

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AS A FACTOR THAT  
IMPACTS ON DISTANCE STUDENTS' PROGRESS AND COMPLETION OF  
STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA'S CENTRE FOR OPEN,  
DISTANCE AND E-LEARNING

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examined student support services as a factor that impacts on students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia's Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning. The Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning (CODeL) at the University of Namibia (UNAM) was established through a merger between the Centre for External Studies (CES) and the Centre for eLearning and Interactive Multimedia (CeLIM) in 2016 to provide and strengthen distance education in Namibia. However, one of the major challenges experienced by CODeL has been on support services which impacts on progress and completion of studies of students. The study adopted a mixed method approach to analyse student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia's Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning. The research questions for the study were: To what extent do student support services impact on distance student's progress and completion of studies? How effective are student support services to distance students at CODeL of the University of Namibia? This study also followed a case study research design to present a real-life situation and to provide a better insight pertaining to student support services as a factor that impacts on students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia. The data was collected from a sample size of 15 staff members at CODeL and 60 students. The findings of the study revealed that student viewed vacation school as extremely effective followed by administrative support. The study concluded that in-dead student support services impacts on students' progress and completion leading to delays in students' progress and completion of their studies. Students view on the types of student support services were that lecturer not turning up for classes during vacation school, short days for the vacation school and administrative support such as staff members not answering student's inquiries on time. The study recommends more attention should be given to student support services such as vacation school, administrative support and as they are the ones viewed by students as extremely effective.*

**Key words:** *Student support services, completion of studies, distance students, students' progress, CODeL*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS**

**CODeL** - Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning

**NAMCOL** - Namibia College of Open Learning

**NOLNet** - Namibia Open learning network trust

**NIED** - National Institute for educational development

**NUST** - Namibia University of Science and Technology

**COLL** - Centre for Open and Lifelong learning

**MOU** - Memorandum of Understanding

**UNAM** - University of Namibia

**CeLIM** - Centre for e-learning and interactive multimedia

**COL** - Common wealth of Learning

**CES** - Centre for External studies

**UNISA** - University of South Africa

**ICT** - Information and communication technology

**SRC** - Student Representative Council

**ODL** - Open, Distance and eLearning

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my late father Mr. Thomas Mutenda whose encouragement and advice will never be forgotten.

It is also dedicated to my daughter, Sasha Chilinda; this thesis is as a result of your foregoing the right to receive undivided attention when I was busy with this thesis.

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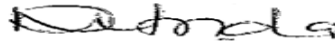
## DECLARATIONS

I **Nicholette Nachilimwe Mutenda**, hereby declare that this study is my own work and is a true reflection of my research, and that this work, or any part thereof has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

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11 April 2020

**Name of Student**

**Signature**

**Date**

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This introductory chapter presents an orientation of the study. The chapter also presents the statement of the problem, the research questions, and significance of the study. The last three subsections relate to the limitations, delimitations and the division of chapters.

### **1.2 Orientation to the proposed study**

Countries around the world are faced with the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands of social transformation. The 21<sup>st</sup> century demands the creation of an educated, knowledge and information technology driven society (Evans & Nations, 2000). The knowledge and information technology driven society contributes to social transformation because knowledge is a critical engine to economic growth; for example, a knowledge society generates, shares and makes knowledge available to all members of the society through the formation of (informal societies, learning communities, schools and universities) where it is believed that knowledge is shared through these platforms.

According to (David & Foray, 2002) a knowledge-based society is important because it encourages lifelong learning in a society, which engages itself in continuous learning (Edwards, 2002). An information technology driven society puts the use of technology at the forefront and the use of technology is attached to its day to day life. What the society requires is the connection to the internet. With technology, everything seems to be

possible and unavoidable; for example, checking one's e-mails, researching on the internet and chatting on face-book.

The provision of full-time education evolved when most of the countries gained independence and the preferred mode was face-to-face whereby both a learner and a tutor were present in the class. Baggaley (2008) observed that in the past the only method of passing on learning was through human contact until when there was the invention of printing since distance education is instruction through the print media. Gutenberg's invention of the printing press assisted the evolution of distance education as well as the introduction of postal services; then correspondence courses began to appear and that was in the nineteenth century up to the twentieth century (Sumner, 2000). Education providers are always challenged in coming up with ways or different methods of learning needed to educate the members of the society, therefore distance education was one of the methods which were drawn up to enable education to be accessible to all.

Most countries in Africa have realised the importance of distance education towards the achievement of the socio-economic development of an economy (Marope, 2005). For example, countries such as Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa have seen distance education as directly related to the country's economic growth that they have placed more emphasis on the development of distance education despite limited resources. African countries have celebrated success with regard to the development of distance education and this has been strengthened by cooperation of Universities. Also, international donors such as the Commonwealth of learning which assists with the development of national

and institutional policy for the use of ODL to scale up opportunities for skills development (Perraton, 2010).

Namibia has also realised the importance of distance education towards the achievement of the socio-economic development of the economy and has made efforts to strengthen distance education. In that regard, the Government of Namibia set up a policy to guide the implementation of distance education. The policy recognises that distance education is widely used to address education and training needs of people in Namibia. The policy maintains that the design and delivery of programmes should be in line with the needs of the learners, industry and national development. Secondly, all open and distance learning institutions that are publicly funded have embarked on institutional collaboration with the help of the Government of the Republic of Namibia through the Ministry of Education.

The mandate of collaboration is located in an organisation called the Namibian Open Learning network trust (NOLNET) which is there to promote collaboration among the institutions offering open and distance learning programmes. These are the Namibian College of Open learning (NAMCOL); Centre for Open, Distance and e-learning (CODEL); National Institute for educational development (NIED) and the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST)'s Centre for Open and lifelong learning (COLL). This collaboration was enhanced by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by heads of the afore-mentioned Universities and Institutions in the year 2000. The MoU promotes the sharing of facilities and services offered on a collaboration basis.

The Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning (CODEL) is an academic Centre at the University of Namibia (UNAM) that was established through a merger between the Centre for External Studies (CES) and the Centre for eLearning and Interactive Multimedia (CeLIM) in 2016. The purpose of CODEL is to serve students who cannot attend full time due to a variety of reasons. CODEL is an administrative and professional unit through which UNAM certificate; diploma and degree programs are offered through distance education (Centre for Open, distance & eLearning prospectus, 2017). One of the major challenges experienced by CODEL has been on availability of support services. Musingafi, Mapuranga, Chiwanza, & Zebron (2015) found some institutional weaknesses in terms of program delivery such as the late delivery of study materials, which had an impact on the students' submission of assignments, and inadequate communication systems which affected the delivery of support workshops. Therefore, the aim of this study is to present an analysis of student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia's CODEL.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Student support services are the cornerstone of every institution in assisting students in solving problems which they may encounter while studying (Tait, 2000). CODEL of UNAM has student support systems to help meet personal and academic needs of distance students and available student support services are highlighted in its prospectus. However, distance students at UNAM are not progressing and not completing their studies on time. For example, in 2009 there were 120 students that were registered at CODEL in degree programmes, of which only 16 students managed to complete their studies in 2015 (UNAM strategic plan, 2012).

Normally the duration of degree programs/courses is 4 years and the maximum number of years a student can stay in a course is 8 years (Centre for Open, distance & eLearning prospectus, 2018). There is absence of awareness on the part of students, of the importance of support services to distance students. Students are also not using support services which are available outside the institution. Support services from work colleagues, family and staff in other agencies such as libraries and advice Centre's are under-utilised (Cummings, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to undertake an analysis of student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia's Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning.

#### **1.4 Research questions of the study**

The study addressed the following research questions:

- To what extent do student support services impact on distance student's progress and completion of studies?
- How effective are student support services to distance students at CODEL of the University of Namibia?
- What areas of student support services needs improvements at CODEL of the University of Namibia?

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

The findings of this research assist the University of Namibia-Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning to come up with a student support policy and procedure handbook aimed at strengthening and improving support services to distance students. The research provides suggestions on how best the institution can serve its students through offering or giving a helping hand to support distance students effectively. The recommendation of the study assists the University of Namibia in implementing tracking systems to capture data on student use of support services, as the data is necessary as it assists the institution in knowing if students are making use of support services, and what support services are helping them to complete their studies. The recommendations of the study promote the institution in coming up with better mechanisms to track student use of available support services and also inform the centre to come up with completion initiatives. Such initiatives could include Academic success plans which involve addressing specific needs and weaknesses in students. The study provides suggestions of methods that the institution can use to determine the reasons why distance students don't progress and complete their study programs on time.

### **1.6 Limitation of the study**

The researcher may have limited skills in conducting interviews and ask probing questions. The second limitation was that the researcher might not know who completed the questionnaire as sometimes questionnaires are mailed to the respondents. Anyone might complete the questionnaire on behalf of someone. The respondents found it difficult in interpreting the questionnaire leading to difficulties in completing questionnaires. The

researcher did not find respondents to collect data for the reason that the respondents were not available at a Centre during the time when data was collected and the researcher did not have transport to travel to the respective Centre's due to distance from Windhoek to Oshakati where the researcher is stationed.

### **1.7 Delimitation of the study**

The study focused only on 10 Centre's because the centres represented high rate of failures in studies completion. The centres are as follows: Windhoek, Keetmanshoop, Eenhana, Katima Mulilo, Gobabis, Swakopmund, Tsumeb, Opuwo, Rundu and Oshakati. It examined student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia. Though there are 12 Centres at CODEL. Ten(10) centres were chosen for the reason that they were the ones impacted by lack of student support services as a factor hindering students' progress and completion of studies. The Centres could be covered within the budget of the researcher (10) centres.

### **1.8 Outline of the study**

The rest of the thesis is organised as follows:

**Chapter 2** provides the literature review of the existing and accessible literature on student support services and how they impact on student progress and completion of studies.

**Chapter 3** sets out the research design and methods used during the study. The chapter presents the population of the study, the sample and sampling procedures, method of data collection and data analysis procedures and the research instruments. Finally, the issue of reliability and validity in addition to ethical consideration is described and discussed.

**Chapter 4** presents and interprets data obtained regarding an analysis of student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia's CODEL.

**Chapter 5** discusses findings of the study

**Chapter 6** presents the conclusions, recommendations and a summary of the whole study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the literature review related to the concepts, theories and frameworks guiding the development of student support services. The first section presents the conceptual framework followed by the theoretical framework. The next section is about the historical perspectives guiding the development of distance e-learning in Namibia. This is followed by the type of student support services availed at CODeL. The last two sections address the factors underpinning student support in open and distance eLearning institutions and the review of related studies on student support services.

### **2.2 Conceptual framework**

The concepts that are discussed in this section include ‘student support services’ and distance students. These concepts are important because they guided the research and provided the structure by which this study was conducted.

Ross-Gordon (2011) emphasised the need for the provision of support services that are responsive to learners’ needs. In that regard, Simpson (2018) views the term student support services as a wide variety of instructional methods and educational services such as counselling. Also, student support services viewed as school resources that are provided to students to help accelerate learning progress and for them to catch up with their peers and meet their learning standards. Nsamba & Makoe (2017) found out that student support services are designed to overcome student learning difficulties and to provide comprehensive services which are built into programmes or courses being delivered. For the purpose of this study, student support is seen as a service designed to assist and escort students in their learning journey so that learning difficulties which they encounter while

studying are solved and students are able to progress to an extent that they are able to complete their studies.

Distance learners are students registered on courses which are delivered remotely. Students study at a distance, with the help of various tools, which typically include online, and offline modules, face to face lectures, telephone support and virtual classrooms (Thompson, 2014). Distance students are learners who are registered in a course and they study remotely (Rovai, Ponton & Baker, 2009). In other words, they are far from the campus where they are registered. Moreover, they do their course at a distance. Students who are studying on a distance are in isolation, therefore most institutions come up with student support services aimed at supporting students in their studies. The researcher understands distance students as those that study on their own, far from campus where they are registered and the only means of interacting with a tutor is through a study guide or other means of communication.

Distance students' study in isolation without having anyone to talk to or to ask questions which they may find difficult in their assignments or study materials. According to Croft, Dalton & Grant (2010) student support services are important as they break the isolation which distance students may experience while studying. For example, if a student experiences any difficulties in the course which they are taking, they might decide to call or to e-mail a tutor to get clarity on what they do not understand in the course material. A student support service assists distance student in the transition and integration to a university or to university life.

Chrysikos, Ahmed & Ward (2017) discovered that students, who consult with the University where they are registered, may often find support services contributing to their academic success, as support services assist students in overcoming inherent difficulties and isolation of studying at a distance. Brindley, Ossietzky & Paul (2004) observed that effective learner support should consist of the following elements, namely:

- **Interactivity** - This encourages the facilitation of the interaction between students, lecturers and institutional support people and not forgetting academic content of a module.
- **Openness to Change** - Student support services should be flexible to allow changes, for example each year there is new students joining the University, there is new educational developments, new technological advances and different economic conditions. Student support services should be flexible so that changes can be made according to the highlighted variables.
- **Learner Development**-With regards to learner development, learning within courses should solve broader issues such as student skill enhancement as well as personal development of students.

