



Block

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BLOCK 1 SUPPORT SERVICES: NEED AND MECHANISMS

Introduction to the Block

The course on the theme of the 'Learner Support Services' has been divided into five blocks (comprising generally four units in each Block), of which this is the first one.

Experience has shown that though self-instructional materials help a vast majority of learners to work through their chosen courses successfully, there is still a large number of learners who for one reason or the other find it difficult to get the best out of such materials. These learners require additional help to achieve what they want to. The ways and means of providing this additional help are called "support services"

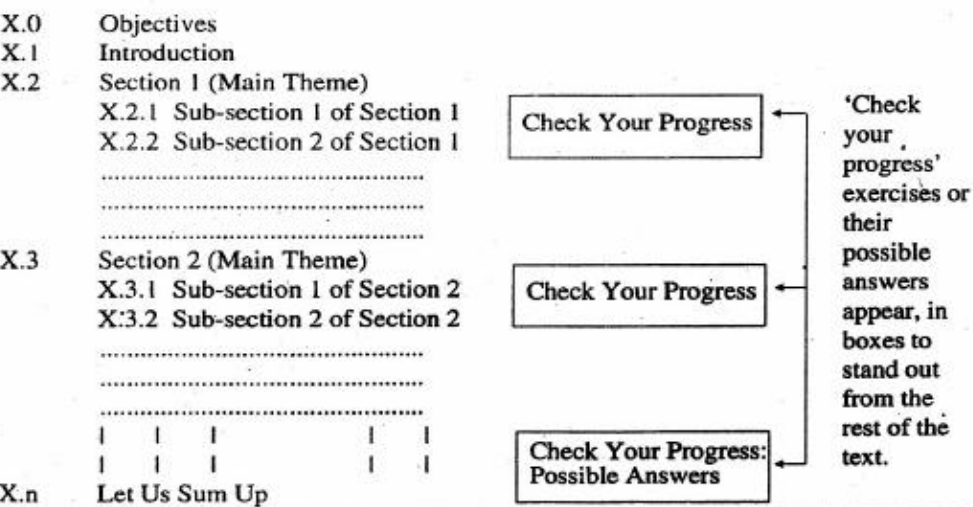
What is it that makes us realize that some learners need additional help? What are the various areas they need help in? What are the various possibilities of providing that help? What can the learners do to help themselves and what institutional mechanisms may be established to provide such help on a large scale? These are the main issues which have been discussed in this block.

The first unit describes what support services are, why they are needed and how they are provided. The second unit deals with *reading skills* as one of the learner based means of successfully working through the courses, while the third unit goes beyond *reading skills* to *study skills*. Study skills are also learner based, but they cover the entire process of working through a course. Subsequently, in unit four we discuss institutional mechanisms meant to provide further help to learners. These mechanisms are Regional and Study Centres. We discuss their structures and functions too.

The last part of unit four also includes discussion on quality assurance and learner support as it is an issue of concern nowadays.

A schematic representation of the design of the units is given below to facilitate your access to the subject matter presented here.

Unit X*



As the scheme suggests, we have divided the units into sections for easy reading and better comprehension. Each section is indicated distinctly by bold capital* and each sub-section by relatively smaller but bold† lower typeface. The significant divisions within sub-sections are in still smaller but bold** lower typeface so as to make it easier for you to see their place within sub-sections. For purposes of uniformity, we have employed the same scheme of 'partitioning' in every unit throughout the course.

- We begin each unit with the section 'Objectives'. It articulates briefly
- What we have presented in the unit, and
- What we expect from you once you complete working on the unit.

In the last section of each unit, under the heading, 'Let Us Sum Up', we summarise the whole unit for purposes of recapitulation and ready reference.

Besides, we have given self-check exercises under the caption 'Check Your Progress' or Self-check Exercises at a few places in each of these units which invariably end with possible answers to the questions set in these exercises.

What, perhaps, you would like to do is to go through the units and jot down important points as you read in the *space provided in the margin*. (**Broad margins in the booklet are there for you to write your notes on.** Make your notes as you work through the materials. This will help you prepare for the examination as well as assimilating the contents. Besides, you will be able to save on time. Do use these margins.) This will help you keep track of and assimilate what you have been reading in the unit, answer the self-check exercises and the assignment questions and easily identify the item(s) to be clarified.

We hope that we have given enough space for you to work on the self-check exercises. The purpose of giving self-check exercises will be served satisfactorily if you compare your answers with the possible ones given at the end of each unit after having written your answer in the blank space.

You may be tempted to have a furtive glance at the possible answer(s), as soon as you come across an exercise. But we do hope that you will overcome the temptation and turn to these possible answers (which are not the best answers necessarily) **only after you write your own.**

These exercises are **not** meant to be submitted to us for correction or evaluation. Instead, the exercises are to function as study tools to help you keep on the right track as you read the units.

