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CHAPTER-1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION:

Education has remained and will always remain the most vital necessary for the civil society. Whether it is basic, intermediate or higher general or professional forms of education stands widely recognized and accepted especially in a competitive environment of the corporate world. However, ever-increasing population and the consequential demand to provide education for all have hit a rough patch due to practical reasons. The government does not have sufficient resources for expanding the educational system beyond a limit. It is not easy to construct thousands of colleges and equip them with supporting infrastructure and component faculty base to cater to the demand of ever-increasing population of students aspiring for higher especially professional education. Under such circumstances, the challenge for most developing countries including India remains in providing education assumes great importance and distance education is the only viable medium available for study today for large number of students.

Futurists predict increasing demands for higher education during the new millennium (Mc Henry and Bozic, 1997). At the same time resources for such education are being threatened. To address this issue, many learning institutions are looking to distance education as a means of sharing resources and reaching more students. Moriarty (1995:5) predict, “The prospects are for more…distance learning courses.” The impact of this trend is described by Noon (1996:4) when he states, “Distance learning courses are offering students new flexibility in course and even campus selection, causing many institutions to begin redefining themselves”.

1.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO THE STUDY AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL:

There can be little doubt that distances education and open and flexible learning policies have done much to extend accessibility to higher education throughout the world. In South Africa specifically, Glennie (1996) provides evidence that the distance education sector is considerable and is becoming a very significant part of higher education provision. She states that approximately one-third of the national teaching corps is involved in distance education programmes. Moreover, South Africa’s White Paper on Education has identified distance education as an essential mechanism for achieving its goals (Department of Education, 1995:28). In a similar vein, Möwes and Siaciwena (2000) state that the University of Namibia’s (UNAM) first five year
development plan (1995-1999) committed the university to continue and expand its distance education services. One of the key objectives in UNAM’s first five year development plan was to address some of “the relics of colonial regimes” and it states in this regard that many Namibians from formerly disadvantaged communities, who were already in employment, needed to have their work skills upgraded and sharpened without having to leave their jobs (University of Namibia, 1995). The development plan noted that such people were scattered throughout the country, especially in regions that had previously been designated as “homelands”. Therefore, one of UNAM’s key goals and responsibilities is to reach out to people and to assist them to continue with their education, through the University’s Centre for External Studies.

One important means of measuring and analysing the effectiveness and quality of the learning experience in a distance education system is through the evaluation of the student support system (Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker, 1992). “Support systems contribute to the ‘process’ of a course as do the learning materials” (Hodgson, 1986:56); and support systems, developed in recognition of student needs, help the distance education student become competent and self-confident in learning, social interactions and self-evaluation (Rae, 1989). Wheeler (1999) substantiates the impact of the provision of student support services and contends that distance learning is not just a move away from learning within the classroom. It is a complete paradigm shift – a change in the fabric and culture of education. When an institution delivers learning materials outside the classroom across any distance, it is important that technologies and techniques support students and improve communications between students and tutors. In addition, Paul (1988) argues that the overwhelming experience of distance educators has been an increasing recognition that part-time adult students, especially those at a distance, require all the personal support they can get if they are to succeed.

Sir John Denial former vice chancellor of the United Kingdom’s Open University (UKOU) contends that a second revolution in education is underway. “Spurred by continuing growth in the demand for education especially among adults teaching and training institutions of all types are exploring and adopting the method of open and distance learning. They are encouraged by the convergence of computers, telecommunications and televisions, which will turn our homes in to environments for learning as rich as our schools, colleges and universities”. (Daniel, 1995: xi)
1.3 INTRODUCTION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION:

It has been argued that individualized learning should be as open as possible, in terms of both removal of institutional constrains and provision of greater flexibility in individual pace of learning. ‘Open education as an educational philosophy has been developed with the aim to address the issues of access, structure of education, educational dialogue and student support systems (Services). It provides for the learner’s complete control over one’s own learning. Any educational provision or learning situation which can provide openness with regard to the following variables can be termed as open learning:

2. Place and Pace: Own place, any time entry, any time study, own pace.
3. Support Services: Flexibility in student support, variety of sources and means of support, any time support.
4. Content and Assessment: Flexibility in the choice of course, alternative pathways to pursue a course of study, credit exemption of prior learning, flexibility in learning objectives and choice of content, negotiable support services, flexible and competency-based assessment.

1.4 NATURE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION:

Before the advent of out-of-classroom education, formal education was always imparted within the four walls of classrooms. In such a system, the teacher is solely responsible for teaching the pre-designed syllabus. Students study extra reading material, interact with the teacher in the classroom, interact informally with each other, and carry out a few activities within and outside the classroom as a part of the curriculum. The teacher and the students may have a one-to-one or group dialogue to clarify concepts or further the discussion. Then and there, students are provided immediate feedback. Through this process, the students validate personal knowledge; and the teacher facilitates the conversion of students’ private knowledge into public knowledge. This is the process of education that takes place within classrooms.

If the teacher and student are removed from the face-to-face situation to interact at a distance through other means like postal correspondence, education becomes non-contiguous. Some of the students find it difficult to attend classroom regularly because of
requirement such as course fee, ineligibility due to lack of a regular college, they pursue their education from where they are, through re-produced printed course materials and postal correspondence. The course materials are self-instructional, and assignments are given from time to time for the students to respond and for the teachers to write comments and evaluate the responses. Feedback, though delayed, takes place through postal correspondence.

Distance education or education at a distance is the extension of the mechanisms and processes involved in correspondence education. All possible media, including print, are brought in to bridge the gap between the teacher and students.

Thus the culture of distance learning does prevail in the state which augurs well for the Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU). The BAOU has, therefore, a fertile soil to plough and disseminate open through regional language on a much larger scale.

### 1.5 HISTORY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA:

At the time of independence higher education in India was accessible only to the upper class of the society. There were 19 conventional universities and 420 affiliated colleges all over the country (Sahoo, 1993). Immediately after independence, the university education commission (1948-49) recommended that in a well-planned education system opportunities should be provided at every level to students for exercise of their reflective powers, artistic abilities and practical work.

