Chapter I

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY
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1.0. INTRODUCTION

The world has witnessed sequence of changes, during the last few decades in different fields. Most noticeable changes are Human Resource Development and Scientific and Technological Knowledge which has expanded and advanced at an increasing pace. Field of Science and Technology has seen qualitative shift in generation of information and knowledge and it's investment which led to significant changes in productive methods. The world has witnessed a rapid development in education and training. Such changes of events and revolutions of knowledge have a direct impact on regular methods of education which may not be able to face challenges of 21st Century. Education in general and higher education (universities) and their institutions in particular, witnessed complete changes and development in comparison to what they were. For example, expansion and increase in the number of institutions and their methods of admission, administration and so on (Al-Kilanil, 2001, p. 3).

As higher educational institutions, universities are not only service oriented institutions but also productive where every student would like to join, pursue and achieve his/her goals. The university becomes an actor who performs many roles, focusing on three directions such as:
- Spreading knowledge by teaching and training.
- Developing Knowledge by Scientific Research.
- Application of Knowledge by Community Services.

These roles are similar, according to the American Education System which considers education, research and community services (Lee, 1971, p. 361). Perhaps, the most hypothesized phenomena of university education today, is the open and distance learning system which is different than our regular education. Here, researcher is going to focus attention and studying a very rare case of Al-Quds Open University, Palestine with reference to Student Support Services provided by Al-Quds Open University (Al-Kilani, 1998).

1.1. OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM

Open and Distance Education system at University level has shown a tremendous growth and development during the last few decades, all over the world. Open learning system provides students with chances of freedom to learn at their own pace, place and convenience while being away from formal institutions. The basic objective of this system is to provide wider access to higher education, as conventional system was proving to be unable to cope up with ever-increasing demand. In recent time, this system has emerged as an alternative mode of learning for higher education, all over the world. Globalization of distance-learning provides many opportunities for developing countries for realization of goals of their educational systems.

According to United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report: Open and Distance Education, as a force contributing to socio-economic development, is fast becoming an accepted and indispensable part of the main stream of educational systems in developed and developing countries. Concept of Open Education reflects a fact that: “all or most of the teaching is conducted by
someone, removed in time, space from the learner and that mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility whether in terms of access, Curriculum or other elements of structure". (UNESCO, 2002, p. 8). Open and Distance Education system can usually be described as a made up of a range of components such as the mission or a goal of that system, programmes and curricular and teaching/learning strategies, techniques, learning materials, resources, communication, interactions, support and delivery systems, students, tutors, staff, other experts, management, housing and equipment as well as evaluation.

1.2. SCENARIO OF OPEN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM TODAY

A Common need, in many, if not all, developing countries is to upgrade their educational systems in quality as well as in quantity. Open and Distance Education system shows a two-fold development pattern, i.e., numerous single mode open universities have emerged to absorb large number of new learners and increasing numbers of traditional universities have also began to offer their regular programmes through distance education. It is more than ever that, open and distance education will be an important element of future education systems. Open Learning is approaching acceptance, within mainstream education and training in such a way that it will make up, part of the repertoire of most educational institutes in the future. As a matter of fact, Open and Distance Education has existed for about one hundred years, in developed regions and for one or two generations in the developing countries (UNESCO, 2002, pp. 9-10).

Growth of Open and Distance Education system in developing countries led to establishment of number of new educational institutions and also to restructuring of many existing educational institutions as they
sought to increase their educational offerings through Open and Distance Learning departments and centres. Many famous open universities of developing countries have done a lot such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (India), AllamaIqbal (Pakistan), Sukhothai Thammathirat (Thailand), Terbuka (Indonesia), South Africa Open University, Open University of Tanzania, Open University of Nigeria, Open University of Venezuela and of course Al-Quads Open University in Palestine and other open Universities. (UNESCO, 2002, pp.10-11).

Despite of their considerable contribution, these institutions have operated in conditions of under-funding and sometimes their accomplishments were even ignored. New millennium witnessed vast recognition and acceptance of Open and Distance Learning as a valuable strategy, in context of new globalization agenda. Today’s new realities need new objectives, modes, flexibility, methods of organization and delivery of education. But as it is known, many problems are faced by these institutions, like priority of objectives. Targets and fund allocation etc. became tricky and with changes of time and technologies, the contexts within Open and Distance Education system requires responding to the needs to be revisited.