On an average, each block will have at least one or a part of one assignment. At times an assignment may expect you to work through more than one unit to prepare your responses. You have to send your assignment responses to your study centre for assessment and comments. In all, you may have to work on two/three assignments per course. Assignments are sent separately and are changed every year.

We suggest the following norms to be strictly practised while you are working through the assignments:

- Write your roll number legibly as indicated in the 'Programme Guide'.
- Before you put down anything in words, assimilate what you have read and integrate it with what you have gathered from your experience to build your answer.
- Make the best use of the block and the additional reading materials for diligently working through the assignments.

UNIT 1 LEARNER SUPPORT — WHAT, WHY AND HOW?

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Learner Support Services
 - 1.2.1 What are support services?
 - 1.2.2 Types of support services
- 1.3 Need for Support Services
 - 1.3.1 Characteristics of distance learners
 - 1.3.2 Characteristics of learning material
 - 1.3.3 Academic socialization
- 1.4 How to Provide Support
 - 1.4.1 Factors affecting the provision of support services
 - 1.4.2 Different models of learner support
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have discussed what learner support services are, why they are needed and how they are being provided.

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- define learner support services;
- list the types of support services;
- state the need for learner support services;
- distinguish between distance learners and conventional learners;
- discuss the factors affecting the provision of support services; and
- categorise the different models of learner support.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

You will agree with us that education, whether it is at a distance or not, is dependent upon two-way communication. There is an increasing realisation in the educational community that simply accessing or assimilating information is not sufficient. In distance education there is a growing need for, and appreciation of, sustained two-way communication in the process of analysing and developing knowledge. Meeting the demands of an educational transaction at a distance is dependent upon communication technologies which provide frequent and regular interaction between teacher and learner, as well as among learners. The focus of much institutional effort has been directed toward the packaging and delivery of knowledge for the independent 'distant' learner and nature of human-to-human and human-to-machine interactions in the learning process.

In this unit we highlight the significance of, and need for, learner support services in distance education.

1.2 LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

In distance education system, learner support services play an instrumental role in making two-way educational communication possible. The term 'learner support' means the range of activities which complement the mass produced materials which make up the most well-known element in distance learning. They cover a wide range of functioning, starting from producing the learning materials and making them available to distance learners upto arranging contact programmes and conducting examinations and providing the final results. The mass produced materials of distance education which replace the lecture as a means of delivery, are printed study materials, television and radio programmes, computer programmes etc. The complementary services are: tutoring and counselling, whether face-to-face, by correspondence, telephone or electronically; interactive teaching through television and radio and other similar activities. These activities have the key conceptual component of supporting the individual learning of the learner, whether alone or in groups, while in contrast the mass-produced elements are identical for all learners, (Tait, 1995).

1.2.1 What are support services?

A range of services are provided through activities such as

- advice/counselling
- 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
- administrative problem solving. (Tait, 1995)

According to Keegan (1989), it is the provision of learner support services that distinguishes distance education from private study and teach yourself programmes. The main objective of these support services is to motivate learners, keep them on the right track, encourage them to make use of the facilities provided and above all facilitate their learning.

Definitions of learner support vary. To take just three: one describes it as the elements of an open learning system capable of responding to a particular individual learner (Thorpe, 1988); another as the support incorporated within the self-learning materials, the learning system and assignment marking (Hui, 1989); and third as the requisite learner services essential to ensure the successful delivery of learning experiences at a distance (Wright, 1991). Some authors include learner support as an integral part of a course, others place it as a supplement. Some include administration and delivery operations in their definitions, others do not, (Robinson, 1995).

Further, Robinson (1995) has viewed learner support as having three components: the elements that make up the system, their configuration, and the interaction between them and the learners, which creates its dynamics.

The elements of the system are:

- personal contact between learners 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 handbook, advice notes or guides;
- study groups and centres, actual or virtual (electronic);
- access to libraries, laboratories, equipment, and communication networks.

Configuration of these elements varies, depending on the requirements of course design, infrastructure of a country, distribution of learners, available resources, and the values and philosophy of the open and distance education provider.

The power of the new information technology lends a new dimension to the concept of learner 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 technologies. Just as electronic media has transformed the instructional methods it can also transform the method of providing support to distance learners. Figure 1 given below, gives the different types of electronic learning support.

Access to Institution	Dial in access Home Page E-mail
General Information	Web Pages Home Page Bulletin Boards Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS)
Pre-admission Counselling	IVRS E-mail Bulletin Boards
Registration	On-line
Course Content	CD-ROM On-line Hyperlink to other WWW sources
Counselling/tutoring	E-mail IVRS Conferencing Chat sessions
Group Discussion	Conferencing
Projects/Assignments	On-line
Feedback on Project/Assignment	E-mail
Examination	On-line

Figure 1: Types of Electronic (E) Support.