In Namibia, there are a lot of institutions offering distance courses, for example Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). According to Haufiku (2007), learner support services at NAMCOL are offered on a continuous basis from when a student registers and for the duration of the study, for example non-academic support services are offered to NAMCOL learners. The support services offered by NAMCOL include: orientation workshops which are normally conducted at the beginning of the year and a NamCol study guide which offers students study hints and study skills; for example, study

skills will help them on how to prepare for the exams. Moreover, support services which were also considered effective was the use of the SMS platform which is very helpful and effective for students. It is a method used to communicate reminders and to communicate urgent information such as when assignments are due or to communicate when students will attend the vacation school.

Furthermore, Haufiku (2007) through a study which was conducted at NAMCOL found out that learners viewed orientation workshops as not being effective, for example there was lack of awareness on the available student support services. The students put the blame on the institution (NAMCOL). Institutions are not informing students when and how orientation workshops are conducted, thinking that face-to-face workshops and attending such workshops is not compulsory though students should be encouraged to attend face-to-face activities (Fan & Lee, 2006). Fan & Lee (2006) further observed that students' motivation and persistence in the studies are guided by students' desire for job advancement. Students are motivated when seeing their friends who studied for a particular qualification being promoted at work. Adult students' study for a purpose, for example, to increase their knowledge but most of all it's for career-advancement.

## **2.3 Theoretical framework**

This study is underpinned by the Retention and Attrition theories and these are discussed below.

### **2.3.1 Retention theory**

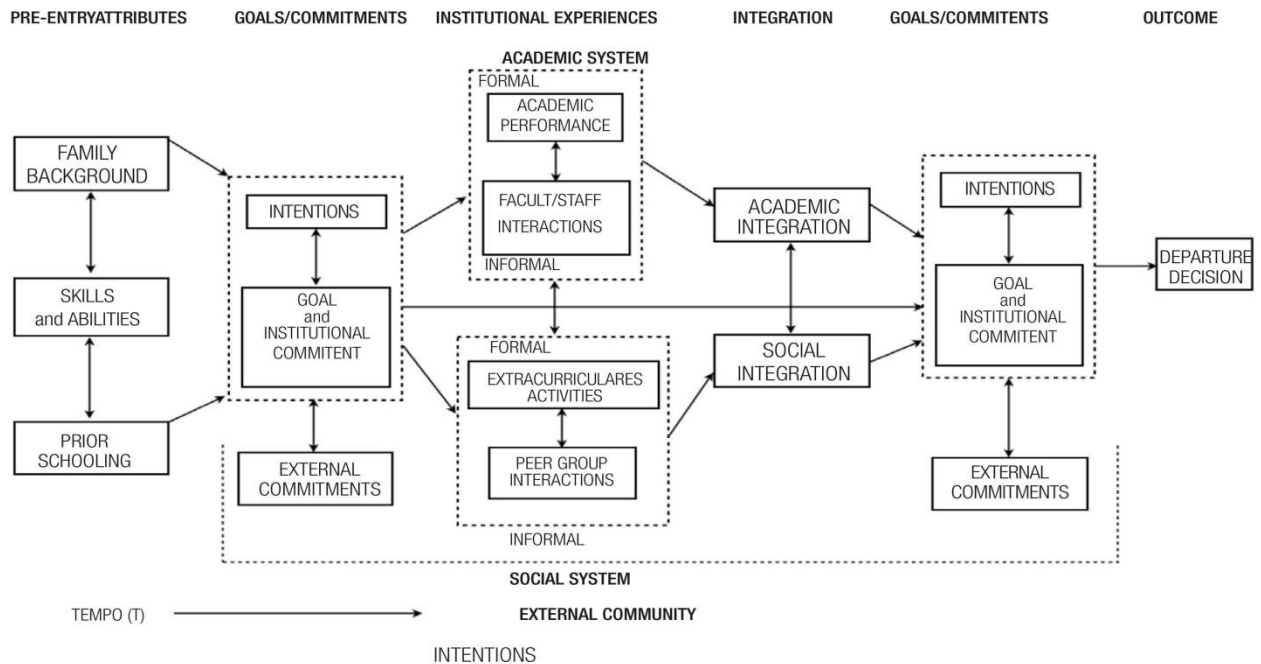
Vincent Tinto introduced the model of student retention in 1987 (Draper, 2008). Thus, the Retention theory is all about how students are able to stay in a course from the first year

up until they graduate. This theory guided the study as it is all about how students can stay at the university as the theory gives ways on how students can be satisfied with the services which are offered at the institution. The institution needs to know how student support services can assist in student's retention so that completion rate can be increased. Tinto (2003) observed that students are able to stay with the institution only when there is a match between students' academic goals and what the institution has to offer.

Rendon, Jalomo and Nora (2002) highlighted other factors which might help a student to stay or not to stay with an institution: financial support may make students to study further so that they can complete their studies. If students are sponsored, that makes it easier for a student to complete their studies. Inadequate resources at the institution will mean that students may not get adequate academic and administration support which can result in a student dropping out of a course because they cannot cope. Though the above studies might not be similar, both points how students can be able to stay at an institution. Tinto (2000) pointed out the conditions that promote retention:

- Explaining institutional requirements and providing good academic choices and advice for students that lack career choices.
- Providing support such as academic, personal and social support before the first year of study.
- The ability of the institution to show that students are valued through the introduction of frequent contact with students especially in the first year of their study.
- Active involvement of students in active learning. This means that students are encouraged to learn in groups to foster friendship.

**Figure 2.1, further illustrates Tinto’s theory of retention. It illustrates how students are able to integrate into an institution.**



**Figure 2.1: Vincent Tinto’s longitudinal model to explain the “student integration model” Source: *Tinto: (1993)***

The above figures show that the pre-entry Attributes. These relates to attributes such as family background, skills and attributes and prior schooling which at the end will determine if a student will be able to persist and stay with the institution. According to Habley & McClanahan (2004) pre-entry education experience is seen as a major contributor in student’s success compared to those who don’t possess any qualification. Secondly, the Goals and institutional commitments represent a strong sense of purpose if students did not set goals for themselves, they are unlikely to show commitments towards achieving an educational goal; therefore, more efforts might be needed in motivating

students to learn. The Institutional Experiences shown in the above figure are how academic and administrative staff interacts with students to promote commitments whereby students are satisfied with the institution where they are registered (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010).

The academic and Social Integration is a factor which describes how a student can integrate into an institution and respond to institutional goals (Sauer & O'Donnell, 2006).

Social integration occurs when there is interaction with other members of a community of practice or a society and can lead to an individual formation of personal affiliations.

Meaning the extent to which a student interacts with staffs and other students at a University that's how they can integrate into the University. Strayhorn (2018) identified three mechanisms through which students can integrate. These are sacrifice, support and the negotiation of arrangements. Support services are considered essential to any students' overall success within formal education (Cain & Locke, 2002). "Learners without support are likely to delay the completion of a program or drop-out of a course altogether" (Rumble, 2000, p. 221). Student's experience is shaped by the presence of the quality of support received throughout their entire learning process (LaPadula, 2003).

The retention theory directed this study because an institution like UNAM-CODEL must retain its students and help them to continue learning. This study is on student support services as a factor that impacts on student progress and completion of studies. If we were to provide adequate students support services, then students will be satisfied and will be retained to enable them to progress and complete their studies.

### **2.3.2 The attrition or drop out theory**

The attrition theory is all about why students may drop out of a course. It explains why students may discontinue their studies. Student participation or enrolling in a course is voluntarily rather than compulsory that can give students the freedom of dropping out of a course (Chen & Zhang, 2017). This theory of student attrition was used in establishing out factors which may lead to students to drop out of a course which can also affect completion rate of distance students as students dropping out completion rates are also affected. The theory also assisted in finding out what causes students to drop out of a course which can be used in predicting which students are most likely to drop out of a course given the factors outlined by the theory. According to this theory, there are factors which make students to drop out both from a student's side as well as from the institutional side. Students' dropping out of a course is considered as an institutional efficiency (Kimbark, Peters, & Richardson, 2017). A high drop out of students from the institution side may mean the inability of the institution in meeting the needs of students (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). The main proponents of the attrition theory are Bean and Metzner (1985) and Tinto (1975). Bean and Metzner (1985) Bean's model identified external and internal factors that affect persistence most of which are beyond the control of the institution where students are registered. Below variables may lead to drop out of students namely:

- Academic Variables such as study habits, course availability, academic advising and absenteeism.
- Background and defining variables such as age, gender, educational goals, ethnicity, enrolment status.

- Psychological outcomes for example stress utility, satisfaction and goal commitment.
- Environmental variables such as finances, hours of employment, family responsibilities and outside encouragements.

Moreover, Bean and Metzner (1985) were of the opinion that if both academic as well as environmental variables are favourable students may not want to drop out of a course. On top of that; Tinto (1975) pointed out the most commonly referred model in the student dropout literature as *Student Integration Model*. Tinto (1975) disagrees on the above theory of Bean and Metzner by explaining that the quality of faculty-student interaction and the student's integration into the school or a university are central factors in student attrition. The extent to which a student is able to interact with the institution to an extent that the student is integrated into the mode of studying that will give a student a decision to either to stay or drop out of the course. However, Tinto (1987) was of the opinion that it is up-most important for institutions to focus on the degree to which the learner is able to be socially and academically integrated with peers and the institution, as a way of ensuring that a student is committed in staying with the institution since Universities are concerned with return on investment with regard to their courses.

According to this theory, dropout occurs because the learner is insufficiently integrated into different aspects of university life. Tinto identified the two important systems at a University as academic and social and contended that dropout could occur through a lack of integration in either of these systems of which students are expected to integrate. According to (Geisinger & Raman, 2013) the following are factors which are related to student attrition:

- **Classroom and academic climate** include the lack of adequate teaching and advising from the side of the institution. In this case, the students may lack a sense of engagement with the learning activities of the institution.
- **Grades and conceptual understanding** include the low course grades which may drive students to drop their studies.
- **Self-confidence** relates to low self-esteem which is likely to continue for the duration of their studies.

The attrition theory guided this study because it helped in establishing why distance students may drop out of a course of study so that early interventions can be thought off. Furthermore, the theory pointed out that environmental variables are mostly the main contributors as to why students may drop out of a course compared to academic variables. The theory pointed out factors which are leading to students dropping out of a course which an institution can look at so that attrition rate can be reduced.

The theory provided factors such as lack of as an institutional variable such as student support services from an institution side as a factor which may lead to students to drop out of a course; therefore, the theory pointed out what factors which an institution can focus on to reduce the attrition rate of a course which may hinder students' progress and completion of studies. According to Keegan (2013) student support services for distance learners were firstly developed as a defending response to the high percentage of "students dropping s" out of a course in distance education; support services were developed to minimize high attrition rate in distance education.

Adult students would want to achieve a goal which they have set of attaining a qualification. The theory explained variables which can hinder attaining those goals and if those variables are known students might come up with ways on how to tackle most of them for example if it's with regards to financial problems then students can still find ways of acquiring funds for their studies.

## **2.4 Historical perspectives guiding the development of distance e-learning in**

### **Namibia**

The foundation of distance education can be traced back to the 1800's when distance education was a form of correspondence education. Correspondence education courses took the opportunity through the provision of new rural free delivery of mails. Distance students were expected to work on their own through a one-way interaction with course materials.

In 1856-1906 the development of correspondence courses spread to other countries such as the United States. For example; Harper as a president of the University of Chicago at that time implemented world's first ever University education programme that targeted students which were located in rural and remote areas. Distance education after the World War II increased dramatically when veterans saw it fit to complete the education which they missed while in the service (Bunker, 2003). Distance education was also a way of fixing the social injustice which exists in many countries since most of the people did not get time to study as they went to fight for the liberation of their country. In Namibia open and distance learning was seen as a way to address Namibia's educational and training needs for those that did not find time to further their studies on full time basis (Hummel, 2010). Möwes (2008) observed that even before independence in 1990, it was recognised

that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has the potential in moving Namibia forward because of its potential as it can address Namibia's educational and training needs in a cost-effective manner. The researcher continues to emphasize that ODL has the flexibility to accommodate varying levels of enrolment and the capacity to reach out to all corners of Namibia as a country. Open learning through distance education has come to stay and come to be accepted as a well-respected mode of study because it meets the emerging demands of the Namibian society. According to Nekongo-Nielsen, Möwes, Murangi, Beukes and Bennett (2008), at independence it was seen that the government of the Republic of Namibia advocated for the development of a policy on Open and Distance Learning; as distance has a greater potential in promoting education for all in Namibia; this was followed by an incentive to develop an ODL policy which saw Namibian Open Learning Network Trust (NOLNet's) organisation of the 2005 National Conference on Towards Education for All: The Cabinet through the Ministry of Education instructed NOLNet to develop an ODL Policy for Namibia and this became a success; reason being that NOLNet, with financial assistance and support from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) it was able to engage a group of international consultants to help in drawing up a draft policy and implementation thereof.

The Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning (CODEL) previously known as the Centre for External studies (CES) was set as part of the new University of Namibia which was established in August 1992. The centre emanates from the department of distance teaching of the former academy and caters for the educational needs of students who for a variety of reasons cannot come on full time studies (Centre for Open, distance & eLearning prospectus, 2017). The Centre was created to ensure greater access to higher education for

all and to create opportunities for professional development to mostly adult members of the community; the Centre provides open and flexible learning through the distance mode and it provides a unique method of learning; students can study in every corner of the country. At the Centre instruction and learning takes place with both a learner and a tutor being at different places for most of the time. Today CODEL is a well-established centre for open and distance eLearning. Study materials are now made available electronically and can be accessed through internet on Moodle as a learning management system unlike in the past where study materials were only made available in print. One of CODEL achievement is the Centre uses Moodle as a learning management system the system has helped a lot in cutting costs and also in efficiency in doing its operations. Since the introduction of Moodle learning management system in 2016 there seems to be light at the end of the tunnel as everything is now done on-line. For example, submission and marking of assignments. The online marking of assignments allows students to receive feedback on time. As soon as a lecturer is done marking an assignment on-line, the feedback is transmitted through the student's e-mail address. This is unlike in the past where, the work was labour intensive, and it was too costly as it meant when a lecturer was done marking hard copies of assignments; the assignments would need to be put in an envelope, one by one and sent to the student's address. The process was time consuming because in some modules the Centre has 300 to 400 students. In some instances, feedback used to reach students late, in some cases even after they would have already written their exams (Centre for Open Distance and eLearning Prospectus, 2018).

## **2.5 Type of student support services availed at CODEL**

UNAM-CODEL is aware of conditions in which a distance student has to study. According to the CODEL Prospectus (2017) the following are the types of student support services which are availed to distance students by means of decentralised student support systems through its 12 regional Centres. The student support services include:

### **2.5.1 Tutor marking**

It is expected of tutors to provide detailed comments in such a way that comments can also serve as tutorial support even when a tutor is far from a student; students can still learn from the provided comments. CODEL Centre is not having its own courses; the faculties are the ones who set up a minimum qualification for distance tutor markers. Normally a Master's degree is the minimum requirements for a lecturer to start tutor marking at CODEL. Then after recruitment CODEL provides training to tutor markers so that they acquire the necessary skills which are necessary in providing quality tutor marked assignments. Tutors are also trained on how to mark on-line on the learning management system (Moodle).

### **2.5.2 Telephone- tutoring**

Students are provided with telephone numbers of their tutors this is always written on their tutorial letters for example telephone numbers of tutors, student support officers, exam officers are normally written on the tutorial letter. If a student requires guidance, then they are free in contacting their tutor who will then clarify whatever they are not sure of.

### **2.5.3 Face-to- face tutorials**

Face-to- face tutorials are normally organised at the regional Centre's: if for example there is a tutor who possess a qualification and is qualified in tutoring a certain module then weekend tutorials can be conducted provided there is more than five students who are willing to attend face-to- face tutorials. This is normally happening twice in a month at smaller Centre's but at the Windhoek Centre weekend tutorials can take place three times in a month more especially for courses which are considered most difficult such as Business mathematics and Business statistics.

### **2.5.4 Vacation school**

Vacation school is offered mainly in May and August at the Windhoek main campus, Oshakati, Rundu and Katima Mulilo for courses such as Degrees in Lower and Upper primary. Since those courses are centralised, tutors are found at those campuses. For courses which do not have local tutors, the use of a video-conferencing room is made so that students who are situated at the northern campus can also be taught by tutors who are in Windhoek via Video conferencing since the headquarters based in is Windhoek is staffed with tutors. Vacation school is normally organised by CODEL student support officers in collaboration with the academic coordinators who are situated at different campuses across the country. Student support coordinators draft vacation school timetables then they send timetables to regional coordinators so that they can also add their slots or adjust the timetable according to their needs. Vacation school is conducted when full-time students are on Mid-year-recess; and then venues are used for vacation school of distance students. This is done as well at the regional Campuses such as Oshakati, Rundu, Katima Mulilo and Southern Campus.

### **2.5.5 First year Orientation**

Face-to-face orientation programs are conducted or offered to first year students and this is centralized to regional Centre's. Regional Centre's conducts their own orientations but students who want to come for orientations in Windhoek are also welcome. The orientations are aimed at introducing students to courses as well as how to use the learning management system (Moodle).

### **2.5.6 Student Counselling**

Counselling is normally done by administration staff especially Student support officers who counsel students on course selection and exemptions and this is centralized to regional Centre's where staffs who are at regional Centre's also counsel students on course choices (Möwes, 2005).

### **2.5.7 E-mail and internet**

Each student is given an e-mail address upon registration which they use to log-in on Moodle as well as on portal to access among others their proof of registration, financial statements and their results. Students are also given a 3G device which they use to access the internet; the device is included in their registration fees (Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning Prospectus, 2017). According to the CODEL (2018) Prospectus; Student support services at UNAM are aimed at supporting students in their studies. Croft, Dalton & Grant (2010) expressed that student support services are aimed at breaking the isolation that distance students experience while studying through distance. Moreover, student support services break the isolation in which distance students finds themselves for example students are isolated from other students, tutors and the institution therefore

involving a dialogue between students and the institution though student support services thus decrease students' isolation. Despite the potential of the student support services at CODEL, failures have been observed and reported in some studies (Möwes, 2005). The example of such failures includes: students are not oriented properly, there is a Learning management system called Moodle which was introduced in 2016 and most students rely on peer to peer orientations on how to use Moodle, CODEL staffs perceive that everyone knows how to use the system. If students are not oriented on how to use a system, they may end up dropping out of the course. The objective of an institution in providing orientation for distance education students is to solve student's problems which might come in their way while studying (Thongsawat, Davidson-Shivers & Chatphoomiphong, 2019). Due to a high number of students in a module or course tutors do not have the capacity in giving constructive or adequate feedback to students so that they can learn from them. In a study by Du Plessis (2012) and (Möwes, 2005) it was discovered that students expressed the need for lecturers to provide them with more support in the form of commenting on assignments so that they can learn from the feedback.

## **2.6 Factors underpinning student support in Open and Distance eLearning institutions**

This chapter demonstrates that student support services is a common feature of open and distance eLearning. Student support services give students an opportunity for control and self-help to help distance students to study effectively (Kvavik & Haneberg, 2000). However, for student support services to succeed it is important to consider some factors. Section 2.6.1- 2.6.6 outlines some of these factors.

### **2.6.1 Characteristics of students**

When developing student support services an institution should take into account the characteristics of its students the following are the characteristics of an adult learner (Kapur, 2015).

- 1) The need to know - In most cases adults would want to know the need to learn something before they enrol for a course and what that course will benefit them.
- 2) The learner's self-concept- self-concept move from dependence to independence as individuals are growing in responsibilities, experience and confidence.
- 3) The role of the learner's experience- learners may come with prior knowledge which they expect tutors to consider when addressing them or while tutoring them.
- 4) Readiness to learn- Adults may become ready to learn a course or something which will allow them to be able to cope effectively with their real-life situations.
- 5) Orientation to learning- Adult learners are life-centred in their orientation to learning.
- 6) Motivation- Adults are motivated to learn due to a variety of factors for example (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries), the most potential motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life).

### **2.6.2 The development of student support services**

The following should be taken into account when developing student support services (Tait; 2000).

### **2.6.2.1 Course or Program Demands**

The special demands of a course or program is as important as the characteristics of students in planning support services (Tait, 2000). An analysis should be done to indicate whether a course should run for a semester or whether there should be face to face vacations which will assist students to cope with course demands (Möwes, 2005). Institutions would normally introduce week-end tutorials in courses where they would see that students are failing. Moreover, courses that require students to perform hands-on experiences such as science practical frequency of face-to-face should be introduced.

### **2.6.2.2 Scale of the Program**

Tait (2000) suggested that an institution offering open and distance learning program requires employment of different support strategies depending on the number of students., The students might well be scattered around the country necessitating a need to establish regional administrative offices and study centres which are aimed at addressing learner support issues locally (Tait, 2002).

### **2.6.2.3 Geographical Environment**

The geographical environmental considerations also play a crucial role in deciding the type and volume of support services (Tait, 2000). It should be determined whether the density of the population is in rural or urban areas. The availability and the cost of transportation all need to be considered when planning the student support services (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). For example, an institution serving a highly populated area may require setting up student support services in regional Centre's. Student support services should

be provided where students are stationed and should be offered according to the needs of students in that geographical area. If an area is less populated, then there is a need to choose students support services which are responsive to their needs compared to the most populated area.

#### **2.6.2.4 Technological Infrastructure**

Paier (2007) observed that most students' activities require interaction between a student and the Lecturer. Some universities have Moodle which is a learning management system (Chaw & Tang, 2018) which can be used to support students. Moodle offers support services such as forum discussions, chats or feedback to students. In this case, the students would be given a 3G device that enables students to access the internet so that they can interact with their tutors and also upload assignments on Moodle as a learning platform.

#### **2.6.2.5 Requirements of the Management**

Tait (2000) pointed out that different institutions might have different organisational structures in place to manage support services. Most institution would have a section which deals with students' problems such as the offices of the dean of students that could attend to problems of students and channel them accordingly (Roscoe, 2005). A University would have a Student Support department or Centre equipped with student support officers which assists students according to their challenges.

## **2.7 Review of related studies on student support services**

The purpose of this section is to present two case studies from Utah State University in United States and the University of South Africa (UNISA). These studies could inform an analysis of student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at CODeL.

The study by Ozoglu (2009) examined and identified support services needs at the Utah state University in the United States of America. The study was aimed at gaining a better understanding of student support needs and preferences of distance students as well as finding out the views, perceptions of Turkish open education system students on importance, availability, and accessibility of student support services. The following were students support services that were implemented at the Utah state University in the United States for the Turkish open system namely:

- Printed self-study textbooks which were written by a team of field experts from various universities upon completion of registration students were given the text-book.
- Face-to-face academic counselling- which included among others on-line academic counselling, study centres and on-line practice tests.
- Pre-recorded T.V programs which are broadcasted nationwide on Turkish Radio and Television channel and students are provided with a guide that lists a schedule of T.V programs in case a student might skip one.

Though there were student support services which were implemented at Utah State University, large needs gaps were identified such as counselling services which were perceived by students that it promotes motivation if offered to them. This study examined

student support services including counselling services as factors which impacts on student's progress and completion of studies thus filling the gap which may exist between the studies.

### **2.7.1 Successes recorded in terms of student's support**

Turkish open Education system installed computer laboratories in and around local venues so that students can use at any time. Text books which were given to students were very much detailed and suitable for self-study. Communication of Open Education System events took place through a TV program called "News; Which involves a 10-minute program in every week for the academic year and it notifies students about what is happening on campus enabling students to know what is happening in and around the University.

Another case study is from the University of South Africa by Arko-Achemfour (2017). This study investigated the access challenges that students face in their ODL mode of study. The study was more on the challenge's students face in accessing student support services which the University of South Africa offers to its distance students. Focus group was conducted at one of the Centre to find out if student support services met the learning needs of students. The study investigated student support gaps in an open distance learning context at the University of South Africa; the types of student support services which were implemented are face to face support which includes orientation of students in their first years, group tutorials, week-end tutorials and individual help from tutors, guidance and counselling, communication and technologies and regional hubs where students can go and access a computer or an ICT service.

The outcomes of the Case study were that students received some of the student support services and they benefited from them, for example students made use of the library to read, borrow books, submit their assignments, as well as to do online registration more especially senior students. Like many other Universities UNISA has a learning portal called my Unisa platform where students can submit their assignment, check for their financial statements, check for their marks but not all functions are used by students because mostly distance students have poor computer literacy skills which are necessary in using a computer (Aralu, 2014). Another success factor which UNISA achieved was the existence of Regional Hubs which students make use off to access student support services. Students also indicated that there is sufficient information about getting textbooks, study materials not forgetting information about student finance matters for example information about billing and students fee payments.

### **2.7.2 The following are lessons learnt from the above case studies**

Firstly, student support services require planning and also there is a need to align learner support services to learners' needs. The provision of decentralised learner support services is essential. Thus, some universities establish study centres, for example making available student support services where students live and work for easy access or building a study centre next to where people live. The researcher learnt from the case studies that despite the assumption that student support services help learners to complete their studies, it is not possible to find students who complete their studies on the specified time frame irrespective of available student support services. The two case studies seem to show that most support needs of students are always unmet by institutions. However, this might

occur due to lack of resources to make adequate student support services available and accessible at an improved level. Though all case studies are on student support services the first one was on finding out the student support needs and preferences of distance students and the second one was investigating the challenges students face in accessing student support services. In this study, the role of student support services as a factor in the completion rate of distance-learning students at the University of Namibia was explored as none of the researcher's studies looked or researched on student support services impacting on students' progress and completion of studies.

## **2.8 Summary**

This chapter presented the concepts, theories and benefits of student support services. Firstly, the chapter addressed the conceptual framework followed by the theoretical framework and lastly two case studies were reviewed. According to Maxwell (2004) a theoretical frame work is important because it serves as a guide to the researcher. This is as it is through the theoretical framework that the researchers find it easy to use it to build and support a study. On the other hand, the conceptual framework also provided direction to which the research should be taken. The conceptual framework also assisted in finding the relationship which existed between identified variables in the study. The conceptual framework also provided a structure to define how the researcher can approach the research paper as a whole. The conceptual framework was important for this study because it guided the researcher as to which key words to focus on.

