Enhancing strategies for the quality teaching–learning practice through open and distance education: a case study

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Abstract

Open and distance learning systems are making an increasing contribution to the quality teaching–learning development of teachers and students as school standards and professional standards are inextricably linked, and the need for a teaching force that is flexible and adaptable to the impact of rapidly changing structures of work and leisure. This study aims to understand how open and distance teaching–learning practices influence the learning of students. Understanding student learning in a open and distance education environment is an important factor to consider in improving the learning experiences of those students who for one reason or the other opt not to study in conventional institutions of education. This study also utilized the case study design and both primary and secondary data gathered through a review of the literature, consultations with program administrators, interviews with facilitators, and direct observations. Both random and non-random sampling methods were used to come up with samples used qualitatively. This case study explores strategies for the design and delivery of quality teaching–learning practice for open and distance learning program. It finds that for students originating mainly from remote regions of Ethiopia, open and distance learning can ofer good opportunities of receiving cost-efective, quality-education on their doorsteps. The study established that in a open and distance education system, the type of learning environment has the potential to influence students' learning, both positively and negatively, of which the main contributing factor is the learning support system. The study found that the learning support system provided by the institution and distance educators can have an impact on student learning. Findings also revealed that open and distance learning was a suitable and efective means of transformational development of Ethiopia such a programme provided an enhancing technological back-up can be easily accessed. The study also revealed that students have varied learning style preferences, and that the open and distance learning environment has the potential to impact on students' learning styles. Since learning styles occupy a central place when it comes to improving open and distance learning materials, the study further explored the relationship between the constructs of learning styles and understanding. Improving students' learning in an open and distance education environment rests mainly on improving the course materials, learner-centered approach, support systems and assessment strategies. A carefully designed and well supported instructional open and distance learning package can facilitate learning. Although the study reveals the potential of coordinated educational eforts, internal weaknesses and ineficiencies need serious attention to ensure the success of such initiatives in the future. Implications and recommendations of the findings point towards the improvement of the open and distance teaching-learning practices through the improvement of a mentoring program, expanded quality control, professional development initiatives, learning materials and the learning support systems for the open and distance education programme.

Keywords: *open and distance learning, Ethiopia,* teaching, learning, strategies.

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is undoubtedly expanding around the world; its delivery and effectiveness are major concerns. The rapid economic development in the Ethiopia over the past decade has resulted in a growing number of educational systems. Since the education systems of Ethiopia or areas have expanded quickly, these educational institutions in open and distance program have suffered from a poor understanding of quality and a lack of educational standards and indicators (MoE, 2010). Consequently, there is a strong emphasis on the pursuit of education quality in ongoing educational reforms in both local and international contexts.

Open and distance education is generally understood as a structured teaching and learning process, delivered through a collection of methods, where educators and the learners are physically separated for part or all of the time and where the course materials are the main means of communication of the curriculum. The interaction between educators and learners involves the use of a variety of media which includes face to face interaction. Face to face interaction can take different forms such as tutorials, peer support and practical work. open and distance education has gained wide acceptance as one of the successful modes of extending education in context of reach, acceptance, and productivity. The provision of an opportunity to learn without being restricted by geographical or time constraints is a major factor behind the growth of open and distance education programs. Furthermore, factors such as interactivity achieved through the use of telephone, two-way video, two-way computer connections, cable, satellite downlinks, and the Internet have contributed immensely to the open and distance mode of learning since many people are able to continue working and attending virtual classrooms on their own schedule and at their own pace (Lentell, 2003; Mercer& Pettit,2001; Lyall & McNamara,2000).

Open and distance education, according to Bhalalusesa (2001), may offer four different benefits to education providers: enabling access to students; alleviating capacity constraints; capitalizing on and & McNamara (2000) advise that administrators need to understand strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to match their resources and capabilities with different states of nature, where:

- Strengths can be assessed in terms of facilitators in place, curriculum, physical location, name recognition, and capital;
- Weaknesses can be assessed in terms of technology, trained facilitators, reaction to change, and quality;
- Opportunities can be assessed in terms of enrolment, recognition, and expansion; and
- Threats can be assessed in terms of competitors, new entrants, insufficient enrollment, and lack of demand.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Open and distance education programmes have a significant role to play in a transformational change in Ethiopia. As noted by the educational policy, open and distance education has demonstrated great potential for increasing

openness in learning and for reducing costs. Open and distance education also has the capacity to reach large numbers of students in a wide geographical area, and in this way, open access to education programmes and ongoing professional development. Key to open and distance education provision is that students can study while continuing to work, making it less disruptive for students and working condtion. In addition, open and distance education supports new models of school focused teacher development which allow for the integration of theory and practice. A question that is being asked is whether or not open and distance education programmes for students can improve working practice. Despite notable successes in Ethiopia of programmes aimed at improving teaching-learning practice, the majority of open and distance education programmes have tended to develop the extension of knowledge and place little or no emphasis on improving practice.

The choice of the open and distance education programme was made for a number of reasons. Firstly, the programme goals reflect a commitment to all four of the lessons about students development drawn from national and international experience- integration of school-based activities, complementing course materials with peer interaction, linking course materials, activities and assessment with daily practice and integration of theory and practice. Secondly, the programme is relatively new, so the benefits of the its findings would presumably be felt in the way the programme was designed. Thirdly, the students on the programme are from a wide range of backgrounds, contexts and schools in a number of different provinces, and so their reaction to the programme could be generalizable to other students in Ethiopia. Finally, the researcher was aware of the commitment of the programme staff to finding solutions to the educational problems of Ethiopia, and their efforts to do so would be worth sharing.

The different educators discovered that:

- The quality and appropriateness of open and distance education courses was very weak in the areas of `improving teaching-learning practice and enabling them to reflect on their practices';
- Often open and distance educational institutions regarded teaching-learning practice simply as a form of assessment (and this observation is not peculiar to open and distance education) with little, and in some instances, no support given to students; and
- The courses also showed very little understanding of the realities of schools in Ethiopia and the contexts of students. The need to integrate mode of open and distance education in students development and recognize them as sites for generating and applying new ideas and practices was missing in most courses.

Further, understanding the influence of a learning environment on student learning is by obtaining insight of the teaching and learning process from the perspectives of the students is a essential issues in open and distance programme. There is therefore a need to understand how the distance students respond to the learning environment and thus obtain perspectives from the students' lived experiences. This enables one to obtain the information as related by the students who are the intended beneficiaries of the educational programme. An understanding of how students respond to the learning environment will provide relevant information on the extent to which the environment supports or deters learning.

The educational policy of Ethiopia suggests that viewing education as a lifelong process opens up opportunities for the integration often associated with teaching theory and ongoing professional development of teachers (often associated with the practice of teaching) in a continuum of learning. The open and distance education programme therefore, becomes an important site where the `...practical applications of theory learned through education courses' can be implemented (MoE, 2010). This will make it possible for students to think about the dynamic nature of relationships between their own contexts and practices, make adaptations and innovations and implement new discoveries. It seemed appropriate to do what general assessment cannot do, that is, look in depth at the texture of the teaching and learning practices in a single regular education programme. National assessments inevitably concentrate on presenting general trends, and when the general trends are negative, the excellence to be found in individual initiatives is lost. In addition, there is a limit to what practitioners can learn about the details of implementation of enhancing strategies for the quality teaching–learning practice through open and distance education practice from broad brush stroke research, however important this may be for strategic planners.

One of the respondents sees as fundamental the purpose of professional development to `... question, challenge and develop individual students and .... to advance the quality of teaching and learning for young people in schools'. One of the key concerns with education programmes, in particular, those offered through open and distance education methods, is a `. . .propensity to use text resource solely in theoretical mode...' and thus resulting in an artificial division between theory and practice. In his examination of open and distance education programmes for students, one of the respondents confirms that the majority of programmes `. . .did not generally teach classroom practice - as opposed to academic subjects and educational theory - at a distance'.

The specific research questions that guide this study are as given below:

1. How do open and distance students experience distance learning at the Ethiopia, with specific reference to the sample Private University Colleges learning?
2. To what extent tutorials integrated into learner-centered development in Private University Colleges open and distance learning?
3. Why assessment strategies take into account the professional and social contexts of learners in open and distance education programme?
4. How students overcome the challenges to advance the quality of teaching- learning open and distance learning in Private University Colleges?

1.3 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the open and distance learning of different courses at the Ethiopian Private University Colleges. The context of this study is the open and distance programme. The research questions stated in the above imply some aims and objectives for this study and these are discussed further.

This study aims to examines enhancing strategies for the quality teaching–learning practice through open and distance education, on the basis of an in-depth case study analysis of the teaching and learning practices in the open

and distance education programme at the private higher education institutions of the Ethiopia, strategies for education offered at an open and distance that could lead to improved teaching-learning. The study also aims to understand how an open and distance learning environment may influence student learning.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To generate insights and understandings of how students at the private higher education in Ethiopia engage in learning activities in the open and distance education environment. This includes gaining insight on how they learn, what they learn, when they learn, what they prefer in terms of learning and why.
- To explore to what extent tutorials integrated into learner-centered development in open and distance learning.
- To characterize how assessment strategies take into account the professional and social contexts of learners in private university colleges.
- To assess challenge students face to advance the quality of teaching- learning through open and distance education programme in private university colleges.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is significant on the following:

1. The study is pertinent to private university colleges in administrators and educators, as findings may impact on the development of teaching material, effective implementation of current and future open and distance education programmes; improvement of the existing programme as well as informing teachers on support services for distance learners.
2. The study may give input to educators in their endeavour to diversify instructional resources and strategies. The study may directly have a significant impact on the mode of delivery of private university colleges. open and distance education programmeat the Ethiopian private higher education as it may inform and illuminate aspects of the programme design that support or that deter learning. The study may also inform material developers, course designers and course tutors on what kind of instructional techniques would be effective and suitable for the private higher education students as they study. Furthermore, the study may inform teachers on the role of learning styles in a distance education courses.
3. The study may also contribute to a body of knowledge on students learning in open and distance education environments, thus in a way make the findings and output of this study useful for programmes in similar educational contexts.

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

The following delimitations were taken into consideration in order to make the research project manageable:

The study was not analyzed the learning resources (e.g. the module, the tutorials, the exam questions, learning styles) in their individual components. The learning resources are looked at as a package and not as individual components since distance students have access to other various sources of content. Of interest to the study are the students' experiences in open and distance learning, school-based activities(tutorials) integrated into learner-centered development in distance learning and assessment strategies; challenge students face to advance the quality of teaching- learning distance learning which emanate from interacting with these resources. Although tutors handle the face-to-face tutorials and may employ different teaching strategies, the tutors' teaching strategies are not analysed on an individual basis.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

In view of the limited time and resources available for the research and the importance of in-depth investigation, it was decided to focus on only one of the further open and distance education programmes offered by the private university colleges of the Ethiopia, the different subjects/courses teaching. Within this programme, particular attention is given to the core course - the theory and practice of teaching, which is central to the improvement of students' teaching-learning practice. The following limitations were noted: It would have been better to extend this study to other regular and extension programmes, rather than to concentrate on a single open and distance education programme. This would have made comparisons possible; in an investigation of teaching and learning practices which will presumably be helpful to other programmes and practitioners; there should be an analysis of the cost implications of the various practices.

Finally, the management and administration of open and distance education programmes is crucial. Effective teaching and learning can be completely undermined by inefficient or simply inappropriate management and administration. Particularly difficult is the situation of open and distance education programmes attempting to run in institutions whose administrative systems are geared towards conventional face-to-face education. Although the research into this programme did uncover some of these frustrations (for example, with the registration procedures), there was not enough time to go into this in depth.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

Distance Education: An education system which covers various forms of study at all levels which are not under continuous and immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in a lecture room or in the same premises. An educational process in which teaching and learning takes place when the student is separated by space or time or both from the teacher or from fellow students. The instruction may be done through the use of some instructional materials/resources that are prepared and designed by the institution responsible for the education.

Open Learning: A philosophy which implies a conflation of shared beliefs about teaching and learning. Among these beliefs, are beliefs about opening up learning opportunities to a wider range of people and enabling them to learn freely and productively without inhibitions emanating from barriers to access

Distance Learning:–a term that emphasises the learning aspect in a distance education system. In this study, the terms distance education and distance learning may be used interchangeably.

Distance Teaching: a term that emphasises the teaching aspect in a distance education system.

Distance student –A student who is taking a course in a distance education environment. Although in certain contexts the terms distance student, distance learner, student, and learner may have differing emphasis, in this thesis these terms may be used interchangeably.

Learning resources – refers to the educational materials, resources, facilities that are used for the teaching and learning process.

Face-to-face tutorial –A face-to-face tutorial session is an institutionally organised contact session where the students and the tutor meet at a specified venue and at scheduled times for learning purposes, the main purpose being to assist students tackle problematic issues of their studies. In this thesis the terms tutorial and face-to-face tutorial will be used interchangeably.

Module –refers to the course book which contains the subject matter for the course. This is produced within the institution and comes as part of the learning materials package. In order to be aligned and consistent with participants' responses in the data, the later 'colloquial' meaning of module will be adopted throughout the study unless otherwise stated.

Tutor – A person employed by the university either on a part-time or full-time basis whose primary purpose is to ensure that students get the most out of the educational experience, by providing additional academic interpretation and backup of the course material. This usually involves providing face-to-face tutorials. The tutor should be well knowledgeable with the course content.

Student support –refers to other services that are meant to improve the students' learning environment and serve to assist students by complementing the learning materials as well as supporting the students' learning activities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Basic Concept of Open and Distance Learning

Open and distance learning is defined as an educational process in which a significant proportion of learning takes place remotely and flexibly beyond the formal learning environment. Therefore it is organised educational activities, based on the use of learning materials, in which constraints on learning are minimised in terms of access, time and place as well as pace and method of study or any of these. However, open and distance learning is used as an umbrella term to include both concepts of distance education and open learning. Supported open and distance learning improves the potential for teachers to develop better links between new teaching practices, their own subject expertise and the application of the new methods in their own classrooms (Perraton, et al.,2002) as well as becoming competent in using emerging technologies for teaching and learning purposes (Stella & Gnanam, 2004).

Physical separation of the student and teacher for the duration of the course is one of the key identifiers for distance education. Lectures, tutorials, and for the most part, student assistance or support, is provided through electronic media (Yellen, 1998). Yellen failed to mention another important component involved; distance education often possesses the characteristic of physical separation of the student from other students. According to the Stella and Gnanam (2004:24):

'Open and distance learning is concerned with the use of new resources (technical and/or non-technical) for rendering the learning process more flexible in terms of space, time, content, selection, access qualifications and teaching resources and/or for improving distance access to education systems. In this way, educational opportunities are extended to people who, because of their geographical, economic or socio-professional situation or because of a handicap, do not readily have access to the mainstream system of education. Open and distance learning can help overcome barriers to transnational mobility and develop a kind of virtual mobility.'

Open and distance learning involves a conceptual shift from the teacher to the learner and emphasises the importance of student-centred learning that means a 'shift in research and practitioner interest from teaching and instructional design towards learning and the particularity of individual student response' (Stella & Gnanam, 2004). Therefore, open and distance learning focuses more on what the learner wants to learn, how the learner approaches learning and the socio-physical conditions for learning than what the learner should learn. To engage individuals in their learning processes, open and distance learning tries to motivate and empower for professional growth of individual teachers. However, supported open and distance learning is also preferable for other reasons such as scalability, sustainability and cost effectiveness compared with the traditional 'face to face' centre-based training approaches (Jung, 2005).

2.2 Benefits of Open and Distance Learning

Fortunately for some students, distance education courses have resulted in an effortless switch from traditional classroom learning (Oravec, 2003). The change in instructional delivery methods, communication with the teacher and other students, and greater use of technology has not presented a challenge. Even when distance education was considered more difficult than face-to-face courses, sometimes the benefits outweighed the costs. Take for example the rural, under-served learner. Distance education may have been their only alternative for receiving an education (Seay & Chamberlain, 2001).

According to Smith (as cited by Grandzol, 2004) and Christensen, et al. (2001), students find many features of distance education to like; for example: (a) convenience, (b) flexibility, (c) accessibility, (d) participative style, (e) absence of labeling, (f) written communication experience, and (g) experience with technology. Oravec's (2003) comment, the opportunity to enroll in courses not available (or at least not available when needed) at the student's own institution, covers an important area not listed by Smith and Christensen. Another feature for online classes noted by some students was the approachability of their instructors (Kroder, et al., 1998).

Not only students find distance education appealing, but faculty and institutions also can be considered members of the DE (distance education) fan club. Teachers also appreciate the same features preferred by students and have the added benefit of possible job related advantages resulting from newly gained skills (Grandzol, 2004). Institutions have enjoyed enrollment increases and have become aggressive competitors in the marketplace (Wagner & Thompson, 1997). All three (institutions, teachers, and students) share the benefits of reduced classroom sizes and have witnessed institutional transformations due to distance education programs (Eastman & Swift, 2001). Even traditional students have benefited from this newer mode of educational delivery when faculty members take their online learning activities back to their regular classrooms (Dennis, 2003).

Spooner, et al. (1999) asserted not only did distance education work, it provided the institutional benefit of serving more people with the same resources, yet Phipps and Merisotis (1999) contradicted this statement. Phipps and Merisotis mention probable purchase requirements and expenses of two-way interactive video and a variety of other technologies dependent upon the types of delivery provided. These expenditures do indeed result in supplementary resources. Both groups failed to mention the possible expense of additional personnel considered necessary for the management of the innovative technology used or the newly created distance education positions which become apparent as distance programs expand (Regalbuto, 1999; Shea, et al., 2001).