1.3. AL-QUDS OPEN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM IN PALESTINE

Idea of establishing Al-Quds Open University goes back to the year 1975, as part of the Palestinians’ demand for higher education, a request was forwarded to the United Nations Organization (UNO) (Qamhawi, 1986, p. 247). A studied proposal was put for discussion by the Palestinian National Council, in the year 1981 which was passed and the university came into existence and named as Al-Quds Open University.
which was established and started in the year 1985 at it's temporary location, at Amman City, Jordan. In 1994, the university was relocated to Al-Quds at it's present building. Al-Quds Open University is an educational institution for Open and Distance Education. It's main job is to transform education to students wherever they may be located and by this way, they can work and learn while at their jobs. Also, it adopts a flexible policy in admission and education of students. (Al-Quds Open University Index, 2003).

Al-Quds Open University is making all efforts to take higher education to the doorsteps of the hitherto unreachable people. As of now, more than 60% of the total students of regular higher education are enrolled with Al-Quds Open University. The university provides education and knowledge to those who have been debarred from higher education due to many different reasons through various flexible means of studies suited to open mode of learning including information, materials and communication. Also, it encourages, coordinates and assists, open and distance learning system to improve it's standards. Al-Quds Open University promotes a strong relationship among the Palestinians and integration and development. The university provides higher education and training to large number and sections of the Palestinians, specifically to disadvantaged segments of the Palestinian society and the Arab world. (Al-Quds, 1998, p. 1).

Al-Quds Open University is considered to be a pioneer institution in the field of Open and Distance Learning in Arab world. Despite of being a new institution of learning, university became a pyramid of education to the academicians and Palestinians who were interested to complete their university education in general and others from Arab world where
number of its enrolled students was more than 36,000 in the academic year 2003. Right now, the university has more than 200 full-time experts and academicians and in addition to that a number of part-time faculty members—some of them are having Ph.D. degrees too. The researcher is going to do a field work so as to investigate students-support-services to those who are enrolled in Al-Quds Open University. A map showing distribution of the following areas and centres of Al-Quds Open University in Palestine is shown below.

**Chart 1: Educational Regions and Study Centres in Palestine**

Source: http://portal.qou.edu
1.4. ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AT AL-QUDS OPEN UNIVERSITY

The University offers five academic programs, all leading to the Bachelor of Arts (B.A) or Bachelor of Science (B. Sc) degree as follows: (i) Technology and Applied Sciences, (ii) Agriculture, (iii) Education (iv) Social and Family Development and (v) Administrative and Economic Sciences. Each program consists of at least one major. Student may choose major, in which he/she is interested with an aim of obtaining a Bachelor of Arts (B.A) or Bachelor of Science (B. Sc) degree.

1.5. MISSION OF AL- QOU 2005-2010

Mission of Al-Quds Open University over period 2005-2010, can be summarized in following points:

1. Commitment to carry out philosophy, principles and methods of open education and distance learning according to latest cognitive and technological developments.
2. To maintain University’s academic, financial and administrative independence.
3. Keeping freedom of thought and expression while avoiding ideological or political conflicts.
4. Providing university educational services to Palestinian people without discrimination in West Bank and Gaza Strip.
5. Granting an M.A degree in specializations relevant to needs of the Palestinian and Arab communities, besides granting a B.A degree in existing programs.
6. Offering various continuing education programs which lead to granting certificates and diplomas of various levels.
7. Taking care to make level of academic programs and graduates equal and competitive to equivalent levels in local and Arab universities.

8. Employing a mixture of various instructional medias (printed, visual, audio, computerized and electronic) to support distance learners.

9. Seeking to convert Al-Quds Open University into a virtual university.

10. Commitment to carry out a principle of learner-centered education.

11. Seeking to implement a principle of total quality at an University and providing necessary qualified cadres, funds and training.

12. Encouraging research and studies in particular, as well as creative production, in general.

13. Developing professional capabilities of academic supervisors so they can perform their duties at a high quality level.

14. Employing qualified and trained human cadres alongside with applying most up-to-date techniques of information and communication technology.

15. Increasing cooperation and relationship with educational, societal and economic organizations in Palestine as well as in Arab and foreign countries.

16. Continuing to develop contents and methods of the university textbooks to integrate distance learning objectives.

17. To increase interest in scientific applications stated in the academic programs, such as Education, Social Development etc.
Administrative Structure of Al-Quds Open University

Chart 2: Administrative structure of Al-Quds Open University is as follows:

Source: http://portal.qou.edu

1.6. UNIVERSITY’S PHILOSOPHY, VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

To enhance commitment to philosophy of University which is represented in implementation of system of open education and distance learning in Palestine through keeping up with latest scientific and technological developments.

1. To encourage academic freedom as well as freedom of thought and expression, adhering to good ethics, respect of others and national unity.

2. To enhance interest in a learner through guiding University’s all activities, towards serving him/her, supporting his/her learning so that he/she can be a high quality graduate.

