UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

THE PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION ON THE
QUALITY OF SUPPORT SERVICES RECEIVED

LYDIA LORDINA AMADU

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Education and Communication Sciences, submitted to the School of Graduate
Studies, University of Education, Winneba, in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for award of the Masters of Arts (Educational Leadership) degree**

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DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, LYDIA LORDINA AMADU, declare that this project report, with the exception of quotations and references in published works which have all been identified and acknowledged, is entirely my original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

SIGNATURE: …………………………………………..

DATE: ……………………………………………………

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work were supervised in accordance with guidelines and supervision of project report as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: PROF. FREDERICK KWAKU SARFO

SIGNATURE:……………………………… ……………………

DATE:…………………………………………………………….

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DEDICATION

To my husband,   Rv. Alexander Antwi and my children, Joel Twumasi Ankrah and

Jael Adolla Antwi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DE – Distance Education

UEW – University of Education, Winneba

MDGs - The Millennium Development Goals

CDE - Centre for Distance Education

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to find out the perception of the distance education students of Asanteman study center about the quality of support services received. The adopted descriptive survey design and 120 students were randomly selected for the study. A self-completion questionnaire was the main instrument used to collect data from the participants. A Cronbach alpha co-efficient of 0.71 was obtained for the instrument. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and means were employed in the data analysis. The results of the study revealed that majority of respondents 91(76.20%) have positive perception about tutorial services received at the Asanteman SHS Study Centre. Furthermore, the study indicated that majority of the respondents 87(74.20%) had a positive perception about the quality of study modules supplied at the Study Centre. Moreover, the study however, revealed that majority of the respondents 76(53.3%) had a negative perception about the quality of available facilities at Asanteman SHS Study Centre. It is therefore recommended that adequate number of computers, projectors, library and computer laboratory should be provided by management of UEW distance education at the Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre to ensure the smooth running of the distance programme.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the year 2000, the United Nations established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emphasized the significance of education to the development and achievement of human rights and to social and economic development. The MDGs contended that education is unavoidable for the development of human resource and the development of a nation. However, Mwansa (2010) posits that in majority of the developing countries, it is nearly not feasible to educate every citizen through on-campus teaching due to the inadequate resources. To educate every citizen through on-campus, a large sum of money is required to put in place for the infrastructure for on-campus teaching, which is out of the reach of the developing countries. In order to educate the most of their citizens, developing countries must rely on open learning and distance education system. Ghana is among the developing countries in the West Africa region. There are many people in Ghana who want to continue their education but are unable to attend on-campus classes due to a number of reasons such as family commitments, and the number of limited learning institutions. Ghana therefore depends on an open learning and distance education system.

Schlosser and Simonson (2009) define distance education as an institution-based formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors. Accordingly, Marshall (2000) distance education offers an avenue to increase the capacity of educational systems devoid of incurring the cost of constructing new building by allowing students the flexibility to remain in their

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Communities or in their duty post. According to Chiyongo (2010), distance education was and is recognised as one of the solutions to training education services staff especially teachers who are working full-time and who are unable to attend and/or afford to register in full-time residential institutions. Chiyongo further indicated that distance education is also regarded as a solution to the draining ranks of teachers and other professionals, as distance education can provide effective pre-service and in-service training programs.

In view of intrinsic limitations in admissions to the full-time courses on campus, the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) established the Centre for Distance Education (CDE) under the Institute of Education Development and Extension in 1994 (Mensah & Owusu-Mensah, 2002). The aim of the CDE is to offer higher education programmes, through the distance education mode, for the benefit of all those who had been deprived of the opportunity, for one reason or the other, to enter the mainstream education, especially those in employment, and also women and adults who wish to upgrade their education in various fields. Specifically, the Centre for Distance Education is responsible for turning out highly qualified teachers for pre-tertiary institutions in Ghana through an improved distance Education delivery system (UEW, 2014).

Nkrujore (2007) noted that the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has emerged as a vital part of higher education around the world. In fact, Sumrall (2002) observes that the universal quest for education, hunger for knowledge and the failure of the conventional education system in taking care of the increasing popular demand for higher education where the chief influential factors behind the emergence of the ODL system. According to Krishnan (2012), the realisation of this new mode of education largely depends on the effective student support services (SSS). Krishnan

(2012) further explained that student support services (SSS) are a cluster of facilities and activities that are provided to make the learning process easier and more interesting for the learner. In this regard, Basar, Rahatullah and Adnan (2013) assert that in distance education, SSS serve as the crossing point between the institution and the learner. The effective delivery of the SSS is now widely and progressively being accepted as an indispensable constituent of any open and distance learning system (Sahin & Shelley, 2008).

There have been a massive progress in interest and really institutional commitment even in times of financial limitation to student support in ODL and many examples in different countries of excellent practice (Tait, 1995). Many authors have highlighted the importance and necessity of the SSS the observation by Prideaux (1989) is universally accepted. The author holds the view that the quality of both the materials and the support systems are critical to the success of a distance learning system. Accordingly, Chiyongo (2010) contends that the aim of most support services is to help the student appreciate the instructional objective of the course by minimizing the negative effects of isolation and the lack of regular personal contact. Schlosser and Simonson (2009) suggest that the SSS must be developed in the context of the almost infinite needs of the students. The authors also hold the opinion that student services in distance education are equated with customer service of an industrial organisation or business.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Currently the provision of education in Ghana is predominantly through conventional institutions. Distance education is quite a new concept although the University of Education, Winneba has been offering distance teacher education

programmes since 1996. Management of education, and distance education in particular, is an issue that has received the attention of policy-makers, educationists and researchers in recent years. Distance education is a system that requires proper support services, structured planning, well-designed courses and administrative arrangements (Krishnan, 2012). The author further asserts that quality support services is crucial to all good distance education practices, principally because the students are mostly strangers at the campus and thus need support to ensure effective teaching and learning and learner support. Chiyongo (2010) contends that the distance learning varies from conservative learning principally in the separation and the greater self-discipline required of its students. As a result of these characteristics, guaranteeing that distance learning systems provide adequate support to, and interaction with students is crucial.

Numerous academic and professional literature has been written about the management of distance education (Mensah & Owusu-Mensah, 2002; Sahin & Shelley, 2008; Braimoh & Lekoko, 2005; Mwansa, 2010; Chiyongo, 2010). Surprisingly, majority of these studies Mensah & Owusu-Mensah, 2002; Braimoh & Lekoko, 2005; Mwansa, 2010) are only geared towards distance education policy relating to distance education delivery models. Issues related to the quality of student support services had attracted little attention. Thus, the need for distance education managers to expand the resources and share their administrative functions which accommodate quality support service should become pertinent (Sahin & Shelley, 2008). Braimoh and Lekoko (2005) observe that problems of distance learning are due to a lack of adequate support services to guide the modus operandi of achieving higher quality in the programmes offered. Also, a review of Open and Distance Education literature in Ghana has revealed that studies on the provision of education

through Open and Distance Education have not given attention to the provision of quality support services to distance teacher education in Ghana.

However, Mwansa (2010) noted that clear differences exist in the nature, range, method of delivery and organization, and management of SSS from one institution to another. Particularly, the nature of the distance teaching institution has an impact on the provision, organization and management of SSS. For example, Chiyongo (2010) noted that in dual mode institutions, the SSS appears to have a low status, the system is hardly geared to cope with the needs of adult students and the different functions are usually broadly distributed, with little contact between the areas which could or should provide services. According to Krishnan (2012), in these types of institutions, decision making responsibilities are distributed such that there is no awareness of the needs of distance students, no harmonisation and often very few actual services are available.

In a study, Sahin and Shelley (2008) observed that in a dual mode university in which distance education is not essentially fundamental to the activities of an institution, issues of co-ordination and decision making in the area of SSS are of supreme importance. In Ghana, universities like the University of Education, Winneba which practises the dual mode system has a lot of challenges. As a former student of the programme, I consistently observed that the students complained of lack of or inadequate support given to them by the school authorities. In this context, this study makes an attempt to understand the current practices of student support mechanisms and discusses issues in their provision and management in distance education in Ghana with special reference to the Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre of the University of Education, Winneba.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out the perception of the distance education students of Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre about the quality of support services received.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Specifically, the study was designed to achieve the following objectives.

1. To assess the perception of students about tutorial services received in the Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre.

2. To investigate students" perception about the quality of modules supplied.

3. To ascertain students" perception about the availability of facilities at the Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the perception of students about tutorial services received in Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre?

2. How do students perceive the quality of the modules supplied?

3. What perception do students have about the availability of learning facilities at the Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study would help the Ministry of Education, the University of Education, Winneba, and other private and public institutions in

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managing distance teacher education programmes more efficiently. The findings of this study would also contribute to the existing body of knowledge about what higher institutions of learning might consider to be vital support services for the management of distance education. It may also fill some gaps in the manner in which management of distance teacher education in Ghana might be examined and assessed.

First, the study emphasises the fact that quality support services for distance teacher education is very important because of the nature and speed of the changes affecting open and distance education. In order to provide quality education through distance education, distance education practitioners need to be apprised with the kind and quality of support services currently provided. From the research undertaken, it should be possible to identify the available support services and their weaknesses in order to put in place measures to address the management of distance teacher education in Ghana.

Moreover, if quality education has to be pursued, proper management of distance teacher education in the form of quality support services should receive serious attention nationally. The problem, therefore, is that the quality of support services to distance teacher education in Ghana is yet to receive a comprehensive assessment to determine the effectiveness of distance teacher education provided by both public and private distance education institutions. In the light of this, the researcher intends to investigate the quality of support services to distance teacher education in Ghana. In order to improve the quality of education provided through open and distance education, it is imperative to assess the effectiveness of the distance education practitioners and the institutions that offer distance teacher education programmes as a whole.

Additionally, the private and public institutions offering distance teacher education programmes in Ghana stands to profit from this research because they would discover whether their student support services need to be changed or improved. Through the study investigated, the effectiveness of the management of distance teacher education in Ghana which primarily concentrated on student support services, the conclusions, recommendations and suggestions provided may assist the distance education practitioners in Ghana and the world in general to realize pitfalls and improve on the management of distance teacher education.

The distance education is increasingly gaining the recognition and attention of Ghanaians who love education. However, it is essential that as Ghanaians we develop interest to research in this area so that we can enhance the quality of education and consequently contribute to the development of our country. Good research offers correct information on specific topics. Therefore, the body of knowledge that is produced by this study would be useful in the education sector, particularly in the management of distance teacher education in Ghana and also serve as a reference material for further studies.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

The scope of the study was delimited to the perception of students of distance education on the quality of support services received in the Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre of University of Education, Winneba in the Kumasi metropolis. Specifically, the study only assessed the distance education students" views in relation to tutorials, study modules and facilities available at the centre.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study arose from the co-operation from the various respondents. Respondents held the opinion that this study would serve no practical purpose. To mitigate this, education of the respondents on the reason behind this project was undertaken. Apart from lack of co-operation, time constraint was another limiting factor to this study because the study coincided with other academic activities. This limited the researcher's ability to test larger samples from the population. Because of this, a sample of the study centres and students were chosen as many subjects could not be included in the study.

A likely limitation to the findings of the study could come from scoring errors. Scoring errors could originate from open-ended responses because divergent responses would have been given and the researcher may have to use his discretion to edit and this could affect the real intentions of respondents. Another limitation could come from insincerity of respondents, that is, information given could not be reliable and that can feed into wrong generalizations to the total population of the study. Since human beings react to situations and conditions in different ways and under different circumstances, it is likely the students, especially provided information to portray inadequate support services that may be different from the truth. The researcher however gathered adequate data for the study for a thorough and logical data analysis.

1.9 Organisation of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One which is the introduction discusses issues like the background to the study, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, and the research questions. Chapter One also covers the limitations and the delimitation of the study. Chapter Two captures the review of related literature on distance education and students support services. Chapter Three looks at the methodology. The sections included in the methodology used for the study which included; the study design, study population, sampling, data collection instruments, data collection procedures and data processing and analysis. Data collected are analyzed and discussed in the Chapter Four. Finally, a summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations, and areas for further studies are provided in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature related to the study. Generally, the chapter synthesizes existing theoretical and empirical research in the area of students support services to distance education students and ends by summarizing the review and identifying the gap in the existing literature. Specifically, the chapter consists of review of literature on the theories of distance education, evolution of distance education, history of distance education in Ghana, the concept of distance education, students support service in distance education, management of distance education etc. The chapter also includes empirical evidence of studies related to the topic.

2.1.0 Theories of Distance Education

Distance education is not organised chaotically but falls within arrangements of a specified operational mode (Ramasamy, 2010). Marshall (2000) asserts that educational theories tend to mirror the political, economic, social and philosophical values philosophical values of a given period and associated events. Marshall‟s view suggests that theories are a creation of prevailing conditions and are, thus, expressed and implemented in order to address prevailing situations. As a result, Chiyongo (2010) argued that theories guide the practice and research of distance education. Simonson, Schlosser and Hanson (1999) contend that theoretical concerns give distance educators a standard against which decisions can be taken with self-assurance. The authors further argued that the understanding of theories lead to understandings explaining what in distance education is to be anticipated under what

conditions and circumstances, thus paving the way for substantiated practical methodological application.

This study discusses four theories that have guided distance education. The study discusses the 1987 tentative research model of retention and attrition of distance education of Vincent Tinto, the theory of integration by Moore (1989), the theory of autonomy and independence by Moore (1991) and the theory of equivalence by Simonson, Schlosser and Hanson (1999). Specifically, these theories are directed at managing distance education. Thus, the study have guided the researchers in assessing the management of distance teacher education.

2.1.1 The Tentative Theory of Students' Retention or Attrition

Many theories exist regarding student development and attrition. The most notable is Vincent Tinto's model for student attrition which was first published in 1987 (Human Resources and Skills Development, 2008). This model incorporates a variety of factors which have been found by researchers to influence student development (Simpson 2004). In this study, the researcher has adopted Tinto's theoretical framework because knowing the reasons that compel distance students to dropout is very important. It helps distance education practitioners to provide their students the required support services.

The model takes into consideration a student's background, their individual attributes and pre-tertiary education. Once these variables have been selected, it suggests that in order for a student to be satisfied at any learning institution, he or she must have success in two areas: academic and social integration. Tinto suggests that academic integration refers to goal commitments, grade performance, and intellectual development. He refers to social integration as institutional commitments, peer-group

integrations, and faculty integration. Success in these areas leads to a re-evaluation of commitments which will either lead the student to continue learning or abandon the programme. Tinto as indicated in Sampson (2004), stresses that it is necessary for institutions to understand that attrition may occur for a variety of reasons. While some reasons may stem from academic faculty of adjustments, they could just as easily come from the student. This is even more likely for distance students who are usually alone all the time.