2.3 Differences Between Traditional and Distance Education Courses

While the goal is the same whether teaching in the traditional classroom or at a distance, there are unique characteristics for each method. This uniqueness must be identified before judgments can be made as to whether or not the traditional evaluation instrument is appropriate for use in evaluating distance courses.

2.3.1 Key Elements of Traditional Courses

Traditional education is quite a few years older than open and distance education. Yellen (1998) claimed the traditional learning setting has survived for at least a few thousand years. Farmer (1999) asserted the beginning of higher education has been traced to the 300-400 BC era, reinforcing Yellen's statement. In earlier times, each civilization had its own use for higher education. Mesopotamia and Babylon citizens looked to improve record keeping. The Romans, on the other hand, were interested in providing education to politicians or government employees. The Greeks differed from the others and were primarily concerned with providing a more philosophical society (F armer). Today's higher education provides opportunities that will fulfill all three purposes plus more.

Similarities between traditionally taught courses and distance courses abound, yet that does not signify a lack in differences. Yellen (1998) described traditional students as students learning in the traditional manner; more specifically, these students are instructed by means of "lecture or discussion in a centralized

location" (p. 216). In the traditional classroom, interactions between the student and instructor, extraneous learning materials and activities (i.e., chalk or white board use, video presentations) can be observed (Tobin, 2004). Bruffee (1999) believes that one activity not found in traditional classrooms is collaboration. He claims this, in part, is due to the failure of teachers to realize collaboration as valid and the misconception that it only promotes plagiarism. Bruffee also described the college and university classroom as a community, complete with its own unique culture.

Worley (2000) makes the bold statement that all education can be considered distance education. She based her comment on the fact that students who spend threehours in a classroom per week, also spend or are expected to spend an additional three hours "reading, researching, preparing assignments, and perhaps conferring with other students" (p. 94). Another example to reinforce her theory is the reliance of asynchronous communication between student and faculty or student and students using e-mail. Gone (or going) are the times of in-person visits to the instructor's office. Not only do traditional classrooms appear to be changing, traditional education is changing. More and more students are enrolled in both traditional and distance courses (Farrington, as cited by Oravec, 2003). Mixed enrollments have stimulated the comparison of the two types of courses, especially in areas of value and appropriateness (Oravec). This result definitely warrants attention by institutions since student expectations in the traditional classroom are likely changed. Pressures on faculty are now of a nature or to an extent not previously encountered. Oravec sees the possibility of students seeking in the traditional classroom what is missed during their distance learning experience (i.e., absence of social interaction). On the other hand, faculty should be alerted to the possible discontentment of students with the typical instructional format and materials found in most traditional classrooms.

2.3.2 Key Elements of Distance Education Courses

Some of the same reasons why distance education is considered so popular are also accredited with creating a better learning environment, better than even face-to-face, according to Draves (as cited by Holcomb, et al., and 2004). Draves' list includes:

- Opportunity for the student to learn during his/her own individual "best" time.
- Pace for learning is set by the student.
- Learning occurs faster.
- Personal interaction with both the teacher and other students can occur with greater frequency.
- While working online, there are more topics and subjects to access readily.
- Classroom participants may experience greater diversity by interacting with students that could be residents of anywhere in the world.

- Online opportunities give the students access to the foremost authorities and experts.
- Distance learning has been found to be less expensive and more accessible.
- Online resources of information abound.
- Online classes create virtual communities.

While the items listed above are positives, distance education has its share of negatives. Being separated from the students creates a new set of problems for teacher. When face-to-face, communication cues and clues are present teacher can assess when understanding or failure to understand takes place (Willis, 1993; Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). These visual hints are very useful tools when conducting a class and depending upon the type of distance education course, may be missing.

Distance education is provided in either a synchronous or asynchronous manner. Synchronous distance courses more resemble traditional courses than asynchronous (King, et al., 2001; see also Miller & King, 2003). Although geographically separated, the instructor and students meet at the same time. This is conducted by interactive television or during chat sessions (Holcomb, et al.). As was reported by NCES (as citedby Miller and King, 2003), the synchronous mode of distance education has become stationary, while asynchronous courses have tripled. One possible reason for the substantial growth could be attributed to the characteristics of asynchronous courses.

The preferred type of distance courses for the institutions, faculty, and students is the asynchronous. Institutions show favoritism to asynchronous, particularly web-based, courses due to the lower cost to provide (Draves, as cited by Holcomb, et al., 2004). Faculty enjoys fewer constraints on their time since meeting times are not synchronized. Students also benefit from the convenience asynchronous courses offer. According to Hiltz (1 997), “time spent in class” and the location of the “classroom” are solely determined by the participants.

Asynchronous distance education is recognized for the great advantage of allowing time for reflection before responding (Bonk & Cummings, 1998), thereby encouraging critical thinking. The faster paced, time constrained traditional classroom fails to provide the same opportunities for reflective thinking. Without the critical thinking component of online courses, then the course becomes more of a “correspondence” course, making an instructor unnecessary (Howland & Moore, 2002). Easton (2003) stated distance instructor roles are often confusing and ill defined, in addition to being untested. The ambiguous role often leaves faculty feeling as if they are flying in an uncertain environment. It is questionable, especially when considering the rapid rate of distance education growth, that faculty are adequately prepared for teaching at a distance. For instance, it is quite possible new instructors to distance learning were not made aware of the need “to frame the course and supplement student interactions by providing resources and opportunities” (Knowlton, 2000:11). Knowlton went on to add distance educators should be charged with the following tasks: Socratic questioning, summarizing, clarifying, and helping students connect their ideas with course theory. Research in the area of distance education places different emphasis on each of the issues. Palloff and Pratt (as cited by Miller & King, 2003) felt it was more imperative to consider the need to alter pedagogical methods used in distance learning situations.

Most traditional classrooms revolve around the lecture format but Regalbuto (1999) suggested this format fails to make the most of the online learning's full potential. Knowlton (2000) recognized that "from a pedagogical perspective, a teacher-centered online course is an oxymoron in that it removes the need for the professor. In the online classroom, 'lectures'—the very essence of teacher-centeredness—come in the form of pre-designed text" (p. 9). Without the lecture format, course materials become a substitute for information typically provided by the instructor in the traditional classroom. Tricker, et al. (2001) stressed students must recognize this change from the norm at the very beginning of their online experience. New emphasis is placed on the need for quality course materials since the instructor is not present to qualify the information. The very nature of the distance education environment demands modifications in pedagogy. Yellen (1998) pointed out that modifications require more than just changing the delivery method. He recognized the need for instructors to use different methods when providing learning materials. Instead, Dwyer and Li (2000) addressed the need for adjustments to visualization, user friendliness, interaction, feedback, and evaluations. Miller and King (2003) cited Moore and Kearsley and Palloff and Prait as stressing the instructors' potential for failure if the only transitioning made from their traditional course pedagogy is accomplished by placing their notes and PowerPoint presentations onthe web. In the American Federation of Teachers report, "Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice" (2000:9), it was stated:

Teachers developing distance education courses should approach course design—curriculum planning, class projects visual aids, library materials and student interaction—not in terms of replicating the traditional classroom, but in terms of maximizing the potential of the medium that will be employed.

Facilitator is a title that adequately describes the role of faculty in a distance learning setting (Kochtanek & Hein, as cited by Easton, 2003). Kochtanek and Hein mentioned the need for teacher to direct information at the students, but instead, charged faculty with creating an environment where students take existing knowledge and create their own learning paradigm. This is what the experts say occurs or should occur in the traditional classroom as well.

Robson (2000) also agreed with the title change for distance education instructors when he stated that the faculty role in a distance learning environment has changed to be one of mentor and manager. Once classes have been developed, Palloff and Pratt (as cited by Easton, 2003) recommended that teachers need to fade into the background, and proceed with monitoring the discussions. Interruptions to the student processions should take place when contributions are needed to stimulate a new way of thinking or to keep discussions on track.

Garrison's model (1997) identified the self-management, self-monitoring, and motivational components necessary for successful self-directed learning. It may be recommended that faculty fade into the background but faculty must also take responsibility for monitoring how successful the students are at self-directing their learning. Not all students will be accomplished in these components.

Brockett and Heimstra's Personal Responsibility Orientation model (as cited by Howland & Moore,

2002) viewed the student as holding the brunt of responsibility for the learning experience. Without the presence of the lecture format, the responsibility falls to the student to interpret the contextual messages found in the written materials provided by the instructor. Easton (2003) recognized this as a power shift from the instructor to the student. Regardless, student-centered classrooms require effort from both the student and the instructor.

A great many authors have supported the need of distance education courses to be structured using constructivism/student-centered and collaborative models. Easton (2003) felt that due to the physical separation of the instructor and student, distance education required a constructivist approach. Knowlton (2000) contended the student-centered approach was the only way for an online course to be effective. Even though online courses force the choice of student-centered pedagogy it does not mean it belittles the possible learning experience. Knowlton reiterated the belief that knowledge is more relevant to the student when the student is active in creating that knowledge. Student-centered may be the typical style and required for the distance education environment, but according to Knowlton, traditional classrooms remain more professor-centered.

The second identified characteristic necessary for distance education courses is developing collaboration among participants. Miller and King (2003) pointed out that it is the inability or unwillingness to make collaboration possible in distance education courses that is detrimental to its success. Unlike the student-centered approach, instructors do have a choice on whether they take steps to set up an environment that encourages and requires collaboration although failure to do so would be detrimental to the learning experience (Carr-Chellman, et al., 2000). According to Moore and Kearsley (as cited by Miller & King), students must be active participants in their distance education pursuits. But this would be true for both traditional and distance education courses. Collaboration between students is needed, as well as students actively participating with other students and the instructor in order to build a community of learners (Hiltz and Palloff & Pratt, as cited by Miller & King).

Students may or may not be aware of the social dimension of learning that takes place in the traditional classroom, but distance students often are aware of its absence (Palloff & Pratt, as cited by Knowlton, 2000). In fact, the omission of personal contact was reported by Spooner, et al. (1999) to be the one primary reason students will choose traditional classrooms over distance education. Hiltz (1997), along with Bonk and Cummings (1998), recognized “social interaction, with its dialogue, active participation, cooperation, and negotiation” (Miller & King, 2003:291) is essential to learning.

2.4 Critical to Distance Education Success

It takes the right ingredients to create a successful product. For distance education to be a success, educators must be aware of the required components.

2.4.1 Effectiveness

The educational goal of distance education programs is to offer learning opportunities that will produce the same or better level of learning as those provided in a traditional environment. Whether distance learning can accomplish this

feat is a public concern, especially in light of the absence of teacher and student exchanges (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). Ideally, delivery methods chosen for teaching distance courses should be based upon the following: background and experience level of the student; cognitive style of the learner; diversity of students participating in the course; and appropriateness of the content being delivered (Willis, 1993). Yet other studies vowed that teacher/student and student/student interaction and appropriate content were of greater importance than the delivery system (Willis).

Distance education has commanded a wide range of responses regarding its effectiveness, from negative, mixed, to positive or no difference. Some still hold the conviction that it provides less of an education than on campus courses (Spooner, et al., 1999), while others view only parts of distance education as a diminished experience (Crump; Duramato; Pirrong & Lathen; and Richie & Newby; as cited by Spooner, et al.). Not only is the public skeptical, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) stated educators also have their doubts. These educators have taken a stand on the belief that teaching and learning are essentially social processes and felt the concept of a community could not be achieved unless students and teachers are in the same physical location (Twigg, 2001). Dewey's arguments support the educators in their "learning is a social process" theory. According to Dewey (as cited by Bruffee, 1999), learning occurs when work is done as a social venture, with students contributing and acknowledging accountability. His next statement, that the community does not occur on its own and requires thought and planning, demonstrates that it is the educator's responsibility to accomplish a manifestation of the learning community. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (as cited by Grandzol, 2004) recommended that faculty should be "involved cooperatively in course creation and delivery and that learning be dynamic and interactive, regardless of the setting" (p. 238). Technology can assist in providing these dynamic and interactive requirements. Bruffee warns us to be careful of hindering distance learning by following "foundational educational assumptions" (p. 129) — ignoring the social dimensions that technology can provide.

Technology is incorporated in the teaching techniques and delivery methods for most distance learning classes, although there are some distance learning courses (i.e. correspondence study, home study, independent study, and external study) that infrequently or never engage the use of technology. For the purpose of this study, the researcher is seeking information on courses that frequently involve the application of technology, thereby necessitating a discovery of how the use of technology affects distance learning situations. Moore and Kearsley (as cited by Miller and King, 2003) declared technology and its use by the instructor is definitely related to teaching effectiveness. Technology, when overused or used improperly, can be a detriment to learning in any situation. Willis (1993) confirmed that technology should not be the focal point of the course for the instructor or the students; instead, the focus should be placed on the process of teaching and learning.

To measure the effectiveness of distance education, researchers generally investigate student outcomes, attitudes, and overall satisfaction (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). An abundant number of researchers have stated students report a high satisfaction with their distance education courses (Phipps & Merisotis). Although feedback from students has been favorable, Clow (1999) warned of possible bias from students that have a vested interest. Although satisfaction is

important, grades earned in traditional, as well as distance education classes, are thought to be the true test of whether or not learning has taken place. Comparisons of student performance for the two different environments have been reported to show similar grades and attitudes based on experimental studies. But, Phipps & Merisotis questioned the results from these studies based upon the quality of the original research.

Willis (1993) listed seven elements that both teacher and students need to be aware of when determining the effectiveness of distance learning. Numbers 1 through 5 are directives for the teacher while 6 and 7 provide directives for the student. These elements should not come as a surprise to educators though, since all seven can also be said to be important to the effectiveness of the traditional classroom. The seven elements listed by Willis (1993) are:

1. Use of teaching techniques and delivery methods that take into account the needs, diversity, and context of distance learners.
2. Use of content examples that are relevant to the intended audience, distance learners.
3. Understand urban and rural students and their diverse backgrounds.
4. Encourage student-to-student interaction.
5. Enhance student motivation.
6. Need of family support to the distance learner.
7. Need of suitable learning environments and available technologies.

2.4.2 Distance Education and Student Characteristics

Prominent in distance education research is characteristics of the successful distance education student. Marshall (2000) believed that the social, political, economic, and philosophical climate influence educational paradigms and enrollments. These forces appear to be driving the popularity and need for distance education. To remain competitive, businesses now demand a workforce that is not only knowledgeable, but pursues lifelong learning. Until distance education became widely available, adult learners often had to forego increasing or furthering their education.

In a study of 250 higher education institutions, Shea, et al. (2001) found that nontraditional students are targeted for distance education programs. Easton (2003) claimed it is the characteristics of the non-traditional student that also enable them to be successful as distance education students. As reported by Brent and Bugbee and Palloff and Pratt these characteristics include: “(a) voluntarily seeking further education, (b) highly motivated and self-disciplined, (c) older and more mature, (d) willing to initiate calls to instructors for assistance, (e) possessing a more serious attitude toward coursework, and (f) already a holder of a college degree” (as cited by Easton: 88).

Another important characteristic that should be added to this list is active participant in learning. Klein (1995) saw traditional classroom students as having the luxury of taking a passive role. He disavowed this role as an option for distance learning students, who must be active to be successful.

The type of learner is also regarded as an important characteristic. In a study of 48 students enrolled in three different online courses, Howland and Moore (2002) examined the experiences and perceptions of students regarding online courses. Although this small population could not warrant generalization, it should be noted that student feedback is necessary for distance course delivery improvements. The research used open-ended questions, providing richer qualitative information. Data was then coded and sorted into themes, using NUD*IST Vivo (Qualitative Solutions and Research Software). Results showed that students with positive attitudes toward their online course were associated with characteristics of constructivist learners.

Savery and Duffy (1995) stated learners must have a sense of ownership of the learning goals. This could be why non-traditional students are so successful in distance learning settings. Non-traditional students frequently are responsible for "footing the bill" for their education (Tricker, et al., 2001), thereby instilling a stronger sense of ownership. On the downside of this scenario are the higher expectations generally experienced by non-traditional students who are paying their own way. Tricker, et al. felt this group is quicker to complain about a waste of time and money when courses fail to meet their assumptions.

Distance education meets the needs of students who are unable to attend classes due to other commitments (job, family), is more economical (does away with travel or residence hall expenses), and holding a philosophy that learning is active, not passive. Yet not all non-traditional students with these characteristics are suited for distance education courses. Easton (2003) stated some non-traditional students have a propensity to work individually, while many distance course activities require online group work. This activity should not be enough to keep a student from enrolling in a distance education program though, since even in the dominant learning setting of a traditional classroom, student-to-student interaction in groups in and outside of the classroom are expected (Christensen, et al., 2001). Miller and King (2003) provided the reminder that faculty must consider the demographics and individual learning styles of the student bodies that make up the course. Schamber (1988) directed educators to assess course enrollees' ages, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, interests, experiences, educational levels, and experiences associated with distance education methods and delivery systems.

2.4.3 Distance Education Teacher Characteristics

In Sherry's (1996) review of literature, it was found that the most important aspects of a faculty member teaching distance education courses include: (a) a caring individual who shows concern for the students, (b) confidence, (c) experience, (d) competency with technology, (e) creative use of the media, and (f) remains interactive with the students throughout the course. These factors are also pertinent with traditional classroom teaching and fit in with Keeton's (2004) findings that there is little difference between teachings online or in a classroom.

Keeton (2004) felt the results from his study were more reliable than most studies. Typically when surveys are conducted, the surveys are sent to faculty randomly, resulting in feedback from the novice as well as the highly rated teacher, consequentially makingthe results ungeneralizable. However, in Keeton's study, survey participants were selected by their respective Deans and the select few were recognized as highly effective teachers. Faculty

participants in this study failed to recognize a significant difference between teaching online or traditionally. This could definitely result in problems for the program since research thus far has supported and recognized differences of a grander scale. Possibilities exist that the highly effective teachers surveyed teach in a hybrid manner, therefore fail to recognize a difference between the two types of courses.