3. To enhance interest in performance quality at all levels within a plan of total quality.
Learners

1. To prepare an independent learner who graduates with an adequate knowledge and skills which enable him/her to continue learning, depending on himself/herself and encourage a spirit of innovation, efficiency, organization and ability to face challenges.
2. To contribute to make a learner acquire a local and Arab character which has a strong belonging to a country and nation.
3. To increase interest in community sectors which are socially, financially or geographically unable to get high education and improve their opportunities, to join higher education and succeed in it.

Technology

1. To continue process of computerizing and developing all administrative systems at the University.
2. To intensify using information and communication technology in process of teaching, to improve quality of learning.
3. To set up new studios for photographing and telecasting, broadcasting and electronic transmission.
4. To provide computer net services to all academic supervisors and students.
5. To encourage access to electronic libraries and international data bases in order to provide an opportunity for employees, students and researchers to make use of these rich sources of knowledge.
6. To increase production of educational video, audio and electronic aids which complete development of the University’s textbooks and consolidate distance learning.
Academic and Training Programs

1. To offer academic programs which lead to B.A and M.A degrees which take into consideration, latest developments and which meet the needs of Palestinian as well as the Arab societies’ future developmental aspirations.

2. To provide academic and professional programs flexible to continuous development in various fields of human knowledge which do not necessarily lead to any university degree. This would open an opportunity for all those interested from various community sectors to develop themselves through implementation of well-prepared training programs and courses.

3. To increase interest in practical aspects of academic and developmental courses.

4. To enhance interest in quality of educational materials, specializations, academic programs and appropriate educational aids, regarding preparation and output.

5. To divert methods of delivering knowledge to learners through employing modern technology in general and electronic learning in particular.

6. To conduct technical internal evaluation to specializations, every four or five years, to maintain best standards.

7. To encourage scientific production in various fields of knowledge through scientific research, translation and writing; in addition to enhancing cultural interaction and exchange among experts inside and outside the country.

8. To build cooperative relations with other universities inside and outside the country, to exchange expertise and services.
9. To build relations with local and external factories as well as companies, to enhance relationship between the university and community’s needs, in addition to provide opportunities for training learners.

**Expansion**

1. To prepare an appropriate infrastructure (buildings, areas of land, equipments, furniture’s, communications, etc.) to cope with the biggest possible number of Palestinians seeking university education.

2. To open new study centers in Arab/foreign countries, hosting a big number of Palestinians where feasibility studies show that there is a possibility to get revenues to support University’s budget.

3. To divert and increase funding sources of the University so as to be sufficient for implementing it's developmental plans.

**Employees**

1. To provide university with highly qualified academic, administrative and service staff, capable of achieving the University’s general goals.

2. To develop qualifications of University employees, in light of latest developments, relevant to high quality standards of production and services.

3. To continue to deal with employees on the basis of efficiency, capability, avoid favouritism and bias or injustice to anyone.
Other Goals

- To enhance attitude of decreasing the education cost while maintaining high quality of education.

1.7. CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION OBSTACLES

Conventional education sector is still suffering from many obstacles: geographical, political, social, and economical. By geographical part, student’s residence may form an obstacle which prevents him/her to reach study place. Hence, in recent conditions, Palestinian territories have witnessed political upsets and instability. It leads to closure of educational establishments because of Israeli occupation. In the current Social Structure, the role of a woman in Society in the home can further be enhanced through the new educational methods which cater to educated and uneducated women. So Distance Learning is a boon to them.

Educationally, as a fact, there is a durable correlation between economy and education. On one hand, it is important to point that education forms an essential part for economic development. On the other hand, economic development is a necessity for educational development. Therefore, it must have been necessary to search for new education system to surpass the above mentioned obstacles and remove them. Hence, an Open Learning is the best solution which fits this problem; Open learning shows itself, as a real alternative for conventional learning, particularly in developing countries, as it reduces expenses. Open learning is considered as one of the fastest training and educational fields all over the world. Additionally, new inventions in information and technique aspects have enhanced possibilities of this learning type over services, offering for various sectors of people-especially women who have been affected negatively by conventional education.
1.8. PROBLEMS AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

However, Palestinian educational system in all stages, has suffered along occupation era, from all types of prejudices and persecutions, for instance closure of educational establishments such as Schools, Colleges and Universities.

In addition to effects which were resulted by Israeli occupation and its practices which have increased negative effects, particularly on higher education- especially universities.

To sum up these problems, cost seems to be one of the main problems of higher education- especially universities, that their budget acts as a burden on government's budgets as well as families' budgets which also act as the same problem in financing their students. Moreover, finance problem increased because of increase in population which caused increase in demand for education. It led to many problems as university education crises which (Bader, 1999) can be summarized into;

- Difficulty of assimilation for flowing numbers who aspires to join universities.
- Weakness of appropriateness between universities' output and the changeable market labour requirements, by effect of scientific & technology progress.
- Increase of higher education burden on families and governments (Bader,1999).