The chapter further discussed the historical perspectives guiding the development of distance and e-learning in Namibia. Is it important to include historical perspectives as it shows us when distance education started and up to where it is now? Moreover, the

chapter presented the types of student support services available at CODEL and the factors underpinning student support in open and distance eLearning. It is important to know the importance of student support services so that an institution can meet the learning needs of its students. Finally, the chapter presented a review of the related literature. Two Case studies were reviewed and these studies pertain to Utah State University in the United States and the University of South Africa. In these case study articles, it was shown that a gap exists in student support and that even if student support services are available, there is a different student profile which a distance institution deals with; for example, some students are based in rural areas where they cannot access available student support services.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the research methods which were used in investigating the research problem, the chapter explains the rationale behind the application of specific selected procedures, as well as techniques which were used to identify process and analyse the information. The chapter defines and describes the chosen target population, sampling procedures, research instruments, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

### **3.2 Research design**

This study adopted a mixed method approach to investigate student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia's Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning. According to Creswell, Plano and Clark (2011), a mixed method research is a method that focuses on collecting data and analysing by a way of mixing both quantitative and qualitative data with the aim of providing a better understanding of a research problem and overcoming the limitation which might be brought by a single design. The researcher believes that the mixed methods enabled the gathering of the necessary data for answering the research questions of the study. The research questions were drafted in such a way that they consisted of non-structured and structured questions. The quantitative aspect of the

methods was used to collect descriptive data using structured questions and the qualitative aspect was used to collect non-structured questions on both a questionnaire and on an interview guide.

This study also followed a case study research design. The case study “are a research strategy and an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; p.278). Case study research approaches are aimed at studying a case within a real-life situation or setting. Therefore, a case study approach presents real-life situations and provides a better insight, in the subject of interest. The case study approach aims to capture the reality with regards to the participants’ lived experience for a particular situation.

This study was on student support services as a factor that impacts on students’ progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia. The topic was of real-life situations and it explored student support services and student progress and completion, a case study research design was chosen because it allowed better insights of the phenomenon under study. A case study method was appropriate as the researcher sought answers to a question found in the research questions - a descriptive question: “What areas of student support services need improvement at CODEL of the University of Namibia?” Given the reasons, the respondents gave what areas of student support services need improvements. A case study method approach was chosen because this method accommodates the use of both quantitative and qualitative data (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

### 3.3 Population

Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009, p.401) defined a population as all individuals from which a sample is selected or a group from which the researcher would like to generalise the results of the research study. The population for the study was all the 510 students who were discovered that they exceeded their number of years of study at the university (A. N. Biwa, personal communication, April 22, 2018). This was done according to the students' data which shows that they failed a lot of modules and resulted in several re-seats for examination. Additionally, the study had a target population of 17 fulltime staff members at CODeL. Therefore, the total population for the study was 527 respondents.

### 3.4 Sample and sampling procedures

A formula was used to calculate a sample size for a finite population (Bouma, Ling & Wilkinson, 2009). Normally a researcher would opt to take only part of the population as the studying of the whole population requires more time and resources hence a need to calculate a sample. To calculate a sample size, one needs to determine a set of values and plug them into an appropriate formula. The sample size was calculated by hand. The following were values which were pre-determined which were plugged into a formula to determine a sample size. This formula was discussed by Thompson (2012) as an appropriate formula to determine a sample size.

#### Formula and calculation:

$$1 + \left( \frac{Z^2 X P (1-P)}{e^2 N} \right)$$

Where:  $Z^2$ = Confidence level

P= Population proportion

$e^2$ = Margin of error

N= Population

$$= \left(1 + \frac{(1.96^2) \times 0.50(1-0.50)}{0.08^2}\right) \times 17 = 150.0625/9.827205882 = 15.27 = 15 \text{ staff Members}$$

$$= \left(1 + \frac{(1.65^2) \times 0.50(1-0.50)}{0.10^2}\right) \times 510 = 68.0625/1.133455882 = 60.0486 = 60 \text{ students.}$$

**Table 3.1: Data values to determine a sample size**

	<b>Students</b>	<b>Staff members</b>
Population Size	510	17
Margin of error	10%=0.10%	8%=0.08%
Confidence level	90%	95%
	Z value=1.65	Z value=1.96
Population Proportion, If unknown use 50%	0.50%	0.50%

Whereby, the population size was the total number of people which the researcher intended to generalise the results.

Margin of error – in this study this is a percentage that tells the researcher how much the researcher can expect the survey results to reflect the views of the overall population or the amount of error the researcher can tolerate.

Sampling confidence level- which tells how confident one can be that the population would select or give an answer within a certain range which is assumed to be at 95% for staff members and at 90% for students as respondents.

### **3.4.1 Sampling of students**

The study used a simple random sampling to select 60 students who exceeded their years of studies. The sample size of 60 students was deemed enough to be a representative of the whole population in the study. The researcher generated a class list of students from the institution's students' data base. The class list consisted of student numbers and was printed out. Thereafter, the researcher cut individual names and student numbers on different piece of papers. Papers were folded and put in a bowl. The researcher mixed them. A student who was not part of the study was blind folded to randomly pick papers one by one until the sample size was reached. After that, the researcher used student numbers to search for students' cell phone numbers and e-mails. Lastly, the researcher shared a link via e-mail as well as on their mobile phones. Hard copies for the questionnaire were also printed for those ones who could not access it via emails or on their mobiles.

### **3.4.2 Sampling of staff members**

Sampling of staff involved some criteria such as: a staff member should have been with the institution for at least two years and directly worked with students on a daily basis. Simple random sampling was also used in selecting 15 staff members, whereby the researcher took a list of staff members and cut them into pieces alphabetically. Papers were mixed in a bowl. While blind-folded, the researcher then started picking these papers one-by-one until a required number (15) was reached.

### **3.5 Research Instruments**

The researcher used the questionnaire and interview guide to collect data pertaining to student support services. Gay, Mills and Arairasian (2009) described a questionnaire and an interview guide as follows: A questionnaire is a research instrument which consists of a set of structured and non-structured questions. It is used to gather data from respondents. An Interview guide refers to a list of questions which the researcher intends to ask respondents during an interview; and each respondent is required to answer the same questions in order.

### **3.6 Data collection procedures**

Data was collected using a questionnaire and an interview guide. A questionnaire was administered on students whereas the interview guide was used to collect data from members of staff. Data collection procedures are regarded as ways or techniques which the researcher uses to obtain information from the respondents (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006). In using the questionnaire, firstly, the researcher piloted the questionnaire before it was given to the respondents to complete. After the pilot, the researcher administered the questionnaire which was formulated in Word and it was printed and given to those who preferred a paper/ pencil method and were present on campus and affected by the phenomenon. Additionally, the researcher drafted the questionnaire using Google forms. A Google form is a web-based application used to create forms which are web-based. The link <https://forms.gle/BSNRHn99R3gt73ay7> to the questionnaire was shared with respondents through their e-mails and through their smart mobile phones. The questionnaire could be viewed on smart phones as well as be completed using

smartphones. Soon after a respondent finished filling in an on-line questionnaire, the responses were sent to the researcher's email as an on-line questionnaire that was drafted using the researcher's e-mail address specifically the Gmail account. Previous records of student marks were used in establishing which students were mostly affected by the phenomenon; thereby lessening the researcher's work. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2015) a questionnaire consists of a list of questions which a respondent should answer. Normally the questionnaire contains either structured or non-structured questions. Section A, consisted of structured questions, whereby the researcher expected the respondents to choose from answers which were given. Section B consisted of non-structured questions which gave respondents the freedom to answer questions in their own words. The researcher chose this type of method because it could reach a large number of respondents within a short period of time. Another method which was used was an interview guide. According to Creswell (2007), interviews refer to a structured conversation between the researcher and the respondents whereby the researcher uses an interview schedule which consists of questions in a pre-arranged order. Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) stated that qualitative researchers may spend a great deal of time with participants. Since the researcher is the one recording the responses. The detailed recording of the process by the researcher enabled the researcher to understand the setting and the participants better. The researcher made prior appointments with staff members. Thereafter the researcher visited staff members in their offices and asked them questions which were on the interview schedule. The interview schedule consisted of non-structured questions. Staff members who were far or at the other Regional offices were interviewed telephonically using the same interview guide.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

Descriptive statistics helped in analysing descriptive questions. Data from a Google form (questionnaire) was generated into a spread sheet which was in excel, Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics refers to numbers that are used to summarize and describe data (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2001). In the quantitative part of the study, a mixture of descriptive statistics and graphs were used depending on the type of questions, for example structured questions were imputed into excel, which assisted in calculating percentages to generate different types of figures, bar charts and pie charts.

Data in the qualitative aspect of the study was analysed using content analysis. The researcher looked for words and phrases, repetitions when analysing the primary data so that the most commonly used ones were identified and codes were assigned to them. Data which was assigned codes was inputted into excel so that the occurrence of words was counted and then converted into percentages. This assisted the researcher in using the data to generate graphs and tables thereby interpreting each graph and table. Primary and secondary data was compared as follows:

The comparison between primary and secondary data involved comparing primary data which was obtained through a questionnaire and an interview guide to data reviewed in the literature. The similarities and differences between the primary and secondary data were discovered and interpreted. The researcher discussed by interpreting major similarities and differences between primary and secondary data.

The researcher also had a chance of pinpointing which aspect of the topic of study was not mentioned by the respondents though the respondents were expected to mention them. Lastly, the researcher summarised the data by linking the research findings to the research questions of the study. Data in quantitative form was also analysed considering the researcher's research questions.

### **3.8 Ethical issues**

The following ethics were observed namely: Autonomy; this means the researcher must first get consent of every person who will participate in the study; participants should participate voluntarily in the study and that they should be told that they have the freedom to withdraw from participating at any time. Participants should be given all the information on what the study expects of them so that they can make a choice to participate or not.

#### **3.8.1 Non- Maleficence**

The research should do no harm to the participants in any form whether physical, emotional or social. Therefore, the researcher needs to tell the respondents how the information will be made public; will the identities of the respondents be made public? Participants should be assured of confidentiality with regards to the information which they are providing.

### **3.8.2 Beneficence**

The respondents were told how they will benefit from the research. Beneficence means the study must be beneficial (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This research was undertaken to find a solution on students support services for the respondents thus respondents were told in advance and the benefit of it included pinpointing the most student support services which can help students to progress and complete their studies. Firstly, the researcher presented an introduction letter from the University of Namibia, Centre for Research and Publications. Secondly, the researcher wrote a letter to the Director of CODEL to request permission to conduct the study among enrolled students. The informed consent was sought from the participants of the study by asking them to sign the consent form. The consent form explained issues of confidentiality and anonymity that were maintained.

The participants were informed in advance about the purpose of the study and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty and participants were also informed how they would benefit from the study. The introductory part of the questionnaire read “Please note that participation in this survey is voluntary”. Your feedback will be treated with the highest degree of confidentiality, and to preserve your privacy, we kindly request that you do not provide any personal information such as your name, student number and phone number”.

The researcher collected data is being kept for three years and then cast-off to prevent other researchers from accessing the data.

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter presented the research methods used to collect data pertaining to the student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia's CODEL. The chapter described the research design and research approach. It was emphasised that it is important to choose the right research design for the study so as to arrive at or to yield the expected results. Other aspects outlined in this chapter included population, sample and sampling procedures. The sample for this study was drawn from students who were studying on distance. These were the students mostly impacted by student support services leading to them not to progress and complete their studies on time, and members of staff who were employed at the Centre. The chapter also included the data analysis and ethical considerations. Data was analysed using content analysis and descriptive statistics. The ethical clearance was received from the Centre for Publications and research at the University of Namibia.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS AND RESULTS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results pertaining to the effectiveness of student support services availed to distance students at the CODEL of the University of Namibia. This chapter consists of part 1 and part 2. Part 1 is on responses of students at CODEL. Part B is on responses of staff of CODEL.

### **4.2 Part 1: Responses of students at CODEL**

The presentation of results in part 1 follows this sequence:

- Demographic information,
- Student programs and motivation
- What are the types of student support services availed to distance students at CODEL of the University of Namibia?
- How effective are student support services to distance students at CODEL of the University of Namibia?
- What areas of student support services needs improvements at the CODEL of the University of Namibia?
- What are the reasons to why distance students may fail to progress in their studies?

#### **4.2.1 Demographic Information**

The information below is all about demographic information of respondents mainly students who participated in the study.

##### **4.2.1.1 Socio-economic Demographic data of respondents**

The participants were asked to complete their demographic information and the responses are shown in Table 1:

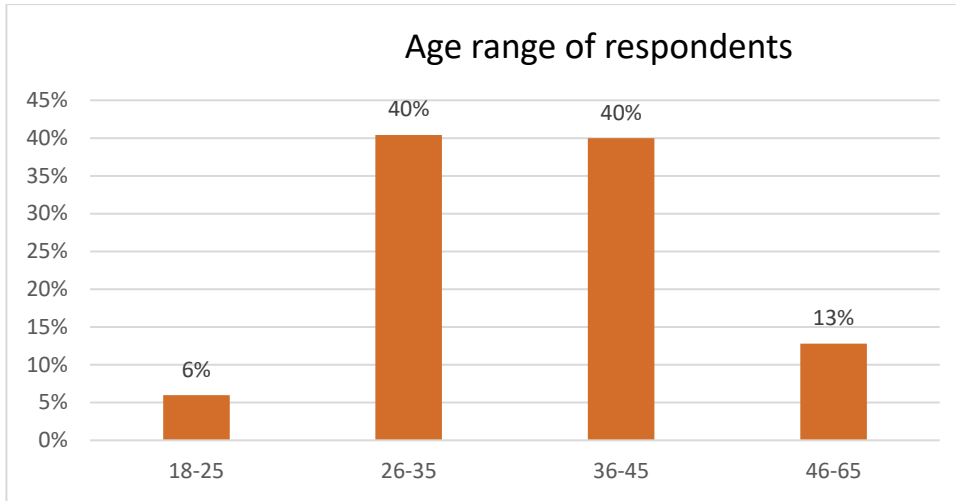
**Table 4.1: Gender statistics of distance students at CODEL of the University of Namibia**

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	17	35.4%
Female	31	64.6%
Total	48	100%

Table 4.1 above shows that (64.6%) of respondents were female whereas 35.4% were Male. The above results clearly show that more females responded positively to the questionnaire than males. On the other hand, that probably means that female enrolment is more at the University of Namibia compared to males.