Institutions offering distance education programmes continue to struggle with the problem of reducing the attrition rate of their distance students in order to maintain great pride in graduating a high percentage of its senior distance students who entered teacher education programmes. Not only is recruitment important, but also the retention of distance students to graduation is a mark of a quality distance education. Students" retention becomes an essential part of distance education. Thus, increasing retention has become a goal for many educational institutions and a way of judging the quality of education. The common characteristics enhancing persistence of students on a distance learning programme may assist distance education practitioners to manage their programmes well.

2.1.2 The Theory of Interaction

The theory of interaction has received much attention in the theoretical literature of distance education. It is equally important to this study because it deals with the use of study materials or content which distance education practitioners should manage properly in order to improve the quality of education through distance learning. Moore's (1989) theory of interaction is that all stakeholders in distance education need to be engaged in educative interaction. According to Chifwepa (2006),

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the three interactions are: students and their lecturer are engaged in two way interaction. The lecturer provides the student with an organized plan, or curriculum for mastering the content and communicates with the student throughout the process of learning; students interact with students by means of group discussions and group project work and students interact with the content by means of study modules and other materials. In this type of interaction, the student is involved in what (Holmberg 1983) calls internal didactic conversation. Since the learning process is based on this interaction there is a need to produce modules and other learning materials which are student friendly.

In this theory, Moore (1989) suggests that when distance education practitioners design distance education materials; they should include interactions between the students and their lecturer, student and student, and student and the content. Gunawardena (1994) have taken the idea of interaction a step further and added a fourth component to the model student-interface interaction. In this regard, the members of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) notes that the interaction between the student and the technology that delivers instruction is a critical component of the model, which has been missing thus far in the literature (AECT 2001). They propose a new paradigm that includes understanding the use of the interface in all transactions. Chifwepa (2006) also contends that students who do not have the basic skills required to use a communication medium spend inordinate amounts of time learning to interact with the technology and have less time to learn the lesson. For this reason, instructional designers, according to them, must include student-interface interactions that enable the student to have successful interactions with the mediating technology.

According to Chiyongo (2008), unlike in the past where distance institutions were hard pressed to provide for two-way, real time interaction, or time-delayed interaction between students and the lecturer or among peers, it is now possible to have formal group work facilitated through distance education technologies. More and more institutions that teach at a distance are integrating a combination of technologies to meet their students" needs. With the recent trend of technical advance, distance learning is becoming more recognised for its potential in providing individualised attention and communication with students internationally. This does not mean that print will no longer be used in distance education. It is more likely that print will be used as a supplementary medium and better ways of communicating information through print will be investigated and incorporated into the design of study guides and other print-based media (AECT, 2001).

This theory of interaction is in accordance with the concept of distance education. According to distance education, teaching and learning processes take place by use of some media, such as telephone and e-mail. In this regard: UNESCO (2002) states:

"Clearly, the concept „distance education" is concerned with a form of educational delivery where the acts of teaching and learning are separated in time and space, and technology plays a significant supporting role in enabling this form of delivery. Although distance education certainly depends on communication technology it is much more than just technology. Rather it is a total DELIVERY system" (p. 14).

The theory of interaction emphasizes two-way communication. Two-way communication remains a major defining feature of distance education systems today. Holmberg (1983) argues that distance education is different from private study because students are supported by the lecturers of distance education institution.

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Therefore, the student is not alone. He or she receives study materials and interacts with the tutors and other people involved in the programme. Today, the interaction is further enhanced by the rapid evolution of computers, telecommunications, and electronic learning technologies. Internet-based learning has become a popular and well-accepted methodology for delivering distance education.

A common misconception of distance learning is the scenario of a lonely person sitting at his or her computer. However, distance learning does not have to be isolating. It can also be highly interactive. Today, distance education practitioners are encouraged to develop strategies that can lead to discussion and group projects. Internet facilities can allow people to be connected to the whole world (Rossen, 2009). Educational technologies have indeed influenced open and distance learning very much. According to Gulati (2008), learning using technologies has become a global phenomenon. Louw (2007) also explains that the impact of technology, which has opened new options for access to information, communication and learning, and the opportunity for enhancing new approaches to learning, has facilitated greater flexibility.

2.1.3 The Theory of Autonomy and Independence

The theory of autonomy and independence is equally important in the management of distance teacher education. According to Bourchard and Kalman (1998), student autonomy is seen as a requisite in highly structured situations, where the student must compensate for the lack of pedagogical flexibility. Simultaneously, student autonomy is seen as indispensable when the student must deal with a lack of structure. According to Keegan (1986), contributions to theories of autonomy and independence were made in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The major representatives

were Rudolf Manfred Delling (Federal Republic of Germany), Charles A. Wedemeyer (U.S.A.) and Michael G. Moore (U.K.). Chifwepa (2006) sees distance education as a multi-dimensional system of learning and communication processes with the aid of an artificial signal-carrier which has to facilitate learning. A signal carrier is a device which facilities learning. The eight dimensions of distance education that Delling identified are: a student, society, distance teaching institution, a learning objective, the content to be learned, the result of learning, distance, and a signal-carrier. The latter implies that there are support services that assist a student to learn.

In the theory of autonomy and independence, Moore (1991), recognizes the importance of the student's determination of his or her own learning pace and time. Nevertheless, within the framework of this independence is the need for effective dialogue between the lecturer and the student. This freedom of distance education should be considered when designing study materials. Indeed, distance education practitioners should devise systems that support this freedom. This can be in form of allowing students to exercise maximum independence with regard to choice of aims, objectives, study methods and learning activities, study pace and progression, and evaluation (Chifwepa, 2006).

The content to be learned, the result of learning, distance, and a signal-carrier which plays an important role in the theory of autonomy and independence are important in the provision of distance teacher education. Therefore, this theory will help the researcher to articulate issues related to distance students. For example, since this theory considers the freedom of the distance student, the researcher will have to consider this aspect when analysing the instructional materials for distance students. Moore (2006) argues that the theory of autonomy and independence reduces the role of the teacher and that of the educational organisation to a minimum and places the

entire emphasis on the autonomy and independence of the student. The advocates of this theory claim that nobody should be denied the opportunity to learn because he or she is poor, geographically isolated, socially disadvantaged, in poor health or unable to be in a special environment for learning. According to Moore (1991), the main aim of the theory of autonomy and independence is to develop in the student the capacity to carry out self-directed learning that will enable him or her to continue learning in his or her own environment.

2.1.4 The Theory of Equivalency

When reviewing the academic research as well as the theoretical literature, it has been found that the phenomenon of equivalency, the notion that traditional and distance education delivery are equal, is very important as far as distance education is concerned (Ibrahim, 2006). According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), the theory of equivalency should be based on the understanding that education at a distance should be built on the concept of equivalency of learning experiences. This approach to distance education, advocates designing a collection of equivalent learning experiences for distant and internal students. These may be different for each student. The objective of the instructional designer of distance education is to provide for appropriate, equivalent learning.

Chiyongo (2010) notes that the theory of equivalency is based on the understanding that the student and the lecturer are separated from one another and that, where possible, two-way interactive telecommunication systems should be used to synchronously and asynchronously connect them for the sharing of video, voice, and databased instruction. The equivalency theory is supported by Akankandelwa (2007) who argued that distance education is not a distinct field of education.

According to Simonson, Schlosser and Hanson (1999), there are several key elements to equivalency theory, namely, the concepts of equivalency, learning experiences, appropriate application, students, and outcomes. These are explained as follows:

Equivalency: Central to this theoretical approach is the concept of equivalency. Local and distant students have different environments in which to learn. It is the responsibility of the distance educator to design learning events or modules that provide experiences with equal value for students. In this regard, it could be mentioned that a triangle and a square with the same area could be considered equivalent even though they are different geometrical shapes. The experiences of the internal student and the distant student should have equivalent value even though these experiences might be very different.

Learning Experience: A learning experience is anything that happens to the student to promote learning. Students in different locations may require a different mix of learning experiences. Instructional design procedures should attempt to anticipate and provide the collection of experiences that will be most suitable for each student or group of students.

Appropriate Application: The idea of appropriate application implies that learning experiences suitable to the needs of the individual student and the learning situation should be available and that the availability of learning experiences should be proper and timely.

Students: Students are the ones involved in the formal, institutionally based learning activity in the course or unit of instruction. Students should be defined by their enrolment in a course, not by their location. They necessarily seek institutionally-based education, sanctioned by a recognized and accredited organization.

Outcomes: Finally, the outcomes of a learning experience are those obvious, measurable, and significant changes that occur cognitively and effectively in students because of their participation in the course or unit.

According to Holmberg (2002), the concept of equivalency is central to the widespread acceptance of distance education. According to the author, if lecturers, students, and the public in general identify learning at a distance as the equivalent of what they consider to be traditional learning, distance learning will become mainstream. If equivalency is not what the public perceives, distance education will continue to be peripheral to the field of education. Okumbe (2001) also notes that the changing and diverse environment in which distance education is practiced has inhibited the development of a single theory upon which to base practice and research. A variety of theories have been proposed to describe traditional distance education. They include theories that emphasize independence and autonomy of the student, industrialization of teaching, and interaction and communication.

2.2 The concept of Distance Education

Distance education may be a new phenomenon in the developing economies but is certainly not new in the field of education in developed economies such as the USA and the UK. In fact, distance education can be traced back to the late 1800''s when correspondence courses were first introduced in 1840 by Sir Isaac Pitman who taught shorthand via postal mail. Nowadays, there is vast and rapid growth of distance learning at all levels of education to the extent that it moves from being a marginal to becoming an integral part of the overall educational and training provision (Ibrahim 2006). This means that a significant number of people in the world today receive their

education through distance education programmes. Since its inception, authors of distance education have tried to define distance education.

According to Louw (2007), distance education is a multi-dimensional system aimed at bridging the time, geographical and transactional distance between student and institution, student and lecturer, student and peers, and student and material. Learning and teaching are facilitated in a manner that accommodates the needs of students by combining a number of delivery options to facilitate flexibility, optimizing effective access to and participation in Higher Education, and enhancing the engagement and autonomy of the student. These processes depend on effective communication through face-to-face and digital means and are guided by properly integrated course design in which the various learning resources and support functions complement each other in such a way that they foster effective learning.

Simonson (2010) describes distance education or distance learning as a separation of teacher and student in space and/or time. The student is physically separated from the learning institution. The student will receive printed study material in the form of study guides. Chikuya (2007) define distance education as an education which covers various forms of study at all levels which are not under continuous and immediate supervision of tutors present with students in a lecture room or in the same premises. According to him however, the students may benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition provided during contact sessions. Allen and Seaman (2008) also state that the term distance" defines the nature and degree of separation of lecturer and student in the educational process. The authors regard the separation in space and time of teaching and learning as a basic feature of distance education. Similarly, Ramasamy (2010) defines distance education as a modality which permits the

delivery of a group of didactic media without the necessity of regular class participation. The individual is responsible for his or her learning.

Keegan (1980) explains that:

> distance teaching/education is a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes which is rationalized by the application of division of labour and organisational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning (p. 6).

As was stated, distance education is defined as an education that takes place when the teacher or lecturer and the student are separated by space and/or time. The gap between the two can be bridged through the use of technology, such as audiotapes, videoconferencing, satellite broadcasts and online technology and/or more traditional delivery methods, such as the postal services (Chiyongo, 2006). According to Keegan (1986), distance learning and distance teaching, which both form part of distance education, is not the same because distance learning focuses on the learning experience of the student while distance teaching focuses on that which the lecturer communicates to the students. According to Allen and Seaman (2011), there are six basic defining elements of distance education. They are as follows: the separation of lecturer and student which distinguishes it from face-to-face lecturing; influence of an educational organisation which distinguishes it from private study; the use of technical media, usually print, to unite lecturer and student and carry the educational content; the provisional of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue; the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic

and socialization purposes; and the participation in an industrialized form of education which, if accepted, contains the genus of radical separation of distance education from other forms within the educational spectrum (Simonson et al., 2012).

Furthermore, Louw (2007) indicates that as a methodology, distance education is generally defined as one in which the students are separated from the instructional base or lecturer, either in space or time, for a significant portion of their learning. Characteristics of distance education are important because they enable the reader to identify distance education even if it is presented in various sheds and for different purposes (Doyle, 2009). These characteristics also enhance the readers" understanding and recognition of this learning and teaching strategy. The above discussion about the definitions of distance education has revealed that it is impossible to provide a comprehensive definition of distance education which is acceptable across the board. What is possible is to identify certain core criteria. Perhaps the most significant criteria in terms of the information is to provide categories to be included in a definition of distance education, and of their use to a researcher engaged in moulding an application model, are: the student, the tutor, the learning process, the teaching process, the communication process, the learning/teaching material (its design, development, production and distribution), the place, the time, the educational body, and evaluation. All these criteria relating to their application in a distance education model are characterized by their flexibility, computability, user-friendliness and student-centeredness. However, their interpretation is defined and depends on the individual case and educational model in question (Lionarakis, 2008).

2.3 Evolution of Distance Education

According to Casey (2008) and Moore (2003), the first correspondence course started by the Phonographic Institute, was called the Pittman Shorthand training program and was developed in 1852. During this course, secretaries would use the United States Postal Service to mail in their completed stenographic shorthand educational exercises (Casey, 2008). After all coursework was completed, the Phonographic Institute would mail a certificate of expertise in stenographic shorthand skills to the individual (Matthews, 1999). In 1881, the Chautauqua Correspondent College was founded and it awarded diplomas in the liberal arts field (Moore, 2003). In 1890, the mine industry began teaching mine safety using distance education; and in 1892, the University of Chicago provided the first college-level distance education program (Casey, 2008; Moore, 2003). All of these correspondence courses were completed through the use of the U.S. Postal Service.

In the early 1900"'s, distance education expanded to the radio (Moore, 2003). Between 1819 and 1946, educational radio licenses were granted to over 200 universities across the United States with the first educational radio licenses being granted to the University of Salt Lake City, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Minnesota (Casey, 2008). Similarly, Zhao, Perreault, Waldman and Truell (2009) contend that the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has become an integral part of higher education globally. It is an effective tool for the provision of education to a heterogeneous group of learners as well as an alternative channel to democratise education all over the world. The origin and growth of Distance Education (DE) has its roots in the familiar circle to be squared: the development imperative of providing health and education facilities to the people in the poor countries, which they can hardly afford and without which they cannot develop such

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economic resources (Macmillan, 1938). This fact underlines the need for a proper educational policy. The goal of such a policy is to arrive at a balance between the demand for and the supply of education to secure the most beneficial form of educational development. This fact has been reiterated by the Education Commission (1966) while observing that the growth of education should go together with the manpower requirements of an expanding economy.

In fact, the universal demand for education, thirst for knowledge and the failure of the mainstream education system in catering to the increasing popular demand for higher education were the major contributory factors behind the emergence of the ODL system. According to Casey (2008), the appearance of knowledge societies where material and physical capital is gradually replaced with knowledge capital and of knowledge workers consisting of technically qualified people dominating the values in all spheres of life has revolutionised the concept of learning and remoulded it into one that envisions learning out of the four walls of classrooms and learning during the entire life span. This has contributed also to the legitimisation of distance education as the right alternative to the conventional system; it has not only proved cost-effective but also has the right potential to reach out to the large segment of the unreached, the marginalised, and the needy. Correspondence education, which developed in the 19th century and remained in the educational margins till the second half of the 20th century, has come to be regarded as a route to social mobility by the socially and educationally disadvantaged.