Therefore, it was necessary to find solutions for all above mentioned problems which education encounters especially-higher education so as to develop Palestinian society. Besides, to meet the increasing demand in higher education to fail the occupation targets which aim to deprive them of education. In light of these, the Palestinian decision- makers found an unconventional solution that was based on supplying education to students wherever they were.
Hence, this idea is represented by Al-Quds Open University which adopts open learning system to meet needs of Palestinian people, in spite of hard and complex economical, social and political conditions of Palestinian people.

1.9. OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING CONCEPT

Open Learning Concept: it is considered one of the distance learning modales which enables a learner to learn separately of the university where he/she studies. Learner can choose appropriate place and time which suit his/her condition. Moreover, he/she can learn in a fast way which suits his/her abilities and possibilities. (Nasrallah.2000).

Open learning is an educational policy that constitutes it's philosophy on individuals right to reach for available educational opportunities. Meanwhile, it is mass open education for all as it has flexibility that enables learners to pick out ways of learning, time, place and learning contents. Consequently for his/her conditions and needs (Keelani.2001). Therefore, it is an educational system which meets natural readiness for an individual through surpassing obstacles which prevent him/her to keep on learning and diluting of attendance conditions which are essential conditions for conventional education system like age, time devotion for studying, former educational qualifications and financial ability.

Lewis has defined open learning, as “The education that enables the learner to control decisions by himself/herself like content study choosing, learning method, learning place and self-learning". (Keelani.2001).

Phil Race determines" Open Learning means that student has a freedom in choosing and controlling. Hence, the freedom means; choosing operation, of what he/she learns, whereas controlling means self-
controlling. Since, student is responsible for his/her learning. By the same,
open learning is considered as a system that can expand opportunities
and control grade learners, also use of educational materials which
concentrated about learners and allow for learners to take their
responsibilities and roles in learning besides helping to keep needed skills
for survival." (Nashwan.1999).

1.10. DISTANCE LEARNING CONCEPT
Initially distance learning had started in past century when many
educational commercial and private institutes in U.S.A and Britain have
used distance learning in order to convey educational materials for
learners in such a system which was called correspondence.

Secondly, after the success that accompanied this experiment, some
universities have started to use distance learning system in university
learning like, Queens Land in Australia and New England University.
But, the British University had started in sixties and it had a main role to
use distance learning in an university grade. Furthermore, this university
had proved, it is possible to use distance learning by less economic cost in
comparison with conventional learning.(Nasrallah.2000).

Hence, as to determine distance learning concept, we will show most
important definitions from well-known specialists: Abed Al-Jabber says,"
Distance learning is a democratic system enables equivalent opportunities
and skills acquisition aspects. On the whole, this is called learning
democracy which includes the following three dimensions:
*- Social dimension: it is a correlation of education democracy and
society’s democracy. Meanwhile, discrimination should be removed i.e.
On race, colour, social status and gender ground.
*- Quantitative dimension: distance education system contains those who are candidates and need to be educated.
*- Qualitative dimension: Distance learning makes structures, contents and creates flexible and improved curricula to meet the needs of environment and population. (Nasrallah 2000).

Accordingly, Al-Quds Open University defined" Distance learning is all organized forms of education and learning, as there is no meeting between learners and tutors in the same place. Hence, distance learning gives an opportunity to individuals to pursue their learning even after break in their studies, as a matter of fact this type is not confined by the restrictions of traditional rules, while it ensures an appropriate flexibility which suits students’ circumstances. Otherwise, it needs special preparation in it's programmes and curricula in order to compensate for interaction absence between learner and tutor. (Shahatah 2003)

Holmburg defined" Distance Learning is a dialogue between the learner and tutor who are not in touch and this type is available wherever learner exists. Furthermore, it has advantage that revolves about responsibility of learner in addition of using several educational means."( Keelani 2001).
Peters defined" Distance learning is a way to spread knowledge and acquisition of skills and attitudes by working condensation in administrative and techniques by various technique medias so as to produce educational material of high quality which enables learners in their places to get knowledge."(Baker 2000).

Hamadi defined" Distance learning is suitable for all distance learning establishments because it determines the following essential factors;
- Separation between learners and teachers.
- Use of technical medias to connect learners and teacher in order to apply educational content for students’ curriculum.
- Use of two directions that a can make use of.
- Possibility of making meetings between teachers and learners to achieve educational and social aims. (Nashwan.1999)

In light of above definitions, researcher implies that open learning and distance learning are in durable correlation where as it is difficult to distinguish between them. Hence, both of them are flexible and constructed on the same philosophy that is learning separated from teacher and educational establishment, not only both of them revolves about learners themselves instead of educational establishment but also both agree with obtaining educational opportunity, since all obstacles can be surpassed whether those were, political, financial, social, related to place or time.