Another problem with Keeton's results was his use of only eight faculty members, which is considered an extremely small sample. According to Keeton (2004), faculty believed student expectations of faculty availability was misguided or incorrect/unreasonable. To alleviate this discordance between faculty and students, Easton (2003) suggested faculty should make it a practice to lay out the communication plan prior to course beginning. This could help prevent misunderstandings or help allay student dissatisfaction. Another important characteristic designated to distance education instructors is qualifications and talent as an instructional designer (Easton 2003). This is perhaps one of the more difficult activities in that distance education relies heavily on visual interpretations. Tricker, et al. (2001) stressed that content in the course materials is one of the dominant factors involved in distance learning. They emphasized the importance of providing course materials with high readability and logical structure. What may be obvious to the instructor may not be to the student. It is vital the instructor view the materials and media chosen as they appear to the students since the instructor is not present to demonstrate or relate the tie-in to the course objectives.

2.5 Distance Education Challenges/ Barriers

It was destiny that distance education would become so popular. While Easton (2003) listed the following four coinciding higher education issues that present complex challenges for delivering courses over the Internet, three can actually be said to have contributed to the increased enrollments in distance education: (a) advances in computer technology, (b) rapidly growing enrollments, (c) changing student demographics, and (d) continued cost containment requirements. First, advancements in technology have changed education, the results being high interest and distance educational prospects never before possible (Worley, 2000). Next, universities have become more focused on recruiting non-traditional (over the age of 22) students who are likely thought to be some of the most likely candidates of distance education courses (Ludlow, as cited by Easton, 2003). Third, Regalbuto (1999) mentioned the concern administrators have regarding the expensive technology universities experience and the desire to get a greater return from their investment. Distance education provides this opportunity.

Program improvements transpire once problems and issues are discovered, and then addressed. In a study conducted by Shea, et al. (2001), 250 institutions offering Internet-based programs were surveyed to reveal the problems and issues challenging the administrators managing these programs. Although the information collected was not considered generalizable to other populations, results demonstrated (a) More student interaction and technical support was desired by the students; (b) Teachers also agreed that more technical support was needed and felt more pay was warranted (resulting in the possible loss of quality teachers) ; and (c) Distance education coordinators were concerned with the low amount of staff available and desired alternative forms of evaluation (Shea, et al.). In response to the request for more technical support, help desks do not appear to provide the support required by

distance learners.

This could be contributed to the quality of support and/or the hours of support provided.

While this study was performed for the purpose of comparison with other studies, a chance to gain valuable information was missed due to the design of the survey responses. Ready-made responses were provided for each question seeking problems or issues experienced, stifling the opportunity to find new information not listed by the survey developer.

Seeking parallels between distance education, the service industry, and evaluation needs, Tricker, et al. (2001) surveyed 285 students from two different distance programs. The top four distance education issues were identified by students as lack of contact with others in their field of study, difficulty of registration, inappropriate support services, and low level of individual student support. In regard to course materials, students expected quality of content. They desired the following features: readability, logical structure/consistency, up-to-date content, variety of media, physical durability of materials, and being self-contained. When asked about assessment, the students unanimously chose the quality of feedback, relevance of assignments, and clarity of assessment criteria as being the most important aspects. These results confirm the need for frequent and high quality communication to compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction. Although the researchers were unclear as to how generalizable their results could be considered, it was surprising to find the student responses were in such accordance. A warning was provided that the students may have responded in a manner that reflected bad experiences in the program which they were currently enrolled. Singh and Pan (2004) shared what May Burgan, the General Secretary of the American Association of University Professors, identified as distance education issues to the U.S. Congressional Web-based Education Commission in July 2000. Burgan reported:

First, from a pedagogical perspective, there are concerns about the accuracy, lack of complexity and depth, and the commercialization of the Web, suggesting flaws in the quality of information, and the possibility of bias. Second, there is a real concern about student isolation and the impact on team and inter-personal skills. Third, there is the issue of access to modern technology, especially by minority and lower-income families/students. Finally, in terms of intellectual property, the use of copyrighted material in web-based education, and the issue of who owns the material created for web-based instruction, are also issues that need resolution. (p. 304)

Others also agreed with Burgan's view that technology could be a barrier for distance education. Miller and King (2003) noted a lack of technological expertise for both the students and instructors could be detrimental. Bland (as cited by Clow, 1999) saw a different type of problem related to technology. Successful instructors make adjustments to their normal teaching style to work with technology rather than try to force technology to conform to their teaching style.

Miller and King (2003) reported up to one-third of distance education students fail to complete the course, resulting in

losses of hundreds of thousands of students. Christensen, et al. (2001) claimed technology, reputation, student constraints, and learning preferences as foretellers to student completions of distance education courses. Frustrations with the technology, lack of feedback, feelings of isolation, anxiety, and confusion are also problems identified as contributing to the high dropout rate experienced with distance education courses (Miller & King). Skill with virtual communication can help counteract these negative effects. Easton (2003) pointed out the importance of a communication plan that addresses student need for information. Communicators must critically assess how they communicate in a virtual environment, avoiding sarcasm and using humor carefully.

While comfort and convenience are lauded as favorite elements of distance education, students still prefer being in a classroom with the instructor leading the class (Spooner, et al., 1999). Personal contact ranks as highly desired in an educational setting. The responsibility lies with the instructor to create activities and exercises that encourage, as well as require students to interact (Clow, 1999). Clow stressed ". . . problems must be addressed and overcome to ensure that students perceive that they receive the same quality of education regardless of the technology used or the site from which they obtain the course" (p. 103).

2.6 Current Distance Education Assessment and Evaluation Practice

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (1998), whose mission is to foster access to and quality in postsecondary education, accentuated the requirement for reliable and valid performance measurements (Twigg, 2001; Scanlan, 2003). Marshall (2000) felt "the design, delivery, assessment, and evaluation of distance learning is pragmatic and not theoretical, based on historical practice and not careful analysis" (p.

2). Achtemeier, et al. (2003) recognized many evaluation instruments failed to include questions that address the uniqueness of the online environment. They suggested this occurred because universities were using traditional course evaluations to evaluate distance courses. These actions constitute the collection of data using traditional education assumptions, concepts, and values which many say differ from distance education. In events such as these, Marshall recommended the development of "new paradigms and models and new ways of collecting and analyzing data" (p. 2).

Evaluations: Most people believe evaluations of job performance and programs are necessary, although some may actually go so far as to acknowledge them only as necessary evils. Despite what is felt about evaluations, the benefits outweigh the detriments. Well designed evaluations can provide valuable information that enable users of the information to make important decisions. Validity of evaluations have been accepted by some educators but disputed by others. One argument against the validity of evaluations rests with the opinion students are not mature or knowledgeable enough to recognize the nuances or relationships of teaching methods and learning.

Government, private, and personal monies provide the funding for higher education. As a result, many have a vested interest in the results of their expenditures. Sutherland (2000) remembered when universities held a highly honored position in society but admitted the public move toward accountability no longer shields them from public scrutiny. It is no longer accepted or taken for granted that a "good" education will be received just because one attends a

university. Accountability is being forced upon educational institutions, from elementary school to higher education.

Purpose of Evaluation: Education has a long history of using evaluations (Patton, 1997) that review both programs and faculty (Algozzine, et al., 2004). Programs are evaluated for quality and accreditation (Shea, et al., 2001). Evaluations of faculty also serve a purpose but, unfortunately, there is not a consensus as to exactly what that purpose should be. One point on which everyone seems to be in agreement is that an evaluation provides information or data to decision-makers. Basically, any further discussion on evaluation demonstrates the enormous amount of dissension present among all educators. Collecting information is not a valid enough reason to conduct an evaluation. The information must be utilized or the evaluation process was a waste of resources (time and money) for all involved. According to Patton (1997), the focus of an evaluation is its intended use. He lists these purposes as: rendering judgments, facilitating improvements, and/or generating knowledge.

Decision-makers: Willis (1993) identified four users of evaluation data as students, academic administrators, institution administrators, and faculty. Students use the information to base course enrollment choices (Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002; Willis, 1993). Information they are seeking is the effectiveness of the instructor, content relevance, and whether the course will aid in reaching long-term goals (Willis, 1993). Academic administrators seek data from the evaluations to judge classroom teaching performance (Emery, et al., 2003; Neumann, 2000; Willis, 1993). Wagenaar, as cited by Chen and Hoshower (1998), affirmed that over 90 % of schools assess teaching performance from information gleaned from student evaluations. Once analyzed, administrators frequently will base tenure and promotion decisions on evaluation results (Algozzine, et al., 2004; Halpern & Hakel, 2003; Spencer & Schmelkin,2002; Willis, 1993). Data from evaluations help institutional administrators determine whether institutional missions are being met, as well as in the development of further educational program plans (Willis). Lastly, faculty can contemplate their job performance from the views of a first-hand observer, whether the role was filled by an administrator or student, by reviewing data collected from evaluations (Algozzine, et al., 2004; Halpern & Hakel, 2003; Spencer & Schmelkin,2002; Willis, 1993). One thing is for certain, evaluations are not used to assess whether learning occurred. The true determining factor of whether learning occurred does not reside in student course evaluations, but in the application of the learning in a real world setting (Benigno & Trentin, 2000; Halpern & Hakel, 2003).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

There are various research designs that are available to a researcher when one is planning on carrying out a research study. These include among others, the survey, the experimental, the historical, the developmental, archival analysis and the case study research design, with each one having its own advantages and disadvantages. The research methods must therefore allow for the data to emerge from the setting without imposing any preconceived structures on it. This implies an `equality of both insiders and outsiders in the process of inquiry ...' as opposed to researcher defining problems in their own terms. Although at times the research designs are not mutually exclusive, Yin (2003:5), identified three conditions that could

significantly contribute to the choice of a research design, and these are:

- The type of research question posed, depending on whether the question is a "who", "what", "where", "how" and "why" type of question,
- The extent to which an investigator has control over actual behavioral events and x the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events.

For this study, these conditions were applicable in coming up with the decision to conduct the study as a case study. Case study design is the subject of discussion of this section. In the following subsections, I concentrate on certain aspects of the case study research design.

3.2 Method of the Study

The decision to use a case study design as opposed to other research designs is therefore not an issue of case study being a method of inquiry, but an issue of what the researcher wants to do and how it is to be done. Several issues motivated my decision to follow a case study research design. Firstly, the nature of the research problem for this study motivated the case study research design. The study attends to "how" and "what" research questions which can be better addressed through a case study (Yin, 2003). Coupled with this, is the need to understand a complex "contemporary phenomenon" such as the distance learning programme in a "bounded system" (Yin, 2003:13) at the private university colleges of Ethiopia. As discussed earlier on in Chapter 1, distance education is a special mode of teaching and learning where learning takes place when the student is separated from the teacher and other students. A case study would therefore assist in capturing the situations of the research problem, as well as the complexity of the process of learning in a distance education environment. As pointed out by Yin (2003), in a case study, emphasis can be placed on understanding why the individual does what he or she does and how the individual responds to the environment. A case study design for this study would result in an in-depth study, thus provide opportunities to involve the students and understand the problem from the perspective of the people who are actually living the experience of learning at the private higher education in Ethiopia.

Secondly, since the St.Mary and Alpha University College is the only resourceful and experienced distance education university college in Ethiopia, it presents a unique and typical case of distance offered university level education in the country. The uniqueness and typicality of the Ethiopia warrants a case study approach so as to gain a deep understanding of the challenges and benefits of open and distance education in the country. Moreover, the two University College are relatively old institution, of which most of the programmes are found on the market, thus having a lot of potential for improvement in terms of providing quality programmes to the students.

Thirdly, a case study would enable me to focus on the open and distance programme, which was a programme of interest and convenience to me since I was involved in it on a day to day basis. A case study would therefore holistically and meaningfully bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the open and

distance programme. Furthermore, I could focus on a narrow content domain of limit of function and derivative of function. Hence, provide opportunities to understand how students learn and what kind of understanding they hold for such fundamental concepts.

Fourthly, the possibility of using several sources of data in the study (Yin, 2003) also motivated the case study design. Using a combination of several data collection methods provides rich data in which to ground the findings. The use of a variety of sources of data usually provides depth for the study, with the intensive probing characteristic of case studies leading to the discovery of previously unsuspected relationships. Other than that, the use of several sources of data is convenient for the study's quality, since the methods can be complementary and serve well for triangulation purposes.

The research focuses on one component of the open and distance education programme. An in-depth study of the theory and practice course through a number of research methods could qualify as a case study. A case study denotes a study of a single case. This however, raises questions about generalizability. More often than not, the essence of conducting research is to generate knowledge that can be used widely.

The case study tries to `...bring into focus the in- depth features and characteristics of the case being studied ....'.It is rich in `descriptions, interpretation, and narrative, working more for understanding than prediction and control of settings'. While case studies have tended to employ qualitative methods, it is possible to use a range of techniques, including quantitative ones that can be used to study the case.

Stage one of the research processes involved selecting the sample, stage two involved collecting the live data, and stage three involved analysis and reporting. The concluding chapter of the report draws from the preceding analysis strategies for the design and delivery of education at an open and distance which could lead to improved teaching-learning practices.

3.2.1 Stage one: selection of sample

Since an in- depth analysis of this open and distance education programme was required, it was decided that rather than trying to get sketchy information from all or many of the students, the opinions and experiences and teaching-learning practice of a small sample of students would be examined in depth. With the assistance of the open and distance education programme coordinator, ten third year students, who have participated actively in the learning through this programme were selected to take part in the research.

The selection of the sample was done in two stages. First the programme coordinator identified for the researcher a number of students who it would be worth focusing on in this research. The guideline provided by the researcher was that they should be students who have in some way shown an engagement with the course and could talk about the effect of the open and distance education programme on their classroom practice. This was judged primarily on the quality reflective comments which these students submitted with their portfolio of assignments for the courses at the end of 2012/13. Ten out of thirty four students were identified by the coordinator for consideration by the researcher. The selection was not based on academic excellence, rather on issues students felt were pertinent to improving their own teaching-learning practices.

The second stage of the selection was carried out by the researcher. A detailed review of the students' reflections was carried out. Ten students were selected. The following excerpts from students' reflections illustrate some of the contributions the course is making towards the improvement of teaching-learning practices.

One student said, *"What has been gratifying has been the realization that one is able to rise to the challenges through the positive feedbacks on the assignments".*

Another said, *"My learning has improved tremendously since I practiced the ideas set out in the course materials".* The learners are enjoying working in groups and their study skills have improved ... and another said, *"I would like to improve the methods of learning and I try and involve in the self learning".* The slow learners should also have a chance to participate and the chance to talk in the teaching-learning practices.

The selection process also took into account gender balance. There are five female and five male students in the sample. Students are encouraged to register with a study partner to encourage collaborative learning. A study partner could be a student in the similar working area or a nearby.

3.2.2 Stage two: collection of data

The current study mainly benefited from information that was obtained from interviews and documents that were generated specifically for the study. For that reason, in the following subsections, I purposely single out and provide an overview of interviews, observation and documentation as data collection methods in case studies. More detailed and elaborate descriptions of the specific research instruments that are used in the study are presented when I describe the data collection instruments for this study.

The present study benefited from semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Interviews with coordinators for

open and distance education programme after examining available documentation about the programme
for example, the course materials to the diplomas and degrees programme for the quality teaching-learning practices, and the record of an earlier interview with the programme coordinator, the researcher
interviewed the different coordinators with a view to drawing up an accurate description of the open and
distance education programme in terms of content, assessment, feedback on assessment, support in centered schools, and administrative support. The coordinators' opinion of issues that should be pursued in the observation of contact sessions, interviews with students, review of assessment, and classroom observation was also solicited. Similar questions were addressed to the education coordinator and interesting differences between the subjects emerged- particularly with regard to processes of assessment. A description of the open and distance education programme was drawn up, verified as accurate and used as a basis for further research. Some, but not all the information from the coordinator has been incorporated under the relevant sections in this report.

From the interviews with the coordinators it was clear that the curriculum developers for the open and distance education programme decided that it was important to incorporate a considerable degree of contact into the programme. This was based on an understanding of the need for learners to be supported in their study, as well as an understanding that sessions can be used to model the kinds of teaching practices being promoted by the programme.

3.2.3 Classroom observations during tutorial session

The main purpose of the observation of the sessions was: To explore the varieties of ways in which the tutors were modelling and developing the notions of good teaching practice described in the materials. This was done according to issues highlighted in the review of the course materials (content as well as teaching approaches) as well as the researchers' understanding of issues to consider in observation of classroom practice. The following list of foci for observation was identified:

- Organization of physical environment (emphasized in course materials mainly in relation to classroom communication and the use of group work);
- Use of visual aids and equipment (dealt with particularly in the materials development course);
- Objectives, purpose and structure of sessions (a major focus running through the assignments which require lesson planning and reflection on lessons)
- Interaction, questioning, student participation and classroom atmosphere (dealt with throughout, but particularly in the Theory and Practice course)
- Language (issues of exploratory talk, of multilingualism and multicultural approaches are foregrounded throughout the materials)
- Extension of student's theoretical content knowledge and its relation to practice (this is clearly related

to the goals of the programme and is a concern in all the courses)

- Links with experience, with work in the other English courses, and future classroom practice (an integrated, experience-based and reflective approach to language teaching is a key feature in all the course materials)
- Links between English and Education Studies courses (coherence across subjects in the programme can only lead to increased impact of each subject individually)

3.2.4 Interviews

Several reasons contributed to why I found one-on-one interviews to be more appropriate for this study than the telephone interviews. Firstly, it was the need to grab an opportunity for establishing rapport with the research participants while at the same time capturing in-depth information from the participants. A one-on-one interview would create an opportunity whereby I could hold a face-to- face discussion with the interviewee, a situation any researcher could take advantage of to gain more information. Secondly, since in a telephone interview there would be lack of direct contact with the participant (Creswell, 2005), I wouldn't be sure on whether the telephone respondent is the intended respondent. Thirdly, it was the intention to avoid over-reliance on telephones since some of the distance students are based in rural and remote areas where there is limited access to telephone communication systems. In addition, it was not possible to know beforehand who would be selected for interviews and whether or not they had access to a telephone.