##### **4.2.1.2 The age categories of respondents**

The participants were asked to complete their age categories and the responses are shown in Figure: 4.1 below:



**Figure 4.1: The Age categories of respondents of distance students at CODEL**

Figure 4.1 shows that 40% of distance students were between the ages of 36-45, followed by respondents between the ages of 46-65 with 40%. The third age categories of respondents were between 46-65 with 13% and the last ages of respondents were between, 18-25 with 6%.

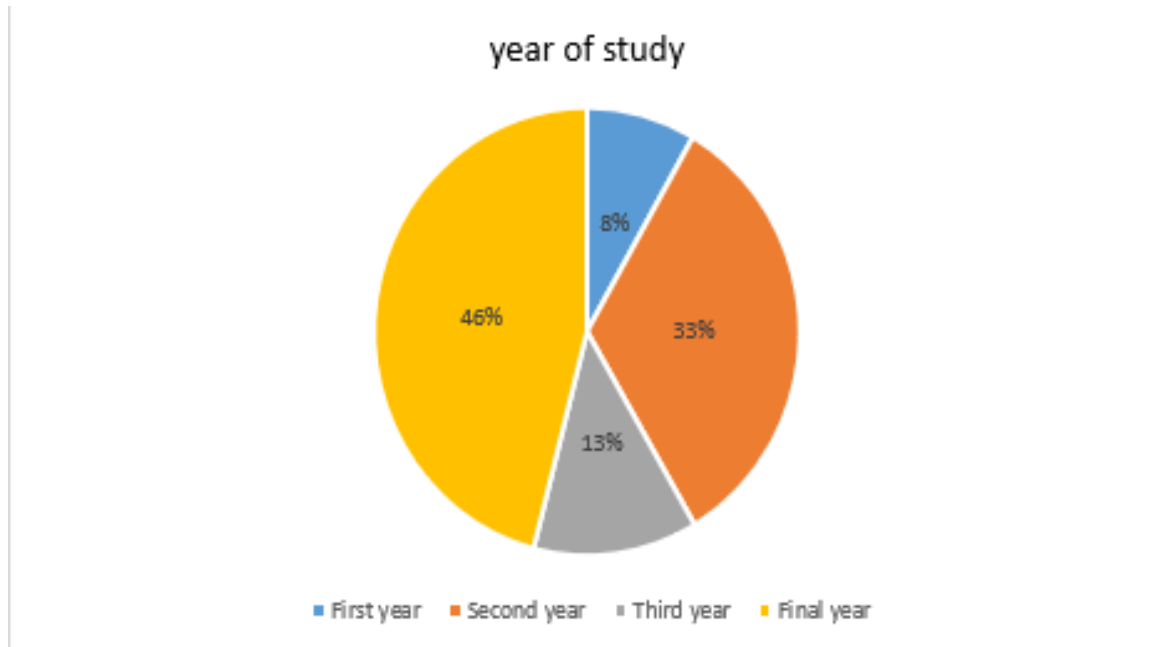
The figure clearly also shows that the majority of distance students were relatively mature adult students who would not be able to attend full-time studies due to other commitments, for example, family and work commitments or they would want to work and study so that they can fund their studies. The figure further indicates that 6% of respondents were the youth meaning the youth are also interested in taking their courses on distance but not most of the time.

### **4.3 Student programs and motivation**

The information below is on the program of study of the respondents and how they were motivated in wanting to complete their studies.

### 4.3.1 The years of study of distance students at CODEL

The participants were asked to complete their years of study and the responses are shown in Figure 4.2 below;



**Figure 4.2: Year of study of participants: distance students at CODEL**

Figure 4.2 shows that 46% of respondents who were mostly affected by the phenomenon of lack of student support services impacting on their progress and completion studies were in their final year followed by 33% of students who were in their second year. This results also indicates that mostly those that participated in the study are mostly students that are in their second and final year.

### **4.3.2 The courses of study of distance students at CODEL**

The participants were asked to complete their course of study and the responses are shown in table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Course of study of distance students at CODEL**

Diploma	9	19 %
Degree	39	81%

Table 4.2 shows that 81% of respondents were doing degrees followed by 19% who were doing diplomas. This means that the majority of students who participated are doing degrees, followed by diploma programs.

### **4.3.3 Frequency of students' interaction with fellow students and Lecturers at CODEL**

Participants were asked to complete how often they interact with fellow students and Lecturers at the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning of the University of Namibia and responses are shown in figure 4.3.

**Figure 4. 3: How often students interact with fellow students and Lecturers at CODEL**

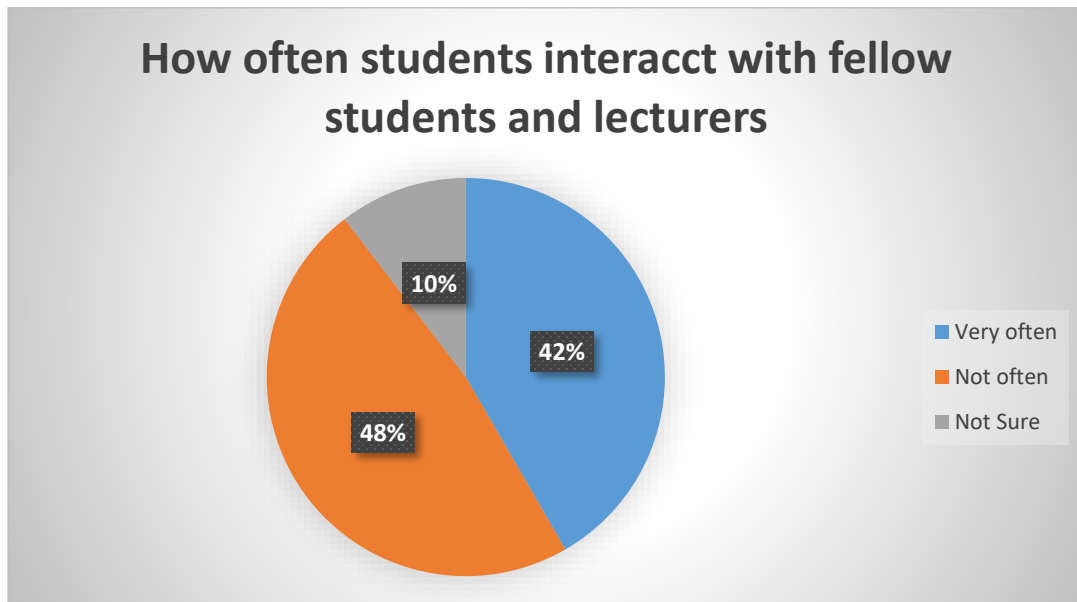


Figure 4.3 shows that 48% of students do not interact with fellow students and lecturers followed by 42% of respondents who indicated that they normally used to interact with fellow students. Moreover, 10% indicated that they are not sure if they normally used to interact with students and lecturers. The data clearly shows that students do not interact with fellow students and lecturers that is to say, that could be that students are far from one another or they do not see the need to interact with students and lecturers.

Additionally, those that interact with fellow students and lecturer have seen the importance of interacting with students and lecturers thus interacting.

#### 4.3.4 Motivation and commitment of students in completing their studies at CODEL

The participants were asked to complete how motivated and committed are they in wanting to complete their studies at CODEL, the responses are shown in table 4.3.

**Table 4.3 Motivation and commitments of students.**

<b>How motivated</b>	<b>No of Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very Motivated	44	92%
Not Motivated	3	6%
Not sure	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	48	100%

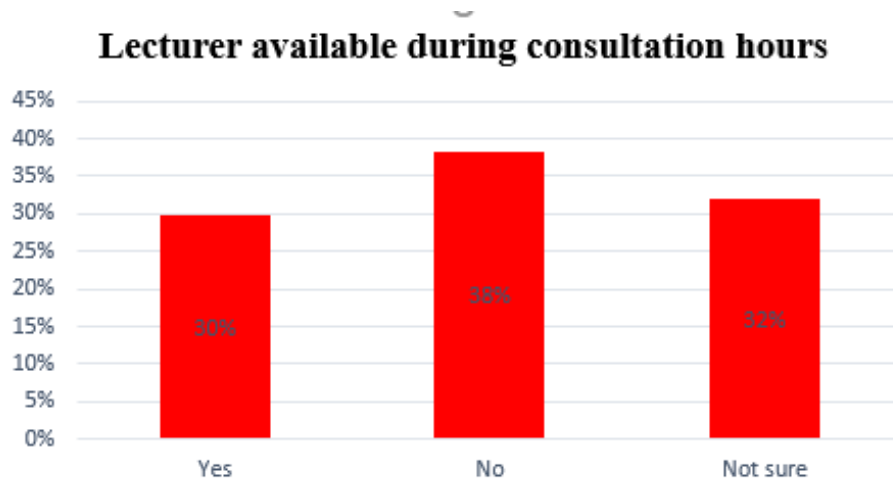
The table 4.3 shows that 92% of students are very much motivated in wanting to complete their studies whereas 6% of students are not motivated in wanting to finish their studies. In addition, the respondents explained that they were not motivated and provided their views as follows:

- *Poor academic administration from the university especially from CODEL management.*
- *Emotionally unstable and that at times many questions which students ask are not answered or are referred from one person to the next and that demotivates students.*

The above data shows that a high number of students are very much motivated and committed in wanting to complete their studies and that few were not motivated because of poor services which they have received from CODEL.

#### 4.3.5 The availability of lectures available during consultation hours at CODEL

Participants were asked to complete if lecturers are available during consultation times at CODEL, the responses are shown in figure 4.4. Responses to the availability of lectures during consultation hours are shown in figure 4.4 below.



**Figure 4.4: Lecturer Availability during consultation hours at CODEL**

Figure 4.4, indicates that 38% of respondents responded that lecturers were not available during consultation office hours whereas 30% of students responded that lecturers were available during consultation office hours. Additionally, 32% of students were not sure if lecturers were available for consultation during office hours. Consequently, one student indicated that mostly lecturers are not available during consultation hours though there are consultations hours placed on their doors and commented that;

*“I travelled all the way from Swakopmund to come and see one of our lecturers for research and I waited for him during consultation hours only to waste my transport money the lecturer was nowhere to be found”.*

Students believe that the following ways be implemented to improve lecturer availability namely:

- *Lecturer should be in their offices even when they don't have classes so that students can find them.*
- *Lecturers should be monitored and followed for example by giving a monthly or a weekly report providing the number of students who had visited their offices and which questions were tackled with students.*
- *They should be told how students may benefit from consultations.*
- *Lecturers to pay the effort of students by deducting them a certain fee or even a warning from HOD if they are not available during consultation hours.*

Overall, it can be seen from the data above that lecturers were not available during consultation hours even when students needed them most, thus students suggested ways on improving lecturer availability and moreover some students indicated that they are not sure if lecturer were not available during consultation hours citing that they are not always on campus to consult lecturers.