The satellite television systems that had been created in the 1960s became cost-effective in the 1980s and reduced the cost of employee training by providing „on location‟ instruction. Prior to satellite technology, either employees or instructors were required to travel. Now, large corporations and the military quickly took

advantage of satellite transmission (Casey, 2008). By 1987, up to half of Fortune 500 companies, including IBM, Federal Express, and Dominos, used videoconferencing for their corporate training programs (Moore, 2003). In 1985, the National Technological University (NTU), located in Fort Collins, CO, offered online degree courses in both continuing and graduate education using satellite transmission to access course materials from other universities and then download and redistribute course materials by satellite (Casey, 2008).

2.4 History and Development of Distance Education in Ghana

The idea of distance education (DE) is not new in Ghana. According to Adoo-Adeko (2012), it was more vibrant two or three decades ago than it is now. It used to be known as correspondence education, an avenue through which a number of workers and professionals upgraded themselves. Similarly, Duodu (2002) contends that the economy of Ghana started deteriorating after independence thus making it difficult for student-workers to afford the cost of upgrading themselves by this means of education. The income levels of workers were so low that they could not simply afford to pay their fees.

However, according to Anhwere (2012), after some time the idea of using DE for manpower development resurfaced strongly and this led to the introduction of a number of DE initiatives including the Modular Teacher Training Programme (MTTP), which was introduced in 1982. This programme was meant to upgrade untrained teachers academically and professionally through some form of DE. Through this programme 7,537 untrained teachers received professional training and obtained Teachers' Certificate A. However this programme was abandoned because of certain difficulties it faced. Despite the difficulties encountered in the earlier

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attempts with DE in Ghana, the author argues that there was still a strong conviction on the part of the Government of Ghana that DE is a viable complement to conventional education especially at the tertiary level. This conviction was partly due to the fact that universities were not able to admit even half of qualified applicants due to limited facilities.

Consequently, between 1991 and 1994, the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education (MOE) sponsored a number of surveys to assess the DE needs of Ghana (Koomson, 2009). Two important international organisations which were involved in these surveys are the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the United National Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Adoo-Adeku (2012) also opines that upon the recommendations from these surveys the universities agreed to start DE programmes. The four universities, University of Ghana (UG), University of Cape Coast (UCC), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and University Education, Winneba (UEW) started preparations for this new model of educational delivery. University of Ghana opted to offer four courses through its distance education (DE) programme. These are Sociology, English, Religious and Political Science at the Bachelor degree level. For University of Cape Coast the courses selected were Bachelor of Education in Primary Education and Post graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). At the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology two programmes were proposed for the programme. These were B.Sc. (Building Technology) and B.Sc. (Biological Sciences). However, funding of the DE programme was a problem for the universities. Of these four Universities only UEW was able to take off in 1996 as a result of assistance from the then British Overseas Development Administration (ODA) now Department for International Development (DFID). UEW took off by

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admitting a first batch of 196 students to pursue Post-Diploma Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree in four subject areas namely: English Education, Life Skills Education, Mathematics Education and Science Education. UEW therefore became the pioneer in university level DE in Ghana. UCC and UG took off in 2001/2002 academic year with diploma programmes in Basic Education and Youth in Development Work respectively.

The mission of Ghana's distance education programme is to make quality education at all levels more accessible and relevant to meet the learning needs of Ghanaians so as to enhance their performance and improve the quality of their lives. The official title of the policy document is "Ministry of Education, Ghana Distance Education Programme:

Policy Document; this document is so far the official policy document, which directs how DE should be delivered in Ghana. It was presented to the Minister for Education who duly sent an acknowledgement in a letter sent to the Committee, which prepared the document.

2.5 The concept of Student Support Service in Distance Education

According to Siaciwena, Trewby and Anderson (2005), in distance education literature, the terms „student support" and „learner support" are frequently used interchangeably. Hence in this work the two terms will refer to the same phenomenon. Different writers have defined the concept of learner support in various ways, each of them emphasizing what seems to him or her to be its essential features especially its position in a course of study. According to Robinson (1995), learner support is an umbrella term which is interpreted in a variety of ways. She observes that some authors regard learner support as an integral part of a course, others place it as

supplementary. Some include administration and delivery operations in their definitions, others do not. This variation in the perception about learner support is again seen when it comes to considering the range of services that come under this aspect of distance education. Some authors, for example, include pre-entry services while others do not (Robinson, 1995).

The most obvious form of support is that required to solve academic or personal problems, but for students studying in isolation moral support may be equally important (Melton 2002). It is a good idea to develop support systems that are suitable for the distance students. Additional support is needed on a more regular, ongoing basis. Distance students are likely to spend the vast majority of their study time in their homes or in the place of work, and they need regular ongoing support. Holmberg (2000) and Trinidade, Carmo and Bidarra (2000) argue that distance education students require some kind of support mechanism, so that they can overcome their learning difficulties. Different kinds of technological facilities, in terms of the objectives of the course, target populations and available resources are therefore needed. These student support mechanisms include mail, radio, telephone as well as computer mediated communication. The findings of Potter (1998) which was not only confined to online students concerning student support in distance education, reveals many forms of assistance that are designed to remove barriers (situational, institutional, dispositional and informational) and promote academic success. Examples of such services are pre-admission counselling, academic advising, financial aid, and learning skills.

Friedman (1981), one of the early writers, provides an analytical perspective of learner support. He views learner support as a sub-system within distance education which itself is made up of smaller sub-systems. Referring to the student

support set of activities as the student operating system, he argues that „the administrator in teaching systems is required to design and operate systems which admit students into the institution, support their study, and provide for assessment and certification (Friedman, 1981). Based on this argument, he divides the student operating system into three systems which he identified as admission, student support and assessment and certification systems, reflecting the life cycle of the student in the institution.

Sewart (1993), distinguishes between the course production and learner support sub-systems and views learner support as the means by which students are able to utilize what their institutions have provided for them. He argues that while course production might work within a management model appropriate to manufacturing industry, learner support can be equated to a service industry because it meets most of the general criteria for service industries. For him, learner supporters are intermediaries who are able to speak the language of the students and interpret the materials and procedures of complex bureaucratic organizations. In his view, "the primary concern of these intermediaries is not for the system itself but for the students and they seek to represent individual needs to such an extent that they force the system to take cognizance of these needs" (Sewart, 1993).

Most adult students need some guidance and help if they are to continue with their studies. In the 19th century the normal way of supporting students was to tell students to attend tutorials and seminars and give them a list of books and articles to read (Rumble, 2001). Nowadays, instead of the students depending only on the information that the lecturer gives them, they can access a lot of appropriate data on the internet. Ibrahim (2006) indicates that it is the duty of successful institutions to meet the needs of their students, to constantly improve the quality of the educational

content, and to use student satisfaction data to mould their directions. It is common sense to note that students who are well supported and are satisfied are likely to complete their programme.

Siaciwena *et al*. (2005), argues that all distance education systems must maintain student records. Well-maintained and easily accessible records are a vital source of information for progress by student cohorts, dropout rates, and examination results. Such records can also be used to assess the progress of individual students, especially those experiencing learning difficulties. The use of computers is very important in this area.

Student support services are important in breaking the isolation that distance education students experience. Support services also provide encouragement and motivation. For most distance students, support of different kinds helps them stay in the programme until they complete it instead of dropping out or failing. Ibrahim (2006) supports the provision of student support services by indicating that research-based evidence has shown that the support the student receives from those people surrounding him or she has emerged as a major factor affecting persistence. In this regard, student support should be designed to meet the needs of particular groups or individual students (UNISA, 1997). It is clear that sufficient support for the students would keep them in the programme and ensure that they succeed.

There is no universal blueprint for the design of student support services. According to Tait (2000), the various factors that need to be taken into account in the planning of student support in open and distance learning systems include characteristics of students, the demands of academic programmes and courses, the geographical environment, the technological infrastructure, the scale of the programme, and the requirements of management. These factors interact in complex

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ways, such that while none can be ignored, none can be given overall priority. In developing countries like Ghana, student support may differ from that of developed countries. The student support that is rendered to students in developing countries greatly depends on the needs of the students themselves. For instance, due to financial difficulties students may face, distance education providers might allow students to pay in instalments.

2.6 The Rationale for Student Support in Distance Education

Having discussed the various ways by which learner support has been defined, this section will highlight the importance of learner support in the provision of distance education. This will help justify why the provision of learner support merits a systematic study as carried out in this piece of research. Thorpe (2002) argues that unlike in most conventional institutions where students have access to their tutors, counsellors and even their course mates, in distance teaching systems the students experience isolation and even alienation. She again highlights that even though conventional students face some problems in some cases, their tutors themselves are able to detect some of these difficulties without them being voiced by the students. Besides, these students often observe their fellow students experiencing similar problems and so can share their strategies for solving them.

Johnson (2004) has also identified a number of reasons why student support is vital in open and distance learning systems (ODL). He also puts these reasons into three categories, which are practical, theoretical and moral. Under practical reasons, Simpson identifies retention and student demands as the two major concerns. Simpson (2002) agrees with Robinson on the relationship between learner support and drop out in distance education. To this effect he argues that the high dropout rates in distance

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education as compared to conventional institutions make it imperative for governments and institutions to develop more sophisticated ways of increasing retention one of which is enhancing and providing student support. On democracy versus authoritarianism Simpson (2002) believes that because ODL can be a potentially authoritarian system with pre-packaged course material that presents only a particular view. Student support, however, affords the students the opportunity of making choices and also to challenge the views presented to them.

McGivney (2004) argues that if lack of effective student support is associated with high dropout rate, then it remains a moral obligation for the providers of distance education to adequately support their students to go through their studies successfully. This is because it is morally wrong to admit students on to a programme and allow them to drop out. The crucial role learner support plays in the successful delivery of distance education seems to be acknowledged by most authors in distance education. Moore and Kearsley (1996), for example, argue that a critical component of effective retention programme for online students is learner support services. According to them, while many factors contribute to attrition in distance education, at the top of the list are levels of interaction and support. In support of such massive acknowledgement of the role of learner support, Ludwig-Hardman and Dunlap, (2003) have argued that the challenge for distance education providers is not so much how to recruit students but how to retain them once they have begun. To them therefore, learner support services are a critical component of an effective retention programme.

Like Robinson and Latchem (2003) advanced reasons for integrating student support in an ODL system. According to Tait (2003), because distance students have the freedom to choose with which institution to study, they are more likely to choose institutions which will offer them what they will prefer. He further argues that distance

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students look for the flexibility that ODL offers, especially freedom of time and place. He maintains that feedback from the students of the Open University of the United Kingdom (OU UK) indicates that only about 10% of them do not want interaction with other students. For the remaining 90%, such an interaction is highly valued. It must be mentioned here that the issue of students choosing to study with an institution that provides maximum support is similar to Simpson's (2002) argument that students demand such support and so will judge distance education institutions based on the quality of the support they offer.

Again like Robinson and Simpson, Tait (2003) has identified reduction of drop out as another reason for providing learner support. He explains that, "Student support, especially student guidance and counselling, tutor support, and effective information and administrative systems provide a range of activity that impact not only in terms of teaching but also affectively, that is to say reinforcing the student's sense of confidence, self-esteem and progress.

Tait (2003) acknowledges the fact that it is difficult to estimate the extent to which student support creates a learning atmosphere that is congenial, attractive and therefore supportive of learner persistence. He, however, argues that the wider affective dimensions of the learning environment which revolves around conversation and community" seems important in most educational contexts including ODL despite the fact that it is difficult to deliver (Tait, 2003). He likens this mode of explanation to Thorpe's (2002) concept of community of practice in ODL, which is made up of learners and their teachers. It is again worthy of note that the role of student support in reducing drop out seems to be a very strong factor which is identified by almost all writers on this topic.

Following Robinson's (1981) model of categorising the problems distance education students face, Tait (2000) identified three primary functions of learner support as, cognitive (supporting and development of learning), affective (that is related to the emotions that support learning and success), systemic (helping students to manage rules and systems of the institution in ways that support persistence). Writing later, he argues that these three functions work together to ensure the eventual success of the learner. He notes,

Student support in ODL has as its primary aim that of assisting students to learn successfully, and in doing so it recognises that in learning and teaching systems characterised by distance and part-time study helping students with their feelings of confidence and self-esteem will energise them in ways that support persistence and success" (Tait, 2003, p. 51).

It can be deduced from the preceding discussion that the ultimate goal of learner support is to ensure persistence and also increase completion rates. It has also become clear that learner support has been conceived as playing a very crucial role in the successful delivery of distance education. In summary it can be argued that justification for the provision of learner support in distance education is closely associated with the problems of distance education students which make them more vulnerable to drop out than their on-campus counterparts

2.7 Empirical Evidence of Student Support Service in Distance Education

Islam and Most (2009) examined the student support offered by the Bangladesh Open University (BOU). Findings of the study revealed that most of the tutors and learners generally had a positive perception and attitude towards Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system of BOU, compared to traditional forms of

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education. The study ended with some recommendations that would help educators and the concerned authority to plan and design an effective open distance learning environment.

In analysing the perceptions of distance students of Andhra Pradesh Open University (APOU), Ashalatha (1990) found that course materials and counselling sessions were highly useful to the students, but that the library facilities and computers were very poorly used by them. Krishnan (2001) investigated the perception and utilization of ODL services by the learners of a DEI in Kerala. It is seen that the institution has succeeded in providing opportunities for learning to many disadvantaged persons. However, the system failed to provide even the basic requirements to the learners. The study advocates a national policy for standards in distance learning programs offered by the state- funded institutions.

Tyagi and Sahoo (1992) noted that IGNOU students did not find the study materials difficult. However, they suggested that course materials should reach them in time and should be made more elaborate and interesting. Mishra (2001) found that to a large extent IGNOU‟s Bachelor Degree Program learners were satisfied with the quality of the materials and presentation of the content. Haughey and Fenwick (1996) provided yet another insight into the attitude of tutors towards distance education. Their study of 181 school superintendents and staff established that "face-to- face learning is essential to the learner.

