out strongly in the study by Owens et al. (2009) that investigated the experiences of remote students in Australia: students felt that self-motivation, time management and achieving a work-life balance are key in completing their studies. These are some comments from students on the element of isolation:

“The challenge is feeling isolated. So much reading and suddenly you have to have knowledge – but with no confirmation that you are on the right track.”

“It's the isolation – I missed face-to-face, you feel so alone.” (p.5)

The expectations from the students identified in these afore-mentioned studies may be similar to those of NAMCOL learners. Many of these learners joining NAMCOL have very limited experience of studying through distance and if not well informed, might not be able to distinguish between conventional and distance learning. Thus, they may cherish unrealistic expectations of a distance learning environment. This study therefore sought to obtain the views and expectations of NAMCOL students during the transition from the conventional to a distance learning environment.



Kirby, Sharpe, Bourgeois and Greene (2010) conducted an exploratory qualitative study that sought to determine the perceptions of high school distance e-learners on online learning at post-secondary education level. This study investigated how students' perceptions compare to those who did not participate in high school distance e-learning courses. On the question of preferred learning environment, the majority of the students who enrolled at post-secondary level opted for face-to-face regardless of whether they had completed online courses at high school or not. Students cited assistance with learning, communication, ease of learning, personal interaction and structured learning environment as the main reasons why they preferred face-to-face learning. Those who participated in online learning courses indicated that the mode of delivery helped them to exercise a greater level of independence, self-discipline and responsibility which are valuable skills required for studies as post-secondary levels. The findings of the study by Kirby et al (2010) was of significant value for this study which explored the perceptions of learners on the preferred mode of delivery: do learners prefer the teacher-led face-to-face delivery model as opposed to the ODL mode where the teacher performs more of a facilitative role and why?

Galusha (1998) expressed the view that barriers students encountered in distance learning environment fall in the following categories: costs and motivators, feedback and teacher contact, student support and services, alienation and isolation, lack of experience and training (p.9). Social interaction is a critical element in any learning environment and students in an ODL environment do not interact with their counterparts and teachers on a regular basis and as a result, they feel alienated or isolated from the scholarly community (Galusha, 1998). The inexperience of distance students in managing their study time and the learning materials is another problem cited by Galusha.

Price et al. (2007), in a similar study, revealed poorer experiences of online students compared to those of students who received face-to-face tuition. Tutoring was viewed as a highly valued academic activity. Online tutoring was new to these students who needed more support and guidance (Price et al., 2007).

Given the above, it can be deduced that learners transiting from conventional to distance learning require additional support and guidance to cope with distance learning.

## 2.7 STUDENT INTEGRATION

Brower (1992) sees integration as the outcome of interactions between students and the college environments. The first year at college is very crucial for students because it serves as a foundation for the years that will follow in a student's education career (Woosley, & Miller, 2009). This is also the period when most adjustments take place. The same can be said about the first experience at a distance learning environment for someone coming from the traditional classroom setting. The transition challenge that either leads to withdrawal or unsatisfactory performance has prompted many researchers to devise models to redress the situation. Background characteristics, initial commitments, academic integration, social integration, commitments and persistence are key variables used in Tinto model on academic and social integration. The model suggests that students are likely to adjust and persist when they are both academically or socially integrated and even more likely to persist if both forms of integration occur (p.2). According to Tinto, students shall continue to enrol at the institution if they are connected in one way or another to its academic and social life. Persistence is therefore linked to integration. Those that remain at the periphery and find it hard to engage socially and academically are less likely to persist. Baker and Siryk (1999b) differentiate four concepts of academic integration: academic, social, personal, emotional adjustment and attachment. On the other hand, Bean (1990) suggests that past academic performance and socioeconomic status are variables that influence the interaction of students with the institution. The person-environment fit theory deals with the key attributes such as motivation, ability and productivity required to fit into a working environment. The person-environment fit theory deals with the adjustment of an individual to an environment which can either lead to stress and low productivity or high productivity if he or she fits adapts well (Caplan, 1987). By applying the person-environment fit theory to an educational setting, Feldman, Smart, and Ethington (2004) established that students who are more congruent with an educational environment are more likely to increase their skills and knowledge than those who are incongruent (p.546).



The study of Fjortoft (1995) in testing models of adult student persistence in distance learning programmes applies two sets of variables, such as age, gender and demographic characteristics, as first set of variables and the previous college experience, such as previous grade and level of satisfaction, as second set of variables. The study found that students with higher levels of perceived intrinsic benefits to obtain a qualification were more likely to persist in a distance learning programme. Older students find it more challenging to persist in the distance learning programme than younger students. The study conducted by Park and Choi (2009) on the factors that influence adult learners' decision to drop out or persist in online learning identifies family support, organisational support, relevance of the course and course satisfaction as factors enhancing student persistence in a course. Furthermore, Liao and Wang (2011) argue that students with low confidence levels are unwilling to actively participate in the learning process or fully integrate with the institution.

Academic and social integration refers to the extent to which students adapt to the academic and social life at educational institutions (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012) (p.17). According to Kember (1995), academic integration in distance education refers to the different facets of course delivery while social integration has to deal with the way the student tries to reconcile the learning content with other commitments such work, family and social lives. Findings of previous research found academic integration more important for students to cope with during the transition stage (Deil-Amen, 2011; Rienties et al., 2012). A study by Rienties et al. (2012) focusing on the relationship between academic and social integration with regard to the academic performance of international and Dutch students at five business schools in the Netherlands showed that academic integration contributes positively to academic performance. The study further revealed that a strong correlation between academic performance following the first year of study and three of Baker and Siryk (1999b) four academic integration scales, namely academic, personal-emotional adjustment and attachment (p.18). Another notable case study by Pauley (2011) to determine the factors that influence the first-year persistence among the 2009 intake of freshmen at Marshall University places academic integration above social integration in terms of student persistence.

Furthermore, commitment to education was cited as a predominant factor which influences persistence (p.105).

The case study by Kubala (2000) on college students' integration revealed that those students who integrated academically also felt socially integrated. However, the study did not show any correlation between integration and withdrawal rates. A study by Bers and Smith (1991) shows that students' educational objectives, precollege characteristics and employment status make a more substantial contribution to students' persistence than either academic and social integration (p.552). Peer group interactions form part of social interaction (Tinto, 1987). This view is supported by Locks et al. (2008); Severiens and Wolff (2008) that interactions with fellow learners leads to sense of belonging and academic success. Eccles, Barber, Stone, and Hunt (2003) claim that participation in non-academic activities helps students to discover their identity and establish and maintain relationships with fellow students. On the other hand, Mannan (2007) presents a balanced view by arguing that those participating too often in non-curricular activities are likely to devote less time to their studies than those who participated less frequently and who could thus pay more attention to their studies and excel academically.

Richardson and Long (2003) indicate that engagement or disengagement with an institution depends largely on the interactions with teaching staff or fellow learners (p.224). Personal engagement can narrow the distance between the student and the teacher (McGivney, 2004; Moore, 1993; Richardson, 2003).

Woosley and Miller (2009) sought to determine whether early college experiences impact academic outcomes and found that academic integration, social integration and institutional commitment positively impact on student performance and retention (p.4). It is therefore important for institutions at early stages to engage students by providing opportunities for them to fully integrate into the institutional culture.

A recent study on the roles and functions of NAMCOL revealed that some stakeholders viewed NAMCOL as an institution for failures (SAIDE, 2011). A large proportion of the students joining NAMCOL are regarded as 'failures' because they did not achieve the minimum requirements to proceed to the next level. These

students are looked down upon by their counterparts and other members of society and may develop a negative attitude towards their studies. Ultimately this situation may influence students' ability to adjust to the new learning environment. Elffers and Oort (2013), and Pauley (2011) refer to positive educational attitudes during the transition to post-secondary levels as key to student success.

In most instances, students in a distance learning environment have to strike a balance between their studies and other activities like family, work or community responsibilities. Potter (2013) emphasises that the students have to find ways to integrate and manage the responsibilities required for both spheres, namely the personal and institutional spheres.

It is evident from the literature reviewed that a learner's integration into a new learning environment cannot only be linked to academic and social factors. Other factors such as learner characteristics, persistence, commitment, learner academic background, perception, time management, personal, and emotional and cultural adjustment are all significant factors influencing the ability to manage the transition process. Strategies and programmes that ODL institutions put in place to assist learners with transition should therefore consider a variety of factors.

## **2.8 MANAGING THE TRANSITION PROCESS**

Initially ODL institutions' focus was to increase access. Of late, institutions have the mammoth task of retaining students and ensuring good success rates. To achieve this, ODL institutions should understand and manage the expectations of students entering the new ODL environment and ensure that they are fully integrated into the system. On the other hand, students should have a clear understanding of the benefits of being a distance education student.

Transition or the transformation process to the next level in one's educational career, whether from primary to secondary, secondary to tertiary or from any mainstream of education to open and distance learning can be associated with uncertainty, fear of the unknown, lack of confidence and anxiety that may have a detrimental effect on students if not adequately addressed. Locks, Hurtado, Bowman and Oseguera (2008) refer to such transition as a psychological adjustment process since it focuses on

factors such as motivation, self-efficacy, attachment and a sense of belonging. Institutions spend resources in attracting new students without realising that further resources (human, financial and time) are needed to ensure that new intakes are recruited and supported. Institutions have therefore an obligation to ensure that much needed assistance is offered to the learners during the transition stage to enable them to adjust to the new learning environment. Locks, Hurtado, Bowman and Oseguera (ibid) reaffirmed the importance of institutions investing resources to support and develop programmes that facilitate meaningful social integration of newly enrolled students.

Some students join the new learning mode with little knowledge of what to expect and often have unrealistic expectations that make the transition to the new environment difficult. As a result, they often find the academic life challenging and feel disconnected from the institution. This results in high attrition rates and low pass rates (Pargetter, 2000; Darlaston-Jones, Cohen, Drew, Haunold, Pike, & Young, 2001; Perry, & Allard, 2003; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008).

The literature reviewed indicates that researchers are proposing various transition models to ensure that students fully integrate into the new environment. The same can be said for the institutions developing and implementing support programmes for first year learners to enable them to cope with the transitional challenge. Researchers have advanced various theories on student integration. One such theory is Tinto's student integration model also commonly known as student retention model. Tinto's model views student retention as longitudinal process of integration between the student and the academic and social systems at any institution. Tinto's model suggests that individuals come to a learning environment with a wide range of interacting personal and social attributes. These attributes as well as institutional practices have a great impact on retention rates as well as academic performance.

Tinto as cited by Mdakane (2011) reflects on several conditions that facilitate students' retention and success, such as high expectation set by the institution, provision of information on institutional arrangements, provision of academic, social and personal support, involvement of students as valued members of the institution, and creation of conducive learning environments for students to experience success

(p.40-41). Additionally these attributes influence their educational expectations and commitments that they bring along to the institution. According to Tinto (ibid), when individuals are either academically or socially integrated or when both forms of integration occur, they are likely to persist and continue with the studies (p.2). To achieve this, Tinto proposes a model of learning referred to as the learning communities that encourages and promotes social and academic networks amongst the students. He further proposes peer tutoring whereby senior students serve as mentors and tutors to the first year students (Tinto, 1997).

Other researchers also advocate peer mentoring as an effective and viable component for student social integration and academic success (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintrón, 2007; Colvin, & Ashman, 2010; Heirdsfield, Walker, & Walsh, 2008). One such study is by Heirdsfield, Walker, Walsh, and Wilss (2008) whereby mentors reflected on their experiences of mentoring first year students pursuing a diploma in community services at a Technical and Further Education College during the first 13 weeks of the first semester. Mentors were drawn from third and fourth year students who had completed a module on counselling and social intervention. The results of the study showed that the mentoring programme was a two-way process, both the mentors and the mentees benefited from the social interaction and academic support. The study proposes a model that shows the interrelationship between the cognitive and the meta-cognitive skills.

Early engagement of students through orientation workshops were identified by some researchers as helping students cope and adjust to the new environment (Brindley, 1995a; Darlaston-Jones et al., 2001; Dzakiria, 2005; Perry, & Allard, 2009; Terenzini et al., 1994). At the beginning of each academic year, a five-hour orientation workshop is held for NAMCOL learners at the various Tutorial Centres. One cannot confirm the effectiveness of this intervention as no study of its impact has been conducted in this regard. Terenzini (1994) refers to orientation programmes that involve not only students but also engage students and their parents. Darlaston-Jones et al. (2001) posited another dimension of orientation initiatives that do not only focus on the academic aspects but also focus on social interaction outside the teaching and learning environment. As one of its support strategies to enable students to cope with the transition, the Faculty of Education at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia

has developed a programme that will enable students to build relationships between peers, faculty members and the wider academic community (Perry, & Allard, 2009). Additionally, Engle (2007) proposes measures to enable the first generation students to succeed as they go through the academic, social, and cultural transition to college. College-preparatory courses, out-reach programmes, which include parents, bridge and orientation programmes are some of the measures proposed. Similarly, Gardner (2013); Pascarella and Terenzini (1980); Pauley (2011); Terenzini, Lorang, and Pascarella (1981); and Woosley and Miller (2009) suggest early assessment of transition experiences to identify students who are at risk to drop out in order to put timely and appropriate retention programmes in place.

Other researchers put much emphasis on the role learner support plays in assisting learners adjust to a new environment by bridging the gap of loneliness and isolation. The lack of effective learning support system makes learners feel disconnected, isolated, and frustrated because at times they do not get prompt or immediate feedback from the tutors. Learner support enhances the learning process in distance education if properly planned and coordinated but can also have a negative effect on the learners if unplanned or uncoordinated (Dzakiria, 2005). Sweet as cited by Brindley (1995a) highlights the importance of student support services in making distance learning responsive to the unique and changing environments. Effective support systems (Nichols 2010) and developmental education courses (Fike and Fike 2008) contribute to student retention. In the view of Potter (2013), student support systems are instrumental in assisting distance learners to cope with the transition and to reduce possible barriers and facilitate academic progression.

Baxter (2012) established that students in ODL have a limited understanding and expectation of the system. In the view of Gokool-Ramdoos (2009), the limited understanding of ODL by students is caused by the lack of policies at institutional and national levels. Therefore, Pargetter (2000) proposes a transition charter to make students aware of the implications of ODL. The transition charter should include issues such as general awareness, early orientation, course advice and independent learning (Pargetter, 2000).

Learner transition into a new environment is a complex process and if it is not well managed it can have negative effects on learners. The ultimate goal of education is to transform the individuals to improve their socio-economic conditions and to contribute to nation building. This transformation will be possible if learners' expectations are met and they are fully integrated into the new learning environment. ODL institutions should seriously consider various transition models to help learners with smooth integration into a new environment in order to reap the benefits of the learning process.

## **2.9 SUMMARY**

The discipline of distance education became a mainstream mode of education delivery evolved over a number of decades. The various theories have approached the discipline of distance education from different angles to show the uniqueness of ODL and its distinct features. However, what is common in all theories is that the learner is at the centre of the learning process. A clear distinction is made between the pedagogies that underpin ODL and the conventional classroom mode of delivery. Despite the differences between the two types of education delivery, both streams are moving towards a blended mode of delivery by combining the strengths of face-to-face which the conventional system is known for and the distance methods delivery. Tinto's theory of social and academic integration and Michael Moore's theory of transactional distance provide a comprehensive framework on the issue under investigation, which is the transition from the conventional mode of delivery to distance education. The study also focused on other factors on learner integration into the ODL mode of delivery beyond the two theories of Tinto and Moore. The last part of the literature reviewed focused on the influence which the change in the learning environment has on the students, the experiences of learners during the transition phase and the different measures proposed by the researcher to manage transition.

The literature reviewed has shown a substantial amount of work done on student transition from high school to the university. Less research was done to examine the experiences of learners during the transition from the conventional to ODL school-level programmes. Additionally, the researcher did not come across any study on transition from the conventional to ODL in the Namibian context. There is generally



little research done on ODL at school level, remarks Sir John Daniel (Latchem, 2012). Brindley (1995a) states that research in ODL mainly focuses on access and learner support with less attention given to research on learner experiences.

The following chapter will focus on the research design and methodology of this study.

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## CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH PARADIGM, DESIGN, AND METHODOLOGY

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research is a planned and systematic process to collect, analyse, interpret and apply data in order to have a clearer understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Mertler, 2015). This chapter presents the epistemological underpinnings this study. The two dominant research paradigms, namely positivist and interpretivist paradigms, are distinguished in this chapter. The study adopted both the interpretivism and positivism paradigms as the main purpose of the study was to gain in-depth understanding as well as perception of the learners' experiences when they change from the conventional school to the open and distance learning delivery mode.

This chapter focuses on the approach that was used in terms of the research design, how the sample of study was selected from the defined population as well as data collection and data analysis methods. The chapter presents the case study as the research design approach that was employed in undertaking this study. An exploratory multiple case study design that gathered information from different data sources and from different settings was used. Thus, the research approach was predominantly qualitative using a multi method design by blending and integrating both the qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. According to Muijs (2010), in a multi method or mixed method design research approach, both qualitative or quantitative can have equal status or any of the two can be predominate. The data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires and document review. The data collected were analysed by applying both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. SPSS version 23 was used for the analysis of the quantitative data and ATLAS.ti version 7 were used for the analysis of the qualitative data. The chapter concludes by outlining the steps undertaken in the research process to confirm the authenticity of the study as well as to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

### 3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Any research work falls within a particular paradigm with constructivism/interpretivism or positivism as the two dominant research paradigms. The different research paradigms have different views on the nature of reality (ontology) and how knowledge is acquired (epistemology) (Creswell, 2012; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014). The choice of the appropriate paradigm depends on the type of study and the research questions. The main objective of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of learners during the transition period from the traditional classroom delivery mode to the ODL mode. Thus, the study falls within the social sciences domain as it deals with the aspects of human elements and behaviour, and the way they interact with each other and with institutional dynamics. The research paradigm sets the tone and serves as the foundation for any particular research study whether quantitative, qualitative or mixed.

No single study is adequate to answer all research questions. Various researchers define research paradigm as a basic belief system, the assumptions and the values on the nature of research (Clark, & Creswell, 2011; Creswell, 2012; De Vos et al., 2011; Guba, & Lincoln, 1994; Johnson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Mukherji, & Albon, 2009; Neuman, & Kreuger, 2003; O'brien, 1998; Ponterotto, 2005). It is of utmost importance for any researcher to understand the paradigm, philosophy or the science that underpins the study since this will determine the required research methodology to apply (Hughes, 2001; Mukherji, & Albon, 2009; Ponterotto, 2005). Every individual has different views about the world and how we should seek to understand it. The way each individual sees the world around him or her depends on his or her particular worldview. The researcher's approach to the study is based on his perceptions about reality and how knowledge or truth can be obtained. Participants' views and opinions on the transition of learners from one mode of delivery to another is the main focus of this study.

To demonstrate his understanding of various research paradigms, the researcher will elaborate briefly on the two dominant paradigms that underpin this particular study. The two research paradigms are positivism and constructivism/interpretivism. Positivism is pre-occupied with finding explanations, predicting and controlling the phenomenon under investigation. It is underpinned by the notion of reality as being

objective and verifiable (Taylor, & Medina, 2013). The paradigm underscores the objectivity of the research process because of the researcher's limited influence on the participants. This view is confirmed by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) who maintain according to this paradigm, the researcher is more objective and this eliminates all possible biases because he or she is more interested in the testing or justifying of hypothesis. According to the positivist paradigm, the world is based on an unchanging foundation order expressed in natural laws (Hughes, 2001). The social world is out there, is already in existence and has to be explored and interpreted. It assumes that people experience the world the same way. The positivist paradigm claims that the best way to construct knowledge is through systematic and scientific research methods. In terms of this paradigm knowledge will be arrived at through observation and has to be empirically tested (De Vos et al., 2011).

Taylor and Medina (2013) posit that through this paradigm "ontology is realism, the epistemology is objectivism and a quantitative methodology governs the research process". Research through this paradigm is more concerned with hard statistical data that is generalisable. The positivist paradigm follows a quantitative approach in collecting data that can be analysed statistically. Experiments and correlational studies through the testing hypothesis draw heavily on positivist research approach. Positivist follows as deductive approach because it wants to prove what is already in existence. This approach moves towards the testing of a hypothesis to confirm, refute or modify the findings (Gray, 2013). The research is conducted at large scale with a reasonable representative sample to make the finding generalisable to other different settings.

Contrary to positivism, in the constructivist (interpretivist) paradigm, reality is viewed as multiple, understandable and constructed by the individuals themselves. Reality is premised on the social construction of knowledge. Knowledge is constructed through social experience when there is constant interaction between the researcher and the participant. As already alluded to, the positivists argue that reality is out there and needs to be studied and understood and social reality is what people perceive to be. Constructivists believe people create and give meaning to reality through experience, beliefs and interaction with other people. De Vos et al. (2011), and Tenenbaum et al. (2001) reaffirm that knowledge is constructed through social interaction or

negotiation, and external reality is likely to be perceived differently by different people. In the words of Tenenbaum et al. (2001) “knowledge is an entity, which is mentally constructed through the actions and experiences that the student undergoes with the immediate learning and broader social environment”. The interpretivist paradigm follows an inductive approach. Through the inductive approach, data collected is used to establish the relationships between the variables and to construct new theories (Gray, 2013). The researcher observes and listens to people’s views rather than formulating hypothesis and developed theories from the data. Knowledge is generated inductively from the data (Mukherji, & Albon, 2009) and conclusions are based on the views and experiences of the people (Johnson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Research within the interpretivist paradigm tends to be more qualitative in nature rather than quantitative because it is more concerned with the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon rather than seeking for explanations, justifying and controlling the phenomenon to be studied. It is a participatory process and fits more with research involving human engagement. Generally, research of this nature is conducted at a small scale because the emphasis is more on the understanding of the phenomenon within a particular context rather than scientifically tested data and generalisations of findings. There is strong connection between the researcher and the participants. The participants are active in the entire research process and viewed as co-researchers rather than being research subjects to be studied (De Vos et al., 2011). Research findings are jointly created because of the interactive dialogue and interpretation between the researcher and participants (Ponterotto, 2005).

Paradigms give different perspectives and meanings to the worldview. The worldview is based on ontological (nature of the world or reality), epistemological (acquisition and validity of knowledge), methodological (the process of research), axiological (values of the research process) and rhetorical (language use) assumptions (Clark, & Creswell, 2011; Guba, & Lincoln, 1994; Maxwell, 1998; Mukherji, & Albon, 2009; Ponterotto, 2005). In terms of ontology, positivists argue that there is one single true reality that should be understood, identified and measured. This reality can be refuted or confirmed through the testing of hypotheses. On the contrary, constructivists or interpretivists advance the viewpoint that realities are multiple, subjective and emerge from people’s experiences, views, and perceptions of a particular situation. These

multiple realities are discovered through an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon to be investigated. The positivists argue that the acquisition and validity of knowledge is more objective because the researcher is detached from the participants. Both the participant and researcher are independent from each other and the researcher takes a passive rather than active role. Conversely, the constructivists/interpretivists are more subjective in their approach. Researchers are active participants in the research process and there is strong symbiotic relationship between the researcher and the researched participant. Ponterotto (2005) supports the view that deeper meaning can be discovered if there is interaction between the researcher and the researched. De Vos et al. (2011) re-affirm this view that through interpretivism the researcher is actively engaged in the research process but does not necessarily control the process. On the methodological aspects, positivists are more scientific and rely heavily on experiments while constructivists rely more on interviews and observations. Axiology deals with the researcher's values in the research process. Positivists maintain that values are non-existent in the scientific process, as the researcher has to control and eliminate his /her influence in the research process. Through constructivism the researcher is in close association with the participants, hence the researcher's values and beliefs cannot be eliminated from the research process. The language used in the positivist paradigm is scientific and the researcher takes a neutral position, while in constructivism the language use is more personalised and narrative. Table 3.1 gives the characteristics of the different philosophical assumptions as articulated by various researchers:

**Table 3.1: Characteristics of the different philosophical assumptions** (adapted from King & Horrocks (2010))

Philosophical Assumptions	Positivist	Interpretivist
Ontology	Single reality established through the testing of hypothesis.	Multiple constructed realities established through the views, perceptions and experiences of people.
Epistemology	Research process is objective - researcher and participant are divorced from each other.	Research process is subjective – researcher and participant are connected.
Axiology	Values and feelings detached from research process.	Values and feelings attached to the research process.

Philosophical Assumptions	Positivist	Interpretivist
Methodology	Deductive approach starts with the testing of a particular theory or hypothesis. Predominantly quantitative and suitable for experimental, quasi-experimental, correlational studies, etc.	Inductive approach: data gathered that lead to the formulation of a new theory. Predominantly qualitative and suitable for case studies, ethnography, etc.
Rhetoric	Language use is more formal and scientific. Findings presented numerical format.	Language use is more informal. Findings presented in narrative format and the views and experiences of participants are presented verbatim.

Table 3.1 shows the distinction between the positivist and interpretivist paradigms in terms of the nature of the world, acquisition of knowledge, research process, values that underpin the research process and the language use in reporting the research findings.

### 3.3 THE APPROACH TO THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of learners during the transition period from the conventional classroom delivery to the open and distance learning delivery mode. According to Creswell (2012), the goal of research is to rely on participants' views of the phenomenon under investigated. This study drew on learners' experiences during transition from the conventional schooling to the ODL mode through triangulation by employing multiple data collection methods. This was meant to ensure that the participants are consistent with their responses in order for the inquiry obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon to the investigated. The researcher was interested in gaining insight into the experiences of the participants by listening to the voices on their lived experiences regarding the phenomenon under study. In view of Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), knowledge is valid and authentic through the voices of the participants. Additionally, the study sought to establish the perceptions of the participants during the transition period. The data on the perception of participants were collected through the use of quantitative data collection instruments such as the questionnaire while the participants' experiences were established through the use of interview protocol.

The researcher was more interested in having an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through diverse views, perceptions and experiences of the participants

during the migration from the conventional classroom delivery to the ODL mode of delivery. The study sought to understand respondents' lived experiences and how they make sense of these experiences. It was important to establish how the different role players constructed their views with regard to learner transition from the conventional system to ODL. Through the interpretivism paradigm the researcher interacts with the participants and listens to what they have to tell in terms of their experiences and perceptions. In this study, the data collection process was spread over a period of five months (June – October 2015) for the researcher to have more time to interact with the participants in order to obtain rich and detailed information. The researcher engaged some participants in a more intensive discussion through interviews in order to collect rich data. Therefore, a substantial amount of data is presented in narrative format rather than presented as scientific statistical data.

Though the study was predominantly qualitative, some data were collected through a questionnaire which is a quantitative data collection technique. Data through the questionnaires was collected during the first two months. In any research study certain information requires numbers, hence the use of quantitative data technique in this study. In this study, quantitative data collection was used to collect demographic data and other information that addressed the perceptions of the participants on transition process. Some open-ended questions were also included in the questionnaires; however, all data collected through this method have been presented in numerical format. The use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches enabled the researcher to triangulate data and gain different perspectives in data analysis. This study was based on the premise that reality is multiple, different people experience and perceive the same phenomenon differently and give multiple meanings to it. The views expressed by the learners might not be necessarily the same views expressed by the tutors, heads of centres or area coordinators because of the different value systems. The learners as main participants in the study might also not experience the transition the same way, because of different educational backgrounds and situations in which they find themselves.

Furthermore, the study followed inductive and deductive approaches in acquiring knowledge. Qualitative research is viewed as an inductive process because data collected is used to develop new theories. The findings from this particular study led



to the development of a new theoretical framework that deals with the transition from the conventional system to open schooling. By way of contract, the positivist paradigm is deductive in nature, it generally starts with the theory already developed because it argues that reality and knowledge is out there and only needs to be discovered and understood in an objective way in addition to extending knowledge. In the context of this study, the findings are also used to confirm, refute or amend Tinto's model of learner integration and Moore's theory on transactional distance. According to Ormston et al. (2014), the inductive process looks for patterns and associations derived from observing the world while through the deductive approach, hypotheses are reached through a logically derived process.

After having done an extensive review of literature on the different paradigms, the researcher maintains there is a strong link between the interpretive paradigm and the principles that underpin ODL. The interpretive paradigm is about exploring people's experiences through interactions and making meaning of these while in ODL the students' learning experiences are central to the learning process. According to the interpretivist paradigm, there is strong connection between the researcher and research participants. ODL advocates for multiple perspectives and views, students are in control of their own learning and the teacher is no longer the dominant and authoritative figure but rather a partner in the learning process. The teacher is also learning from the experiences of the students. These are all features of constructivism.

In this study, the positivism paradigm was used to ensure that data which required quantitative methods were collected objectively without interference of the researcher. In using the questionnaire the researcher managed to distance himself from the participants and study. Also, since the initial data was collected quantitatively, the interpretivist approach was key in conforming the opinions expressed in response to the questionnaires to provide substantial and accurate information for analysis. This particular study has a number of research questions that could not be answered through one particular research method. The blending and integrating of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods ensured that both approaches compensated one another in terms of weaknesses and strengths. This approach was deemed appropriate for this inquiry because of the researcher's firm



belief that some areas under investigation were more suited to qualitative enquiry while others fit quantitative investigation. The questionnaire was administered to collect the initial data and the key issues which emanated from the findings of the quantitative approach were used to collect data through semi-structured individual interviews as well as focus group discussion sessions. Hence, both approaches were instrumental in ensuring that rich data were collected.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Yin (2013) refers research design to a chronological process that connects data to research questions and conclusions. The research design for the study was a case study. A case study research design enabled the researcher to glean an in-depth understanding of learners' experiences and perceptions during the transition from one mode of delivery to another. A case study focuses on researching a phenomenon within a particular context in order to arrive at a large amount of wealth of information (Yin, 2013). A case study explores a contemporary phenomenon, focuses on the dynamics of the case in its real-life situation through detailed, in-depth data collection and is bounded by time, place, context and activity (Baxter, & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Mukherji, & Albon, 2009; Neuman, & Kreuger, 2003; Patton, 1990; Jennifer Rowley, 2002; Teegavarapu et al., 2008). According to Rowley (2002), and Yin (2013), case studies are effective in addressing the how and why questions.

From the various definitions given above, the suitability of the case emerged strongly. The case study guides the researcher's investigation of a demarcated area which enables him/her to gather holistic, in-depth information on the research topic. It narrows the scope of the investigation whilst at the same time allows the collection of rich information about the phenomenon under investigation. Although NAMCOL offers study opportunities to a diverse group of students through its general, vocational and professional programmes, not all groups took part in this research. The study was limited to the current and former Grade 12 students who were registered with the College in the 2013 to 2015 academic years. The former Grade 12 students were those who have successfully completed their Grade 12 through NAMCOL and proceeded to the tertiary institutions. To further narrow the scope of the study, participants were drawn from students, tutors and area coordinators in NAMCOL's two operational regions, namely the southern and northern regions.

A prime advantage of this research design is the close connection between the researcher and the participants. In the context of this study, the researcher wanted to maintain close contact with the participants by collecting the data for a prolonged period of time. The collection of data from multiple data sources is a major characteristic of case study research. The use of different data sources enables the researcher to explore the issues from different perspectives in order to construct multiple views and meanings. The data sources for this study included current and former learners, tutors, heads of centres and area coordinators.

### **3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

NAMCOL accommodates a diverse group of out-of-school youth and adults in its secondary education programme. However, for the purpose of the study the target population comprised more than 25 000 Grade 12 learners who transferred from the traditional school system and joined the college from the 2013 to the 2015 academic years. Moreover, the other population in the study included some categories of part-time and full-time staff members (heads of Tutorial Centres, area coordinators and tutors) who engage with the learners on a regular basis. The participants for the study were selected from the Tutorial Centres and regional offices in the NAMCOL's southern and northern regions. Guion, Diehl, and McDonald (2011) refer to this kind of approach of using different locations and settings in data collection as environmental triangulation.

The main participants in the study were the learners who experience the transition process directly. The following three categories of learners form part of the study population were included: contact learners (the category of learners who have the benefit of attending weekly tutorials); non-contact learners (those learners who qualify for tutorials during school holidays because of work, family and other commitments); and learners who exited the system in 2013 and 2014 academic years and proceeded to the next level in their educational career. The latter category was selected because of their experiences of success since the study aimed at establishing how learners adapt to the new mode of learning. The study did not include dropouts. From the learner category registered for the contact mode of study, two hundred (200) learners that joined NAMCOL since 2013 until 2015 were selected of which 50 were drawn from each of the four identified centres. From the non-contact mode, twenty-five (25)

learners in each of the two identified regions were selected. Ten (10) former learners who had graduated from the College between the 2013 and 2014 academic years were drawn for the previous years' registration list.

In this study, the learners were vital components because of the researcher's assumption that they experienced the transition process differently, either positively or negatively, because of their individual characteristics and previous academic experiences. The other participants were selected because of their engagement with the learners in one way or another, either directly or indirectly. In addition, the study included four heads of centres (one from each centre), 20 tutors (five from each identified centre) and four area coordinators (two from each region). Altogether the study gathered data from 288 participants through the questionnaires and 44 participants through the interviews.

The researcher opted to include a diverse group of participants in the collection of data in order to obtain rich and trustworthy data. Hussein (2015) refers to this approach of using multiple sources to collect data as data triangulation. Table 3.2 below gives an overview of the research sites.

**Table 3.2: An overview of each research sites**

Research Sites	Number of Contact Learners	Number of Non-contact Learners	Number of Head of Centre	Number of Tutors	Number of Area Coordinators
Okahandja Centre	393	91	1	9	1
Hage Geingob Centre	916	230	1	15	
Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo Centre	1140	140	1	8	1
David Sheehama Centre	637	180	1	13	

The most often used sampling technique in qualitative research is purposive sampling. However, the study applied both probability and non-probability sample techniques. Firstly, the study carried out a purposeful sampling technique to identify centres from which the participants were drawn. The centres for the study were identified in terms of urban and semi-urban/rural geographical settings. The centres were selected taking into account rural/semi-rural and metropolitan settings in the two identified regions. For this study, Okahandja and Hage Geingob Tutorial Centres in

the southern region and David Sheehama and Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo Tutorial Centres in the northern region were selected. Two of the selected Tutorial Centres in each region are situated in close proximity of the regional office; the other two centres are in the radius of more than 50 kilometres from the regional offices. NAMCOL operates more than 90 Tutorial Centres and because of the vastness of the country and financial constraints, it was not possible to cover other centres. It was assumed that the two groups of students at different settings would experience the transition differently due to the context. This sampling technique was used on the assumption that the participants attached to these centres were knowledgeable and informed about the issue under investigation.

The criteria for the selection of these centres were: they had enrolled learners for both modes of learning (contact and non-contact) with an annual minimum learner intake of one hundred (100). Generally, distance education is characterised by a high dropout rate. Therefore, the researcher intentionally opted for centres with high learner intakes to ensure a reasonable pool of learners from which to select the study participants. In terms of the former learners, the study focused on those who were attached to any tutorial centre during the 2013 and 2014 academic years.

The same sampling technique was used to select the other categories of staff excluding the tutors and all participants who took part in the interview process. Learners who already exited the system were also purposefully selected. This method of sampling was chosen to select former learners, heads of centres and area coordinators because of the relatively low numbers. Creswell (2012); Neuman and Kreuger (2003), and Patton (1990) claim that purposeful sampling is used when participant selection is based on participant's expertise or their experience of the phenomenon to be investigated. According to Maxwell (2008), through purposive sampling techniques, particular events, settings and persons are deliberately selected because of the critical and important information they can provide. Neuman and Kreuger (2003) claim that purposive sampling is appropriate for exploratory research. Another justification for using purposive sampling in this study is based on the assumption that the participants were knowledgeable, informed and had experience of the phenomenon to be investigated (i.e., the transition from one mode of delivery to another).

Secondly, a simple random sampling technique was used during the collection of quantitative data through the questionnaires. This form of probability sampling allows for the generalisation of the findings to the target population (Acharya et al., 2013). Fifty (50) learners of those attached to the four Tutorial Centres were randomly selected from the computer generated lists. The total number of registered learners was divided by 50 to show the subsequent number for selection. For example, in the case of Hage Geingob centre, N=916 learners registered. The researcher randomly selected the first learner on the list and thereafter every twentieth learner until a total number of 50 ( $n=50$ ) learners were selected. In the case where some learners were not present, the same formula was used to select other learners for participation. Mobile numbers obtained from the learner record database were used to call the former learners and those who enrolled for the non-contact mode of study to request their participation in the study. The non-contact learners who agreed to participate in the study were invited to the August holiday workshops. Appointments were made with the individuals who were no longer enrolled in College to complete the questionnaire at a convenient time and venue. In all instances and where possible, a gender balance was maintained in the selection of the participants. The same sampling technique was applied to select the tutors for participation in the questionnaire. A tutor list kept at each centres was used to select the participants.

This inquiry explores the experiences of learners during the transitional change from the conventional to open and distance learning; the researcher's intention was not to generalize research findings from this study. However, some quantitative data provides evidence of partial generalisation in some cases. The researcher was of the opinion that adequate information and rich data would be collected from the selected sample.

The assumption underpinning this study is that change in the learning environment might be one of the factors having the greatest impact on learners in terms of adapting to the new ODL mode of delivery. The traditional pedagogical approach to learning is premised on the notion that the learner is dependent on the tutor who decides when, where and what to learn while in open and distance learning environment the learner moves from dependency to self-directedness. Although the college enrolls a diverse group of learners annually, the researcher confined this particular study to those who

are transferring from the conventional system as they are currently experiencing the change in mode of delivery. Secondly, the approach and support to the learners enrolling for the two modes of study differs immensely. Thus, the researcher has opted to include both groups of learners to establish which learners integrate easily into the ODL environment. With regard to the graduates, it is important to establish why certain students who underwent the same change in the mode of delivery succeeded.

The principal criterion for the selection of former and current learners was that they are (or were previously) products of the conventional schools and thus have knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, that is, the transition from traditional schooling to open and distance learning. The learner participants experienced this change directly, hence their inclusion in the study as the main participants.

On the other hand, the tutors perform a facilitative role during the teaching and learning process. Therefore, they are better positioned to share their experiences on how learners cope and adapt to the new mode of delivery. The Heads of Tutorial Centres and Area Coordinators are not in direct daily contact with the learners; however, their experiences of observing, monitoring and evaluating the activities at the different Tutorial Centres add value to the study.

The key criteria that were applied for the Tutors, Heads of Tutorial Centres and Area Coordinators for participation in the study were:

- they were attached to the southern and northern regions with a minimum of three years' tutoring and supervisory experience; and
- they were involved at Tutorial Centres with a minimum learner intake of 100, which offer both modes of study (open-contact and open non-contact).

The researcher opted for these particular criteria as they were in line with those applied to the main participants. Furthermore, the College engages a high percentage of full-time teachers from the conventional system on a part-time basis in its programme delivery. Thus, the researcher found it necessary to engage tutors and heads of centres with appropriate teaching and supervisory experience on the

assumption that they have observed certain behaviour during the learners' transition over a period of time. Further, the Area Coordinators, as full-time appointees of the College, have the key responsibility to implement and monitor activities at Tutorial Centres and thereby engage with learners.

### **3.6 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

The study involved the use of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection to obtain rich data. The use of multiple methods was important for complementary findings and to strengthen the research results. A triangulation approach was adopted in this study to ensure enhanced and richer data, which could subsequently lead to quality findings. Triangulation in research is the use multiple methods and sources to enhance the validity of the research findings (Guion et al., 2011; Mukherji, & Albon, 2009; Neuman, & Kreuger, 2003; Shenton, 2004). Four data collection tools for the study included questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. The use of multiple data collection strategies is not peculiar to this study. It is worth noting that other researchers who have conducted similar studies have combined these data collections techniques. For instance, Briggs, Clark, and Hall (2009) applied an intranet survey, questionnaire survey and interviews in their study on student transition from school or college to the university, Clark and Hall (2010) used an online questionnaire survey and focus group discussion in their study on the experiences of first year students at Newcastle University. Smith, Akos, Lim, and Wiley (2008) used a questionnaire survey and interviews in the study looking at the perceptions of high school transition and finally, Leese (2010) applied a questionnaire and a small group discussion in the study to assess students' early experiences in an undergraduate course.

The use of these data collection techniques is expounded in the sections that follow.

#### **3.6.1 QUESTIONNAIRES**

Two types of questionnaires were developed and administered to collect the initial data and the key issues emanating from the findings of this quantitative approach were used to develop interview questions used in the semi-structured interviews. One questionnaire collected data from the learners; the other collected data from staff. The



questionnaires were based on Tinto's model of student integration. Inventories from previous studies such as the study by Woodley et al. (2001) on student progress in distance education, the study of SAIDE (2014) on effectiveness of support services at NAMCOL and the study by Owens et al. (2009) on the experiences of remote students also informed the formulation of questions for the questionnaires. The questionnaires designed for the two categories of participants comprised of the four main sections. Section A dealt with biographical data, academic background and reasons for enrolling with NAMCOL; Section B aimed at generating information on student integration based on Tinto's four main constructs (academic integration, social integration, institutional and goal commitments); Section C explored learners' difficulties during the period of change from formal school to distance learning; and Section D examined the participants' understanding of the ODL system. In most instances the participants were asked to indicate their responses on a 5 point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree". The questionnaires also included two open-ended questions to solicit qualitative responses whereby respondents could express their views through statements.

The questionnaires were taken through various critical review processes. The initial step involved the review of the initial questionnaire by the Research, Development and Quality Assurance Manager at NAMCOL. This was followed by the review by two researchers with extensive experience in the discipline of distance learning. Comments from the review processes were incorporated and the amended questionnaires were shared with the supervisor and a statistician from the University of Namibia who assisted with the data analysis.