Within a few years the rapid expansion of primary and secondary education, and the need for higher degrees among middle and upper-middle classes to apply for suitable jobs acted as strong forces for expansion of higher education in India. By 1960, the number of universities had increased up to 45 and the number of affiliated colleges rose up to 1222. Enrolment in colleges and universities increased from about 180000 during 1947 to 890000 during 1960. (Sahoo, 1993).

The government apprehended that quantitative expansion of conventional colleges and universities would lead to dilution of standards in higher education. It was also observed that the conventional classroom based higher education had its limitations. It couldn’t increase the accessibility of higher education to a larger section of people. These limitations paved the way for alternative systems. In this context the planning
commission of India (1960) had made a significant observation in the third five year plan that proposals for evening college, correspondence course and award of external degrees were under consideration. The matter was referred to the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in its 28th meeting (January, 16-17, 1961) suggested further detailed studies by a small committee. Consequently, the ministry of education constituted an expert committee in March 1961 under the chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari, the then of UGC (University Grants Commission) to look in to the proposal in detail and make recommendations. The committee consisting 10 members from different organizations like ministry of education, UGC (University Grants Commission) and different universities of India, studied the proposal in detail and make recommended the introduction of correspondence courses at university level leading to a degree or equivalent qualifications. The committee had made suggestions with regard to the nature of course to be introduced, instructional processes, use of media and so on. Further, it recommended that Arts and Commerce courses should be introduced first through correspondence education systems followed by science subject.

It was necessary to associate experienced teachers and top ranking scholars in the preparation of course to maintain educational standards. The new system should be more flexible in terms of admission and duration of study. There should be personal contact (through tutorials) between the teacher and thought.

The committee had observed that a large number of aspirants could be educated through correspondence course as competently as those at the universities and affiliated colleges. It also suggested that the university at the Delhi should run correspondence course in the first instance.

The University of Delhi agreed to the proposal of the expert committee and appointed a sub-committee to prepare a programme of action of correspondence courses. The sub-committee recommended the introduction of various courses like English, Economics, Modern Indian Languages, Mathematics, History, Political Science and Commerce. Following the recommendations the university established the school of correspondence courses and continuing education in 1962 as a pilot subject.
STREAMLINING THE INTRODUCTION OF CORRESPONDENCE COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL:

The education commission of India (1964-66) supported the idea of introducing correspondence courses at the university level. It was optimistic about the role of correspondence education in general disciplines and suggested that it should also include courses in science, technology and vocational fields. The commission justified the relevance of correspondence education as a system of taking education to the doorsteps of those who were motivated to study either at home or at their place of work and recommended that correspondence courses should be introduced at the university level on a large scale. This idea was highlighted in the national policy of education (1968). It was also suggested that education through correspondence should be given the same status as full time or conventional system of education. The planning commission in its fourth five year plan (1966-71) recommended the expansion of higher education through correspondence courses, evening colleges and part-time classes.

In 1967, UGC (University Grants Commission) appointed a committee to streamline the introduction of correspondence courses at the university level. The government of India sent three delegations to the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) during 1967 1971 to study the system of correspondence course in that country. In line with suggestions given by these delegations, the UGC (University Grants Commission) formulated a set of guidelines to improve the system of correspondence education in India.

By this time the pilot project of the University of Delhi elicited good response from the students. Punjabi university, Patiala set up a full-fledged directorate of correspondence courses in 1968. A number of other universities like Meerut(1969), Jamia Milia Islamia (1970), Mysore (1970), Madurai Kamraj (1971), Punjab(1971), Bombay(1971), Himachal Pradesh(1971), Venkateshwara (1972), Andhra(1972) etc. are established institutes of correspondence courses. All the institutes had received a good response from the prospective learners. This had encouraged UGC (University Grants Commission) to take further steps for strengthening correspondence education at the university level. The establishment of Open University in UK (United Kingdom) (1969) also drew attention of the UGC (University Grants Commission) policy makers. They started to think of strengthening correspondence education through the Open University system in our country.
1.7 PROPOSALS FOR AN OPEN UNIVERSITY:

In 1970 (International education year), the ministry of education and social welfare in collaboration with the ministry of information and broadcasting, the UGC(University Grants Commission) and the Indian national commission for cooperation with UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), organized a seminar on ‘Open University’. The seminar recommended the establishment of an open university in India on an experimental basis. The Government of India appointed eight member working group on Open University in 1974. The leading role was given to G. Parthasarathi, the then vice-chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University.

The working group had recommended establishing an open university by an act of parliament as early as possible. The university should have jurisdiction over the entire country so that, when it is fully developed any student even in the remotest corner of the country can have access to its instruction and degrees (working group report, 1974). The working group suggested several measures to be followed in instructional and management processes of the Open University which include admission procedure, age relaxation, preparation of reading materials, setting up of core group scholars in different fields, setting up of study centers, vehicle of curricular programmes, live contact with teachers and so on. On the basis of the recommendations of the working group, the Union Government prepared a draft bill for the establishment of a national open university, but due to some reasons the progress was delayed.

1.8 FURTHER GROWTH:


Two other institutions viz, National staff college for educational planners and administrators (Presently named as National institute of educational planning and administration) and association of Indian universities (AIU- Association Of Indian
Universities) introduced special courses for educational administrators and teachers respectively during 1979.

The growth of correspondence course institutes continued through the 1980s. During the 1970s, 19 correspondence course institutions were established throughout the country, and in 1980s 17 such institutes came into existence. Some of these institutes are: University of Calicut (1981), University of Madras (1981), University of Poona (1983), Tilak maharastraVidyapeeth (1985), M. D. University Rohtak (1988) and so on.

1.9 FIRST STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY:

Though the progress of national university was delayed the state of Andhra Pradesh came up with the first state open university in the country on August 26, 1982. Through an act of the Andhra Pradesh state legislature. Presently it is named as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University. The headquarters of this university is situated at jubilee hills, Hyderabad. It has 137 study centers spread all over the state. The main objective of this university was to provide educational opportunities to those learners who could not take advantage of higher learning in conventional universities. The university offers both short term and long term programmes. The areas include master degree programmes, professional programmes, bachelor’s degree programmes, research programmes and so on. The academic package of this university consists of various media like print, audio and visual materials and contact sessions. The university can also uses radio programmers and arrange practical for science courses.