The ICDE (2009) Standing Conference of Presidents declaration drew together the conclusions and recommendations of each working group and made the key recommendations that: (a) Proponents of open, online and distance education must use the current economic crisis as an opportunity both to influence policy and to drive forward innovation in teaching and (b) The open, online and distance education

community must strive to meet the highest expectations with regard to effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

2.8 Quality in Distance Education

Quality in Distance Education has been viewed from different perspectives. Bulewati, & Zuhairi (2007) examined the experiences of Universitas Terbuka (UT) in implementing a quality management system and concluded that quality assurance must be developed as an institutional policy and strategy for continuous improvement. Nugraheni et al (2013) studied students‟ perception on quality assurance (QA) system of distance education, using an online survey method involving 306 students at

Universitas Terbuka (UT). They analysed students‟ perception on QA system in terms of profile of respondents, perception on important values of QA, students‟ satisfaction on the quality of the distance education programs and courses. Their study revealed that Distance learning students (DLS) students needed both academic and social psychological support and that external accreditation and qualified staff are key factors to institutional quality. Students also seemed to value the importance of well-structured courses and interactivity in the learning process. Other key findings that were reported from this study are that media technology supports, faculty support, and fair assessment are important in the quality of teaching learning at a distance and that protection of student rights, course content, and technology infrastructure were well facilitated by the institution.

Daugherty and Barbara (1998) examined perspectives of university faculty and students currently involved web-based instruction. Their results indicated that Students and faculty benefitted from meaningful learning of technology through the integration of course content and computer applications, increased access to the most

current and global content information available, increased motivation, and convenience. Faculty reported a wide range of challenges in the development and delivery of Web-based instruction. The most frequently identified barriers included lack of technical support, lack of software/adequate equipment, lack of faculty/administrative support, the amount of preparation time required to create assignments, and student resistance. Faculty respondents in this study consistently identified convenience and improved learning as advantages for students enrolled in Web-based instruction.

Cashion and Palmieri (2002) investigated Australian learners" and educators" views on the quality of online learning. Flexibility, in utilizing e-learning technology was rated as the most important factor in quality e-learning by learners. Other quality factors cited as highly important by most educators, such as induction, communication with teachers and other students, and a hybrid mix of face-to-face and online learning, were rated as less important by the learners. Jung (2011) found that South Korea"s e-learners perceived staff support to be the most important indicator of e-learning quality, followed by institutional QA mechanisms and learning tasks.

2.9 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the theories of distance education, evolution of distance education, history of distance education in Ghana, the concept of distance education, students support service in distance education, management of distance education etc. The chapter has discussed four theories that have guided distance education. The study discussed the tentative research model of retention and attrition of distance education of Vincent Tinto, the theory of integration by Moore (1989), the theory of autonomy and independence by Moore (1991) and the theory of equivalency

by Simonson, Schlosser and Hanson (1999). Specifically, these theories are directed at managing distance education.

Also, it has been noted that there is global acceptable definition of what constitute a distance education and that what has been a challenge for researchers and policy makers is the type and level of support services given to students of distance education. Due to the problem of definition of the type of kind of student support service given to students, researchers have categorised students support services based on the location of the study area. For instance, it was realised that the terms „student support‟ and „learner support‟ are frequently used interchangeably in distance education literature. The literature reviewed above obtained examples of such student support services as pre-admission counselling, academic advising, financial aid, and learning skills. Other studies argued that student support mechanisms include mail, radio, telephone as well as computer mediated communication.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The objective of the study is to examine the perception of the quality of the students learning and tutorial student support services in the UEW distance education. This chapter deals with the methodology used in gathering the relevant data for the study. It focuses on the research design to be adopted, population, sample size and sampling techniques, research instrument , reliability of instrument , data collection procedure , data analysis procedure and ethical considerations of the research.

3.1 Research Design

Research design is a plan used to test the hypothesis to find solutions to the research questions. The design involves the identification of the problem, investigating the problem by collecting data through questionnaires and interviews, analysis of the data, drawing conclusions and then making recommendations. This study is structured within the framework of descriptive research approach. Descriptive research studies are designed to obtain information, which concerns the current status of phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007).

Amin (2005), asserts that descriptive research is the most commonly used research method in social sciences and is used to gather data from a sample of a population at a particular time. It is however argued that the descriptive research may however fall short of discovering new insights into a phenomenon, because it does not manipulate the variables concerned and it only focuses on explaining what already exist. Yin (2003) also argues that descriptive research method may also produce unreliable results because it may dig into private and emotional matters that

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Respondents may not be completely truthful about. Notwithstanding these weaknesses, the descriptive research design is considered the most appropriate for study.

The study aims to evaluate the quality of the students learning and tutorial support service (SSS) in the UEW distance education at the Asanteman SHS Study Centre. As a result, a case study approach was adopted for the study. The Asanteman SHS Study Centre was chosen because it is one of the pioneer study centres of UEW. Again, the Asanteman SHS Study Centre is noted as one of the most populous study centres of UEW.

3.2 Population

The population of this study comprises students of the distance education program of the University of Education, Winneba in the Kumasi. The structure of this population enabled the researcher to collect objective and detailed information from different groups of people. Specifically, the students of Asanteman SHS Study Centre were chosen as the population of the study. The estimated number of students at the Asanteman SHS Study Centre was 360. The sample size of 120 students were chosen based on the guidelines provided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970)

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The estimated number of students at the Asanteman SHS Study Centre was 360. One hundred and twenty students were chosen for the study. The sample size of 120 students were chosen based on the guidelines provided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The authors have shown that a population of 360 demands a sample size of 183. However, due to time and resources constraints, 120 students were chosen.

Simple random sampling technique was used to select the study centre for the study. There were two study centres for distance education in Kumasi: Asanteman Senior High School and Kumasi Girls' Senior High School. The names of the two study centres were written on pieces of papers and mixed in a bowl. The papers that contained the names of the study centres were picked and replaced four times. The study centre, Asanteman Senior High School was the first to be picked two times and based on that it was selected for the study.

The students were also selected based on convenience sampling technique. Due to the large number of students in the study centre, it was not possible to contact everybody due to resource and time constraints. Owing to that, the students who were available and willing to respond to the questionnaires were chosen for the study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher chose a sample size of 120 students: composed of 50 students in Year 1, 30 students in Year 2 and 40 students in Year 3.

3.4 Research Instruments

According to Yin (2003), there are a number of methods through which data can be collected and their appropriateness depends on many factors. Data collection instruments are the instruments used to obtain applicable data for the study. The selection of an instrument depends on many elements including the type of research conducted, educational background and characteristics of the respondents. For the study under review, the study employed the use of questionnaire.

The structured questionnaire method was used because it facilitates the data collection process and more so, the researcher was able to get respondents to provide appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth of the study without much difficulty. The questionnaire was designed for the respondents with open and closed

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ended questions to elicit relevant information that provided the necessary assistance in gathering the primary data for the study.

I designed the questionnaire through a thorough review of literature. The questionnaires were also administered and collected by the

researcher. The questionnaire was in four sections (Sections A to D). The first part of the questionnaire sought for the bio-data of respondents and the subsequent parts sought for information in relation to the objectives of the study. The questionnaires were mainly made up of Likert scale questions. According to Bryman (2004), the Likert scale normally has five or seven categories to show strengths of agreement or disagreement, and it is also argued that the multiple-item scales such as the Likert scale are popular for three reasons.

First, many items have the potential to capture a broad concept than a single question. Again, the use of many items can assist to illustrate finer distinction items. In this study, only five categories were used, for example: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Specifically, Section „A" asked six questions that sought to obtain background information of the respondents with respect to their age, gender, educational qualification and profession. Section „B" had six item questions that looked at the perception of students about the tutorial services received. A five-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1)) was used measure their responses this. Again, Section „C" consisted of six items also designed to obtain information on the perception of students on the quality of study modules supplied. In this section, the question items were six and the responses were five point likert scale, from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Finally, Section „D" focuses on the perception of students on the quality of available facility.

Similarly, a five point likert scale was used to obtain data on the perception of students on the quality of available facility. Sample of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix A.

3.5 Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability of measurements is also the extent to which a particular measuring procedure provides similar results over a number of repeated trials. In order to ascertain the reliability of the research instrument, a pilot study was carried out by administering the questionnaire among 15 respondents at Kumasi Girls" Study Centre. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the instrument was 0.71. This was deemed appropriate for the study based on the suggestion made by Straub, Boudreau and Gofen (2004) that a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or above is good enough for research purposes. Consequently, the researcher used the instrument in collecting data for the study.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

After the pilot study, the researcher used the questionnaire to collect data from the participants. Before the actual administration of the questionnaires, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Department of Educational Leadership, University of Education, Winneba which helped in attaining permission to administer the questionnaires. Firstly, upon reaching the intended Study Centre, the researcher met the Coordinator of the Asanteman SHS Study Centre. This helped me to introduce myself to the Study Centre Coordinator and also to discuss the purpose of the study.

The coordinator allowed the researcher to have a 20 minutes interaction with each of the class selected. I used this opportunity to explain the purpose of the study and how the participants could respond to the questionnaire items. The students were then allowed some time to fill the questionnaires and the questionnaires were collected on the same day. In all, 120 questionnaires were distributed and retrieved from the participants. All the retrieved questionnaires were appropriately responded. Thus, the return rate was 100%.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedure

The data gathered from the field of study were edited by the researcher to ensure that all questionnaires were properly completed and contained accurate information. The data were then inputted into computer programme, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version (21.0). Data were analysed quantitatively through the use of descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations to answer the formulated research questions. Moreover, figures (e.g. bar graphs) were subsequently used to present pictorial responses of the items.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

In conducting the study, certain principles and ethics were observed. The respondents were informed on the purpose of the research and their consent was obtained. Information was obtained from the respondents out of their own will. There was no deceit, coercion, inducement or unethical means of obtaining data. The confidentiality of the information was received and the anonymity of the respondents was protected. The information obtained from the respondents was used solely for this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to find out about the perception of students of distance education on the quality of support services received on IEDE study centre of the University of Education Winneba. This chapter presents (4.1) demographics characteristics of participants. In addition, the chapter present and discusses (4.2:R.Q 1) perception of students about the tutorial services received, (4.3:R.Q 2) perception of students on the quality of modules supplied and (4.4:R.Q 3) perception of students on quality of available facilities.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The sexes, age, profession, educational level, qualification being sought and work experience are discussed below. Sixty-eight (56.70%) were male with the remaining 52 (43.30%) being female. The ascendancy of the male students over female students shows that there must be convenient platform and policies to help females to enrol in various distance educational institutions in Ghana in order to upgrade their knowledge through distance education medium.

With respect to respondents" ages, 29 (25%) were below 25 years, 65 (56%) were between the ages of 26-35, 12 (10.30%) were between the ages of 36-40, 8 (6.90%) were between the ages of 41-35 with 2(1.70%) having their ages above 46 years. This illustration indicates that most of the participants are of age, of which the distance education is appropriate medium for them to upgrade.

With regard to the professional status of respondents, 90(77.60%) were teachers, 13(11.20%) were unemployed with 13(11.20%) belonging to other

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professions. This implies that most of the distance students participated in this study was teachers.

On the educational level of respondents, 29(24.6%) have attained WASSCE certificates, 12 (10%) had attained Certificate "A", 44 (37.30%) had Diploma Certificate, 10 (8.50%) had Higher National Diploma (HND), 23 (19.5%) had First Degree Certificate. This indicates that respondents had the pre-requisite qualification to attain further studies in their field of study.

In addition, 80 (67%)were upgrading themselves to Diploma in basic education, 38 (32%) were studying to acquire a Bachelor's Degree with 1 (1%) studying to attain a second degree From the illustration it is clear that most of the participants were learning through the distance education medium to upgrade themselves from lower status to acquiring diploma in basic education.

Finally on the years of working experience, 64 (59.80%) had worked for less than 5 years, 29 (27.10%) had worked between 5 to 10 years, 7 (6.50%) had worked between 11 to 15 years, 5 (4.70%) had worked between 16 to 20 years with the remaining 2(1.90%) having worked over 20 years. This implies that majority of the respondents used for this study had working experience less than 5 year.

**4.2 Presentation and Discussion of Findings on Perceptions of Students about Tutorial Services Received**

Research Question 1: **What is the perception of students about tutorial services received in Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre?**

This research question was designed to find out about tutorial services received in Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre. Respondent responses are highlighted in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4. 1: Descriptive statistics on perception of student about tutorial services received**

No	Perception statement	Levels of agreement						
		SA(5) F (%)	A(4) F (%)	N(3) F (%)	D (2) F (%)	SD(1) F(%)	Mean	+SD
1	Your tutors have adequate knowledge in subject matter	73(60.8)	32(26.7)	14(11.7)	-	1(0.8)	4.47	.766
2	Tutorials received are quality	52(43.7)	45(37.8)	17(14.3)	2(1.7)	3(2.5)	4.18	.920
3	Your tutors respond promptly to your request	51(42.9)	36(30.0)	25(21.0)	3(2.5)	4(3.4)	4.07	1.023
4	Tutors are punctual and regular	51(43.2)	40(33.3)	15(12.5)	7(5.8)	5(4.2)	4.06	1.088
5	Marking and comments of assignment are promptly done	46(38.3)	38(31.7)	17(14.3)	11(9.2)	7(5.9)	3.88	1.194
6	Mode of delivery are appropriate	41(34.2)	40(33.3)	26(21.7)	7(5.8)	6(5.0)	3.86	1.110
Total	**Frequency (f)**	52.3	39	19	5	4.2	4.0	
	Percentage (%)	43.9%	32.3%	15.9%	4.1%	3.6%		

Source: Field survey, 2016. N= 120, SA = Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D = Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree
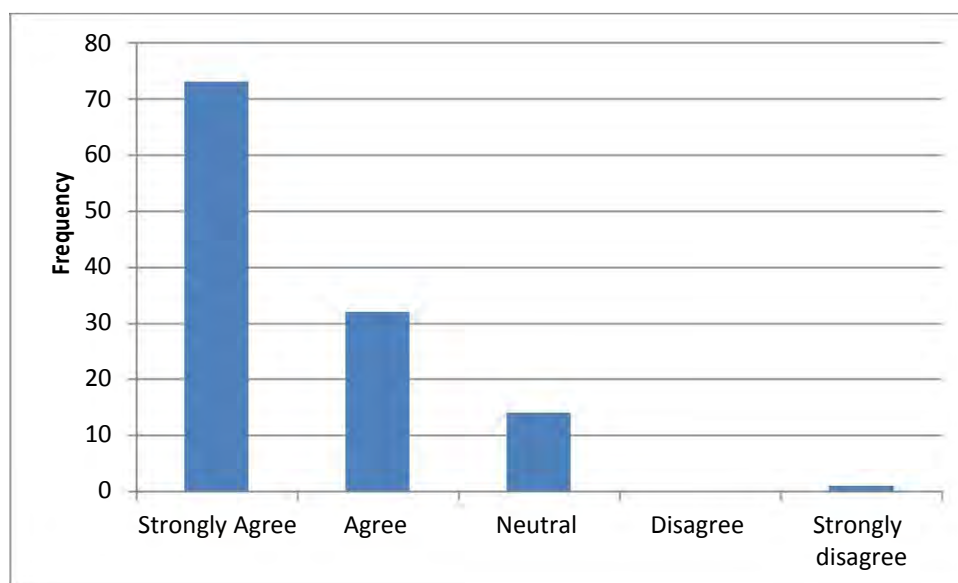

 Figure 4.1: Bar graph showing the perception of tutorial services received in relation to tutors' knowledge in subject matter.