Two interviews were carried out with the students. The first was after the first semester observation and was designed to ascertain student opinion on what the impact of the course might be on teaching-learning tutorial practice. These were recorded on tape. The second was after the second semester observation and was designed to uncover more detailed information about student use of the materials and approach to and opinion of the assessment than could be provided in the Programme (described below).

3.2.5 Stage three: documentation as data sources

When documentation is included as a data source in case studies, a common type of documents that are referred to is the kind of documents that are not produced specifically for purposes of the research but are already present in the study setting before the commencement of the study. This includes such documents as public records, administrative documents, meeting minutes, personal records, print press clippings, evaluation reports and other written reports. Yin (2003), acknowledged the use of such types of documents, though he expressed concern since these documents would have been developed for purposes other than the research being studied. Such documents are beneficial to the study as they are generated specifically for the study and hence enable the researcher to learn more about the phenomenon being investigated. The current study benefited from researcher-generated documents in the form of students' written learning journals, questionnaires and calculus tests.

In this stage, each of the major components of the teaching and learning approach in the open and distance programme were analyzed - the course materials, the sessions as an extension of the teaching in the course materials, assessment and student support. A description of the open and distance programme design was compiled following the examination of available documentation about the programme, a record of an earlier interview with the programme director and the researcher's' interviews with coordinators.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 The Major Components of the Teaching and Learning Approach in the Open and Distance Programme

This part of a chapter was look mainly at the course materials for the different courses, with some reference to the other course materials, as well as the extent to which the course materials are aligned with the open and distance programme goals. The course materials are regarded as central as it provides the theoretical and practical framework for the improvement of teaching-learning practice which is the focus of our research into this particular open and distance programme.

The course materials are the main means whereby the curriculum is communicated. If the open and distance programme is to have an impact on classroom practice, it is essential that the teaching in the course materials is sound and the content likely to inspire good classroom practice and reflection on classroom experience. However, although necessary, this is not sufficient. To ensure impact, the students need to be motivated to study the materials, see the relevance of the content how they teach and think about teaching, and use the approaches either directly or indirectly in their classrooms. The materials have therefore been examined in three ways:

- Expert review to determine teaching effectiveness and content relevance;
- Survey of student opinion and extent of use of materials directed to some extent by the findings of expert review;
- Interviews of the sample of ten students to provide more detailed information about the trends in student opinion and use of materials discovered through the survey.

Tutorial visits include the observation and monitoring of intended change in the classroom, the encouragement of students to reflect on their own practice with the view to improving it and the assistance of students in the organization of their classrooms. The respondents report notes that facilitation of tutorial practice was `. . .the most difficult aspect of the work and took most of the facilitator's time'.

The facilitation proved difficult for both the facilitators and the students. The report states that, students seemed uneasy about classroom visits. However, once their confidence was won, some requested further visits and support. The report concludes that `the more innovative the course is in its understandings of good teaching-learning practice the more demanding it is for the student and, concomitantly, the more assistance in classroom performance that student will require'. Given the fact that open and distance education could have a distinct role to play in the development of learners, it is important to draw out from national and international experience positive lessons about effective education at a distance. This was inform the way in which the selected programme will be investigated in this research.

It is widely accepted that in open and distance education, the course takes the place of the educator in providing an appropriate learning environment. An important element of the course is support for learners. The support provided can be within or outside text. One of the respondent notes that `... a well functioning [open and distance education] system, will integrate various types of support (including carefully planned contact tutorials, telephone tutoring, vacation schools, and other forms of support) with course materials to create a system which supports and deepens students' learning' .

A point also made by the another respondents. He notes that, `interaction with others (peers, facilitators and tutors) is needed for support, exchange of experience, motivation and problem solving'. He cautions that, '…change in classroom practice may be constrained by other external factors: lack of teaching resources, poor school management, low morale resulting from teachers' conditions of works'. The evaluation of the project also indicates that, although students were satisfied with multimedia materials, face to face contact was a preferred method for promoting the ideas and methods and supporting students in trying to understand those ideas and methods.

The description provides information about open and distance programme goals, course content, course materials, assessment, and student support and also some indication of the ways in which the various elements were investigated.

Course Materials: The first phase in determining the teaching effectiveness and content relevance of the course materials was expert review in terms of standard criteria. The courses was the main course reviewed, but the other course contents and teaching -learning strategies were also looked at. The expert review was complemented by interview and survey described above (Simon & Soliman, 2003; Simpson & Siguaw, 2000).

The point of the interviews with the six students was to uncover specific examples of how the course materials are used in the self learning. In answer to a general question about the best parts of the courses, one student highlighted improved knowledge of grammar as having being translated into better lessons in the self learning; another cited the pre- reading, while reading and post reading

approach to learning reading as particularly beneficial; another cited ideas for group work; another said that he had been helped by having a colleague observe his lessons and comment on it.

In answer to specific questions related to the use of theory and practice course in the self learning, students said that they had actually used the following parts of the unit in the self learning:

- *Student 1:* The activities to do with dramatizing, and the activity which required students to build a picture with words, and the section on group work.
- *Student 2:* The activities to do with tasks with individual work and classroom drama.
- *Student 3:* Performance poetry.
- *Student 4:* Different group work ideas, use of a range of questions when he set exam papers, the activity about naming at the beginning of the year to get to know the students, debates. • Student 5 : Group work ideas.
- *Student 6 :* Very difficult to get detailed answers from this student.

The categories for review were drawn from a variety of open and distance education sources. One of the main sources consulted was *Criteria for Judging Open and Distance Learning*. The main categories for these criteria were: *clarity of purpose, objectives within overall purpose, exploiting student knowledge and experience of colleges and teaching, accuracy of text and up-to-date citation of contemporary research/ scholarship, course use of students' entry competence in subject matter, text style, instructional design, materials design, activities, assessment strategy, appropriate use of audio-visual media.*

What follows is a description of the kinds of features that were looked for in the course materials. Orientation to open and distance programme, introductions, aims and learning outcomes this category for review is about the way that clear and relevant information can motivate and direct students effectively in their study. Students need to understand from the outset the requirements of the various courses in the programme. As adult learners, they need to be motivated by relevant introductions and overviews within each individual course. They also need to be clear about what they have to achieve in each unit and these aims and learning outcomes should be consistent with the goals of the open and distance programme.

Objectives/purpose of a session: The objectives/purpose of a session needs to be clear in the facilitator's planning, should be negotiated to some extent with students (particularly adult students), and the session should be structured to achieve coherence and successful learning. In all cases, there was a clear structure and purpose in the sessions, communicated to the students through a handout, on newsprint or orally as the session unfolded. In some cases, the students had the opportunity to contribute to or modify the objectives of the lesson. In one introductory session, the opening discussion involved the students in determining their own objectives in doing the particular course. In another, the students' own problems with teaching became the basis of the lesson. In the sessions where team teaching was involved, there was evidence of careful shared planning of what would be done.

Selection and coherence of content: What is at issue here is rigour, interest and relevance. The content should be well-researched, up- to-date and relevant to the Ethiopian context. The students should also be able to see how the content is related to the learning outcomes and goals of the open and distance programme. Coherence is also important. If the courses in a programme are contradictory or unrelated to each other, the impact of the programme will be considerably lessened.

Presentation of content: This is to do with how the content is taught. There is no one `right' way to teach content - it will vary according to the course/subject and the audience. However, there are certain pointers for a reviewer. These include clear explanation of concepts and a range of examples, as well as sufficient and appropriate ways for students to process new concepts, rather than merely learn them off by heart.

Interaction, questioning, student participation and classroom atmosphere: It is in these aspects of the professional development of educators that contact sessions are most valuable, because desirable patterns of interaction, questioning skills, a variety of methods of encouraging student participation, and the creation of a conducive classroom atmosphere are best communicated through modelling and experience. It is difficult to teach these things through written materials alone.

In all sessions there was ample opportunity for pair and/or group discussion as well as for whole class discussion. Student - to-student interactions were central and facilitated by a variety of clearly designed tasks. Because a variety of types of interaction were encouraged, students who did not feel confident to speak to the whole group nevertheless had an opportunity to contribute in groups and pair s. In two of the classes, males tended to dominate in the plenary discussion, but the facilitators were aware of this, and in one case deliberately requested female students to respond.

Facilitator questions were at range of levels - descriptive and analytical. Facilitators not only asked questions of the students, but encouraged them to ask questions of each other and of the facilitator. Students were given adequate time to consider the questions. Student generated questions were taken seriously. Facilitators were skilled at getting students to unpack their assertions, to clarify what they meant, and to use their own experience to reflect. Facilitators also used students' questions and comments to build rich discussion.

In sessions where team teaching was involved, there was easy interaction between the two facilitators and clear sharing out of responsibility for various phases of the lesson. In all cases the atmosphere created in the classes was informal and friendly, but professional. Facilitators generally took trouble to refer to students by name, and indicated genuine interest in the contexts in which the students were teaching.

Facilitators showed great respect for individual answers to questions and made an effort to hear and understand points made by students even if they were not immediately clear. Students were credited with being experts in their own contexts, and with their own pupils. Facilitators were at pains to make it clear that the students should be critical of the ideas and material the facilitators themselves presented, and even though the students did not critique much, this attitude created an atmosphere of openness in the lesson. Particularly in the second year classes, the level of student response in the lesson was extremely high.

In terms of the *abilities needed for the design of lessons* for tutorial, the open and distance programme aims to develop teachers who have the ability to:

- design a lesson/series of lessons with a clear purpose, and in which the structure and methods are appropriate for the achievement of that purpose;
- design a lesson/series of lessons with the needs, interests and contexts of the learners in mind; • develop appropriate teaching and learning materials for the lesson/series of lessons; • plan to use existing resources creatively for teaching and learning purposes;
- design a variety of teaching and learning strategies to involve the students actively in their own language learning through the lessons;
- develop appropriate strategies to assess the language learning of the learners.

In terms of the *abilities needed for the implementation of lessons,* the diploma and degree programme aims to develop teachers who have the ability to:

- facilitate learning through the organization of the physical environment in the classroom and the effective manipulation of teaching aids and learning materials;
- ensure learner participation in the lesson through skilful questioning and an appropriate blend of individual, pair and group work;
- facilitate the learners' grasp of key concepts and processes through constructivist methods and the provision of sufficient scaffolding and reinforcement;
- manage the discussion in the lesson in such a way as to encourage critical enquiry and sensitive response to differing viewpoints;
- respond constructively to learners' varying needs, interests and difficulties. Purpose and structure of lesson

View of knowledge and use of students' experience: In the Ethiopian context, where rote learning and authoritarian views of knowledge have been the norm, particular attention needs to be paid to the way knowledge is presented. The perspective of this reviewer is that knowledge should be presented as open and constructed in contexts, rather than merely received in a fixed form from authorities. Students should be given opportunities to interrogate what they read, and their prior knowledge and experience should be valued and used in the development of new ideas and practices. Frequent opportunities and motivation for application of knowledge and skills in the classroom should be provided, but this should

be done in a reflective rather than mechanical way.

Activities and Feedback: A major strategy for effective teaching-learning in course materials is the provision of a range of activities and strategies to encourage students to engage with the content. If feedback or commentary on these activities is provided by the course writer, then students will be able to have a written version of the experience of discussion that takes place in lively teaching-learning practice. Furthermore, because students work through the materials on their own, they need some means of assessing their own progress. Comments on the activities in the materials can help to do this.

Language: Aside from the obvious importance of clear, coherent language at an appropriate level for the students, the kind of style that is used is crucial. The style can alienate or patronize the reader, or it can help to create a constructive learning relationship with the reader. The assessment of language level in course materials is a complex task, and this review will not go into the technical complexities of syntax, cohesion, coherence and text structure. However, reference will merely be made later in this chapter to the students' perceptions of the appropriateness of the language level.

One issue that needs special mentioning is the way `difficult vocabulary' has been treated. These course materials appear to have a coordinated and effective way of dealing with vocabulary. The number of technical terms is kept to a minimum, so that really interesting distinctions (such as the difference between materials and resources, and between activity sheets and worksheets) can be explored thoroughly. There is not simply a reliance on glossary (although that is present in some units), there is also

• In-text unpacking of concepts;
• A `guess before you read' approach to unfamiliar terminology; and
• Brief indications of the meanings of unfamiliar words in brackets so that learners do not have to interrupt the flow of their reading to remind themselves what certain words mean.

The sensitivity to learners also extends into choice of terminology. The terms `main language', `additional language', `language of choice' and `target language' are chosen instead of `first language', `second language', `home language', `mother tongue' and `native language' because the latter set of terms was devised by writers based in a context in which most people are monolingual or at best, bilingual. The writers of this course want to acknowledge and value the multilingual language ability of their students.
They do not wish to imply that they are second best, second rate second language learners who could not ever become as proficient in English as first language learners.

Teaching in Tutorial Sessions: The chief purpose of the observation of tutorial sessions was to explore the varieties of ways in which the tutors were modelling and developing the notions of good teaching-learning practice described in the materials. The tutorial sessions were therefore analyzed as extensions of the kind of teaching done through the materials, assessment design, and support and quality assurance. It could be argued that unless an effective assessment strategy is in place, good course materials and successful teaching on tutorial sessions could have next to no impact on student learning. An assessment strategy consists of design, support and quality assurance. Many sources of evidence were used to conduct this review - information from the coordinators, analysis of the assignments in the courses, the survey of student opinion, interviews with students on their opinion and experience of the open and distance programme, review of the reports of the external examiner for the diploma and degree, and the portfolios of the six students in the sample.

The main issue here the extent to which the facilitators managed the physical environment to ensure maximum communication of a variety of different kinds. A related issue is whether or not the facilities were suitable for the numbers of students. Where possible (not possible in three of the six sessions observed), facilitators arranged desks in a horseshoe shape to enable students to see each other as they engaged in whole group discussion, as well as for ease of pair discussion. Where this was not possible and students were seated in rows, facilitators compensated by circulating in the classroom, and making sure they reached a variety of students during pair and or group work.

Effect of the Open and Distance Programme on Students: Analysis of the different teaching and learning practices is incomplete without an attempt to assess the effects of these practices on student learning, and in particular, on teaching-learning practice. The effects are judged in terms of a framework for analysis which embodies the abilities, knowledge and values and attitudes being promoted by the open and distance programme. The analytical framework was developed by reviewing course materials, assessment, key documents about the programme, interviews with the coordinators and observing selected contact sessions. The evidence presented in this chapter on whether or not students can demonstrate the desired abilities, knowledge and values and attitudes is derived from classroom observations and interviews with students and the student opinion survey.

Strategies for Programme Design and Delivery: This part of the study summarizes the preceding parts of the study in an effort to draw out helpful strategies for the design and delivery of effective teaching-learning development practice using open and distance education programme. These strategies could be used by institutions which are planning to introduce open and distance education programmes for students or those that are in the process of redesigning existing programmes so that they can improve teaching-learning practice.

The following aspects, drawn from literature on the evaluation of open and distance education course materials, provided the framework for the review (Halpern & Hakel, 2003; Robson, 2000):

- Orientation of students to programme;
- Introductions to courses;
- Aims and learning outcomes;
- Selection and coherence of content;
- Presentation of content;
- View of knowledge and use of students' experience;
- Activities and feedback;
- Language;
- Layout and accessibility;
- Student opinion of `difficulty' of materials;
- Student use of the materials; and
- Student use of the content of the course materials in the classroom.

The following list of foci for observation was drawn up from the review of the course materials (content as well as teaching approaches) as well as the researchers' understanding of issues to consider in observation of classroom practice (Alavi, Wheeler, & Valacich; Leidner & Jarvenpaa as cited by Christensen,et al., 2001):

- Organization of physical environment (emphasized in course materials mainly in relation to classroom communication and the use of individual work);
- Use of visual aids and equipment (dealt with particularly in the materials development course);
- Objectives, purpose and structure of sessions (a major focus running through the assignments which require lesson planning and reflection on lessons);
- Interaction, questioning, student participation and classroom atmosphere (dealt with throughout, but particularly in the courses);
- Language (issues of exploratory talk, of multilingualism and multicultural approaches are fore grounded throughout the materials);
- Extension of student's theoretical content knowledge and its relation to practice (this is clearly related to the goals of the programme and is a concern in all the courses);
- Links with experience, with work in the other English courses, and future classroom practice (an integrated, experience-based and reflective approach to language teaching is a key feature in all the course materials);
- Links between English and Education Studies courses (coherence across subjects in the programme can only lead to increased impact of each subject individually).

Assessment design, support and quality assurance were selected as key aspects of assessment to consider. The rationale for this was as follows:

If you do not design assessment properly, students will not achieve what you want them to achieve. If you do not support students adequately, they will not achieve what you want them to achieve. If you do not have

effective quality assurance procedures in assignment marking and management, some students will achieve what you want them to achieve, and some will not. The research focused on the assessment design and support in the different courses. With regard to quality assurance, the approach adopted in the Education courses was discussed.