1.10 THE NEED FOR STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES:

Distance education has rightly been recognized and acclaimed for its ability to “open doors” for large numbers of people who have no other access to further education and training. The question however, is: Does this access lead to success for the majority who enter the open doors? Studies internationally (Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker, 1992 and Shin and Kim, 1999) indicate that withdrawal from distance education has many different causes. Research (Rae, 1989) has found that students with higher previous educational qualifications tend to perform better than those with poorer qualifications. Those who find it difficult to reconcile the conflicting demands of their jobs, family and studies tend to do less well, as do those who find it difficult to direct their own learning (Kuhn and Williams, 1997).
From the literature (Sewart, 1983; Bääth, 1982; Paul, 1988 Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker, 1992; Rumble, 1993; Tait, 1995) on student support in open and distance learning, it was concluded that:

- Student-institution contact, such as regular contact with support staff, appears to have a positive effect on student performance and persistence rates;
- Factors which correlate positively with course completion rates include the use of course assignments, early submission of the first assignment, short turn-around time for giving students feedback, pacing progress, supplementary audio-tapes or telephone tutorials, favorable working conditions in the student’s context, the quality of learning materials and reminders from tutors to complete work;
- students value contact with support staff and their peers, though they do not always use the services provided; students most often report a preference for face-to-face tutoring compared to other media, though where face-to-face tutorials are not possible, other forms of contact are rated valuable; and
- Personal circumstances and lack of time are the most common reasons given for poor academic performance.

It is therefore evident that the profile and needs of distance education students justify the provision of individualised support if they are to complete their studies and develop into critical learners with appropriate competencies.

The majority of adult students have a range of activities, commitments and responsibilities which impinge on their learning. Many have to cope with a fulltime job. They have to divide time among their various roles. Studying is just one part of the any parts which they have to balance in their daily lives. While this may be typical of any adult student, the situation in the distance education context is different. Several researchers (Brindley, 1988; Evans, 1994; Sims, 1997; Stokken, 1996; Von Prümmer, 1994; Von Prümmer and Rossil, 1988; Woodley, Wagner, Slowey and Fulton, 1987) have argued that distance education students normally experience role conflict because they are studying and living at home. They have to set aside time for study. Consequently, distance education students, with their diverse experiences, personal circumstances, and learning preferences, need a corresponding diversity of support from providers. Providers of open and distance learning presently offer various levels of support and King (1988:1) contends that these support mechanisms demonstrate “commitments to ease of student access to courses, academic advice, assistance with administrative matters and, in some
instances, counseling of a personal kind”. King (1988:1) further argues that there is recognition, common to modern distance education, that students need support through some regular human contact in their studies. It is no longer generally assumed that students will be sufficiently motivated to complete courses, whatever problems they incur, simply by virtue of their enrolment”.

The unique situation of distance education students increases the importance of student support provision. Student support services are provided to meet the needs of distance education students and to prevent problems that lead to dropout or failure. Student support services can make a positive difference to completion rates and have been found to be effective in retaining distance education students (Brindley and Jean-Louis, 1990), who might otherwise drop out because of factors such as poor study habits, inadequate time management techniques, or unrealistic expectations. According to Brindley and Jean-Louis (1990), students often enter the Institution with no recent educational experience and very little idea of the special demands of self-study consequently; the overwhelming experience of distance educators has been an increasing recognition that adult students, especially those at a distance, require all the personal support they can get if they are to succeed. While it is critical that such students have the support of family and friends in their academic endeavors, the institution has important responsibilities to provide its own forms of support.

1.10.1 ISOLATION OF THE STUDENT:

The adult distance education student is typically isolated geographically from the institution and from contact with peers. For example, on a traditional campus, upon leaving a difficult lecture, a student receives immediate support from peers who also found it confusing, whereas the isolated distance education student gets little such reinforcement and is apt to think that he/she is just not “smart” enough to understand a passage (which may be merely badly written or poorly designed).

This sort of isolation tends to exaggerate the poor self-concept of those who are uncertain of themselves. Without scheduled classes, the student may not be able to get the support services just when he/she requires them. A frequent problem which occurs with telephone-tutoring for example, is that a tutor is not readily available just when a student is ready to deal with him/her; conversely, the tutor may contact the student when he/she is preoccupied with personal or family concerns.
Another basic problem identified by Cross (1981) as critical for the adult distance education student, is basic information – simply knowing what the rules are and what services are available. Even when an institution has a wide range of support services for students, many may not avail themselves of them because they are unaware of their existence.

In addition, “informal” learning of the sort which takes place in common rooms, cafeterias and residences is less readily available in open and distance learning, especially if the student does not attend study sessions or have a supportive network of family and friends.

Clearly, studying through open and distance learning is often a very isolating experience – students are isolated from other students, their tutors, the institution and sometimes their own family and friends. Such isolation must inhibit if not prevent entirely any possibility of dialogue in their studies. Yet, education – at least as perceived in traditional thought – is essentially a process of dialogue. Simpson (2000) argues that if students are not offered the opportunity for dialogue, any kind of education will fail. Moreover, it is not possible in open and distance learning to offer dialogue through course materials only. Overcoming isolation through dialogue can only realistically take place through the process of student support. Chadibe (2002:9) offers the following account on how participation in self-directed study groups enabled BAOU (Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University) students to make better use of distance education courses and to overcome the barrier of isolation experienced by many distance education students. Study groups are set up, usually by students themselves, in conjunction with tutorials, so that tutorials enable study groups and also keep them on track… The reasons respondents gave for participating in a study group are themselves examples of the development of “learner autonomy” among them: “…a study group gives one more insight and enables you to participate. What you have discussed in a group once, you will never forget. If you agree to come to the group knowing something about the chapter you agreed to prepare for that meeting you are forced to do so. It is usually unacceptable if you keep coming up with apologies caused by lack of prior preparations. It benefits us, as we know that each one of us has to prepare beforehand. It also encourages us to study hard. We build confidence in each other; even introverts become extroverts because each one is given a chance to say something. Each one chooses the chapter she wishes to
prepare for the next study group meeting; especially a chapter she wants to understand better”.