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To determine if tutors have adequate knowledge of the subject matter, 73 (60.80%) strongly agreed that their tutors have adequate knowledge in subject matter, 32 (26.70%), agreed, 14 (11.70%) were uncertain whiles 1 (0.8%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for the responses was 4.47 indicating that respondents agreed that tutors have adequate knowledge of the subject matter on a standard deviation of 0.766.
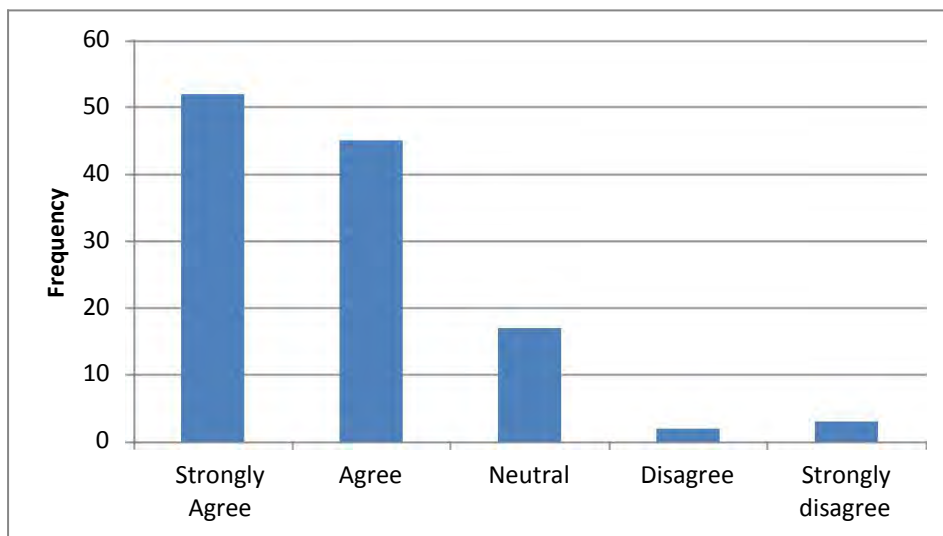

Figure 4. 2: Bar chart showing tutorials received are of quality.

To find out if tutorials received are of quality, 52 (43.70%) strongly agreed that tutorials were quality, 45 (37.8%) agreed, 17 (14.3%) remained neutral, 2 (1.7%) disagreed and 3(2.5%) strongly disagreed. With a mean score of 4.18 and standard deviation of 0.920, respondents agreed that the tutorials received are of quality.

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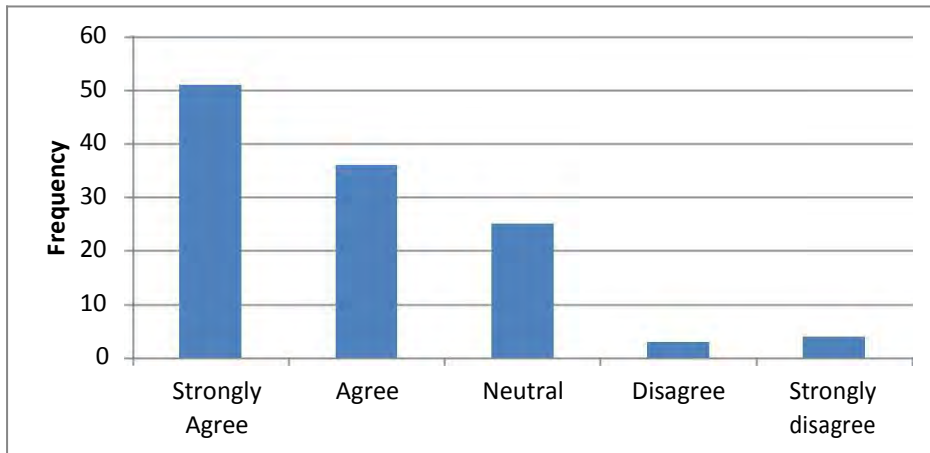
Figure 4. 3: Bar chart showing if tutors respond promptly to their request

To determine if tutors respond promptly to students' request, 51 (42.10%) strongly agreed that teachers respond promptly to their request. 36 (30%) agreed, 25 (21%) were uncertain, 3(2.5%) agreed whiles 4(3.4%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for the responses was 4.07 and standard deviation 1.023 indicating that respondents agreed that tutors responded promptly to students' request.
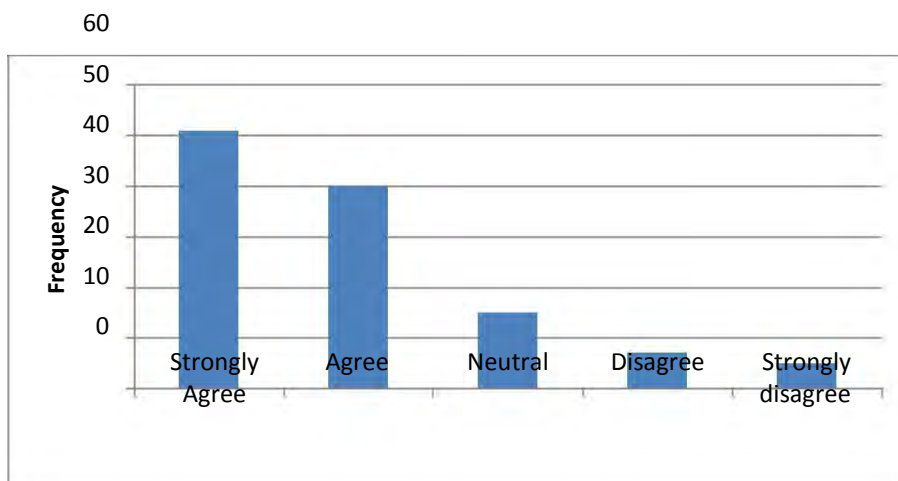

Figure 4. 4 : Bar chart showing how tutors are punctual and regular.

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From item 4 in Table 4.1, 52 (4.20%) strongly agreed that tutors were punctual and regular in class, 40 (33.30%) agreed, 15 (12.50%) were.neutral,7(5.80%) disagreed whiles 5(4.20%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for the respondents' responses was 4.06 and standard deviation 1.088 which shows that respondents agreed that tutors were punctual and regular in class.
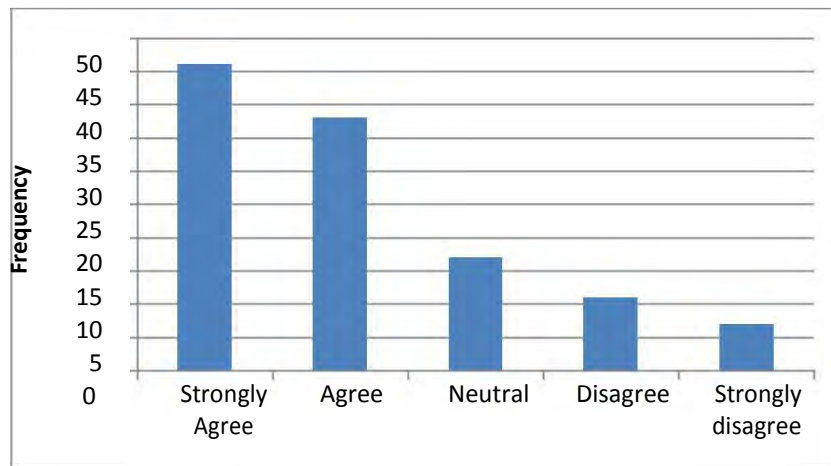
Figure 4. 5: Bar chart showing whether marking and assignments are promptly done.

marking and comments of assignment were promptly done, 38 (31.70%) agreed, 17 (14.30%) were uncertain, 11 (9.20%) disagreed whiles the remaining 7(5.9%) strongly disagreed. The mean for the responses was 3.88 with standard deviation indicating that respondents agreed that marking and comments of assignment were promptly done.
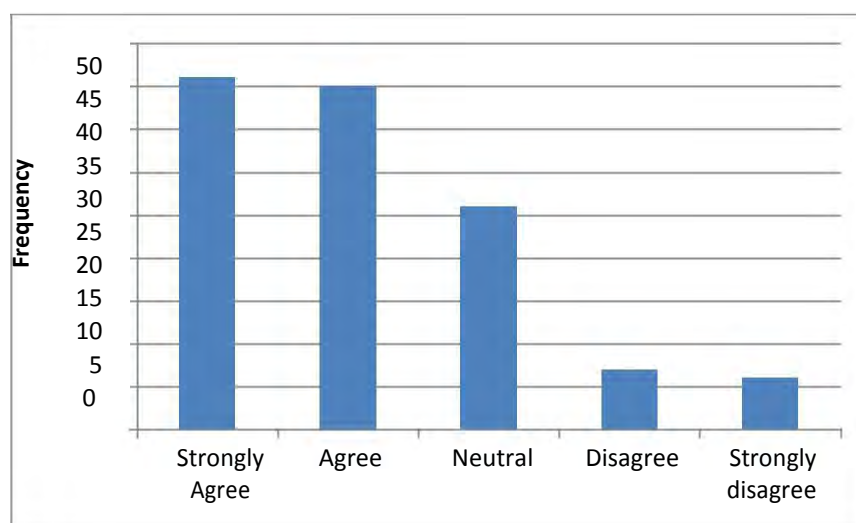

Figure 4. 6: Bar chart showing how mode of delivery is appropriate.

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With regard to the appropriateness in mode of delivery, 41 (34.20%) strongly agreed that the mode of delivery was appropriate, 40 (33.30%) agreed, 2 (21.70%) were 52 uncertain, 7(5.80%) disagreed with the remaining 6(5%) strongly disagreeing. With a mean score of 3.86 and standard deviation 1.110, respondents agreed that the mode of delivery was appropriate. Please refer to item 6 in Table 4.1.

The summary of responses showed that 91 (76.20%) strongly agreed or agreed to the fact that they held positive perceptions about the tutorial services received in schools, 19 (15.90%) were neutral whilst 9(7.70%) strongly disagreed or disagreed to having positive perceptions about the tutorial services received. Figure 4.7 highlights these findings.
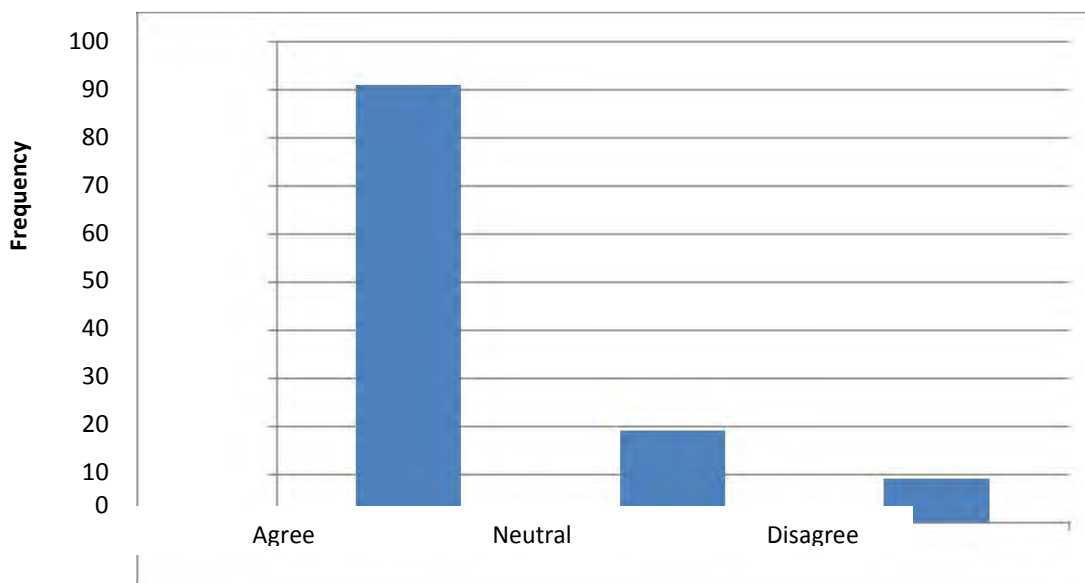
Figure 4. 7: Bar chart showing a summary of responses on perception of students about tutorial services received.

The result of the finding indicated that 91(76.20%) strongly agreed or agreed to the fact that they held positive perceptions about the tutorial services received in schools. This shows that majority of the students held positive perceptions about the tutorial services received. This attests to the fact that

students agree that tutors have content knowledge and are guided by proper course design in which various learning resources and supports functions complement each other in a way that they foster effective learning.

**4.3 Presentation and Discussion of Findings on Students' Perception on the Quality of Study Modules Supplied**

Research Question 2: How do students perceive the quality of the modules supplied?