To test and validate the original research instrument, a pilot study was conducted with a smaller group similar to the population sample which did not partake in the main research to establish the instrument's suitability, validity and reliability. De Vos et al. (2011) stress the importance of the pilot study by arguing that the practical and real environment remains unknown until it is entered by the researcher. For pilot testing of the instrument, the NAMCOL central region with its regional office situated approximately 240 kilometres from the main campus was selected as it did not form part of the two regions selected for data collection. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires with forty (40) learners, two (2) heads of centres and



five (5) tutors at two centres in Otjiwarongo. The researcher observed during the process that learners, in particular, experienced challenges in responding to certain items of the questionnaire which were not clearly formulated. The process of pilot testing helped the researcher to include new items that he did not think of in the design of the initial instrument. Consequently, the items were refined, amendments made and the final layout of the questionnaires was done. The questionnaire was designed to take between 20 – 25 minutes to complete. In the pilot phase, the researcher also monitored the time the participants required for completion. The final questionnaires were administered after they had been approved by the researcher's supervisor.

The use of questionnaires in this study was appropriate because other research of similar nature followed the same methodological approach. Locks et al. (2008) applied a survey in their longitudinal study on transition to college for diverse students and Akos and Galassi (2004a), and Akos and Galassi (2004b) made use of a questionnaire in their studies on transition to middle and high school.

To improve the return rate of questionnaires and minimise the misinterpretation of the questions, the researcher self-administered the questionnaires with the help of two research assistants. Questionnaires were handed to participants at the Tutorial Centres. The two paper-based questionnaires were administered to two hundred and eighty-eight (288) participants selected for the study: 260 questionnaires to the three categories of learners and 28 questionnaires to the categories of staff (heads of centres, tutors and area coordinators). The main advantage of the questionnaires was that data could be collected from a large group of participants in a short period. The researcher took cognisance of the fact that completing a questionnaire might be a new experience to some participants, in particular the learners. To facilitate the completion of the questionnaires, the researcher and research assistants were available to clarify issues when needed. However, their involvement during the completion of the questionnaire was minimal.

The actual data collection was planned for a period of five months, between June 2015 and October 2015 and the process unfolded as anticipated. The questionnaire was anonymous as participants were not required to identify themselves. However, the participants were required to put their signatures on the consent form attached to

the covering letter to indicate that they had participated voluntarily in the study. In general, the questionnaires were completed fully and accurately. The data collection process started as early as June 2015 with the Area Coordinators, Heads of Centres, and the group of learners attached to the four identified Tutorial Centres. However, the researcher only managed to collect data from August 2015 from the fifty (50) non-contact learners at the two identified vacation workshops venues: in Windhoek and in the northern part of the country. The data collection process for the former learners took place in September 2015.

Of the total number of questionnaires administered, 248 and 25 questionnaires for learners and staff were returned respectively. This represents a retrieval rate of 94.8% of the combined questionnaires or 95.4% and 89.3% retrieval rate for learners and staff questionnaires respectively.

### **3.6.2 INTERVIEW GUIDE**

To obtain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences of the transition from the conventional to the ODL mode of study, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. There are three types of interviews, structured, semi-structured and unstructured. A structured interview is a verbally administered questionnaire used for quantitative data collection; unstructured and semi-structured interviews are normally used in the qualitative approach. Interviews are inevitable in a case study research design and primarily used in qualitative research in order to get in-depth data which cannot be easily gathered through questionnaires (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; King, & Horrocks, 2010; Patton, 1990; Teegavarapu et al., 2008). Pereira and Pooley (2007) and Letrello and Miles (2003) used interviews in similar studies that dealt with the transition experiences of learners from middle to high school. In their view, qualitative research provided insight into both the positive and negative aspects of school transitions (Pereira, & Pooley, 2007).

In this study, a semi-structured face-to-face individual interview to collect qualitative data was applied. Semi-structured interviews focus on pre-determined key questions on the area to be investigated; however, they make provision for further probing responses where necessary (Gibson et al., 2013). Gill et al. (2008); Tong, Sainsbury, and Craig (2007) maintain that semi-structured interviews explore experiences, views

of participants and the meaning they attach to them. The semi-structured interview schedule developed contained questions on learners' new learning experiences, the difficulties they experience when they joined NAMCOL, how they cope with the new mode of delivery and what suggestions they propose to the institution to assist learners to cope during the transition period. In the process of data collection through face-to-face individual interviews, the researcher observed that some learners at the Tutorial Centres were reluctant to participate in individual interviews. Consequently, the researcher changed his approach to a focus group discussion to accommodate the learners. Gill et al. (2008) advance the view that the focus group discussion is appropriate for a multi-method research design. In focus group discussions, the participants feel less exposed and thus share individual and shared perspectives (Gill et al., 2008; King, & Horrocks, 2010).

Interview instruments were developed following the preliminary analysis of quantitative data obtained from participants at Hage Geingob Tutorial Centre in Windhoek. The questions for the interviews were piloted with five students and one head of centre at another centre in Windhoek that did not form part of the sample. The pilot test was aimed to determine possible flaws and weaknesses in the interview instruments and to enable revision thereof.

Following the pilot phase and the revision of the interview instruments, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-two (22) participants as follows: sixteen (14) learners for the three identified categories (contact, non-contact and graduates); two (2) area coordinators, two (2) heads of Tutorial Centres and four (4) tutors. Additionally, two focus group discussions consisting of ten and eight participants respectively were held with learners at the two Tutorial Centres, one in the northern region (David Sheehama) and the other in southern region (Hage Geingob). Prior to the interview process, the researcher ensured that suitable venues were identified and the interviews were conducted at a time convenient to the respondents. Key issues such as purpose of the study, permission to audio record interviews, format of the interview, duration of the interview process, terms of confidentiality, need for a follow-up interview, and participants' freedom and rights to participate and ask questions preceded the interview process. In cases where participants selected for the interviews were unwilling to participate, the researcher

identified alternative respondents until the required number was secured. The respondents were asked the same questions to make it easy for the responses to be coded and tabulated.

The respondents' responses to the questionnaire enlightened the researcher on nature of the transition experienced by the learners as well as the common and diverse views expressed by the tutors, heads of centres and area coordinators. The interviews explored in-depth participant perceptions, which was not possible through the questionnaires. During the interviews, the researcher could also observe participants' satisfaction and/or frustration through body language and tone of voice.

To ensure that critical information from the participants was not lost, interviews were audio recorded after participant permission was obtained. The reason for audio recording of interviews was clearly stated in the consent letter and explained before the commencement of the interviews. The researcher also kept notes of each interview in case the audio recording equipment failed and to cater for those who may not feel comfortable being recorded. Interviews for each day were burned on a CD as a backup. Interviews lasted for between 30-40 minutes. Transcription commenced immediately after the interviews. A few transcripts were shared with the interviewees in Windhoek to establish a fair representation of facts. It was impossible to apply same procedure with participants outside the researcher's duty station because of cost and time factors. Table 3.3 gives an overview of the interviews conducted during the data collection process.

**Table 3.3: Interview Plan**

Participants	Number of Interviews	Research Site	Reason for inclusion/participation
Current learners which include both contact and non-contact learners	8 contact learners and 4 non-contact learners	Four identified centres with two interviewees from each centre and two vacation workshops venues from the two identified regions with one interviewee from each venue.	Learners are key respondents. They are joining NAMCOL from the conventional schools and they may experience the transitional challenge when changing from the traditional schooling to distance learning.

Participants	Number of Interviews	Research Site	Reason for inclusion/ participation
Tutors	4	All four Tutorial Centres, two tutors at each centre	Tutors are in direct contact with the learners because of their involvement in weekly tutorials or vacation workshops and they may observe certain behaviours.
Area Coordinators	2	One from each region	The Area Coordinators are full-time staff members attached to the regional offices with the core function of monitoring and evaluating the activities at the Tutorial Centres.

Data collection through this instrument also posed challenges; however, useful lessons were learned. The researcher learned that collecting information from people is a complex matter because actual interviews may not turn out as planned. Focus group discussion did not form part of initial planning but on two occasions, the researcher had to opt for focus group discussions because some participants, in particular the learners, were shy and uncomfortable with the one-on-one interview. Additionally, a few appointments did not take place as participants did not show up or were late. Albeit frustrating, this did not disrupt the process altogether as the heads of centres were helpful in approaching other learners for the interviews.

### 3.6.3 DOCUMENTARY REVIEWS

Relevant documents were reviewed to generate data. Document review was important because sometimes what people say in interviews differs completely from the information in the documents. Content analysis is one method of document review that complements other data collection methods (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009). Document review is interpretative research because it describes, interprets or explains what has already happened. The documents reviewed in this study included the following:

- monitoring and evaluation reports on the monitoring tutorial and vacation workshops centres;
- attendance registers;
- moderation reports on tutor-marked assignments;

- examinations' entry data; and
- other research studies relevant to this study.

The identified documents were used as verification of participants' views and were an additional source of data. At this stage, the researcher looked for issues relevant for the research study, categorised and interpreted them in terms of emerging themes. This study's principal objective was to assess the experiences of learners during the transition stage. To some the transition is complex and they may withdraw completely or partially from studies. In NAMCOL's context partial withdrawals refer to failure to attend tutorial sessions or submit assignments but one can opt to sit for final examinations. Complete withdrawal refers to learners' failure to participate in any activity including sitting for the examinations. According to Tinto (1987), learners who fully integrate into the academic institution are likely to persist. Thus, it was important to review learner attendance registers and to establish complete or partial withdrawals.

### **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis for interviews was done simultaneously with data collection. Creswell (2012) describes the analysis of qualitative data as an on-going process that should run concurrently with data collection and report writing. Data was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. Data collected through the questionnaires were coded and entered into a quantitative database for computational analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), version 23 was used to analyse quantitative data. Before the data were entered on the database, a rigorous cleaning process was undergone to ensure accuracy. A statistician from the University of Namibia who assisted with the refinement of the questionnaire further assisted with the capturing of data during the analysis phase. The researcher checked all the questionnaires to ensure that the data was correctly captured. Analysis of data using SPSS enabled the researcher to use standard statistics, such as raw count frequency distribution and percentage frequency distribution to carry out the analysis. SPSS can thoroughly analyse data in order to present flexible reports in different formats. Tables, graphs and charts were developed from the SPSS package to reveal emerging patterns and trends

Interviews were recorded once permission had been obtained from respondents followed by the transcription and coding of data before being entered into the database. Due to the volume of data from the number of interviews conducted, the researcher used the research assistants to assist with the transcription of data. To ensure the accuracy of data they cross checked each other's transcribed work. In addition, a small sample of the transcribed data was submitted to the respondents for verification. This verification process was done with only one area coordinator, a head of centre, two tutors and four learners in Windhoek. The transcribed interviews were uploaded on ATLAS.ti version 8, a computerised software programme designed to analyse qualitative data. ATLAS.ti has the capacity to organise, store and analyse data and create graphs, word trees and map trees to indicate the most frequently appearing words in selected areas. Codes were created that address different areas on transition, such as students' perceptions and experiences on the transition process as well as the academic and social integration processes. Students' demographic data were also coded. The researcher had only used the software once at the University of Pretoria's support sessions; hence assistance was sought from a qualitative researcher at the Namibia University of Science and Technology who had extensive experience in using the software.

### **3.8 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS**

To achieve trustworthiness, increase rigour and enhance quality and credibility of the study, the researcher applied a variety of strategies throughout the research process. Data collection is an evolving process and a key strategy was prolonged engagement with the participants to cross-check various issues and to allow participants to become accustomed to the researcher. The data collection process was spread over a period of five months (June-October 2015); the last two months were more intensive as interviews were conducted during that period. The extended period of time enabled the researcher to follow-up participants to obtain critical, sensitive information that they could not provide during the initial phase of the data collection process. The prolonged engagement period with the participants was critical for the researcher to achieve data saturation. A field journal was kept throughout the entire research process to reflect new ideas, thoughts, and challenges. This enabled the researcher to make some modifications to the research process.



Triangulation was another key strategy applied to enhance credibility and give a multidimensional perspective on the phenomenon under investigation. Triangulation is viewed as a strategy to validate research findings and to eliminate possible biases. As pointed out in the preceding sections, different types of triangulation exist, namely, triangulation of data methods, data sources, investigators and theoretical triangulation (Guion et al., 2011; Hussein, 2015; Patton, 1990; Weyers, Strydom, & Huisamen, 2014). Multiple data collection methods such as interviews, questionnaires and document analysis were used in this study. Triangulated sources included learners who have coped well with the transition and succeeded, those that did not progress to the next level and those who experienced the transition process for the first time. It also included learners studying through different modes of course delivery (contact and non-contact modes of study). Additionally, data was also sourced from tutors, heads of centres and area coordinators to increase validity. The different data sources helped the researcher to compare similarities and identify areas of divergence. In terms of theoretical triangulation the findings were tested against Tinto's theory of student integration and Moore's theory of transactional distance. To diversify the research approach, the researcher used two research assistants to administer the questionnaires and to transcribe the interviews. This approach of using more than one person in the research process helped to decrease possible biases and to confirm data coming from different people. To ensure transparency and trustworthiness direct quotations from both individual interviews and focus group discussion were included in the data analysis process.

To decrease misinterpretation of data and recognise participants' experiences in the research process, a small sample of the transcribed interviews was presented to certain participants in Windhoek for cross checking. Additionally, the entire research process and findings was shared with peers and experts in the discipline of ODL for critical comment.

### **3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Any research involves different people and is embedded in elements of trust, mutual respect and honesty between the researcher and the participants (Resnik, 2011). Ethics in research constitutes moral principles, rules and expectations that the researcher should adhere to when engaging with the participants in the research



study (Pickard, 2007; De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2011). The researcher has an obligation to minimise risk while at the same maximising the quality of information needed.

Firstly, the researcher requested permission from the Chairperson of the NAMCOL Governing Board to engage the learners and employees attached to the institution and to use available documents. The letter of approval to conduct the study on NAMCOL formed part of supporting documents submitted to the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. The data collection process commenced in June 2015 after the ethical clearance approval was granted in October 2014 by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee

Voluntary participation, confidentiality, debriefing of participants and anonymity are some of the ethical issues every research study should comply with. Right from the onset, the participants who were willing to participate in the study were issued with a consent letter to sign. The consent letter indicated that they would not be subjected to any form of coercion because of the position of authority the researcher occupies at NAMCOL. Other details such as the purpose of the study, the participants' rights to participate in or to withdraw at any given time, how the data would be recorded and how and when the findings would be shared with the participants was clearly explained to the participants. Participants were made to understand that their participation in the study was voluntary and that their withdrawal or refusal to participate would not have adverse consequences on their studies. Assurance was given that their responses would be treated anonymously and that responses would not be linked to any respondents. It was clearly explained to the participants that the study could assist ODL practitioners and policy makers to have a better understanding on how the learners experience change from the conventional school system to ODL and what intervention programmes should be implemented to assist learners to adapt to the new pedagogical approach and environment. Any personal gain derived from the study by the researcher such as enhancing research skills and obtaining a PhD qualification was pointed out to the participants.

To maintain a high degree of integrity in conducting this research and to avoid any conflicts of interest or appearance thereof, the researcher disclosed any personal

relationships that might constitute a conflict of interests. The researcher was fully aware that his position as a figure of authority in the institution might influence the responses of participants. Therefore, research assistants were used to assist in the data collection process and transcription of qualitative data.

### **3.10 DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Every study has its own delimitations and limitations. Although 26 442 learners were enrolled with the college in 2015 for the Namibian senior secondary certificate at almost 90 Tutorial Centres, this study was confined mainly to four Tutorial Centres with a combined learner population of 3 086. Furthermore, the study was delimited to learners who registered with the College between 2013-2015 academic years including those learners who successfully exited the system in 2013 and 2014. Another delimitation of this study was that it excluded some key stakeholders such as parents, families, community members and regional staff who could have shared their experiences and perceptions on the learner transition to NAMCOL. A limitation of the study lay in an element of bias and subjectivity in that the researcher is currently an employee of the institution and might have had own personal preconceived ideas on challenges learners experience during the transition stage. The use of research assistants, member checking and the external review of the research process and findings were measures used to limit researcher bias. The small sample size and predominantly qualitative nature of the study also reduce generalizability although partial generalisation may be possible in some instances. The present study addresses learner integration into the ODL system and the exclusion of the implications of student integration on academic performance is also a limitation of the current study.

However, it is critical to highlight that the study was significant in pinpointing key transitional issues from the perspectives of learners.

### **3.11 SUMMARY**

The chapter explained the different research paradigms and deliberated extensively on the paradigms that underpin the study. The research design was a case study that explored the experiences and perceptions of learners from the traditional school

environment in adapting to open schooling at four selected study centres. The study adopted a multi method design by blending and integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Data collection instruments involved questionnaires, interviews and content analysis through document review. Data analysis through the use of SPSS Version 23 for quantitative data and Atlas.ti version 7 for qualitative data has been explained. The chapter is concluded with the strategies applied to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the study as well as ethical issues that were considered during the entire research process.

In the following chapter, the findings from the data collected through the quantitative phase are presented.

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## CHAPTER 4

# PRESENTATION OF THE QUANTITATIVE DATA

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the findings of data gathered through the use of the quantitative data collection instrument are presented. In this case, two different questionnaires were administered to collect data from the main participants, the current and former learners as well as the various categories of staff (area coordinators, heads of centres and tutors). The data presented in this chapter sought to answer the following main research question: *What are the experiences and perceptions of learners during the transition period from the traditional classroom mode of delivery to open and distance learning?* The findings in the chapter are presented under the learners and staff categories. The following themes are used in the presentation of data: demographic data and academic background, learner experience of ODL, learner integration, transition difficulties, factors that facilitate learner integration, level and period of adjustment, and learner understanding of the ODL system. In this study, the researcher purposively selected 260 learners from the total population of more than 25 000 learners who enrol annually for the NSSC qualification. This represents 1% of the total learners' population. Additionally, twenty eight (28) staff members who were drawn from the categories of area coordinators, heads of centres and tutors also participated in the completion of the second questionnaire.

The study used quantitative data analysis and presented data by using descriptive, correlational and regression statistics. The participants' raw data were first coded to ensure the data is readable by the software before it was imported to the Statistical Package for Social Science, version 23 for analysis. The first section of the analysis presents the descriptive statistics of the demographic data and academic background of the participants and the latter sections of the study present the findings that serve to address the main research question and the six auxiliary research questions. The chapter presents the analysis in two parts, the first section of the chapter presents the analysis of data obtained from the instrument completed by the learners while the second section deals with the data obtained from staff.

## 4.2 ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM LEARNERS

### 4.2.1 LEARNER DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The researcher has applied descriptive analysis such as frequency distributions and percentages to describe students' characteristics for the study. The demographic information of learners includes all data obtained from the three categories of learners, namely those who registered with the College for the open contact mode, those who registered for the open non-contact and those that have exited the system. Altogether 260 questionnaires were distributed to the various categories of learners, however only 248 questionnaires were returned.

#### 4.2.1.1 Region

The learners for the study were drawn from the four Tutorial Centres in NAMCOL's southern and northern regions. Table 4.1 below shows that 55% of the participants were from the southern region while 45% were from the northern region.

**Table 4.1: NAMCOL region where learners enrolled**

Region	Male	Female	Grand Total
Northern region	51%	43%	45%
Southern region	49%	57%	55%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### 4.2.1.2 Age and gender

Table 4.2 below shows the age and gender distribution of the participants.

**Table 4.2: Age category and gender**

Age category	Male	Female	Total
Below 18	1	6	7
Between 18 and 24	54	146	200
Between 25 and 29	2	33	35
30 and above	0	6	6
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>248</b>

The gender distribution of the participants (n=248) shows that the most were female (n=191) which represents 77% of the total participants with only 57 (23%) male participants. The dominance of the female participants in the study is consistent with NAMCOL's annual enrolment where female learners outnumber their male counterparts. For the past three academic years (2013-2015), of the total NAMCOL population for the secondary education programme, between 67%-70% of the learners were female (NAMCOL, 2016). The high percentage of female learners studying with NAMCOL supports the view advanced by Pityana (2007) that ODL is instrumental in addressing the needs of the less privileged members of society such as women and girls.

The age distribution of the participants ranged between under 18 years and 30 years and above. The age distribution was grouped in four categories, namely below 18; between 18 and 24; between 25 and 29; and 30 and above. The table shows that 200 (81%) of the participants were between the ages 18-24, 35 (14%) were between ages 24-29, seven (3%) were below 18 years and six (2%) was recorded for the ages above 30.

The age distribution of the majority of participants is in line with NAMCOL's annual age distribution. For example, the NAMCOL registration for 2015 shows that 67% of the learners fell within the age range of between 18-24 (NAMCOL, 2016). The finding which shows the highest number of participants falling within the age ranges (18 and 24) implies that these learners migrated from the formal system and joined NAMCOL to improve their grades. Learners in the formal schools normally complete their Grade 12 within ages of between 18-20 years. Those learners who did not meet the minimum requirements to advance to the next level of their educational career join institutions established to support such learners to improve their grades. Possibly, some participants in this age category were those learners who attempted to improve their grades through NAMCOL over a couple of years.

#### **4.2.1.3 Subjects and mode of study**

Learners pursuing studies with NAMCOL are presented with two options: those who prefer weekly tutorials can register for the contact open mode, while those who are unable to attend weekly tutorials due to work, family and other commitments can

register for the open non-contact mode. The latter group is entitled to one week tutorials held twice annually.

**Table 4.3: Subjects taken and mode of study**

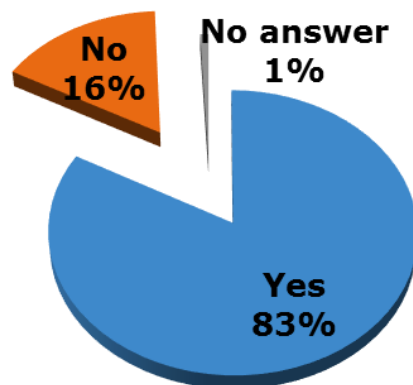
Subjects enrolled	Mode of study			Total
	Contact	Non-Contact	No study mode indicated	
Accounting	89%	11%	0%	100%
Agriculture	86%	3%	11%	100%
Biology	75%	20%	5%	100%
Business Studies	77%	10%	13%	100%
Development Studies	71%	14%	15%	100%
Economics	88%	6%	6%	100%
English Second Language	75%	15%	9%	100%
Geography	78%	13%	9%	100%
History	79%	16%	5%	100%
Mathematics	87%	4%	9%	100%
Oshikwanyama First Language	100%	0%	0%	100%
Oshindonga First Language	50%	25%	25%	100%
Otjiherero First Language	100%	0%	0%	100%
Physical Science	90%	7%	3%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.3 above depicts that many subject entries (79%) were entered for the contact mode which provides learners the opportunity to attend weekly tutorials. Only 12% of the subject entries were taken on the non-contact mode while 9% of the learners did not indicate any mode of study. The study showed that the learners took a combined number of fourteen subjects and of those subject entries, more than 70% were taken on the contact mode of study with the exception Oshindonga First Language where only 50% of the learners indicated the contact mode. No learners registered for the non-contact mode for Oshikwanyama and Otjiherero First Languages. The high percentage of subject entries for the contact mode of study mirrors NAMCOL's actual enrolment because a large number of learners registered consistently for the contact mode over the years. For example, in the 2015 academic year, 21 760 and 4 682 students registered for the contact and non-contact modes of study, respectively (NAMCOL, 2017). It is evident from the finding that the vast majority of the participants

prefer the contact open mode which makes them eligible to three hours of tuition per week which resembles the mode of delivery they are accustomed to. This finding is similar to previous findings from the literature where learners who come from the conventional system generally prefer more structured teaching and learning environments where the teacher plays a critical role in directing learning (Leese, 2010; Lentell, 2004; Locks et al., 2008; Mdakane, 2011).

#### 4.2.1.4 Learner academic background

This part determines learner current academic status as well the previous academic background before the learner joined NAMCOL.



**Figure 4.1: Learners currently studying Grade 12 through NAMCOL and those that already exited the system**

Figure 4.1 depicts the responses of the participants to the question that relates to the current status of their studies. Of the total number of participants, 83% were active learners pursuing their studies with NAMCOL during the 2015 academic year, while 16% of the participants indicated that they are no longer with the institution. Only 1% of the participants did not indicate their current status. Those who were no longer with the institution included those who were pursuing their studies through the University of Namibia and Namibia University of Science and Technology. This finding of the high number of participants who were studying with NAMCOL at the time of the survey supports the previous finding of 96% of the participants who have indicated that they migrated from the formal schools. The percentage of learners (16%) no longer with NAMCOL indicates that they were able to realize their goals and improved their grades sufficiently in order to meet admission requirements at the institutions of higher learning. This suggests that these learners integrated into the ODL system which



enabled them to move to the next level. This finding further demonstrates the difference ODL makes in lives of many who fail in the formal system.

**Table 4.4: Completed Grade 12 with NAMCOL and year of completion**

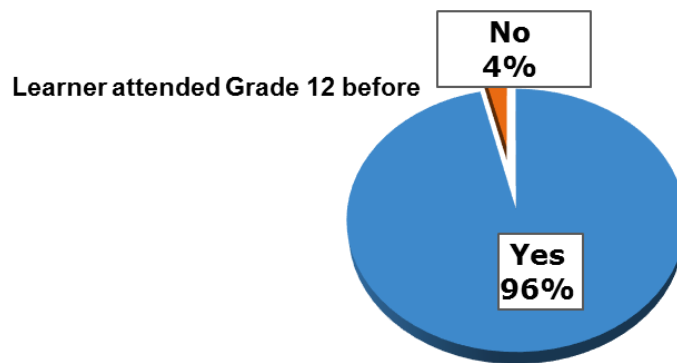
Completed Grade 12 at NAMCOL	2012	2013	2014	Year not indicated	Total
Yes	1%	5%	3%	3%	11%
No	0%	1%	1%	79%	81%
No answer	0%	0%	0%	8%	8%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.4 refers to the participants' responses to the questions as to whether they had completed Grade 12 through NAMCOL and the year of completion. In the case of non-completion, the participants were asked to give the reasons. On the question of completing the Grade 12 qualification through NAMCOL, Table 4.4 shows that only 11% responded in the affirmative, 81% responded that they did not complete their studies while 8% of the participants did not specify whether they completed or not. The overwhelming majority of participants who did not complete their Grade 12 corresponds with the previous finding where 83% of the learners indicated that the majority are still pursuing the studies with NAMCOL. Of the 11% who completed their studies, 5% indicated that they completed their studies in 2013, while 3% completed in 2014 and only 1% in 2012. The remaining 3% did not indicate the year of completion.

**Table 4.5: Reasons for non-completion**

Reasons for not completing Grade 12	Participants
Laziness and lack of motivation.	1%
It was difficult to understand some subjects.	1%
I was on full-time study.	15%
I failed my subjects.	1%
I am still doing my Grade 12.	15%
I did not meet the requirement to enter higher education.	33%
The syllabi was not covered hence we were not well prepared.	3%
I was not satisfied with the grades I obtained.	2%
No comment	26%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.5 depicts the participants’ responses to a follow-up, open-ended question on reasons for non-completion. The participants gave a variety of reasons for non-completion with 33% indicating that a few of them did not meet the requirements to enter higher education. Possibly these learners had attempted to improve their grades over a number of years but were not successful in meeting the requirements to enter the institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, 15% of the participants indicated that very few were studying full-time through the conventional system while another 15% indicated that they were still pursuing Grade 12. Twenty-six percent (26%) of the participants did not advance any reason for non-completion. Other reasons which were advanced by 1% to 3% of the participants were: laziness and lack of motivation, difficulty in understanding some subjects, failed subjects, syllabi not fully covered hence we were not fully prepared, and not satisfied with the grades obtained.



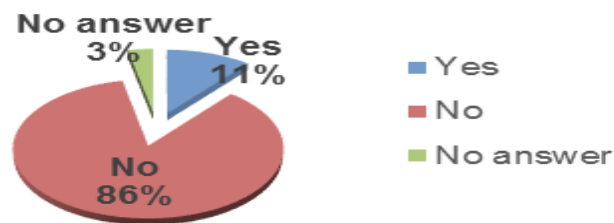
**Figure 4.2: Number of learners attended Grade 12 in the formal school before joining NAMCOL**

Figure 4.2 depicts the responses to the question relating to whether the participants attended formal schools before joining NAMCOL. This study is aimed at exploring the experiences of learners when transferring from the conventional school system to ODL and whether this change influenced learners’ adaptation to the new learning environment. It was therefore necessary to establish whether these learners were indeed products of the conventional system. Of the total number of participants, the great majority (96%) indicated that they attended their Grade 12 through the formal schools before they joined NAMCOL. The remaining 4% indicated the contrary. This small fraction could be those learners who completed their grade 10 through NAMCOL, through the formal system or through private providers in an earlier year and then opted to pursue their Grade 12 through NAMCOL. The study aimed at engaging those who came from the formal system after they had not gained sufficient

credit to move to the next level. However, it was difficult to eliminate the few who were not part of Grade 12 in the formal system because of its insignificant number. Possibly this small fraction never experienced ODL before and that could make their participation relevant. This finding corresponds with the previous finding where 81% of the participants fall within the age range of 18-24 years. This shows that these could be learners who joined NAMCOL straight from the formal education system.

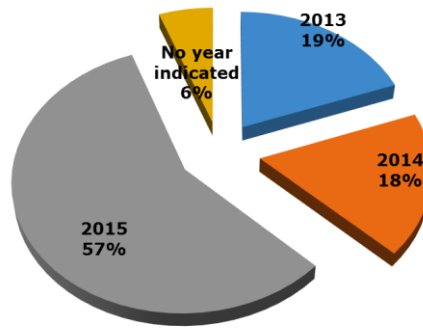
#### 4.2.1.5 Learner experience in ODL

This study is driven by the notion that change in the learning mode might be a factor with the greatest impact on learners' ability to integrate into the new distance education learning mode. One of the study's auxiliary objectives was to establish how learners who have the experience of studying through the conventional school system adjust to the distance learning environment. It was therefore important to establish the learners' prior experience of studying through the distance learning mode.



**Figure 4.3: Showing previous experience of studying through distance education mode before joining NAMCOL**

Figure 4.3 shows that most learners (86%) had no experience of distance learning; only 11% of the learners had prior experience of studying through this new mode. An insignificant number of learners (3%) did not answer the question. It could be that those participants who indicated that they had prior experience of distance education had tried to improve their grades through NAMCOL or other ODL private providers before. The lack of any experience of distance education could have a negative effect on learners' integration into NAMCOL because of their previous study habits. Dzakiria (2005) claims that any new approach to learning can either be accepted by learners to enhance learning or impede learning. Learners with prior learning experience in the distance education mode are more likely to continue with their studies than those learners who lack the necessary experience (Galusha, 1998).



**Figure 4.4: Showing year of first NAMCOL registration**

Many learners (57%) were first years. The year of data collection was their first experience with NAMCOL. Some learners (19%) indicated that they enrolled with NAMCOL for the first time in 2013 (19%) while (18%) enrolled for the first time in 2014. Only 6% of the learners did not indicate the year of registration. Those learners who registered between 2013 and 2014 could be those who completed their studies and those who were taking subjects over a number of years.

**Table 4.6: Two most important reasons for enrolling with NAMCOL**

Rank	Participants who did not complete Grade 12		Participants who completed Grade 12	
	Reason	Percentage of participants	Reason	Percentage of participants
1	To upgrade my symbols/grades	53%	To upgrade my symbols/grades	59%
2	To improve my results in order to further my studies at institutions of higher learning	47%	To improve my results in order to further my studies at institutions of higher learning	41%

To indicate the reasons that prompted them to register for studies with NAMCOL, learners were asked to rank the two most important reasons from the list provided in the questionnaire. Provision was also made for the learners to mention and rank other reasons which the researcher might not have thought of. Table 4.6 above shows the two most important reasons advanced by learners in the order of priority. The current and former learners were unanimous with their responses because both have indicated that they wanted to improve their grades and secondly they wanted to improve their results in order to further their studies at institutions of higher learning. As can be observed from the responses above, the overwhelming majority of learners

already attempted their Grade 12 qualification and failed to meet the minimum requirements to advance to the next level. They aspired to further studies and employment. The learners had a strong desire to obtain the Grade 12 qualification in order to change their lives for the better. This finding corresponds with views expressed by learners during a study which traced former learners who were engaged with NAMCOL between 2005-2010 (SAIDE, 2012). According to Elffers and Oort (2013), learners who fail in their first attempt, who become skeptical about any future prospects and who feel discouraged seldom do well in their second attempt. This suggests that learners joining NAMCOL after they had failed in the formal system were also pessimistic about their chances of succeeding through NAMCOL where the teacher is not always readily available.

#### **4.2.2 LEARNER INTEGRATION**

This section of data analysis focuses on Tinto's model of learner integration as well as Michael Moore's model of transactional distance. According to Tinto (1975), teaching and learning institutions consist of academic and social systems and for learners to fully integrate into these institutions, mutual relationships between these systems are imperative. The learner's individual commitment and his/her commitment to the institution also determine his/her integration into the system (Tinto, 1975). Moore (2013) emphasises the relationships or interactions between the learner and teacher, between the learners themselves and between the learners and the learning content which are key in the distance learning environment.

The questions in the part of the questionnaire that related to the different types of relationships in the teaching and learning environment were appropriate and relevant in addressing the objectives that dealt with learners' experiences and perceptions when moving from the traditional classroom mode of delivery to open and distance learning. In this section, questions were grouped into three categories, namely academic integration, social integration, and institutional and goal commitments. The researcher used a five-point Likert Scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree) to record the level of learners' responses to certain issues. The participants were mostly presented with a statement with a list of possible responses. Learners were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with certain statements that relate to academic integration.

#### 4.2.2.1 Academic integration

In the context of this study, academic integration refer to the relationship between the learner and the academic elements that contributes to learner integration into the NAMCOL environment. Karp et al. (2010) defines academic integration to the connection between the learner and the intellectual life of the institution.

**Table 4.7: Agreement level with the following statements with regard to academic integration**

	Statement	SA	A	NADA	D	SD	N	Total
1	I have adjusted easily to the distance learning environment (NAMCOL)	9%	27%	13%	18%	17%	16%	100%
2	I prefer to study on my own without support from teachers	4%	7%	8%	29%	43%	10%	100%
3	I can cope well on my own with the assignments (submitting on time)	37%	40%	8%	5%	4%	5%	100%
4	NAMCOL is not different from the previous school I have attended	13%	21%	15%	27%	19%	6%	100%
5	I have full understanding of what it means to study through distance education	13%	23%	21%	23%	14%	6%	100%
6	I struggle to manage my study time (balancing between my daily activities, eg. work, studies, and household duties.	23%	33%	16%	12%	11%	5%	100%
7	I do understand the subject content better with the provided learning materials without any support from my tutors or fellow students.	8%	18%	11%	33%	25%	4%	100%
8	Studying with NAMCOL is much better and easier than studying through the formal schools.	7%	11%	15%	29%	33%	5%	100%
9	I prefer more face-to-face sessions with my tutors	61%	25%	5%	4%	2%	4%	100%
10	The inexperience of studying through distance education makes it ever harder for me to cope at NAMCOL.	17%	25%	20%	16%	13%	9%	100%

Statement		SA	A	NADA	D	SD	N	Total
11	The study materials (guides) received at NAMCOL are of better quality than the lecture notes and textbooks I used to receive in formal schools	12%	18%	21%	23%	19%	7%	100%
12	The workload at NAMCOL is too much	3%	5%	19%	32%	31%	10%	100%

In Table 4.7, the majority (86%) of the learners rated regular face-to-face contact with the tutors as key for them to fully integrate within the ODL environment. This observation corresponds with the previous finding where the majority (86%) of the participants indicated that they did not possess any experience of studying through the distance education mode.

This finding suggests that the learners are relatively new and too 'immature' to adopt and adjust to the new mode of learning. Learners' preference to be taught the same way they were taught in schools illustrates their inability to understand the ODL system and their reluctance to take full responsibility for their own learning. This further shows the tension between learners' expectations and the principles of independent, self-directed and self-determined learning which are key for distance learning.

This finding is similar to the views expressed in a tracer study that was conducted to former learners who were with NAMCOL between 2005 and 2010 where more than 50% of the participants indicated that the college should improve its services by introducing more face-to-face sessions with tutors (SAIDE, 2012). The learners at the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL) in the study that deal with the experiences and perceptions of distance learners in Botswana expressed the same view by demanding to be taught the same way as in a conventional face-to-face school (Gatsha, & Evans, 2010). Tinto (1982) claims that students can develop a negative attitude if their demands are not met and that can ultimately lead to their failure to achieve their educational goals. The same negative attitude can be developed by the NAMCOL learners should the institution fail to meet their demands for more contact sessions. Furthermore, Moore's (1993) theory of transactional distance claims that independent learners cope well with less interaction/dialogue



while those who depend heavily on the teacher/tutor prefer more interaction. Learners' request for more contact sessions should not be viewed as unreasonable because they were heavily dependent on the teacher and want to maintain that status quo. However, the high demand for face-to-face to some extent contradicts Freire's (2000) views that limited contact sessions can also be beneficial as long as both parties (learner and teacher) engage in some kind of dialogue. The second highest rating relates to the submission of assignments. Of the total number of the participants, the majority (77%) indicated that they are coping well with the assignments and that they also submit their assignments on time.

One would think that learners may not experience any difficulties with the assignments because they can approach fellow learners, tutors/teachers and parents for assistance. In the view of the researcher, assignments may not be best assessment tools to determine whether learners have adjusted to the institution or to determine the competencies gained as the scores achieved can be very misleading for learners who did not produce own work. Though learners have indicated their satisfaction towards assignments, one needs to establish the general level of performance as well as the support the learners receive through tutor marked assignments. These issues will be addressed in the following chapter that deals with the analysis of qualitative data as marked assignments formed part of the document review.

This finding contradicts the views expressed by ODL B Ed Honours students in the study by Mdakane (2011) who complained about doing assignments on their own without sharing ideas and thoughts with their counterparts. If tertiary students find it difficult, it cannot be easy for learners in the secondary education programme. The opinion expressed by the learners in this study contradicts the actual data on the rate of learner assignments submitted for marking as well as their general level of performance at these four centres. The statistics show a positive average submission rate of above 65% for the first assignment, however a decline in the submission of subsequent assignments: 59% and 35% of assignments two and three respectively were submitted for marking (NAMCOL, 2015).

The third highest rating of 72% was in line with the learners' preference for more contact sessions. The learners found it extremely difficult to cope on their own without the support from the teachers; only 11% indicated that they could cope studying on their own. In support of this view, many (58%) of the participants indicated that they need the support from tutors and fellow learners to master the subject content.

The data for this study were collected three to four months (between June-August) after learner registration at the College; however, learners still preferred the learning approach followed in formal schools. This finding implies that learners do not want to abandon the study habits and the institutional culture they were used to. This further shows a mismatch between the learners' expectations and the institution's approach to learning.

The views expressed by the participants corresponds with the argument by Moore (1989) that transaction in distance education involves three forms of interaction: teacher-learner, learner-learner and learner-content interactions. Although some degree of interaction occurs, the learners demand for the traditional, one-way classroom-based interaction, which is normally dominated by the teacher, is contrary to Moore's approach to teacher-learner interaction.

Other areas where learners indicated high ratings were: 63% felt that the workload at NAMCOL is too heavy, 62% felt that studying with NAMCOL is not as easy as studying through the formal schools, and 53% struggle to manage study time or balance daily activities such as work, studies and household duties.

On the other hand, these findings show the learners' unwillingness to change and their inability to adopt and develop new study habits. NAMCOL follows the same curriculum followed by learners in the conventional school system. Therefore, the workload remains more or less the same; what changes is the approach to learning. The finding concerning a balance between the various activities shows learners' lack of capacity to plan and organize carefully. It further suggests the learners' level of immaturity and inability to manage self-directed and self-determined. The results of this study supports other research which indicated that managing study time was a

challenge facing learners during the transition stage (Barron, & D'Annunzio-Green, 2009; McGivney, 2004; Talbot, 2010).

The areas in which learners indicated lower ratings were the adjustment to distance education, the acknowledgement that NAMCOL is different from the previous school they had attended, the lack of understanding of and inexperience in the distance education mode which makes it harder to cope at NAMCOL. Some participants (42%) felt that the self-contained study guides provided by NAMCOL are not as good as the lecture notes/textbooks they used to receive in schools while few (30%) felt that the study guides are helpful. It should also be noted that although these items were scored lower by the participants than those previously reported on in the preceding paragraphs, they seem to have a negative influence on learners' integration into the ODL system.

These findings to some extent show the learners' inability to move from the transmission form of education or what Freire's refers to as the banking approach to learning to a more constructivist model where learners are viewed as central agents in the learning process who can construct own knowledge. The views expressed by the learners in this study support Richardson's (2003) observation that students transiting from high school to the university continue with the same learning approach developed at school although it is expected of them to become independent learners.

❖ **Support services that facilitate learner integration into the distance learning environment**

The participants were asked to express their views on the most appropriate support services which they thought were helpful in enabling them to adjust to the new environment of distance education. The participants could indicate more than one response on this question.

**Table 4.8: Academic support services that facilitate smooth transition**

Rank	Participants who did not complete Grade 12		Participants who completed Grade 12	
	Support services	Percentage of respondents	Support services	Percentage of respondents
1	Study guides	26%	Study guides	17%
2	Face-to-face tutorials	22%	Study groups	16%
3	Vacation workshops	16%	Face-to-face tutorials	15%
4	Study groups	6%	Comments from tutors on tutor marked assignments	14%
	Comments from tutors on tutor marked assignments	5%	NAMCOL learner handbook (Prospectus) and motivational talks at centres	9%
6	Motivational talks at centres	4%	Tutorial letters	8%
	Regular contact with tutors after the tutorial sessions	5%	Open days and prize giving ceremonies	7%
8	NAMCOL Learner Handbook (Prospectus)	4%	Orientation workshops	5%
9	Information campaigns	4%	Tutorial letters	3%
	Tutorial letters	3%	NAMCOL Learner Handbook (Prospectus)	3%
11	Open days and prize giving ceremonies	2%	Information campaigns	2%
	Orientation workshops	2%	Regular contact with tutors after the tutorial sessions	1%
13	Academic counselling	1%	Academic counselling and orientation workshops	0%
Other	No comment	100%	No comment	100%

It emerged from Table 4.8 that few learners who were still within the system rated the NAMCOL study guides highly (26%) as the most helpful support service followed by face-to-face tutorials (22%) and vacation workshops (16) in the third place. Of the total participants who have completed their studies with NAMCOL, 17% felt that study guides are the most helpful support services. The provision of face-to-face tutorials (15%) was also viewed by the former learners as a critical support service. Tutor comments on marked assignments was ranked fourth by all respondents, and this ranking somehow corresponds with the previous response where 77% of the learners indicated that they are coping well with the assignments. Other support services such

as motivational talks, tutorial letters, orientation workshops and the learner information handbook (prospectus) received average ratings while regular contact with tutors after contact sessions and academic counselling received the lowest ranking.