1.10.2 REIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE:

Distance education is supposedly non-traditional and innovative, and yet there is a considerable case for suggesting that it can be extremely conservative. It may perpetuate the worst of traditional rote learning, encouraging students to repeat what has been presented rather than really thinking the materials through.

Another disadvantage of the printed self-study package is that it cannot so easily be adapted to the needs of a particular student or to accommodate new knowledge, whereas the volume of face-to-face course content is frequently cut back during the year by a professor who has underestimated the time or found that his/her students cannot cope with the volume and pace. This almost never happens in the distance education setting where the course is the same for every student. One of the most frequent student complaints, despite the best efforts of instructional designers, is that distance education courses are too long and that one has to work twice as hard as required at a traditional university to achieve the same credits. One way of combating this would be to give more powers to course tutors to modify courses.

Some of the students may find it difficult to handle the self-instructional materials with their various access devices, activities and assignments. These would require knowledge of study skills, which can be provided through student support services.

Paul (1988) argues that whatever the merits of the self-instructional materials be it that they try to build the teacher in the text, or that they try to simulate a classroom situation – they remain finite in their character. On the other hand, student needs are “infinite” in their variety, since all human beings are. Open and distance learning has to cater for these infinite variations, which the self-instructional materials, however good, may not completely succeed in doing. To satisfy these variations, it thus becomes necessary to offer some additional support. This is precisely where the role of student support services becomes important in open and distance learning.
1.10.3 PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The literature on dropout and course completion rates in universities, adult education centers and distance education institutions overwhelmingly identifies personal rather than institutional factors as being the critical ones in determining a student’s success or failure (Bean and Metzner, 1985; Dodds, Lawrence and Guiton, 1984 and Eisenberg and Dowsett, 1990). Contrastingly, Brent and Bugbee (1993), Brindley (1987), Carmichael (1995), Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker (1992) and Peters (1992) are of the opinion that institutional support plays a critical role in the adult distance education student’s educational process. Brindley’s (1987) findings have challenged the notion that the institution cannot do much to make a difference in students’ performance. In particular, she found that while changes in personal circumstances and/or time available were critical incidents most frequently reported by distance education students, course completers reported these almost as frequently as non-completers (1987:84). Clearly, both completers and non-completers faced similar difficulties in trying to learn at a distance, but the major difference appeared to be in the ways with which the two groups coped with them. This contributes to the notion that students can be taught coping skills and strategies and hence it reinforces the need for student support services.

1.10.4 GAP BETWEEN STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND REALITIES:

Conway and Powell (1986) described the “non-starter” as a phenomenon that has received particular attention in open and distance learning - a student who enrolls in a course, does not withdraw within the formalised “withdrawal” period but never completes an assignment, quiz or otherwise participates in the course. While many rationales have been suggested for this non-start problem, including poorly designed first units and unreasonably demanding courses (Conway and Powell, 1986) attention has focused more on the gap between students’ expectations for self-study and what they actually face when the course package arrives. In this respect, Woodley and Parlett (1983) include concerns such as ensuring that students have a well-informed sense of the demands on basic skills like time management and study habits, the need for better academic advising and programme planning and a number of other services typically provided by student support services.
1.10.5 STUDENT IDENTITY:

Another, often overlooked factor is the relatively small number of students for whom their identity as “student” is first priority. The adult distance education learners’ “student” identity may be relatively minor, compared to their roles as workers, parents or homemakers. This contrasts with the full-time undergraduates out of secondary school for whom “university student” is almost their exclusive label for the duration of their stay on campus. This is not to suggest that the adult distance education student is less important in any way but simply to note differences in the relative priorities attached to formal learning by these two categories of students. To this effect, Purnell, Cuskelly and Danaher (1996) cite Jegede and Kirkwood (1994) who found that many distance education students are of mature age, have demanding family and work commitments, and have often had a long break since their last formal study. Consequently, the students face a variety of sources of anxiety as they juggle demands from various areas (such as study, work and family), financial costs and the requirements of the study materials themselves. Jegede and Kirkwood (1994: 279) note that “learning within the distance education context may be a daunting prospect for many students” and that student performance may be directly related to the anxiety engendered. This indicates that adult distance education students need support services that contribute to:

- Maintaining Or Increasing Student Motivation;
- Promoting Effective Study Skills;
- Generating A Feeling Of ‘Belonging’ To The Providing Institution Through, For Example, Contact With Tutors And Peers For Both Social And Academic Purposes;
- Providing Guidance Through The Study Materials;
- Providing Access To Resources; And
- Providing Answers To Administrative Queries.

(Brent and Bugbee, 1993; Carmichael, 1995; Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker, 1992; Peters, 1992; Ramaiah and Srinivasacharyulu, 1991)

1.10.6 UNDERSTANDING THE INSTITUTION:

While open and distance learning institutions are dedicated to overcoming barriers which have previously prevented students from gaining access to formal
education, they also create barriers of their own. In particular, students may find the modes of operation, from initial registration and course selection through the various non-traditional delivery options, strange and confusing. Paul (1988) is of the opinion that student support services can play a critical role in assisting students to overcome these, through effective information, orientation and advising roles through a host of programmes offered in regional centers, telephonically, regional seminars, by correspondence and through the application of newer, more interactive communication technology. A student’s first contact with the institution is a critical one and it will usually be with a regional office, student support department or a tutor. The quality of service rendered will play a critical role in that student’s subsequent success in pursuing a distance education course.

In view of the fact that open and distance learning is different from correspondence and conventional study, Calder and McCallum (1998) suggest that systematic efforts need to be made to orient the new entrants into the system. Also, distance education students are mostly adult students and the effectiveness of adult learning varies with learning ability, but is also affected by the approach the adult takes to the learning activity. Undoubtedly, an adult’s approach to a learning activity reflects previous experience, including the extent and type of formal education, recent use of learning procedures and current circumstances that give rise to the need for increased competence.