#### **4.4 Students views on the types of student support services**

Students were asked the types of student support services, their effectiveness and how they can be improved at CODEL and the results are presented below:

#### 4.4.1 Students views on the current student support services

Participants were asked to complete how they view the current student support services which are available at the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning of the University of Namibia the responses are shown in table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Current view on student support services at CODEL**

<b>Current student support services at CODEL</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Good	15	32.6%
Poor	22	47.8%
Cannot say	9	19.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.4 shows that 47.8% of students responded that the support services which are available at CODEL are very poor, whereas 32.6% of student's responded that current student support services are good. Also, 19.6% indicated that they cannot say anything with regards to the current student support services at CODEL. Students cited the reasons as to why they view current support services as good, poor and cannot say, as follows:

Reasons as to why they view current student support services as good:

- *Some officials are very supportive and helpful.*
- *They are always supportive whenever a student submits an inquiry.*
- *The services are good but sometimes it is hard to get your call picked up, in general it's good.*
- *Because every time I need assistance I am assisted.*
- *Officers are readily available for students.*
- *At least staff responds to student's inquiries even not on time.*

***Reasons as to why they view current student services as poor:***

- *Not supported at all, no orientation done for students.*
- *They don't answer their phone; they have attitude when you approach their offices*
- *They do not reply to emails at all, you ask something they are quiet but quick to give us surveys.*
- *They take long to attend to problems you email to them.*
- *Not every CODEL staff is willing to assist students politely.*
- *They are trying their level best but maybe overloaded, lock themselves in their offices while we are patiently waiting outside.*
- *Study materials are made available late to students, ICT services not good for every student because some students are working where there is no internet or network.*
- *Poor, because in most cases it takes long and sometimes, they are totally unreachable,*
- *Some of those who are supposed to assist us are sending us around without giving the right directions.*
- *Poor management services and disorganised.*
- *Phones not answered, student issues are not resolved or take time to be resolved, rude officials at points, Assignments marks missing all the time.*
- *Regular communication online is absent*
- *Although at the later stage support is given, it comes after scolding alterations and unpleasant words by some staff. Many at times calls are un-answered for enquiries, forcing us to reach campus in person despite the limited resources and long journeys just to find doors locked, being forced to return with no help.*
- *I should stress that the service of CODEL is very poor, study materials are not made available on time to students and we are being forced to submit assignment on time. Assignments are loaded very late on Moodle. Distance students not based in Windhoek suffer a lot at the hand of CODEL because when faced with troubles office telephone numbers made available to us are not picked up.*
- *If you call a staff at CODEL you will be put on hold for a long time or even ignored.*

- *Information reaches student very late.*
- *Misleading due dates on assignments. We are given 7 days' grace period of submitting assignments but sometimes they close the system even if it was still grace period.*
- *Tutorial letters are given to us students late, making us to hurry in writing assignments and if assignments are written while you are in a hurry that may result in poor quality of assignment.*
- *Previous examinations marks and assignments are no were to be found and as I student you even wonder who is responsible.*

***Reasons as to why they cannot say anything pertaining to the current student services:***

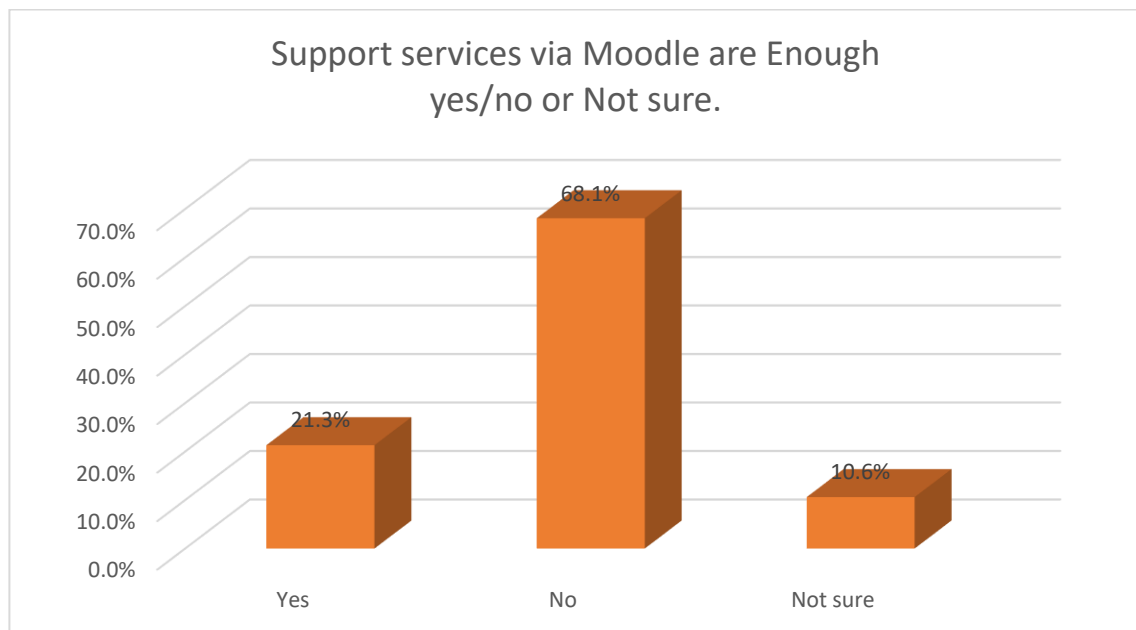
- *Sometimes we are supported sometimes not.*
- *Some staff are good but some are rude to students, I cannot judge.*
- *I barely go there.*
- *The support is not acceptable and is unreliable. Students make effort to register but CODeL will not provide a student with materials and assignments and the proposed ticketing system does not help. If you call student support officers, it becomes a problem and enemy-ship can arise between a student and student support officer.*
- *No answer when you call.*
- *"I cannot say I am a distance student and I only meet these staffs during vacation school.*

The data above shows clearly that the current student support services at CODeL was viewed as poor by students and most of the reasons for support services being viewed as poor were that there was no orientation for first year students, study materials were not available on time to students and that regular communication on-line was absent. Though the current student support services were viewed poor by many, there was also a high number of students who viewed the current support services as good.

#### 4.4.2 Support services delivered via Moodle

Participant were asked if support services delivered via Moodle as a learning platform were enough for distance students at CODEL, the responses are shown in figure 4.5.

The support services delivered via Moodle as a learning platform for distance students are shown in figure 4.5.



**Figure 4.5: Support services delivered via Moodle as a learning platform enough for distance students**

The above figure shows that support services delivered via Moodle are not enough and 68.1% of the respondents were of the opinion that support services delivered via Moodle are not enough, followed by 21.3% who indicated that support services were enough, on top of that 10.6% of the respondents are not sure if support services delivered Via Moodle are enough. Respondents indicated that support services delivered via Moodle are not enough and highlighted the following reasons as to why student support services delivered via Moodle not enough, and how they can be improved namely:

- *Not all support services can be on-line.*
- *The technology is advanced and leaves some student stranded.*
- *Not enough, because short message is sometimes uploaded that are not clear and very late.*
- *To support is very difficult because they do not know how to go about it. Prefer the old system portal it was user friendly.*
- *Support services should be easily accessible on Moodle instead of downloading them otherwise students will not see them.*
- *No because we cannot access those support services on-line.*
- *We would like to see notes appearing on our Moodle platforms and get rid of old notes of 3 to 4 years back.*
- *Some of students do not have access to internet, so Moodle is not the solution*

From the above data, student support services delivered via Moodle as a learning platform were viewed not enough by students among all, the reasons which were cited are that in order for one to know a type of student support service one needs to download it of which is not easy on a mobile phone. Students came up with views on how to improve student support services such as that student support services should be easily visible not downloaded.

#### **4.4.3 Student support services considered effective by students**

The participants were asked which student support services they considered effective in assisting them to progress in their studies are in table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Student support services considered effective by students in assisting them to progress in their studies**

<b>Student support services</b>	<b>No. of Respondents/ Extremely effective</b>	<b>No. of Respondents/ Very effective</b>	<b>No. of Respondents Somewhat effective</b>	<b>No. of Respondents /Not so effective</b>	<b>No. of Respondents/ Not at all effective</b>
<b>1.Academic counselling</b>	8 (18%)	10 (23%)	14(32%)	9(20%)	3 (7%)
<b>2.Administrative support</b>	10 (22.72)	21(47.72%)	7(16%)	4(9%)	2 (5%)
<b>3. Orientation</b>	8 ( 17.77%)	12(26.67%)	16(35.55%)	5 (11.11%)	4 (8.88%)
<b>4.Vacation schools</b>	23 (48.94%)	2 (4.26)	17(36.17)	1 (2.13%)	4 (8.51)
<b>3.Telephone tutoring</b>	3 (6.98%)	9(20.93%)	9(20.93%)	14 (32.56%)	8 (18.60%)
<b>4.Face-to-face / Saturday classes</b>	17 (38.63%)	5 (11.36%)	8(18.18%)	6 (13.64%)	8(18.18%)

Table 4.5 above shows that respondents indicated that they considered vacation school with 48.94% extremely effective, followed by Administrative support with 47.72% which was considered very effective. And lastly, Face-to-face / Saturday classes which was also viewed extremely effective by respondents with 38.63%. Respondents viewed vacation

school, Administrative support and face-to-face/ Saturday classes as the three support services which they considered effective in assisting them to progress in their studies.

***Students gave reasons as to why they considered some types of student support services as assisting them to progress, the reasons given were:***

- *Vacation school; this is where students get to know and ask questions.*
- *Face -to-face will help me to understand well, where I have difficulties and lecturers will provide notes as in our study guides there is no enough information.*
- *More academic support leads to improvement in academic results.*
- *Vacation school is fitting with our schedule because we are working and other commitments, telephones are just ringing, no reply.*
- *Students need to learn from lectures during the vacation school, tutors can help for exercises but not lecturing new topics.*
- *We need vacation school as part of support and sort of guidance or direction towards improving on our academic results.*
- *Vacation school is not sufficient to cover the difficult parts of the course.*
- *Administrative support is always there, and the telephone tutoring is very well.*  
*Vacation school is sometimes time wasting because some lectures don't turn up.*
- *I find administrative support very effective, Face to face and Saturday classes.*
- *Vacation school for better improvement on our studies.*

***Reasons as to why they viewed student support services not assisting them to progress in their studies namely:***

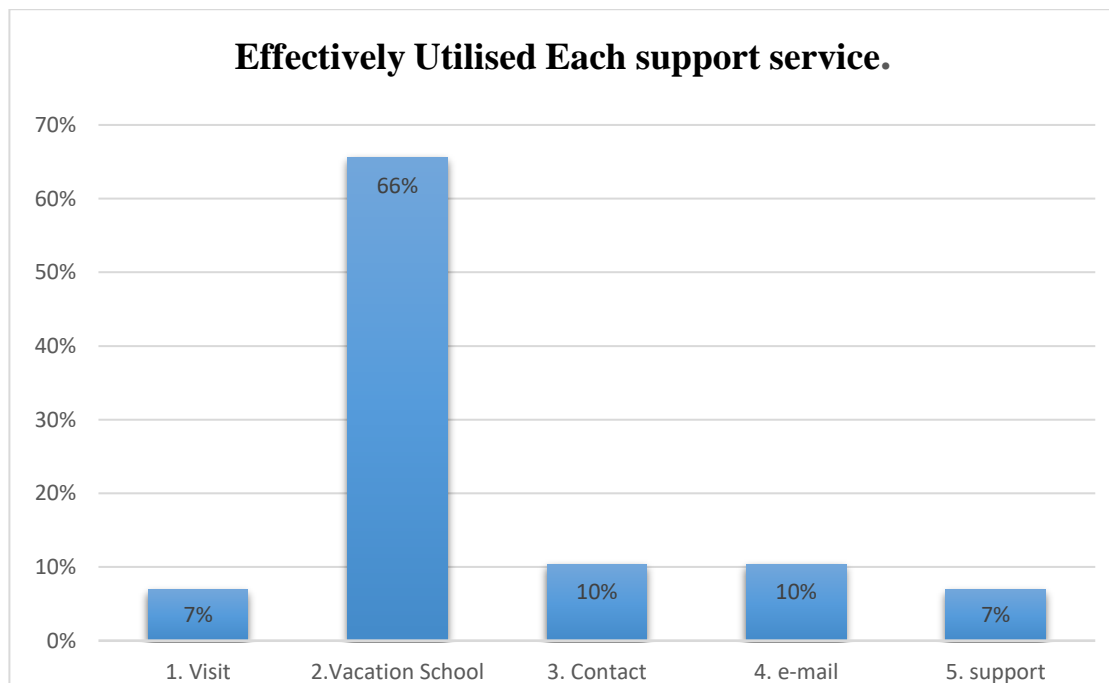
- *There are no Saturday classes at the centres outside of Windhoek.*
- *Some of those support services are not availed to distance students.*

The above data clearly interprets that student support services which students viewed as extremely effective, very effective in assisting them to progress in their studies are the vacation school, administrative support and face-to-face /Saturday classes whereas academic counselling, orientation and telephone tutoring were not viewed effective in

assisting students to progress in their studies. The reasons for students or respondent's choices are also given such as that some support services are not available to students.

#### 4.5 The Utilisation of student support services at CODEL

Figure 4.6: The utilization of student support services: responses were used to identify themes and codes and the analysis was as in Figure 4.7 below, showing the utilisation of student support services at the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning.



**Figure 4.6: What students have done to effectively utilize each of the student support services.**

Figure 4.6 show that in order to effectively utilise support services, students attended vacation school. This was shown by 66% of the respondents who indicated that they normally used to attend vacation school; secondly, respondents indicated that they

contacted the Centres. This was shown by 10% of the students. Then, *students contacted staff for support* - this is shown by 10%. *They sent e-mails to staff at the Centre* - this is shown by 10%. Lastly, 7% of the respondents indicated that *they normally used to visit the Centre so that they use the available support services*. Finally, 7% indicated that *they make use of any available support services*.

#### 4.6 Areas to improve student support at CODEL of Namibia

Participants were asked which areas to improve student support services at the Centre, for Open Distance and eLearning and the responses are shown in table 4.6

**Table 4.6: Areas to improve student support services at CODEL**

Themes	Codes	Frequency	Percentage
Communication	A	14	34%
System Improvements	B	3	7%
Study Materials	c	7	17%
Support Services	d	17	41%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4. 6 shows that (41%) of the respondents indicated that support services need to be improved for example, they pointed that:

- *Face-to-face Saturday classes should be introduced at the entire Centre's not only Windhoek.*
- *Allocate more time for the vacation school.*
- *Decentralize all support services to the entire Centre's.*
- *Increase the number of tutors so they mark together for prompt feedback.*

On table 4.6 communication improvements follows with 34% the areas which needs improvements as suggested by respondents are:

- *Staffs should always reply to student's e-mails.*
- *Attend to student's inquiries on time.*
- *Telephones must be answered at all times.*
- *Update information both on Moodle and Students portals.*

Above all study materials improvements follows with 17% the areas which needs improvements as by the respondents are:

- *Online and study materials be available to students on time.*
- *Assignments to be uploaded on time so students find time to do assignments.*
- *Material distribution department should be improved that study materials are distributed immediately after registration and materials should be distributed even on Saturdays.*
- *Study materials should be written before courses are run, "they give us assignments while there are no study materials saying we must use books in the library".*

System improvements follows with 7% the areas which need improvements as by respondents are:

- *Moodle need some attention. It's not user friendly.*
- *Provide enough internet services and student computers to use at the Centre's.*

The data above clearly shows areas to improve support services which the respondents pinpointed and these are students support services and communications. Students pointed that the Centre should allocate more time to the vacation school and that staffs should try by all means in ensuring that it attends to student's inquiries on time weather it's by telephone or by e-mail.