One could assume from the learners' responses that the study materials received a relatively high rating because of their previous experience in formal schools of shared textbooks and late delivery of learning resources. The participants' responses on the effectiveness of the study guides imply that the learning resources are of acceptable quality and learners feel comfortable confronting the content even in the absence of the tutor. The participants' preference for face-to-face tutorials and vacation workshops suggest that the learners value the human element in constructing their own knowledge. One can deduce from the rankings that learners mostly have high regard for the support services which have a more direct influence on their academic performance than those support services of an indirect nature.

The findings correspond with the views expressed by NAMCOL learners in the SAIDE study that determined learners' awareness of various support services. In the study 91% of the learners were aware of the learning resources while 48% and 21% indicated their awareness of the face-to-face tutorials and vacation workshops respectively (SAIDE, 2014). Human interaction through tutorials is viewed by researchers as an important component that increases learner success in ODL (Leese, 2010; Lentell, 2004; Locks et al., 2008).

#### **4.2.2.2 Social integration**

This section presents learners' views and experiences on how they integrate into social life within the institution. In the view of Karp et al. (2010), social integration refers to relationships and engagements with fellow learners and other connections outside the classroom situation (Karp et al., 2010). Tinto's model of interaction and student attrition suggests that students do not only persist with their studies by integrating academically but also participate in other social activities within and outside the context of the learning environment which he refers to as social integration (Tinto, 1975, 1997b). It focuses on how learners engage with other people and how the non-academic activities assist them to fully integrate within the institution. The

learners were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed to certain statements that relate to social integration.

**Table 4.9: Agreement level with the following statements with regard to social integration**

Statement		SA	A	NADA	D	SD
1	I have established a close relationship with my fellow learners	32%	50%	8%	5%	5%
2	There is regular communication between myself and the tutor	33%	45%	12%	7%	3%
3	I do receive enough support from my family members/friends/employers/co-workers in advancing my studies at NAMCOL	36%	40%	5%	9%	10%
4	There is a variety of extra-mural activities at NAMCOL, eg. sports, debating etc.	14%	27%	15%	18%	26%
5	The extra mural activities (non-academic) at NAMCOL make me feel part of the institution.	19%	30%	17%	18%	15%
6	I learn best when competing with others	58%	33%	3%	3%	3%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>32%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>10%</b>

The findings in Table 4.9 reveal that the great majority of the learners (91%) indicated that they learn best when competing with others; very few (6%) indicated otherwise. Learners did not have serious challenges when engaging with their peers in this new mode as the majority (82%) indicated that they had established close relationships with their counterparts. Very few learners (10%) indicated the opposite while 8% of the learners remained neutral. This seems to be a good sign amongst NAMCOL learners as healthy competition motivates learners and encourages collaborative learning. Competition allows learners to share ideas that lead to the development of new competencies. These findings imply that learners have developed positive social relationships and interactions that engage them in constructive learning. Their engagements with peers made them become valued members of the community and that facilitated their integration into the new learning environment.

In support of the views expressed above, Locks et al. (2008) argue that positive interaction with peers lead to a sense of belonging and ultimately contribute to persistence and academic success. Tinto (1987) also highlights peer group interactions as vital for social integration. These views are supported by Severiens

and Wolff (2008) who found that those learners who are more connected to their peers and who engage themselves with the non-academic activities stand a good chance to succeed with their studies. On the contrary, Mannan (2007) found that students who engage too much in non-academic activities may devote less time to their studies which can negatively affect their academic performance and those who are less involved in non-academic activities are likely to excel academically. This finding by Mannan (2007) to some extent validate Tinto's views on social and academic integration.

In response to the question of communication between the teacher and the learner, 78% of the learners expressed their satisfaction with the regular communication between themselves and tutors. Learners viewed communication between themselves and tutors as important because they are products of the conventional system and still hold to the belief that tutors/teachers are critical for their academic performance. This finding supports the views expressed by Sweet (1986), and Tinto (1975) that quality communication between the instructor and the student is an effective form of social integration. On the contrary, a study by Potter (2013) at three Canadian dual mode institutions found insufficient communication between the students and the instructors and among the students themselves leads to a sense of isolation.

Learners also expressed their satisfaction with the support they receive from family members, friends, employers and fellow workers in pursuit of their studies. Of the total who responded to the question, the majority (76%) were satisfied with the support; only 19% felt that the support was insufficient. This finding suggests that productive learning is a collaborative process rather than an individual activity. Productive learning or knowledge acquisition takes place through the support from people around one. Park and Choi (2009) claim that support from families enhance learner persistence.

In response to the question as to whether the extra-mural (non-academic) activities available at NAMCOL make learners feel connected to the institution, learners were almost equally split in their views: 41% felt that the extra-mural activities are sufficient while 44% felt that they are insufficient. A follow-up question was asked whether the



non-academic activities make them feel part of the institution. Of those who responded, some (49%) were of the opinion that the non-academic activities at the College made them feel connected while a third (33%) did not see any benefit being derived from these activities. This implies that some learners had developed new other skills beyond the academic domain and a sense of belonging. However, it suggests the ineffectiveness of the NAMCOL non-academic services which should assist learners to discover their own potentials and talents. Learners come with talents that need to be enriched and ODL institutions should develop the learners holistically by focusing on both academic and non-academic activities.

Research has shown that learner participation in extra mural activities help learners to discover their personal identity and establish and maintain relationships with the counterparts (Eccles et al., 2003). However, too much involvement in non-academic activities may also be counterproductive because students devote less time to academic work, which may ultimately affect their academic performance and integration (Mannan, 2007).

#### 4.2.2.3 Institutional and individual goal commitments

To determine their level of commitment, learners were asked to express their views on four statements with regard to NAMCOL preparation of learners to achieve their educational goals.

**Table 4.10: Agreement level with the following statements with regard to NAMCOL preparation of learners to achieve their educational goals**

Statement		SA	A	NADA	D	SD
1	NAMCOL has prepared me to continue studying through distance education at any other level.	27%	42%	13%	11%	7%
2	I will recommend the Grade 12 NAMCOL programme to any other learner who wants to upgrade his/her grades	52%	40%	2%	3%	3%
3	I do not regret being part of the NAMCOL community in advancing my educational career	40%	35%	10%	9%	6%
4	If I had a choice, I would have undertaken my entire secondary education career through open and distance learning.	18%	30%	17%	16%	19%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>34%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>9%</b>

In response to the question as to whether NAMCOL prepared them adequately to study through distance learning at any other level in their education journey, many participants (69%) indicated that they had been prepared to engage in further studies using this mode of delivery. A small percentage (18%) indicated otherwise and 13% remained neutral. This finding contradicts the data presented in Table 4.7 where 72% of the participants indicated that they struggle to study on their own.

The new mode of learning was a new concept to many of these learners when they joined NAMCOL for the first time, however it appears that NAMCOL has empowered some of them to study through this new mode of study. The observation from the participants shows commitment and shift of mindset from the traditional pedagogical approach to more andragogical and heutagogical approaches to learning that could be of benefit to these learners when engaging with studies at institutions of higher learning which require more independent learning. This finding further implies that some learners have mastered the skills required study at a distance.

Furthermore, the great majority of the learners (92%) felt that because of their preparedness to study through the distance learning mode, they feel comfortable advising other potential learners to pursue their Grade 12 qualification through NAMCOL. This implies that learners have taken ownership of the learning process and have developed a sense of belonging to the extent that they feel comfortable serving as 'ambassadors' in promoting the institution to other potential learners.

The majority (75%) of the participants felt they had become part of the NAMCOL community to advance their educational career. Only half of the participants (48%) indicated that given the choice, they would prefer to take their entire secondary education career through the distance learning model while some (35%) felt otherwise.

The participants' commitment to their studies and the institution displayed through their responses support Tinto's (1975) view that the level of personal and institutional commitment could influence learner ability to integrate socially and academically into the new learning environment. On the contrary, Makoe (nd) found that the culture of

autonomous and independent learning for distance learning students remains a challenge because of lack of institutional support.

#### 4.2.3 TRANSITION DIFFICULTIES

This study is driven by the notion that change in the learning environment might be the most influential factor shaping the learner’s ability to integrate into the new distance learning environment. The study’s principal objective is to explore the experiences and perceptions of learners during the transition period. Learners were asked to rate possible transition difficulties they face when transferring from the formal school to distance learning.

**Table 4.11: Agreement level with the following statements with regard to transition difficulties**

	Statement	SA	A	NADA	D	SD
1	I found it hard to motivate myself to study	16%	29%	7%	25%	23%
2	I did not receive information on how to study through distance on time	13%	25%	15%	27%	21%
3	Not enough information was given to me at the beginning	12%	23%	15%	28%	22%
4	It is difficult to balance between studying, family and work commitments	23%	30%	13%	21%	13%
5	It is difficult to adjust to this new mode of study (distance learning)	14%	30%	17%	23%	16%
6	I feel isolated from the learning environment	7%	20%	18%	30%	25%
7	I find it hard to study on my own	11%	24%	8%	32%	25%
8	I feel inferior studying through NAMCOL	7%	17%	21%	30%	25%
9	The negative perception on NAMCOL makes me feel discouraged	11%	14%	14%	33%	28%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>13%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>22%</b>

In general, there were significant high ratings in terms of the difficulties learners experienced. There was also a fair balance between learners experiencing difficulties and those coping well during the transition period. Table 4.11 indicates that learners find it difficult to strike a balance between studying, family and work commitments as was indicated by half (53%) the learners. Some learners experience difficulties in managing their time. On the contrary, a third (34%) of the learners indicated that they

manage their time well. Distance learning is known for its flexibility which allows learners to perform multiple tasks; however, this finding implies that a large number of learners did not master the distance learning environment to perform multiple tasks. This further shows that learners lack the necessary time management skills. Time management goes hand in hand with self-discipline, and failure for learners to manage study time may encourage procrastination which may affect their academic performance.

In support of this finding, Romero (2011) argues that learners' study time is challenged by work, family and social activities which are all in direct competition. This view is corroborated by Talbot (2010) who posits that time management in distance education may contribute to learners' stress during the transition process. Motivation is another factor that was rated by some learners (45%) as challenging; some (48%) also felt motivated to study through NAMCOL. This finding implies that distance education learners enter the learning environment with different degrees of motivation which can either be extrinsic or intrinsic. Those learners who are more intrinsically motivated are more likely to persist or achieve academic success. This finding is in line with the SAIDE (2011) study at NAMCOL, in which some stakeholders found that learners on the secondary programme are immature, lack motivation and self-discipline (SAIDE, 2011).

In terms of introducing the learners to the distance education mode, 48% confirmed that they received sufficient introduction while some (38%) denied that they did not receive the information. Similarly, half the learners (50%) were comfortable with the information shared at the beginning of the academic year, just over a third (35%) felt that the information given was insufficient to assist them with the adjustment needed to cope with the distance learning mode. NAMCOL offers orientation workshops to learners at the beginning of each term; however, some learners did not optimize these interventions, possibly due to their own failure to attend or factors beyond their control, such as distances to centres, work, family or other commitments. This finding also suggests the institution's inability to reach out to all its learner population. These findings support the views expressed by Makoe (nd) that students struggle with independent learning because of lack institutional support.

On the question of whether they feel isolated from the new learning environment, many (55%) felt part of the academic community at NAMCOL; only very few (27%) felt isolated. Because many learners felt connected to the institution, 57% indicated that they can study freely on their own while some (35%) still lack the confidence to conduct independent study. Despite the positive comments from some learners, a good number of learners (44%) expressed the sentiment that they find it challenging to adjust to the new mode of distance education. Although many participants felt connected to the institution, the fact that some (27%) felt isolated from the learning environment suggests that NAMCOL does not conform to the principle of inclusivity. Distance education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century does not only focus on increasing access but is also moving towards a systems approach that is more inclusive and which responds to the individual needs of the learner population. Rumble and Koul (2007) attribute the drop-out rate at NAMCOL to the isolation of the learners from the institution. Other researchers concur that isolation is a factor experienced by distance education students (Dzakiria, 2005; Kember, 2007; Morgan, 2013).

In general, ODL is characterised by negative perceptions and is regarded as an inferior form of education. Surprisingly, many learners (61%) revealed that they were not discouraged by the negative perception attached to ODL in general and NAMCOL in particular. Similarly, many (55%) felt proud of being associated with NAMCOL; only a few (24%) differed. To some extent this shows that NAMCOL has become an institution of choice for learners who feel that the conventional system is not the sole way to deliver education. This observation could also be linked to the learners' perception that the conventional school system had failed them, hence their engagement with NAMCOL. Additionally, this finding implies that learners entertain a clear purpose of studying at NAMCOL and ignore negative remarks in this regard. This finding differs from the SAIDE (2011) study, which indicated that stakeholders regarded ODL in general and NAMCOL in particular as inferior, a system designed for failures to redress the deficiencies of the formal education system (SAIDE, 2011).

#### **4.2.4 SUPPORT SERVICES THAT FACILITATE LEARNER ADJUSTMENT TO THE NEW ENVIRONMENT**

In this section the participants were asked to prioritise the support services they think might be helpful to cope with the transition.

**Table 4.12: NAMCOL support services to assist learners cope with the transition (change) ranked in order of importance**

Rank	Participants who did not complete Grade 12	
	Support services	Percentage of participants
1	It should provide more face-to-face sessions with tutors	17.2%
2	It should provide full-time centres, so that classes can be held in the morning as well	17.0%
3	It should provide additional learning resources	16.6%
4	It should introduce some extra mural activities to bring learners closer to each other	10.4%
5	It should create discussion platforms for learners to feel connected	10.0%
6	It should enhance supervision and monitoring at centres	9.7%
7	It should create discussion platforms for learners to feel connected	9.4%
8	It should implement technology (radio, video and online content) to supplement the print based materials	9.3%
Other	It should invite former learners to motivate others	0.4%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Table 4.12 reveals that 17, 2% of the participants valued the provision of more face-to-face contact sessions by the tutors. This was followed by a strong demand to offer classes during the morning as is the case in the conventional schools (17% of the participants). The demand for more contact sessions shows that these learners prefer a high degree of interaction between themselves and the teacher, a teaching delivery model to which they are accustomed. The table also indicates learners' resistance to change because familiar teaching approaches and study habits are hard to relinquish. Furthermore, some learners mistrust a form of education offered outside the normal school hours. This finding to some extent contradicts the previous finding in Table 4.11 where roughly half (57%) the learners indicated that they felt comfortable studying on their own.

This observation on the awkward times for tuition is not unique to NAMCOL, Chikoko (2010) also reported on the mixed reactions from learners in terms of suitability of the scheduling of classes. Some found weekdays suitable; others prefer the weekends. The demand for face-to-face tuition as a preferred mode of delivery for distance

education learners is prevalent in other research studies (Kirby, Sharpe, Bourgeois, & Greene, 2010; Owens et al., 2009)

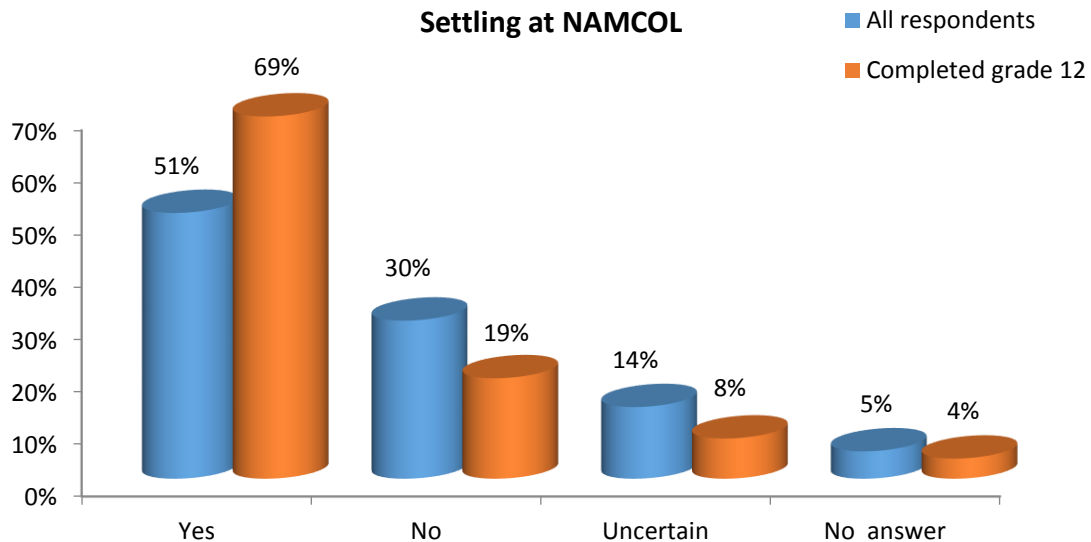
Learners also felt that the College should provide additional learning resources (16,6%) to supplement the study guides. Other support services mentioned in the order of importance include the provision of extra-mural activities (10,4%), creation of discussion platforms (10%) and the implementation of technology related services such as radio, video and online content (9,3%) to supplement the print-based materials. A study by Potter (2013) on the support services at three Canadian universities shows that students had high demand for quality learning resources and access to instructors. It appears that the learners prefer the traditional method of using print-based materials rather than any other form of learning resources which can add equal value to the learning process. Some learners do not realise the benefits of the use of technology in the learning process. It also shows NAMCOL's inability to sensitise learners to the benefits of technology. If the tutors continue to predominantly use the traditional method of teaching and resist embracing technology in the teaching and learning process, this will influence the learners' attitude towards technology. Learners' demand for traditional learning resources implies that the learner-content interaction is not multi-dimensional as it only refers to the print-based materials. This is contrary to Moore (1989) interpretation of learner-content interaction. According to Moore (1989), learner-content interaction refers to the use of print-based study guides, interacting with different forms of multimedia such as radio, video and online content, searching for information and completing assessment instruments such as assignments and projects. However, the finding corresponds to some extent with similar views expressed by NAMCOL learners who were most aware of study guides and workbooks as support services in comparison to technology-driven support services (SAIDE, 2014).

#### **4.2.5 LEARNER ADJUSTMENT TO DISTANCE LEARNING AT NAMCOL**

The study examined the level of learner adjustment to the distance learning environment since the great majority (96%) indicated that they joined NAMCOL after struggling to succeed in the conventional face-to-face school system. In the conventional system these learners were accustomed to the face-to-face pedagogical approach to learning where they were highly dependent on the teacher. This study



therefore was based on the assumption that learners would find it problematic to adjust to the new learning environment because of challenges of transition. Figure 4.5 below shows the learners responses on the question of adjustment to the distance learning environment.



**Figure 4.5: Learners' responses on their adjustment at NAMCOL**

Interestingly, half the learners (51%) who were in the system indicated that they have adjusted well to the new learning environment; less than a third (30%) felt they did not settle well; very few (14%) were uncertain and 5% did not respond to the question. On the other hand, most (69%) of those who have completed their studies with NAMCOL indicated that they adjusted well with 19% indicating otherwise. The remaining learners were either uncertain (8%) or did not respond to the question. Since the majority indicated that they adjusted well, it could be that the timing of data collection influenced responses because by then, they would have established new relationships with tutors and fellow learners. This finding is somehow contradictory to the finding in a study by Chikoko (2010) which showed a low level of student integration ultimately leading to early withdrawals.

The response on learner adjustment was followed by a question that determined the stage/period in the academic year by which time learners had adjusted well to the ODL environment. The NAMCOL academic year is spread over three terms; January-April; May-August; and September-November. In the first term, tutorials normally run between March and April because the other two months are used for learner registration. In the second term tutorials run for the entire period. The third term is the

shortest term because tutorials are suspended by the end of September when the national examinations commence. Table 4.13 below shows the learners' responses on the period in the academic calendar when they felt they had adjusted to the new learning environment.

**Table 4.13: Learner period of adjustment**

Settlement term	Male	Female	Total
First term	53%	39%	42%
Second term	35%	47%	44%
Third term	5%	7%	6%
Not answer	7%	7%	7%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Forty-two percent (42%) indicated that they adjusted well during the first term while (44%) and (6%) adjusted well during the second and third terms respectively. Male learners (53%) adjusted well in the first term; female learners (47%) indicated that they adjusted well in the second term.

Finally, the participants were asked to advance own reasons for their responses regarding their adjustment at NAMCOL. Table 4.14 indicates the participants' reasons for their adjustment in the new learning environment.

**Table 4.14: Responses on the extent to adjustment at NAMCOL**

Comments	All respondents	Completed Grade 12
Progressing well with studies and have made new friends. Tutors are good and we have enough materials.	66%	72%
I am studying very well, but NAMCOL should consider having morning classes and have our own tutors rather than relying on school teachers.	7%	6%
Syllabi is not completed due to fewer classes per week and vacation schools should be extended to two weeks.	2%	5%
Classes are overcrowded, no notes given and classes end very late.	2%	
Always doing class activities, received all the assignments, & memos'.	2%	
Assignments marks take forever to receive.	2%	6%

Comments	All respondents	Completed Grade 12
All necessary information is given on time.	2%	
Poor attendance of tutors.	1%	
I have no place to stay close to the centre.	1%	
I feel inferior to study at NAMCOL.	1%	
Not enough classes per week.	1%	
I live close to the school.	1%	
No comment	14%	11%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

On the extent to which they have adjusted, many (66%) of the participants felt that they were progressing well with the studies, have made new friends, viewed the tutors as good and claimed to receive enough study materials. However, for those who have completed the course, many (72%) expressed the same views in terms of their adjustment. Again, some responses indicated that learners have the desire to have morning classes with own tutors rather than depending on formal schools teachers. Some learners expressed certain concerns that hinder them from adjusting well at NAMCOL: overcrowded classes, the length of time before marked assignments are received, poor attendance of tutors, feelings of inadequacy to study at NAMCOL, insufficient classes per week, lack of notes, classes end very late in the evening, syllabi not completed because of few hours allocated per subject and the duration of the vacation workshops which is too short.

#### 4.2.6 LEARNER UNDERSTANDING OF THE ODL SYSTEM

The study also sought to determine the learners' level of understanding of the ODL system. The participants therefore were asked to give their own views on how they understand the ODL system which they were exposed to for the first time in their education career. Table 4.15 shows the participants' comments on their understanding of how the ODL system differs from the conventional face-to-face system.

**Table 4.15: Comments on the difference of NAMCOL from the school environment**

Comments on the difference of NAMCOL to school environment	Respondents
No daily classes and only after school sessions	16%
Limited contact sessions at NAMCOL	16%
Tutors are not teaching but only focus on few topics	13%
NAMCOL provides extra resources (study guides and resource centres]	13%
Tutors are experienced in subject matter and they tutor very well	8%
Tutors are tired from their daily normal activities and do not give class activities and tests	6%
Learners have the freedom to manage own study time. They can do self-study with limited supervision unlike in schools	5%
Learners are not supervised, they make noise and are not punished	4%
No difference between NAMCOL and full-time study	3%
Some classes are overcrowded and not conducive for learning	2%
No school uniform to differentiate tutors from learners	1%
NAMCOL suitable for the working class as it provides after hours tutorial sessions	1%
No hostel and walking from classes in the evening is risky to learners	1%
Tutors miss classes	1%
No comment	10%
<b>Grand Total</b>	100%

Table 4.15 shows the learners' diverse views of the ODL system. This was an open-ended question and the participants could give more than one response. Sixteen percent (16%) of the participants differentiated the ODL system from the conventional school system on the basis of the timing of the contact sessions: NAMCOL classes are scheduled after normal schools hours. They also distinguished the ODL system at NAMCOL from the conventional school system on the basis of the limited contact sessions (15%), teachers not teaching but focusing on a certain topic (13%), provision of learning resources (13%), experienced tutors (8%), exhaustion of tutors because of their other engagements during the day (6%) and learners' freedom to manage own study time (5%). However, 3% of the comments did not see any difference between ODL and the conventional face-to-face system. Other areas mentioned were: unruly learners because of lack of supervision, overcrowded classes, no school uniform, suitable for working class, no hostel facilities and tutors missing classes. From the responses above, it appears that the participants lack the general

understanding of ODL, they define ODL from the perspective of the traditional school system they are coming from, and neglect to define its fundamental principles. Gokool-Ramdoos (2009) recommends the design of an advocacy strategy to assist learners to understand the expectations of distance education and to develop skills to engage with tutors and to manage time.

### 4.3 ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM STAFF

This part presents the quantitative analysis of the data collected from the different categories of staff. The data were collected from area coordinators, heads of Tutorial Centres and tutors because of their direct involvement with learners. The area coordinators and heads of Tutorial Centres perform the duties of monitoring and supervising Tutorial Centres while the tutors are more directly involved in tutoring or marking of assignments. The purpose of including these categories of staff was to draw a comparison with the data obtained from the learners. The sample included 28 participants as follows: four (4) area coordinators, four (4) heads of Tutorial Centres and 20 tutors. However, only 25 questionnaires were returned from all three categories of participants. Two questionnaires from the southern and one from the northern regions were not returned. The data are presented into the following sections: demographic data pertaining to the respondents, learner integration, difficulties of transition, support systems that facilitate learner integration, and learner adjustment to the distance mode.

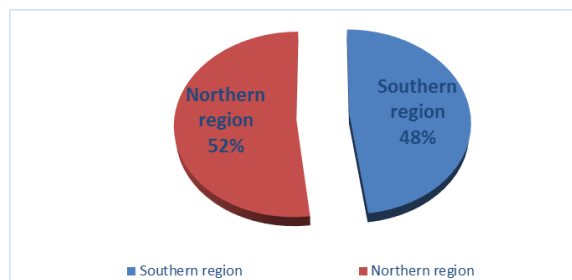
#### 4.3.1 STAFF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

**Table 4.16: Years of experience in an ODL delivery and gender distribution**

NAMCOL service years	Female	Male	Total
3 years	4	5	9
Between 4, & 5 years	3	1	4
More than 5 years	1	11	12
Grand Total	8	17	25

Table 4.16 depicts staff years of experience of tutoring and supervision in an ODL delivery mode, which ranged between 3 years and more than 5 years and the gender distribution. Eight (32%) of the participants were females while 17 (68%) were males.

One key criterion for participation in the study was that they should be attached to the two selected regions and should have a minimum of three (3) years of tutoring and supervisory experience in an ODL environment. The reason for setting a minimum number of years of experience was to ensure that rich data were obtained from staff who had worked with the learners in an ODL settings over a couple of years. ODL environment differs from the conventional school environment; it was therefore important to get views from staff who have worked with learners in an ODL setting before. The table shows that 12 (48%) of the participants had more than 5 years of experience, while (9) 36% had experience of 3 years with only 4 participants (16%) having experience of between 4 and 5 years. It is clear from the table above that staff with a substantive amount of experience of more than 5 years constitute the largest percentage. This is evidence that learners were exposed to those with sufficient experience and knowledge to guide them through their studies. One could also assume that the majority of staff prefer to continue to work for NAMCOL for couple of years.



**Figure 4.6: Showing participants by NAMCOL region**

Figure 4.6 shows the regional distribution of staff of which 12 (48%) were from the southern region while 13 (52%) were from the northern region. Of the total number of participants who were from the northern region, six (24%) of the participants were from Andima Toivo Ya Toivo study centre and seven (28%) were from David Sheehama study centre. As for centres in the southern region, both Hage Geingob and Okahandja study centres had an equal number of six (24%) respondents. Two participants from southern and one participant from the northern region did not return their questionnaires. Two centres were selected from the major towns, one in each region, while the other two were taken from semi-urban areas. The reason for this selection was that learners may experience transition differently; therefore, the selection of centres from different locations could possibly give a different dimension to the study.

**Table 4.17: Subjects responsible for and number of years tutoring subjects at NAMCOL**

Subjects	3 years	Between 4, & 5	More than 5	Grand Total
Accounting	2			2
Otjiherero First Language		1		1
Geography		1	1	2
Agriculture	1		2	3
Biology	2			2
Business Studies	2			2
Development studies		1	1	2
English Second Language	3		2	6
Oshindonga First Language			1	1
Mathematics		3		3
Physical Science	1	1		2
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>11 (44%)</b>	<b>7 (28%)</b>	<b>7 (28%)</b>	<b>25 (100%)</b>

Table 4.17 shows the subjects for which the tutors were responsible and the years of teaching experience. The subjects were represented as follows: English 2<sup>nd</sup> Language had the highest number of six tutors (24%) and Otjiherero and Oshindonga had the lowest number of one (4%) each. This finding to some extent corresponds with the number of tutors required to teach a particular subject. The more the learner intake, the more the number of tutors are required. For example, English had a combined learner intake of 1 912 while Otjiherero and Oshindonga had learner intakes of 13 and 62, respectively (NAMCOL, 2015). Concerning teaching experience, 44% of the participants had three years of experience, while 28% had experience of between three and five years and another 28% had more than five years of teaching experience. The participants' overall teaching experience may differ from the years of experience at NAMCOL (ODL setting) since this question was meant to establish the years of experience for teaching a particular subject. This question was not designed for those who were not directly involved in tutoring. Williams and Williams (2011) argue that the teachers' skills, experience and expertise could make a huge difference in the educational outcomes of the learners.



## 4.3.2 LEARNER INTEGRATION

### 4.3.2.1 Academic integration

This section presents the views of the participants with regard to the academic integration of learners. In this part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to express their views on the five-point Likert Scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree) with respect to academic integration of the learners.

**Table 4.18: Agreement level with the following statements with regard to social integration of the learners**

	Statement	SA	A	NADA	DA	SA	Total
1	Learners adjust easily to distance learning at NAMCOL after coming from the formal schools	12%	36%	16%	20%	16%	100%
2	Learners prefer to study on their own without much support from tutors	4%	0%	12%	44%	40%	100%
3	Learners' assignments are generally of good quality and mostly submitted on time	8%	52%	24%	12%	4%	100%
4	Learners fully understand the dynamics of distance learning	4%	16%	32%	32%	16%	100%
5	Learners find it hard to balance between their daily activities such as work, family responsibilities and studies	32%	28%	12%	20%	8%	100%
6	Learners show a good understanding of the content in the study guides	8%	44%	20%	20%	8%	100%
7	Learners demand more face-to-face sessions with tutors	46%	42%	8%	4%	0%	100%
8	Learners' inexperience of studying through distance education makes it ever harder for them to cope at NAMCOL	16%	36%	24%	16%	8%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>16%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.18 shows that 48% of the participants indicated that learners coming from the formal schools comfortably adjust to the way NAMCOL delivers its programme; 36% felt that learners struggle to adjust; and 16% did not express any opinion. Although fewer learners (36%) were indicated as struggling to adjust, the fact remains that 36%

still represents a significant number of learners, which suggest that there are potential barriers to learning at the institution which possibly have a negative influence on learners. This should be a concern to the institution. This concurs with Cross and Carpentier (2009) who found that students experience difficulties adjusting to the new environment because they continue to approach their studies in the new environment according to the same approach used in the previous learning environment. According to Potter (2013), distance education is meant to reduce or eliminate some situational and institutional obstacles to learning, which appears not to be the case through the finding in this study. Inclusivity through increased access and better learning outcomes is at the core of distance education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Positive learning outcomes could be achieved if learners are fully integrated within the learning environment.

Table 4.18 reveals that most participants (84%) felt strongly that learners cannot cope or study on their own without the support of the tutors. Only an insignificant number of the participants (4%) felt that learners can easily cope on their own without much support from the tutors while 12% did not express any view on the matter. This finding corresponds with the earlier finding whereby the great majority of learners (86%) revealed that they prefer regular face-to-face contact with the tutors to fully integrate within this new environment. This finding could be influenced by the staff's own pedagogical approach to learning, which they accustomed to because of their full-time engagement in the traditional brick and mortar learning environment. This finding could also be based on staff's own personal perception that learners want to maintain the status quo of dependence on them instead of adopting an independent approach to learning required in ODL. Furthermore, this finding could possibly imply that the learners are not cognitively and psychologically ready to engage in independent learning. This finding is similar to the viewpoint expressed by Lentell (2004) that regular communication between the learners and tutors/teachers is critical for learners to succeed in an ODL environment. Moore and Kearsley (2011) argue that sufficient interaction in a distance learning environment is important for both the learner and instructor to exchange ideas because the learner also serves as a source of information.

On the question that dealt with the quality of marked assignments, many staff members (60%) were of the opinion that learners' assignments are generally of good quality and that learners adhere to submission dates. Very few (16%) of the participants questioned the quality of the assignments as well as the submission period while few (24%) did not express any opinion. This observation corresponds with 77% of the learners who reported few challenges with the completion of assignments. On the contrary, Mdakane (2011) found that students struggle to do assignments on their own without sharing ideas and thoughts with fellow students.

Furthermore, table 4.18 further shows that 48% of the participants felt that NAMCOL learners lack a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of distance education while few (20%) felt that learners fully understand the system. However, 32% did not respond to the question. This finding implies that a conflict between the learners' expectations and the change of behaviour the academic staff expect from them. Staff felt that learners expected the same 'spoon feeding' approach to learning they were accustomed to in schools while the learners should take a more leading role in the learning process. The staff's observation on learners' understanding of the ODL system leaves the researcher with one question: Do the staff have the knowledge and expertise to adjust their teaching approach to suit learners better to appreciate distance learning? Tinto (2005) argues that institutions of learning should understand the character and diversity of first year students.

Time management is a factor contributing to some distance education learners' failure to complete their programmes of study. Unlike the conventional system where there are mandatory sessions learners should attend, in distance education the onus is on the learner to attend as he/she so wishes. Because of the flexibility within the system some learners lack the discipline to manage their time well. On the statement of striking a balance between the various daily activities, 60% of the participants felt that some learners struggle to strike a balance between activities such as work, family responsibilities, leisure and studies. However, 28% of the participants were of the opinion that learners balance the activities well while 12% did not respond. This finding relates to the responses of learners where just over half (56%) indicated that they struggle to strike a balance between the various daily activities. Though distance learning is meant to enable learners to manage their study time while performing other

multiple daily tasks because of its flexibility, the finding in this study shows that learners had little understanding of the demands of the system. The inability to balance daily activities and to manage study time are factors leading to learner drop out (McGivney, 2004; Talbot, 2010)

A good distance education system is characterised by the quality of its learning materials. These materials are written in such a way that they replace the teacher who is not readily available because he/she is separated from the learner in time and space. The table above shows that over half (56%) of the participants felt that the learners grasped the content in the materials; (28%) felt that the learners have some difficulties in comprehending the subject content and 20% remained neutral. This finding suggests a generally positive interaction between the learners and the learning resources. The learners' engagement with the content in the materials shows their ability to adjust to an independent approach to learning and to become autonomous. However, a considerable percentage of the participants (28%) felt that learners have difficulties and this suggest learners' lack of knowledge and experience to handle the distance learning materials. Moore (1989) refers to the engagement of the learner with the material as learner-instructor dialogue where the learner is silently in discussion with the teacher who is not physically present.

Table 4.18 also shows that a great majority (88%) of the participants expressed the view that learners prefer more face-to-face sessions with tutors; very few (4%) of the participants expressed a different opinion and 8% of the participants did not respond. This finding is consistent with the observation made by learners where 86% indicated that they prefer the traditional mode of delivery (face-to-face contact sessions). It could also be assumed that the observation by staff is due to their own perception that face-to-face teaching is the best approach for transferring knowledge because of their own experiences of this pedagogical approach. The demand for more face-to-face interactions concurs with other studies (Guri-Rosenblit, 2005; SAIDE, 2011, 2012). On the contrary, a study by Gokool-Ramdoo (2009) on the policy deficit in distance education establishes that students prefer more comprehensive print-based materials and minimal face-to-face sessions.

On the statement whether learners’ inexperience to study at a distance makes it even harder to cope at NAMCOL, roughly half (52%) answered in the affirmative: 24% were in disagreement and 24% of the participants did not express any opinion. In contrast, 42% of the learners felt that their inexperience affects their ability to cope with the new mode of delivery. Distance learning requires that learners adopt a completely new learning paradigm and the finding in this study suggests that learners are ill prepared to confront the new learning environment. It further shows learners cognitive and psychological unpreparedness to distance learning. Hung, Chou, and Chen (2010) maintain that the teachers have a critical role to play to help learners to develop skills in self-directed learning and self-control in online learning. The researcher believes that the teacher can play the same role in any distance learning environment to enable the learners to cope with the new mode of delivery.

#### 4.3.2.2 Academic support services

This section presents the views of staff on the support services they think are more effective and appropriate to help learners adjust easily to the new environment of distance education

**Table 4.19: Most effective support services which help learners to adjust to the distance mode ranked in order of importance**

Rank	Support service type	Percentage of respondents
1	Study Guides including examinations booklets	17%
2	Face-to-face tutorials	15%
3	Vacation workshops and study groups	14%
4	Feedback tutorial letters	11%
5	Motivational talks at centres	9%
6	Learner information handbook and orientation workshops	8%
7	Comments on tutor marked assignments	7%
8	Information campaigns	6%
9	Academic counselling	5%
10	Regular contact with tutors after the tutorial sessions	4%
11	Open days and prize giving ceremonies	3%
Other	Mock examinations	2%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

The provision of study materials was rated high by 17% of the participants as the most effective support services, followed by face-to-face tutorials at 15% and the third ranked support services were vacation workshops and formation of study groups which was rated by 14%. The provision of feedback tutorial letters was regarded as a critical component to direct the learners on subject specific matters as it was rated fourth by 11% of the respondents. Other support services ranked in the order of importance were: motivational talks (9%), learner information handbooks and orientation workshops (8%), comments on tutor marked assignments (7%), information campaigns (6%), academic counselling (5), regular contact with tutors after tutorial sessions (4%), open days and prize giving ceremonies (3%), and mock examinations (2%). The findings indicate that the participants felt that learners should take a more independent approach toward learning by using the study guides and at the same time they recognise the importance of dialogue in the learning process. The staff view of learners' preference for certain support services is congruent with Moore (1993) who identified three variables of transactional distance, namely dialogue, structure and learner autonomy. The findings suggest a relatively high degree of structure with a slightly decreased element of dialogue which can lead to learners becoming more autonomous and self-directed. Additionally, the views expressed by the participants also highlight the three forms of interactions namely, learner-content interaction, learner-learner interaction and learner-tutor interaction (Moore, 1989). Furthermore, it emerged from the data that the various forms of support services are paramount to facilitate learner integration into a new learning environment. Studying through distance can be a very isolating experience, therefore academic and non-academic support through dialogue and structure is paramount to narrow the transactional distance in ODL (Simpson, 2013b). Whilst this study places greatest emphasis on the support services that relate to learning resources and interactions between the learners and tutor, Potter (2013) study on support services at three Canadian universities shows a different picture. In addition to the communication with teachers and their counterparts, the students also value other academic support services such as writing and learning skills and prefer studying on their own (Potter, 2013).

### 4.3.3 SOCIAL INTEGRATION

In this section, the participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree to certain statements with regard to the learners' social integration on a five-point Likert scale.

**Table 4.20: Agreement level with the following statements with regard to social integration of the learners**

	Statement	SA	A	NADA	DA	SA	Total
1	I observe a close relationship between learners	16%	56%	16%	8%	4%	100%
2	Learners are establishing study groups to discuss the subject matter	0%	42%	33%	17%	8%	100%
3	There is regular communication between myself and the learners even after the tutorial sessions	17%	54%	17%	8%	4%	100%
4	Learners do receive enough support from their families and parents through participation in meetings or through follow-up on progress	0%	8%	52%	20%	20%	100%
5	The extra-mural activities at NAMCOL make learners feel part of the institution, eg. Sports, debating	32%	48%	16%	0%	4%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>13%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Interaction among the learners in distance education could enhance learning as it enables active learner participation as learners clarify complex issues. On the statement of how learners connect with fellow learners, many participants (72%) indicated that they observe peer interaction among learners while very few (12%) felt the opposite and 16% did not respond. Thus, in the view of the respondents, learners connect well with the institution by engaging with others in the learning process. The observation by 72% of the participants also corresponds with 82% of the learners who have indicated that they established close relationships with their counterparts.

Tinto's (1997b) model of integration suggests that students pass through three phases, separation, transition and incorporation. In the first phase (separation) they are separated from their past engagements with teachers or fellow learners and feel isolated. In the second phase (transition) they start connecting and adapting to the new environment while in the final phase (incorporation) they fully integrate into the



new environment and connect freely with teachers and fellow learners. It appears from this finding mentioned above that the learners in this study have passed through the first two phases and have begun to connect and form relationships with their counterparts.

Furthermore, the participants were asked to express their views on the establishment of study groups by learners to discuss subject content. In this case, 42% of the participants were certain that learners establish study groups while 25% felt that learners are reluctant to form study groups. A third of the participants (33%) did not express their views on the formation of study group. Thus, staff felt that a reasonable number of learners connect well with others and have developed a sense of belonging to the distance learning community. This concurs with Croft, Dalton, and Grant (2010) who found that students value the creation of a learning community to hear different viewpoints, discuss issues and share information.