However, if students are inducted or oriented into the open and distance learning system, they are bound to respond better, understand the system, and thereby perform better. Orientation into the system is therefore essential as it prepares the student for his/her academic socialization with distance learning methods and contributes to his/her understanding of the institution.

1.10.7 MORAL REASONS FOR STUDENT SUPPORT:

This aspect may seem a little strange, but Simpson (2000) is of the opinion that there is a moral aspect to open and distance learning as there is in any educational activity. If one justification for the provision of student support is to help students progress in their studies, there is a higher moral imperative that sometimes conflicts with that – assisting students to do what is right for them in whatever situation they are currently experiencing.
Clearly, there are situations where a student support adviser or tutor will have conflicting demands. Typically, there will be students who are experiencing difficulties – illness, divorce or bereavement – or who are simply struggling with the intellectual demands of a course. There is a fine line between encouraging and supporting such students to continue at whatever personal costs and allowing them to withdraw, perhaps prematurely, to become dropout statistics, and leaving them with a sense of failure. Simpson (2000) contends that this line can only be drawn if sophisticated and clearly thought out student support policies and procedures are in place.

1.10.8 COMBATING GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION:

An effective student support department can complement the use of innovative delivery modes and communication technologies in combating the geographic isolation faced by so many distance education students. Regional centers, travelling tutors and counselors, regional residential schools and self-help orientation and learning materials are critical support services in addition to the basic self-study package provided by distance education institutions.

1.10.9 FINANCIAL AID:

While open and distance learning in itself helps students to afford their tertiary studies by allowing them to study while working or bringing up a family, student support services can assist students further through the provision of financial aid services.

1.10.10 STUDENT ADVOCACY ROLE:

Distance education students are usually isolated from each other and they are more remote from the institution than in conventional institutions. Consequently, it may be easier for conflict and misunderstandings to arise between them and the institution. It happens that they have very little power to influence decision-making or to plead a particular case in a distance education institution. Paul (1988) suggests that it is vital that the student support department provide a strong student advocacy service in assisting students to organised their own associations and in taking up student cases, both individual and collective. This role also involves flexibility on occasion to serve the needs of a particularly disadvantaged individual student.
An objective scrutiny of the above challenges and special characteristics of the open and distance learning system should result in institutions that become less able to rely on what Simpson (2000) refers to as “educational Passchendaelism” – throwing new students at courses in the hope that some will get through – and will need to develop more sophisticated ways of increasing retention.

Some improvements will be made possible by redesigning course materials but much more will have to be achieved through enhancing and developing student support services. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, one characteristic of open and distance learning is its association with high dropout rates (at least in comparison with conventional institutions). As a result, there are implications for institutions as governments throughout the world take an increasingly instrumental view of education and start to link funding to outcomes or success and not to access. The rationale for the establishment of many open and distance learning institutions is to become more accessible to educationally disadvantaged students. Since such students are more likely to drop out there is danger that widening access offers such students not an open door but a revolving door that sweeps them out of the institution as fast as they enter. Widening access will therefore imply a consequent enhancement and focusing of support for such students. In addition, as open and distance learning provision grows, so competition mounts. As such, Tait and Mills (2002) note that the majority of higher education institutions now in existence offer some part-time study and many also offer some opportunity for distance study. Tait and Mills (2002) elaborate that some universities have as many as 50% of their student body as “mature” students. The multi-mode university is evident, where students can move between full-time and part-time, and campus- and distance-based modes, in a relatively seamless way according to their life situation over a number of years. This offers a very serious challenge and where students have a choice, they will judge institutions by both the quality of the materials they produce and – probably even more – by the standards of student support they offer.

From the above discussion it becomes apparent that the implementation of a student support model should incorporate and aim to meet the unique challenges and needs of distance education students at various stages of their studies. The researcher is of the opinion that the development and implementation of such a student support model calls for and stresses the responsibility of the Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar open University
to determine and address its distance education students’ needs and expectations. This model of support services should represent and integrate these needs and expectations.

Bearing all of this in mind, it is essential to explain what support services are and what types of support services are provided to distance education students through various stages of their studies.

1.10.11 THE PROVISION OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING:

In open and distance learning, student support services are instrumental in making two-way educational communication possible. According to Tait (1995), student support means the range of activities that complement the mass-produced materials which make up the most well-known element in distance learning. These activities have the key conceptual component of supporting the individual learning of the student, whether alone or in groups, while in contrast the mass-produced study materials are identical for all students.

1.10.11.1 WHAT ARE SUPPORT SERVICES?

A range of services are provided through activities such as:

- Advice/Counseling;
- Induction/Orientation Sessions;
- Tutoring Individually and in Groups;
- The Learning of Study Skills, Including Examination Skills;
- Peer Group Support;
- Feedback Concerning Assessment and Progress;
- Language Support;
- Career Guidance; and
- Administrative Problem Solving. (Tait, 1995)

According to Keegan (1989), it is the provisions of student support services that distinguishes distance education from private/correspondence study and teach-yourself programmes. It is in recognition of the challenges and needs unique to distance education students (as discussed in the previous section) that the main objective of the above support services is to motivate students, keep them on the right track, encourage them to make use of the facilities provided and above all facilitate their learning.
Definitions of student support vary. Thorpe describes it as the elements of an open learning system capable of responding to a particular individual student (Thorpe, 1988). Hui (1989) regards it as the support incorporated within the self-learning materials, the learning system and assignment marking, while Wright (1991) refers to it as the requisite student services essential to ensure the successful delivery of learning experiences at a distance. Simpson (2000) defines student support in the broadest term as all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of students in their studies. Simpson (2000) suggests that it falls into two broad areas. The first is academic (tutorial) support – which deals with supporting students with the cognitive, intellectual and knowledge issues of specific courses or sets of courses. The second is non-academic or counseling support – the support of students in the affective and organizational aspects of their studies.