#### 4.7 Reasons why distance students fail to progress

The participants were asked why distance students fail to progress or complete their studies and the responses are shown in the below 4.7. The table shows reasons as to why students may fail to progress in their studies or fail to complete their studies. 58% of students indicated that lack of student support services as a reason as to why they may fail to progress or complete their studies, followed by lack of finances with 20%, and followed by lack of motivation with 15%, and lastly, students as well indicated life commitments as a reason as to why they may fail to progress in their studies with mainly with 8%.

**Table 4.7: The reasons why distance students fail to progress or complete their studies**

Themes	Codes	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Motivation	E	6	15%
Life commitments	F	3	8%
Finances	G	8	20%
Lack of support services	H	23	58%
	Total	40	100%

#### 4.8 Reasons why distance students may opt to drop out a course

The reasons why distance students may opt to drop out of a course at the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning of the University of Namibia are in table 4.8.

**Table 4.8: Reasons why distance students may opt to drop out of a course at the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning of the University of Namibia**

Themes	Codes	Frequency	Percentage
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Lack of funds	I	9	23%
Lack of support services	J	9	23%
Frustrations	K	14	36%
Other commitments	L	7	18%
	Total	39	100%

The above table shows that 36% of students indicated that they may opt to drop out of a course due to frustrations. Secondly, 23% indicated that they may opt to drop out of a course due to lack of student support services. Thirdly, 23% indicated that lack of funds may result in students to opt to drop out of a course, lastly 18% of respondents indicated that they may opt to drop out of a course due to other commitments such as work and family commitments.

36% of students were of the opinion that they may opt to drop out of a course because they are frustrated due to the following reasons:

- *Missing of examination marks while the student wrote the exam and rudeness of lectures when you need clarity on the question.*

18% indicated that they may opt to drop out due to other commitments and they are as follows:

- *Lack of family support, work commitments and lack of time to study.*
- *Busy schedules, balancing work with studies.*
- *work commitments*
- *Family and work pressure.*

Overall the data above, shows that students may opt to drop out of a course at CODEL because of frustrations which are brought to them by the Centre, for example students were frustrated because mostly their examination marks were missing while they wrote examination among others students also highlighted that they may opt to drop out of a course because they find it difficult to balance work with studies.

#### **4.9 Additional comments pertaining to student support services**

Participants were asked if they have additional comments pertaining to student support services at the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning and the responses are shown in table 4.9. The table shows that students would want the Centre for Open, Distance and e-learning to improve its student support services thus they came up with comments which the Centre can take into account if it considers assisting students to progress and complete their studies as well as a way of retaining new and old students.

**Table 4.9: Additional comments pertaining to student support services at the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning**

<p>CODeL should support student fully as the mode of study is not easy.</p> <p>Students wants orientations at the beginning of the year</p> <p>Moodle as a learning management system not benefiting everyone as students in remote areas find it hard to be on-line every time due to lack of connectivity</p> <p>UNAM-CODeL should have permanent on-line agents that can be answering or taking up and answering student query.</p> <p>It was good if CODeL can set up WhatsApp groups for each course.</p> <p>The Centre should increase the number of staffs and they should be trained on customer service.</p> <p>Vacation school should increase from 3 days to 5 or 10 days in a semester.</p> <p>Staffs should be answering their telephone promptly. There should be someone on standby answering their phones if they are not in office.</p> <p>CODeL should avail study materials on time. And they should update students on new developments.</p> <p>Distance students should have a representative in the UNAM-SRC council at all campuses.</p>
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CODeL must have a call Centre where students can call and inquire about all their problem cases.

CODeL to keep records of lecturer's names who marks CODeL scripts as such will assist when exam marks of distance students are lost.

#### **4.10 Part 2: Responses of staff at CODeL**

**The presentation of data in part 2 follows this sequence.**

- Staffs views as which support service is used mostly by students
- What staffs do often to interact and support CODeL students of the University of Namibia
- Staffs views on how can CODeL improve student support services which are provided to distance students at the University of Namibia.
- Additional comments by staffs on the support services at the CODeL of the University of Namibia.

##### **4.10.1 Staff's views as to which support service is used mostly by students**

Participants were asked what is their view as which support service is used mostly by students and the responses are shown below;

The following are student support services which staffs viewed as mostly used by students mainly:

- *Administrative support*
- *Vacation school*
- *Face to face/ Saturday classes*

Participants were asked to explain as which student support services are mostly used by students and why and their responses are as follows;

- *Face-to-face or Saturday classes and vacation school because that's the time students can get time to see the lecturers and ask questions and learn about subject or module content.*
- *Administrative support as mostly student's inquiries are on administrative matters such as on their registrations, missing assignment and exam marks.*

The data above shows that the types of student support services which staffs viewed as the ones mostly used by students were administrative support, vacation school and face-to-face Saturday classes. With regards to face-to-face Saturday classes, students have shown preferences with face-to-face Saturday classes as that's the time when they can be able to see the lecturers, be able to ask questions and learn more about the subject content. On administrative support student's inquiries are mainly on registrations, missing assignment marks and exam marks.

#### **4.10.2 Staffs views on how effective are student support services**

Participants were asked how effective are available student support services to distance students towards progressing and completing their studies the responses are shown in Table 4.10.

**Table 4.10: How effective are available student support services to distance students towards progressing and completing their studies.**

<b>Face to face/ Saturday classes</b>	Extremely effective	40%
	Very effective	20%
	Somewhat effective	40%
<b>Administrative Support</b>	Extremely effective	17%
	Very effective	67%
	Somewhat effective	17%
<b>Telephone Tutoring</b>	Extremely effective	17%

	Somewhat effective	33%
	Not so effective	67%
<b>Vacation school</b>	Extremely Effective	40%
	Very Effective	60%
	Somewhat effective	20%

Table 4.10 shows that the most effective student support services in assisting distance students to progress and complete their studies is the use of administrative support and vacation school. Administrative support with 67%, followed by Vacation school with 60% and also viewed face to face/ Saturday classes as extremely effective this is shown by 60% of the respondents.

#### **4.10.3 What staff do often to interact and support CODEL students**

Participants were asked what they often do to interact and support CODEL students at the University of Namibia and the responses are shown in table 4.11

**Table 4. 11: What staffs do often to interact and support CODEL students at the University of Namibia?**

<p>On a daily basis I see students pertaining to their exemptions, students asking for their marks; students calling on a daily basis.</p> <p>Trying to stay in contact via e-mail or on social media e.g. WhatsApp</p> <p>I allow them to ask questions and answer them in a politely way.</p> <p>Yes, by providing information about their studies</p> <p>Through videos Tutorials</p> <p>Through student inquiries</p>
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The table above shows what staffs often does to interact with students and the most one which was highlighted was: “on a daily basis I see students pertaining to their exemptions, students asking for their marks; students calling on a daily basis”.

#### **4.10.4 Staff’s views on how CODEL can improve student support services**

Participants were asked how CODEL can improve students’ support services which are provided to distance students at the University of Namibia and the respondent’s respondent by giving ways on how student support services can be improved and this is shown on Table 4.12

**Table 4.12: Ways in which CODEL staff could improve student support**

<p>CODEL management to invest more on student support services so that students are supported properly so that they can complete their studies.</p> <p>By employing competent staff, capacitating the existing staff members and improving on the current equipment e.g. computers.</p> <p>CODEL must improve online delivery; materials must be available to students and if study materials are not in stock, they must be printed on time.</p> <p>Vacation school to be allocated with more time e.g. five days or more.</p> <p>They should have their own orientation seminars for first year students.</p> <p>By ensuring that students get assignments upon registration, all assignment and examination marks are given to students on time.</p>
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Table 4.12 above shows ways in which staff members believe how the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning can improve student support services of which can be beneficial to distance students if they would want their students to progress and complete their studies.

#### **4.10.5 Additional comments by staff on the support services at CODEL**

Participants were asked if they were having any additional comments on the student support services available at CODEL of the University of Namibia the responses are shown on table 4.13

**Table 4.13: Additional comments by staffs on the support services at the CODEL of the University of Namibia.**

<p>Student support officers to reach out to everyone this can be done via telephone or even via e-mails</p> <p>I wish the academic arm of the university will fully support CODEL to achieve its objectives.</p> <p>Students should be trained on how to use the learning management system Moodle; students' needs orientations on how to use online facilities for CODEL; they are really struggling to submit assignments.</p> <p>Need a student support officer in Windhoek for Upper and Lower Primary Education students instead of the officer stationed at Oshakati Centre.</p> <p>We must improve as staffs on responding to students on time.</p>
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Table 4.13 shows that it's never too late for CODEL to improve on student support services which are provided to students. From the above, staffs provided additional ways or areas to improve student support services which CODEL can follow so that available student support services can help students to progress and complete their studies.

#### **4.11 Summary**

This chapter presented results pertaining to the effectiveness of student support services available to distance students at CODEL. The chapter comprised of part 1 and part 2. Part 1 was about the responses of the students at CODEL on student support services as a factor that impacts on students' progress and completion of studies. Here the types and the effectiveness of available student support services were explored and the most useful support services were administrative support, vacation school and Face-to face / Saturday classes, areas to improve student support services were also identified such as decentralising all student support services to all centres. Part 2 was about the Responses of the staff members at CODEL.

In this chapter one can see that student responses did not differ with those of the members of staff. Both categories of respondents shared the same sentiments on the types of student support services which were mostly used by distance students and how beneficial they were. Also, how often students and staff interact as well as which areas in which to improve student support services. Both strata of respondents provided reasons related to the types of student support services, effectiveness of student support services and areas to improve student support services. The next chapter presents discussions of the results of the study and presents the findings.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the results pertaining to the effectiveness of student support services availed to distance students at the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning of the University of Namibia. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results based on the research questions provided in chapter 1, pertaining to student support services. The first section is about the student program and motivations and is followed by the types of student support services availed to distance students of CODEL. The next section is about the effectiveness of student support services to distance students and areas of student support services that need improvement at CODEL. Finally, the section will discuss results pertaining to the reasons as to why distance students may fail to progress in their studies.

### **5.2 Student programs and motivations**

The results of the study revealed that the majority of students who participated in the study were enrolled for degrees (see Chapter 4, Table 4.2). This can be relating to Fan and Lee (2006) who found out that most of the distance students may choose to study for a college degree because they see a degree as opening up job opportunities for them. In this study students were motivated to study for degrees as they believed that these could open greater career opportunities for them.

Secondly, in this study it seems that students do not interact with fellow students and the lecturer that often. This could be averred because as it shows in chapter 4, figure 4.3, the majority of students do not interact with their lecturers. In the Tinto retention theory (1987) it was shown that academic and administrative staff needs to interact with students as this promotes commitment and it is also regarded as a way in which students would be satisfied with the institution where they are registered. Lack of student interaction is a cause for concern as it means that students would not easily integrate within the institution and that would mean that students would not easily cope with their studies, thus delaying completion of their courses.

Additionally, Students were motivated and committed to complete their studies, for example, Chapter 4; Table 4.3 shows that students were very much motivated in wanting to complete their studies. However, some students were not motivated. Some of the reasons cited for the lack of motivation were poor academic administration from CODEL management. One of the practices that demotivated students was the practice of having their questions or queries not answered or the process of being referred from one person to the next. Moreover, the availability of lecturers was viewed as a problem because most lecturers were not available for consultation despite placing consultation hours on their doors. This is shown in Chapter 4, figure 4.4. Some students travelled long distances to come and see lecturers but they could not find them during consultation hours. Students believed that lecturers should be in their offices even when they do not have classes so that students can find them. They also suggested that there should be monitored ways of monitoring them as follows:

- Requesting a monthly report showing students who visited their offices.

- Lecturers should be coached on how students may benefit from consultations.
- Lecturers to pay the effort of students by deducting them a certain fee or even a warning from HOD if they are not available during consultation hours.

### **5.3 Types of student support services**

Various types of student support services are availed to UNAM distance students. These are: Academic Counselling, Administrative support, Orientation Seminars, vacation schools, telephone tutoring and Face-to-face/Saturday classes (See table 4.5, Chapter 4). The above findings concurs with Vincent Tinto retention theory, Tinto (2000) pointed out that providing support such as academic, personal and social support services and the ability of the institution in the introduction of frequent contacts with students that signals conditions that support students to stay with the institution given the support services which they require

In this study, participants (students) viewed student support services as poor. This can be averred because as seen in Chapter 4, Table 4.5, for a significant number of students who were unhappy with the delivery of student support services, one of the reasons given was a lack of orientation opportunities for first year students. There were no Saturday classes at the Centres outside of the main Centre (Windhoek) and some of the support services were not available to distance students. It appears that the support services delivered through Moodle as a learning management system are inadequate (Figure, 4.5). The reasons cited by participants were that some support services were not easily accessible on Moodle. In order to access them, one needs to download them so that one can familiarise themselves with particular support services which are available on Moodle.