Given the importance of various forms of interactions, the participants were asked to rate their level of interaction with learners after the normal contact sessions. A high percentage of participants (71%) claimed to have regular contact with learners outside the normal tutorial sessions, while 12% of the participants were of the opinion that there is no regular contact, and 17% did not express their views. This finding corresponds with the views from learners (78% expressed satisfaction with the regular communication between themselves and tutors). This suggests that learners' access to teachers is not classroom or time-bound, but they can access their tutors anytime and at any place without necessarily being in the classroom in front of the teacher. This cements the critical form of interactions between the teacher and learner (Kearsley, 1995; Moore, 1989).

Education is a collective responsibility. Support from parents and family members can make an immense contribution to the success of any distance education learner. As indicated in table 4.20 above, the participants were asked to give their views on the support learners receive from their family members and parents. Only 8% felt that learners receive enough support from family members and 40% felt otherwise. Half of the participants (52%) declined to express their views on the question. This finding contradicts the views expressed by many learners (76% felt that the support from

parents and family members were sufficient). The non-response by the majority of the participants could be attributed to lack of knowledge since they may not have any direct contact with the parents. The negative response rate on the support learners receive from their parents could also be that parents were disappointed by the performance of their children during the first attempt in the formal school or that they did not have faith that NAMCOL will make any difference. Furthermore, it could also be attributed to their inability to offer any academic support because of their level of education. Vellymalay (2012) found that the socioeconomic status of the parents and family can affect their involvement in the education of their children. Parents who are educated understand the educational needs of their children and are likely to support them (Vellymalay, 2012).

Tinto's model of social integration refers to learner engagement with institutional activities outside the classroom environment. The majority of the participants (80%) felt that the extra-mural activities organised by NAMCOL connect learners to the institution. Only 4% of the participants felt that the extra-mural activities do not have any influence on learner integration while 16% did not express any opinion on the matter. This implies that the College strikes a balance between academic and non-curricular activities that may enable learners to cope with the reality of life. This further shows that learners are holistically developed to discover their full potential. However, there was a discrepancy between the views expressed by staff and those of learners as only 41% of the learners felt that the extra-mural activities are sufficient. The fact that less than half of the primary beneficiaries were not satisfied with the extra-mural activities requires NAMCOL do a needs analysis on its current activities. Marais (2011) found that the non-academic activities provide an opportunity for students to experience positive growth in self-esteem and confidence.

#### **4.3.4 TRANSITION DIFFICULTIES**

In this section the participants were asked to express their views on certain statements with regard to the difficulties learners face when migrating from formal school to distance learning by using the five-point Likert scale.

**Table 4.21: Agreement level with the following statements with regard to transitional challenges**

Statement		SA	A	NADA	DA	SA	Total
1	There is a lack of motivation amongst the learners.	28%	52%	8%	8%	4%	100%
2	Learners do not get proper advice on how to study through distance education	29%	29%	13%	25%	4%	100%
3	Not sufficient information is given to learners on time to support them during the transition stage	14%	36%	14%	27%	9%	100%
4	Learners cannot study independently, they rely heavily on support from tutors	32%	52%	4%	12%	0%	100%
5	The negative perception on NAMCOL discourages learners	25%	21%	21%	33%	0%	100%
6	They feel isolated from the social learning environment and as a result withdraw from attending classes	16%	20%	28%	28%	8%	100%
Others	Learners feel that they do not need uniform		100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	Some students are like domestic workers in their homes, not enough time to study.		100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	Low self esteem		100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	Learners become victims of alcohol drugs abuse as well as pregnancy		100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>24%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The first statement relates to learner motivation. The majority of the participants (80%) felt that NAMCOL learners lack the motivation to pursue their studies through the distance education mode while very few (12%) of the participants felt that learners are motivated enough, and 8% did not respond. On the contrary, some learners (45%) felt that they lack motivation to study through the distance education mode. The finding implies that staff are frustrated because learners do not take an independent approach to learning. It further shows that the staff blame the learners for lack of motivation without reflecting of their own personal shortcomings that are likely to contribute to learners' lack of motivation. This finding contradicts Williams and Williams (2011) views on the factors that impact of student motivation, namely, student, teachers, content, method and environment as it only places the emphasis on the one component. However, it supports the view by Murphy and Rodríguez-

Manzanares (2009) that learners at secondary level lack intrinsic motivation and that the teacher has a key role to play in enhancing motivation amongst learners.

Furthermore, 58% of the participants felt that the guidance given to learners to assist them to study through the distance education mode is not sufficient, while few participants (29%) felt that the guidance they receive is appropriate and very few (13%) did not express their views. Of those that have indicated that learners get the necessary advice and guidance on how to study through the distance education mode, only 36% felt that sufficient information is given to the learners in good time while half (50%) felt that NAMCOL does not give the information on time. Of the total number of participants, 14% did not give their views on whether the advice is given on time. This corresponds with the previous response of 13% of those who did not respond to the advice and guidance given to learners to study through the distance education mode. The finding corresponds with view of learners (38% denied that they received any information and 35% felt that the information given was not sufficient to assist them with the adjustment needed to cope with the distance learning mode). This finding implies that the advice and guidance given is not sufficient and not communicated at the right time to engage the learners in learning and to make them feel connected to the institution. This finding is consistent with Potter (2013) who found that students prefer access to academic advising and guidance that will assist them to approach distance education with ease at an earlier stage.

In the conventional classroom setup the teacher directs the learning process while in distance learning environment, the learner is the central agent of his/her own learning. The nature of distance learning allows learners to migrate from a state of dependence to a more independent approach to learning. In terms of the approach to learning, most participants (84%) perceived learners are more dependent on the tutors while very few (12%) disagree. An insignificant number of the participants (4%) did not respond to the question. This finding supports the data in Table 4.17 regarding the high demand for face-to-face tutorials. Jaggars's (2014) study that focuses on online and face-to-face learning experiences of students at the Teachers College at Columbia University showed that some students prefer face-to-face to maintain the connection with peers and the strong student-teacher interaction, which is consistent with the finding in this study.

On the statement of how the negative perception of ODL in general and NAMCOL in particular affects learners' integration, 46% of the participants felt that the negative perception discourages learners while 33% felt that it does not have any impact on them. 20% of the participants neither agree nor disagree with the statement. This suggests that a negative perception still exists of ODL as an inferior form of education. This perception could hinder some learners to associate themselves with NAMCOL and could also lead to learner dropout.

In terms of learner isolation from the learning environment, 36% of the participants felt that learners felt isolated and subsequently withdraw from attending classes at the Tutorial Centres. However, the same percentage (36%) were of the opinion that learners have adjusted well and did not feel isolated while 28% opted not to respond to the question. Though the participants were equally split in their views, it could also be argued that NAMCOL is not doing enough to make learners feel part of the institution. The ultimate goal for ODL institutions should be to remove all possible barriers to learning that prevent learners from achieving their educational objectives. The finding on learner isolation is not unique to NAMCOL; this element came out strongly in other studies (Galusha, 1998; Mdakane, 2011; Owens et al., 2009).

In addition to the participants' views on the above statements, the participants also raised some critical issues which they perceived as challenging to the learners. These include learners' who are working as domestic workers and who do not get enough time to attend to studies, learners developing a low self-esteem because of their previous learning experience of failing in schools, and learners becoming victims of drug abuse as well as teenage pregnancy.

#### **4.3.5 SUPPORT SERVICES RELEVANT TO ASSIST LEARNERS COPE WITH THE CHANGE**

Learners in a distance learning environment need sufficient support to eliminate or reduce potential barriers to learning in order to for them to achieve academic success. This section solicited the views from staff on the possible support services they deemed appropriate to assist learners cope with the transitional changes.

**Table 4.22: Support services that assist learners cope with transition ranked in order of importance**

Rank	Support services	Percentage of respondents
1	It should provide more face-to-face sessions with tutors	32%
2	It should provide full-time centres, so that classes can be held in the morning as well	23%
3	It should build the capacity of staff to understand the dynamics of distance learning to better support the learners.	14%
4	It should introduce technology driven initiatives (radio, audio and online resources) to supplement the traditionally print-based content	12%
5	It should create discussion platforms for learners to feel connected	9%
6	It should introduce some extra mural activities to bring learners closer to each other	8%
other	Vacation workshops should be revised, recruit better tutors for extra activities	2%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

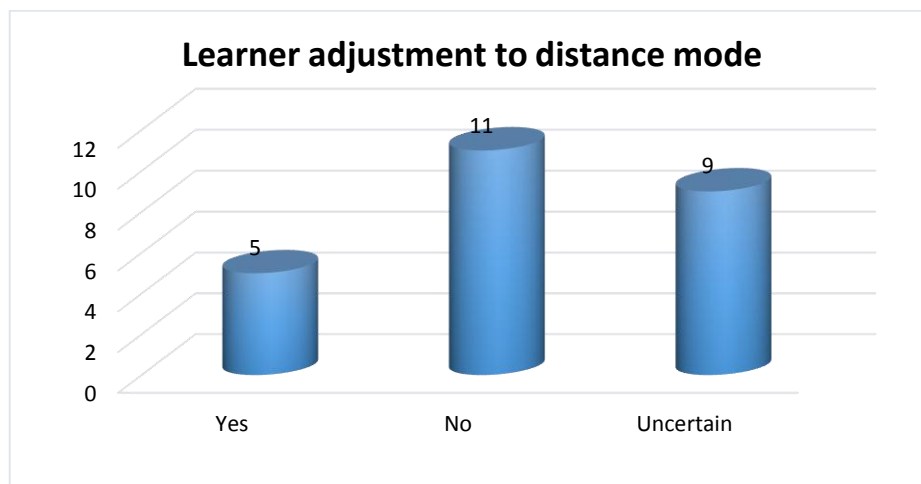
Table 4.21 indicates the ranking of participants of measures NAMCOL should put in place to assist learners to cope with the change from the conventional school system to ODL. Of the total number of respondents, 32% strongly felt that NAMCOL should facilitate more face-to-face tutorials. In support of this view, 23% of the participants felt that NAMCOL should establish own full-time centres to run its tutorials in morning hours instead of relying heavily on the formal schools to run its programmes in the afternoons or evenings. The building capacity of staff was rated third at 14% by the respondents. Fourthly, 12% of the participants felt that print-based materials should be supported by technology driven initiatives, such as audio, video and online resources. Other initiatives the participants felt should be introduced include the creation of discussion platforms (9%), introduction or expansion of extra mural activities (8%), and the complete overhaul of the vacation workshops (2%) for non-contact learners to become more relevant and useful. The views by participants on face-to-face sessions corresponds with the views by the learners (table 4.12) where 17,1% of learners demanded more direct interventions with tutors. This finding implies that staff view the teacher-learner interaction as critical for learner integration. Also, there is a strong desire for NAMCOL to consider having own academic staff and infrastructure rather than relying on the formal system in terms of physical and human

resources. The observation shows that staff still hold to the belief that teaching and learning can only take place in a structured learning environment. It is therefore, fair to assume that teachers are not convinced that distance learning is the panacea for learners at secondary school level. The findings differ from the views expressed by students in a study by Potter (2013) where they value access to the tutor but preferably for feedback and encouragement. Furthermore, these observations by staff participants also contradict Wedemeyer who found that teaching and learning can take place anywhere and anytime and not only in an environment where both the teacher and learner share the venue at the same time (Deil-Amen, 2011).

Furthermore, the participants realised their skills deficit in the discipline of ODL and demanded interventions to equip them with relevant skills and knowledge that would enable them to have a greater appreciation for distance learners.

#### 4.3.6 LEARNER ADJUSTMENT TO DISTANCE LEARNING AT NAMCOL

In this section staff respondents' views were sought on how learners adjust to the distance learning environment. Figure 4.7 depicts staff participants' views to the question of learner adjustment.



**Figure 4.7: Learner adjustment to distance learning mode at NAMCOL**

Eleven (i.e., 44%) of the total number of participants stated that learners do not adjust well, five (i.e., 20%) said they adjust well while nine (i.e., 36%) were uncertain. An open ended follow-up question was asked for the participants to elaborate on their

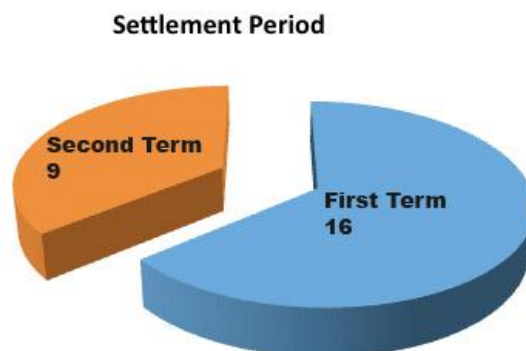


previous response. Those participants who felt learners have adjusted well advanced the following reasons:

- Learners are qualifying for tertiary level institutions after their studies at NAMCOL;
- Learner support in terms of study material and orientation workshops help learners to adjust well;
- Learners are motivated, they follow the course outlines and study on their own.
- Learners come to centres even on the days of no classes; and
- Learners come to classes on time and regularly.

Those participants who felt that learners do not adjust well were of the opinion that learners take time to adjust to distance learning as they expect the tutors to teach instead of preparing for classes with certain questions on the subject matter they do not understand. Some participants felt that learners work on the assignments on the dates they are due for submission. One respondent claimed, “Some learners only open their books when in class”.

These responses were followed by a question on the period in the academic calendar year when the learners settled well.



**Figure 4.8: Showing NAMCOL learners' settlement per term**

The participants were asked to indicate the term in the academic year when learners settled well at NAMCOL. Of the total number of participants, 64% indicated that learners settled well during the first term while 36% felt that they settled well during the second term. There was no indication of learner settlement during the final term.

The opinions of staff participants differ slightly from those expressed by learners because 42% of the latter indicated that they settled well during the first term while 45% and 6% settled well during the second and third terms, respectively.

#### 4.3.7 EXPERIENCES OF STAFF WITH LEARNERS DURING THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

NAMCOL accommodates a diverse group of learners every year who have different expectations. In this section, the participants were asked to share their experiences with learners during the first encounter.

In Table 4.23 below, the participants were asked to share their experiences during their first encounter with the learners.

**Table 4.23: Comments on first encounter with NAMCOL learners**

Experiences during the first encounter		Total
1	Learners are very serious at the beginning and do well in their first assignment.	9
2	Learners are not sure of what is expected from them.	3
3	Learners are not familiar with the subjects they register for, and therefore they do not participate in discussions	4
4	Learners need to be well motivated to pay attention and must be treated with care	5
5	Learners are from different schools and have different back grounds	1
6	Learners need more support from fellow learners.	1
7	Learners are coming with so many expectations, and if they are not met they became demotivated	1
8	Learners displayed a positive attitude towards their studies in the past, nowadays they skip classes all the time.	1
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>25</b>

According to Table 4.23, of the total number of participants, nine (36%) claimed that learners are very serious at the beginning of the year and do well in the first assignment. This observation corresponds with their views in Figure 4.8 where 64% of the participants indicated that learners are settling well during the first term. The remaining participants were less enthusiastic and made the following comments: learners need motivation to pay attention and must be treated with care (20%), learners are not familiar with the subjects they register for and do not participate in

discussions (16%), learners are not sure of the institutions' expectations (12%). Other comments made by few of the participants were:

- Learners are from different schools and have different backgrounds.
- Learners need more support from fellow learners.
- Learners need to be given the maximum support.
- Learners come with so many expectations and some are demotivated.
- Learners displayed a positive attitude towards their studies in the past, nowadays they skip classes all the time.

This finding implies that learners are joining the new learning environment with expectations which they anticipate the institution should meet. They see NAMCOL as a “safety net” which can assist them to realise their dreams. It appears as they move on with their studies there is mismatch between their own expectations and what the institution has to offer.

#### 4.3.8 DIFFICULTIES STAFF EXPERIENCE WITH THE CURRENT COHORT

In this section, staff views were sought to share the difficulties they experience when they engage with the current cohort when compared to other learners they engaged with in the past.

**Table 4.24: Comparison of the current group of learners with previous cohorts**

Difficulties staff experience with learners		Total
1	The majority of the learners do not create time to study on their own, they rely more on the tutors.	2
2	The current cohort of learners are much younger, active with fewer responsibilities at home.	3
3	Learners are different each year with their own different expectations	1
4	The current cohort of learners misbehave, lack discipline, dropping out of the programme, do not do their work, and are more on cell phones rather than books.	9
5	No difference between the learners.	1
6	More learners are now taking the subject for the first time.	1
7	Learners are not active.	3
8	The current cohort of learners are more playful and less committed to school work. Some are forced by parents to enrol at NAMCOL.	2
9	Learners are not motivated.	1
10	Learners are too many to fit in classrooms.	1
11	No comment	1
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>25</b>

Table 4.24 above shows that some participants (36%) felt that the current cohort misbehaves, lacks discipline, dropping out of programme, do not do their work and are more on cell phones than on books most of the time. Some other participants gave diverse views on their experiences with learners which range from; lack of time to study, relying too much on tutors, lack of subject knowledge because they are taking subject for the first time, less committed, only forced by parents to enrol and not out of own conviction, and lack motivation. The observation made by some participants demonstrates the staff's lack of trust in the current group of learners because of their laxity to adopt a learning culture. It appears staff felt discouraged and demotivated because of the negative approach adopted by the learners towards their own studies.

Finally, the participants gave their general views on the current state of affairs at NAMCOL and how it affects learner adjustment from the conventional mode to open and distance learning.

**Table 4.25: General factors that affect learner adjustment to the distance learning mode**

Other comments		Total
1	Learners need more time to learn and need to be introduced to morning sessions.	2
2	The hosting schools in certain areas are mistreating learners when they come for their tutorials.	2
3	Learners face accommodation problems and must be motivated to work hard due to these unfavourable situations.	1
4	Some learners quit half way due to various job opportunities.	1
5	NAMCOL should build centres all over Namibia and should seriously monitor the attendance of learners.	2
6	NAMCOL should provide enough books and study materials to every centre of learning	1
7	Learners undermine the mode of open and distance learning and need to be encouraged.	9
8	Learners feel shy to study with NAMCOL because it is perceived as institution for failures.	3
9	Learners who are taking subjects for the first time need more help.	1
10	No comment	3
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>25</b>

According to Table 4.25, 36% of staff felt that learners undermine the open and distance mode of delivery and that they should really be encouraged. The finding points to the limited understanding people have on ODL differs which could influence

learners approach to learning. Furthermore, some felt that learners feel shy because NAMCOL is perceived as the institution for failures. This finding implies that there is a disconnection between the learners and the institution because of the negative perception attached to ODL in general and NAMCOL in particular. This finding somehow corresponds with the view expressed by the learners where 46% of the participants felt that the negative perception about NAMCOL discourages them to pursue their studies through the institution.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

Learner integration is a critical area that appears to be neglected by researchers and ODL practitioners over the years. ODL institutions have the mandate to increase access, improve service delivery and ensure learners are fully integrated to achieve academic success. This study focuses on perceptions and experiences when migrating from the conventional school environment to an ODL. Findings from this study show the learners' lack of experience to study through distance learning and this can negatively affect learner integration. The study reveals that learners are struggling to strike a balance between studying and attending to other family and work commitments. The findings from both learners and staff confirm that learners do not only need to integrate academically but also socially by engaging in other activities outside the learning environment. All participants (staff and learners) value learner-tutor intervention and the provision of learning resources as important interventions for academic integration. In addition, the participants were congruent in their views that learner-learner interactions make learners to become valued members of the learning community. However, the staff (80%) revealed a low level of learners' motivation while only less than 50% of the learners claimed to lack the motivation.

The following chapter deals with the analysis of data collected through the qualitative method.

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## CHAPTER 5

### PRESENTATION OF QUALITATIVE DATA

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#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of data collected through qualitative collection methods. The data presented in this chapter includes outcomes of interviews which were conducted with the learners and various categories of staff (area coordinators, heads of centres and tutors). The interviews sought to gain a wealth of information and better understanding of the learners' experiences and perceptions when migrating from the traditional school environment to an open and distance learning environment. The opinions of staff on how learners experience this transition were also sought. Furthermore, the chapter also presents a selection of documents reviewed to enrich the data and substantiate the views expressed by the participants.

Five broad themes were identified from the analysis of the interviews conducted with the participants, namely, understanding of ODL, experiences of learners during the transition period, the transition period, factors that hinder and factors that facilitate learner integration to distance learning and strategies proposed to manage learner integration into distance learning. The chapter compares the findings from the participants against the observation made in the literature as discussed in chapter 2.

The data collected through interviews from the participants are discussed on the basis of the themes identified. Similar ideas, views and perceptions were grouped together to serve as basis for the different themes. The qualitative data analysis tool, ATLAS.ti version 7 was used to code, analyse and to present data into the various themes.

**Table 5.1: Themes from the analysis of qualitative data that respond to the research questions**

Themes	Findings
Theme 1: Understanding of ODL system	ODL as a flexible form of education Duration and timing of tutorials Level of learner participation.

Themes	Findings
Theme 3: Adjusting to distance mode of learning	Adjustment during the first and second terms
Theme 4: Factors that hinder or facilitate learner integration to the distance learning mode	<u>Factors that hinder learner integration</u> Lack of motivation Management of time Timing and frequency of contact sessions Parental and community involvement Independent learning Tutors' work ethics <u>Factors that facilitate learner integration</u> Face-to-face support Learning resources
Theme 5: Managing learner integration into the distance learning mode.	Immediate feedback on assessment activities Enhance level of motivation Consider appointing a separate cadre to facilitate learning Enhance the use of technology Instructional language

## 5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF THE LEARNERS

In order to contextualise the interviews that were conducted with the various categories of participants, the researcher has presented a brief summary of the participants in the tables below. However, the researcher does not give an elaborate background on the participants since similar data was already presented in the preceding chapter that dealt with quantitative analysis. To protect the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms were used instead of real names.

**Table 5.2: Profile of the learners**

Learners	Gender	Learner type	Years of experience of studying through ODL	Region	Employed
LA	Male	Contact	None	Northern	No
LB	Male	Non-contact	None	Northern	No
LC	Female	Contact	None	Northern	No
LD	Female	Non-contact	None	Northern	No
LE	Female	Non-contact	None	Southern	Yes
LF	Male	Graduate	1 year	Northern	Yes
LG	Female	Contact	None	Northern	No
LH	Female	Non-contact	None	Southern	No



Learners	Gender	Learner type	Years of experience of studying through ODL	Region	Employed
LK	Female	Contact	None	Southern	No
LL	Male	Contact	None	Southern	No
LM	Male	Contact	None	Southern	No
LN	Female	Contact	None	Southern	No

Table 5.2 presents the profile of the individual interviews that were conducted.

Fourteen individual interviews which included nine female and five male learners were conducted. Of this number, eight learners were registered for the open-mode of study, four registered for the non-contact mode while two learners had already completed their studies through NAMCOL. Of the two participants who already completed their studies, one was pursuing his studies at the University of Namibia while the other was hired by NAMCOL at one of its Tutorial Centres to assist grade 10 learners doing History as one of their subjects. Only two participants were employed, one on a permanent basis and the other on a part-time basis. The one participant who was employed could possibly give a different dimension to the study as it will be interesting to establish how she was balancing between her studies, family responsibility and work requirements.

In addition to the individual interviews, two focus group discussions were held with contact learners at two centres in the two different regions. The focus group discussions were not pre-planned but instantly organised because some learners felt intimidated or shy to be interviewed separately. The focus group discussions consisted of eighteen learners of which eight and ten were from Northern and Southern regions, respectively. Of the eighteen learners, eleven were female and seven male. Only one learner from the Southern region was employed as a temporary employee. One learner from the Southern region had two years of experience of studying through the distance mode with another learner from the Northern region who has indicated he had one year of experience. Tables 5.3 and 5.4 present the profile of the learners who have participated in focus group discussions in the two regions.

**Table 5.3: Profile of learners who participated in focus group discussion in Northern region**

Learners	Gender	Learner type	Years of experience of studying through ODL	Region	Employed
Group LA	Female	Contact	None	Northern	No
Group LB	Female	Contact	1 Year	Northern	No
Group LC	Female	Contact	None	Northern	No
Group LD	Female	Contact	None	Northern	No
Group LE	Female	Contact	None	Northern	No
Group LF	Male	Contact	None	Northern	No
Group LG	Male	Contact	None	Northern	No
Group LH	Male	Contact	None	Northern	No

**Table 5.4: Profile of learners who participated in focus group discussion in Southern region**

Learners	Gender	Learner type	Years of experience of studying through ODL	Region	Employed
Group LI	Female	Contact	None	Southern	No
Group LJ	Female	Contact	None	Southern	No
Group LK	Female	Contact	None	Southern	No
Group LL	Male	Contact	None	Southern	Yes
Group LM	Female	Contact	None	Southern	No
Group LN	Female	Contact	None	Southern	No
Group LO	Female	Contact	None	Southern	No
Group LP	Male	Contact	None	Southern	No
Group LQ	Male	Contact	2 Years	Southern	No
Group LR	Male	Contact	None	Southern	No

Most learner participants came directly from the conventional school system when they joined NAMCOL, with the exception of two participants who first attempted to improve their grades through other private institutions. These institutions followed the same pedagogical approach to teaching which was similar to the traditional school system. Thus most participants were not exposed to the distance learning mode before joining NAMCOL. One participant had the experience of studying with

NAMCOL before by repeating some grade 10 subjects and later continued with his Grade 12 studies at the college. The participant stated:

*I failed my grade 10 with 19 points in school, but I was ashamed to take studies with NAMCOL. I took a job in Otavi and after a year in 2012, I registered with NAMCOL for grade 10 and got B symbol in the two subjects I repeated. The following year 2013, I went to get space for grade 11, but was told, “since you are turning 21 that year, we were not allowed to proceed to grade 11”. I was forced to approach NAMCOL again (Learner LF).*

From the quotation above, it seems that even though NAMCOL helped the learner to get better grade 10 qualifications compared to the formal school, the learner seemed embarrassed to associate with NAMCOL. Possibly the learner was of the opinion that NAMCOL offers an inferior form of education in comparison with formal schooling. It is also clear from the quoted statement above that the learner resorted to NAMCOL as a second choice, and indeed, this could be true with many of the College’s learners. Given the choice, many learners enrolled with NAMCOL would prefer to register with the conventional schools.

Other interviews included the other categories of staff (area coordinators, heads of Tutorial Centres and tutors) as presented in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.5: Profile of staff**

Staff	Gender	Staff type (AC=Are Coordinators; HOC=Head of Centre; T=Tutor)	Years of experience in ODL	Region
ACA	Female	Area Coordinator	5	Northern
ACB	Male	Area Coordinator	3	Southern
HoTCA	Female	Head of Tutorial Centre	6	Northern
HoTCB	Female	Head of Tutorial Centre	7	Southern
TA	Female	Tutor	5	Southern
TB	Male	Tutor	1	Southern
TC	Female	Tutor	4	Southern
TD	Male	Tutor	4	Southern
TE	Female	Tutor	2	Northern
TF	Female	Tutor	5	Northern

Staff	Gender	Staff type (AC=Are Coordinators; HOC=Head of Centre; T=Tutor	Years of experience in ODL	Region
TG	Female	Tutor	3	Northern
TH	Female	Tutor	3	Northern

The participants were drawn from NAMCOL's two largest regions in terms of learner intake. Twelve interviews which comprised of nine female and three male staff members were conducted. The participants interviewed included two area coordinators, two heads of Tutorial Centres and eight tutors. Most of the participants had more than two years' experience of working in an ODL setting.

In sections 5.3 to 5.8, the findings from the interviews are presented as they emerged from the different themes.

### **5.3 THEME 1: UNDERSTANDING OF THE ODL SYSTEM**

This section presents research findings on participants' understanding of the ODL system. ODL is a new phenomenon to most participants because of their previous learning experiences in the traditional school system. These participants and in particular the learners had never been exposed to any other form of education other than the traditional school system for their entire academic career. The pedagogical approach to teaching and learning that underpins ODL is different from the traditional school approach. To assess the participants' understanding of the new distance mode of learning, they were asked to express their views on how their learning at NAMCOL differs from their learning experiences in the conventional school system. This theme serves to address the following auxiliary research question: What are the different role players' understandings of the ODL system? This question was designed to determine how the participants understand the new mode of learning that they were exposed to. The discussion in this theme is on learners' understanding of the ODL system and is structured according to the following sub-themes: ODL as a flexible form of education, duration and timing of tutorials and level of learner participation.

### 5.3.1 ODL AS FLEXIBLE FORM OF EDUCATION

The greatest benefit of ODL is its flexibility to satisfy the growing demand for education for a diverse learner population which the conventional system is unable to accommodate because of work, family responsibilities, geographical location and socio-economic factors (Hannay, & Newvine, 2006; Pityana, 2008).

In this study, the staff viewed the ODL system as a flexible form of education where the learner can study conveniently at his or her own pace and time while performing other multiple tasks such as family and job responsibilities. One participant had the following to say on the flexibility of the system:

*NAMCOL is an open learning system, learners can do their assignments and study at own pace and time. That is good because if the learner is committed he or she will know how to manage the time. The system is very flexible and learners can study while at the same time earning a salary and taking care of families. ODL is characterised for the multiple delivery approaches one can also apply in the formal school (Staff ACA).*

The finding from staff members of their understanding of ODL suggests that the participants had some training in ODL and had an understanding of its basic principles. This finding further implies that tutors had acquired new skills and qualities beyond the subject matter knowledge they received through formal and in-service training. Training interventions and the understanding of the philosophical underpinning of ODL shaped the participants' understanding of ODL.

However, some learners did not have a clear understanding of the ODL system. Most of their responses focused on the timing, frequency and duration of the contact sessions rather than on the philosophical principles of ODL. The few that displayed a good understanding distinguished ODL from the conventional school system based on the level of learner dependency on the teachers which is prevalent in schools. The participants claimed that the ODL system differs from the traditional school system because, in the latter, they were over-dependent on the teachers whilst at NAMCOL they are expected to do more on their own. They emphasised the point that in the conventional school environment teachers were always behind them and they were forced to study. Study time was pre-determined either through afternoon study time

or for those who were in hostels they had dedicated evening study times. Learner LB said:

*At NAMCOL I have learnt to adapt to the different learning environment. I have taught myself how to study on my own, and I do not need a teacher or tutor to help me throughout my work. I have learned to be more independent without depending too much on the teachers, tutors or anyone. I have learnt to cope with the time and cope with my studies and make different time on how to study.*

Learner LH, echoed the same sentiment by stating:

*The system is totally different from the spoon feeding and the baby attention I used to receive from the school.*

These views were further supported by Learner LJ, who aptly stated:

*What is working well at NAMCOL is the freedom you have. The freedom to have own time to study; you can talk to the tutor anytime. You can ask your tutor to deal with challenging topics unlike in schools where you do not have the right and freedom to discuss issues with your teacher.*

The level of dependency in school was high to the extent that teachers had to explain some content in the vernacular for learners to understand. Learner LG stated:

*Learning through NAMCOL is completely different from my previous school because in school if you do not understand, the teacher will explain in the vernacular while the national examination is set in English. But here at NAMCOL everything is in English.*

Learners in this study define ODL from their own personal understanding and experiences which to some extent might be different from their expectations. Though the learners did not have prior knowledge and experience of the system, their responses suggest that they found the new approach to learning exciting and they approached learning from a different dimension. The learners gained confidence in self-driven and independent learning.

Furthermore, some stressed the use of information communication technology as a means of adding value to the print-based materials they received and the tutorial

support from the tutors. Learner LD had the following to say on how she used the technology:

*I do self-study and if I come across a difficult matter, I try to google through internet whereas in school you memorise things even if you do not understand them. You continue to memorise without understanding the meaning. At NAMCOL I am trying to understand first as part of my learning process.*

The above quotation demonstrates learners' ability to use technology to enhance their learning, and secondly it recognises the use of information communication technologies as an innovative mode of education delivery. Furthermore, the use of technology in learning encourages learners to be independent and active participants, who seek knowledge and information and are not passive recipients of information and knowledge flowing from one direction only. There is appreciation for self-directed learning based on the use of technology. This is particularly important for lifelong learning which is key to the demands of the ever-changing job market.

The view expressed by Learner LD that the conventional school is characterised by memorisation without comprehension is in line with what Paulo Freire (2000) refers to as the banking approach to learning where learners are not offered any opportunity to know, explore and critique but to blindly memorise learning content as narrated by the teacher.

The views expressed on the flexibility of the ODL system is supported by Butcher and Rose-Adams (2015), and Hossain (2010) that ODL mode of delivery is superior to the conventional system because of its flexibility and affordability which allows learners to study conveniently and independently. Similarly, views of the participants in the current study are similar to the other findings (Pyari, 2011; Race, 2008; Simonson et al., 2003; Wedemeyer, 2009) which suggest that ODL is a learning system that promotes learner-autonomy, separates the learner from the teacher and makes the learner a central agent for his/her own learning. According to Moore (1993), transactional distance in a distance learning environment depends on dialogue, structure and learner autonomy. The more the structure increases and dialogue decreases, the more the learner becomes highly independent. The ability to study independently was also expressed by the learners in the current study. The findings



suggest that the learners are comfortable using the NAMCOL self-instructional study materials on their own and revert to using technology for content which appears challenging. This finding further suggests that the learners prefer a high structure which assists them to become autonomous.

### 5.3.2 ODL DIFFERS IN TERMS OF DURATION AND TIMING OF TUTORIALS

Most participants and in particular the learners draw the distinction between ODL and the conventional school system in terms of the duration and timing of the tutorials. The participants mentioned that the Grade 12 qualification is offered over a two year period in the conventional school system while at NAMCOL it is offered in one academic year. In high school they had enough time to study unlike at NAMCOL where the academic year is spread over six months. In school they were in daily contact with teachers while at NAMCOL they met their tutors twice or three times a week depending on the timetable at a particular centre or twice in a year for those attending the vacation schools during school holidays. A learner from a focus group discussion said:

*In school, you study full-time. You go to classes morning time and you have class for each subject every day, from Monday to Friday. Here at NAMCOL you have classes in one subject for one hour and 30 minutes. So you will not manage to finish all the things with your tutors (Group LA).*

This finding suggests that learners were more interested in the number of hours and days they spend inside the four walls of a classroom and not necessarily the notional learning hours they engage themselves to master learning content such as attending contact sessions, participating in practical work, doing self-study or completing assignments. This shows the participants and in particular the learners' peripheral understanding of the ODL system. This further suggests that learners came to the new learning environment with similar expectations they had in the formal schools. This demonstrates the lack of mind-shift from conventional school learning principles to an ODL learning system. The learners could also be struggling to manage time effectively in order to cope with the demands of being an independent learner. The study by Baxter (2012) on interventions that contribute to student progression reveals that students had limited understanding and expectations of distance learning. Gokool-Ramdoo (2009) argues that because of the lack of national and institutional

policies to assist learners understand the ODL system, they are unaware of the implications, demands and expectations of distance learning.

In support of the views expressed by the learners, the staff members also expressed the opinion that the hours learners engage with the teachers in the conventional school system are more than in ODL. The limited hours, therefore prompted them to facilitate learning rather than to follow the traditional way of teaching.

A tutor, Staff TH stated:

*With the formal education, the learners are full-time with the teachers, teaching hours are more and with distance education the teaching hours are very limited, so we do not teach them in detail but we only coach them.*

The view expressed above implies that tutors' facilitative approach to teaching and learning is motivated by the limited number of hours at their disposal and not necessarily by their own conviction as the best method to deliver learning in an ODL setting. The tutors also prefer teaching rather than coaching or facilitation. This could be attributed to teachers' background of formal training through conventional universities and the influence of the formal school system where they were engaged in a full-time teaching and learning environment. Distance education requires teachers to adopt a new model of teaching. The sentiments expressed by the staff members contradict the philosophical principles of ODL and the views of other researchers. The method of delivering content in ODL has nothing to do with the limited number of hours at the disposal of the learners but an ideology to encourage independent learning. Msila (2006) refers ODL to a transformational teaching model. Supporting this view, Galusha (1998) argues that the teacher in ODL should perform a mentoring, tutoring and facilitating role.

The timing of contact sessions during morning hours in schools and in the afternoon or evening at NAMCOL was also raised as a clear distinction between NAMCOL and the conventional school system. Learner LA rightly stated:

*We are being taught till late, like 20:00 hours, when you get home you are exhausted. You have been sitting from 14:00 to 20:00 hours and all the energy you had is taken in the process.*

One participant from the working class had the following to say regarding the timing of tutorials:

*In the morning from 08:00-12:00 I am at work, from 14:00-17:00 at NAMCOL and from 17:00 at home. Now when I reach home I put on the pots to prepare food and to warm water for my husband. While the pots are on the stove, I am helping out my kids with their homework. Sometimes it is getting tough to get to NAMCOL because I am too tired (Group LL).*

This finding implies that learners lack the necessary skills to strike a balance between the studies and their daily routine work. The views expressed by the participants on the timing of the tutorials is similar to the views expressed by students in a study by Chikoko (2010) where students also complained about the timing of the tutorials.

### **5.3.3 LEVEL OF LEARNER PARTICIPATION**

The interviews with participants suggested that studying with NAMCOL increased their level of participation. They felt that opportunities were created for them to express their views and participate freely in class activities. The learners further claimed that at NAMCOL tutors focused on building their strengths. The learners emphasised that in school they were forced to study and mostly depend on the teacher, hence their level of participation was minimal because of the dependency syndrome of the traditional school system. Learner LG claimed to have scored good marks at NAMCOL because of her active participation and increased confidence level, as she aptly stated:

*Compared to the time I was in school, I think I have changed percentage wise from 50% to 80%. The time I was in school I couldn't even express myself because of lack of confidence. Now my confidence level is so high, I ask questions and participate in class.*

The views expressed by some learners imply that ODL follows a constructivist approach to learning where learners act as active participants who play a central role

in the construction of own knowledge (Anderson, & Dron, 2012; Barr, & Tagg, 1995; Johnson et al., 2011; Tenenbaum et al., 2001). This suggests that ODL empowers learners and builds their self-confidence. It further implies that some learners have the ability to learn when the system creates opportunities for them to explore and discover new knowledge.

The views by these learners support the claim by Blaschke (2012) that the new pedagogical approach to learning enables learners to survive in this competitive global economy and to become lifelong learners. It requires pro-active learners that can make a meaningful contribution to the learning process. The views expressed by the learners is further supported by Knowles et al. (2014) and Mdakane (2011), who argue that learners who are self-determined and self-directed exhibit a high degree of motivation and show willingness to learn.

However, this finding is contrary to the behaviourist pedagogy where learning is directed by the teacher, and learning occurs through change of learner behaviour by responding to stimuli (Johnson et al., 2011; Nawaz, & Kundi, 2010). Furthermore, the views expressed by the participants in this study contradicts the sentiments expressed in the previous study on NAMCOL where the lack of motivation, isolation and the difficulty of studying through this mode were identified as key attributes to learner dropout (Rumble, & Koul, 2007).

#### **5.4 THEME 2: EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD**

This theme aims to address the principal research question: What are the experiences and perceptions of learners during the transition period from the traditional classroom mode of delivery to open and distance learning? The following guiding questions were asked to the participants to trigger the discussion: How did you experience the change in learning as you moved from your formal school to ODL? Is your current experience different from when you started studying at this institution? The participants gave diverse views on learners' experiences during the transition stage at NAMCOL. Some participants described positive learning experiences of studying through the distance education mode while others talked of unpleasant experiences. This observation supports the view by Woosley and Miller (2009) that students may experience the

transition period differently, either positively or negatively. Some learners may take advantage of distance education depending on their individual characteristics (Zhao et al., 2005). Therefore, to some it may lead to positive learning outcomes while to others it may lead to failure or complete withdrawal from the course.

The discussion of the first theme, namely, learning experiences of learners focuses on the following sub-themes: level of uncertainty among the learners, learner engagement with tutors and fellow learners, and the level of independent learning among the learners.

#### **5.4.1 LEVEL OF UNCERTAINTY AMONGST THE LEARNERS**

The interviews conducted with the various categories of the participants (learners and staff) confirmed that the learners went through a stage of confusion when they first engaged with learning in this new mode at NAMCOL. The findings show that some learners found the new learning mode overwhelming and confusing. They entered this new mode with the same state of mind as in the traditional face-to-face school environment. The findings from the interviews showed that the learners were not aware of what is required in distance learning. The state of confusion amongst the learners led to discouragement, isolation and poor attitudes towards their own studies. Of those learners interviewed some showed little appreciation for the new method of teaching and learning. They found the new mode of delivery unfamiliar and demanded to be taught the same way they were taught in formal schools. Examples of learners' comments follow:

*I am a bit confused with the way the tutor was teaching; the method of teaching was different and confusing. I feel out of place and isolated (Learner LK).*

*At the beginning, I was confused and not comfortable because I did not know the people and adapting to the new environment scares me a bit (Group LR)*

One learner believed that the NAMCOL environment was very intimidating and indicated that the statements made by the younger learners and some tutors were discouraging, offensive, insensitive and hurtful.

*You know the youngsters are very discouraging, if you ask something it is like you are stupid and they laugh at you because their brains are fresh and they*

*know all the stuff. Sometimes the remarks teachers made are really hurting, for example, why are you asking this (Learner LE).*

Building and strengthening interpersonal relationships among the learners is critical in any learning environment. Relationships are about trust, working together and showing respect for diverse views. The findings indicate that the younger learners show little respect for older learners and lack the general understanding of teaching and learning in an ODL mode. Learners in this type of setting come with diverse views and experiences which others can also benefit from. On the other hand, it appears that the teachers lack the necessary skills in building positive and trusting relationships. ODL promotes inclusiveness and equitable education among learners at all levels where everyone is equal because of the diverse learning experiences they bring to the learning environment. However, the observation by Learner LE suggests the lack of tolerance and poor interpersonal relationships among the learners. This finding demonstrates a lack of social cohesion among the learners. Furthermore, these negative experiences suggest learners' expectations are similar to their expectations of formal schools. There is therefore a mismatch or disconnect between learners' expectations and what the ODL mode can offer.