In addition, Robinson (1995) has viewed student support as having three components: the elements that make up the system, their configuration, and the interaction between them and the students, which creates its dynamics. Elements of the system are:

- Personal Contact Between Students And Support Agents, Individuals or Groups, Face-To-Face or Via Other Means;
- Peer Contact;
- The Activity of Giving Feedback To Individuals on Their Learning;
- Additional Materials Such as Advice Notes or Guides;
- Study Groups and Centers, Actual or Electronic; and

Configuration of these elements varies, depending on the requirements of course design, infrastructure of the country, distribution of students, available resources, and the values and philosophy of the open and distance learning institution/provider.

The power of the new information technology lends a new dimension to the concept of student support. The regard for face-to-face interaction even though being limited in distance education, as patently superior to all other forms of interaction, will be overcome with the widespread use of the new information and communication technology (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996). Just as electronic media have transformed the
instructional methods they can also transform the method of providing support to distance education students.

1.10.11.2 TYPES OF SUPPORT SERVICES:

In this section I will be differentiating between the types of support services provided to distance education students through various stages of their study course, namely the pre-entry stage, the course stage and the post-course stage.

➤ THE PRE-ENTRY STAGE:

At the pre-entry level, the situation very often is that the student feels something wanting in his/her life or has a wish to change his/her situation. A student may not be very clear about what he/she wants to do. At this stage the prospective student needs a mixture of information, advice and counseling. Prospective distance education students would need to know about the courses, entry requirements, application procedures, the university/institution, fees charged, the teaching-learning process, and recognition of prior learning. Manjulika and Reddy (1996) and Simpson (2000) include the following types of support required at the pre-entry stage:

- Guidance about the types of programmes and courses available;
- Pre-admission counseling with regard to selection of courses;
- Information regarding the instructional system, entry requirements, fee structure, duration of the programmed of study and recognition of prior learning; and
- Advice regarding fee reimbursement and fee concessions.

➤ THE COURSE STAGE:

The first stage must help the student to identify a line of action. Once a student has been admitted, the student will be issued with the necessary course materials and assignments along with details as how to use study guides or programme guides. At this stage the student may be alarmed at how much work seems to be involved and may be apprehensive about the possibilities of completing the course of study successfully. During this stage the student may also not feel very confident or may become less motivated and think of dropping out. In addition, certain personal and non-academic problems may crop up which may affect his/her studies. Finally, the student may suffer
from examination anxiety. Manjulika and Reddy (1996) and Simpson (2000) suggest that a student might require the following support during this stage:

- An induction/orientation into the instructional system of the organization;
- Distribution of self-instructional materials and assignments;
- Provision of television programmes, radio broadcasts, teleconferencing, and the schedules thereof;
- Provision of library facilities;
- Organization of experiential learning, practical at science laboratories, computer laboratories and industry;
- Organization of assignment evaluation and feedback through tutor comments;
- Development of study skills, time management and structuring of the learning process;
- Provision of counseling and tutoring services (including face-to-face tutorials and schedules thereof);
- Admission and assessment criteria and examination procedures;
- Communication of results of assessment; and
- Provision of relevant, accurate and unbiased information.

➢ THE POST COURSE STAGE:

At this stage the student has taken the required examination. Manjulika and Reddy (1996) and Simpson (2000) suggest that the student might now seek the following support:

- Communication of final results/grades/awards;
- Advice regarding career advancement/job opportunities/future prospects; and
- Guidance and developmental counseling with respect to re-registration in case of failure.

1.10.12 ESTABLISHMENT OF STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY:

Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University was established as per the ordinance No. 5/1994 of Gujarat Government published in extra ordinary gazette on 13th April, 1994. Afterwards this ordinance was given the form of an Act which is known as Act No.14 of 1994 passed by Gujarat State Legislature.
1.10.13 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The distance education student’s needs for a variety of student support services can be well justified. In the literature on student support, many researchers (Sewart, 1983; Brindley, 1988; Rumble, 1993; Tait, 1995; Mills and Tait, 1996; Paul and Brindley, 1996 and Lamb and Smith, 2000) express the conviction that student support services can personalise and humanise distance education systems. While course-materials writing and development tends to focus more on content, support services tend to focus towards facilitating each student’s full development (Brindley, 1988).

In addition, in the literature on student support in open and distance learning, description and prescription outweigh empirical enquiry or research. According to Robinson (1995), publications on student support are often in the form of “how to do it” guidance or reports of experience. These can have practical value but may be a theoretical or unsubstantiated or lack validity when transferred to other contexts. She further maintains that research on student support in open and distance learning does not reflect diversity. Its base is relatively narrow: most published research studies are on formal education, are institutionally based, and usually focus on higher education in the more developed countries. Yet, cultural contexts have considerable implications for the generalisability of the research findings. Models of “good practice” developed in Western institutions are not always appropriate for other countries and cultures as Priyadarshini (1994:462) points out: “While education means spreading awareness and lifting taboos, it does not mean violation of people’s customs and traditions. This must be kept in mind while planning a support system”.

It is for this reason that the researcher carried out a study to evaluate the student support services in open and distance learning at the Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University. It is hoped that this study will help to fill the gap in the limited information available regarding the topic under investigation. Moreover, the study was carried out in the specific context of the Gujarat situation, and the results therefore apply and may be used to facilitate distance learning strategies that will support adult students in Gujarat in a competent manner. The statement of the problem, hypothesis and its main objectives are, “A study to analysis the Management of Learner Support Services System in Distance Education with reference to Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat.”
1.10.14 HYPOTHESIS:

1. Learner support service system (Lsss) of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University is found to be effective and efficient.
2. What is the international trend regarding the provision of student support services for distance education students?
3. Working system of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University for Lsss is assisting to reduce Drop out ratio.
4. The rate of absentisem in classroom counseling is found to be significant.
5. The time gape for completion of course among the students is very significant.
6. The Moto of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University reach to unreached is successfully achieved.
7. Is there some Learner support service system (Lsss) that are some influential and effective and some that should be improved?
8. To what extent does Learner support service system (Lsss) respond to the Expectations and needs of students?
9. What are students opinions of the Learner support service system (Lsss) Provided at Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University at Ahmedabad.
   - Administrative support
   - Academic support
   - Exam support
   - Admission support

1.10.15 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To examine whether the Distance Education University -Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) provides learning facility or not?
2. To review the Learner Support services provided by Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) is to satisfy /accomplish to the learners’ academic requirement in time.
3. To find out the nature of Services transformed from mechanical phase to Digital phase to provide learner support services in better way.
4. To examine the present Learner Support Services (LSS) is effective to reduce the drop-out ratio of the University.
5. To redesign to change the operational scenario of Learner Support Services (LSS) of the university in the technical Mode with a view of Digital era.
6. To examine the Distance learner of the Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) are satisfy with the present support services.