1.11. TARGETS OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Targets of open and distance learning involve that following as were referred to them by 'Ibraheem"

- Requirements and development plans meeting from qualified trained manpower.
- To allow an education university opportunities for all learners who aspire to, in correspondence for increasing social demand for this learning type.
- To grant learning opportunity for those who missed higher education for reasons which are related to an individual or society.
- Providing educational opportunities, training and continuous habitation for employers who are in charge.
- To provide all people with cultural programmes, supplying them for enlightenment .Moreover, supplying for knowledge by using
modern means like television and satellites. Through transmitting educational programmes, use is not exclusive on learners only but including all people, who are not uncovered by conventional education.

- To participate encouraging woman to be educated but in developing countries, woman's education represents real problem-for example in agricultural societies, percentage of illiteracy has risen because women are discouraged. (Ibraheem, 2004).

1.12. JUSTIFICATIONS OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Justifications can be summarized such as:-

- To give university education to those who face economical and social obstacles which hinder them to join immediately after secondary grade during that time.
- Open and distance learning enables those who had not joined university.
- Open and distance learning is considered as an important mean of developing society through developing it's individuals.
- Open and distance learning act as buffer between job and learning.
- Woman's learning is an essential matter in developing society. Hence, open learning suits women by giving them enough time to practice their social role.

Ability of this type to contain huge number of students which exceeds traditional education ability in this sphere such as:

- Open and distance learning grants academic programmes.
- Open and distance learning obtains progressive education programmes and society services which are essential for it.
- Flexibility principle that is represented in surpassing all obstacles that may rise by rules and laws.
- Political uproars and conflicts may not allow one to pursue organized study.
- Traditional education fees is more compared with open learning.
- To Save efforts and time so as to give more production which leads to adopt more flexible educational system than the traditional one.
- To solve psychological problems like dropout and slow learning. Studies pointed out that slow learners, are ashamed of their inability to convey to others which creates loathing for schools and universities. Hence, open learning may solve some of these problems because it reflects fitness for those students. (Teashory.2005)

Open and distance learning, under consideration of individual differences among learners.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) can provide basic education, skills training and lifelong learning. Appropriate ODL materials are especially important for women who live in countries where they are seen principally as homemakers and caretakers of children and where their social and cultural norms, make attending face-to-face classes are difficult. ODL can provide such women, their partners and their children with a key to the world of learning. Producers of ODL materials must ensure that this key works for both sexes. For example, a 2001 publication of case studies, compiled by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) found that in India, distance education (DE) is the preferred option for women. DE is cost-effective in India as a learner pays only one third of total fees compared to a conventional institution. As no classroom attendance is required, there is no need for woman learner to dislocate herself; because of the degree of flexibility in course completion, she can
adjust her study time table within her schedule of household responsibilities. (Jenkins, 1995).

1.13. EXCEPTIONAL SERVICES IN OPEN/DISTANCE LEARNING

As it was referred in Al-Quds Open University (Manual, 2003), open/distance learning presents the following unusual services:
- Presentations of educational services for those who were not able to join regular universities.
- Presentations of suitable educational conditions which conform to student’s needs.
- Give a share in women learning, illiteracy elimination and adult learning.
- Enable learners to conjoin between work and study.
- Enable learners who are in service to develop their vocational growth.
- Creation of educational methods which are different than regular educational matters.

Give a share in solving problems which are related to inability of regular universities for capacity increasing. (www.portal.qou.edu).

1.14. HISTORY AND LOCATION OF JENIN EDUCATIONAL REGION

It was established as a Study Centre in 1991 and was a part of Nablus Educational Region. When, first it was inaugurated, there were only 203 students but in 1998, it reached to 1487 students. That was, one year before it’s promotion as an Educational Region. Jenin Educational Region is located in the northern part of Jenin, and Jenin Study Centre is in the southern part of the city. Number of students in an academic year 2006-
2007 was 7,000 in the Educational Regions and a Study Centre; 4,913 students were in the former and 2,087 in the latter. Jenin Educational Region is located now in two rented buildings of 4,500 square meters and Jenin Study Centre is located in a-three buildings of 1,200 square meters. Jenin Centre of Al-Quds Open University is headed by a Director of education along with assistants of (Academic Affairs, Library, Recruitment, Examination, Full Time and Non-full Time Experts, Student Affairs, Social Counsellor, Computers, Personal Affairs, Finance, Admission, Store and Security). Number of Academic Supervisors - Full and Part Timers Are shown in the following table 1.1:

**Table 1.1: Number of Academic Supervisors - Full and Part Timers in Educational Regions and a Study Centre in Jenin to Academic year 2009-2010.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Timers</th>
<th>Part Timers</th>
<th>Total Number of Full Timers and Part Timers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ph.D</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td><strong>Total = 40</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>189</td>
<td><strong>Total = 213</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bachelor</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td><strong>Total = 213</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ph.D</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>213</td>
<td><strong>Total = 255</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Total = 213</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bachelor</strong></td>
<td>213</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Total = 255</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.2: Number of Jenin Educational Region and a Study Centre Distribution of Learners by Academic Program are shown in following table 1.2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programmes</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology &amp; Applied Sciences</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>360</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Family Development</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>537</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1034</td>
<td>2816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>3850</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic and Management Sciences</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1019</td>
<td>1182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>2201</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>2354</td>
<td>4666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>7020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Al–Quds Open University. Primary Statistics from admission department/Academic year 2009-2010.

1.15. RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

From discussion made over here and through the nature of researcher's work as a part timer supervisor in Al-Quds Open University in Jenin area, it was clear that student support services were very vital in an Open Distance Learning System. This was because students over there were not formal or regular students, to the institutions but a facility to learn at their own place and time of convenience was there. Therefore, student support services were very important for them to continue with their courses.
Such courses get a good success when student support services were provided of proper quality and at proper time by proper teaching faculty. Since, researcher was interested to study overall success of this Open University; it was decided to make a status survey of present student support services provided to the students and full time academic supervisors.

1.16. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Main aim of Open and Distance Education is to promote self-study among learners, in absence of regular teaching system. To achieve this, every institution of Open and Distance Learning, extends support to its students that comprises of many facilities and activities which were intended to make learning process easier and more interesting for the students (Sharma, 2007, p. 4). There are many key-issues which help and guide preparation and advancement of distance learning initiatives. These activities, beyond production and delivery of course materials, help and assist in progress of learners in term of education (Learning) and effective communication (Simpson, 2000). Therefore, support may range from study centre, counselling and tutorial support to administrative problem solving (Rumble, 1992). Institutions will need to develop policies which clarify academic issues, tuition fee, services considering geographical area, labour management, legal matters and student support services such as counselling, training and others (Gellman-Danley and Fetzner, 1998). Researcher in his opinion mentioned that following are some of student services such as: (i) admission procedures (ii) mode, course and subjects of study (iii) guidance to the students (iv) recruitment (v) job projects (vi) examination and (vii) electronic portal.
Open and Distance Education, utilized regular mail to send written material, videos, audiotapes, and CD-ROMs or other medias storage format such as compact flash to students and to turn in the exercises but today’s Open and Distance Education courses make use of internet (E-Mail and Web sites) and video conferencing over broad band and network connections for wired physical locations and wireless mobile learning. In some countries, material is supplemental by television and radio programming. Al-Quds Open University utilized (i) Electronic Libraries (ii) Open Access Resources (iii) EBSCO Database and others. Digital Books Index is fairly new site which offers simple, swift and direct access to online digital books which are fairly utilized at Al-Quds Open University.

Year 2006 marked the first anniversary of establishment of the Blind and Visually Impaired Training Centers of Al-Quds Open University (QOU) at it’s Hebron and Jenin locations. These centers were established in conviction that students with disabilities have the same right to access Information Technology as everyone else. Centers were providing services to all university students who were blind or visually impaired in addition to individuals with the same disabilities from the local community. Two centers were well equipped and furnished with latest adaptive or assistive tools, backed by qualified and trained staff to enable students to achieve their highest potential. This would promote students’ independence, economic well-being and enhance their quality of life through using latest technology, combined with time-tested adaptive methods. Training centers offer academic and work-related practical training such as computer keyboarding, typing, Windows XP, introduction to computers, word processing, e-mail and Internet.
Supporting Educational Multimedia: Academic Directorate undertakes high importance in supporting educational multimedia for its educational significance in open and distance education. Curricula and Textbooks Department bear this through its director and supporting multimedia employee, by way direction and advising from vice-president of Academic Affairs, tasks of facilitating between the Ramallah and Amman offices of Media Productions Centre as well as all educational regions and directors of academic programs to provide each centre with the latest multimedia productions, as well as following the facilitation mechanism for producing and presenting multimedia productions and it's utilization by academic advisors and learners. Department actively supported facilitation process towards creation. Supporting Multimedia Facilities in three new educational regions where this is an ongoing process until every educational region and centre will have it's own Supporting Multimedia.