In terms of this open and distance programme which aims `to develop in education quality learning and teaching relevant to a changing Ethiopian's and to extend students' course/ssubjects teaching knowledge and skills', it is clear that there should be some assessment of the performance of students and their learners. However, this is not feasible for the open and distance programme at the moment, even though there is a vision for it. What is interesting is to see how the assessment in this programme has been designed to achieve the teaching-learning and education-based goals even though the tutors do not actually visit their students in the open and distance programme.

The following questions were asked about assessment on this open and distance programme (Alavi, Wheeler, & Valacich; Leidner & Jarvenpaa; as cited by Christensen,et al., 2001):

- Is the assessment designed in such a way that it contributes to the achievement of the programme goals, mastery of the course content, and development of broad abilities both in terms of the product expected and in terms of the process students go through to achieve that product?
- Are the students supported to achieve assessment requirements through clear instructions and criteria, and scaffolding and support in the achievement of the tasks?
- Is the commenting on assignments an effective means of extending the teaching on the course andproviding supportive formative feedback?
- Do the quality assurance processes ensure that the marking is fair and reliable? Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that the turnaround time on assignments is kept to a minimum?

4.2 Student Support

In this section we look at forms of support and how they meet the needs of individual students and contribute towards meeting the programme goals and aims. Tait(2004) defines learner or student support as those activities which are individualized or delivered in interactive groups (whether face -to-face, by telephone or in some other medium), such as tutoring and counseling, in contrast with the learning materials prepared for a mass of users without any actual individual or group in mind. Similarly, Taylor(2001) argue that Support systems are usually conceptualized as that range of resources - human, technical and administrative - available to learners, which are complementary to centrally produced, possibly multi-media, materials.

The aim of the investigation into student support provided in the open and distance programme was to see how the various forms of support meet the needs of individual students and contribute towards meeting the programme goals and aims. Several methods were used- the interviews with the coordinators, the survey,

questions to the ten students. In addition, however, the courses coordinator was asked to review each form of support she provides for the students and record the time spent on support during a given month.

Effective student support is critical for the success of an educational programme, particularly one where there is considerable work done by students independently at a distance. Support should motivate and encourage learners as well as help to combat feelings of isolation.

Support cannot be left to chance. Structures must be set up to facilitate the provision of support. The strength of this programme is the wide range of support structures which have been set up to serve both academic and social functions - the residentials sessions, peer support, voluntary rind-cycle workshops, telephone support, individual face-to- face consultation with lecturers and tutors. However, it is necessary to explore in more detail why not more use is made of all available support in addition to the more obvious logistical constraints.

Support is as much an attitude as it is a structure. The support on a programme is effective because of the attitude to support as well as the combination of structures that enable the support to operate effectively. An important element in this programme the sense of caring for the students and a strong ethos of collaborative work which encourages teachers to draw on a wide range of support people in their schools in addition to drawing on the programme staff.

A programme should recognize that students are likely to encounter a range of personal problems and provision needs to be made for counselling of students. In this programme, counselling is done by individuals in varying degrees, although there are no formal structures or mechanisms in place. Finally, in a teacher development programme, ideally there should be support for teachers in schools. At present the programme does not offer direct support to teachers in their classrooms. Through the study partner system and the encouragement of a collegial approach, the programme encourages teachers to be each other's mentors, but most students express the need for direct support from programme staff in their classrooms.

Effective student support is critical for the success of an educational open and distance programme, particularly one where there is considerable work done by students independently at a distance. The diploma and degree distance programme is designed as a mixed mode programme with seven residential sessions over the two years because there is recognition that students need considerable support and cannot be expected simply to engage with the course materials and assessment on their own.

Support should motivate and encourage learners as well as help to combat feelings of isolation. The main structures provided for student support in the open and distance programme (Macdonald, et al., 2001) are:

- Compulsory residential blocks;
- Peer support;
- Voluntary mid-cycle workshops;

- Telephone support;
- Individual face-to- face consultation with lecturers and tutors;
- Feedback on assignments (dealt with under assessment).

Each of these is investigated in the research in terms of the extent to which the students make use of it, as well as in terms of how they value it. A further dimension of support that should ideally be in place in a teacher development open and distance programme is support for students in their own learning. Although this programme has a plan for providing support in students learning, it has not been possible to implement it because of financial constraints and other related problems.

An important aspect of learner support is humanizing the institution and helping the student in managing the administrative process' and it is important for distance education institutions to have an efficient administrative system which is responsive to individual learner needs. Due to time limitations we did not focus on administration but the following comments can be made. No special arrangements have been made by the university authorities to recognize the special needs of distance learners. Applications are processed centrally with other applications.

Clearly student support is critical to the success of any well functioning distance education system. The Green Paper on Higher Education Transformations acknowledges the positive role of distance education and resource based- learning in relation to providing access and promoting the quality of education but cautions that despite these positive aspects, there is 'inadequate learner support'. A Distance Education Quality Standards Framework for Ethiopia is firm in its assertion that learner support needs to be an integral part of well functioning distance education.

A Policy Framework for Education and Training' is unequivocal in its statement that learner support is a necessary criteria for distance education to function effectively: For distance education to function effectively, there are a number of criteria to be met, including well-designed courses, learner support, efficient administrative processes and appropriate organisational structures and evaluation procedures. The national Teacher Audits also recognizes that support is very important to the success of any teacher education programme offered at a distance and advocates that: [P]rovision should be made by distance education providers to advise and help individuals who would otherwise be isolated throughout the learning process... It should be made easily available through a variety of devices including, most importantly, human intervention.

It goes on to say, If learners are to adapt to the special requirements of guided self -study, they require various forms of support, for example satisfactory access to tutors and facilitators, opportunity to interact with other learners, and access to the necessary facilities. Support should help, motivate and encourage learners as well as help to combat feelings of isolation. The main structures provided for student support in

the diploma and degree programme are:

- Contact sessions;
- Peer support;
- Voluntary mid-cycle workshops;
- Telephone support;
- Individual face-to- face consultation with teachers and tutors;
- Feedback on assignments.

Furthermore, Stella and Gnanam (2004) have observed that open and distance university students tend to blame themselves for failure rather than the institution or courses when they perform badly. As such it is important to develop the learners self confidence and peers can offer reassurance and support. In practice, some students live too far apart to make it feasible to work with a partner, but these students are definitely in the minority. Students can have different study partners for the English courses from those that they have for the Education courses. Very often there is a Math or Science student in their school, and it is convenient to work on the education assignments together. The teachers often change study partners when they choose their options in the second year.

Peer support is built into various parts of the course such as assignments and exams. For example the Unit One Assignment: Relating theories of language learning and acquisition to own teaching and teaching of study partner involves classroom observation, discussion with partner about lessons observed, and own reflections about partner's observation of student's own lesson.

The Theory and Practice Course extends the notion of study partners into the exam. The examination in the Theory and Practice course is open book and the students receive the questions beforehand. Students choose one of four questions. Each question focuses on a different aspect of the course - oral language, reading, writing, and integrating skills. Two different strategies using the peer support systems have been built into the assignments during the course of the year. In the first year in which the course was nm, students were required to spend the first part of the examination working in pairs to prepare a lesson/series of lessons in response to one of the questions. This was awarded 70% of the marks. In the second part of the examination they were required to write an individual commentary on the task just completed with the partner. This was awarded 30% of the marks. This had problems, picked up both by the external examiner and the course coordinator.

Opinion of course coordinator: According to the Education Course Coordinator, the effectiveness of the study partner system is variable - it works excellently for some but for others it doesn't work well for logistic as well as other reasons (for example a teacher couldn't phone her partner at Paul, R. 1 990.Towards Open Management. In Leadership and Integrity in Open Learning and Distance Education. Sometimes study partners help each other to do good work, but sometimes they reinforce the worst things in each other. There have also been problems with copying each other's assignments word for word. However, once it has been drawn to the attention of students that they can work together but then must go

away and write their own assignments, it usually works.

The following illustrates what types of support students make use of and how they rate the importance of each type of support. The contact sessions supported the learners in the following main ways.

Assignments: An important function of the residentials is helping students with assignments. In at least four of the sessions observed teachers were given direct help with assignment The sessions offer students support in working on assignments still to be written a well as providing additional feedback on previous assignments.

Interacting with materials: The issues here are: use of aids/equipment appropriate to the purpose of lesson, effective use of aids/equipment, awareness of `appropriate technology' issues for the mostly rural classrooms of the teachers balanced with the importance of exposure to a variety of media for learning facilitated by the Wits venue.

Social support and building confidence during tutorial session: The tutor gives students the opportunity to get to know each other and interact with each other. Student participation was commented on favourably in most of the observation providing an opportunity for students to get to know each other. The conducive classroom atmosphere (informal and friendly but professional) and group and pair activities which were central in the sessions also contributed to this. Because a variety of types of interaction were encouraged, students who did not feel confident to speak to the whole group, nevertheless had an opportunity to contribute in groups and pairs. In two of the classes, males tended to dominate in the plenary discussion, but the facilitators were aware of this, and in one case deliberately requested female students to respond.

Questioning and encouraging the use of Students' questions to build rich discussion was skillfully employed. Tutors not only asked questions of the students but encouraged students to ask questions of each other. Students were credited with being experts in their own contexts and with their own pupils and facilitators frequently drew on tutors' experiences and elicited their opinions. Students' experiences in the classroom and in the wider context were often the starting point for introducing new work. For example students were asked to discuss their difficulties in teaching poetry; they were asked to share their lesson planning experience and in day- to-day practice; they were asked to think about the resources available in their schools and communities; they were asked to write about their own experiences; they were asked during the lesson to evaluate the suggested ideas in terms of their knowledge of their own pupils' level and interest.

Layout and accessibility: Effective layout maintains a creative tension between consistency and variety. It

is important that students are able to find their way through the various units and sections by the provision of contents pages, concept maps, heading, subheadings, statements of aims and learning outcomes, and other access devices. The module also needs to be broken up into reasonable chunks, and the layout should assist the logical flow of ideas. At the same time, a very predictable format can lead to boredom. A good way of introducing variety is through the use of visual material such as concept maps, pictures and diagrams. This has the added advantage of catering for learners who learn best through visual representations of ideas. Where appropriate, concept maps, pictures and diagrams should be included.

The many different sources used, and the many examples in these materials make it imperative that appropriate layout and access devices are used to ensure readability of the module. Use of language at the appropriate level is insufficient if students cannot get an overview of the module, cannot find which sections of the module they need for particular purposes, and cannot refer back and forward easily. There are a number of devices that help to make the content and structure of a module more accessible to students who are studying independently. Words in a module do not necessarily have to be read one at a time in a certain order.

There can be excellent activities, wonderful use of students' experience, excellent examples of lessons they could try out in the classroom, a logical development of ideas with a range of examples to help students get to grips with concepts. But if they are presented in an inaccessible way, students will find it difficult to make sense of how they fit together, and could end up with a somewhat lopsided or fragmented notion of what is in the module. Then the students will have to rely on the residential sessions to get a sense of the direction of the course, and will tend to engage with the sessions to get a sense of the direction of the course, and will tend to engage with the content only as it relates to the assessment. Even then, weaker students will not discover all there is in the module that could help them engage with the assessment.

From the research, it seems that there are two major areas which would improve the effectiveness of the course materials as vehicles for independent teaching and learning: increased accessibility from a layout point of view, and increased clarity about learning outcomes with associated self-assessment exercises.

Layout is not simply a matter of making materials attractive, although attractiveness does help. It is about arranging the material in such a way that students can grasp concepts and access ideas and examples without having to move through the module sentence by sentence and page by page. It is about encouraging more effective reading and studying.

Provision of clear learning outcomes and self-assessment is a useful way of helping the students focus on what is important, and develop the skills required for independent learning: the ability to assess what one wants to learn, what one is required to learn for certain purposes, and the extent to which one has learnt these things. There seems to be evidence from this research that even if accessibility were improved and learning outcomes and self-assessment exercises provided, student use of the materials would not

necessarily be more efficient. It is important therefore that effective ways of teaching students to use the materials efficiently and flexibly for independent study should be built into the programme as a whole.

Accessibility includes the use of various access devices such as contents pages, headings, icons, etc) and the layout-the way the module (of whatever kind whether visual or verbal) is arranged on the page. Features in the course materials which enhance accessibility:

- There are contents pages for each course with numbered sections (although the numbering of the first unit of the theory and practice course is not consistent with the rest);
- Extracts from other sources are boxed, shaded and clearly referenced;
- Activities are boxed and indicated by means of heading and icon (although differentiation between icon signalling individual activity and icon signifying work with partner is not particularly useful);
- There are summaries, references and assignments at the end of each unit (but the positioning of these elements semis irregular and it is often difficult to find the summary which seems to be lost in the rest of the information). Features which hinder accessibility are mostly found in the first course, Theory and Practice. Many of the points mentioned below have been remedied in the later courses;
- Headings are very inconsistent within courses and even within individual units and are not helpful in distinguishing different sections. They are often too similar to each other and to other bold parts of the module which are not headings;
- The numbering in the activities is inconsistent - sometimes a, b and c is used, sometimes bullet points, sometimes numbering, sometimes nothing;
- There are apparently unmotivated changes in font (quotations in boxes sometime appear in sanserif bold, sometimes in sanserif italic bold, sometimes in serif bold, sometimes in a mixture of serif bold and normal);
- There is lack of consistency in the way that assignments are placed in the units - in the worst case they appear as various choices throughout units (although there is a summary with page references at the end of units, and the assignments are listed in the contents page as well);
- In some cases (e.g. theory and practice), there is a lack of orientation to the overall assessment for the course in the general introduction. The appearance of individual assignments within the units is therefore unmotivated;
- Original pages (e.g. of classroom activities) from a variety of sources are included with insufficient standardization of borders and sizes, so that the pages look inconsistent and messy and interfere seriously with the flow of the surrounding text; and
- The margins are inconsistent - sometimes they are broad enough, sometimes they are not, and there does not seem to be a policy for how they will be used aside from positioning the icons.

When original pages from other sources are scanned in there is no regard for the margins at all.

One of the points about accessibility of the materials that is raised in the quote from Fred Lockwood at the beginning of this section is that access devices are necessary to help students get an overview of what they are learning. In addition, however, the point must be made that while some students learn best from the words on the page, others learn best through pictures and diagrams. In the interview recorded that the Developing English Learning and Teaching Materials Course, makes some good points about the importance of making materials visual: I think the use of visuals and the teaching of visual communication are essential. All learning materials should be visual. They should include photos, drawings, cartoons or images because we live in a highly visual world and are becoming more and more sophisticated at reading and making images.

A final point needs to be made about layout and accessibility as this relates to the packaging of the materials. This reviewer found it extremely frustrating to work with a cumbersome file (for the Theory and Practice and Grammar Courses), in which the ring binder inevitably starts to give trouble, and pages start falling out. The bound single booklets of the later courses are much more manageable.

4.3 Orientations to the Programme, Introductions, Aims and Learning Outcomes

Orientation of the students to the open and distance programme as a whole before the first sessions is by means of the booklet `An Introduction to the diploma and degree in education programme which contains clearly written orientation material for both the specialization and common courses. An important feature of this orientation is that it requires the students to do an assignment in both the common and specialist courses. This is useful in that it engages the students immediately with the approach and requirements of the courses in the programme, provides them with formative feedback so that they can assess early on without wasting time what they need to do to succeed in the programme, and also provides the course coordinators valuable information about the level, capacity, and backgrounds of the students on the open and distance programme. As far as the individual courses are concerned, care is taken in the general introductions to the courses that the students understand the approach that they need to take to studying the courses, and not merely the kind of content that they need to master. For example, in the theory and practice course, the course writer advises keeping a personal/professional journal, and in reading and writing for personal and professional growth course, there are `suggestions to guide you through this unit' which include for example, `practice', `working with a study partner', `activities', reading and writing', `keep a notebook or a journal' as well as an outline of assessment requirements. In other of the courses, an introduction to the content is regarded as most important, either in the form of an introduction to key terms or to the approach to the content. Course goals/aims are also present in the general introductions to the courses - with the notable exception of the theory and practice course (where it would seem to be most important as it is the introductory and fundamental course). The course goals are clearly related to the overall programme goals - they refer to improving students' knowledge and use of English as a language, theory and practice of language teaching, as well as improvement of students' teaching skills. In various ways they relate to goals

of developing reflective practitioners, encouraging teaching-learning and school-based research, enabling and fostering collegial and co-operative ways of working amongst teachers.

What is missing in the general introductions to the courses is a clear sense of the outcomes that learners need to be able to demonstrate by the end of the course. Many of the goals are easily translatable into learning outcomes, but in some cases (for example, the Reading and Writing for Personal and Professional Growth course) they would amount to a `wish list', rather than a statement of the necessary on the basis of which summative assessment will be designed.

The courses are all extremely rich and broad- particularly the theory and practice course - and so students do need guidance as to how they are being expected to develop through the course, and on the basis of what learning outcomes they will be assessed. The phrasing of some of the statements o£ goals (`The goal of the course is to provide you with opportunities to extend your knowledge and skills as/in:) should not be lost. It is an open invitation to development. But more general goal statements need to be supplemented with more precise learning outcome statements.

A related issue is that the English courses do not provide any indications to students as to how much time it will take to meet the requirements of the course, or even to work through the materials. This is a particular strength of the common courses in the open and distance programme, and perhaps there should be some sharing of the methodology for determining learner workload. At the micro level, one of the most important purposes of a good introduction to a section is to provide the learner with a motivation to engage with the material presented. From the introduction to a unit or section, the distance learner should be able to answer the question `Why do I want to know about/learn this?' in ways that make sense for a person who is very busy working at the same time as studying.