7. To make recommendations that could help to implement a more effective student support system at the Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU).

1.10.16 SCOPE OF STUDY:

- This study is delimited to the effects of distance education within Gujarat it will not examine the effects of Distance Education out of Gujarat.
- This study is delimited to post effects of distance education after year 2004.

1.10.17 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

- This study is primarily based on questionnaire and secondary data published by Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University.
- In some of the Cases University published limited data for purpose of maintain secrecy then those data will not analyses and studied.
- This study is limited with selected centers, category wise students and courses out of available categories.

1.10.18 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Each student as well as each class is unique. Each student brings a different level of preparedness to the class, and the institution must be prepared for each student (Lamb and Smith, 2000). The researcher believes that the provision of student support services is an attempt to be prepared for each student. The need for preparedness through student support was stressed by Stewart in his key-note address to the 16th World Conference of the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) (1992), when he stated:

The objective of a distance institution… is the production of successful students. Students will not easily achieve success if course materials are of poor quality. Nor will them Achieve success if they are not dealt with individually through the student support subsystem. It is clear that the purpose of student support is based on the belief that learner cantered Support services are essential for meaningful learning at a distance and pivotal to student completion (Kuhn and Williams, 1997). The researcher trusts that this study will be of value to the Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) as a
whole, as well as providers of open and distance learning both in Gujarat, and in developing countries with extensive rural communities. It is hoped that the study will:

- Play a role in helping to achieve the mission of the Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) specifically and that of the University in general;
- Offer guidelines to empower and enable the student support department to address the needs of adult students in the Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU);
- In broader terms, contribute to the effective operation and delivery of student support services at open and distance learning institutions. The proposed model for student support, based on the empirical evidence of this study, should enable open and distance learning institutions to continuously and systematically evaluate and monitor their student support sub-systems to determine best practice associated with the way they operate and to establish rational performance goals.

1.10.19 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The provision of effective student support services is probably one of the most important responsibilities of a distance education institution and certainly one that can have the greatest impact on students – the difference between success and failure. In this vein, Paul and Brindley (1996) maintain that with the evolution of distance education in both theory and practice, institutional research has shifted its focus to understanding individuals better: what and how they learn and how they can be encouraged to develop more independence. As a result, the vision of students as passive and somewhat invisible receivers of knowledge has given way to one of students as being much more actively involved in their learning process. These authors stress that within this dynamic, distance educators have been challenged to reconsider the role and purpose of student support systems. There is growing recognition of the central role of student support services in making distance education more responsive to individual students. It is therefore crucial to examine how student support services fit into the distance education system as a whole, since this will help to clarify the role of student support services.
1.10.19.1 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

There are two commonly used conceptual frameworks which set out to explain how support services fit into the Distance Education System, namely the systems approach and the transactional framework.

1.10.19.2 STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AS ONE OF THE ESSENTIAL SUB-SYSTEMS OF THE DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Von Bertalanffy (1950:143) argues that the generally acknowledged central position of the systems theory is the concept of wholeness. System theorists recognise that “the whole is more than the sum of its parts”. He stresses the need to study not only isolated parts and processes of organisms or systems but also to study the operation of the whole and in particular to consider ways in which parts and processes interact. He says: “As a consequence it is not sufficient to study isolated parts and processes since the essential problems are the organising relations that result from dynamic interaction of those parts” (1975:6). The concept of a system can be defined or conceptualised in many ways. Specifically, Von Bertalanffy (1975:7) suggests that a system can be defined as “complexes of elements standing in interaction”. Bleecher (1983:68) contends that “a system is an organised collection of interrelated elements characterised by a boundary and a functional unity”, while Betts (1992:38) sees a system as “a set of elements that function as a whole to achieve a common purpose”. A common thread emerges from these concepts, namely that interaction, interrelatedness, functional unity and functioning as a whole are key elements of conceptualising a system. The systems approach sees distance education as a system with a number of sub-systems, of which student support is one, which are all inter-linked and interdependent. As such, this approach looks at how the sub-systems work and fit together into an integrated whole (Kuhn and Bussack, 1997). Furthermore, it emphasises the need to structure a distance education institution systematically so that it is designed to, and actually does, meet the needs of its distance education students. The person who first tried to describe distance education institutions in this way was Erdos (1975) in her address to the International Conference of the then ICCE (International Council of Correspondence Education), the forerunner of the ICDE. In her paper, she argued that distance education has a recognisable system and identifiable sub-systems.
To fulfill the aims and objectives of the planned educational programme, teaching materials must be prepared for one or more medium of communication – printed matter, radio, television, tape recorder or a combination of two or more media. The prepared teaching material should be distributed to those who want it and their reaction channeled back to the educators. Only by the reaction of students can the instruction be assessed in relation to its objectives. These subsystems of planning the educational programme, the preparation of its teaching material, service to students, and evaluation, all depend on financial resources, and on the administrative organisation and routines of management. Thus, every one of the six sub-systems feeds into, and is dependent upon, each of the others in a tightly interlocked relationship, so that the efficient functioning of the whole system depends on the efficient functioning of each activity within each subsystem (Erdos, 1975). These sub-systems are all important in their own right, but they must work together and they cannot remain static if they are to serve the students. In addition, there is no doubt that the approach to student support, which an institution might take, is usually shaped by their understanding of the primary functions of student support. Tait (2000:289) proposed these as being threefold:

- “Cognitive: supporting and developing learning through the mediation of the standard and uniform elements of course materials and learning resources for individual students;
- Affective: providing an environment which supports students, creates commitment, and enhances self-esteem; and
- Systemic: establishing administrative processes and information management systems which are effective, transparent and overall student-friendly”.