Tait (1995) wrote in his article on Student Support for Open and Distance Learning, examined various factors which need to be taken into account, in planning of student support and stated that there could be no universal blueprint for design of student support services. Information communication technologies and marketisation of education are two dimensions which were influencing planning of student support services in open and distance learning. Former brought seamless technological media and later brought consumer culture in open and distance learning system. Both were strongly influencing the methods and philosophies of student support services in open and distance learning.

According to author, student support services means "Range of services both for individuals and for students in groups which complement the
course materials or Learning resources which were uniform for all learners and which were often perceived as Major offering of institutions using ODL. "Tait said that student support services covered areas of "inquiry, admission and pre-study advisory services, tutoring, guidance and counselling services, assessment of prior learning and credit transfer, study and examination centres, residential schools, library services, individualized correspondence teaching, record keeping, differentiated services for students with special needs and materials which support development of study skills, programme planning and career development.".

Tait in another article on "Student Support in Open and Distance learning" defined student support as "range of activities which complement mass produced materials which make up most well-known element in ODL" and consisting with elements of tutoring, counseling, interactive teaching through television and radio and other activities. Principles which govern support services, were formulated in the form of following questions. Who were your students? What were their needs? How would you meet their needs? How would services be managed? How much would services cost? How would you evaluate? According to author, under each question, there would be number of parameters to be considered and acknowledged as identity of learner is central to student support system. In operationalizing student support services, study centres play a very crucial role. Study centres are physical locations through which a wide range of services are operationalized and provided to learners. Proper understanding of above questions is essential for any open and distance learning institution for evolving a model for student support services in open and distance learning system.
David Sewart's (1978) article on "Continuity of Concern for Students in a System of Learning at a Distance" was an attempt to identify role of intermediary in the process of student support services to the learners at a distance. As the societies were growing and becoming complex, role of an intermediary assumes significance to bridge the gap between individual and institution. This assumed greater significance wherein education had to be imparted at a distance with the help of course material and other forms of support. Concept of "Continuity of Concern" aimed to provide support and a "Safety Net" to the distance learners wherein a wide variety of support services and counselling was provided. Continuity of concern for students gained importance because of educational background of most of its students who were adults, returning to study after a number of years. They would need a local and continuing advice on the problem which they encountered would be attended by these intermediaries known in different names like tutors, counsellors, teachers, advisors and academic counselors and coordinators. Counseling function encompassed all those other areas in which University and students 'Interact' and all this interactions need not be "Academic" means counselling covers, general advise on general problems of part-time study. This article was an attempt to put student support services in a perspective with the concept of "Continuity of Concern". It recognized role of "Human Element" in the form of an intermediary.

1.17. WHY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES?

Putting definitions of research and student services together, raises obvious question of why research was important or what can it do for
those involved in learners’ services? Answer to this question, had two components. The first was to consider many facets of learners’ services in which our knowledge was lacking and thus, the ways in which our involvement in it’s provision was compromised. Researcher was sure that many of the people could provide a list of issues which were relevant to their practices and which had important consequences to lives of learners and to their institution’s capacity to serve, to which their knowledge was at best untested and uninformed and at worst incorrect. These issues probably included traditional distance education questions such as how to reduce attrition, improve learning outcomes and reduce cost of services. But, now we are challenged to provide answers to questions, raised by new forms of distance education provisions, questions such as:

- What mix of personal and machine, delivered services was needed by learners?

- What combinations of collaborative and group based learning were worth cost and inconvenience to both teachers and learners?

- Did face to face tutorials really make a difference or is real time video conferencing just as effective?

- Was travelling to a learning centre worth expense and hassle when we can cost effectively deliver via audio and video to home or workplace?

- How much did expensive multimedia really enhance students’ learning; how important are real time interactions?

The list is long and growing. It is even more important to ask ourselves, if our current research practice is capable of answering these questions.
1.18. CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

In distance education period, examples of student support services would include:
Tutor contact, telephone counselling, correspondence contacts, assignment correction, audio conferences, email, seminars and face-to-face meetings.
In a broader interpretation they would include provision at a distance of all features which conventional universities and colleges provide for their students including:
Induction-type services, General information services, Counselling, Social work services, Special needs services, Career Guidance, Study Guidance and study groups, Intervention service (for those who are likely to drop-out of the system).
The best distance education systems and Open Universities provide a wide range of services for their students which make them national institutions of great prestige and reputation which take their place easily amongst the universities of the nation. (Rekkedal, et.al.2003).

1.19. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
A Study of Student Support Services Provided by Al-Quds Open University of Palestine.