The English course materials have a clear practical focus, and students can usually see their relevance immediately, but in certain circumstances there is need for motivation to read a particular section. For example, when the theories of language learning and acquisition are dealt with in unit one of the theory and practice course, the students are motivated by the clear link created between introductory assignment and the goal to establish `possible relationships between these theories and approaches and your classroom teaching and learning situations'. However, in unit three, the reason for inclusion of much of the material is not immediately clear to the student. Unit plunges straight from goals into a discussion of meanings of literacy, a fairly abstract set of ideas.

4.4 Presentation of Content

Presentation of content could also be termed `teaching approach'. It is important that ways are found to

encourage students to engage with the material actively, rather than merely reading it passively. Ways of presenting the content are slightly different for each of the individual units and courses, because each course has slightly different requirements. However, common strengths are: Use of a range of rich examples, both to help students understand the concepts and to provide activities for them to try out in the classroom. The examples come from many different sources, and the inclusion of these different `voices' allows students to understand the issues from more than one point of view and in more than one way. For example, unit two of the theory and practice course does not only define all right's five aspects of teaching-learning interaction management; it provides a description of each aspect as it relates to a transcript of a lesson. In order to help students deepen their understanding of classroom interaction the writer provides two further transcripts and a summary.

The examples are not only there to help students understand concepts. There are also examples of related activities for students to try out in their teaching-learning practices. In unit two of the theory and practice course, for example, there are three sample group work lessons, a teaching-learning activities focusing on questioning, a teaching-learning activities to encourage self learning and determination, and then nearly many pages of examples of lessons from a variety of sources which encourage the development of listening and speaking skills.

In the course materials, the writers, where appropriate, take their own advice, and use stories for teaching purposes. This is noticeable in the course on developing teaching and learning course materials where the entire introductory section dealing with criteria for approaches to materials development is done by means of four interviews with materials developers. Activities help students engage with central issues in these interviews and relate them to their own contexts and experience, and when technical aspects of materials development are referred to later in the course, there is frequent reference back to these `stories'.

A recursive, process approach to the development of the ideas in a course. Often writers of open and distance materials present content in a linear way, and assume that students can come to grips with difficult concepts one by one and then write them off. The writers of these materials help students understand by returning to the same ideas many times in different ways. They encourage students to interact with case studies, to talk to each other and work cooperatively, to do activities which help them analyze concepts and apply them to their own experience or practice.

Building of essential skills: In recognition of the fact that success with open and distance education courses relies to a very large extent on ability to read, the writers of the course materials devote a lot of time to helping students develop critical reading skills. (This is done even more extensively in the education studies courses).

4.5 View of Knowledge and Use of Students' Experience

One of the strengths of these course materials is the understanding they reflect of the contexts and capabilities of the students for whom they are intended, and the respect with which the students' personal and professional experience is treated. From the first assignment, it is clear that the stories the students have to tell are important and form the basis for the development of their understanding of the course content. Throughout the course materials, activities require students not only to draw on previous knowledge and experience but to create and reflect on new experiences. Students are asked to describe their own experience as a basis for theoretical discussions. Students are asked discuss how their own experience can be explained interns of theory. They are told stories that could reflect their own contexts and experiences as a trigger to finding ways to think about their own experience. They are asked to share understanding and experience with their study partner. They are asked to observe each other's lessons, so that they have a common experience on which to reflect together. They are asked to assess sample activities in the light of their experience of the level and interests of their own class (as in the developing teaching and learning materials course). In other words experience is not seen as a static thing - something you have had - but something you are continually having and need to be thinking about in new ways all the time.

The range of sources and the range of voices used facilitates the students' understanding. The range of sources and the range of voices used facilitates the students' understanding that knowledge is open and constructed in contexts, rather than merely received in a fixed form from authorities. In addition, different theories are presented in terms of their strengths and weaknesses in representing reality, rather than as either wrong or right. For example, instead of a condemnation of behaviourist theories of language learning, the aspects of language learning that they do account for (for example, routine aspects such as greetings) are illustrated. This encourages students not to develop stereotypes, or to slip into the polarization of traditional practice.

In addition, instead of being presented with different views and then being asked to decide between them, much more nuanced activities are set. For example, students are asked first to think about their own language learning experience in childhood in a structured way with their study partners before being asked, On the basis of your answers to these questions do you agree or disagree with the theorists who stress the importance of caretaker talk and of interaction between caretaker and young child?

In other words, interrogation o£ theory is required, but on the basis of something concrete, rather than merely as an academic exercise which could be learned by rote. An interesting perspective on the issue of presenting knowledge in an open way was revealed in the interview with the coordinator. One of the aims of higher education is that students should learn to be critical and develop their own views on the issues they learn about. At the same time, the course writers need to push the students to consider limitations in their traditional practice and to explore new ideas. This often involves deliberately positioning the students,

rather than allowing them to position themselves. On selected issues - such as that of code-switching - the courses writer made a strenuous effort to help students develop their own position, but in some of the less apparently debatable issues this proved more difficult. What is difficult in materials is often easier face-to-face, and increasingly as the year proceeded the course coordinator used the sessions to signal to students that it is acceptable and even desirable to have different positions on a topic.

4.6 Activities and Feedback

As has already been discussed, the range of activities in the materials is extremely wide and the activities help the students engage with the content, rather than merely passively letting it flow over them. Some activities require individual work, but many encourage consultation with the students' study partner. This appears to be a mechanism used by writers to help students develop a way of working through the material collaboratively, and overcoming some of the isolation of open and distance study.

The peer support system is discussed at length in the chapter on student support. However, there is a query about whether or not students will actually take the time to do. However, there is a query about whether or not students will actually take the time to do a fairly complicated exercise like this (especially since they will not be certain whether or not they are `getting it right'). Writers of open and distance education materials need to develop strategies to encourage students to engage with the activities. In the courses developed subsequent to the theory and practice course, deliberate strategies are adopted to encourage students to work through the activities. In the developing teaching and learning materials course, the first assignment requires students to work through a series of questions in the activities related to four interviews with materials developers. This compels students to acquire an overview of the theory and practice of materials development and relate it to their own experience, before going into the detail of the subsequent units. A similar approach is adopted in the researching our teaching-learning practices. The students are motivated to do the activities, because many of the activities are for portfolio, and those that are not for direct inclusion are related to portfolio activities in some way- for example, editing for content, structure and grammar.

Generally students are supported in the cumulative development of the required competence and the performance of assessment tasks through the kinds of activities that are set. A particularly good example is in the researching our teaching-learning activities, which move from engagement with action research stories in the first assignment (ten activity questions), to a series of activities designed to encourage students to select the research they would like to do for the assignment, the methods they would use to collect and analyze data. This leads to the research assignment on which oral reporting is required at the Residential workshop, which in turn this leads to activities relating to writing a final report, followed by the submission of the research report as the examination equivalent assignment. It is quite clearly a cumulative developmental process, with opportunity for peer and tutor feedback.

It is not only activities that play an important part in ensuring active engagement with open and distance learning materials: it is also the feedback that students receive on their attempts to work through the activities. The purpose of activities and feedback is to create a sense of the to and fro of classroom interaction and face-to- face discussion even when students are reading on their own. If feedback is missing, then it is as if student comments or responses are unacknowledged and left hanging. It is also important that students learn through the materials to assess their own progress: the ability to do this is essential for independent learning.

In these courses there is generally no written feedback provided on activities within the materials. Furthermore, there are no self assessment questions or tests, and beyond reading the summaries at the end of the units there does not seem to be any way within the materials themselves that students can assess their own progress. The encouragement to work with each other on activities and assignments is a strategy for getting feedback, but this has its limitations particularly if a student happens to have a partner who cannot engage at a very deep level. Particularly if a student happens to have a partner who cannot engage at a very deep level. Of course, some of the activities are incorporated into the assignments, and these receive extensive feedback fromtutors. However, tutor- marked assignments do not adequately develop the ability of the students to assess themselves. It is recommended that the course writers think of further ways in which students can reflect on and assess their own progress in getting to grips with the ideas in the materials.

4.7 Student Opinion and Experience

In eliciting student opinion and experience of the materials, it was necessary first of all to establish the amount of the material that students actually read. One cannot draw any conclusions about the success or otherwise of the materials in communicating the curriculum or affecting teaching-learning practice without knowing the extent of use of materials. A related issue is whether or not the students actually do the activities designed to help them interact with the text. Secondly it was important to see whether the kinds of problems highlighted by the expert review were problems as far as the students were concerned. Questions were therefore asked (though indirectly) about:

- Learning outcomes,
- Layout and accessibility,
- Opportunity for self- assessment.

The researcher decided not to try to work out how much time students spend studying a particular course. The students completed the theory and practice courses in 2013, and it is unlikely that they would be able to indicate reliably how much time they spent on a course they had completed. Thirdly, it was important to try to assess the extent of difficulty the students have in understanding the material - the level, and in particular, the language level. This cannot easily be established by expert review. Fourthly, the major aim of the research is to establish transfer - the extents to which the ideas and approaches recommended and modeled

in the materials are used in the self learning. Therefore, students were asked about their experience of using these ideas and approaches in the self learning.

4.8 Student use of Materials

Course coordinators' view: The programme coordinator reported that although she/he has no reliable information from the students on the extent to which they use the materials, she/he can tell to some extent whether students use the materials from what they look like - whether the materials are well- fingered and written in. Students tend not to read the materials if they are not required for the assignments or if they are not required to submit portfolio activities.

However, students say that when the course is finished they will go back to the materials and use them in the self learning. These opinions of the course coordinator were tested in the survey and interviews with students. Naturally, student opinion on this issue cannot be accepted as absolutely valid.

However, what the response does indicate is commitment to reading all the materials. It was necessary to verify this by student interviews. Findings from individual interviews. Two methods were used in the interviews - looking at students' files to see how extensively they had been used; and asking students directly about use.

Interviews with students and observations of classrooms show that the students are aware of the need to take into account learners' life and home experiences, use the experiences to build the lesson and make links between pupils' experiences in the same subject or across lessons and subjects. The awareness was demonstrated to varying degrees. During an interview, one student said, `... it is important to draw on the pupils' experiences and build on them.' Another said, `it is important to be constantly alert to the needs of the learners...' The choice of the content of the lesson also reflected an awareness of the students' contexts of the pupils. The translation into practice of the students' awareness was varied. In one lesson, the student elicited the learners' life and home experiences by asking learners to identify objects that they know which are similar in shape to the shapes shown to them in class. The pupils mentioned a range of objects mainly from their homes. However, the experiences of the learners were not integrated into the lesson and used to teach further. Neither did the teacher make links across the curriculum and between previous lessons and future ones.

Of the students interviewed, four students had notes, *highlighting,* and *other pencil or pen marks* which indicated engagement with the course materials. One student had not brought her course materials for the evaluator to see and one student said that she didn't like to write in her file because she would like to use it later for her masters. One student's file contained *pencil marks on every page.* These were either comments or underlining or dates (sometimes several different dates) on which he started or revised a particular section. The numbers of pages read ranged from one to five pages at a time. Everything was read and then

revised at least once. Some parts were revised as many as four times.

This student when asked to talk about the content under each heading of a particular unit could describe main points clearly and spontaneously. The other students had to think and refer to the materials to form an opinion in answer to a question about the content. Responses to the question `What were the best parts of the courses last year?' demonstrated varying degrees of specificity:

- Process writing approach and code-switching/code- mixing;
- Working with transcripts and asking a colleague to observe and code-switching/code- mixing;
- Reading;
- Theory and practice course ;
- No specific part of any of the courses mentioned.

The more engaged students were able to refer to two or three specific parts of a specific course, whereas the less engaged students referred to one of the two courses vaguely, or no specific course at all. With regard to whether or not students do the activities in the materials, the following emerged. One student said that he thought about them all, but only actually did an activity if it had a direct bearing on the assignment. Another student said that the assignments are grounded in the activities and classroom practice, therefore it would really be hard for one to write an assignment without having done the activity.

This student also said that he tended to ignore the activities that simply say `think about' primarily because there is no way to test whether or not one actually thought about the activity.

It appears that students read the course materials, but in varying amounts and with varying degrees of thoroughness. It also appears that unless activities are related to assignments, students tend not to do them. Finally, it is encouraging to note that students seem to continue reading the course materials even after the course is complete. Indirectly, these findings support the impression gained in the expert review that the materials are interesting, relevant, and likely to engage students.

The interview results showed as:

- No students were able to find the main sections of the unit, though one student referred to the list of contents and index as well as highlighted passages (which he referred to as key points), and another to the introductions, the headers and footers.

- No students were able to point to a place in the unit which summarized what they had to learn in the unit, although one student pointed to certain highlighted key points dotted across the unit, and two students read excerpts from the interim core syllabus which appears at the beginning of Unit Two.

- No students were able to indicate ways within the materials whereby they could assess how much they had learned in the unit. One student said he does it himself by making summaries and doing the activities, and another says she does it by applying the knowledge in the classroom - `it helps you to assess yourself as well as the learners'. Another student said he is unable to assess what he has learnt but this is made easier when working with a study partner.

In addition to group tutorials, lecturers and tutors provide individual face to face tutoring throughout the year. The education coordinator reported that three or four students come round assignment time and another three or four will phone in for help. Generally very few learners visit the university and it is usually those in the vicinity of Gauteng who are able to take advantage of one to one tutoring outside of inhabited. The education coordinator reported that students go to good tutors. The idea is to encourage a close tutor student relationship, for academic support. In the English courses, the numbers are relatively small, and hence in 1997 there were no tutors, only the course coordinator, and two additional course writers who acted as tutors for their courses. In education there are over 200 students. To cope with this number, there are eight tutors including the course coordinator.

The education coordinator reported that the students come not only with academic problems, but with personal problems which create academic problems. She has decided that she or her tutors can't really deal with these problems, because they don't have the expertise or time to do so. For example, one student lost her child, one female student was beaten up by her husband, another male. Student was beaten up by wife's family, lots of students get ill, and lots of students have financial problems. A complicating factor is that these problems usually come in the form of requests for extensions on assignments. Now the coordinator asks students to put in writing the request for late submission of assignments, and then makes a decision as she believes that if you want to be strict about submission dates, decisions about extensions must be done centrally.

In addition to coming to see lecturers and tutors in-between residentials, many students consult with them during the residentials. An example from the April residential of a list kept by the English coordinator shows how common this is: Although some students managed to speak to the coordinator during the residentials, she has pointed out that at the residential sessions; there is limited time available for individual consultation, especially because she teaches students in both year groups. On average the coordinator estimates that she spends 60- 90 minutes per day doing individual counselling during the residential week. Student comment on the packaging was also interesting. One student liked the file, because it was durable, easy to turn the pages (although the pages must be reinforced) and also because he was able to put his extra notes in it. Another said that the material was not well packaged. Too many pages had been fitted into the folder making it too bulky and uncomfortable to use. This student said he liked reading in bed but he couldn't read these course materials in bed because the folder was too big and `one get tired of holding it up'.

On the one hand the evidence cited above points to lack of student expertise in handling course material, and on the other, it points to certain deficiencies in the materials themselves. Students do not have sufficient skill in engagement with written course materials. They do not know sufficiently well how to look for what they must learn in the materials, and they do not use the full range of strategies at their disposal to find their way around the materials. Even though they claim to be able to find their way around the materials easily, when actually asked to do so, they tend to fumble. As far as the materials themselves are concerned, they clearly do not provide students with opportunities to assess themselves. They have to find means outside of the materials of assessing their progress. Secondly, the materials do not provide students with sufficiently accessible information about what they need to learn in each unit.

Thirdly, the accessibility of the materials could be improved. The findings from the student interviews seem to support the expert review in suggesting that the accessibility of the materials needs to be improved, learning outcome need to be stated for each course, and for each unit in the course, and the inclusion self-assessment questions with feedback could help students assess their own progress after working through a unit - rather than relying tutor or peer feedback. However, it is also clear that students need to be taught how to read and study from materials. The responses again reflected positively on the materials. However, they should be taken together with the responses to the final question in the survey: What has been the most negative aspect of this programme? Less number of respondents indicated that they found the programme highly strenuous. This indicates that the positive responses to level of difficulty of language do not mean that the students find the course easy or unchallenging.

Although no direct question about difficulty of the materials was asked in the interviews, the following points emerged:

- Three students specifically mentioned that the level of the language was right. One of these added that it was not loaded with academic jargon and he found that he did not need to keep a dictionary nearby while reading the text. The same student said that the unit was captivating in that it was written in a conversational manner: `when you read, it is like you are in conversation with the text'. For this reason there was no need to memorize the concepts and terms.
- One student said she found some of the course documents are difficult, but that it had been helpful in teaching her how to recognize her own language errors.
- Another student said that a particularly difficult part of the theory and practice course had been the unit on literacy. He said he had to read it four times, but when he did the assignment where he was asked to talk about his own experience, everything became clear.
- Two students said that the tutorial were necessary to clarify difficulties in the materials.

Respondents who participated in the focus groups interviews conducted as part of a broad investigation into issues in students supply, utilization and development in open and distance education, pointed to the disjunction between students and tutorial/facilitators preparation programmes, ongoing professional development initiatives and what actually happens in the open and distance education programmes.

The course materials in open and distance education, designed to encourage critical self reflection, comprise printed study materials, video cassettes and audio cassettes. Study guides include activities that are aimed at improving students' understanding and teaching-learning practice. The course materials were designed by a team of experts with experience in education. Course materials include ongoing support for students in the form of meetings at designated centres and visits by the facilitators. The facilitator's role is a mixture of

- monitoring (classroom practice and course progress);
- assessing (lessons, assignments, and examinations, and study guide activities);
- tutoring and mediating (course content and video and audio programmes); and
- pastoral care (usually telephonically).

It appears that though students find the courses challenging and individual students have particular problems with various sections, the writers have pitched the course materials correctly, particularly with regard to the language level. It is important, however, that students are able to come to tutorial to discuss problems they have with the materials.