### **5.3.2 Effectiveness of student support services to distance students**

There were student support services which were considered effective towards student success in their courses. The most effective student support service which respondents viewed as effective was the vacation school and administrative support which respondents utilised by making sure that they attended vacation school and inquired on anything which they were not clear with (figure 4.6 and table, 4.5 & 4.10). Participating staff also shared the same sentiment with regards to the most effective student support service, citing that most students come for the vacation school and that is when they receive administrative support.

Students and Staff suggested areas to improve student support services. They suggested improvements in student support services and communication services (Table 4.6). Students pointed out that the University needs to allocate more time to the vacation school and that staff should reply to students' e-mails. Moreover, staff members pointed out that student support services such as orientation on how to use Moodle as a learning management system needs to be introduced. Staff members emphasised that most students struggle to submit assignments on-line thus orientation would assist in solving some of these problems. The above findings are in line with the study of Haufiku (2007) who expressed that orientation of students lays the basis for learners as it gives students the opportunity to take full responsibility of their own learning.

### **5.3.4 Reasons why distance students fail to progress**

The reasons why students fail to progress in their studies are due to the lack of student support services (Chapter 4, Table 4.7). This can be averred because, among other reasons why students failed to progress in their studies was lack of support services which was pointed out by many students as the reason why they fail to progress. This result agrees with Rumble (2000, p.221) who pointed that students without the necessary support when studying are likely to delay the completion of program. Therefore, it is important that student support services be strengthened to facilitate completion of students' studies. In this study, another factor which was found as to why students may not progress in their studies was that most students may not have enough funds to continue with their studies of which most institutions may not find ways of assisting students in finding the means of funding their studies (Kandjaba, 2018).

### **5.3.5 Why distance-learning students may opt to drop out of a course at CODEL**

Distance-learning students often opt to drop out of a course due to frustration (Chapter 4, Table 4. 8). Among the reasons cited in the study were those of missing examination marks even when that particular student wrote the examination and has proof that they wrote examination. The findings are different from (Geisinger & Raman, 2013) who found that low grades and low self-esteem may drive students to drop out of a course. Simpson (2006) observed that reasons for students dropping out vary. The result concurs also with the Bean and Metzner (1985) bean's model which explains that there is external factor which affects persistence. An external factor such as psychological which includes stress

utility in this case, stress which emanates from students not finding what they are looking for.

### **5.3.6 Areas to improve student support at CODEL**

Areas which were highlighted as areas to improve student support were (Chapter 4, Table 4.6). Student support services which respondents indicated needs to be improved are face-to-face Saturday classes which should be available to all the centres, allocate more time to the vacation school and increase the number of tutors for prompt feedback. This differs from the results obtained by (Ozoglu, 2009) who found out that a large needs gaps was identified such as counselling services a support service which is there to promote motivation to students.

### **5.4 Summary**

This study has discussed the results of the study pertaining to the effectiveness of student support services availed to distance students at CODEL. It seems that students were motivated to study for degrees as they believed that these could open greater career opportunities for them. In this study, it was also shown that students do not interact with fellow students and the lecturers often. The types of student support services availed were: vacation school and administrative support services. These were also seen to be utilised by most students. They were also voted by students as extremely effective in assisting them to progress and complete their studies. Moreover, in this study it was learnt that though there were different student support services which were available; a few of these were being used and that not all student support services were available or accessible to all students. Student support services at CODEL have been found inadequate and

ineffective, though in the study, there were some types of student support services which were considered effective.

It was one of the findings in this chapter that student support services impact on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia's CODEL. The reasons why students fail to progress in their studies were mainly related to lack of adequate student support services. The suggested solution by the respondents in solving the issue of student support services was that the top Management of CODEL should buy into the importance of student support services to distance students by looking at areas to improve student support services so that if support services are improved then that's how the institution can retain new and old students. Distance students often opt to drop out of a course due to frustration. Among the reasons cited in the study was that of missing examination marks, while that particular student wrote the examination and has proof that they wrote examination.

## **CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise findings and provide recommendations. It is also to make conclusions, from the findings. The final section of this chapter presents the suggestions for further research.

### **6.2 Summary of findings and conclusions**

The results of the study reveal that the majority of the students who participated in the study were enrolled for degrees with 81%, this is shown in (Table, 4.2). It seems that students do not interact with fellow students and lecturers often this is shown by 48% (Figure, 4.3) of respondents indicated they don't normally interact whereas 42% indicated they normally used to interact with fellow students and lecturers. The lack of student interaction is a cause for concern as it means that students would not easily integrate within the institution, making it difficult for them to cope with their studies, thus delaying completion of the courses.

The findings from the study further revealed that indeed lack of student support services is a factor that impacts on students' progress and completion of their studies. In the study the respondents were of the view that lack of support services hindered their progress and completion of studies, leading to them dropping out of a course or to stay in a course for

too long. However, there were two types of student support services which the students considered effective and these included vacation school and administrative support.

There were also some factors leading to delays in students' progress and completion of their studies. These included the unavailability of lecturers, which was viewed as a problem because most lecturers were not available for consultation despite placing consultation hours on their doors.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

In the study the types of student support services which are offered at CODEL are face-to-face Saturday classes, vacation school, administrative support, academic counselling, and student orientation. However, there are two types of student support services which are viewed as effective by students such as vacation school and administrative support, though students have shown the two types of support services as extremely effective. There is a challenge that those that are offering such services are not offering them up to the fullest for example students used to come for the vacation school only to come and find that some lecturers are not available during vacation school or they do not turn up for classes. Overall, the types of student support services were viewed as poor by the participants with 47.8% (Table 4.4), 32.6% as good and 19.6% cannot say how good or poor are student support services. Student support services considered as poor that in itself impacts on students' progress and completion of studies. The drop out theory explains that if students are not satisfied with the support services available to them that will mean they will drop out of a course or delay in completing their studies. Areas to improve student support services so as to retain current students as guided by the retention

theory are the two support services which the respondents viewed as effective such as vacation school to encourage lecturers to turn up for vacation school as well as capacitating staff so that they can administratively support students adequately.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Based on the results reported in this study, the following recommendations are made.

#### **6.3.1 Recommendations to Academic staff**

Academic staff should be urged to be available during the vacation school as students indicated that it is the most effective student support service. Moreover, Academic staffs should be advised to be available also during consultation hours so that they attend to students' enquiries.

#### **6.3.2 Recommendation to Admin Staff**

- Admin staff should be urged to improve communicating with students as communication is a means by which students are supported, the following are communication systems which they can improve on:
  - Staff should always reply to students' e-mails.
  - Attend to students' enquiries on time.
  - Telephones must be answered at all times.
  - Update information both on Moodle and Student portals.
  - Student support officers should also reach out to everyone; this can be done via telephone or even via e-mails.

### **6.3.3 Recommendation to Students\**

- Students should be urged to bargain for the best student support services which students believe would be helping them to progress in their studies.

### **6.3.4 Recommendation to CODEL**

- More attention should be given to student support services such as conducting orientation for distance students. Orientations assist students to know all about CODEL, distance education and its operations.
- CODEL-UNAM should look at mechanisms which are aimed at assisting distance students in progressing in their studies. These could include mechanisms such as reminders which remind students when assignments are due. Also, a web-based early alert system can be introduced to notify student support officers as soon as a student starts missing the submission of assignments so that they can intervene and assist where they can.
- CODEL should ensure that academic staff and administrative staff work hand in hand so that the institution is able to retain students and prevent drop outs.
- There is a need to allocate more time to the vacation school and that staff should reply to students' e-mails on time.

## **6.4 Directions for further research**

More research should be embarked upon to find out:

- The extent of the correlation between student support services and completion.
- Why students may decide to drop out of a course and how to retain and keep distance students.
- At which level of study is the Centre having a high failure rate; is it in modules or is it at a course level and if it's at course level in which courses.

## **6.5. Summary of the whole thesis**

This research paper was all about how student support services as a factor impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia's Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning. The research was prompted by the fact that most distance students do not progress in their studies as well as they don't complete their studies on time, in other words they don't complete their studies within the given duration of the study program.

The method used was purposeful sampling and simple random sampling. Purposeful sampling was used on distance students who were affected by the phenomenon of lack of student support services impacting on their study progress and completion.

The study concludes that indeed lack of student support services is a factor that impacts on students' progress and completion of their studies. In the study, the respondents were of the view that lack of support services hindered their progress and completion of studies, leading to them dropping out of a course or to stay in a course for too long. Though the CODEL centre has student support services however, they were viewed as inadequate.

The recommendations were that students should be urged to bargain for the best student support services which students believe would be helping them to progress in their studies and that CODEL staff should improve all its communication channels, telephones and e-mails should be answered on time. Lastly, academic staffs were also urged to be available during consultation hours so that students can be assisted during consultation hours.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE: STUDENTS



#### UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

##### CENTRE FOR OPEN, DISTANCE AND eLearning (CODEL)

This survey is on analysing student support services at the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning. This research is undertaken to analyse student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia-centre for open, distance and eLearning and aims to come up with recommendations on how best students can be assisted in completing their studies.

I **Nicholette Mutenda** currently conducting a research, as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of business administration (Management strategy). The information you are going to provide will be treated with high degree of confidentiality, thus feel free when attempting to the following questions:

#### **Section A: Socio- economic Demographic data**

#### **Structured and semi- structured interview guide for CODEL students**

**Instructions: please tick (√) or cross (×) in appropriate box.**

##### 1. Gender

Female	
Male	

2. Which one of the following age categories applies to you?

18-25	
26-35	
36-45	
46-65	

3. In which year of study are you?

First year	
Second year	
Third year	
Final year	

4. Which course of study are you doing?

Certificate	
Diploma	
Degree	

5. How often do you normally interact with fellow students and lecturers?

Very often	
Not often	
Not sure	

6. How motivated and committed are you towards completing your studies?

Very Motivated	
Not Motivated	
Not sure	

6.1 If not motivated what could be the cause of the demotivation?

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.....

7. Are Lecturers available during consultation times to assist the distance students?

Yes	
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No	
Not sure	

7.1 If no or not sure, what do you think can be done to improve lecturer availability for consultations?

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**Section B: Students views on the types of student support services; their effectiveness and how they could be improved.**

**8.** How do you view current student support services at the Centre: CODEL?

Good	
Poor	
Cannot say	

8.2 Explain your answer in 8

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9. Are support services delivered via Moodle as a learning platform enough for distance students? Yes/No

Yes	
No	
Not sure	

9.1 If No or not sure what can be done to improve the support platform?

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**10.** The following are different support services availed to distance students at CODEL. Use the rating scale provided to indicate which of these support services could be considered effective in assisting you to progress in your studies

	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Not so effective	Not at all effective
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Academic Counselling					
Administrative support					
Orientation Seminars					
Vacation schools					
Telephone tutoring					
Face-to- face / Saturday classes					

10.1 Explain the reasons for your choices in 10.

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11. Explain what you have done to effectively utilise each of the student support services listed in 10 in your studies.

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12. Specify the areas of improvement needed in the provision of student support services at the CODEL of the University of Namibia

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13. What are the reasons why distance students fail to progress or complete their studies?

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14. What are the reasons why students of CODEL may opt to drop out of a course?

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15. Write any other comment that you have pertaining to student support services at the  
CODeL of the University of Namibia.

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**Thank you for participating in this structured and semi-structured interview guide**

**APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE (STAFF)**



**Interview Guide (Staff)**

This research is undertaken to analyse student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia-centre for open, distance and eLearning and aims to come up with recommendations on how best students can be assisted in completing their studies.

I **Nicholette Mutenda** currently conducting a research, as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of business administration (Management strategy). The information you are going to provide will be treated with high degree of confidentiality, thus feel free when attempting to the following questions

The following are available student support services

- |                                  |
|----------------------------------|
| Academic Counselling             |
| Administrative support           |
| Orientation Seminars             |
| Vacation schools                 |
| Telephone tutoring               |
| Face-to- face / Saturday classes |

1. Explain which of these student support services are mostly used by students?

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2. How effective are the above student support services to distance students towards progressing and completing their studies?

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3. What do you often do to interact and support the CODEL students of the University of Namibia?

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4. How can CODEL improve the student support services provided to distance students at the University of Namibia?

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5. Write any other comment you have on the student support services at the CODEL of the University of Namibia

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**End of the Interview.**  
**Thank you for participation.**

## **APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTER**

University of Namibia  
Private Bag 13301  
Windhoek  
Tel: (061) 206 4856  
Fax: (061) 206 3617 / 3016  
E-mail: [aschaller-nangolo@unam.na](mailto:aschaller-nangolo@unam.na)

Namibia Business School  
Private Bag 16004  
Pionierspark  
Windhoek  
Namibia

Dear Sir/ Madam

This letter serves to confirm that **Nicholette Mutenda** is an employee of the University of Namibia: Centre for Open distance and e-Learning, the Centre has a lot of a challenge which needs solutions therefore she has been granted permission to conduct a research project on student support Services to enable her to complete a Master's In Business Administration. The recommendation of the study will assist the Centre on how best the Centre can support distance students to enable them to complete their studies.

The topic of the Dissertation is approved as: An analysis of student support services as a factor that impacts on distance students' progress and completion of studies at the University of Namibia: Centre for Open, Distance and e-learning.

Yours Sincerely

Ms Schaller-Nangolo, Anna-Marie  
Deputy Director: Open and Distance Learning