Similarly, the interviews conducted with area coordinators, heads of Tutorial Centres and tutors reaffirmed that the learners were disappointed because they had to adjust to the expectations of the ODL mode of delivery. Therefore, their first encounters with the learners were not as pleasant as they expected. At first contact, staff observed elements of hopelessness, discouragement and anxiety among learners. They were shy, negative, showed low morale and feared the unknown. In their view this was caused by the learners' previous experience of failure in the formal schools. In their analysis, the staff felt that learners who had studied with NAMCOL before knew what was expected of them compared to the new entrants who came from the formal schools. Some participants had the following to say:

*The first time we met with the learners I could see that they were a bit confused because they did not know the difference between the formal school and non-formal school. They were asking questions such as, are we getting classes from the morning to the afternoon just like in other schools? Are we going to be given homework? Are we going to be punished? You know, those type of questions.*

*So is like they are confused and do not know exactly what is going on (Staff ACA).*

*You get different types of people. The first impression is when you look at them, they look confused. Maybe some are disappointed because they could not make it to the universities. You can see the disappointments in their faces and because of what we do in the orientation programme, somehow you can see that motivation is coming back (Staff HoTCB).*

These views were echoed by Learner LG who stated:

*It was difficult even to know the class to go to because in school this particular teacher teaches in this class and at this block.*

Learner LB added:

*For me the first experience at NAMCOL was weird, I came with a different expectation that learners maybe wear school uniforms. But when I came here people are wearing funny things.*

Despite the fact that staff acknowledged the difficulties learners were experiencing, it was evident from their responses that they did not understand and could not accommodate the challenges learners went through during the period of transition. Staff were unable to manage the dilemma learners faced as they moved from the conventional learning mode that they were familiar with to ODL. Staff members lacked an understanding of the learner's needs, their lack of readiness to adapt to the ODL mode of delivery and the cause thereof.

Learners' previous experience of failure in the formal schools could possibly have contributed to the low morale and negative attitude to learning in general. Learners are often pessimistic of achieving better grades through NAMCOL if they could not make it when they were in regular contact with the teachers. This further suggests a lack of confidence in the ODL mode.

This finding implies that uncertainty, fear of the unknown, lack of confidence and anxiety which learners experience during the transition from the traditional face-to-face environment to the ODL mode have a detrimental effect on them in terms of



integrating fully into the new learning environment. Lack of change in the learner's mind-set during the transition period may subsequently result to poor performance. Elffers and Oort (2013) claim that learners who failed to succeed at any level in their education career become more skeptical about succeeding with the second attempt and therefore feel discouraged. The finding in this study corresponds with views expressed by other researchers that learners entering the new arena of ODL experience elements of isolation, uncertainty, insecurity and alienation (Kember, 2007; Mowes, 2005; Qakisa-Makoe, 2005). To curb the problem of learner uncertainty and isolation, Leese (2010) in a study on early experiences of first year students at the Wolverhampton University in the United Kingdom argued for a robust student support system to assist students to cope with the transition difficulties during the early stages of their studies.

#### **5.4.2 LEARNER ENGAGEMENT WITH TUTORS AND FELLOW LEARNERS**

The learners interviewed in this study showed great appreciation for the support rendered by NAMCOL to enable them to adjust to the new mode of delivery. One element which came out very strongly from a number of learners was the direct engagement between the learners and their tutors. Additionally, some learners also indicated that they engaged with their counterparts. The learners indicated that they developed the necessary skills to work in groups.

Particularly, the support the tutors rendered to the learners outside the scheduled tutorial sessions was highly valued. They felt that the support from the tutors could assist them to achieve better educational learning outcomes. Some indicated that tutors gave them their phone numbers and they could communicate when in need of assistance. Two participants expressed the benefits they derived from engaging with teachers and fellow learners in the following statements:

*I learned to work in groups like helping one another and also getting support from tutors. I have regular contact with my tutors, they gave us their numbers if we do not understand anything and ask questions as we have also established an Economics WhatsApp group where we pose questions to tutors and she responds to our questions (Learner LC).*

*Tutors here tend to give you more attention and make time for you in case you don't understand the work. They make time for you to go through the work. At the previous learning environment teachers do not care and had a lot of excuses. There is much improvement compared to the teachers we had in high school (Learner LK)”*

The learners felt that they received sufficient individual attention from their tutors. They valued the engagement with tutors and fellow learners greatly because it mirrored the relationships they were accustomed to in the conventional school system. The responses from the learners showed that they did not only see the tutors as knowledge distributors but as partners in the teaching and learning process. This finding implies that education through ODL is a social process where learning occurs when learners interact through reciprocal communication with peers and tutors. It further implies that knowledge is socially constructed and cannot be directed from the teacher because all partners are equal, unlike the situation in the traditional schools where the teacher directs, commands and decides when, where, what and how to learn. The views expressed by the participants cement Moore (1993) theory where he refers to dialogue between the two parties as vital to narrow the transactional distance.

Furthermore, the participants expressed the view that they were motivated by teachers who capitalise on the subject knowledge the learners bring to the learning environment. One participant, Group LD stated:

*If we do not understand, my Mathematics teacher will ask us to volunteer to come up with another method to solve a mathematical problem which is understandable to other learners.*

Learner LG maintained:

*If you are doing, for example Algebra, the teacher will explain the basic rules and ask the learners share other methods that will enable them to understand the subject matter better while in school the teacher will sit there with you and read the same information from the textbook without explaining.*

This finding underscores the importance of learner engagement with tutors and fellow learners in the learning process. It demonstrates that the learner-to-learner and learner-to-teacher interactions were effective for both social and academic integration. It also shows the learners' desire for a technology-mediated learning environment. Though ODL is characterised by separation of the learner from the teacher in space and time as well as limited contact sessions, the learners' views show that the human element remains an effective component in any teaching and learning environment. Through the ODL mode of delivery, learners are expected to do more on their own and to come to the learning environment prepared to discuss problematic areas with the tutor. In ODL, the tutor's role of directing, coaching and facilitating learning remains of cardinal importance. The appreciation expressed by the participants, particularly the learners, on the different types of interactions (learner-learner interaction and learner-tutor interaction) imply that these interactions were instrumental in bridging the gap in the distance learning environment.

The views expressed by the participants support Moore (1989) who proposed three forms of interactions critical in distance education, namely student-student interaction, student-tutor interaction and student-content interaction. Moore (1989) argues that student-tutor interaction is desirable for cognitive development and motivational support. Student-tutor interaction stimulates and maintains student's interest and motivates students to learn (Moore, 1989). In the context of this study, the student-student and student-tutor interactions were predominantly synchronous through the face-to-face dialogue at the Tutorial Centres, follow-up discussions through telephone and through the use of social media platforms. Furthermore, the views of the participants support the view expressed by Williams and Williams (2011) who argued that positive interactions with the teachers have the potential to engage learners in learning. The finding on the use of technology supports the view by Sher (2009) that technology bridges both the physical and time dimensions and brings the academic staff and students close to each other.

The engagement of learners with the tutors outside the scheduled tutorial sessions or during odd hours corresponds with the argument by Wedemeyer (2009) that teaching and learning is not only taking place where the teacher and learner share the same learning environment but the two parties can communicate while at different locations

and at different times. This finding is similar to the views expressed by other researchers who claim that direct engagement between the learners and tutors and between the learners themselves has the potential to decrease the transactional distance or to narrow the distance between the learner and tutor (McGivney, 2004; Moore, 1993).

Furthermore, Learner LG indicated that the learners formed good working relationships with fellow learners where they actively contribute to their own learning and where they felt equal in their contributions. This is what Hiltz (1997) refers to as collaborative learning because it stresses the active participation and interaction between the two groups namely, the students and teachers.

#### **5.4.3 LEVEL OF INDEPENDENT LEARNING**

Learning in a traditional learning environment is teacher-directed; in ODL there is room for learner self-directedness and self-determination. In this study, some learners felt that the teaching model being followed at NAMCOL had enabled them to discover their full potential and talents, something which they did not achieve in the traditional school setting because of the teacher-centred pedagogical approach that was followed. The school environment was more prescriptive, the teacher in most instances decided on what, where, how and when to learn. The learners further stated that their involvement at NAMCOL increased their confidence level and they knew the reasons for studying unlike the situation in the formal school where they were more extrinsically motivated. For example, Learner LL, who obtained good symbols in Grade 12 through NAMCOL the previous year and who was recruited to facilitate History at one of the Tutorial Centres stated:

*In school I got the support from my mom. At NAMCOL I prepared questions to go ask tomorrow, I did not hang around with wrong friends. I tried to associate with people I can benefit from in terms of my education. I was more with books than any other thing and I share my experiences with learners at orientation workshops.*

Another participant, Learner LH, who left the formal school when she was 16 years, claimed that she was very immature and after joining NAMCOL, she became

independent and could study on her own. She said: *“Now I am more experienced and can learn better on my own than before.”*

The views expressed by the learners demonstrate that the ODL mode of delivery helped them to develop the abilities required of independent learners. Furthermore, the view expressed by Learner LH demonstrates that adult learners acquire knowledge and gain more practical experience in life which they can apply in any learning environment. This finding contradicts the views expressed in the previous section (5.4.1) where learners indicated that they experienced a certain level of uncertainty during their first encounter at NAMCOL.

Furthermore, learners felt that NAMCOL helped them to develop research skills as they progressed with their studies. They looked for other learning resources and used the internet to search for additional information. Group LJ stated:

*At NAMCOL you are urged to research more after you were taught in class. The time was in school, you wouldn't use your cell phone or computer to find more information on the subject matter. Right now I have my cell phone here and after the lesson I have to use my cell phone looking for extra information.*

In the process of independent learning through the use of technology, the learners also gained new research skills. The finding implies that learners found themselves in a learning environment where they could use ICT construct new knowledge. Knowledge acquisition is influenced by several factors rather than only one.

Additionally, the ODL method of delivery inspired some learners, who found the teaching model stimulating and enhancing dialogue. The participants felt that the mode of delivery prepared them to cope with learning at the next higher level. Learner LF stated:

*For me, I think it is a nice experience of studying through NAMCOL because it prepared me for tertiary level.*

This view was expressed by the participant who pursued his studies at a public higher education institution in Namibia. Another participant, Learner LA, echoed the view that the teaching approach at NAMCOL assisted one to cope with studies at university

level. Though this participant was still at NAMCOL, his view was shaped by the experience of his brother who was at the university. Similarly, Learner LB, supported the views expressed by stating:

*Learners from a top performing school such as ST Boniface are struggling to cope at the university level because they are used to the way their school is giving them more attention and helping them every time.*

The views expressed by the learners were partially supported by the staff. According to them, NAMCOL received diverse learners coming from different schools and with different backgrounds. This diversity enriched class participation.

The results of the study showed that ODL has emerged as a mainstream mode of education delivery that can develop learners holistically by not only focusing on the academic development but also focusing on learners' self-development to become self-directed and self-determined. From the perspective of staff, the new system of learning came as a surprise to some learners because some of their expectations could not be met. Though some learners had great appreciation for the ODL mode of delivery, they only had a marginal understanding of the system. Studying independently which is a fundamental principle in ODL was also viewed as a challenging task.

The finding on the increased level of confidence that contributed to their active participation is similar to the observation made by Liao and Wang (2011) that students with low confidence levels are not willing to actively participate in the learning process. A finding in a study by Hannay and Newvine (2006) that students in an ODL mode of delivery are more motivated and disciplined than those in the traditional school environment supports the views expressed by some learners in this study. These findings were not consistent with previous studies that suggested that students had challenges becoming independent hence they demanded more structured activities as in the conventional system (Cross, & Carpentier, 2009; Leese, 2010; Mdakane, 2011).

## 5.5 THEME 3: ADJUSTING TO DISTANCE MODE OF LEARNING

Under this theme, the participants were asked to indicate the period in the NAMCOL academic calendar when learners had adjusted well to the new learning mode. The academic calendar runs over three terms: the first term covers the period January to March, with the second term covering the period May to beginning August and the final term runs between the last week in August until end of September. This theme therefore attempts to address the following research question: At what stage do learners fully integrate into the delivery mode?

From the responses of the participants, most learners settled well during the second term of the academic calendar. However, a few participants indicated that they had settled during the first term. One participant, Staff TG stated: “ *In March it is just the beginning, I think they cope well as from May onwards.*”

Staff TE agreed:

*At the beginning of the year, learners do not know what is going on, only during the second term when they start to comprehend what is going on and start to participate in class activities.*

The views of the staff members were supported by Learner LI who stated that:

*At the beginning, the only challenge I had was, I was not comfortable at first because I did not know the people and adjusting to the new environment scares me. I felt anxious and confused at the beginning.*

Learners feel isolated because of the lack of expected interpersonal relationships with tutors and fellow learners. During the first weeks of engaging with studies in this new mode of delivery, the learners experience emotions such as low self-confidence, anxiety and confusion. This is possibly due to their inability to adjust to the learning culture of distance education. This finding implies that the transition to the new ODL delivery mode created a human relations gap between the learners and teachers and between the learners themselves.

On the contrary, some staff members indicated that learners do adjust during the first term of their study in ODL. The staff members alluded to the fact that learners



displayed a positive attitude at the beginning of the year because of high level of learner-tutor and learner-learner interactions. Staff TC claimed:

*At the beginning, learners are engaging themselves in activities, but towards the end of the year, learners are very rare in classes and some of them do not hand in their assignments, especially the second and third assignments which are usually due in June and July.*

Positive adjustment in the first term experienced by a few learners implies that they had already developed skills and strategies at an early stage to cope with the new mode of delivery. In addition, learners who had the opportunity to bridge the gap between contact and distance mode of learning, tend to cope better than those learners who still have to fill the gap. These learners have a competitive advantage over the new ones. Whilst there were good indications of some learners adjusting well to the ODL mode in the first term, there seems to be a decline in attendance and performance during the subsequent terms.

No responses indicated the adjustment took place during the final third term. The participants argued that the third term was too short and learners normally prefer to stay at home to prepare for the national external examinations. It was therefore difficult to make a judgement on learner adjustment to the distance mode during the final term of the year. One participant, Staff HoTCB, had the following to say on the learner adjustment during the third term:

*I have been observing for many years now that some learners do not register at this centre for the examination. During the third term they have to travel to other places to go and write the examination. The third term, if it is possible should be cancelled completely.*

The finding in this study implies that learners need some time to settle before full integration into the new ODL environment takes place. It further implies that the new learning environment is a completely strange phenomenon when compared to what learners are accustomed to. This further shows inadequate support systems to facilitate learner adjustment to the ODL mode in the first term of their studies. The findings show that learner adjustment is a long process with multiple stages and that learners need institutional interventions to cope with adjustment.

Tinto (1987) proposes that for learners to fully integrate into the new environment, they have to pass through three phases namely, separation, transition and incorporation. In the context of this study, it appears that most learners felt separated from the past learning experiences during the first term. During the first few weeks at NAMCOL, the learners feel disconnected from the tutors, fellow learners and the institution. It seems real connection with the new delivery mode (transition) and free interaction with others (incorporation) take place during the second term.

## **5.6 THEME 4: FACTORS THAT HINDER OR FACILITATE LEARNER INTEGRATION TO THE DISTANCE LEARNING MODE**

### **5.6.1 FACTORS THAT HINDER LEARNER INTEGRATION**

Learners who are migrating from the traditional school environment to the ODL learning environment at NAMCOL have developed certain study habits and skills from their past learning experiences and may find it challenging to shift from one learning mode to another. For any change to be successful, a person should leave the present, move from the present to the future and put measures and processes in place to ensure success in any change (Pryor et al., 2008). Some learners have not adjusted to the distance learning mode and continued to prefer to be taught the way they were taught in formal schools. These expectations and demands made the adjustment to the new learning environment difficult. In the context of this study, learners were asked to share the difficulties they experienced when studying through NAMCOL if compared to their previous learning experience at school. The participants gave a variety of views on the difficulties confronted when they first joined NAMCOL. The discussion of this theme focuses on factors that hinder or facilitate integration into distance learning. The sub-themes that deal with the hindering factors are: lack of motivation, management of time, timing of contact sessions and lack of parental support.

#### **5.6.1.1 Lack of motivation**

Motivation plays an important part in course completion. Dropout in distance education is due to lack of motivation and the best approach to retain students is for ODL institutions to embed student motivation in their support systems (Anderson,

2003; Simpson, 2008, 2013a). In this study, the lack of motivation contributed to low confidence levels among the learners to the extent that some felt too shy to freely participate in class activities. From the learners' perspective, the lack of motivation was aggravated by discouraging remarks made by some tutors.

The participants, mainly the learners, raised several areas of concern that contributed to their lack of motivation: learners' general attitude toward studies, tutors, learning resources, learning environment and the methodology of teaching. For example, one of the participants from the focus group discussion stated:

*At high school, you have the courage to study very hard, but here at NAMCOL you don't feel like you have the courage to study (Group LC).*

Another participant added a completely different dimension by stating:

*If you are serious you motivate yourself. First as a person, you need to motivate yourself and then maybe later teachers, principals and others motivate you (Learner LB).*

This suggests that learners doubted succeeding through the ODL mode when they had not been able to succeed in the formal system they were familiar with. The learners' observation implies that they regarded ODL as an inferior form of education that could not make any difference in their lives. The second finding goes with the idiomatic expression: "You may take a horse to the water but you cannot make it drink". This implies that the learner is the central agent and primary beneficiary of the learning process and should be intrinsically motivated to learn.

Tutor conduct could also possibly contribute to the lack of motivation because a number of learners claimed that they did not benefit from tutor support. Although this statement conflicts with previous remarks on the strong support and interaction between the tutors and learners, learners commented and follows:

*Teachers coming to NAMCOL are tired, is not like they are serious with teaching because they already teach full-time learners in the morning (Group LM).*

*Teachers at school they can motivate you to study hard. They deliver speeches and motivate you to study very hard. Some teachers at NAMCOL are too reluctant and do not help much (Learner LL).*

This finding suggests that the learners depended on external forces to learn because of the dependency syndrome created by the conventional school system. They were not intrinsically propelled to study. Lukewarm behavior and lack of encouragement on the part of tutors as well as the threatening, unfamiliar new context reduced learner motivation.

Some learners regretted the mode of delivery characterised by facilitation or the coaching method and limited face-to-face tutorials. There was a request for extension of time and the introduction of morning sessions similar to the practice in conventional schools. On the mode of delivery Learner LL maintained:

*The methodology in school is best, because there you have a lot of time with the teacher and after the lesson you can do some activities.*

Another participant in the category of staff added:

*In distance education the teaching hours are limited and we don't teach them in detail we only coach them. But they want us to teach them way they were taught is formal school (Staff TA).*

Learners wanted to hold on to the teacher-centred approach they were accustomed to. There is also an element of fear in taking responsibility for own learning. Conversely, the tutors wanted learners to take full responsibility for their learning which would transform them into lifelong learners. This implies a gap between what the learners expect the institution should do and what the latter can provide.

The participants expressed diverse views on the positives and negatives of the new learning mode of delivery. Some felt that NAMCOL had made a huge difference in their lives and it would assist them to realise their dreams; others felt that the new learning mode of delivery was detrimental to their educational career. A tutor said:

*During winter some of the classes are ending at 19:00 or 19:30. The second group starting after 17:00 you won't meet these learners because they will tell that is too dark, because for us to walk from here back home is not safe (Staff TC).*

This view was supported by Learner LM:

*The environment is not conducive because we depend so much on the formal schools for our classes to start. Sometimes they end very late with their school activities and that disrupt our timetables. Because of all these problems we lose out on our classes.*

In addition, other external factors also contributed to the lack of motivation as stated by a participant from the focus group discussion:

*The challenge is that your close friends and your former fellow classmates are at Polytechnic of Namibia and University of Namibia, then they are asking what you are doing. I am doing NAMCOL. Ooh really, you are doing NAMCOL. So you didn't make it? Yes, I did not make it, I am trying to improve. I felt horrible to be associated with NAMCOL, but now I have settled, I have self-confidence and with the information I have, I feel I will make it (Group LF).*

Firstly, it appears that the learning environment is not always accessible and open to enhance learning. ODL subscribes to the principles of openness and accessibility; however, ODL institutions are sometimes more closed than open because of their inability to address the diverse training needs of learners. The timing of tutorials was not convenient to learners and that made them to feel excluded from the ODL system. This implies that the teaching and learning relationships are not based on the key principles of ODL. Secondly, learners enroll at NAMCOL with expectations which are in conflict with what the institution can deliver. The institution expects learners to take full control of their studies; the learners expect the institution to provide similar, intensive support they are used to in the formal system.

In this study, the lack of motivation among the learners could be attributed to a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The issues raised by the learners that contributed to the lack of motivation are similar to the key ingredients of motivation: student and teacher behavior, content, method and the learning environment (Williams, & Williams, 2011). In the view of Williams and Williams (2011), learning cannot take place unless the student is motivated on a constant basis. The learner should be intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, the teacher should display good subject knowledge and create an environment that motivates the student to learn, content should be interesting and relevant, the method of delivery should be

appropriate, and finally the environment should be conducive and safe for learning (Williams, & Williams, 2011).

Liao and Wang (2011) further state that the teacher has a role to play by creating a learning environment that will arouse learners' attention, motivation, and confidence to learn. This finding on the lack of motivation is similar to the view expressed by Pauley (2011) that the learner's ability to adjust to a new learning mode is linked to affective domains such as motivation, locus of control and satisfaction. Rumble and Koul (2007) found that the dropout at NAMCOL is attributed to the learners' lack of motivation, isolation and difficulties with the mode of study. Similar observations made by the participants in this study mirrored the findings of Rumble and Koul (2007). Lack of motivation, striking a balance between studies and daily multiple tasks and the inability to study through distance learning are burning issues raised that hinder learner integration into the ODL environment.

Contrary to the views expressed by the participants, a study by Hannay and Newvine (2006) that compared learners in different learning settings (online ODL and traditional face-to-face settings) revealed that students were more motivated and disciplined in an ODL environment than in a conventional classroom setting. The students preferred distance education as they felt it allowed them to balance their various activities. The students also felt that they achieved higher education outcomes in the distance learning environment.

#### **5.6.1.2 Management of study time**

Learners engage in several activities in their daily routine in addition to their studies and thus, learners may devote more attention to other activities and less time on their studies. This study indicated that some learners had difficulty managing their study time. The flexibility of the ODL system is meant to create room for learners to engage in multiple tasks, such as domestic tasks, raising funds for their studies and maintaining their families (Pityana, 2008). However, the findings show that some participants found it difficult to strike a balance between their full-time or part-time jobs, family commitments, studying, attending contact sessions and other equally important activities. A participant had the following to say:

*To study with NAMCOL you need to seriously plan your activities very carefully. It is not always easy to balance between your studies and normal daily activities. In my case, I have to wake up early in the morning to prepare my child to go to school and also prepare myself to go to work. The only free time I find during the day, I have to use it for my studies (Learner LE).*

The flexibility and convenience of the ODL system is meant to enable learners to balance their other daily commitments and studies. However, the findings of this study indicate that learners had difficulties prioritising their studies. High demands on learners' daily schedule contributed in some cases to neglect of their studies. Additionally, this suggested that learners lack the necessary time management skills.

The inexperience of distance learners to manage study time was also cited by Galusha (1998) as a barrier in the distance learning environment. Mapolisa (2012) reiterated that the lack of time amongst ODL learners is due to their poor time management skills. This was corroborated by other researchers (Barron, & D'Annunzio-Green, 2009; McGivney, 2004; Mdakane, 2011; Talbot, 2010)

### **5.6.1.3 Timing and frequency of contact sessions**

The participants and in particular the learners were concerned about the number of contact hours allowed for them to engage with the tutors. As alluded to in the preceding chapters, learners who can attend weekly tutorials are entitled to three hours per subject per week. Those learners who are unable to attend weekly tutorials because of other commitments qualify for 20 hours per subject for the year spread over two school holidays. The learners felt that the allocated time for tutorials was not sufficient to achieve their goal of improving their grades. Some claimed that they feel excluded because of the limited direct contact with their tutors. The views expressed by the learners in this sub-theme are somehow contrary to their previous claim that the mode of delivery helped them to become independent, self-directed and self-determined. The demand for more contact sessions was motivated by their previous learning experience in schools, characterized by high level of interactions and daily contact with teachers and peers (Murangi, 2009). Contrary to the views expressed by the learners, a small number of tutors claimed that attendance at the Tutorial Centres



is generally low and they felt that the request for additional contact sessions was unjustifiable.

Furthermore, some learners referred to the unsuitable time scheduling of face-to-face tutorials. Learners felt strongly that tutorial sessions at NAMCOL began too late and this compromised their safety as they have to walk long distances at night to get home. This situation is created by the College's use of the formal education facilities (schools) for its programmes in the afternoon or evening. At times schools have their own extra-mural activities which results in NAMCOL starting its programmes at 16:00 and ending at 22:00. One participant, had the following to say:

*The challenge is that learners are getting taught until late and by the time one gets home, you are exhausted. You don't have the energy to study because your brain is drained for sitting from 14:00 to 20:00 (Learner LA).*

Another participant echoed similar views by stating:

*The challenging part is coming to NAMCOL in the afternoon, and you go home at night. It is very challenging especially for the people who are footing going home (Learner LK).*

Similarly, the participants mentioned timetable conflicts: classes in different subjects which they need to attend were scheduled on the same day at the same time. A participant stated that she did not get the chance to attend all the subjects that she had registered for because of the clashes in the timetable. She stated:

*I have three subjects, but then Development Studies and Geography are at the same time. So I have to set up a date like Tuesday I must come for Development Studies and Thursdays for Geography. So I am missing out here and there because they all at the same time and day (Group LG).*

The observation made shows NAMCOL's inability to address the diverse training needs of the learners due to lack of planning.

The finding on the timing of contact session corresponds with the finding in a study by Chikoko (2010) where the participants claimed that the contact sessions were not suitable for them to integrate into institutional culture. Some claimed that afternoon

sessions in the week were suitable while others complained about fatigue after day's work.

#### 5.6.1.4 Parental and community involvement

Parental involvement refers to parents' participation in the education of the children which can contribute to learners' academic achievement (Hornby, 2011). Support from the parents and community can have a positive influence on the learners' education. Adjusting to the new way of learning especially for learners at middle-age is a complex matter without proper support from home and the community. The support from the parents, family members and community is more critical in an ODL environment because most of the time learners are operating from home and community unlike in the conventional school environment where the teacher fulfills the parental role because of the number of hours learners spend at school.

The lack of support was cited by some of the learners as a barrier affecting them during the transition stage. Learners felt that supportive relationships from their parents, families and communities were lacking. In particular, school aged learners needed strong support from parents. Learners indicated that parents failed to understand why they should spend time at the College early in the morning or over weekends while their classes were scheduled in the afternoons between Mondays and Fridays. Some of the participants had the following to say:

*Sometimes you want to come to NAMCOL at 08:00 to start doing your school work, then your parents will ask you; what are going to do at school very early in the morning because your classes only start at 14:00 (Learner LB).*

*When you come to the NAMCOL centre, people will shout at you – Are you a NAMCOL learner especially the full-time learners. They think we are nothing and useless, we are stupid and know nothing. If they call and you say you are busy, they will ask. What are you busy with at NAMCOL? They don't see the importance of NAMCOL. I just ignore and focus on what I am busy with (Group LC)*

*When I come to classes some people will ask: Are you going to NAMCOL? Do you think you will benefit? I will say yes I will benefit. Why not? (Group LK)*

This view was supported by a participant in the category of staff who stated:

*The learners do not receive enough support from home and community because some will say, NAMCOL is for school repeaters and failures. So, we as tutors play also the roles that the parents and community should play. (Staff TB).*

Participant views on the lack of support from parents, families and communities imply that these key stakeholders have little appreciation for distance learning due to lack of insight into the dynamics and importance of the ODL mode. Learners experience little support from home and community and this has a negative effect on learners' ability to adapt and succeed in distance learning. ODL institutions in general and NAMCOL in particular should increase awareness of this mode of delivery among members of the community. Possibly parents, families and communities feel that these learners had their chances through the conventional school system and should move towards being self-sustaining. Further, some stakeholders perceive that the ODL mode of delivery is an inferior form of education. Furthermore, it could also be argued that some learners are from families where they are the first generation of ODL learners and parents lack ways to assist the learners to adjust to the new ways of learning.

Borup, Graham, and Davies (2013) found that in the online learning environment learner-parent interaction is motivating and leads to high student performance. Moore (1989) also identifies structure and communication as important factors that can narrow the distance between the parties involved in distance learning. However, his model ignores student-parent/family/community interaction as a factors that can benefit learning in a distance learning environment. The model fails to acknowledge the contribution the parent, family or community plays in narrowing the transactional distance.

#### **5.6.1.5 Independent learning**

Although independent learning was mentioned as a positive learning experience, it was also considered to be a challenge to some learners because they were unaccustomed to this pedagogical approach. The regular personal engagement with fellow learners, tutors and the institution and to some extent their close relationships

with friends and family members were cut off because of geographical and environmental changes. This led to isolation in the new learning environment. One participant stated:

*Personally, I really find it difficult to do studies on my own. First of all because of the facility at home, and the child who is nagging on me. There is always something at home and the fear is that the environment is really not motivating. It is totally different from the spoon feeding and the baby attention I used to receive from the school (Learner LE).*

In response to a follow-up question on the preferred mode of education delivery, most learner participants opted for the traditional face-to-face mode of delivery with very few preferring the distance learning mode or a blended approach which combines the strengths of the other two approaches. In contrast, most staff preferred the distance learning mode. The participants expressed the following sentiments on their preferred mode of delivery:

*I prefer both modes of study as they complement each other. For those who prefer to get classes let them get it, for those like myself who do not get the time to attend, I should be given the opportunity to attend vacation schools. Use a combination of methods otherwise some groups will be locked out (Learner LH).*

*I would prefer face-to-face schooling, starting in the morning until a certain period just like a normal school. For example get homework and teacher is there to explain to you (Group LH).*

*I prefer the method of teaching at NAMCOL because only few difficult concepts are explained and they expect the learners to do more on their own (Learner LC).*

This response from the learners was not surprising because they came from the traditional school environment and they were accustomed to face-to-face learning where the teacher directs and controls teaching and learning. The observation implies learners' lack of ability to internalise the principles of distance learning. Learners favoured the structured on-campus approach they were accustomed to in the formal school system. Furthermore, they resisted the paradigm shift from contact learning mode to self-regulated, self-directed and self-determined learning with minimum contact.

This preference demonstrates the learners' expectations when they enroll at NAMCOL; adopting a new approach becomes problematic. They still hold to the mindset that teaching and learning only takes place if it is controlled and directed by the teachers. Learners had more confidence in the formal system they were exposed to for many years. On the other hand, the views expressed by staff suggest that learners should relinquish their previous learning approaches and become central agents in their own learning.

The isolation experienced by some participants corresponds with the views expressed by Simpson (2013b) who found that studying through the distance mode can be a lonely experience because learners are isolated from fellow learners, tutors, institution and also from friends and family members. Moore (1993) argues that dialogue, structure and learner autonomy determine transactional distance. The views expressed by the learners in this study in terms of dialogue are different from Moore interpretation. Moore (1993) refers to dialogue in a qualitative way where real teaching and learning is taking place and not necessarily the frequency of tutorials as demanded by most of the learners. The blended learning model suggested by some learners corresponds with Moore (1993) variables of transactional distance: dialogue, structure and learner autonomy. The learners under the blended learning model take the central part in the learning process, acknowledge the importance of dialogue while at the same time they recognise the flexibility of the system to respond to their needs.

#### **5.6.1.6 Tutors' work ethics**

Learners questioned tutors' general work ethics. A number of learners expressed their dissatisfaction with the support they received from the tutors. They claimed that they were not receiving adequate learning support from some tutors. They argued that the tutors lacked commitment and were not serious about their task. Tutors often absconded from their classes without alerting learners beforehand. Learners travelled long distances to Tutorial Centres, paid for taxis and struggled to obtain transport only to find a particular tutor was not present. Consequently, many lost faith in the tutors. A participant said:

*You come to school there is no teacher; tomorrow you come the teacher is there, other day the teacher is not there. If the teacher is not there, sometimes I take my books and study and sometimes I go back home (Learner LJ).*

*The teachers are always absent. Sometimes they stay away for the whole week without informing us. They don't value the distance learners much. It is very discouraging (Group LQ).*

This observation implies that the tutors' relationships with learners were not based on core values such as mutual respect and care. The relationship was not of equal partners in the learning process but rather of a recipient of knowledge and curator of knowledge where the latter decides what, when, where and how to learn. This also showed the laxity of tutors to perform their fiduciary duties with diligence.

In addition, the participants felt that the dual role performed by tutors of teaching the formal school learners in the morning and engaging the NAMCOL learners in the afternoon or evening compromised the quality of teaching and learning, as Learner LM, aptly put it:

*The teachers coming to teach they are already tired because they also attend to full-time classes at their schools.*

Thus, learners lacked the sense of belonging and would prefer a separate cadre of staff that they can easily connect with. However, this finding contradicts to some extent the previous views expressed by the learners on the support they received from the tutors.

The observations made by the learners do not reflect the view expressed by Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens (2012) of a good tutor who is accessible and provides individual attention.

### **5.6.2 FACTORS THAT FACILITATE LEARNER INTEGRATION INTO DISTANCE LEARNING**

The participants were asked to express their views on the question whether NAMCOL is doing enough to help learners cope during the transition stage. This theme serves to address the research objective that deals with the factors that facilitate learner integration into the new learning environment.

Mixed reactions were expressed: most participants felt that NAMCOL is doing a fairly good job to help learners adjust to the new delivery mode in order to achieve

academic success. However, a few participants felt that more needs to be done to assist learners during this difficult stage of transition.

Those participants who have responded in the affirmative felt that the current support system at NAMCOL is comprehensive enough to help them cope with their studies. Face-to-face tutorials either through the weekly tutorials for contact learners or during the vacation workshops for non-contact learners was highly rated as a support service. As alluded in the preceding part of this chapter, the learners showed great respect for learner-tutor interaction because of the historical relationships they had with teachers in formal schools. Equally, the learners were appreciative of the learning resources issued at enrolment unlike in the conventional system where late delivery of textbooks and the sharing of textbooks was common. Learner LD stated:

*I think the good thing from NAMCOL is just the modules they give us. You can study alone and you are free because when you are in school you are sharing modules or textbooks. Now you get your own modules and study alone.*

The other participants, namely the staff members (area coordinators, heads of centres and tutors) supported the views expressed by the learners that NAMCOL is doing enough to ensure that learners achieve their educational goals. The participants felt that the learning resources such as the study guides and examinations booklets as mentioned by the learners were of great value to assist learners to improve their grades.

However, staff also felt that learners did not take their studies seriously despite all efforts by the institution. Staff HoTCA said:

*I will say NAMCOL is doing a lot but the learners are not doing their part, because you find the classes empty. You only see learners when they bring in their assignments and some of these assignments are incomplete.*

Other participants supported this view by stating the following:

*I think NAMCOL is doing its level best because learners are given materials even though the time for contact sessions is not enough. Full-time learners use to borrow materials from NAMCOL learners, even full-time teachers use the material for their full-time teaching and that is a sign that NAMCOL is doing its*



*best to prepare learners for their studies. However, the learners do not go through the modules they expect us to help them word by word, line by line and paragraph by paragraph. (Staff ACB).*

*I think NAMCOL is doing enough it is just the unhelpful attitude of the learners. These learners are reluctant or may had disciplinary problems in the past. So they are still coming here with the negative attitudes, negligence and all the things (Staff TH).*

This indicates that learners receive value for money in terms of the quality of the learning resources. This further shows that the learning resources are “fit for purpose” to enhance learning experiences, to contribute to a high retention rate and better learning outcomes. Furthermore, the effectiveness of learning materials depends on the quality time learners devote to it; materials will not be of any value if they are not effectively used for learning. Though the staff members also showed appreciation of the NAMCOL learning resources, they claimed that they were not put to good use. Possibly learners lack the skills to use distance learning materials, they are not motivated enough to read them or they need interpersonal support to navigate through the materials.

The appreciation expressed by the participants on resources corresponds with stakeholder views in the SAIDE (2011) study on NAMCOL: materials were widely acknowledged and were listed in the Ministry of Education textbook catalogue for use in conventional schools. This correlates with the view by Moore (1993) that transactional distance can be bridged if learners have access to well-developed learning resources and if there is increased communication between the teacher and learner. This leads to learner autonomy in the learning process.

## **5.7 THEME 5: STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING LEARNER INTEGRATION INTO DISTANCE LEARNING**

Learners joining the ODL delivery mode enter with personal expectations, therefore the institution should understand and meet learner expectations to enable them to fully integrate into the new environment. Taking into account the challenges learners met during the transition stage, participants’ views were solicited on measures that NAMCOL should put in place to assist learners during the transition stage. Despite

the fact that the participants were generally happy with the current support system at NAMCOL they suggested several transition management measures that the College should put in place. Therefore, the discussion of this theme, focuses on the following sub-themes: immediate feedback on assessment activities, enhance the level of motivation, consider appointing a separate cadre of staff to facilitate learning, enhance the use of technology and introduce programmes to improve English language proficiency.

### **5.7.1 IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES**

Immediate and timely feedback on assessment activities is an essential component in the learning process. The finding of the study revealed that learners wanted immediate feedback after they have done the various assessment activities such as tests, project work and assignments. The learners said they needed to know their shortcomings before they attempted the next assessment activity. Learner LJ stated,

*In Economics we write tests, we do assignments and then the test never comes to us to see how we perform.*

The staff participants raised similar concern on the turn-around of assignments. They felt that learners should receive feedback on the first assignments before they attempted the second assignment.

This finding shows the laxity of the tutors to perform their duties with diligence which negatively affects learners' academic performance and motivation. It further shows the lack of an effective monitoring systems to facilitate the marking process and shorten the turn-around time of assessment activities. Again, this may indicate tutors' failure to grasp that assignments are not only assessment instruments, but more importantly they are teaching devices.

Participant views relate to the view of Thompson (1997) that delayed feedback, unconstructive, negative and demeaning comments on assignments may lead to learners withdrawing from the course. The finding in this study also corresponds with the opinion of Weaver (2006) who found that immediate feedback helps the learners identify strengths and weaknesses in order for them to assess their performance and make improvements in future.

### 5.7.2 ENHANCE THE LEVEL OF MOTIVATION

As previously mentioned, some learners cited lack of motivation as a barrier to adjustment to the new ODL mode of delivery. Learners therefore expressed the need for motivational talks to inspire them. Group LF said:

*NAMCOL is already giving us enough books, maybe they should do more speeches to motivate us each term. They should invite people to advise us on how we should approach Grade 12 to pass with more points through NAMCOL.*

This finding suggests that the learners' previous learning experience of failure had a negative psychological effect and it calls for interventions to boost morale and increase confidence.

Participant views support the recommended approach of instituting initiatives such as orientation programme that is not necessarily of an academic nature but that focuses on the social dimension of the learners (Darlaston-Jones et al., 2001).

### 5.7.3 CONSIDER APPOINTING A SEPARATE CADRE TO FACILITATE LEARNING

The findings included the learners' request for NAMCOL to appoint own full-time qualified teachers and restrain from making use of teachers from formal schools. The issue was raised by both the learners and tutors. A participant from the focus group discussion stated:

*Tutors for NAMCOL should be separated from the ones in the formal schools because when you meet them they looked tired and do not cope with the work (Group LA).*

Another participant in the same group discussion agreed:

*I think there should be specific teachers for NAMCOL only, there shouldn't be a double day job for full-time teachers to go teach at NAMCOL again.*

This opinion was substantiated by the learners' comments on teacher absenteeism and teacher exhaustion due to multiple commitments including NAMCOL classes in the afternoons or evenings.

The demand for a dedicated teaching staff shows learners' lack of confidence in the current approach of employing school teachers. This finding shows that the learners' level of readiness for self-motivated, self-directed and self-determined learning is low. This finding further illustrates learners' lack of knowledge and understanding of ODL experiences where the self-instructional learning resources are meant to substitute much of what should take place in the classroom. Timely institutional interventions on the importance of ODL could make a significant difference during learner transition by increasing their level of readiness to partake ODL education. The view expressed by the learners to have own full-time teachers and infrastructure is similar to views expressed by stakeholders in the study on the roles and functions of NAMCOL (SAIDE, 2011). It also concurs with the study by Kirby et al. (2010) where the students opted for face-to-face learning mode, even those who had completed online courses at high school. Interaction, support, communication and a structured learning environment were the main reasons for the preferred option.

#### **5.7.4 ENHANCE THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

Learners raised the use of modern technology in education delivery as a critical component to facilitate learner integration into the ODL system. Learners felt that NAMCOL should implement a learner portal to load subject notes and provide more computers with internet connectivity to use for research purposes. Two participants had the following to say:

*NAMCOL should provide notes which they can provide on the portal, and also at the same time consider providing online courses to learners who do not get time to attend classes (Learner LD).*

*NAMCOL should consider moving into online delivery of its programme so that learners do not need to walk long distances to the Tutorial Centres. Through online learning, learners will have the opportunity to interact with fellow learners and tutors at any given time (Tutor TH).*

This view was supported by the employees who stated that NAMCOL should consider changing the mode of delivery from print to eLearning for learners to access learning content anytime and anywhere. This finding suggests the inadequacy of the current system to accommodate learners with diverse expectations and the need to narrow the transactional distance that is widening due to tutor laxity.

The recommendation on the implementation of technology to support learners and facilitate course delivery corroborates the view of Taylor (2010) that increased use of ICT contributes to a flexible learning environment.

#### **5.7.5 INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE**

Some learners in this study identified a language barrier which hinders engagement with the subject matter. One participant said:

*Also I have noticed the language barrier, we cannot cope with English. For example, when the questions are asked like “explain” we fail because we do not respond well to the question. NAMCOL should introduce remedial English lessons, which will assist learners to respond to different types of questions (Group LC).*

The language barrier is aggravated by the separation of learners and tutors for most of the learning time and learners have to engage with subject matter on their own without the support of tutors and other fellow learners. This finding concurs with the study by Cross and Carpentier (2009) which found that a lack of English proficiency challenged distance learners.