Tait (2000) further points out that these functions are both essential and interdependent, which supports and must be interpreted within the above theoretical framework and address needs on all system levels. The three core functions of student support are truly interrelated and interdependent (Tait, 2000) which stresses the need to study not only isolated parts and processes of the student support system, but also to study the operation of the whole and in particular to consider ways in which parts and processes interact. What is of particular concern is to acknowledge that the operation of the three functions should be seen as a whole and to consider how they interact.

Tait (2000:289) justified the interdependence and interrelatedness of the three core functions of student support and argued that:
Student support can primarily be seen as to do with an administrative process (function three), often from the perspective of efficiency. But where this limited view governs, there will be a diminishment in the second function, relating to the extent to which a student feels committed and comfortable with the institution, and dropout may be more likely to occur. Equally, however, in an institution where administrative procedures or information management are ineffective, for example, not being timely, or being obstructive through admitting no leeway or exceptions, then students will be pushed out. What is less often recognised is the cognitive function of student support, where it includes tutoring and assessment services. Where the support of students mediates teaching embodied in courseware, then it clearly relates to learning, and thus to cognitive outcomes. It also and necessarily relates to the objective of providing an environment where students feel at home, where they feel valued, and which they find manageable.

1.10.20 THE TRANSACTIONAL FRAME WORKS:

Moore’s theory of transactional distance, which is the psychological and communications space that separates the teacher and the learner, includes discussion of “instructional dialogue” and notes that the term dialogue has a greater degree of purposefulness, being “valued by each party”, than the broader term interaction (Moore, 1993:23-24). Tait (1996) also quotes Moore (1983:76) whose work established that in relation to structure – that is to say the pre-written learning and assessment materials – central to distance education was a “relationship that was individual and dialogic”.

According to this framework, a series of transactions are made between the different people involved in a distance education programme:

- Between learner and course material;
- Between learners and tutors;
- Between a learner and (an) other learner(s); and
- Between learners and their institution.

(Kuhn and Bussack, 1997) “Transaction”, in this sense, implies that two parties are involved in an action that involves both of them in some form of communication and usually also some form of contract or agreement. Applied to distance education, this means communication between the providing institution through its administrative or academic staff or its course materials, and the students. In addition to communication, there is a contract involved, with responsibilities assumed by both parties. Similarly,
Basson and Nonyongo (1997) argue that transactional distance, as a concept, derives from the belief that distance education provision is an interactive participatory experience for both the providing institution and for its students. Based on this belief, the provision of distance education should follow a “student-oriented” or “responsive” approach (Basson and Nonyongo, 1997). This orientation foregrounds interaction between institutional requirements and student needs, stresses dialogical communication, and creates space for students to exercise limited forms of control over learning. This orientation emphasises that organisational arrangements should hold together at any one moment the various sub-systems of its provision so that they function holistically to serve students. Nonyongo (1993) endorses this view and is of the opinion that materials writing, support for learning, ongoing analysis of needs and the administration of support services as sub-systems of distance education, are seen to be organically connected, to decrease transactional distance and to promote responsiveness between providers and students. The transactional framework puts the emphasis on the people involved and the agreements between them, rather than on the structures stressed by the system approach. However, these two frameworks are both relative to the understanding and importance of student support services in open and distance learning, since both structure and relationships are important in the provision of effective student support services.

1.10.21 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS AND TERMS:

Distance Education:

It is a process of teaching and learning, where the learner is “quasi-permanently” separated from the teacher and peer group, and teaching is done usually through self-instructional materials (both print and non-print) and communication technology with an emphasis on supported self-study.

Open Education:

It is a system of education that does not operate through the traditional conventions which are essentially restrictive in nature, e.g. admission restrictions or the period of time to be devoted to a course, or restrictions on the number of examinations in a year, etc.
Learner Support Services/ Student Support Services:

It is a broad term which includes in its purview all activities of an open university that intend to help its learners through the system. Learner support service (LSS) may include within its fold such activities as admissions, regional services, course delivery services, examinations and certification. However these activities are common for both conventional and open universities. LSS is used more often to refer to regional services in the context of open universities. LSS is distinguished from Academic Support Services (ASS) which includes such support functions as help to the academic in designing and development of programmes, courses and instructional means. Such services are offered by educational technologists, media experts, graphic experts and printing technologists.

1.10.22 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY:

The study has been organised in the following way:

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

This chapter will deal with concept of open distance learning and learner support services, Theoretical and conceptual frame work of the study Clarification of concepts and terms as well as organization of study.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will deal with need for student support services in distance learning, provision of student support services in open and distance learning and reviews of research work related to present study by various researchers. It includes published research work in research journals, books, research projects, and internet websites.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will deal with research design, Methodology, Pilot testing of the research, Instrument, Population and sampling plan, data collection method, analysis and consideration regarding the study and limitation of the study etc.

CHAPTER 4 - PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter will deal with findings of the study, analysis, findings of the open-ended questions.
CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will deal with overall finds and conclusion given by the researcher on the basis of that findings recommendations will be put forward with a view to make excellent student support services at Dr. Baba saheb Ambedkar open university campus and final reflection.

1.11 SUMMARY:

The first part of this chapter explained the increasing demands for higher education at a time of limited resources and indicated how methods of open and distance learning are regarded as a means of sharing resources and reaching more students. This was followed by a discussion to illustrate that distance education and open and flexible policies have done much to extend accessibility to higher education with specific reference to Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU). Emphasis was shifted to the importance of supplementing distance education learning materials with effective student support services to ensure quality higher education through open and distance learning methods. When considering the specific statement of the problem, this chapter listed four questions to address the evaluation of student support services from the perspective of the adult distance education student. A theoretical framework for this study, which is also part of this chapter, was based on two commonly used conceptual frameworks which set out to explain how student support services fit into a distance education system. Included in this chapter is a section that clarifies important concepts and terms that will recur throughout the study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the organisation of the study.