This concurs with the findings from the expert review. The students appreciate the kind of relationship the writer creates with them through her style, and even though some of them struggle with difficult parts of the courses, the level of language itself is not a barrier.

4.9 Active Involvement of Learners

A variety of teaching and learning strategies that encourage active involvement of learners were modelled during contact sessions. This was consistent with the general approach in the course materials which also advocated active involvement of learners. The strategies suggested and modelled include questioning skills, the creation of a conducive classroom atmosphere, and a variety of methods of encouraging student participation. In all residential sessions observed, the use of group and pair work as well as whole class discussion was modelled.

In the interviews, the students recognized that the learner always has something to contribute to learning and opportunities that encourage learner participation must be created. A student mentioned that one of the main things she has learnt from the programme is that `children ought to be given more time and space to learn rather than hurrying on to the next topic.' She also said she always looks for ways to `involve the children more in the lessons.'

At the residential sessions, the researcher observed how the tutors managed the physical environment to ensure maximum participation of the students. As noted in section four, a related question that was looked at is whether or not the facilities were suitable for the number of students. The physical environment in the classrooms was observed in term of how the students organized it to encourage learner participation and the suitability of the facilities for the number of the learners.

The physical environment of classrooms varied considerably. In a classroom of forty eight pupils, the class was arranged in groups of four around tables facing each other. Some of the desks normally in the classroom had been stacked up outside to create more space for group work. The arrangement of the furniture encouraged cooperative learning in groups and the teacher could move around to provide support to groups. In one class, the learners sat in groups on a dusty concrete floor. The groups sat so close to one another that sometimes it was difficult to distinguish one group from another. The teacher moved around with difficulty. In another class in the same school, the pupils sat on benches arranged in rows. During group work, some of the children remained seated on their benches. While others worked in groups, those that remained seated tried to do the activity individually on their laps. The teacher made no attempt to organize the pupils so that they could work co-operatively. All students spoke consciously about group work as a way of encouraging learner participation. During the first round of classroom observations, group work was used in all lessons. Only in one class was group work used together with pair and individual work. In the second round of observations, group work was used in all but one lesson. One student said that he had always known about group work. Being on the FDE programme had helped him to develop a deeper understanding of why group work was encouraged in English teaching. He said the programme he was on before, simply portrayed `... pupil centred and communicative approaches as slogans.' He said, `instead of being pseudo- military and instructional...', he now created opportunities for students to get involved. In his words, he `takes learners aboard.' Another student said, `the [programme] is learner centred and shifts the focus from the teacher as the sole supplier of knowledge ... kids are active participants in the acquisition of knowledge.' The same teacher said he no longer concentrated on whole class but used group work. Another said, `I never get tired of using group work.' The implementation of group work raised interesting questions about the constitution of groups, the role of the student during group work, and the use of fe edback from group reports. Group work took the form where an activity was given and the pupils worked together on it. In some classes the instructions were given verbally and repeated during group work. In others the instruction were written up on the chalkboard or on newsprint.

In most classrooms, learners were divided into predetermined groups with identified group leaders. The groups were not permanent but they were constituted and reviewed by the students from time to time. In one class, each group id entified its own scribe, chairperson and presenter and the responsibilities were rotated on a regular basis. The students gave reasons for using predetermined groups. One student noted with concern that generally boys and girls do not like to work with each other. The researchers noted that in mixed groups there were more boys than girls and vice versa. One student said he allocated pupils to groups according to the rows (front to back) and because boys tend to sit at the back, he was able to get mixed groups. Another student said he had to work with predetermined groups because, `with a class of sixty eight learners, it is quicker for pupils to get into predetermined groups.' The researchers confirmed this. Within a very short time the pupils were in their groups. He also said bright pupils tend to form their own groups and exclude the weak ones. The researchers were unable to ascertain the extent to which this concern was addressed.

The role of the student during group work was played out differently in different classrooms. In one classroom, the student did little to encourage the pupils sufficiently. Although the activity was suitable for group work and the level of the pupils, she did not support or monitor group work activities. She gave

unclear instructions for the group activity from her desk which was in front of the class. As a result, the pupils interpreted the activity differently. Some sorted the cards which they had been given according to colours, others sorted them according to according to shape. Very few pupils worked in groups, others worked in pairs, the majority worked individually and some just sat on their benches with the cards in their hands. From time to time, she would shout from her desk and ask the pupils not to make too much noise. The locus of control rested very much with the teacher who was the initiator of whatever interaction took place.

In another lesson, the student moved around the groups but repeated the same instructions despite indications that the pupils were having difficulty understanding the task. He could not diagnose the support the pupils needed in developing the ideas logically. He tended to ask low order questions of one kind, for example, `what.' In yet another lesson, the teacher spent time with the groups and was able to identify possible problems and redirected the discussions appropriately. Throughout the lesson, through individual interaction with pairs, he provided learners with support and modelled the language they should use orally. Questioning in some cases also provided scaffolding. However, the student tended to provide the answers himself.

The students made use of feedback from the groups and individual learners in different ways. In some lessons, reports from groups were simply acknowledged and the learners were not encouraged to engage with the reports. In one class, the student forewarned the pupils that they should be prepared to `defend their positions' during presentations. During the presentations, the class was given the opportunity to ask questions to the group giving a report and thus generating a large group discussion.

The student skillfully guided the discussion by asking purposeful questions which extended the pupils' understandings. The students asked a variety of questions which demanded different levels of understanding, such as, `who has a lean and hungry look?', `what does the phrase mean?', `why did Brutus kill himself?' The student then summarized the key issues and asked the pupils to do an individual activity which was based on the group reports. During the activity, the teacher moved around providing support to individuals. The pupils also asked the teacher for help. Some pupils wanted to do the individual task in pairs but the teacher insisted that they must work individually in order to develop their writing skills.

4.10 Assessment Design, Support and Quality Assurance

Assessment tasks compel students to engage with what has been taught, and the way assessment tasks are set encourages learning processes that are either helpful or unhelpful, that contribute to the goals of the open and distance programme or that distract students from achieving them.

Usually an assessment strategy is evaluated in terms of its validity, reliability, fairness, and feasibility. Validity is to do with setting meaningful goals for student learning and then designing effective ways to assess student achievement of those goals. Stella and Gnanam(2004) outlines the major questions around validity:

- Are we assessing the right things'? In other words, Are our learning outcomes (our construct) the right things to be assessing?
- Are we assessing the thing right? In other words, Does the assessment assess (the construct) that it claims to assess'?

In this report, it has already established the validity of the open and distance programme goals, so the first question is not an issue. The second question is therefore the major one in evaluating assessment design.

Reliability and fairness are about quality assurance measures set in place to ensure that standards are maintained from year to year and across the numbers of students enrolled in the open and distance programme. Very often there is a tension between reliability and validity in assessment design. More valid ways of assessing complex goals (eg the capacity for reflective practice, rather than a more simple outcome such as recognition of the function of a word in a sentence) are often less reliable than standardized objective tests which enable one to generalize about student achievement at different times and places and with a range of assessors. In this part of the chapter, the researcher will not look in depth at the balance between validity and reliability. What is of more concern for a open and distance education programme which should be able to deal with large numbers of learners in different places, is the kinds of quality assurance mechanisms that need to be put in place to ensure reliability across markers as well as efficiency in assignment management. When the courses are offered to more students and involves more tutors, it will be important for appropriate quality assurance mechanisms to be developed, and lessons can be learned from the system developed by the Education coordinator.

Feasibility has two dimensions - designing assessment strategies that are manageable in terms of workload for staff and complexity and expense of implementation; and designing assessment strategies that are feasible for the students - is there enough support to enable them to succeed in completing the assessment? Again, as with reliability, there is often a tension between validity and feasibility. In terms of this open and distance programme which aims `to develop in colleges quality learning and teaching relevant to a changing Ethiopia's and to extend students' course/ subject learning knowledge and skills', it is clear that the most valid form of assessment would be visiting colleges and assessing the performance of students and their learners in colleges. However, as will be pointed out in the chapter on learner support, this is not feasible for the open and distance programme at the moment, even though there is a vision for it. What is interesting is to see how the assessment in this open and distance programme has been designed to achieve the classroom and school- based goals even though the lecturers are not able to actually visit their students in the schools.

In an open and distance education programme there is a further dimension to the evaluation of an assessment strategy- teaching through assessment. Because of the limited contact between student and tutor, it becomes important to use assignments not just to grade learners, but as a major form of teaching.

To summarize: if you do not design assessment properly, students will not achieve what you want them to

achieve. If you do not support students adequately, they will not achieve what you want them to achieve. If you do not have effective quality assurance procedures in assignment marking and management, some students will achieve what you want them to achieve, and some will not. This chapter will therefore deal with three aspects of assessment, primarily as it relates to central course, Theory and Practice, but with some reference to the other courses, as well as to the education quality assurance strategy

Design: Assessment needs to design in such a way that it contributes to the achievement of the open and distance programme goals, mastery of the course content, and development of broad abilities both in teens of the product expected and in terms of the process students go through to achieve that product. Another aspect of assessment design is the extent to which it supports students to achieve assessment requirements by providing clear instructions and criteria, and scaffolding and support in the achievement of the tasks.

Support- teaching on assignments: The commenting on assignments needs to be an effective means of extending the teaching on the course and providing supportive formative feedback.

Assessment design: According to the open and distance programme coordinator, the overall assessment design for the courses is as follows:

- Self- assessment activities (in the materials);
- Tutor- marked assignments;
- Course portfolio (not required for all courses); and
- Examination or examination equivalent assignment.

Each course in the open and distance programme has different versions of the above outline, according to the demands of the specific course, According to college regulations, the assignment mark is worth 30% and the exam mark is worth 70%. The exam can be an examination equivalent.

4.11 Student Views on Feedback

Comments of students also indicate the importance of the feedback, particularly as a mechanism for encouraging and motivating students. One student commented about the feedback It's always very encouraging. They motivate us and are very positive. And another student said:

I have gained confidence that at least I am able to cope. After not having studied for a couple of years, I was not sure how I would cope with this distance course at a university. But through the assignments I have realized that I am capable. I feel that I ant communicating with Yvonne and she has come to know me a lot through my assignments though we do not have much physical contact. The comment I liked very much was the one where she commented about my writing style. 'I really enjoy your writing style', 'I like this term chronological status'. My wife looked at it and she was thrilled.

The open and distance education embraces a constructivist approach to learning with a focus on a cyclical

process of learning. As such, feedback is central as a teaching mechanism: Learning is far more than simply 'being taught'. To learn, we need to plan what we're going to do; attempt to do it; and then receive feedback on our work. We then use this feedback to improve the work we have just done, or, more often in education, to ensure that the next work we do embraces what we have learned. One of respondent states that: ... the assessor may respond as a teacher, using the knowledge gained to interact with the student in helping him grow; or he may respond as a reporter, classifying, labeling, or describing the student for the benefit of others who have an interest in the student.

Detailed and useful comments on the assignments make feedback an important teaching mechanism on the distance education programme and a way of establishing dialogue with and motivating teachers. The usefulness of the feedback given to learners is further supported by comments made by the external examiner such as the one below.

The students received a great deal of individual attention - through extensive and encouraging comments on their assignments and in the tutorial letters, individual discussions with the course coordinator, and structured work with partners. Feedback is a useful tool to promote the goals of the distance education programme and to encourage teachers to improve their practice by linking what they write in assignments to their own contexts. Most importantly, feedback is used to model good approaches to marking and as such contributes to the central goal of the distance education programme to improve classroom practice.

4.12 Quality Assurance

There need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that the marking is fair and reliable, particularly if there are different markers, and there also need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that the turnaround time on assignments is kept to a minimum. These aspects will be evaluated using information from the course coordinators and assessment documentation and then by analyzing student opinion provided in the survey and in interviews. For the section on support, further sources of evidence, the theory and practice portfolios of the sample of six students will be examined. In addition, some the examiners' reports on the theory and practice and examinations in 2013 were also used.

There are two aspects to quality assurance as it applies to assessment:
• Assignment management, with particular emphasis on turnaround time;
• Reliability and fairness of marking.

Assignment management: The aim of feedback on assignments is to create a dialogue between the student and the lecturer. If the assignments are not returned before the next assignment has to be written and submitted, then the dialogue has been curtailed. In distance education, turnaround time on assignments is not simply a matter of tutors marking assignments quickly. When large numbers of students are being dealt with, there are administrative processes of receiving assignments, allocating them to tutors, recording the marks/comments given by tutors, and sending them back to students. From the interview with the English

coordinator the following information about turnaround time on assignments was obtained.

Assignments from learners are sent to the university, are received by the administrative office of the distance education programme. Assignments must reflect the following details: course/specialization, Diploma and Degree. They are then recorded and sent to the teachers for marking. When assignments have been marked and individual comments made, feedback or tutorial letters are prepared. The marked assignments together with feedback/tutorial letters are then sent to the administrative office for mailing back to the learners.

The turnaround period for assignments is estimated at four to six weeks. However, this is dependent on the kind of assignments, when they are received, the number of scripts to be marked and whether or not marking has to be share with markers external to the Diploma and Degree programme or to the university. Some learners do not submit their assignments on the specified date. The coordinator usually takes a week to mark the assignments, and then either posts them back or returns them at residentials. The result is that the turnaround time is anything from four to six weeks. The question to be asked about this is whether the students find this satisfactory. No direct questions were asked on this topic in the interviews, but the responses in the survey (see above) indicate that of all the aspects related to assessment in the English courses, this is regarded as least satisfactory by the students.

Reliability and fairness of marking: As has been mentioned above, this is not a big issue with the English courses, because usually one lecturer marks all the assignments and examinations of the students doing a particular course in a particular year. In the English courses at the moment the only check on reliability and fairness of marking at present is the fact that the courses have an external examiner who looks at each batch of examinations and examination equivalent assignments. In terms of reliability and fairness the examiner found that the marking was accurate and consistent and very few changes in marks were made. Essentially, though, the external examiner system is a quality control system. What is more interesting is to record the quality assurance system devised by the Education coordinator to cope with larger numbers of students and a group of eight markers. The development of criteria in terms of which student achievement is to be judged becomes critical when tutors marking the same group of students need to be sure about what standards they are applying.

For each education assignment, broad assessment criteria are provided in the assignment booklets. However, when tutors receive a batch of assignments, they sit together and work out a much more detailed set of criteria in teens of what the students have produced. The course coordinator plots these criteria on a grid which tutors then use to give marks to students. The students receive a copy of the grid with a rationale for the mark they have been awarded. A copy of the grid worked out for the third assignment in the Curriculum and Classrooms course is on the next page.

The procedures for marking each assignment are therefore as follows:

• Tutors individually sample mark some assignments to get a sense of criteria to use.
• Tutors as a group workshop the criteria.
• The coordinator works out the grid.
• The tutors group mark and discuss several assignments together in order to get a sense of how to use the grid.
• Sometimes the coordinator moderates the assignments, but the benefits of this must be measured against the disadvantage of increasing the turnaround time.

This approach is helpful in a number of ways:

1. It provides a balance between being transparent about assessment criteria and evolving assessment criteria through professional judgment based on what the students produce.
2. It provides opportunity for the professional development of tutors both in terms of the demands of the course and the manner in which feedback should be provided.
3. Use of the method is likely to increase inter-tutor reliability as far as grading of the students is concerned.
4. The amount, accuracy, as well as efficiency with which feedback can be given to students is impressive.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 conclusions

It is not easy to distinguish between student uses of course materials, or student use of the content of the course obtained through the tutorial and through the assessment. However, as the course materials are main means for communication of the curriculum, it can be assumed that they have been directly used.

Clearly a major strength of the programme is that such a wide range of support mechanisms have been built into the programme to serve both an academic and social function. It is necessary to explore in more detail why not more use is made of the available support in addition to the more obvious logistical constraints. Support is as much an attitude as it is a structure and the support on the programme is made successful because of a combination of structures that enable the support to operate effectively as well as the attitude to support. An important element in supporting the teachers is the sense of caring for the students and a strong ethos of collaborative work which encourages teachers to draw on a wide range of support people in their schools in addition to drawing on the programme staff. The programme recognizes that students are likely to encounter a range of personal problems and counselling of students is done by individuals in varying degrees, although there are no formal structures or mechanisms in place. At present the programme does not offer direct support to teachers in their classrooms, although this has been identified as a need by both staff and students. The support offered is an integral component of the programme and it functions not only to help students succeed with their studies but to model types of support relationships that teachers could replicate with their pupils.

The students seemed aware of the importance of the module in learning, irrespective of whether they are `ready made' materials or those that have been made by students themselves. There seemed to be an understanding that the modules should be suitable to the level of the pupils, appropriate to the purpose of the lesson and should be integrated into the lesson to enhance learning. There was also evidence to the effect that the students had attempted to make the modules as attractive as possible. Organizational issues with regard to clarity of instructions of how the learning modules should be used, who should it and how they relate to the lesson are important. While teachers seemed aware that the environments in which they are can be rich sources for learning modules and that the pupils could be involved in developing the materials, there was also a view that colleges ought to provide the learning materials. There appeared to be an awareness and desire to develop materials but students said they lacked the creativity to identify resources that could be turned into learning materials. Lack of secure storage for the materials in some schools seemed to be a factor which might affect securing and developing students' own materials. The students recognized learners as active participants in learning and that opportunities which encourage pupil involvement must be created. There seemed to be an understanding that in order for co-operative learning to occur, the environment must be conducive. The rearrangement of the classroom demonstrated this very well. In some classes however, it was difficult to reorganize the room because of the design of the furniture and the non-availability of the space. In classrooms where there was space available, the students seemed unable to use it creatively. The pupils tended to crowd in one section of the room rather than spread out.