In the next section, the findings that emerged from the documentary review process are presented.

### **5.8 DOCUMENTARY REVIEW**

This phase of the study involved the review of relevant documents to compare the data obtained from the participants through the questionnaires and interviews. The documentary review was important to enrich the data and substantiate the views expressed by the participants through the other data collection tools. The following documents were considered appropriate in this regard:

- monitoring and evaluation reports,
- attendance registers,
- assessment mark sheets, and
- previous research studies on NAMCOL.

The monitoring and evaluation reports included learner-tutor evaluation, tutor monthly self-evaluation, heads of centres and area coordinators' class visits reports. The attendance registers dealt with the three terms in the academic year for those learners who attended the weekly tutorials as well as of those non-contact learners who took part in the vacation schools. Assessment mark sheets were for both the assignments and mock examination. The NAMCOL research studies reviewed which were of direct relevance to the study included the review of roles and functions studies of 2005 and 2011, learner support quality assessment survey of 2014, and the tracer study of the former learners of 2005-2010. Through the review of these documents, issues relevant for this research study were examined, categorised and interpreted in terms of emerging themes. The key issues that emerged from the documentary review process are discussed under the same research themes as the preceding sections above.

#### **5.8.1 UNDERSTANDING OF ODL SYSTEM**

The research study on the effectiveness of NAMCOL support services revealed learners' peripheral understanding of ODL (SAIDE, 2014). In this study, the learners demanded support services that mirror the conventional system, such as more Tutorial Centres, own teachers and provision of learner residences. The study therefore suggests that learners should be sensitised to the difference between the conventional school system and ODL to enable learners to take full responsibility of their own learning when they join NAMCOL (SAIDE, 2014). Similarly, some learners in this study portray the NAMCOL system as parallel to the conventional school system because they demand similar services as those revealed in the learner support study. However, some learners have a better understanding of the ODL mode as they appreciated the flexibility of the system and the increased participation during the tutorial sessions.

#### **5.8.2 EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD**

The learning experiences of learners at NAMCOL is characterised by lack of self-discipline and motivation as well learners' reluctance to adopt a more independent approach to learning. The study on the roles and functions of NAMCOL referred to above proposes motivating learners and fostering greater discipline as strategies to

fully engage learners in learning and enhance quality through ODL delivery (SAIDE, 2011). Furthermore, a study which traced former Grade 12 learners shows that 46% of those who participated in the study find it hard to motivate themselves (SAIDE (2012). The finding of this study concur with the findings of previous studies mentioned above: it indicated that learners approach the new learning experience with the same attitude as the traditional conventional system from which they came. Learners in this study were unaware of the expectations and demands of distance learning and lacked the commitment and discipline to approach the new method of learning differently.

### **5.8.3 ADJUSTING TO THE DISTANCE MODE OF LEARNING**

This part of the document reviews attempts to address the research auxiliary objective that deals with the stage that learners integrate into the new environment. Tutor absenteeism and poor motivation were cited as reasons that contribute to learners' poor attendance (SAIDE, 2005). The monitoring and evaluation reports of Tutorial Centres and attendance registers reviewed show a relatively high attendance rate during the first months (March/April) of the academic year; however a drastic decrease in attendance was observed during the second term. The researcher maintains that poor attendance during the second term is partly due to constraints cited by learners in this study: the tutorial sessions start very late in the day thereby compromising learner safety, tutor absenteeism, tutor exhaustion and lack of motivation. Furthermore, at the beginning of the year learners enroll at the institution with high expectations and if these are not immediately met, they prefer to stay away from classes during the second term.

The observation on the high attendance during March/April to some extent corresponds with the view expressed by some staff members that learners adjust well during the first term, they display positive attitudes towards their learning and the level of interaction is very high at the beginning of the year. The subsequent drop in attendance in the latter part of the year could be due to learner discouragement or seasonal changes.



#### **5.8.4 FACTORS THAT HINDER AND FACILITATE LEARNER INTEGRATION TO DISTANCE LEARNING**

This first part of the documentary review highlights negative factors which affect learners' engagement with studies at NAMCOL; the second part focuses on the positive factors that facilitate learning at NAMCOL.

##### **5.8.4.1 Factors that hinder learner integration to distance learning**

Poor attendance of tutorial sessions by tutors, lack of parental and community support, timing of tutorials and lack of motivation and discipline emerged as serious challenges that affect learners while studying at NAMCOL (SAIDE, 2005; 2011) .

Firstly, the failure of tutors to attend contact sessions and lack of commitment in performing their duties were cited as possible reasons that discourage learners from attending classes (SAIDE, 2005). This observation is congruent with the learners' views in this study regarding the tutors' work ethics.

Secondly, the previous studies showed the lack of parental support of learners (SAIDE, 2011). Similarly, in this study learners complained about the lack of support from parents and family and cited it as a barrier affecting the smooth transition to the new learning environment.

Thirdly, a common suggestion retrieved from the different evaluation reports is the extension of the duration and number of contact sessions for the week. Both learners and tutors claimed that the period is too short to cover the entire syllabi and they continuously appealed through their monthly reports that NAMCOL should consider extension of time. The two studies on the roles and functions of NAMCOL reported that stakeholders maintained the time allocation for contact sessions was minimal (SAIDE, 2005; 2011). These comments suggest that stakeholders lack a comprehensive understanding of the ODL delivery mode and confuse it with the pedagogical approach followed in the traditional school environment. These sentiments concur with the view expressed by the learners in this study who mentioned that they feel excluded because of the limited contact sessions.

Finally, the lack of learner motivation was cited in various documents reviewed as a contributing factor to learner drop-out or poor academic performance. For example, the tracer study of former learners indicated that 46% of the participants found it difficult to motivate themselves. Furthermore, the survey report on the effectiveness of support services offered by NAMCOL indicated that most factors that contributed to poor motivation were tutor related. The report cited tutor absenteeism, laxity in tutoring, ridiculing of learners and use of derogatory language as undesirable behavioural forms displayed by the tutors (SAIDE, 2014). On the other hand, in another study conducted at NAMCOL on its roles and functions, the tutors blamed the lack of learner commitment demonstrated by their failure to attend contact sessions and to submit assignments (SAIDE, 2011). The findings in these reports are consistent with the views expressed by the participants in this study that lack of learner motivation was attributed to diverse factors, such as learners themselves, tutors, learning resources, environment and methodology.

#### **5.8.4.2 Factors that facilitate learner integration to distance learning**

The high quality print-based learning resources were mentioned in all research studies as contributing factors to the success of NAMCOL learners (SAIDE, 2005; 2011; 2012; 2014). The findings from the previous research studies are congruent with the finding in this study where most participants indicated that the learning materials are vital for their integration into the ODL environment. Similarly, all research studies including this study showed high regard for the face-to-face interactions between the learners and tutors, however the commitment of tutors to the course was questionable.

#### **5.8.5 Strategies to manage learner integration into distance learning**

In terms of this theme, the previous research studies suggested mechanisms that could enhance the quality of support services at the College. Although these studies' main focus was not on learner integration into ODL, the findings on measures to improve the support services relate to interventions proposed by the participants in this study to facilitate learner integration. Key interventions proposed in previous research studies to enhance quality relate to the employment of separate full-time staff to address the tutors' laxity and lack of commitment, use of ICT in service

delivery, motivating learners and providing immediate feedback on assessment activities (SAIDE, 2005, 2011, 2012, 2014). In this study, participants proposed similar strategies to manage learner integration, however in addition remedial lessons in English focusing on how to approach assignments and examination questions was viewed as an important strategy to assist learners during the transition stage.

## 5.9 CONCLUSION

The main findings in this chapter are classified under five themes: understanding of ODL system, learning experiences of learners, adjusting to the distance mode of learning, factors that hinder and facilitate learner integration to distance learning, and strategies for managing learner integration into distance learning. Generally, learners expressed mixed reactions on their experiences during the transition stage. Some learners indicated that they found it difficult to adjust while others expressed their satisfaction with the way NAMCOL prepared them to cope with the transition. Staff felt strongly that the learners were not ready to confront the new mode of learning and that impeded full integration into the ODL mode of delivery.

In the next chapter, emerging findings from both quantitative and qualitative data are discussed and insights that contribute towards knowledge building and good practice in ODL are highlighted.

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## CHAPTER 6

# MERGING OF QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DATA

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of key role players in the migration of learners from the conventional school system to ODL, and in particular to an open school mode of delivery. The study was premised on the assumption that learners migrating from one system to another experience the transition period differently, which can either be negative or positive and this could possibly influence their adaptation to the new learning environment. In the context of this study, the change to the new learning environment could be one of the factors influencing learners' ability to integrate into the new distance learning environment. The preceding chapters 4 and 5 presented the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the main findings that emerged from both quantitative and qualitative data collection by highlighting the divergence and convergence in the data. The data is presented under the following broad themes: participants understanding of ODL, learner experiences during the transition period, learner integration, transition stages, factors that hinder and facilitate learner integration, and strategies to manage learner integration into distance learning. Thereafter, the key findings are discussed in the context of the two theoretical framework, namely Tinto's model on learner integration and Moore's theory on transactional distance as discussed in detail in chapter 2 that deals with literature review.

### 6.2 STAKEHOLDERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE ODL SYSTEM

Quantitatively, the great majority of learners (86%) showed a lack of understanding of the distance learning mode. This finding is not surprising because 96% of the learner participants indicated that they migrated from the formal schools. This finding is also congruent with the learners' age distribution of between 18-24 (81%), which is normally an age category of learners who have finished high school. The age and the schooling experience of the learners may have had an effect on their ability to cope with the ODL system. Some staff participants (48%) echoed the same sentiment that learners lacked the basic knowledge of the philosophy that underpin ODL delivery.

The staff also took cognisance of the learners' inexperience and inability to cope with studies at NAMCOL as was stated by 52% of staff participants. The learners' inexperience affects their ability to cope with the new system. This finding from the quantitative data supports the views in the qualitative data that learners had a narrow understanding of the ODL delivery mode because they differentiated the ODL mode from the traditional school system on the timing, frequency and duration of tutorials than rather focusing on the fundamental principles that underpin ODL.

On the contrary, the qualitative data shows that some learners valued the flexibility of the ODL delivery mode to satisfy the growing demand for education for those who are not in any position to pursue their educational career through the conventional system. One significant attribute of the ODL mode which learners revealed through the quantitative data is the self-confidence they have developed and their ability to become self-driven and independent learners. The quantitative data shows that the academic staff had reasonable experience of working in an ODL environment: 48% of staff participants had more than 5 years of experience, 36% indicated the experience of 3 years and 16% had an experience of between 4 and 5 years. This suggests that staff had developed an understanding of the pedagogical approaches that underpin both the conventional school and the ODL systems while, in the same vein, they acknowledged learners' inability to handle the new method of learning confidently and meticulously. The staff according to the qualitative data portrayed a good understanding of the ODL delivery mode because they defined it in terms of its flexibility and indicated that learners can study anytime, anywhere and can also perform multiple tasks while studying. Although the quantitative and qualitative data are consistent in terms of learners' lack of understanding of ODL, a small proportion of learners in the qualitative data showed appreciation of the new mode of delivery because of its positive attributes such as flexibility, level of independent learning and the fact that it embraces technology.

They perceived these as positive learning experiences. This small fraction could also possibly be represented by the 11% in the quantitative data who showed their familiarity with the system because of prior learning experience in the ODL mode. This finding on learners' poor knowledge and understanding of ODL is not unique to NAMCOL. Baxter (2012) affirmed that students had limited understanding and

expectations of distance learning and institutions should implement interventions that facilitate student progression. Similarly, Gokool-Ramdoe (2009) cautions of policy deficit at national and institutional levels to assist learners understand ODL implications, demands and expectations.

### **6.2.1 CRITICAL VIEWS OF THE LEARNERS AND STAFF IN TERMS OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

The findings show greater similarities pointing to a critical aspect of ODL as an unfamiliar territory to the primary beneficiaries the system is intended to serve. The inability and inexperience to approach the ODL teaching and learning mode influence the learners' integration into the new delivery mode. This is revealed by the great majority (86%) of learners and some staff (48%) who were consistent in their views that learners had limited understanding of the ODL system. The qualitative data supports the quantitative data because ODL was defined in terms of the duration and frequency of the tutorials rather than by its key principles of flexibility, openness, self-directedness, independent learning and the physical separation of the instructor and the learner. Another similarity is that staff in the qualitative data had a good grasp of ODL because of the exposure to training through NAMCOL staff development programmes. Most importantly the quantitative data shows that many staff members (64%) had the experience of four years or more of working in an ODL environment while some (36%) had three years' experience.

The legitimacy and credibility of any education system or educational institution depend largely on its high academic standards which include quality programmes, support services and learning outcomes. This could possibly not be achieved if key stakeholders, and in particular the learners, lack the basic knowledge and understanding of the system that should facilitate effective teaching and learning. Though the ODL mode has been in existence for a number of years, it remains an unfamiliar discipline because of the dominant nature of the conventional school system in the Namibian education system. It is therefore of great importance for ODL practitioners and policy makers to rethink and reemphasise how the delivery of ODL at all levels should be maximised for it to become a system of choice for those who do not prefer to study through the conventional school system because of their own conviction that ODL is the best delivery model.

## 6.2.2 COMMENT ON THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The principal models that guided this study were Tinto (1975) model on learner integration and Moore (1993) theory on transactional distance. According to Tinto (1975), academic integration occurs when there is connection between the student and the intellectual life of the institution while social integration occurs when there are other close relationships outside the boundaries of the classroom (Tinto, 1987; 1997a). Tinto further claim that family backgrounds, individual attributes and prior learning experience influence students to fully integrate into the new learning environments (Tinto, 1997a). It appears from the findings of this study that learners' prior learning experience of engaging in the conventional system for the entire school career could have retarded or delayed their understanding of the ODL mode and their connection to this new delivery mode. In the context of this study, the researcher regards the main participants as first generations learners in ODL because of the lack of prior exposure of their parents/relatives to the distance learning mode of delivery. The findings show great similarity between the quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitatively, 96% of the learners indicated that they hailed from the conventional schools while the qualitative data confirmed that most respondents came from formal schools with the exception of two who first attempted to improve their grades through private institutions, which were no different from the formal schools in terms of the pedagogical approach to teaching. This finding shows that learners have developed a particular learning style which might not necessarily work well in an ODL setting. To some extent this finding supports the views advanced by Tinto in his model on student integration that students' diverse background and prior learning experience could determine their commitment to the institution and the goals they have set for themselves and their studies.

On the other hand, Moore's (1993) theory on transactional distance refers to various forms of interaction that can influence teaching and learning in the distance learning mode. In his view, transaction in distance education is a function of three variables, namely, dialogue, structure and learner autonomy. In the context of this study, ODL was an unfamiliar territory to the great majority of learners (86%) and this is consistent with the views in the qualitative data that most learners attended the conventional schools before they joined NAMCOL. This suggests that NAMCOL should identify and respond to the learners' educational needs since they mainly come from the



conventional school system and held expectations which were contrary to the institution's expectations.

Furthermore, learner autonomy refers to the extent to which the learner takes control of own learning, and it could be that learners may struggle at the beginning because of their lack of experience to take an independent approach to learning. In view of the findings in this study, learners' understanding of dialogue is completely different from the definition of Moore. The latter refers to any form of engagement which is cooperative and meaningful for teaching and learning to occur. Moore refers to dialogue in qualitative form. In the context of this study, the learners define dialogue in quantitative terms. They define dialogue in terms of the number, frequency and timing of the tutorials. Learners' peripheral understanding of ODL widens the gap between them and the institution and they experience transactional distance because of their inability to study at a distance effectively.

### **6.3 LEARNER EXPERIENCES DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD**

The main purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of learners during the transition period from the traditional classroom mode of delivery to the ODL mode. Diverse views were presented by the participants through quantitative and qualitative data. Some participants had positive learning experiences while others shared their unpleasant experiences of studying through the ODL mode. It appears from the quantitative data that 63% of the learners indicated heavy workload and strongly felt that studying with NAMCOL is not as easy as studying through the formal schools. Although a relatively good number of staff participants (36%) reported that students were keen on studying through ODL, other staff were not enthused by their first encounter with the distance learners. The staff participants cited that 20% of the learners needed motivation, 16% of the learners do not participate in discussions, and 12% are not sure of the institutions' expectations.

Qualitatively, the participants gave mixed reactions on learning experiences. Contrary to the quantitative data, three sub-themes emerged, namely the level of uncertainty, learner engagement with tutors and fellow learners and learners' level of independent learning. The majority of learners appreciated the engagement they had with tutors and fellow learners as well as the level of independent learning they developed.

However, both the learners and staff stated that the beneficiaries found the distance learning mode overwhelming. The majority of the staff according to the qualitative data claimed that learners were anxious, shy, displayed a negative attitudes and show low morale. The views of the participants in the quantitative data differs slightly from the qualitative data.

### **6.3.1 CRITICAL VIEWS OF THE LEARNERS AND STAFF IN TERMS OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

The findings from quantitative and qualitative data show some similarities with the way the learners experienced learning in the new mode of ODL. Some learners had a positive learning experience while others experienced the learning process negatively. The results of the study show that many learners (63%) experienced the new learning environment of ODL negatively as they cited the complexity of studying at a distance and the highly demanding workload as some unpleasant learning experiences. The observation by the learners is partly corroborated by some staff (36%) who indicated that learners experienced a positive learning experience as they had the desire to study through ODL. The qualitative data cites the level of uncertainty amongst learners, learner engagement with tutors and peers and independent learning as learning experiences. The learners 'engagement with tutors and peers were viewed as positive learning experiences; however, both the learners and staff gave mixed reactions on the level of independent learning. To some, independent learning was viewed as a positive learning experience while others found it an impeding factor because of their inability to study independently.

Another important similarity one could draw from the responses of the participants through both data collection approaches is the mismatch between the learners' expectations and the high demand of distance learning and its expectations. Quantitatively, although learners in an open school system follow the same curriculum as the counterparts in formal schools, in this study, learners complained of the workload as if what it being taught at NAMCOL is different from what was taught in schools. What differs is the approach to learning because the institutions expects the learners to do more while the learners expect the same from the institution. The institution demands an independent approach to learning which is contrary to their expectations. The similar observation was made by staff through the quantitative

data. Staff observed passiveness to participate in discussions (16%), lack of motivation (20%) and learners' unawareness of the expectations, implications and demands of the new delivery mode of ODL (12%). This similarity in finding is important for ODL institutions to rethink how best they can orient the learners coming from the conventional system to enable them to understand their responsibility in ODL settings.

### **6.3.2 COMMENT ON THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this study, it appears from the finding on learner experiences that learners prefer a situation characterised by a high degree of dialogue because of the discomfort associated to study independently. This emerged strongly from their responses in the qualitative data when they attached high value on their face-to-face engagements with tutors and peers. The positive reaction from learners on their engagement with tutors and fellow learners shows that they cope with difficulty on their own because the learner-tutor and learner-learner interactions mirror the similar pedagogical approach they were used to in the conventional school system. Also, in the quantitative data the learners stated that they find it difficult to study on their own (stated by 63% of learners and 36% of staff). This implies that learners cannot cope on their own without external interventions. This finding further implies that knowledge is socially constructed as it requires joint participation of the tutor and learner in the learning process. This finding validates Moore's view that less autonomous learners are likely to prefer a high degree of dialogue with their teachers and fellow learners. There is a low level of responsibility and self-directedness because of the high level of dependency displayed by the learners in this study. In the context of this study, learners joining NAMCOL from the conventional school system displayed a different value system from NAMCOL values which makes the adjustment to the new learning environment of ODL not a simple matter.

### **6.4 LEARNER INTEGRATION INTO THE DISTANCE LEARNING MODE OF DELIVERY**

Tinto posits that learning institutions consists of academic and social systems that comprise mutual relationships to assist students to fully integrate into the system (Tinto, 1975). Similarly, Moore's identifies three forms of interactions that are necessary for a learner to meaningfully engage in learning in a distance learning

mode of delivery, namely student-tutor, student-student and student-content interactions.

#### **6.4.1 ACADEMIC INTEGRATION**

In the context of this study, academic integration refers to learners' connection with the intellectual part of the institution. The following key issues emerged from the quantitative data, regular face-to-face interaction, learners' approach towards assessment activities and support from tutors. The quantitative data show that the majority of the learners (86%) preferred regular face-to-face interactions, while many (77%) indicated that are coping well with assignments, and another 72% showed that they relied heavily on the direct support on tutors. Some learners (53%) claimed that they cannot cope on their own and indicated that they struggle to balance study time and other commitments as was revealed by 56% of the participants. The observations from the learners is supported by the majority (84%) of staff participants who indicate learners' inability to cope on their own without the support of tutors. Additionally, many staff (60%) echoed similar views as expressed by the learners that the assignments were of acceptable standard and that learners strictly adhered to the deadlines. Incongruent with the learners' views, many staff (60%) felt that learners do not balance studies and other commitments and in the process they neglect their own studies. On the use of learning resources, staff felt that learners had a good grasp of the content, while some (36%) of the learners felt that they can work through the study materials on their own without much support from tutors and their counterparts.

The qualitative data supports the views expressed by both the learners and staff in the quantitative data that learners prefer a method of delivery characterised by direct interactions between the learners and tutors. However, the qualitative data obtained through the document review process contradicts the quantitative data. The reality shows a positive response rate on the first assignment with an average submission rate of 59%, and a subsequent decline in the submission of assignments 2 and 3 to 40% and 27% submission rate, respectively (NAMCOL, 2015). The qualitative data also confirm that learners had confidence in using the NAMCOL self-instructional materials on their own. The results of the study in both the qualitative and quantitative data collection methods show the learners' immaturity and unpreparedness to adjust and adopt to the new distance learning mode. These findings further show the tension

that exists between the learners' expectations and the principles of self-directed and self-determined learning that underpins the ODL mode. The findings in the study as was revealed by the different categories of staff support the views by Moore on the importance of the three forms of interactions. It appears from the findings that the College's academic system did not effectively facilitate learner integration.

#### **6.4.1.1 Critical views of the learners and staff in terms of similarities and differences**

A similarity in terms of both qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches is the participants' admission of the importance of interaction between the learners and tutors that connect them to the new learning mode of ODL. This similarity was retrieved from the responses that relate to the demand for regular face-to-face interactions, demand for tutors and the learners' inability to cope on their own. However, there was a huge discrepancy between the participants' remarks on the assignments and the actual trend in the submission thereof. Although many learners (77%) stated that they coped well with the assignments, the real data from learner record management system showed a completely different picture of an average submission rate of 42%. This finding contradicts the view expressed by learners in the qualitative data that they handle the learning resources comfortably.

#### **6.4.1.2 Comment on the theoretical framework**

The finding in this study show that learners' direct connection with the tutors makes them feel academically more connected to the institution. Some learners were actively engaged in the academic activities at the institution through the submission of assignments although quite a number did comply with the course requirements. Likewise, the finding shows that students attach great value to dialogue as a key variable to narrow the transactional distance. Two forms of interactions were evident, namely student-tutor and learner-content interactions. Most participants demanded tutor interactions and there was an element of student-content interactions because of learners' participation in the assignments. A reasonable number claimed to cope well with the study guides on their own. To some learners, a high degree of dialogue and structure led them to become autonomous and self-directed learners. However,

some experienced a low degree of dialogue and less structure and were thus unable to cope with their studies on their own.

#### **6.4.2 SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

Social integration focuses on learner engagement with peers and other connections outside the academic life. Quantitatively, most learners (82%) felt that they had established strong interpersonal relationships with peers. The same view was expressed by many staff members (72%). Learner interaction with tutors outside the learning environment was rated high by 78% of the learners. This observation is supported by 71% of staff participants. Additionally, many learners (76%) felt that they received sufficient support from the family, friends, employers and co-workers, a finding which was only supported by 8% of the staff participants. On the issue of learner participation in extra-mural activities, only some of the learners (41%) showed their satisfaction with the activities. Contrary to this, the majority of staff (80%) felt that the extra-mural activities were sufficient enough to connect the learners to the new learning mode.

The qualitative data confirmed the finding in the quantitative data on the critical role tutors play outside the scope of the engagement contract. Teaching and learning is not only taking place when both parties share the same venue but it can also take place at different venues and times. The qualitative data showed that tutors were at the disposal of the learners to the extent that they availed the contact numbers to be contacted anytime. Additionally, the qualitative data recognised the learner engagement with their counterparts where they contribute actively to their own learning and where they are equal partners in the learning process. The lack of support from parents, family and community was cited as a barrier affecting the full integration of the learners into the ODL mode of delivery. Karp et al. (2010) claim that learners interacting with others and engaging in academic and social and extra mural activities are more likely to integrate and persist than those that remain passive. The findings show that learners do not only depend on academic systems to persist and achieve academic success but also need some form of social interactions. The results of the study further indicate that positive social relationships and interactions are important for learners to engage in constructive learning. These different types of

interactions also lead to a sense of belonging and ultimately to positive learning outcomes.

#### **6.4.2.1 Critical views of the learners and staff in terms of similarities and differences**

An important similarity in the responses of the participants through both data collection approaches relates to the learner engagement with other learners and tutors. Quantitative data show divergent views of the support learners receive from parents, family and community. While the quantitative data showed great support as was stated by many learners (76%), the findings from the qualitative data indicated that support from external forces outside the learning mode was lacking. Another similarity was the indication of strong interpersonal relationships with their peers as was revealed by 82% of the learners and this was reaffirmed by many staff members (72%). The qualitative data recognised the engagement of learners with the counterparts as vital for the learning process.

#### **6.4.2.2 Comment on the theoretical framework**

Tinto (1975) posits that students do not only need to integrate academically but also socially through interactions with others operating in the same environment. In this study, the qualitative and qualitative data show that learners need to experience informal and formal systems to integrate socially in the ODL mode of delivery. In the context of this study, the informal systems refer to the engagement of learners in activities not spearheaded by the College which involve learners' social interactions with their peers, while formal systems refer to the activities specifically arranged to integrate learners within the institutional culture. The participants in this study reported positive social integration due to efforts made to form new relationships in a new environment and learning space. Although Tinto's model was developed for the conventional college environment, learners made good connections with peers and lecturers that would ultimately lead to a strong commitment to NAMCOL.

Tinto refers to communication between the student and teacher as a form of academic integration. Sweet (1986) who applied Tinto's model to a distance learning context posits that good communication between the student and teacher in distance



education settings is an effective form of social integration. Karp et al. (2010) claim that students commuting to campus, their interactions with peers and connection to the learning environment can be challenging. The authors proposes information networks to strengthen social connections (Karp et al., 2010). In the view of Kember (1995), distance education learners have to cope with various social demands, therefore social integration precedes academic integration.

According to Moore (1993), the transaction between the teacher and the learner in a distance learning mode takes into account three factors: dialogue, structure and learner autonomy. Dialogue refers to the quality communication between the parties that takes into account all forms of interactions: teacher-student, student-student and student-content. Structure refers to the extent the learning programmes respond to the individual needs of the learners. In the context of this study, two of the three forms of interactions are evident, namely teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions. This indicates a high degree of dialogue which can lead to learners constructively creating own knowledge through social interventions. The strong reliance on interpersonal relationships shows that some learners were not comfortable with ODL because of the fear of becoming autonomous in their studies.

## **6.5 LEARNER TRANSITION STAGES**

This theme was meant to address the research auxiliary objective that relates to the stages learners go through before they fully integrate into the ODL learning mode. The question on the transition stages was preceded by participants' general views on their adjustment to the distance learning delivery mode. The quantitative data shows that some current learners (51%) and many former learners (69%) had adjusted well to the ODL mode. However, a few learners in the system (30%) indicated they settled well. Some (44%) of the staff participants indicated that learners had challenges to adjust to the new learning environment of ODL; only a few (20%) indicated that they had adjusted well. The staff participants cited the commitment of learners towards their studies as an indication of their adjustment to the College. Those that claimed that learners struggled with adjustment mentioned that learners expected normal teaching from tutors without studying beforehand. Many learners (66%) said they were progressing well with their studies and had established new relationships with their peers. It could be that the timing of data collection had an influence on the way

the participants responded to the question. The fact that the data collection process took place during the last part of the second term and partly in the third term could be that learners had spent a considerable amount of time at NAMCOL and adjusted fairly well.

On the period of adjustment, the learners were split in their views: 42% and 44% felt they had adjusted well during the first and second terms, respectively and only 6% indicated that they had adjusted in the third term. The responses of staff differed slightly from the learners as they indicated that 64% and 36% adjusted in the first and second terms, respectively. It is a matter of concern that some learners had not adjusted to ODL in the second semester. The quantitative data also shows diverse views from learners and tutors on the period of adjustment. The conflicting views the two groups had on the transition period show a different understanding of settling into an ODL system. The qualitative data from both the learners and staff showed that the majority of the learners had adjusted well during the second term; some indicated a good settlement in the first term. The results of the study show that learner settlement in an ODL system occurs at different stages depending on learners' individual characteristics and prior learning experiences. It further shows that the process requires multiple interventions from the institution for learners to adjust comfortably into an ODL learning environment.

#### **6.5.1 CRITICAL VIEWS IN TERMS OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

A significant similarity one could draw from the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative data collection methods is the period of adjustment to the new learning mode. The finding also suggests that a quite number of learners start connecting to the new learning in the first and second terms. Both the learners and staff were consistent in their views on the adjustment period through the qualitative and quantitative data. However, staff leaned more towards adjustment in the first term while the learners became more confident in the second term.

#### **6.5.2 COMMENT ON THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Tinto asserts that, for students to fully integrate into a learning environment, reciprocal relationships between the academic and social systems are vital. Tinto further avows

that full integration requires the learner to pass through three sequential stages, viz. separation, transition and incorporation (Tinto, 1997b). The first phase is characterised by the learner being separated from past associations (separation); in the second phase the learner starts making connections with the new environment and acquires the necessary skills and knowledge to adjust best to the environment (transition); during the final stage the learner is fully connected and has formed new relationships with their peers, teachers and other key stakeholders at the new ODL mode of delivery (incorporation). Tinto's view is reaffirmed by other researchers who attest that for change to occur, an individual should abort the present situation, move into the future and put appropriate systems in place for change to happen (Pryor et al., 2008). This study supports Tinto's model on the three phases learners go through. In the context of this study, learners were divorced from the previous associations in formal schools (separation). At this stage, there was disconnection between the teachers and peers and the learners had to start making new connections. They experienced isolation and they lack the ability and experience to study through this distance learning mode.

During the second phase (transition), learners started making connections with teachers and fellow learners. They appreciate the engagement with tutors and learners, and start having an understanding of the ODL system. In the final phase (incorporation), they communicate freely with others and tutors, participate with confidence in the learning process and fully integrate into the ODL mode. It is not clear from Tinto's model as to the specific timeframe for full integration to occur as it differs from one learner to another. To some it could be a lengthy process while to other learners it can happen in a short period. The researcher believes this depends on the learner's individual ability to adjust to the new delivery mode. In the context of study, the findings show that learners pass through the stage of incorporation in the first and second terms. The findings imply that adjustment in the first term could be attributed to some learners' prior ODL experience as well as to a positive attitude to the new environment of ODL. The adjustment in the third term validates Tinto's view that learner adjustment is a longitudinal process.

## 6.6 FACTORS THAT HINDER OR FACILITATE LEARNER INTEGRATION

This study is driven by the notion that changing from one mode of delivery to another influences learner integration into the ODL mode. In the process of transition, certain factors impede adjustment while other factors accelerate the transition process. The findings in this study indicate that some learners experienced some difficulties in adjusting while others did not experience serious obstacles during transition. The quantitative data show that learners had difficulties in managing their time as was indicated by roughly half (53%) of the learners. Also, learners were nearly equally split in their views on the element of motivation: some (45%) felt they lack the motivation to engage with their studies while others (48%) felt motivated enough to study with NAMCOL. Quite a number of learners (38%) claimed not to have received sufficient information on the distance learning mode, while 35% felt that they were fully oriented at the beginning to assist them cope in the new learning mode. Although 55% of the learners felt part of the learning community at NAMCOL, 27% experienced isolation. Many learners (61%) did not experience any inferiority's a result of being associated with NAMCOL; (24%) differed on this issue.

What came out strongly from staff through the quantitative data is the learners' lack of motivation as was highlighted by the majority (80%) of the participants. Additionally, many (58%) of the staff felt that the guidance and advice given were insufficient to assist learners cope with the new learning mode. Another factor raised by staff was the lack of smooth integration from the conventional to the ODL system. Learner over-dependence on the tutors was indicated by the majority (84%) of staff. Contrary to the views expressed by learners, some (46%) of the staff members were of the opinion that the negative perception about ODL in general and NAMCOL in particular affects learners negatively and leads to low self-esteem. Learner isolation was indicated as impeding factor affecting the learners, as was stated by 36% of staff members. Time management, teenage pregnancy and learners' vulnerability to drug abuse were cited by some participants as inhibiting factors.

The qualitative data also show some factors that delay learner integration. The findings show a significant number of learners who were not comfortable with the general work ethics of tutors. They complained about the insufficient support and lack of commitment from tutors. The learners felt that the quality of teaching and learning

is compromised because of the multiple roles tutors performed by engaging in an already packed programme in formal schools and at the same time participating in the NAMCOL programme. Furthermore, learners cited the lack of supportive relationships with parents, families and communities as a barrier affecting them during the transition process. Both the learners and staff raised concerns on timing and frequency of contact sessions at Tutorial Centres. They claimed that the times scheduled for tutorials are unsuitable for learning as it compromised on their safety and the allocated time is also not sufficient. Independent learning was viewed as a positive learning experience but also cited as a factor that hinders learner full integration. Independent approach to learning, lack of motivation and time management were raised by staff as impeding factors. These views were also supported by some learners.

Quantitative and qualitative data showed key factors that facilitate learner adjustment in the new learning environment. Quantitatively, the provision of study guides and face-to-face tutorials were rated as significant to learner adjustment as was stated by 21% and 18.5% of the learners, respectively. Vacation workshops (16.6%) formation of study groups (11%), comments on tutor marked assignments (9.5%) were also found to be useful. Other interventions the learners found to be appropriate in their adjustment to the new environment include the motivational talks, prize giving, feedback tutorial letters, orientation workshops, information campaigns, information booklets and academic counselling. Staff endorsed the views expressed by the learners that study guides (17%), face-to-face tutorials (15%), study groups (14%), feedback tutorial letters (11%) and motivational talks (9%) were useful. The qualitative data indicated that learners and staff appreciated the comprehensive support systems NAMCOL offers to support learners. Chiefly, all participants were in agreement that face-to-face tutorials are an important component for learner integration. The participants also equally felt that learning resources are essential to integration and academic success.

The findings on the factors that impede learning show a gap between learners' expectations and what NAMCOL can offer. It appears from the findings in the study that the college did not provide a conducive learning environment to stimulate learner motivation and boost confidence. The gap in support learners experienced from

external stakeholders such as family and community shows that full integration requires both institutional and non-institutional support. Regarding the support systems that facilitate learner integration, the findings show that learners prefer a system characterised by a high degree of dialogue and structure because of the great value attached to interpersonal relationships through various forms of interactions and the quality of learning resources.

#### **6.6.1 CRITICAL VIEWS OF THE LEARNERS AND STAFF IN TERMS OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

The findings show greater similarities pointing to critical factors that impede learner integration into the distance learning delivery mode. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments showed consistency in the participants' views with regard to learners' lack of motivation, their inability to manage study time, and the feeling of isolation. However, divergent views were also expressed. The quantitative data showed deficiency in learners' knowledge on the ODL delivery mode apparently because learners did not receive sufficient information at the beginning of transition to cope with difficulties. The qualitative data also revealed the timing and frequency of tutorials as problematic. Learners alluded to the poor work ethics of tutors and the lack of support from home and community as contributing factors affecting their integration.

Concerning factors that facilitate learner integration, all participants felt the same about on the provision of face-to-face interactions and learning resources through both data collection methods. However, the quantitative data identified other support services found to be useful and effective to help learners adjust easily to the new environment of distance learning.

#### **6.6.2 COMMENT ON THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The key issues emerged from the findings in this study signifies the importance of various forms of interactions in the learning process. Moore posits that dialogue in ODL is possible through the three forms of interactions. There is a real connection between factors that hinder or facilitate learners' full integration into the ODL system and the different forms of interactions. For example, fear of independent learning,

poor work ethic of tutors, frequency and timing of tutorials show that learners need guidance and support from tutors and peers to assist them cope with the transition process. Similarly, the high regard for more face-to-face tuition, quality learning resources and the formation of study groups show that learners value a high degree of dialogue and structure, a situation they are accustomed to. To some extent this finding supports Tinto's model which posits that learners need both academic and social relationships to persist with their learning. The lack of parental, family and community support is in line with Kember, who modified Tinto's model by arguing that academic success in a distance learning environment depends on social systems such as support from family members, fellow students, employers and friends (Kember, 1995).

## **6.7 STRATEGIES TO MANAGE TRANSITION IN ODL**

This theme was meant to explore the possible strategies to manage learner transition in an ODL environment in response to the following research question: What strategies should be put in place to facilitate learner integration into an ODL environment? Both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed key interventions of importance for ODL institutions in general, and open schools in particular, to enable learners to manage the transition process effectively and efficiently. Quantitatively, the most significant were the provision of face-to-face tutorials, establishment of full-time Tutorial Centres and provision of additional learning resources to help learners manage the transition in ODL. This was stated by 17.2%, 17% and 16.6% of the learners, respectively. In addition, the introduction of extra-mural activities (10.4%), creation of discussion platforms (10%), strengthening the supervision and monitoring at Tutorial Centres (9.7%), and the implementation of technology mediated services (9.3%) were also found to be useful to assist learners during the transition phase. Likewise, the staff validated the views expressed by learners regarding face-to-face tutorials and the establishment of own study centres as important interventions to help learners cross from formal schools to a more independent and flexible learning of ODL as was indicated by 32% and 23% of staff, respectively. Staff attached great value to their own capacity building initiatives that could help the learners to grasp the dynamics of ODL (14%). The introduction of technology driven initiatives (12%), creation of discussion platforms (9%) and the provision of extra mural activities (8%) were also found to be critical for learner transition.



Similarly, the qualitative data identified strategies that open schools in general and NAMCOL in particular to manage learner expectations that could ultimately facilitate a smooth transition process. Both the learners and staff felt strongly that NAMCOL should have a separate, dedicated cadre of staff to render effective support to learners through some forms of face-to-face interactions. From the side of the learners, this strategy was possibly proposed to address the poor work ethics of tutors. It could also be that tutors engaged in self-reflection and realised the problems caused by performing multiple tasks. Moreover, the learners and staff were consistent in their views on other measures that NAMCOL should introduce to facilitate a smooth transition process. Firstly, they acknowledged assessment activities in ODL settings as essential components of the learning process and therefore demanded for immediate feedback on assignments and other activities. Secondly, the participants proposed a series of motivational talks to enhance learner motivation. Thirdly, they felt that the use of information and communication technology in the learning process would create flexibility and lead to better learning outcomes. Learners acknowledged their lack of proficiency in the medium of instruction and proposed remedial English language tutorials to enable them to become fluent enough to engage with the subject matter independently. The findings in this study stress the need for ODL institutions to develop a comprehensive understanding of the learners' expectations in order to devise appropriate strategies to facilitate learner transition in an ODL environment. The results further suggest that any proposed transition model should include transition management strategies and support programmes to help learners with a smooth transition process.

#### **6.7.1 CRITICAL VIEWS OF THE LEARNERS AND STAFF IN TERMS OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

It appears from the findings in this study that the conventional school environment has moulded the way learners and staff think about education delivery. The responses of learners in general were influenced by their own personal expectations of the College. A similarity throughout this study and which also emerged as a fundamental transition strategy centred on the high value the learners and staff placed on the interpersonal relationships between the learners and tutors. This included the demand for more tutor-learner interactions and the establishment of independent study centres where the tutors can engage the learners more frequently on a regular

basis. The participants, through both quantitative and qualitative approaches, showed a common understanding of the role the technology plays in enhancing the learning process. The parties also identified additional support systems through both data collection methods which they believed could be useful in the transition process: non-academic services such as discussion platforms and the introduction of remedial classes and academic support services such immediate feedback on assessment activities and the establishment of independent study centres.

### **6.7.2 COMMENT ON THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Tinto's theory focuses more on academic and social integration aspects without directing what institutions or practitioners should do to achieve academic and/or social integration. However, the results in this study show interventions needed to enhance social and academic integration. Most importantly, what came out strongly from the proposed interventions is the element of learner engagement with tutors and peers which is part of social and academic integration. Additionally, the results of the study also relate to the three forms of interactions, namely tutor-learner, learner-learner and learner-content interactions as identified by Moore. The study recommends motivational talks, face-to-face interventions, establishment of independent study centres, appointment of a separate cadre of dedicated academic staff and timely feedback on assessment activities, which also comprise various forms of interactions. Thus, both the learners and staff in the study valued opportunities which contribute to meaningful interactions as suggested by Moore and by Tinto's elements of social and academic integration.

### **6.8 FINDINGS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE**

This section shows how the results of the study contribute to the body of knowledge. The study examines the participants' understanding of the ODL mode of learning. The findings suggest that learners' lack of knowledge and understanding of an ODL system could affect their ability to adapt and adjust to the novel learning mode. This study portrays ODL as parallel to the conventional school system because the learners defined ODL from the perspective of the conventional system. A number of previous studies on student transition focus more on the movement of learners from the school environment to college or university. This study therefore contributes to

the limited literature on learner transition from the conventional schools to an open school system. The finding on the lack of knowledge and understanding of the ODL mode presents ODL practitioners and policy makers with an opportunity to consider intervention strategies that will help novice students understand the principles and dynamics of ODL at the outlet. The study further shows staff who are hired from the traditional school environment to support ODL learners lack the understanding of the psychological needs of ODL learners.