1.20. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
1. To study provisions of Student Support Services for all courses provided by Al-Quds Open University, Palestine.
2. To study effectiveness of present Student Support Services provided by university in terms of (a) Extent of students satisfaction level. (b) Level of satisfaction of persons providing it. (c) Time cost involved in provision
of student support services. (d) Percentage of students acquiring Student Support Services.

3. To collect suggestions for improvement of Student Support Services provided presently to all Students of Al-Quds Open University.

1.21. SIGNIFICANCE OF PRESENT STUDY

Political situation of middle-eastern countries was not stable. In addition to regional conflicts of West Asia, particularly, Palestine was going on. Thus, to have institutions of regular learning and their continuation was somewhat difficult. When Al-Quds Open University came into existence, many Palestinians who missed train of regular learning were pleased to get their chance of higher education. Since, Al-Quds Open University had specific feature of adhering to mode of open and distance education, it had high degree of importance and significance to Palestinian society. As a matter of fact, this university admitted number of students and provided them, by training and scientific knowledge which qualify them in their profession. Whereas, recommendations of experts helped the university and a directorate of planning and development, to study and put forth the correct plans and policies to distance learning and improving an education by Al-Quds Open University. Research studies have solved concerned problems of the students and that is why we have taken student support services which were provided by the university.

This study is first to be conducted, considering Palestinian level and it is going to investigate student support services which were provided by Arabian/Distance learning institutions and will benefit new researches and further studies in a same area.
1.22. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Followings questions emerged from discussion:
1. What were Student Support Services provided by Al-Quds Open University, in different subjects, based on perspectives of students?
2. What were Student Support Services provided by Al-Quds Open University, in different subjects, based on perspectives of full time academic supervisors?
3. Are there significant differences at (alpha=0.05) in the Student Support Services, provided by Al-Quds Open University, in different subjects based on perspectives of students due to these variables: Gender, Age, Specialization, Place of Residence and Study Level?

1.23. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

1- There is no significant difference at (alpha=0.05) for student support services, provided by Al-Quds Open University, in different subjects, based on perspectives of students due to Gender variable.
2- There is no significant difference at (alpha=0.05) for student support services, provided by Al-Quds Open University, in different subjects based on perspectives of students due to Age variable.
3- There is no significant difference at (alpha=0.05) for student support services, provided by Al-Quds Open University, in different subjects, based on perspectives of students due to Specialization variable.
4- There is no significant difference at (alpha=0.05) for student support services, provided by Al-Quds Open University in different subjects, based on perspectives of students due to Place of Residence variable.
5- There is no significant difference at (alpha=0.05) for student support services, provided by Al-Quds Open University in different subjects, based on perspectives of students due to Study Level variable.
1.24. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Some of limitations of this study were as follows:

1- This study was based on a sample composed of (351) students which equals to (5%) of Population. The number was 7020 - male and female students from Al-Quds Open University in Palestine –Jenin.

2- This study also involved all Academic full-time Supervisors in Al-Quds Open University in Palestine –Jenin. The number was 40 Supervisors.

3- This study was conducted during the second semester of an academic year 2009-2010.

4. This study was conducted at Al-Quds Open University / Jenin branch – Palestine.

1.25. EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN TITLE OF THE STUDY

Open Learning: Open Learning concept was considered as one of distance learning models which enabled learners to learn separately of university where he/she studied. Learners can choose an appropriate place and time which suited his/her condition. Moreover, he/she can learn in a fast way which suited his/her abilities and possibility (Nasrallah, 2000).

Al-Quds Open University (QOU)

AL- QOU is a national institution for higher education located in Palestine. It enjoys an independent status in academic, financial and administrative affairs. The university attempts to provide educational services for interested students, through adopting Distance Learning system. (www.portal.qou.edu)
Student Support Services

1.26. CONCLUSION

This research study could find out some student support services, provided by Al – Quds Open University of Palestine. This will help students of different universities, researcher and community at large.

To conclude, researcher would like to say that, we desperately need an increase in quality and quantity of educational research and especially devoted to learners’ services. Further, it must involve and be co-directed by practitioners so that results would inspire practical improvements. To achieve this goal, we need to fight much less about the various research paradigms that were available and learn to integrate all research paradigms – extracting value and meaning from each as it provides effective tools to answer our many problems. The emergence of developmental or design-based research seems to offer a promising new methodology which can effectively use all research methodologies, in a process which follows interventions from literature and theory based researches, to multi-mode data collection to implementation and adoption studies. Development of such a methodology gives promise for creation and sustenance of a vibrant research culture in distance education. Cultures are not formed quickly but once established and nourished; they would provide sustaining impetuous for collective action which is desperately needed in our mission of providing quality educational opportunity to every inhabitant of our global home.