This research question was designed to find out about students' perception on the quality of study modules supplied at Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre. Respondent responses are presented in Table 4.1

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics on perception of students on the quality of study modules supplied

No	Modules supplied	SA(5) F (%)	A(4) F (%)	N(3) F (%)	D (2) F (%)	SD(1) F(%)	Mean	±SD
				Levels of agreement				
1	Content of modules are relevant to subject matter	1(0.8)	4(3.4)	10(8.4)	48(38.7)	58(48.7)	4.31	.831
2	Modules are easy to understand	4(3.4)	7(6.0)	11(9.5)	46(38.3)	48(41.4)	4.09	1.030
3	Content is adequate	2(1.8)	4(3.5)	18(15.0)	48(42.1)	42(35.0)	4.09	.908
4	Modules are free from grammatical and typographical error	4(3.4)	11(9.2)	15(12.6)	38(31.7)	51(42.9)	4.02	1.112
5	Modules are interactive	8(6.8)	5(4.3)	14(12.0)	49(41.9)	41(35.0)	3.94	1.124
6	Modules are supplied on time	19(17.0)	23(20.5)	14(12.0)	35(31.2)	21(18.8)	3.14	1.394
Total	**Frequency (f)**	6	9	13.6	44	43	4.0	
	Percentage (%)	5.5%	7.8%	11.5%	37.3%	36.9%		

Source: Field survey, 2016. N= 120, SA = Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D = Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree
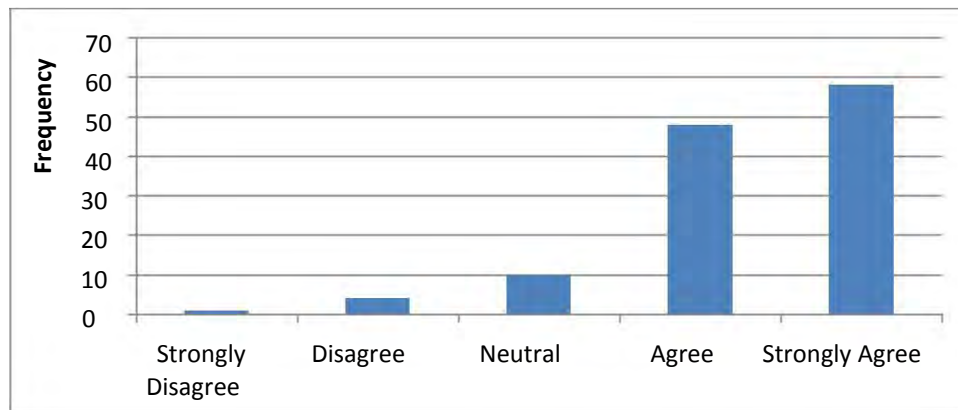
Figure 4.8: Bar chart showing whether content of modules are relevant to subject matter

To determine if the content of modules are relevant to the subject matter, 58(48.70%) strongly agreed that the content of modules were relevant to subject matter, 48 (38.70%) agreed, 10(8.40%) remained neutral, 4 (3.40%) disagreed whiles1 (0.8%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for respondents' responses was 4.31 indicating that majority of the respondents agreed that the content of modules were relevant to the subject matter on a standard deviation of 0.831.Please refer to item 1 in Table 4.2
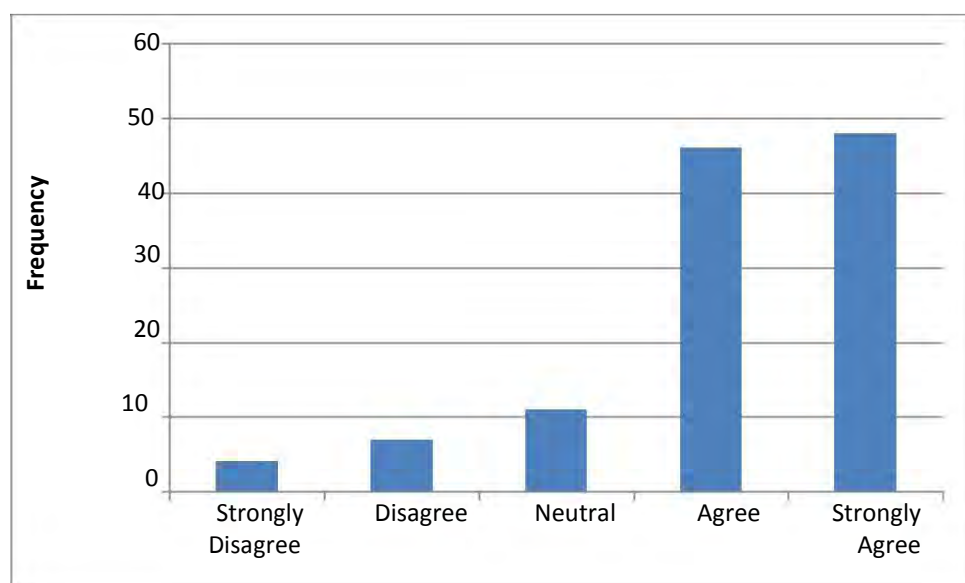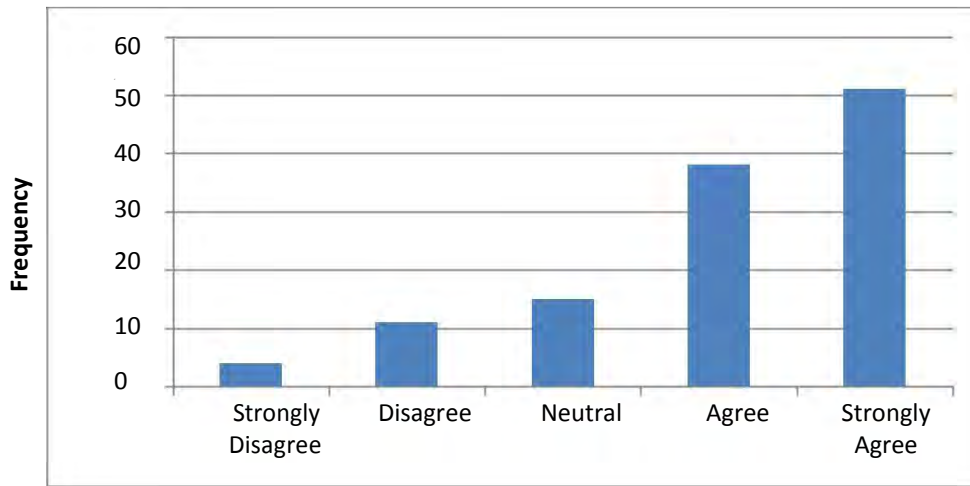

Figure 4. 9: Bar chart showing how modules are easy to understand

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To find out if the modules provided are easy to understand, 48 (41.4%) strongly agreed that the modules are easy to understand, 46 (38.30%) agreed, 11 (9.50%) were uncertain, 7(6%) disagreed whiles 4(3.40%) strongly agreed. The mean score for the responses was 4.09 and standard deviation 1.030 which shows that majority of the respondents agreed to the fact modules provided are easy to understand. Please refer item 2 in Table 4.2.
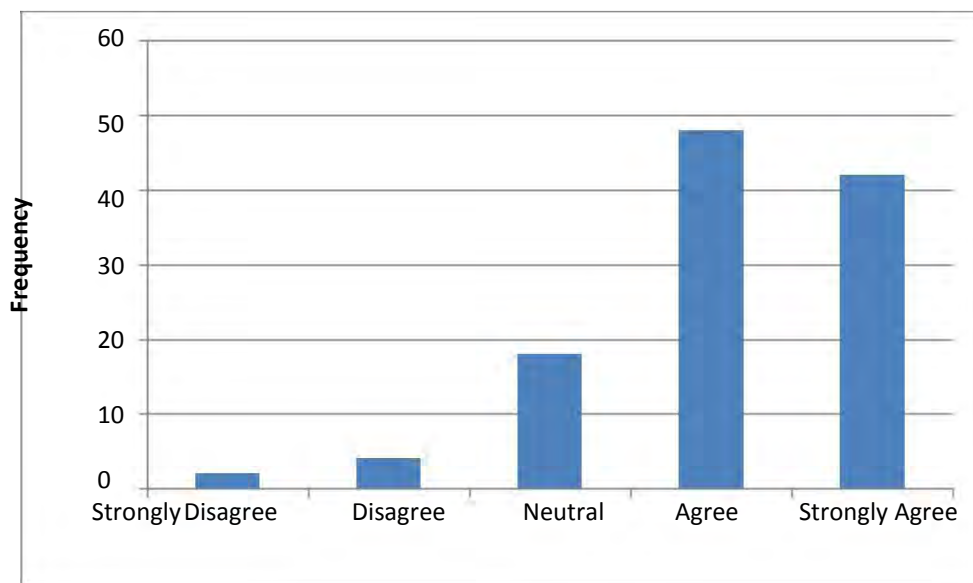

Figure 4. 10: Bar chart showing how content is adequate

From item 3 in Table 4.2, 42 (35%) strongly agreed that the content was adequate, 48 (42.10%) agreed, 18 (15.0%) were doubtful 4 (3.5%) disagreed whiles 2 (1.80%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for the responses on content adequacy was 4.09 and standard deviation 0.908 indicating that majority of the respondents agreed that the content was adequate.
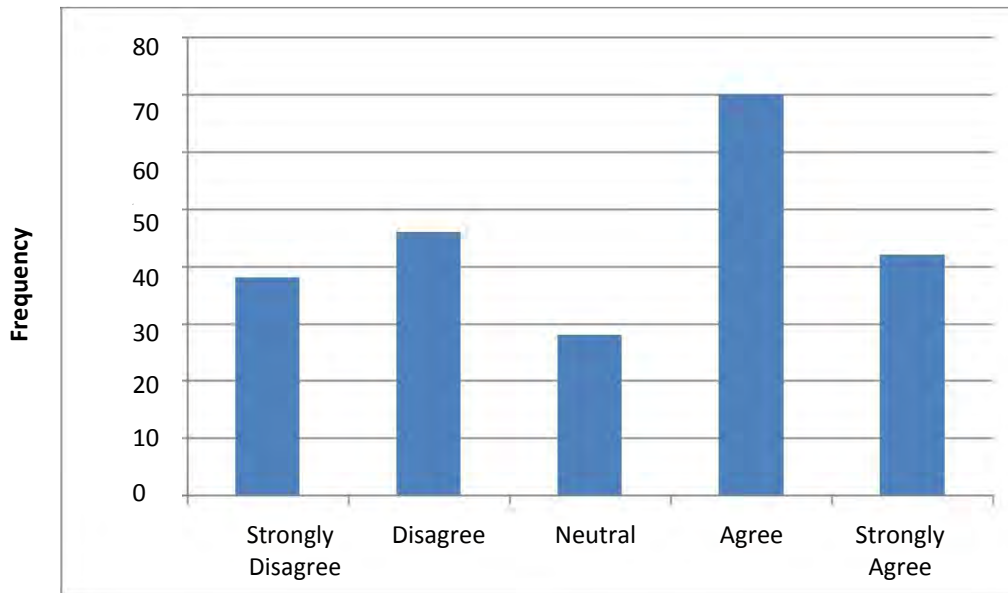
Figure 4.11: Bar chart showing whether modules are free from grammatical and Typographical error

To find out if modules are free from grammatical and typographical error, 52 (42.90%) agreed that modules are free from grammatical and typographical error, 38 (31.7%) strongly agreed, 15 (12.60%) remained neutral, 11 (9.20%) disagreed whiles 4 (3.40%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for the responses was 4.02 was and standard deviation 1.112. The mean score indicates that majority of respondents agreed that modules were free from grammatical and typographical errors. Refer to item 4 in table 4.2.
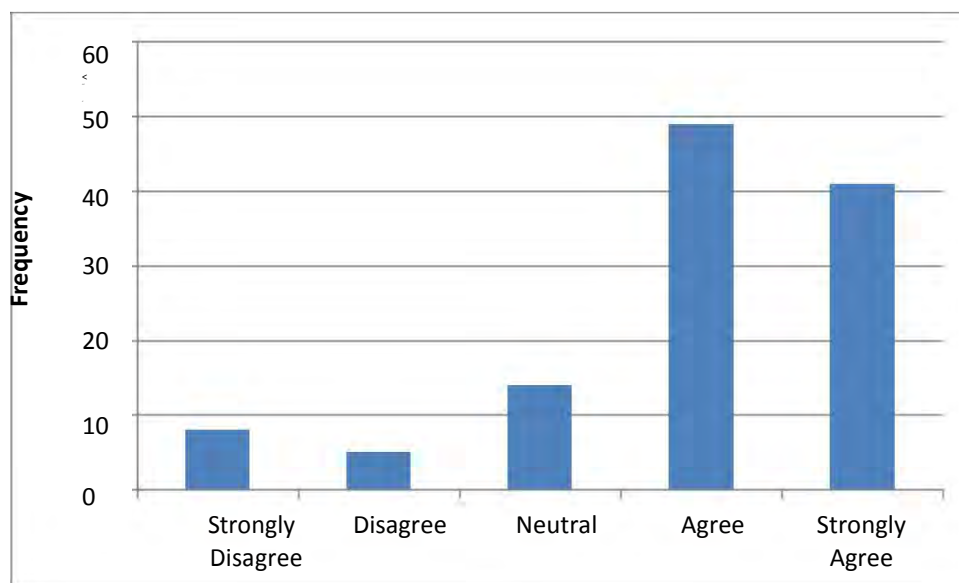
Figure 4. 12: Bar chart showing whether modules are interactive

With reference to item 5 in Table 4.2, 41 (35%) strongly agreed that modules are interactive, 49 (41.90%) agreed, 14 (12%) remained neutral, 5 (4.30%) disagreed whiles 8 (6.80%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for the responses was 3.94 and standard deviation 1.124 which shows that majority of the respondents agreed that modules are interactive.


Figure 4. 12: Bar chart showing if modules are supplied on time

To determine if modules are supplied on time, 21 (18.8%) strongly agreed that modules are supplied on time, 35 (31.2%) agreed, 35 (31.20%) were uncertain, 23 (20.5%) disagreed whiles 19 (17%) strongly disagreed.

Please refer to item 6 on Table 4.2. The mean score for the responses was 3.14 which gives a clear indication that respondents were somewhat neutral to the fact that modules were supplied on time.

The summary of responses is presented in Figure 4. 12.
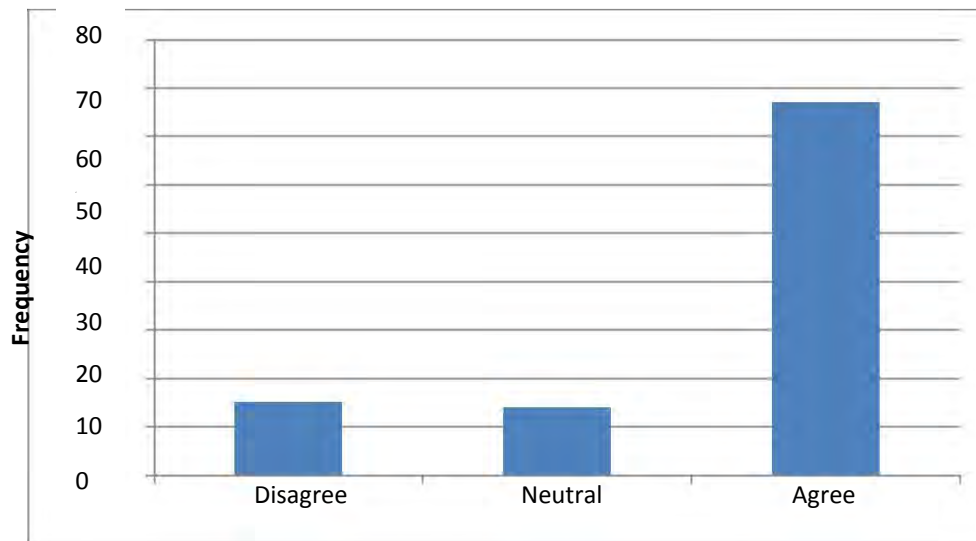
Figure 4. 13: Bar chart showing a summary of respondents' responses on the perception about the quality of study modules received.

The summary of responses showed that 87 (74.20%) strongly agreed or agreed to having positive perceptions about the quality of study modules provided, 14 (11.50%) were uncertain whiles 15 (13.30%) strongly disagreed or disagreed to the fact that they held positive perceptions about the quality of study modules supplied.

The result of the finding indicates that 87 (74.20%) strongly agreed or agreed to having positive perceptions about the quality of study modules provided. This depicts that majority of the students held perceptions about the quality of study modules supplied. This finding is in support of Daugherty and Barbara (1998) who asserts that students prefer learning through course content, computer applications and well-outlined modules of instructions. Students therefore believe modules supplied are quality and satisfied. Hence, they are able to complete their course without much difficulty. The mean score for the responses was 4.02 was and standard deviation 1.112.

4.4 Presentation and Discussion of Findings on Perception of students on the quality of available facility

Research question 3: What perception do students have about the availability of learning facilities at the Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre?