Neither Moore's theory on transactional distance nor Tinto's model on learner integration pertinently addresses the mismatch between the institutions' demands and expectations and what learners expect. This gap in transition exists because of the institutions' inability to meet the diverse needs and expectations of the learners. In this study, the learners had little understanding of what to expect from the distance learning mode. The learners' expectations can be academic, social, cultural and psychological which could influence their participation in the new learning environment. Baxter (2012) found that student expectations can change if institutions initiate and sustain positive relationships with the students. Staff did not have a sympathetic understanding of the learners' fear of and uncertainty surrounding the ODL learning mode. In the qualitative data, the response of learners was interpreted by staff as confusion without further exploring the cause of the state of mind of the learners.

The results of the study show a positive relationship between the learners and tutors; however, it was unable to substantiate that the connection between the two can lead to learner integration. The study confirms that learners from the schools prefer to continue with the same learning approach they have developed and accustomed to. This confirms Tinto's views that prior learning experiences determine the learner's individual and institutional commitments. Although ODL follows a constructivism approach where learners actively participate in the learning process in the construction of knowledge, the findings showed that learners want to take a more passive role and maintain the status quo. This finding suggests that learners lack self-confidence to approach the learning environment differently.

A number of studies were carried to establish the empirical status of Moore's theory in different settings (Falloon, 2011; Park, 2011). The studies confirm the relevance of Moore's theory to distance education practices. Although distance learning advocates for independence and flexibility, it recognises the importance of regular interactions. Similarly, Tinto's model on student integration also acknowledges interaction between the peers and other interactions as important interventions for social integration. However, what is of significance to this study, which does not feature prominently in both Tinto's and Moore's models, is the importance of supportive relationships with parents, families and communities. It could also be argued that the contribution of these external key stakeholders contribute to the integration of learners into the system and to learner autonomy. ODL follows a constructivism approach to learning. The assumption is that knowledge could best be constructed through social interactions with others. Knowledge acquisition in an ODL setting is not only confined to study centres where learners come for tutoring but it can happen anywhere - at home, in community and in workplace.

Despite the academic, social, psychological and other challenges the secondary education learners go through during the transition stage at NAMCOL, some managed to adjust while others struggled. It is not clear from Tinto's model when on the particular time frame full integration occurs as it differs from one learner to another. However, Tinto refers to the process of learner integration as longitudinal. In the context of this study, the learners experienced the transition stages differently: to some it is a lengthy process, to others it could happen in a shorter period. This depends on the learner's individual ability to adjust to the new environment. The findings show that most learners passed through the final stage of transition (refer to by Tinto as incorporation stage) in the first and second terms. Adjustment in the first term may imply that learners had developed appropriate skills and strategies at an early stage to cope with the demands and expectations of ODL. It further shows that learners who had the opportunity to bridge the gap between contact and distance mode of learning because of their previous learning experiences at NAMCOL tend to cope better than those learners who still have to fill the gap. These learners had a competitive advantage over the new ones.

The findings of this study imply that learners lack the sense of belonging during the transition process and would prefer to have a teaching and learning model that places strong emphasis on the various forms of interactions to enable them to connect easily to the institution. Madgett and Bélanger (2008) posit that a high level of a sense of belonging and confidence is vital to retention. Additionally, the findings from staff on the difficulties that relate to teenage pregnancy and drug abuse add a completely different dimension to the study that calls for psychosocial support.

Finally, it is clear from the findings in this study that the strategies to enhance learner transition add a new dimension to Tinto's model on transition. Tinto (2006) acknowledges the deficiencies of the existing model on student integration and proposes further research on a model of institutional action to enhance learner integration and persistence. There is a need for a model that deals with the development of effective policies and programmes on learner integration argues Tinto. The strategies to enhance learner transition serves as a contribution to the body of knowledge on the transition model for learners migrating from the conventional school system to ODL at secondary level. In the context of this study, the various forms of interactions which came out strongly are predominantly synchronous through the face-to-face dialogue at the Tutorial Centres. Another prominent dimension which emerged from this study is the engagement of learners at this level in the utilisation of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. The study proposes the use of technology to remove the distance between the teacher and learner in order to enhance the teaching and learning process. This interesting and important finding serves as a value addition to the traditional print-based materials the learners are accustomed to. Zhao et al. (2005) suggest that distance education that uses the combination of technology and face-to-face results in positive learning outcomes.

## **6.9 CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented the results from both quantitative and qualitative data by showing the key areas of divergence and convergence. A similarity which emerged from the study is the mismatch between the learners' expectations and the high demands of distance learning. Also in common was the learners' inability and inexperience to approach the new teaching and learning mode that delayed their full integration. This similarity in finding is critical for open schools to think about the best

possible ways to orientate new entrees to enable them to understand their responsibility in ODL settings. Additionally, the findings are consistent on the importance of the human element in the learning process. There was a huge demand for all forms of interactions as suggested by Moore. A key difference that emerged from the study is the role of external factors in learner integration. The quantitative and qualitative data show divergent views on the support learners receive from parents, family and community. While the quantitative data showed great support, the findings from the qualitative stance indicated that support from external forces outside the learning environment was lacking. The chapter also showed how the findings support the theoretical framework and contribute to the body of knowledge.

The final chapter presents the summary of the research findings, proposed transitional model and recommendations for further research.

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## CHAPTER 7

# CONCLUSION, SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Any educational institution has a vital obligation to facilitate learning and at the same time to create a conducive and supportive learning environment to ensure learner success. Over the years, NAMCOL has experienced a phenomenal growth in terms of learner intake; however its learners' throughput rate has not been at the expected level. The number of learners from the conventional system that do not meet the requirements to enter higher education put pressure on NAMCOL to admit more of these learners. To some learners NAMCOL is not an institution of choice; however they are forced by the situation because the current education system does not make provision for Grade 12 repeaters. This study investigated how learners who migrate from the conventional schools integrate within the NAMCOL system. The study recognises that transition is a critical stage in the learner's educational career and if not properly deal with at an early stage, it could have a detrimental effect on their prospects for success. Taylor (2010) posits that learners experience a high level of isolation during the transition phase. Other researchers recognise the challenges learners experience during this difficult period of transition and advocates for social and academic support (Dzakiria, 2005; Lynne Cohen, 2012; Potter, 2013; Tinto, 1997a). This study was therefore based on the assumption that change in the learning mode could be one of the factors having a greatest impact on learners' ability to fully integrate into the ODL mode of delivery.

A high proportion of learners joining NAMCOL are from the conventional schools and they are not prepared to be independent learners. The learners are acquainted with the traditional talk and chalk approach where learning is directed from one angle also known as teacher-centred learning. These learners are conditioned to react in a certain way and correspondingly develop a particular learning style that fits best with the conventional school environment. Their educational experience was known for the conventional face-to-face support characterised for a high level of interactions between the learner and the teachers and also between learners. The learners enter the distance learning mode with certain expectations which are sometimes contrary



to the demands and expectations of the ODL mode of delivery. Truly so, the learning environment at NAMCOL requires the learners to adopt an independent approach to learning and develop new learning skills that will enable them to cope with self-directed learning. To differentiate distance learning from the conventional classroom learning, scholars distinguished the following three approaches to learning: pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy as teacher-led, self-directed and self-determined learning respectively. There is a need for a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning process when moving from one system of education delivery to another. Beldarrain (2006); Dzakiria (2005); Galusha (1998), and Qakisa-Makoe (2005) advocate for a new teaching and learning paradigm for distance learning. This requires a shift in the mind-set of learners and tutors to understand that the tutor performs more of a coaching, tutoring and facilitating role. It also requires a shift in both instructional design and pedagogy (Beldarrain, 2006).

This new chapter gives a brief overview of the main research findings, the significance of the main findings to the literature and contribution to new knowledge, the research study implications to practice, limitations and recommendations for further research. A new model of learner transition from conventional to ODL school system is also presented.

## **7.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of NAMCOL senior secondary level learners who transfer from the conventional schools to the college to upgrade their scores.

The study main research question was: What are the experiences and perceptions of learners during the transition period from the traditional classroom mode of delivery to ODL mode of delivery?

Moreover, the following auxiliary research questions were addressed in the study.

- What are the different role players understanding of the ODL system?
- What are the experiences of learners during the transition period?
- How do learners adjust and adapt to the distance mode of learning?
- What factors facilitate or hinder learner integration during transition stage?

- What strategies should be put in place to facilitate enhanced learner integration into an ODL mode of delivery?
- At what stage or period do learners fully integrate into the new learning environment?

The study also served the purpose of testing the validity of Tinto's (1975) model of academic and social integration as well as to determine the comprehensiveness of Moore's three variables of transactional distance namely, dialogue, structure and learner autonomy (Moore, 1993) to describe the NAMCOL learner's experience.

### **7.3 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The research design for this study was a case study that adopted a multi method approach in data collection. Case studies focus on investigating a particular phenomenon through in-depth data collection in order to obtain rich data and are bounded by time, place, context and activity (Creswell, 2012; Mukherji, & Albon, 2009; Yin, 2013). This study adopted both the interpretivist and positivist paradigms because the main purpose of the study was to gain understanding of the experiences and perceptions of learners when they transfer from one mode of education delivery to another. Though the study was predominantly qualitative, the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods enabled the researcher to capitalise on the strengths of both methods in order to obtain a reasonable amount of rich data. Muijs (2010) claims that in multi method or mixed method design, the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods are of the same status or any of the two can take a predominant role.

The population of the study was the more than 26 000 Grade 12 learners enrolled for the 2013 to 2015 academic years as well as some other categories of staff who engaged with learners in one way or another, either directly or indirectly. A study sample of 260 learners and 28 staff members was obtained. The sample was drawn from regional offices and four Tutorial Centres in the NAMCOL's southern and northern regions. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires, individual face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions and review of important documents. All interviews were audio recorded. Interviews were transcribed with the assistance from one colleague and a small sample of transcriptions was sent to few selected

respondents for member-checking purposes. Data obtained through both quantitative and qualitative sources were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23 and ATLAS.ti version 8, respectively.

## **7.4 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS**

The summary of the key findings in this section are presented under the following themes: demographic data, understanding of the ODL system, learner experiences during the transition period, learner adjustment to the distance learning mode, factors that hinder or facilitate learner integration and strategies to manage learner integration. These themes answered to the main and auxiliary research questions mention in 7.2 above.

### **7.4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

The quantitative phase comprised 260 questionnaires distributed to the learners of which 248 were returned and that represents a response rate of 95.4%. Of the total number of learners participated in the study, 55% and 45% were from NAMCOL's southern and northern regions, respectively. One hundred and ninety-one (77%) were females and 57 were males (23%). The age distribution shows that 200 (81%) were between the ages 18-24, 35 (14%) were between 24-29, 7 (3%) were below 18 years, and only 6 (2%) were 30 and above. The study further shows that 79% of the subjects' entries were taken on contact mode while 12% of subject entries were on non-contact mode. Of the total number of participants, 83% were active learners on the programme while 16% indicated that they were no longer with the institution. The data shows that many learners (57%) registered with NAMCOL for the first time in the year the data was collected while some (37%) had indicated that they also registered in the preceding years. On the question whether the participants attended formal schools before joining NAMCOL, the great majority (96%) answered in the affirmative. Learners advanced two reasons for enrolling with NAMCOL, firstly to upgrade their scores, and secondly to improve their results that would qualify them for admission to higher education.

The quantitative demographic data for staff shows that of the 28 questionnaires distributed in the sample population, only 25 (89.3%) were returned. Eight (32%) of

the participants were females and 17 (68%) were males. The proportion of female tutors did not match the gender distribution amongst learners where 77% were females. In terms of regional distribution, 12 (48%) were from southern region while 13 (52%) were from northern region. The participants displayed reasonable years of experience in ODL, with 12 (48%) had more than 5 years of experience, while 9 (36%) had experience of 3 years, and only 4 (16%) had experience of between 4 and 5 years.

Qualitatively, 14 individual interviews which included nine female and five male learners were held. Of the 14 learners in the sample population, eight were for the contact mode, four for non-contact mode while two already exited the programme. The regional distribution was equal. On the other hand, the focus group discussions consisted of 18 learners of which eight and ten were from northern and southern regions, respectively. Eleven of the respondents were females and seven males. The staff respondents were 12 which comprised nine females and three males. Of the total number of respondents, two felt in the category of area coordinators, two were heads of centres and eight were tutors.

Following are the findings presented in terms of the various themes which emerged from the study.

#### **7.4.2 UNDERSTANDING OF THE ODL SYSTEM**

This particular theme was aimed at addressing the research question that focuses on participants' understanding of the ODL system. The participants were asked to give their views on how they understand the ODL system. Learners displayed a marginal understanding of the ODL system as they defined it from the perspective of the traditional school system that they are accustomed to. Learners in this study defined ODL from their own personal understanding and experiences which to some extent contradicts their own expectations of the system. They lacked the understanding of the philosophical principles that underpin the ODL delivery mode. To the learners, ODL was defined in terms of timing and duration of tutorials. However, some learners were knowledgeable as they describe the ODL mode on the basis of separation of learners from the tutors, that it enhances learning through the use of ICT that it encourages independent learning and increases learners' level of participation. On

the other hand, staff had a better grasp of the ODL principles, and this could be attributed to the various training interventions they were exposed to by NAMCOL.

### **7.4.3 LEARNERS' LEARNING EXPERIENCES DURING TRANSITION**

This theme was meant to respond to the main research study objective as well as the auxiliary objective that deals with learners' experiences during the transition period. The learners were expected to share their experiences when they changed from the formal schools to the ODL mode of delivery. Did they experience any change in learning? Diverse views on the learning experiences were given, with those who indicated that they experienced positive learning experiences while unpleasant experiences were also mentioned. This observation supports the view by Woosley and Miller (2009) that learners may experience the transition process either positively or negatively. When asked to give their views on the learning experience, there was a general feeling of uncertainty and confusion about the new delivery mode. This led to discouragement, shyness, anxiousness, low morale, fear of the unknown, isolation and development of negative attitudes toward own studies. The high demands and expectations of ODL and lack of motivation to participate during tutorial sessions were also some experiences reported on by the different categories of learners and staff.

On the contrary, there was a great sense of appreciation for the human element which learners viewed as an essential component of their learning process. The direct engagement the learners had with the tutors and their counterparts even after hours was highly valued because they believe it contributed to their academic success. Moreover, the participants reported that the level of independent learning they had gained through NAMCOL empowered them to become self-directed and self-determined learners. The learners felt that the new approach to learning enabled them to discover their full potential and talents, something they did not dream of when they were in formal schools. In formal schools, there was no room to reach for their full potential because of the teacher-led pedagogical approach.

### **7.4.4 LEARNER INTEGRATION INTO THE DISTANCE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The results from this study show that learners' engagement with tutors, peers, learning content, and other domains inside and outside the structured learning

environment promote academic, social and psychological integration. In terms of academic integration, there was a strong call for more direct face-to-face interactions with tutors and learners showed a positive attitude towards their assignments. Staff and learners claimed strict adherence to deadlines and assignment work was of acceptable standard. However, the documentary review process showed a poor submission rate contrary to views expressed by the participants through the quantitative data collection instrument, through which they lamented on the delays by tutors to mark assignments assuming they submitted on time. The findings on learners' inability to cope on their own and the challenge of striking a balance between studies, work, family and other social commitments made it difficult to fully integrate within the ODL system.

In the social dimension, learners had established strong interpersonal relationships with their peers. The relationships with tutors outside the learning environment were also highly rated by 78% of the learners. Some tutors showed commitment, dedication and support outside the scope of their engagement contracts. Although the quantitative data showed a significant rating for support from family, friends, employers and co-workers, the qualitative data showed the lack of support thereof as an obstacle affecting their full integration into the new ODL delivery mode. The social and extra mural activities received a reasonably high rating as they were instrumental in connecting learners to the learning mode.

Issues such as lack of motivation, anxiety, isolation, low morale and negative attitudes were some psychological constructs that affected full integration of learners into the ODL mode. It appears that learners who were highly motivated, showed high morale and displayed a positive attitude towards learning were more likely to experience a smooth transition than those that displayed the opposite.

#### **7.4.5 LEARNER TRANSITION STAGES**

This particular theme was meant to answer the following research question: At what stage or period in the academic calendar do learners fully integrate into the new ODL mode of delivery? This question was preceded by a question that was meant to establish whether learners had generally settled well at the College or otherwise. By the time the study was conducted a relatively high number of learners had settled into

the institution. It could possibly be that the timing of data collection had influenced the way the learners responded to the question. Data were collected towards the end of second term and 30% of the learners felt that they were still not settled into ODL system.

On the stage in the academic year when the learners had full adjusted to the new ODL delivery mode, both the staff and learners were unanimous in their views that smooth transition took place during the first and second terms. Staff felt strongly that more adjustment took place in the first term while learners were more inclined towards suggesting the second term.

#### **7.4.6 FACTORS THAT HINDER OR FACILITATE LEARNER INTEGRATION**

This study is driven by the notion that learner movement from one system to another is influenced by certain factors that facilitate or hamper smooth transition in the learning process. The study therefore established certain factors that impede or accelerate the transition process. Through this theme the participants answered to the following research question: What factors facilitate or hinder learner integration during transition stage? The results from both the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods showed some level of consistency on the factors that impede smooth transition into NAMCOL, such as, poor time management, lack of motivation, insufficient guidance and information on the new mode of delivery, isolation, low self-esteem because of the negative perception attached to ODL in general and NAMCOL in particular, fear of independent learning, lack of parental support, frequency and duration of tutorials, teenage pregnancy and vulnerability to drug abuse. Learners on their side also complained during the interviews of the tutors' poor work ethics and the lack of supportive relationships with parents, families and communities as a barrier affecting them during the transition process. While independent learning came out earlier as a positive learning experience, it was also cited by staff and learners as a constraint.

The findings on the factors that facilitate learner transition indicated the elements that involve one or another form of interactions. These interactions could either be between learners themselves, between the learners and tutors, and/or between the learners and the learning content. The main factors that were indicated as facilitating



learner transition included, study guides, face-to-face support through weekly tutorials or vacation schools, formation of study groups, feedback tutorial letters, motivational talks and comments in the tutor marked assignments.

#### **7.4.7 STRATEGIES TO MANAGE TRANSITION IN ODL**

The theme on transition management is linked to the following research question: What management strategies should be put in place to facilitate learner transition into an ODL mode of delivery? Some of the findings under this theme differ little from the factors the participants indicated as critical to ensure a smooth transition process. The participants emphasised the strategies such as interpersonal supporting relationships from tutors and fellow learners, face-to-face interactions, establishment of own full-time Tutorial Centres to enhance tutor-learner interactions, strengthening supervision at centres, expansion of non-academic activities, motivational talks, creation of discussion platforms and the appointment of a separate cadre of NAMCOL staff to engage learners on a regular basis. There was also an acknowledgement of the role the learner-content interaction plays in the learning process, therefore additional learning resources and immediate feedback on assignments were rated as important. The results of the study also proposed the implementation of technology mediated services to counter some factors that prohibit effective learning in ODL. One significant strategy that was proposed by staff was capacity building to fully understand and appreciate ODL learners in order to serve them better. Remedial classes in English were found to be crucial to enable learners to confront the subject matter confidently and independently on their own.

### **7.5 CONTRIBUTION OF MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS TO LITERATURE AND BODY OF KNOWLEDGE**

#### **7.5.1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

Tinto posits that learners enter the new learning environment with quite a variety of attributes such as prior learning experiences, family background, skills and abilities which can influence the learners' individual goals and institutional commitments (Tinto, 1997a). These attributes determine the learners' commitment to finish their studies or to withdraw completely from the learning mode.

The findings from the study show some areas which are consistent with the attributes in Tinto's model of learner integration. Most importantly, there appears to be a strong relationship between the learners' prior learning experience and their lack of experience to study through distance learning. However, the study did not conclude that learners' lack of knowledge and expectations of distance learning affected them negatively in the process of integration into the NAMCOL system since they gave diverse views on the factors that facilitate or impede their full integration. Notably though is the learners' clear purpose of goal to improve their grades which is a testimony of their individual goal commitment.

### **7.5.2 UNDERSTANDING OF THE ODL DELIVERY SYSTEM**

The findings in this study suggest a mismatch between the learners' understanding of the ODL system, their expectations and the demands and expectations of the new learning mode of ODL. This finding shows a peripheral conceptualisation of ODL by the learners. Learners define the ODL mode from the perspective of the conventional schools. For example, the learners' demands and expectations resemble the traditional high schools' learning mode. Therefore they erroneously perceived NAMCOL as an extension of the high school learning environment. The lack of knowledge and understanding of the new ODL mode of delivery could possibly affect their integration and a smooth transition process. Learners do not have a clear picture of the pedagogy that underpins ODL and they do not differentiate between the two systems. To these cohorts of learners, NAMCOL is an unfamiliar territory, and their previous academic background and other individual characteristics might not be in harmony with the new delivery system to enable full integration to take place. Unfortunately, learners migrating from the conventional school system had to deal with the opposite of what they are familiar with.

Although the findings in the study show that staff had gain quite a considerable amount of skills and knowledge in the discipline of ODL through various training interventions arranged by NAMCOL, it appears that they lack the ability to understand the cause of the state of mind of learners. They tend to apportion the blame on the learners for lack of motivation without exploring the root causes of the learners' lack of paradigm shift from the traditional learning mode to ODL mind-set. This study is of significant value to the body of knowledge because of its uniqueness. The literature

reviewed focused more on the movement of learners from high school to university and less attention was given on the transition of learners at a school equivalent programme being offered through two distance modes of delivery.

### **7.5.3 LEARNERS' LEARNING EXPERIENCES DURING TRANSITION**

The diverse views expressed by the participants on learner experiences which were either positive or negative show that learners enter the learning environment with specific attributes which can either facilitate smooth transition or contribute to partial or complete withdrawal from the ODL learning mode. The findings in this study support the view by Woosley and Miller (2009) that students may experience the transition process differently - either positive or negative. The undesirable learning experiences of uncertainty, low morale, anxiety, isolation and other negative factors that may affect learners' integration unduly signal that ODL is not inclusive and open as it should be. This calls for interventions from the ODL institutions to devise strategies that would address the psychological effects on the learner transition on a timely basis. Tinto's model regards academic and social elements as paramount for learner integration, however it neglects to reflect on the psychological dimension of the human being. ODL learners in general face social challenges outside the learning environment which require psychosocial support interventions. Baker and Siryk (1999a) who modified Tinto's model distinguished academic, social, personal and emotional adjustment as paramount for academic integration. The findings in the study on psychological integration is congruent with the view by Locks et al. (2008) of students' psychological adjustment process which focuses on factors such as motivation, self-efficacy and sense of belonging.

Moreover, the positive experiences of interpersonal relationships and reciprocal communication with tutors and fellow learners reaffirm the value of education as a social process. It cements the notion that knowledge is constructed through social interactions. The observation made by the participants and particularly the learners, support the view by Moore that transactional distance can be bridged through dialogue, structure and learner autonomy and when the three forms of interactions occur (Moore, 1993). Paulo Freire (2000) sees education as a political process where both the learner and teacher engage views through dialogue. The findings place value on technology to bridge both physical and time gaps.

#### **7.5.4 LEARNER INTEGRATION INTO THE DISTANCE LEARNING MODE OF DELIVERY**

The findings on learner integration disclose that learners established good relationships with tutors and fellow learners which are important for academic and social integration. This finding is congruent with Tinto's model which states that learning institutions have academic and social systems that work together to assist students to fully integrate into the system (Tinto, 1975). Similarly, the strong demand for face-to-face encounters, the positive approach towards assessment activities and learners' engagement with peers demonstrate the three forms of interactions as suggested by Moore (Moore, 1989). This further shows that learners desired to narrow the transactional distance. The distance learners spend a considerable amount of time outside the physical learning environment and engaged more with other people in the community. Engagement with the family, employer, co-workers and community brought in another dimension to the learner's studies. Support from the community where the distance learner spends most of his/her time is an important external factor that can ultimately contribute to full integration. If a learner gets motivation and support from outside, he/she is more likely to persist. On the other hand, a learner without support and who receives discouraging remarks from any quarter is more likely to discontinue his/her studies because of the external factors. Thus, external motivation and support also lead to academic integration.

#### **7.5.5 LEARNER TRANSITION STAGES**

Tinto (1997b) argues that students need to pass through three stages to fully integrate into the institution, namely separation, transition and incorporation. According to him student integration is a longitudinal process. The findings in this study disclose that at the beginning, learners are characterised for anxiety, lack of motivation, isolation and the fear of taking full responsibility for own studies. The learners are separated from the previous learning experiences and friends and teachers in the formal schools. As they start making new connections with peers and tutors, they move to the next level of transition. In the context of this study, learners confirmed that they had connected well with peers and appreciated support from tutors. That signalled that learners found themselves at the second stage of integration. Finally, the third phase of incorporation emerged during the first and second terms of the academic calendar when learners experienced academic, social

and psychological integration. Tinto argues that full integration is a longitudinal process. However, the three phases on integration for learners at NAMCOL could not be determined over a long period of time because most learners only enroll at the College for one academic year to improve one of two subjects.

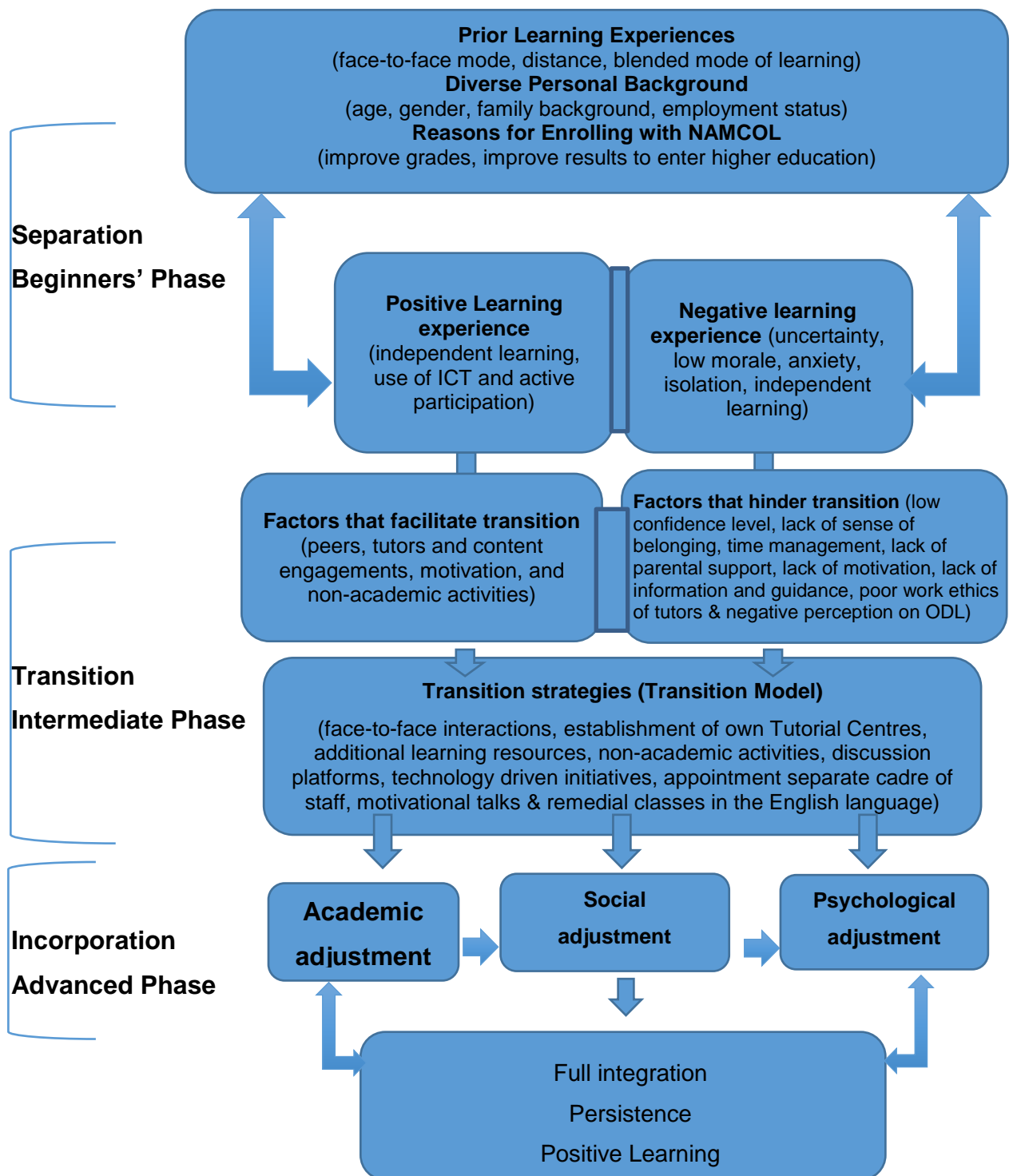
#### **7.5.6 FACTORS THAT HINDER AND/OR FACILITATE LEARNER INTEGRATION**

Learners had developed certain study skills and habits which they derived from the past learning experiences. The learners came with certain expectations to NAMCOL and if their expectations were not immediately met, they struggled with adjustment in the new ODL mode of delivery. The lack of motivation, poor time management, poor work ethic of tutors, lack of parental support and other hindering factors revealed in this study affected learners' sense of belonging. The study indicated that learners preferred human interventions to restore their confidence level and sense of belonging. High level of sense of belonging and confidence are important for student retention (Madgett, & Bélanger, 2008). The role of interpersonal relationships with parents, family and communities adds a new dimension to the study which Tinto and Moore did not emphasise. Personal engagements can narrow the transactional distance in the ODL mode of delivery (Moore, 1993; Richardson, & Long, 2003).

#### **7.5.7 STRATEGIES TO MANAGE TRANSITION IN ODL**

To ensure that the diverse learner expectations are met, a series of interventions should be instituted at individual, community and institutional level. ODL providers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have a mandate to enhance access and most importantly to ensure that the recruited learners are supported and retained. Investing sufficient resources and the development of retaining programmes facilitate a smooth transition process (Locks et al., 2008). The interventions proposed to mitigate transition difficulties leaned more toward those that require interpersonal relationships. The findings suggest that any model on learner integration should include transition management strategy as an integral part of the model.

### 7.5.8 PROPOSED MODEL OF THE LEARNER TRANSITION FROM CONVENTIONAL SCHOOL TO THE ODL DELIVERY MODE



**Figure 7.1: Learner transition model for open schools (This study)**

The study proposed a model of a learner transition from the conventional school learning environment to an open schooling system. The learner transition model considered Tinto's theoretical model's key variables, however it added further strategies to manage the transition process. Tinto (1982) admits that his model cannot explain everything on learner integration and suggests that the model should be modified to make it more relevant to the learners outside the conventional learning environment. Similarly, other researchers have applied Tinto's model and adapted it to the distance learning settings (Kember, 1995; Sweet, 1986). This study highlights a gap in the Tinto's model that requires further expounding. It highlights the learner experiences in terms of positive and negative learning experiences, factors that facilitate and impede the transition process and adds a psychological or an emotional support system as a third dimension to Tinto's academic and social systems. The three phases of learner adjustment as suggested by Tinto, namely separation, transition and incorporation, are also added to the model of learner transition in an ODL secondary school level system. Additionally, the model also infuses some constructs from Moore's theory on transactional distance.

This study acknowledges that some learners are joining the ODL mode of delivery with prior learning experiences they had gained through the conventional school system, social and family background as well as diverse personal backgrounds. Most importantly, the learners had developed a particular learning style in the formal schools which might not necessarily work in an ODL setting. Dzakiria (2005) suggests that the ODL mode ought to adopt a new teaching and learning paradigm that will address the diverse training needs of learners. The study supports the view by Tinto that learners enter the new learning environment with attributes such as family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling which serve as basis of contact with the new institution (Tinto, 1975, 1987). This finding is congruent with the view expressed by Duquette (2000) in the study on the experiences of students with disabilities at the university that background characteristics and academic integration are important variables for persistence. Furthermore, the study showed that learners joined the new learning environment with a specific goal in mind. Most learners came from the conventional schools and had failed to obtain the required credits to advance to the next level in their educational career. They cited two reasons for engaging with studies at NAMCOL, namely, to upgrade their scores and improve their results to



further their studies at the institutions of higher learning. This testifies to their commitment to their individual goals. This finding shows that learners' prior learning experiences, personal background and other personal attributes could possibly influence their expectations of the College and their own personal goal commitment. Tinto (1975) theorises that the interactions between the student and the academic and social systems of the institution continually modify the learner's goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence or dropout.

This study shows that the different attributes the learners came with had an impact on how and when they experienced learning in the new mode of delivery. Some learners experienced the new learning environment positively while others had a negative learning experience. Furthermore, the learners had joined the learning environment with certain expectations, and if their expectations were not met, they were likely to develop negative attitudes towards their studies. The study shows that those learners that entered NAMCOL with a positive mind-set and who were goal oriented were more likely to easily integrate into the ODL mode of delivery compared to the learners who were reluctant to make a paradigm shift to the distance learning mode. The latter were confused, isolated and had a negative attitude towards their own studies. They lacked experience of distance education mode and found it difficult to juggle their various daily activities.

To address the different learning experiences of learners, the model shown in Fig.7.1 proposes transition management measures as a critical component that institutions should institute to enable learners to integrate academically, socially, culturally and psychologically within the institution. The study proposed some measures of learner transition although the list is not comprehensive. What is important is the institutional actions to facilitate learner transition according to the learners' training needs and personal expectations. The model therefore argues that transition interventions should precede the various forms of integration. In the transition measures proposed, the three forms of interactions as suggested by Moore are evident.

Consistent with Tinto's view, the model suggests that learners need to adjust academically and socially to fully integrate into the new ODL delivery mode. Additionally, the new model proposes psychological adjustment as a key component

because of the learners' prior learning experiences of failure in the formal schools and also to address some social demands they face in the community. The model suggests that academic, social, psychological and other forms of integration are more likely to occur if they are preceded by measures that could lead to positive learning experiences. The study showed a high demand for interactions between tutors and learners and among the learners themselves, which are key constructs for academic and social integration. The study further shows that learners were nevertheless anxious, shy, displayed a negative attitude and low morale towards their studies. This observation requires interventions that could address the psychological effects on learners. In support of this view, Baker and Siryk (1999a) argue that academic, social, personal and emotional adjustment are important elements of academic integration.

In the context of this study, the proposed expanded model shows that during the first phase of separation (Tinto, 1997), learners face the challenge of comprehending the ODL mode which may lead to negative learning experiences. These learners migrated from the conventional system and are disconnected from their teachers, peers and the learning environment. At the stage where the institutions start to institute measures to facilitate learner adjustment, the learners start making new connections and move to the next level of transition. The interventions advanced the learners to the next level where they feel more connected to all systems of the institution and then became academically, socially and psychologically integrated.

## **7.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

This finding of this study have several implications for practice amongst ODL institutions in particular open schools, governments, ODL practitioners, community and learners.

### **7.6.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT POLICY DECISION MAKERS**

The government policy decision makers through its ministries that deal with education and training normally put accountability measures in place with which ODL institutions comply. These measures include access, delivery of quality programmes and positive learning outcomes. This study is of significant value to government as it will enable the policy makers to understand the transition process from one level of education

provision to another when developing national policies. Government can make provision for the transition period in policies to enable the learners to adjust from one learning mode to another. This could be done by issuing a policy directive that would compel state funded ODL institutions such as NAMCOL to develop and implement a comprehensive transition programme for its learners. This programme could be made mandatory for ODL learners and should form part of the curriculum.

### **7.6.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR ODL PRACTITIONERS AND RESEARCHERS**

The present study has practical implications for practitioners and researchers who engage with research work in ODL delivery mode. The substantial literature review done during this study showed that less attention was given to research that examines the transition from the conventional to ODL school-level programme. Researchers could use this study to further explore and identify the needs of the learners in a particular learning context in order to design commensurate transition programmes and strategies. ODL practitioners have to ensure that the transitional strategies are implemented during the learners orientation programmes and these have to be constantly monitored at different phases, such as beginners phase (first term), intermediate (second term) and advanced phase (third term).

### **7.6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR ODL INSTITUTIONS (OPEN SCHOOLS)**

Open schools such as NAMCOL have the mandate to broaden access and to ensure that learners are fully integrated within the learning mode in order to achieve academic success. The study found a mismatch between the high demands and expectations of the ODL mode and the learners' personal expectations. It remains the responsibility of open schools to ensure this gap is timely bridged. Open schools should use the results of this study to put systems in place that will enable them to understand, appreciate and manage the high expectations of the learners when introducing the new delivery mode. This study further revealed that the learners' inability to study through the distance learning mode affects their full integration into the institution. Therefore, open schools may consider developing a special guide (booklet) that deal exclusively with learner integration into an ODL system for learners from conventional schools. The booklet has to discuss the differences between formal schools and the ODL delivery mode, and should clearly articulate what is expected

from the different role players in an ODL setting in order to create a common understanding of the expectations and goals.

The research may also be used by open schools to evaluate their existing policies, procedures and programmes in order to accommodate the diverse needs of the learners. A transition policy is vital to ensure the variety of programmes and initiative are implemented. Perry and Allard (2009) developed a programme to help students build relationships with peers, lecturers and the wider academic community. The transition model for learners at this level requires interventions from the institutions that could address the psychological effects these factors could have on learners. Open schools could also consider appointing a separate cadre of staff with certain expertise to provide psychosocial support and deal with student welfare. It is prudent for open schools to create and use the 21<sup>st</sup> social network platforms (Facebook, Messenger, Website, Twitter and WhatsApp) to inform and sensitise learners on benefits of ODL and other developments at the institution so that they feel connected.

#### **7.6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR OPEN SCHOOLS COMMUNITY**

The study showed that learners preferred interventions that require face-to-face interpersonal relationships. The learners' first point of entry are the Tutorial Centres and if they discover that teaching and learning is not meeting their expectations, they are likely to withdraw from the institution. It appears from the findings in this study that some learners cannot fully differentiate between ODL and the conventional school they hail from. Staff may therefore use the results of this study to understand the potential challenges the learners experience during the transition period and devise support programmes that will help learners to integrate within the ODL system. The open schools community through its full-time and part-time academic staff have to continue to support learners during the transition stage and should identify and reach out to those who appear to struggle during the transition stage. Continuous professional development sessions (in-service training) for academic staff should be arranged to address the challenges that learners experience due to the change from the traditional teaching mode to the ODL mode. Staff and in particular tutors should create social media group accounts for their class groups in order to share relevant information with learners pertaining to activities at the centres.

### **7.6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY**

The study showed the engagement of family, employer, fellow employees and community members as important constituents in learners' educational career. Some learners complained about insufficient support from these constituents. The staff should understand that ODL learners spend a considerable amount of time at home, workplace and in the community. The findings of this research if shared with these constituents may influence them to understand the transition challenges and that could possibly change their mind-set and the apparent negative perceptions about ODL in general and open schools in particular. Some constituents regard open schools as institutions for failures and repeaters and studies of this nature may influence their thinking and they can play an important complementary role. Family support is a key for the child's success. Some members in the community can also serve as resource persons for open schools during orientation, open days and at any other events. It is important for open schools to ensure that parents, families and community members are included in the outreach initiatives and they should be informed about developments and activities at these institutions. Information sharing meetings with the community should take place to discuss the principles of the ODL mode of delivery so that they can 'buy-in' to the importance and value of ODL as an alternative mode of learning and not as an inferior form of education. Motivational speakers should be drawn from the community, public and private sector to motivate learners.

### **7.6.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LEARNERS**

Learners are key stakeholders in the learning process who could benefit from this study. They are the primary beneficiaries of programmes and should therefore be acquainted with research studies that deal with issues affecting them. Learners enter the new learning mode with little knowledge of what is required. Therefore, current and potential learners of NAMCOL, and others at similar institutions, should be informed at very early stages about the potential implications the transition process may have on their academic progression. It will benefit learners to actively engage in learning in order to achieve a high rate of academic success. Learners should know the transition programmes, strategies and policies institutions have put in place to eliminate or mitigate the challenges of transition. Social media platforms could also

be possible avenues for sharing information with current and potential future learners. The use of Short Sending Message (SMS) and institutional websites could also be used as platforms to share information. Most importantly, learners who have successfully gone through the transition process should be invited to share their experiences with the new cohorts of learners.

## **7.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

As with any other research, there are limitations in this study. The research design was a case study designed to gather in-depth information on the phenomenon under investigation, that is, the experiences of learners when transferring from the conventional schools to ODL. A case study focuses on a particular phenomenon and context to get wealth of information (Yin, 2013). Furthermore, the study focused on the experiences of learners in the Namibian context without drawing a comparison with other open schools in the SADC region or internationally. Moreover, although NAMCOL enrolls more than 25 000 learners, the study only focused on two regions and four centres out of the more than 90 Tutorial Centres countrywide. From the sample learner population, only 260 questionnaires were distributed of which 248 were returned. The results in this study could be applied to other similar settings in the NAMCOL context, but may not generalizable to other institutions. The study adopted a multi method approach by applying both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods; however, the study was predominantly qualitative. The selection of centres and sampling of staff participants for the study was not randomly done, but out of convenience. However, a systematic simple random sampling technique was applied in the selection of the learner participants for the collection of quantitative data.

The second limitation is related to the element of bias and subjectivity because the researcher is an employee of the institution and could have own preconceived ideas on the learner transition process. Although critical measures were put in place to overcome this limitation, such as, the use of research assistants, member checking and the external review throughout the entire research process, it could also be possible for some issues to be overlooked.

The third limitation is related to some learners' inability to answer all questions in the questionnaire and to respond to some questions during the interview process. In some cases, one could see the completion of the questionnaire was done hastily. This could have affected the degree of obtaining accurate data. The limitation could be attributed to the learners' level of understanding since most had not participated in this kind of study before.

The fourth limitation is the focus of the study. This study mainly focused on learners who engaged with NAMCOL through its secondary education programme at the senior secondary phase (Grade 12), but excluded the learners who migrated from the same system but were pursuing studies at the junior secondary phase (grade 10). It could have been beneficial to compare the two groups of learners because of their different ages. For example, which group experiences serious challenges with the transition process, the younger or older learners? This could have yielded interesting findings into the influence of the transition process on learner integration at junior and senior secondary phases.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a model from the findings which serves as a lens to better understand the phenomena of transition and integration of learners coming from conventional to the ODL mode.