Although the students spoke about the use of a range of strategies that encourage learner participation, group work seemed to be the only strategy that the students used in their classrooms despite the observation that in the residential sessions a variety of strategies for involving learners were modelled. It would seem group work is viewed as being synonymous with learner participation. Where questioning techniques were used, the students appear not to recognize those techniques as alternative ways of encouraging learner participation. In such instances some students were quick to provide answers to their own questions. This tended to undermine their own efforts to `scaffold' and encourage pupils to discover knowledge. Generally, the questions used to check for understanding tended to require low order skills.

The role of the teacher during group work was played out in different ways. In some cases the students monitored the work of the groups and provided support to the groups. In others no support was provided and thus the students were unable to identify the difficulties the learners were experiencing. There seemed to be an assumption that learning automatically occurs when pupils work in groups. As shown, there was no mediation of group activities in some classes and yet the students seemed quite satisfied that by creating the opportunity for learners to interact with one another, learning will occur. It would appear what is of primary concern to the students is to get the learners to sit together in groups.

Although the students went so far as to solicit feedback from groups, it was not incorporated in the lesson or used to link the lesson with future ones. In some classes group presentations actually marked the end of the lesson. In contrast, where feedback was sought, pupils' understandings were tested through skilful and purposeful questioning which was followed by students' comment and summary.

Students seemed aware that some form of assessment is necessary at some point in the lesson. Only one student could clearly differentiate formative forms of assessment from summative ones and indicated when he would use what form during the lesson. Others mentioned only summative assessment even though during the lesson, there were formative `checkpoints' in their lessons done mainly through questioning. The students seemed unaware that they were in fact using forms of formative assessment. It could be argued that unless an effective assessment strategy is in place, good course materials and successful teaching on residentials could have next to no impact on student learning. Assessment tasks compel students to engage with what has been taught, and the way assessment tasks are set encourages learning processes that are either helpful or unhelpful, that contribute to the goals of the programme or that distract students from achieving them. The programme offers a number of insights into how to design assessment, how to support students in the assessment process and how to ensure the fairness and reliability of the assessment procedures.

The quality control function of the external examiner is not adequate, particularly when there are large numbers of students and a team of markers (some of whom might not be very experienced). The external examiner only sees the marking when it is done, and only sees the end of year examination or examination equivalent. In addition to external examination, there needs to be a quality assurance process which starts with careful assessment design, provides criteria for students, ensures that all markers understand the criteria and can apply them fairly, and ensures that the turnaround time is kept to a minimum.

The quality assurance process used in the education studies courses in the programme has the following good features:

- It provides a balance between being transparent about assessment criteria and evolving assessment criteria through professional judgment based on what the students produce.
- It provides opportunity for the professional development of tutors both in terms of the demands of the course and the manner in which feedback should be provided.
- Use of the process is likely to increase inter-tutor reliability as far as grading of the students is concerned.
- The amount, accuracy, as well as efficiency with which feedback can be given to students are impressive.

In answer to the general question- *Do the course materials encourage you to apply what you are studying in your teaching-learning practices?* on this question, the students responded as follows: A subsequent question in the survey attempted to make this general response more specific to individual units of the theory and practice courses. The overwhelmingly positive responses indicate that students found that the content was relevant to their situation, increased their knowledge of course/subject, increased their skills and knowledge in learning, were not difficult to use, and that students used ideas from the units successfully in their learning. The most interesting of the questions for the purposes of this research was the question about successful use of ideas in the materials in the self learning.

It would appear that the major *areas of strength* in the materials are:

- Up-to-date, contextualized content at the correct level for the students, and coherence across the different courses in the open and distance programme;
- Explanation of concepts in accessible ways, with plenty of examples provided;
- An open view of knowledge, encouragement of debate, and use of students' experience; • range of relevant activities used;
- Accessible language and good relationship created with the reader.

The areas which *need some attention* are:

- Making learning outcomes clear for the students so that their attention is focused on what they need to achieve in each section and unit;
- Developing strategies across all the courses to motivate the students to complete the activities;
- Provision of feedback on activities and ways to help students to assess their own progress in getting to grips with the materials;
- Accessibility of the materials so that students can get an overview of what each unit contains and can find their way easily through the materials;
- Increased emphasis on visual ways of communicating ideas;
- Packaging of material in more user- friendly ways.

If students are going to complain about a programme, the first thing they tend to complain about is the assessment. It is significant; therefore, that not only did the students not complain about the assessment in the English courses on this programme, but it was commented on very favourably both in the survey and the interviews.

Assessment design: In terms of the main research question, which is to determine the teaching and learning practices that lead to improved classroom practice, the findings on assessment design are crucial. Even if assessment of students' classroom practice by lecturers/tutors in schools is not feasible, classroom practice and reflection on practice can be built into the assessment design and assessed indirectly. In this programme the majority of the assignments require the students to work in the classroom - either teaching, preparing materials, or doing research. The students definitely see and value the link between the assignments and the improvement of their classroom practice.

What is also interesting is that the way the assessment is designed allows for the cumulative development of competence. Similar competences are required in a series of assignments, which mean that students have a chance to `get better'. For example, in the Theory and Practice course, nearly every assignment requires design and/or adaptation of a lesson(s), theoretical justification of approach, actual implementation of the lesson, and reflection on the success/lack of success. This process also involves self and peer assessment and builds cooperative as well as independent learning.

A very practical, applied, process approach in assignments has its dangers, however. Often it means that students can avoid specific engagement with the particular theory dealt with in the course, and simply fall back on what they know already to analyze what happens. Strategies need to be found to encourage engagement with theory. A strong feature of the assessment in the English courses is that support is structured into the design of the assignments. Students are not expected to know automatically how to do a complex assignment, but are guided step by step through the process, often with formative assessment at specific stages. This support would be further strengthened if specific assessment criteria were provided to guide students in their assessment of themselves and each other.

Teaching on assignments: Teaching on assignments, both in the form of commenting on individual assignments and in the form of tutorial letters, is a useful tool to promote the goals of the programme and to encourage teachers to improve their practice by linking what they write in assignments to their own contexts. Most importantly, feedback can be used to model good approaches to marking and as such contribute to the central goal of the programme - the improvement of classroom practice.

The feedback on assessment in the English courses had a number of important features. Every possible opportunity was found for praise and encouragement on specific matters. However, the comment did not stop at the positive; it includes constructive criticism which opened dialogue, and pointed to concrete changes for improvement. Most importantly, the style of commenting established a supportive relationship in which the difficulties facing the students as well as the efforts they have made were recognized.

Quality assurance: The quality control function of the external examiner is not adequate, particularly when there are large numbers of students and a team of markers (some of whom might not be very experienced). The external examiner only sees the marking when it is done, and only sees the end of year examination or examination equivalent. In addition, there needs to be a quality assurance process which starts with careful assessment design, provides criteria for students, ensures that all markers understand the criteria and can apply them fairly, and ensures that the turnaround time is kept to a minimum.

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- Use of the process is likely to inc rease inter-tutor reliability as far as grading of the students is concerned.
- The amount, accuracy, as well as efficiency with which feedback can be given to students is impressive.

In summary, the open and distance programme hopes that students will :

• improve their self learning practice;

• extend their subject knowledge and subject teaching knowledge and skills; • become competent reflective professionals;

• learn how to do classroom and school-based research;

• learn how to work cooperatively;

• learn how to critically evaluate and adapt teaching strategies for their own classrooms.

In addition it is said that the open and distance programme will

• recognize what teachers already know;

• facilitate reflection on experience;

• offer extensions or alternative to established subject knowledge and patterns of classroom practice.

Good features of the assessment design for the Theory and Practice course

The assessment design contributes to the achievement of the above goals in the following positive ways:

1. The most important point to be made is that every assignment in the demands that students work directly in the self learning- either teaching or doing research on their learners. There are no assignments which require students to read and reformulate theory without applying it to teaching-learning practice.
2. What is interesting about the assessment design for this courses are that whereas the detailed content of the assignments and examination questions differs from unit to unit, the basic processes through which students are required to work are broadly similar. These processes of design (or adaptation of lessons or approaches provided), implementation and reflection are shown diagrammatically below. It is important that students are required to go through the same processes again and again as it gives them an opportunity to develop broader abilities over time, rather than merely master the content of individual units one by one. Furthermore these broad abilities are central to the successful teaching of reflective practitioners.

3. Another feature of the assignments is that they usually structure in self and peer assessment. In one assignment, study partners are required to observe each other in the classroom and then share their reflections before submitting individually written assignments. In another, study partners are asked to work on an assignment together and then submit one jointly written or two separately written accounts of their work. In other assignments, students are required to try out a lesson or series of lessons in the classroom and then use various means to reflect by themselves on the successes and lack of successes. What is interesting is that collaboration and reflection are also allowed in the usually constrained conditions of the examination room at the end of the year. For the first part of the Theory and Practice Examination, students may plan their lesson or series of lessons together, after which they individually write down both the lessons, and their reflections on the lessons. This means that the collaborative practice developed through the course work assessment is not merely treated in a token way and undermined by the examination.

4. Individual reflection and the development of students' ability to assess their own progress is encouraged through the requirement that students should submit all their Theory and Practice assignments at the end of the year in the form of a portfolio with a reflective comment.

5. The notion that teachers need to be researchers in their own teaching-learning is a theme through all the assignments, but is particularly evident in one assignment which requires students to investigate the literacy practices of the pupils in her/his class.

This allows students to see clearly where they are going wrong and what strengths they can build on, so that they can adjust their work to perform well in the final research report. Some criticisms of the assessment design for the Theory and Practice course

1. One of the open and distance programme goals has not been `covered' in the outline of features of the assessment strategy above, and this is the goal that refers to extension of students' subject knowledge and subject teaching knowledge. A criticism of the assessment design in the theory and practice course is that though students will develop excellently through the repeated process they are required to go through, it is by no means certain that they will learn to reflect on their practice using the ideas and language of subject teaching theory. In the assignments there is not enough requirement to use the theories that are so carefully mediated in the materials.

2. If it is regarded as important for students to engage with all these issues in order to extend their subject teaching knowledge, then the assessment design has not succeeded in encouraging them to do so. This problem has been resolved to some extent in other courses. In both the Developing teaching and learning materials course, students are required to engage with the theory that establishes the basis of the course by completing and submitting a series of in -text activities.

3. In order to be guided to perform the assessment tasks satisfactorily, students need not only clear instructions and a range of means to support them in achieving the requirements: they also need clear statements of criteria in terms of which they will be judged. These are absent. Students only learn after the fact from the kinds of comments made by the marker what the criteria are against which they were judged. The issue of criteria is picked in the external examiner's report for the 2013 theory and practice exam from the marker's point of view: It was fairly straight forward to assess the students' performance in the first and second sections of the questions, as, broadly speaking, one was looking for depth of theoretical understanding as opposed to vague generalisations.

Flexibility of assessment design across the courses. The impression might have been created above that there should be one assessment design applied rigorously to all content in order to realize the goals of the programme. A feature of the assessment design across the courses which must be mentioned in conclusion is that even though a good `formula' is developed for the Theory and Practice course, it is not assumed that this formula will be equally applicable to the other courses. In the Grammar course, for example, when

content mastery is much more of an issue, there are many more smaller assignments and even a test. The test helps students prepare for the examination, in which they will be required to show not only that they know how to teach grammar, but also that they know enough grammar to equip them to teach it accurately.

The questions asked in the survey of student opinion were on all three aspects: assessment design, teaching on assessment and quality assurance. It is useful, however, to record the responses together, because they demonstrate an overwhelmingly positive opinion of assessment as a teaching and learning strategy in the courses. It is significant that half of the students are using their choice thoughtfully, rather than merely strategically. Whatever their choice motivation, it is clear that the students like the idea of choice as it provides flexibility (two students commented on this). From the responses to the issue of choice, the conclusion can also be drawn that students understand the assignments as something you have to do actively and in your school and classroom. This is emphasized by the following three comments from different students: Many of assignments make you to work inside the classroom. You have to go and present the lesson, write the comments on the lesson, ask any colleague to come and observe you, and write comments on the lesson. The assignments are motivating; they force you to teach an actual lesson.

For some assignments, classroom activity must be done and there is no way one can cheat. When I (lid the assignment, I asked [the pupils] to answer the questions for all their subjects. Then they reported. Then [the pupils'] handouts were posted outside the classroom for the other teachers to see. The teachers were very interested to read what the pupils said about their subject.

This leads to the first point about process. The assignments obviously compel students to work in the classroom. However, the way this is done is not as with many other courses, where students are simply required to repeat in their own class the model lesson provided by the lecturer. There is a process of adaptation. As one student reflects:

... the text can be adapted to suit different levels. ... the text provides room for interpretation and thus encouraging the teacher to take into account the realities in the college and level of the pupils ... the slang words are not suitable for the children here... Some of the activities depend on the amount of vocabulary the pupils have and the teacher can make judgements and adapt the activities.

Another teacher confirmed this emphasis on adaptation:

Many transcriptions, many examples of other teachers. You read that, then you ask yourself 'How am I going to present this lesson [to my class]?

A third comment was: The text forces one to think about one's own realities and draw on one's own experiences. The second aspect of process relates to reading and interaction with study partners around assignment completion.

Two students mentioned reading the course materials as essential to the assignment: The reading usually builds up towards an assignment. In this way one has to read and one cannot write the assignment without the reading.

Although collaborative work on assignments is not regarded as essential by all students, one student reported quite an interesting process: First of all, before I involve my study partner, I read [the information on the assignment] alone at (tome, and I decide which one I must write that is on their level - not any assignment pleases me, because the focus is on the learner.

In the English sessions, the focus was clearly on modelling good practice, because the central thrust of the majority of the courses is shifting teachers' practice in concrete ways. It appeared that the focus in the Education sessions was not so much on modelling certain teaching practice with a view to transfer to the classroom as on using effective strategies to ensure that students understood the necessary concepts. The method adopted in the Education sessions of an interactive lecture followed by tutorial is potentially a useful way of ensuring that large numbers of students get the benefit of careful conceptual analysis as well as opportunity to interact with each other on the basis of their knowledge and experience. However, the benefits of the carefully designed and implemented interactive lectures were lost on many students because they could not hear and see properly. For the model to work, there also needs to be more effective planning of the purposes and methods in the tutorials as related to the lectures.

However, generally students experienced skilled and varied teaching in which every effort was made to model the approaches and attitudes recommended in the courses. The major features of the teaching in these residential sessions that could be generalized to other teacher development programmes are as follows:

- It is important that there is coherence between the ideas and approaches discussed in the various sessions and courses.
- Students learn not only from the content of the sessions, but also from their form. If the teaching approaches and attitudes are not consistent with each other, the impact of good teaching
- Approaches in one course could be weakened by less satisfactory approaches and attitudes in another.
- Theory is important, but not theory in isolation from practice. The genesis of theory in reflection on practice needs to be clear.
- It is helpful to use students' experiences in their classrooms and schools as a basis for the sessions, and for students to be encouraged to think of how they could use or apply ideas in practice.
- The teaching methods practiced in the sessions themselves can be the subject of discussion. This encourages reflective practice and is also likely to result in more effective transfer to the teachers' own classroom practice.

5.2 Recommendation

It appears that the students have found the course materials useful in their teaching-learning practice. The range of different sections chosen for emphasis indicates that it is not only certain sections of the materials that have proven useful. Again, the finding of the expert review about the likelihood of these course materials being used by students directly in their self learning seems to have been confirmed. How effectively the course materials are used in the students' self learning will be established in the chapter on the effect of the open and distance programme on student learning and self learning practice.

The most important point to be made about these course materials is that the students like them, read them, find them both challenging and relevant to their teaching situations, and use them in their teaching. What is it that has had this effect? What has been done well that could be used to guide other course materials developers? The first point that needs to be made is that the open and distance programme goals should not only be valid, but should guide each course in a tangible way. The goals of this open and distance programme reflect a concern for the development of quality learning and teaching relevant to a changing Ethiopia, and each course contributes in a different way to the realization of these goals.

The second point is that the course content has to be well-researched and up-to-date. But it should also be contextualized: students want to see themselves and their own situations in what they read about. They need to feel that there is plenty to explore, many examples and ideas they can take up, and many things they can do with the materials even when the course is finished. They need to hear many voices speaking in the materials; they need to pick up an excitement about being part of making knowledge.

The third point is that the learning- teaching strategies/approaches used in the materials should help the students engage with the materials actively in a variety of ways. Several features of the learning-teaching strategies/approaches in these materials need to be specifically mentioned:

- Instead of the presentation of content in a linear way, a recursive process approach to the development of the ideas is adopted. Theory and principles are often presented through stories and interviews rather than merely through abstract text. A range of rich examples are used, both to help students understand the concepts and to provide activities for them to try out in the self learning.

• Activities encourage both understanding of concepts and application in the self learning. The materials encourage critical reflection and adaptation of ideas for specific contexts and self learning, rather than imitation of model lessons.

• Students' personal and professional experience is acknowledged and respected. They are encouraged to build their own understanding of issues based on their experiences.

• Built into the materials is the understanding that students are not working on their own - they have study partners and colleagues in the settings in which they work. They are encouraged to discuss ideas with each other, to work together, and to develop a community of concerned professionals around them.

• The style used in the materials establishes a friendly collegial relationship with the learners in which they are treated as fellow professionals who have individual experiences and ideas and can contribute as professionals to the creation of knowledge.

In the survey the following suggestions were made about additional support:

• Additional course materials (e.g. audiotapes and even videotapes, tutorial letters) • Help with finances;

• Face-to- face (regular face- to- face support, lecturers should visit monthly, • student counseling for encouragement) ;

• School visits (classroom observation by lecturer);

• Assignments (more time, more support); and

• No additional support needed.

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