This research question was designed to find out about students' perception on the quality of available facility at Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre. Respondent responses are presented in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4. 3: Descriptive statistics on perception of students on the quality of available facility

No.	Quality of available facility is perceived by students as:	Level of Agreement						
		SA(5)	A(4)	N(3)	D(2)	SD(1)		
		F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	Mean	+SD
1.	Classrooms have white boards and markers	69(57.5)	17(14.2)	5(4.2)	4(3.3)	16(13.3)	4.07	1.457
2.	Classrooms are convenient for learning	15(12.5)	24(20.0)	30(25.0)	16(13.3)	33(27.5)	2.76	1.388
3.	Library books are relevant to student courses	8(6.7)	15(12.5)	11(9.2)	25(20.8)	56(46.7)	2.08	1.319
4.	The Centre has a library	13(10.8)	12(10.0)	6(5.0)	21(17.5)	66(55.0)	2.03	1.423
5.	Computers are in good condition	7(5.8)	15(12.5)	7(5.8)	22(18.3)	61(50.0)	1.97	1.311
6.	Computer are adequate for student	7(5.8)	8(6.7)	7(5.6)	26(21.7)	71(59.2)	1.77	1.189
7.	Computer lab are available at the study Centre	8(6.7)	7(5.8)	8(6.7)	22(18.3)	73(60.8)	1.77	1.222
8.	Classroom have projectors	5(4.2)	3(2.5)	4(3.3)	22(18.3)	76(63.3)	1.54	1.020
Total	Frequency (f)	17	12.6	13.6	19.5	56.5	2.24	
	Percentage (%)	13.7%	10.5%	9.75%	16.4%	46.9%		

Source: Field survey, 2016. N= 120, SA = Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D = Disagree,

SD=Strongly Disagree
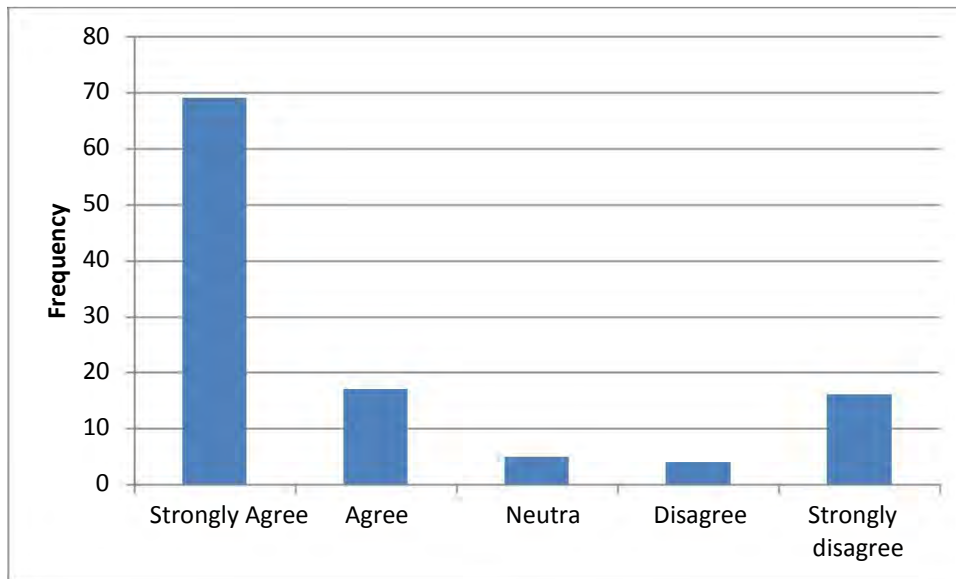
Figure 4. 14 : Bar chart showing if classrooms have white board and markers

To determine whether classrooms have white boards and markers, 69 (69%)strongly agreed to the fact that classrooms had white boards and markers to enhance teaching processes, 17 (14.2%) agreed, 5 (4.20%) were uncertain, 4 (3.30%) disagreed whiles the remaining 16 (13.30%) strongly disagreed. With a mean score of 4.07 and standard deviation of 1.457, majority of the respondents agreed that classrooms have white boards and markers. Please refer to item 1 in Table 4.3.
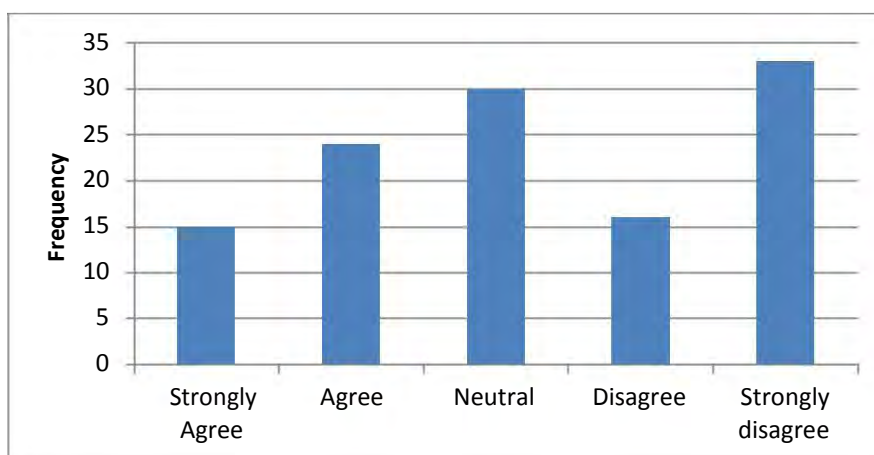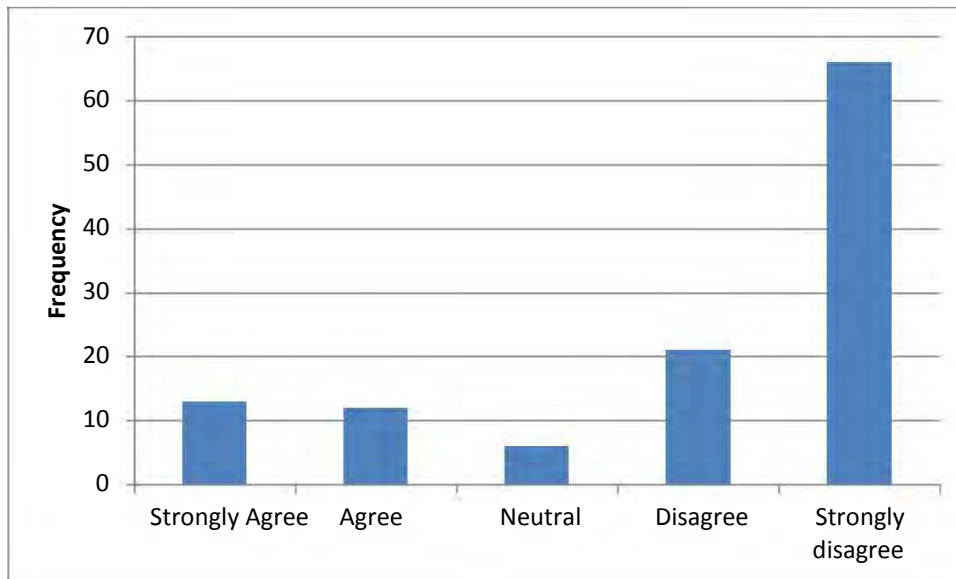

Figure 4.15: Bar chart showing whether classrooms are convenient for learning

From item 2 in Table 4.3, 15 (12.50%) strongly agreed that classrooms are convenient for learning, 24 (20%) agreed, 30 (25%) were undecided, 16 (13.30%) agreed whilst 33 (27.50%) strongly disagreed. Majority of respondents were neutral on the fact that classrooms are convenient for learning with a mean score of 2.76 and standard deviation 1.388.
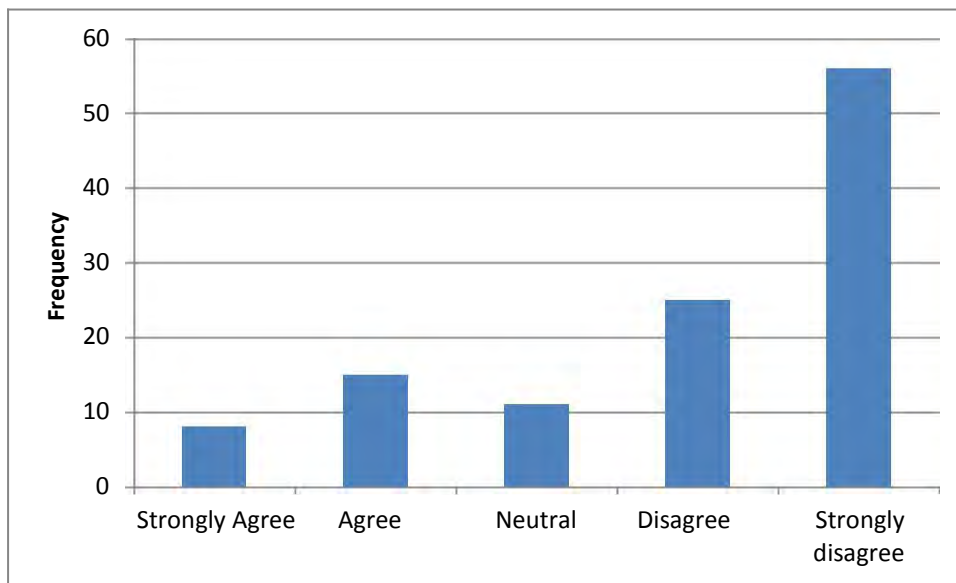
Figure 4. 3: Bar chart showing how library books are relevant to student courses

To find out whether the library books were relevant to student courses 8 (6.7%) strongly agreed that library books were relevant to students" courses, 24 (20%) agreed, 11 (9.20%) were uncertain, 25 (20.80%) agreed with 56 (46.70%) strongly disagreeing. The mean score for the respondents' responses was 2.08 and standard deviation 1.319 indicating that majority of respondents strongly disagreed that library books were relevant to students' courses. Please refer to item 3 in Table 4.4 below.

Figure 4. 4: Bar chart showing whether the centre has a library

With reference to item 4 in Table 4.3, 13 (10.80%) strongly agreed the centre has a library, 12 (10%) agreed, 6(5%) remained neutral, 21 (17.5%) disagreed whiles the remaining 66 (17.5%) strongly disagreed. With a mean score of 2.03 and standard deviation of 1.423 majority of the respondents disagreed that the centre has a library.
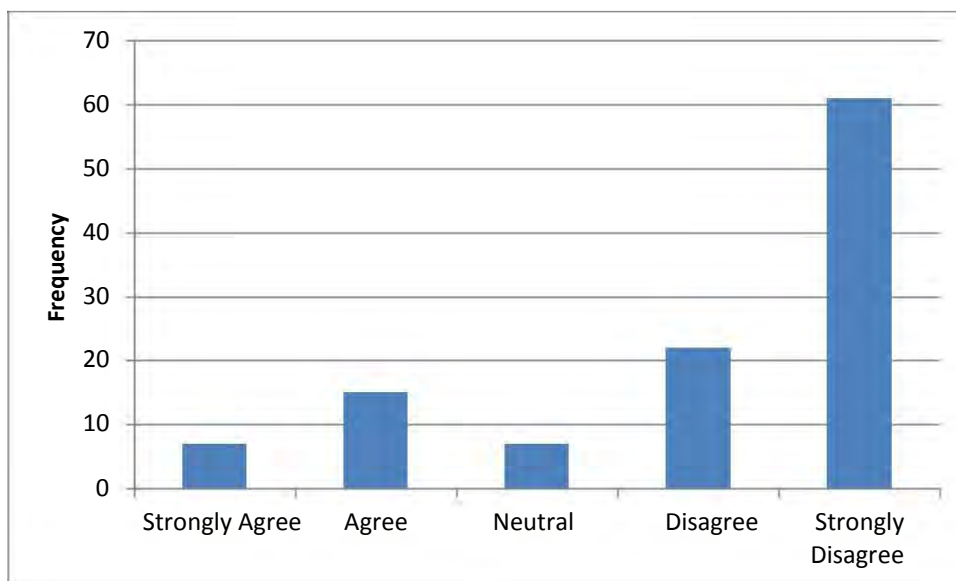
Figure 4. 5: Bar chart showing how computers are in good condition

To determine if the computers were in good condition, 7 (5.80%) strongly agreed that the computers were in good condition, 15 (12.50%) agreed, 7 (5.80%) remained neutral, 22 (18.30%) disagreed with 61 (50%) strongly disagreeing. The mean score for respondents' responses was 1.97 and standard deviation 1.311 which shows that majority of the respondents disagreed that computers were in good condition. Please refer to item 5 in Table 4.3.
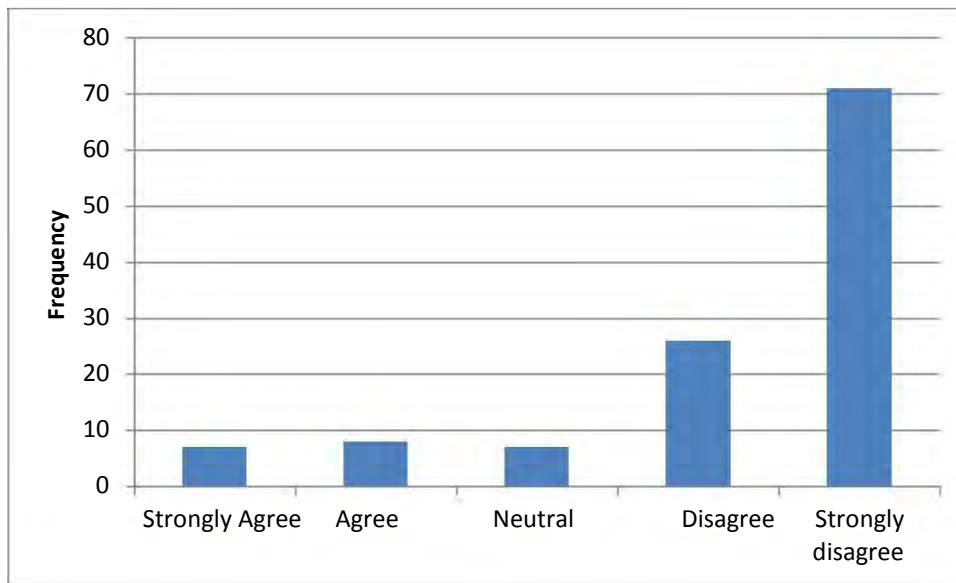
Figure 4. 6: Bar chart showing how computers are adequate for students