## **7.8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The reported study applied Tinto's model of learner integration and how it influences the transition of learners into school equivalent ODL programme. Tinto's model was developed for full-time on campus students; therefore, future research studies should focus on applying other models developed as an enhancement to Tinto's model as well as others that were modified to suit the distance education students. For example, Sweet (1986) applied Tinto's model to the distance education environment and Kember (1995) model is based on the premise that adult learners studying part-time or at a distance have to cope with various social demands.

Secondly, the researcher did not come across studies in open schools that looked at the psychological effect of learner integration into a school equivalency programme. Future studies should also incorporate models that deal with other external factors



such as motivation, time management, family and work commitments. For instance, Baker and Siryk (1999a) added personal and emotional adjustment to Tinto's academic and social integration while Schmidt's et al. (2010) theory focuses on the learning process. Also, the researcher did not determine studies that compared the learning experiences and perceptions at more than one open school. Therefore, these research areas could be further explored to add to the body of knowledge in this research area.

Moreover, further research could be directed at the two levels of education provision, junior and senior secondary phases, to draw a comparison how the two groups of learners experience the transition process. Also, there is also a need to conduct a study to determine how male and female learners experience the transition process to identify any gender specific challenges that affect the transition process.

A final recommendation is that future research for ODL secondary education learners should focus more on the aspects of the learners' experiences that have the most influence on learners' throughput rates. The current study focused more on learners' integration but did not make any comparison between academic integration and throughput rates. Other areas such assessment outcomes, teaching approaches, competencies of tutors, effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation systems, learner satisfaction and parental involvement should also be investigated.

## **7.9 CONCLUSIONS**

ODL institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are expected to increase access and at the same time improve the quality of service delivery for learners to achieve positive learning outcomes. Learner transition from a traditional learning mode to an ODL delivery mode is a critical experience which needs more research. ODL learners are confronted with several issues that impede their smooth transition from contact to distance mode of learning. This study evaluated the experiences and perceptions of learners when they transfer from the conventional school system to open schools. The study identified the mismatch between the learner expectations and the certain level of high demands and expectations of ODL. The study found that ODL institutions sometimes fail to meet the learners' expectations, and the learners find themselves in a situation where they lack a sense of belonging and develop a low level of

confidence in learning through the distance mode. The findings from this study also emphasise that learners have to adjust academically, socially and psychologically in order to fully integrate into the distance learning mode of delivery and it is the responsibility of ODL institutions to design transition policy and strategies to help learners to adapt to the new teaching and learning mode.

In general and in open schools in particular, ODL institutions should have the passion, commitment and sense of urgency to ensure that learners are fully integrated in order to achieve high quality education and better through put rate.

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## APPENDICES

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### Appendix 1a: Declaration Form Employee Data



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

15 July 2014

Ms Magnaem Hofni  
Human Resources Manager  
NAMCOL  
Private Bag 15008  
**Windhoek**

**Dear Ms Hofni**

#### **Re: Staff Member Declaration to Release Employee Data**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, an employee of NAMCOL in the Human Resources Unit, hereby confirm that I have provided Mr. Heroldt Vekaama Murangi with employee data to enable him to select participants for his research on the Managing of Transition from Conventional to Open and Distance Learning. The information provided is only for research purposes and is restricted to employees' full names, contact details and information on tutorial centres.

By signing this declaration I assure the employees and the researcher that the information provided will be treated confidential and will not be revealed to anyone having authority or any other participant.

Ms. Magnaem Hofni  
**HR: Officer**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mr. Heroldt Murangi  
**Researcher**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dr Teresa Ogina  
**Supervisor**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 1b: Declaration Form Learner Data



15 July 2014

Ms Ndesihii Afunde  
Manager: Learner Support  
NAMCOL  
Private Bag 15008  
**Windhoek**

**Dear Ms Afunde**

**Re: Staff Member Declaration to Release Learner Data**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, an employee of NAMCOL in the Learner Support Unit, hereby confirm that I have provided Mr. Heroldt Vekaama Murangi with learner data to enable him to select participants for his research on the Managing of Transition from Conventional to Open and Distance Learning. The information provided is only for research purposes and is restricted to learners' full names, contact details and information on tutorial centres.

By signing this declaration I assure the learners and the researcher that the information provided will be treated confidential and will not be revealed to anyone having authority or any other participant.

Ms. Ndesihii Afunde

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**HR: Manager**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mr. Heroldt Murangi

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dr Teresa Ogina

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisor**

Date \_\_\_\_\_





## Appendix 1c: Research Assistants Declaration Form



15 July 2014

Ms. Evelina Nsinano  
P.O. Box 71378  
**Windhoek**

### Re: Research Assistant: Declaration to adhere to Ethical Requirements

I, \_\_\_\_\_, Research Assistant, hereby confirm that I will adhere to all ethical requirements that relates to this study.

By signing this declaration I assure the researcher and the participants that any information provided for this research will be treated as confidential and the participants' identity will be protected and not compromised in one way or another.

Ms. Evelina Nsinano  
**Researcher Assistant**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mr. Heroldt Murangi  
**Researcher**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dr Teresa Ogina  
**Supervisor**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix 2a: Request to conduct research at NAMCOL



10 March 2014

Mr. Justin Ellis  
NAMCOL  
Board Chairperson  
WINDHOEK

Dear Mr. Ellis

### ***REQUEST TO CONDUCT MY RESEARCH ON NAMCOL***

As you are well aware, I am currently pursuing my PhD in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) through the University of Pretoria. In fulfilment of my studies, I am required to conduct a research; hence this letter is seeking for your approval to conduct my research on NAMCOL.

The research will focus on the management of transition from conventional to Open Schooling using NAMCOL as the case study. It aims to explore the experiences of learners when transferring from the traditional school environment to open and distance learning. I believe this study will be of great benefit to NAMCOL because it may provide insights that may enable institution to improve on its learner support services.

The participants for this study will include NSSC learners, Head of Centres, Tutors and Area Coordinators in the NAMCOL's northern and southern regions. The learner data management system and employee list from the human resources unit will be used to select the participants. Participation in the study is voluntary, and those that are willing to participate will be required to sign an informed consent letter. The data collection procedure will be done before or after hours in order not to interfere with the learners' lessons or staff members' normal duties.

Upon completion of my studies I intend to have a seminar to brief the participants, the entire NAMCOL community and other key stakeholders. The final copy of the thesis will be submitted to the College for record purposes.

I hope you will find this arrangement in order.

Yours sincerely,

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**HEROLDT V. MURANGI**



## Appendix 2b: Response letter to conduct research



Private Bag 15008, Katutura, Windhoek  
Tel: + 264-61-320 5111, Fax: + 264-61-216 987  
[www.namcol.com.na](http://www.namcol.com.na)

17 March 2014

Mr. H.V. Murangi  
Director  
Private Bag 15008  
NAMCOL  
**KATUTURA**  
Windhoek

Dear Mr. Murangi

### RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT YOUR RESEARCH ON NAMCOL

Your letter dated 10 March 2014 concerning the above subject matter is hereby acknowledged with gratitude.

On behalf of the Governing Board, I have the pleasure to inform you that your request to conduct your research on NAMCOL was positively considered. You are further requested to submit the final research to NAMCOL upon completion of your studies.

I wish you all the best with your academic career.

Yours sincerely,

  
**JUSTIN ELLIS**  
**CHAIRPERSON**



**TAKING EDUCATION TO THE PEOPLE**

*All official correspondence must be addressed to the Director, NAMCOL*

## Appendix 3a: Research questionnaire for learners



Department of Education Management and Policy Studies

### MANAGING THE TRANSITION FROM CONVENTIONAL TO OPEN SCHOOLING: A SOUTHERN AFRICA CASE STUDY.

Dear Participant,

**Re: Letter of Informed Consent to Participate in Research**

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to explore learners' experiences of change from the traditional school environment to an open and distance approach with NAMCOL. The study further intends to determine whether this change has any influence on learners adapting to this new learning environment. This study will be of great benefit by providing insights to enable NAMCOL to improve its learner support services. Additionally, I am conducting this research as a requirement towards as part of the PhD programme that I am currently pursuing through the University of Pretoria.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or wish to withdraw at any time, this will NOT have any consequences for your employment contract with the College. Any information that you reveal will be treated as strictly confidential. In addition, you will not be asked questions that will reveal your identity, unless you are willing to be contacted for follow-up interviews. **Even if you consent to a follow-up interview, any information that is likely to reveal your identity will be excluded from the research report/thesis.**

If you agree to participate in this search, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and take part in an interview. **Though research assistants will assist in the data collection process, in your case both the questionnaire and the interview will be managed by the main researcher.** The questionnaires will be administered and interviews will be carried out at your duty station. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 – 25 minutes to complete while the interview should not last longer than one hour. **An audio recorder will be used to record the interview.** The data collection procedure will be done outside your official working hours in order not to interfere with your normal duties.

If you are willing to participate in this study, **kindly complete and sign the declaration form below** to indicate that:

- you have not been subjected to any form of coercion or inducement in order to gain your consent to participate,
- your participation in this research is out of your own free will, and
- you understand that you may withdraw from the research project at any given time.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNERS

The study intends to explore the experiences of learners during the transitional period from the conventional to open and distance learning and whether this change has any influence on learners' adaptation to the new learning environment. This study is of great benefit because it may provide insights that may enable NAMCOL to improve on its learner support services.

This questionnaire is for the current and former Grade 12 (NSSC) learners of NAMCOL who have joined the institution after the conventional system. If you did not join NAMCOL for the first time at the beginning of the 2013 school year, please do NOT fill in the questionnaire.

NB. Kindly take time to respond to the questions below. This questionnaire will take you 20 – 25 minutes to complete. Any information that you will provide through this questionnaire is for research purposes only and will be treated as confidential.

### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

1. Gender: TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
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2. In which age range do you fall? TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

Below 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	Between 18 and 24	<input type="checkbox"/>	Between 24 and 29	<input type="checkbox"/>	30 and above	<input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Did you previously attend Grade 12 in the formal school before you joined NAMCOL? TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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4. Are you currently studying your grade 12 through NAMCOL? TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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5. Have you completed your grade 12 with NAMCOL? TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	----	--------------------------

5.1 If Yes, indicate the year you completed. Year \_\_\_\_\_

5.2 If No, what were the reasons for non-completion?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



6. Before joining NAMCOL did you have any previous experience of studying through the distance mode? TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	----	--------------------------

7. Indicate the NAMCOL region where you have studied or are currently enrolled: TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

7.1	Erongo	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.2	Hardap	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.3	Karas	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.4	Kavango East	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.5	Kavango West	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.6	Khomas	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.7	Kunene	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.8	Ohangwena	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.9	Omaheke	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.10	Omusati	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.11	Otjozondjupa	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.11	Oshana	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.12	Oshikoto	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.13	Zambezi (previously Caprivi)	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Complete the following relating to attending NAMCOL:

- 8.1 The year you first registered with NAMCOL. TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

2013	<input type="checkbox"/>	2014	<input type="checkbox"/>	2015	<input type="checkbox"/>
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- 8.2 Subjects taken

No.	Subject	Subject (s) taken at NAMCOL (Indicate by ticking the corresponding box)	Which mode of study did you enrol for? Write "C" for contact (face-to-face) or "NC" for non-contact (distance) in the appropriate box to indicate the mode of study for each subject.
8.2.1	Accounting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2.2	Afrikaans first language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2.3	Afrikaans second language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2.4	Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2.5	Biology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2.6	Business Studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2.7	Development studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2.8	Economics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2.9	English second language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2.10	Geography	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2.11	History	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



No.	Subject	Subject (s) taken at NAMCOL  (Indicate by ticking the corresponding box)	Which mode of study did you enrol for? Write "C" for contact (face-to-face) or "NC" for non-contact (distance) in the appropriate box to indicate the mode of study for each subject.
8.2.12	Mathematics		
8.2.13	Oshikwanyama first language		
8.2.14	Oshindonga first language		
8.2.15	Otjiherero first language		
8.2.16	Physical Science		
8.2.17	Rukwangali first language		
8.2.18	Rumanyo first language		
8.2.19	Silozi first language		
8.2.20	Thimbukushu first language		

## SECTION B: REASONS FOR ENROLLING WITH NAMCOL

9. Why did you enroll with NAMCOL for this specific programme? Use numbers (1, 2, 3) next to the choices you made in order to rank the three most important reasons according to your choice (with 1 being the most important reason).

	Possible Reasons	Ranking (1,2,3)
9.1	I could not get a place in a formal school	
9.2	To upgrade my symbols/grades	
9.3	To obtain a grade 12 certificate to apply for jobs	
9.4	I am employed and therefore cannot study full-time	
9.5	I never had a chance to complete Grade 12 when I was of school going age	
9.6	To do additional subjects that were not available at my school	
9.7	I wanted to change my career and needed some relevant subjects	
9.8	It is cheaper to study with NAMCOL compared to other institutions	
9.9	I prefer to study through distance education rather than full-time	
9.10	I was advised to enrol at NAMCOL by parents/relatives/friends	
9.11	NAMCOL was the only institution offering this particular programme	
9.12	To improve my results in order to further my studies at the institution of higher learning.	
9.13	Other (please specify): _____	





## SECTION C: INTEGRATION

### 10. ACADEMIC INTEGRATION

To what extent do you agree with the following statements with regard to academic integration?

TICK THE RELEVANT BOX (SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NADA = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; DA = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree)

		SA	A	NADA	DA	SD
10.1	I have adjusted easily to the distance learning environment (NAMCOL)					
10.2	I prefer to study on my own without support from teachers					
10.3	I can cope well with my assignments (submitting on time)					
10.4	NAMCOL is not different from the previous school I have attended					
10.5	I have full understanding of what it means to study through distance education					
10.6	I struggle to manage my study time (balancing between my daily activities, eg. Work, studies, household duties.....)					
10.7	I do understand the subject content better with the provided learning materials without any support from my tutors or fellow students.					
10.8	Studying with NAMCOL is much better and easier than studying through the formal schools.					
10.9	I prefer more face-to-face sessions with my tutors					
10.10	The inexperience of studying through distance education makes it ever harder for me to cope at NAMCOL.					
10.11	The study materials (guides) received at NAMCOL are of better quality than the lecture notes and textbooks I used to receive in formal schools					
10.12	The workload at NAMCOL is too much					

10.13 Indicate in the appropriate box the support services you think were helpful in enabling you to adjust to the new environment of distance learning. Rank in order of importance with number 1 being the most important.

	Support Services	Ranking (1,2,3...)
10.13.1	Tutorial Letters	
10.13.2	Study Guides	
10.13.3	Vacation Workshops	



10.13.4	Study Groups	
10.13.5	Face-to-face Tutorials	
10.13.6	Comments from Tutors on Tutor Marked Assignments	
10.13.7	NAMCOL Learner Handbook (Prospectus)	
10.13.8	Motivational talks at centres	
10.13.9	Information Campaigns	
10.13.10	Open Days	
10.13.11	Regular contact with tutors after the tutorial sessions	
10.13.12	Academic Counselling	
10.13.13	Orientation workshops	
10.13.14	Any other not stated above .....	

11. SOCIAL INTEGRATION

To what extent do you agree with the following statements with regard to social integration? TICK THE RELEVANT BOX (SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NADA = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; DA = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree)

		SA	A	NADA	DA	SD
11.1	I have established a close relationship with my fellow learners					
11.2	There is regular communication between myself and the tutor					
11.3	I do receive enough support from my family members/friends/employers/co-workers in advancing my studies at NAMCOL					
11.4	There is a variety of extra-mural activities at NAMCOL, eg. sports, debating, .....					
11.5	The extra mural activities (non-academic) at NAMCOL make me feel part of the institution.					



11.6	I learn best when competing with others					
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12. INSTITUTIONAL AND GOAL COMMITMENTS.

Do you think NAMCOL prepared you well to achieve your educational goals? TICK THE RELEVANT BOX (SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NADA = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; DA = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree)

		SA	A	NADA	DA	SD
12.1	NAMCOL has prepared me to continue studying through distance education at any other level.					
12.2	I will recommend the grade 12 NAMCOL programme to any other student who wants to upgrade his/her grades					
12.3	I do not regret being part of the NAMCOL community in advancing my educational career					
12.4	If I had a choice, I would have undertaken my entire secondary education career through open and distance learning.					

**SECTION D: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED DURING THE TRANSITION/ PERIOD OF CHANGE FROM FORMAL SCHOOL TO DISTANCE LEARNING**

13. What were the challenging aspects of your transition (change): TICK THE RELEVANT BOX (SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NADA = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; DA = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree)

		SA	A	NADA	DA	SD
13.1	I found it hard to motivate myself to study					
13.2	I did not receive information on how to study through distance on time					
13.3	Not enough information was given to me at the beginning					
13.4	It is difficult to balance between studying, family and work commitments					
13.5	It is difficult to adjust to this new mode of study (distance learning)					
13.6	I feel isolated from the learning environment					
13.7	I find it hard to study on my own					
13.8	I feel inferior studying through NAMCOL					
13.9	The negative perception on NAMCOL makes me feel discouraged					
13.10	Other: _____					

14. What should NAMCOL do to help learners cope with the transition (change): INDICATE YOUR ANSWERS BY RANKING THEM USING NUMBERS (1, 2, 3....) WITH NUMBER 1 BEING THE HIGHEST.

14.1	It should provide more face-to-face sessions with tutors	
14.2	It should provide full-time centres, so that classes can be held in the morning as well	



14.3	It should provide additional learning resources	
14.4	It should introduce some extra mural activities to bring learners closer to each other	
14.5	It should create discussion platforms for learners to feel connected	
14.6	It should enhance supervision and monitoring at centres	
14.7	It should schedule more classes during the week	
14.8	It should implement technology (radio, video and online content) to supplement the print based materials	
14.9	Other: _____	

15. Do you think that you have settled well at NAMCOL?

Yes	No	Uncertain
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16. Comment on the extent to which you settled at NAMCOL.

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17. Indicate the period during your first academic year in which you became more settled at NAMCOL. TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

17.1	First trimester (March – April)	
17.2	Second trimester (May – August)	
17.3	Third trimester (September)	

18. Answer the question below by writing a few sentences in the space provided.  
How does NAMCOL differ from the school environment you are coming from?

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**THANK YOU FOR RESPONDING TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE**



Department of Education Management and Policy Studies

## MANAGING THE TRANSITION FROM CONVENTIONAL TO OPEN SCHOOLING: A SOUTHERN AFRICA CASE STUDY.

Dear Participant,

**Re: Letter of Informed Consent to Participate in Research**

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to explore learners' experiences of change from the traditional school environment to an open and distance approach with NAMCOL. The study further intends to determine whether this change has any influence on learners adapting to this new learning environment. You have been selected to participate in this study in your capacity as **Head of Centre** because of your direct involvement with learners through the monitoring and evaluating activities at tutorial centres. This study will be of great benefit by providing insights to enable NAMCOL to improve its learner support services. Additionally, I am conducting this research as a requirement towards as part of the PhD programme that I am currently pursuing through the University of Pretoria.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or wish to withdraw at any time, this will NOT have any consequences for your employment contract with the College. Any information that you reveal will be treated as strictly confidential. In addition, you will not be asked questions that will reveal your identity, unless you are willing to be contacted for follow-up interviews. **Even if you consent to a follow-up interview, any information that is likely to reveal your identity will be excluded from the research report/thesis.**

If you agree to participate in this search, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and take part in an interview. **Though research assistants will assist in the data collection process, in your case both the questionnaire and the interview will be managed by the main researcher.** The questionnaires will be administered and interviews will be carried out at your duty station. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 – 25 minutes to complete while the interview should not last longer than one hour. **An audio recorder will be used to record the interview.** The data collection procedure will be done outside your official working hours in order not to interfere with your normal duties.

If you are willing to participate in this study, **kindly complete and sign the declaration form below** to indicate that:

- you have not been subjected to any form of coercion or inducement in order to gain your consent to participate,
- your participation in this research is out of your own free will, and

## Appendix 3b: Research questionnaire for tutors

# RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire must only be completed by the following category of officials

**TUTORS, HEADS OF CENTRES AND AREA COORDINATORS**

This questionnaire is for NAMCOL staff members who are involved in tutoring or responsible for the monitoring, evaluating and supervising activities at the tutorial centres. The study intends to explore the experiences of learners during the transitional period from the conventional to open and distance learning and whether this change has any influence on learners' adaptation to the new learning environment. The study has great potential for providing insights that may enable NAMCOL to improve on its learner support services.

NB. Kindly take time to respond to the questions below. This questionnaire will take you 20 – 25 minutes to complete. Any information that you provide through this questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and will be treated as confidential.

### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

1. Gender: TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX:

<b>Male</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Female</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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2. Indicate the number of years you have been in the services of NAMCOL. TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX

<b>Between 1 and 3</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Between 4 and 5</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>More than 5</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Indicate the NAMCOL centre you are attached to or responsible for.

Write the centre name in the space provided below.

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4. Indicate the NAMCOL region you are attached to: TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

4.1	Erongo	
4.2	Hardap	
4.3	Karas	
4.4	Kavango East	
4.5	Kavango West	
4.6	Khomas	
4.7	Kunene	
4.8	Ohangwena	
4.9	Omaheke	
4.10	Omusati	
4.11	Otjozondjupa	
4.11	Oshana	
4.12	Oshikoto	
4.13	Zambezi (previously Caprivi)	

5. Which mode of study do you think learners prefer when enrolling with NAMCOL?  
TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

<b>Open Contact Mode</b> (regular face-to-face sessions)		<b>Open Non-contact Mode</b> (studying independently on the own)	
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## SECTION B: SUPPORT TO LEARNERS

6. Complete the following relating to the subjects you are responsible for. (To Be completed by Tutors only).

No.	Subject	Subject(s) you are responsible for at the centre (Indicate by ticking the appropriate box)	No of years you have been tutoring this subject at NAMCOL (Write years in appropriate box, e.g. 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.)
6.1.	Accounting		
6.2	Afrikaans first language		
6.3	Afrikaans second language		
6.4	Agriculture		
6.5	Biology		





No.	Subject	Subject(s) you are responsible for at the centre (Indicate by ticking the appropriate box)	No of years you have been tutoring this subject at NAMCOL (Write years in appropriate box, e.g. 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.)
6.6	Business Studies		
6.7	Development studies		
6.8	Economics		
6.9	English second language		
6.10	Geography		
6.11	History		
6.12	Mathematics		
6.13	Oshikwanyama first language		
6.14	Oshindonga first language		
6.15	Otjiherero first language		
6.16	Physical Science		

## SECTION C: INTEGRATION

### 7. ACADEMIC INTEGRATION

To what extent do you agree with the following statements with regard to learners' integration into the academic environment? TICK THE CORRESPONDING BOX (SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NADA = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; DA = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree)

		SA	A	NADA	DA	SD
7.1	Learners adjust easily to distance learning at NAMCOL after coming from the formal schools					
7.2	Learners prefer to study on their own without much support from tutors					
7.3	Learners' assignments are generally of good quality and mostly submitted on time					
7.4	Learners fully understand the dynamics of distance learning					
7.5	Learners find it hard to balance between their daily activities such as work, family responsibilities and studies					
7.6	Learners show a good understanding of the content in the study guides					
7.7	Learners demand more face-to-face sessions with tutors					
7.8	Learners' inexperience of studying through distance education makes it ever harder for them to cope at NAMCOL					



8. Indicate in the appropriate box the support services you think are most effective in helping learners adjust easily to the new environment of distance learning. Rank in order of importance with number 1 being the most important.

	<b>Support Services</b>	<b>Ranking (1,2,3...)</b>
8.1	Tutorial Letters	
8.2	Study Guides	
8.3	Vacation Workshops	
8.4	Study Groups	
8.5	Face-to-face Tutorials	
8.6	Comments from Tutors on Tutor Marked Assignments	
8.7	NAMCOL Learner Handbook (Prospectus)	
8.8	Motivational talks at centres	
8.9	Information Campaigns	
8.10	Open Days	
8.11	Regular contact with tutors after the tutorial sessions	
8.12	Academic Counselling	
8.13	Orientation workshops	
8.14	Any other not stated above _____	



9. SOCIAL INTEGRATION

To what extent do you agree with the following statements with regard to learners' social integration? TICK THE RELEVANT BOX (SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NADA = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; DA = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree)

		SA	A	NADA	DA	SD
9.1	I observe a close relationship between learners.					
9.2	Learners are establishing study groups to discuss the subject matter.					
9.3	There is regular communication between myself and the learners even after the tutorial sessions					
9.4	Learners do receive enough support from their families through participation in meetings or through follow-up on progress.					
9.5	The extra-mural activities at NAMCOL make learners feel part of the institution, eg. Sports, debating, .....					

**SECTION D: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED DURING THE TRANSITION/ PERIOD OF CHANGE FROM FORMAL SCHOOLS TO DISTANCE LEARNING**

10. In your view what do you think are the challenges learners face during their transition/ period of change from the formal schools to NAMCOL: TICK THE RELEVANT BOX (SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NADA = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; DA = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree)

		SA	A	NADA	DA	SD
10.1	There is a lack of motivation amongst the learners.					
10.2	Learners do not get proper advice on how to study through distance education					
10.3	Not sufficient information is given to learners on time to support them during the transition stage					
10.4	Learners cannot study independently, they rely heavily on support from tutors					
10.5	The negative perception on NAMCOL discourages learners					
10.6	They feel isolated from the social learning environment and as a result withdraw from attending classes					
10.7	Other:					



11. What should NAMCOL do to help learners cope with the transition (change): INDICATE YOUR ANSWER BY RANKING THEM USING NUMBERS (1, 2, 3...) WITH NUMBER 1 BEING THE MOST IMPORTANT AND RELEVANT SUPPORT SERVICE.

11.1	It should provide more face-to-face sessions with tutors	
11.2	It should provide full-time centres, so that classes can be held in the morning as well	
11.3	It should provide additional learning resources	
11.4	It should introduce some extra mural activities to bring learners closer to each other	
11.5	It should create discussion platforms for learners to feel connected	
11.6	It should establish counselling desks to support learners to cope with elements such as anxiety, fear, loneliness etc. during the transition period	
11.7	It should enhance supervision and monitoring at centres	
11.8	It should build the capacity of staff to understand the dynamics of distance learning to better support the learners.	
11.9	It should introduce technology driven initiatives (radio, audio and online resources) to supplement the traditionally print-based content	
11.10	Other: _____	

12. Do you think learners adjust well to the distance learning mode at NAMCOL?

Yes	No	Uncertain
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13. If YES or NO, explain your answer.

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14. During which period of the academic year do you think learners settle well at NAMCOL? TICK IN THE CORRESPONDING BOX.

14.1	First trimester (March – April)	
14.2	Second trimester (May – August)	
14.3	Third trimester (September)	



15. Answer the questions below by writing a few sentences in the space provided.

15.1 Comment on your first encounter with learners.

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15.2 What difficulties do you experience when engaging with the current group of learners compared to other learners you engaged with the previous years?

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15.3 Is there anything else that you want to share with me regarding the transitional challenges learners face when changing from the conventional mode to open and distance learning?

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**Thank you for responding to the questionnaire.**

## Appendix 4a: Interview Protocol for Learners

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR LEARNERS

Starting time of Interview:	_____	Date:	_____
Ending time of Interview:	_____	Interviewer:	_____
Interviewee:	_____		

1. Tell me about yourself? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Please tell me about your learning experiences since you were admitted in this institution?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What can you say about learning as you moved from your former school to NAMCOL?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Since you started studying with NAMCOL, has anything changed with regard to how you learn? If it is different, please explain what have change. If it is not dif ferent, what is still the same?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



5. What can you say about the way teaching and learning took place in your former school compared to NAMCOL?

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6. What is working well in terms of studies at NAMCOL? Why?

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7. What difficulties do/did you experience while studying through NAMCOL compared with your previous school?

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8. "Did/Is NAMCOL help/helping you to cope with the new way (or mode or approach) to learning? What more could NAMCOL do?"

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9. What can you say about the change in teaching and learning style and your performance? Do you think that it had/may have an influence on your performance in the examination?

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10. What are some of the problems/challenges you faced when you started studying with NAMCOL?

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11. Which of the problems are you no longer experiencing?  
Explain how you overcame the problems.

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12. Which challenges did you manage to overcome when studying with NAMCOL?

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13. Explain how you overcame the problems.  
(For former learners who are studying/have studied at higher education level)

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14. Is there anything else that you want to share with me regarding the learning style from your former school compared to the learning style in this institution?

“Thinking back over all the things we discussed, would you say that ....”

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15. Which mode of learning works well for you? Why?

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16. Why do/did you prefer the particular mode of study? Why?

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**NOTE:** These are only guiding questions; they will be refined after the completion of questionnaires as new themes may emerge from those responses.



## Appendix 4b: Interview Protocol for Tutors

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TUTORS, HEADS OF CENTRES AND AREA COORDINATORS

Starting time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ending time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please tell me about your experience with learners during your first meeting at the beginning of the year? How did it go?

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2. Was your first encounter with learners an enjoyable or not enjoyable? Why?

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3. What problems/challenges do learners face when they start studying with NAMCOL?

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4. How do you think that NAMCOL's open and distance learning mode differs from the way teaching and learning takes place in conventional schools?

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5. Which mode of learning do you think works well for them? Why?

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6. Why do they prefer this particular mode of study? Why?

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7. What difficulties do you experience when engaging with this group of learners compared to other learners who joined NAMCOL before?

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8. Do you think that NAMCOL is doing enough/not enough to help learners cope with the new learning experience?

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9. What can you say about the change of learning approach when learners start to study with NAMCOL? Do you think that it has an influence on their performance in face-to-face sessions or in their examinations?

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10. Is there anything else that you want to share with me regarding the transitional challenges learners face when changing from the conventional mode to open and distance learning?

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## Appendix 5: Sample of transcripts for interviews

### INTERVIEW NO. 11 (16 minutes) – Non-contact

#### Tell me about yourself

I completed my Grade 12 in 2006, I got 16 points and the following year I applied and then I did not really study because this experience of being out of school took me to a new level. I did not have any time for NAMCOL so I didn't finish my Grade 12. And then I started doing odd jobs, working at hotels and restaurants. In 2007, I did a full computer course certificate at Danida Training Centre which I completed in 2008. And then I was working as a Relief Secretary during that period at Baumgartsbrun Primary School. After that I did here and there help out, did some courses which I could afford. Finally this year 2015, I applied again for my Grade 12 and I took on Economics, Physical Science and Biology. Biology and Economics is the first time that I ever tried the subjects. I don't know how I am going to cope with that but I am trying. This year I really, really decided that I have to finish my Grade 12 and obtain the optimum minimum mark because I want to become a nurse. That is actually my dream. So, I push myself to the limit. I took upon the face-to-face courses on NAMCOL and now apparently I got a job at G4S and because I working shifts I don't have actually time to attend classes. But I need to get attention from my tutors.

#### Learning experience since you joined NAMCOL. Is it different from your experience when you were in school?

Personally, I really, really find it difficult to do studies on my own. First of all, at home there is a child who is always nagging on me. There is always something at home and the fear is that the environment is not really motivating. It is totally different from the spoon feeding and the baby attention I used to receive from school. So I think I prefer if there could be a possibility that maybe the tutors and the students themselves could have morning classes like a normal school where you can come from morning to a certain time and where someone could really give you that special attention like to explain to you from A – Z. This is what you need to do, if you don't understand don't be ashamed or don't be afraid to ask these questions. So that is my biggest problem which I am crying for because I guess most of the people are struggling especially us who have been out of school for such a long period of time. And now you wake up to this solution that everywhere you go you need to have a certain qualification or you need a qualification to go to any institution of higher learning. I think that is really what is bothering me the most.

#### How do you learn?

I am not the type of person that will make notes and scramble the whole day. I am someone who likes to read. If I read something and I have to read it over again. I don't really like to write much because if I write I write more than what is required of me. I prefer to read.

### **Have anything changed in how you learn?**

Oh yes, a lot. Because when I was at school I competed with my fellow students. There was always that little motivation in the surrounding where I was that really motivated me to study. But then now is like I don't have it and I wanted somehow but I really don't get it. So maybe that has something to do with the lack of studying I think. If someone is there to motivate you, and you get this help, a little bit of a push then I think it would be better. Now studying on my own is really tough because now I don't have that regular interaction with my teacher or fellow learners every day. So it's difficult.

### **In terms of teaching, what is it that you prefer. Which teaching methodology do you prefer?**

I think the schooling method is better. Why I am saying this is because for us who have been out of school for quite a number of years, is like the brain becomes rusted. You come back to this environment and now you have to start calling, you have to learn how to walk and how to talk. So, I would prefer face-to-face schooling session, starting in the morning until a certain period just like a normal school, for example, you get homework and the teacher is there to explain to you. The next morning you can ask, "Mam could you explain to me chapter what and what." For now you pay, get your books, assignments come in this date and then you give in. Most of the time, I am sure you don't even understand what you write but you just try so that it shows you handed in something.

### **Where will you find time for face-to-face you want, since you are a mother and you work as well?**

I think there should be provision made for working class and mothers, because us having all those responsibilities do not make us inferior to other students that do not have same responsibility than what we have. Because we also want what they want, we want to be spoon fed just like they do.

### **What is working well for you in terms of studying with NAMCOL?**

I really enjoyed the vacation workshops. It is just a shame that it didn't stay that long but I really enjoy more than what I enjoyed at school. I got to understand more here at the vacation workshop than what I do at school. You know the youngsters are very discouraging, if you ask something it's like you are stupid and they laugh at you because their brains are fresh and they know all the stuff. It is not nice, therefore sometimes we keep on our questions and we don't bother asking because now the young ones they will laugh at us. Sometimes the remarks teachers made are really hurting, e.g. why are you asking this.

### **What is it what NAMCOL should do to assist learners coping with this adjustment?**

Maybe, sometimes like sport events, extra moral activities, motivational talks and creating motivational groups amongst the students. Through that students and tutors can get to know each other better, not only as teacher/student but the personal side of you so that those people can interact to know each other better. We are all different, coming from different

environment. Being in one room or class doesn't mean we have same views or ideas. One more thing, discipline is really lacking both from us as students and the tutors. NAMCOL should become more strict on values, we should put a stop if students failing are too much. Also I have noticed the language barrier, language is a very big problem. We cannot cope with the English, for example in the exam when the question is asked like "explain", we fail because we don't respond to questions. NAMCOL should try to fix the language problem. Not all of us understand what is being asked or being taught.

## **INTERVIEW NO. 12 (21 minutes, 30 seconds)**

### **Tell me about yourself in terms of your studies:**

I completed my Grade 12 in 2005, from there I decided to go to NAMCOL. I registered with NAMCOL for History and English in 2014. I struggled to pay for my studies in Windhoek because my mother was not working and my father passed away long time ago. I had to pay for myself. I got a small job in a "Bar" and after 13:00 I used to get permission so that I can attend classes at NAMCOL. I got 18 points in Grade 12, but I did not improve since my job at the Bar was 24 hours. Sometimes you see the sun rising as you were selling throughout the night. I just ended up with those 18 points again. In 2005, I decided not to go to school again until such time that I can find someone who can pay for my studies and accommodate me. I have spoken to my sister and from there I got another job again where I took care of someone's business as I was recruited as Assistant Manager. In 2010, I decided to go to NAMCOL again because there I had a chance to study. I enrolled at Jan Jonker Centre for 3 subjects, Physical Science, English and Mathematics. Unfortunately I did not have Physics and Maths at Grade 12 before but I tried the subjects. Still I did not achieve good grades because I got F symbol in Maths and English which took me to 22 points which were also not enough to proceed to the next level, e.g. any institution of higher learning like UNAM and PON. Thereafter I got a chance to take a computer course in 2011 for 6 months. Then I decided to go to IUM as I heard that students can register even if they have 18 points. I took Business Administration which I am still doing right now with my 22 points. This year 2015, I registered with NAMCOL for Mathematics and English because I know the points I have are not enough, because wherever you go people ask for your Grade 12 qualifications with 25 points and above.

### **Learning experience at NAMCOL**

In my view, my learning experience at NAMCOL is not as difficult as I was in Grade 12 in formal school. But the learning experience is totally different because now I have knowledge and skills if I compare it to the time I was in Grade 12 in school. Now I know the reasons for studying which I did not know when I was in school. Like those years I was in school when your parents are asking you to study or do your school work it was like you were studying for them and not for yourself. It felt like they just want me to do for them that is the feeling that I was having when I was in school. But now, I know what I am doing and what I want to achieve. I know what I want to achieve through NAMCOL because I want at least to get a decent job so that I can feed my family because I will be a breadwinner. I have at the moment 2 children. Now I am more knowledgeable and I know the reasons for studying.

### **Has anything changed how you learn? How do you learn?**

Compared to the time I was in school, I think I have changed percentage wise from 50% to 80%. The time I was in school, I couldn't even express myself because of lack of confidence.

### **In terms of studying at NAMCOL, does it differ from the way you were taught in school?**

At NAMCOL you are urged to research more after you were taught in class. At NAMCOL you are forced to do further research because of the technology that is also available. The time I was in school, you wouldn't use your cellphone or computer to find more information on the subject matter. Or the computer will be there but not connected to internet. Right now I have my cellphone here and after the lesson I have to use my cellphone looking for extra information. Also the tutors give more information and are knowledgeable than the previous ones. At least we get more information from tutors than the time we were in schools. One positive aspect about NAMCOL is to encourage me to do more research.

### **What is challenging of studying through NAMCOL?**

To study with NAMCOL you need to seriously think of time to study and which time to do my daily work. It is not always easy to balance between your school work and normal daily activities. You have to wake early in the morning to prepare your child to go to school and also to prepare yourself to go to work. The only free time you find in your daily plan, you have to use it for your studies. You have to make sacrifices to make it at the end of the day, otherwise you will be someone who did not do anything at NAMCOL.

### **What is it what NAMCOL should do to help cope with the change for you to adopt better?**

What I can say NAMCOL should do more is to provide notes or additional learning resources on the portal. Or the College should also consider providing online studies same time learners don't get time to attend classes.

### **Which mode of studying do you prefer?**

I prefer both modes of study as they complement each other. For those who prefer to get classes let them get it, for those like myself who do not get time to attend, I should be given the opportunity to attend weekly vacation workshops. Use a combination of methods otherwise some learners will be locked out.



## **INTERVIEW NO. 13 (15 minutes)**

HOC – David Sheehama

### **Learner Experience**

The first day we start with orientation workshop with all learners who registered for both contact and non-contact mode of study. They normally expect more from us, they come helpless, discouraged with no hope. In our interaction we start motivating them not to give up. During our motivational talks we refer to other previous NAMCOL learners who were very successful through studies at College, e.g. the NAMCOL learners who was first a security guard but through support from NAMCOL he became a lawyer. They were discouraged in the sense that by looking at the marks they scored when studying full-time the marks were very low.

### **Was your first experience with them enjoyable or not enjoyable?**

I enjoyed my learners because as a mother I don't hide anything to them. I will tell them the reality from my real experience. I normally give them my own experience. When I pass my Grade 12 I wanted to go study further but during that time, before independence, there were no loans, scholarships or bursaries. After finishing my Grade 12, I did not have any choice than to stay at home. Lucky enough one of the Principals in my area, found my mother at the church and said; "I heard Selma passed Grade 12 but where is she?" She replied, She is at home doing nothing. The principal told my mom that I should come to school tomorrow because there was a vacant post. I got in there teaching as an unqualified teacher for a period of 3 years. From there I did not lose hope because I wanted to be someone in life. I was hiking 50km to get a testimonial from a school inspector so that I can pursue my studies at the Ongwediva College of Education. Meaning, that is already an encouragement to them. In life you don't need to lose hope. Where there is a will there is always a way.

### **Problems/Challenges the learners experience when they come for the first time to NAMCOL**

The first challenge I experience with them is to understand the timetable. We create opportunity for them to discuss the timetable with the tutors. The other challenge is that they are coming with the expectation that they will be taught the same way they were taught in school, e.g. sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph. The fact that their timeframe is very limited we only facilitate tuition by focusing on the most difficult topic. To them it's difficult to differentiate between formal education and distance education. They want us to teach, teach and teach.

### **Difference between formal education and ODL**

With formal education, the learners are on a full-time basis with their teachers and the teaching hours are and more'. With distance learning the teaching hours are very limited and we don't teach them in detail we only coach them. But they want us to teach them the way they were taught in formal schools, especially those learners who took the subject for the very

first time. Those who have done the subject before they won't demand much teaching. They only demand more teaching in the different topics. The new ones want everything to be taught in detail.

**What do you think which mode of study works well for learners?**

I suggest we only focus on difficult topics. I was also a student, when I study on my own I used to start with difficult topics first. When I come up with my timetable I would normally prioritise difficult subjects.

**Is NAMCOL doing enough to help learners cope with the new learning experience?**

I think NAMCOL is doing enough to help the learners. If I compare the results for different years there has been an improvement in the performance of the learners. I have seen a learner who have enrolled with NAMCOL at the centre and attending classes on a regular basis, they performed good at end of the year because they are taught by professionals who are teaching the same subject like in formal schools. I have also seen learners enrolling with NAMCOL but who go to private tutors but if they do not do well they return to the College and want the teachers to teach more in detail because they have wasted their time on independent tutors. The examination booklets learners receive from NAMCOL is also a positive information as it prepares learners well for the examinations.

**Which term do learners adjust well at NAMCOL?**

In March it's just the beginning, I think they cope well as from May onwards. Once they receive their 1<sup>st</sup> assignment and they see that they have scored good marks, you notice change in them. The grade 10 in particular knows that the marks they receive in the assignment will influence the final mark in the examinations. If possible, NAMCOL should consider increasing the tutorial hours for Grade 12 including the period for vacation workshops because the week or holiday is not enough.

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