With regard to item 6 in Table 4.4, 7 (5.80%) strongly agreed on the fact that there were adequate computers, 8 (6.7%) disagreed, (5.80%) remained neutral, 26 (21.70%) agreed whiles 61 (50%) strongly disagreed. With a mean score of 1.77 and standard deviation 1.189, majority of the respondents disagreed that were adequate computers.
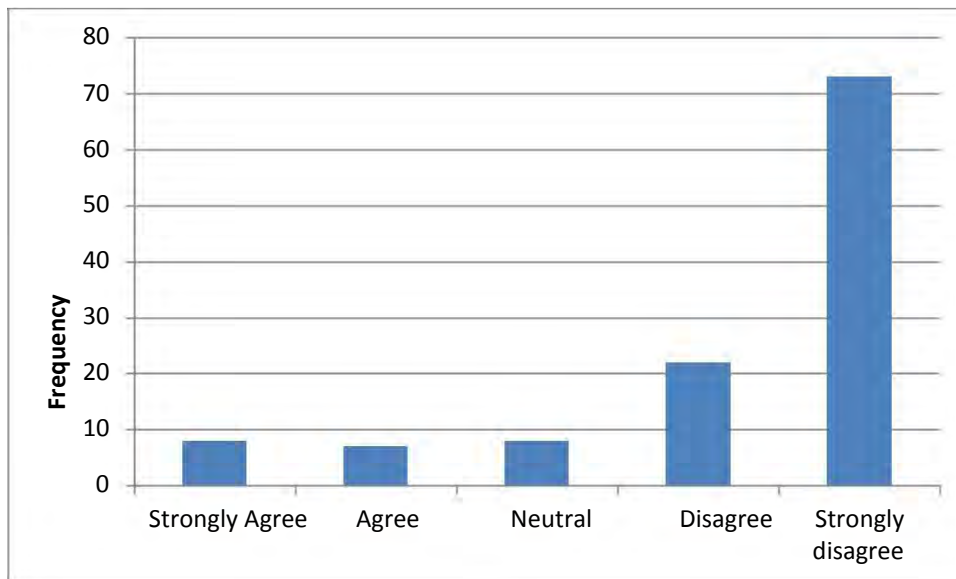
Figure 4. 7: Bar chart showing whether computer laboratories are available at the study centre

From item 7 in Table 4.3, 8 (6.70%) strongly agreed that a computer laboratory was available at the study centre, 7 (5.80%) agreed, 8 (6.7%) remained neutral, 22 (18.30%) disagreed whiles 73 (60.80%) strongly disagreed. Majority of the respondents disagreed that computer laboratory was available at the study centre; with a mean score of 1.77 and standard deviation 1.222.
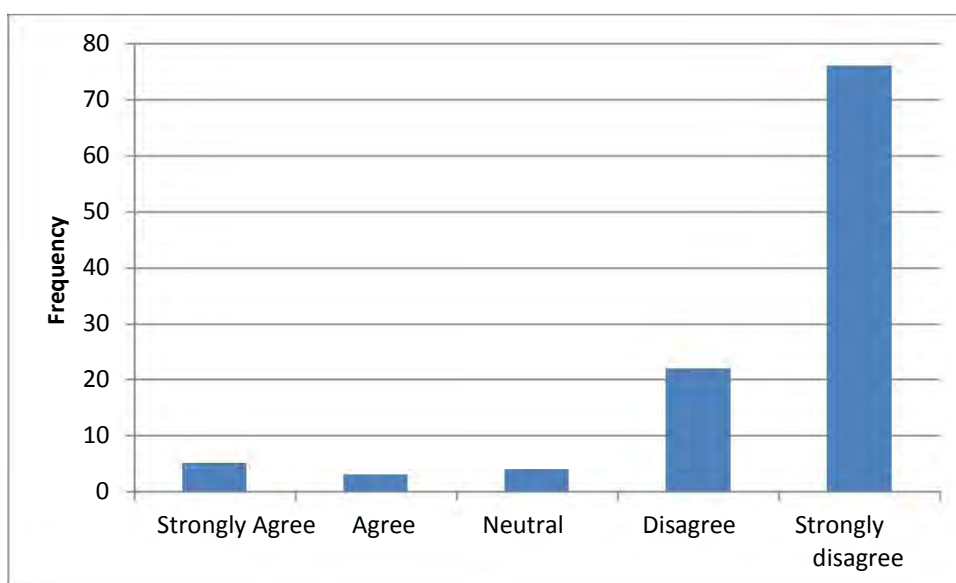
Figure 4. 8: Bar chart showing whether classrooms have projectors

To determine respondents'' views on the availability of projectors at the study centre, 5 (4.20%) strongly agreed that projectors were available at the study centre, 3 (2.50%) agreed, 4 (3.30%) remained neutral, 22 (18.3%) disagreed whiles76 (63.3%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for the respondents was 1.54 and standard deviation of 1.020 which shows that majority of the respondents

Figure 4.21 gives a summary of respondents'' responses.
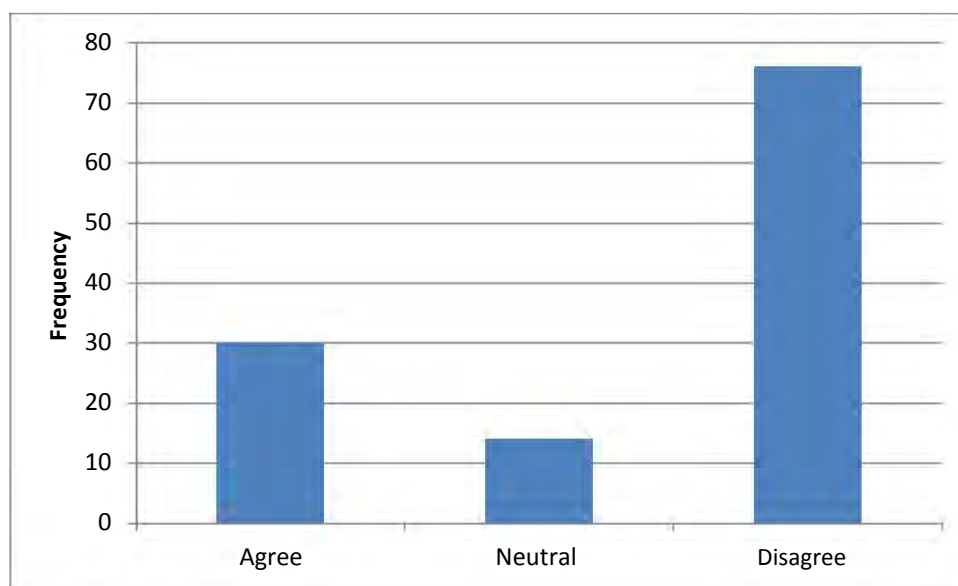
Figure 4. 9: Bar chart showing a summary of respondents' responses on the perception of students on quality of available facility

The summary of the responses show that 76 (63.3%) majority respondents strongly disagree or disagree that facilities available are of good quality in other words majority of respondents 53% strongly agree or agree to perceive that facilities available are not in good quality.

The finding revealed that 76 (63.3%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that they held positive perceptions about the quality of available facility. This indicates that majority

of the students were negative about the quality of available facility in the study centre. This finding contradicts the view of Trinidade, Carmo and Bidarra (2000) who posited that distance education students require some kind of support mechanism, so that they can overcome their learning difficulties for which tutorial services are major factors. Tait (2003) acknowledges this view stating that difficult to estimate the extent to which student support creates a learning atmosphere that is congenial, attractive and therefore supportive of learner persistence, therefore distance education heads must ensure that quality student support services and facilities are available to promote students learning.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents summary of findings, the recommendations and the final conclusion of the study based on the key findings. Specifically, appropriate recommendations have been made to address the issues of quality of support services received by Distance Education students as discussed in chapter four in a bid to achieve better perception these students. The recommendations made are based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study as well as suggestions for further studies.

5.2 Summary of Research Process

The purpose of the study is to find out the perception of the distance education students of Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre about the quality of support services offered. The exploration sought to:

1. To assess the perception of students about tutorial services received in the Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre.

2. To investigate students" perception about the quality of modules supplied.

3. To ascertain students" perception about the availability of facilities at the Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre.

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the perception of students about tutorial services received in Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre?

2. How do students perceive the quality of the modules supplied?

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3.   What perception do students have about the availability of learning facilities at the Asanteman Senior High School Study Centre?

The study set out to find out how student support services provided by UEW to distance students facilitated learning. This was necessitated by the important role the institution has played since the inception of this learning platform nationwide. The provision of support to distance students is critical to the success of any DE programme because it helps in bridging the physical gap between the students and the institution, thereby helping them overcome the feeling of isolation. When the needs of distance students are largely met via the support given them, this can also help in reducing failure and attrition rates.

The study therefore investigated some vital aspects of student support services such as face-to face tutorials support to distance students, learning materials, Assess the perception of students about tutorial services received, students perception about the quality of modules supplied, students‟ perception about the availability of facilities at the study centre.

This study was structured within the framework of descriptive research approach. The study aimed at examining the perception of students on the quality of tutorial support services received in the UEW distance education at the Asanteman SHS Study Centre. As a result, descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. One hundred and twenty students were randomly selected through the use of respondents simple random sampling technique. Questionnaire was the main instrument used to collect the data for the study. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Summary of Key Findings

The study showed that;

1. Ninety-one (76.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed to the fact that they held positive perceptions about the tutorial services received from the study centre, 19 respondents representing 15.90% were neutral whilst nine respondents representing 7.70% strongly disagreed or disagreed to having positive perceptions about the tutorial services received. This indicates that majority of the respondents had positive perceptions about the tutorial services received at the study centre.

2. Eighty-seven (74.2%) respondents strongly agreed or agreed to having positive perceptions about the quality of study modules provided, 14 respondents representing 11.50% were uncertain whiles 15 respondents representing 13.30% strongly disagreed or disagreed to the fact that they held positive perceptions about the quality of study modules supplied. This implies that majority of students had positive perceptions about the quality of study modules provided at the study centre.

3. Thirty (24.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed to the fact that they held positive perceptions on the quality of available facility, 14 respondents representing 9.75% were uncertain whiles 76 respondents representing 63.3% strongly disagreed or disagreed to the fact that they held positive perceptions about the quality of available facility. This revelation implies that students generally held negative perceptions about the quality of available facility at the study centre.

5.2 Conclusion

Institutions offering distance education programmes continue to struggle with the problem of reducing the attrition rate of their distance students in order to maintain great pride in graduating a high percentage of its senior distance students who entered teacher education programmes. Providing students with adequate facilities, good tutorial services and appropriate study modules will to a large extent help students of the UEW distance education programme accrue the full benefit of their investments in their studies.

The perceptions students hold about the above mentioned provisions goes a long way to predict the success of distance programmes provided by UEW. The study recognized that UEW Distance Education students held positive perceptions about available facilities, tutorial services, and the quality of modules provided by the institution.

It has always been argued that distance education students can benefit immensely from distance education programs if it is properly carried out. Tutors knowing students have positive perception about services means they could positively adjust their tutoring style or manage the students' expectations to a more appropriate level. The students benefit from sharing their concerns and expectations of service with the tutor who will be teaching them and shaping the way in which the service is provided. The end result should be greater satisfaction with, and improvement in, the quality of service delivery of distance education for all concerned.

5.5 Recommendations

Despite the numerous achievements and benefits of the UEW Distance Education (DE) programme, there exist a few challenges and constraints. They include poor guidance and counseling support, lack of library support at the study centers and uncomfortable classroom furniture. Following the findings, some recommendations are offered to enrich the support services of the programme.

The following recommendations are meant for both DE institutions and researchers:

1. According to the finding majority of the students had no access to library books which play major role in student's studies. Therefore, UEW authorities must ensure that relevant books are provided to students to boost their academic research.

2. Adequate and quality computers should be provided by UEW authorities to complement the modules supplied to students.

3. The use of projectors during teaching and learning is pertinent. Therefore UEW must provide them with these support services to enable students" comprehension to things taught because when they hear they easily forgets but when they see they understand easily.

4. Even though students have positive perception about tutorials services provided, about 30% of DE students disagree that tutorials services provided are satisfactory. Therefore UEW should provide some strategies that will improve quality tutorials

5. Computer labs are essential for research work .Therefore computer labs should be established for students by the institution in the Asanteman Study Centre.

5.6 Areas for Further Research

The subject of student support services in the UEW DE programme, as important as it may be, is a very broad one and which requires more research to enable DE institutions as well as students benefit more. The following areas can therefore be considered for further research:

1. The role of student support services in reducing attrition rates in the UEW DE programme

2. An assessment of the effects of student support services on academic performance of DE students.

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<div align="center">

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION - KUMASI

QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS OF DISTANCE

EDUCATION ON THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT SERVICES RECEIVED

</div>

This questionnaire is part of a study aimed at: **evaluating the perception of students of distance education on the quality of support services received**. Please your time and energy used in responding to this questionnaire are highly appreciated. Please you are assured that any information given shall be treated with confidentiality and anonymity.

You are please entreated to provide objective and dispassionate answers to the questionnaire items. The information provided will be treated confidentially. Please tick (√) the appropriate response to each item.

SECTION A: Background information of Respondents

1. Gender: Male [ ]   Female [ ]

2. Age in years: below 25   [ ] 25-35 [ ] 36 – 40 [ ] 40 – 45 [ ] 45 and above [ ]

3. Profession of respondents:

Teacher [ ]

Unemployed [ ]

 Others (please specify) [   ] …….………………

4. Educational qualification of respondents:

WASSCE [ ] Certificate [   ] Diploma in Basic Education [ ]

H.N.D [ ] First Degree [   ]

5. Which qualification are you seeking here?

Diploma in Basic Education [ ] First Degree [ ]

6. Years of working experience of the respondents:

<div align="center">83</div>

Less than 5 years [   ] 5-10 years [ ] 11-15 years [   ]

16-20 years [   ] 20yrs and above   [   ]

How satisfied are you with the following forms of support services offered by your tutors?

✓

(Please, appropriately tick (   ) the response that best reflects your opinion on the following choices.

SECTION B: Perception of students about tutorial services

(Please, appropriately tick (√) the response that best reflects your opinion on the

Item	STATEMENT	RESPONSE				
		Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
1	Your tutors have adequate knowledge in subject matter					
2	Tutorials received are quality					
3	Your tutors respond promptly to your request for help when you face difficulties					
4	Marking and comments of assignments are promptly done					
5	Tutors are punctual and regular					
6	Mode of delivery is appropriate					

following choices.

SECTION C: Perception of students on the quality of study modules supplied

Please, appropriately tick (√) the response that best reflects your opinion on the following choices.

Item	STATEMENTS	RESPONSE				
		Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
1.	Content of modules are relevant to subject matter.					
2.	Modules are easy to understand.					
3.	Content is adequate					
4.	Modules are free from grammatical and typographical errors.					
5.	Modules are supplied on time					
6.	Modules are interactive					

SECTION D: Perception of students on the quality of available facility.

Item	STATEMENT	RESPONSE				
		Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
1.	The centre has a library.					
2.	Library books are relevant to student courses.					
3.	Classrooms are convenient for learning.					
4.	Computer labs are available at the study centre.					
5.	Computers are adequate for students.					
6.	Computers are in good condition					
7	Classrooms have white boards and markers.					
8	Classrooms have projectors.					