Check Your Progress 1

What are learner support services?

- Notes:** a) Please do not proceed until you have attempted the question.
b) Write your answer in the space given below.
c) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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1.2.2 Types of support services

In this section we will be differentiating between the types of support services provided to distance learners through various stages that they go through namely — the pre-entry stage, during the course, and post course stages.

Pre-entry stage

At the pre-entry level, the situation very often is that the learner feels something wanting in his/her life or has a wish to change his/her situation. He/she may not be very clear about what he/she wants to do. At this stage the prospective learner needs a mixture of information, advice and counselling. Prospective distance learners would be wanting to know about the courses, entry requirements, application procedures, the university/institution, fees charged, the teaching-learning process, the recognition of the awards, employment prospects etc

The type of support required at this pre-entry stage would include:

- guidance about the types of programmes and courses available,
- pre-admission counselling with regard to selection of courses,
- information regarding the instructional system, entry requirements, fee structure, duration of the programme of study and recognition of awards, and
- advice regarding fee reimbursement and fee concessions.

During the course stage

The first stage must help the learner to identify a line of action. Let us assume that he/she has decided to take a particular course and sought admission to that course. Once admitted, he/she would get his/her course materials and assignments along with details, as how to use study guides or programme guides. He/she may be alarmed at how much work seems to be involved. He/she may be apprehensive about the possibilities of completing the course of study successfully. During this stage the learner may not feel confident enough or may become less motivated and may think of dropping out. Also certain personal and non-academic problems may crop up which may affect his/her studies. He/she may finally suffer from examination anxiety.

Thus once admitted, he/she would require the following support:

- an induction into the instructional system of the organisation,
- distribution of self-learning materials, assignments etc.,
- provision of TV programmes, radio broadcasts, teleconferencing etc.,
- provision of library facilities,
- organisation of practicals at science labs, computer labs, industry etc.,
- organisation of assignment evaluation and feedback through tutor comments,
- development of study skills and structuring his/her learning,
- provision of counselling and tutoring services (including limited face-to-face sessions),
- conduct of examinations,
- communication of results of assessment, and
- provision of relevant, accurate and unbiased information.

Post course stage

The learner at this stage has taken the required examination. He/she may not receive his/her final grade card/award. He/she may also require information on possible careers and career guidance in general. Support sought for at this stage would be:

- communication of final results/grades/awards, convocation etc.,
- advice regarding career advancement/job opportunities/future prospects etc., and
- obtaining feedback on the programmes and services provided.

Check Your Progress 2

Study section 1.2.2 carefully once again and list all the types of support required by a distance learner.

- Notes:**
- Please write your answer in the space given below.
 - Please don't write out full sentences. Instead use words or phrases.
 - Please don't proceed till you complete your answer.
 - Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

Pre entry stage	During the course	Post-course stage

1.3 NEED FOR SUPPORT SERVICES

Learner support services become important in open and distance education because of the special characteristics of this system of learning. When the learners join this scheme for the first time they find themselves in an unfamiliar situation. They usually associate learning with being taught by a teacher who is physically present. But, now they will be expected to learn for a good proportion of their time on their own, in the absence of a teacher. It should also be remembered, that the learners are mostly adults studying part-time. Many of them are not generally confident of their capacity to learn through unfamiliar learning packages that are sent to them. This can be a disorienting experience, not only for fresh learners doing basic courses, but also for experienced, who may have gained their qualifications through more conventional routes.

The need for learner support can be more clearly understood if we look into the type of learners that enrol in distance education and also the specific features of the learning materials and methods used.

1.3.1 Characteristics of distance learners

A general comparison of learners in conventional system and distance system reveals that whereas in the former, learning is a full time as well as a major activity for learners, for a distance learner it is a part-time and secondary activity. This part-time adult learner will in most cases have returned to a role he/she has given up some time ago. The conventional learner belongs to an institution, but a distance learner is a member of many institutions, most of which (e.g. work, family etc.) take precedence over the institution which provides his/her courses. In the conventional system, the learner is in easy contact with the institution. However, in the distance education system he/she is isolated, as contact with the university is infrequent and often takes place across a distance.

Table 1 indicates the differences between learners in conventional and open learning systems: (Koul *et al.*, 1989):

Table 1: Learners in Conventional and Open Systems: A Comparison

Conventional System	Distance Education System
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learning is a full time and major activity. ● The learner remains in one role, and continues the membership of a learning institution. ● The learner 'belongs' to an institution. ● The learner is usually young. ● The learner is in easy contact with fellow learners. ● The learner has easy access to the institutional resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learning is a part-time secondary activity. ● The learner returns to a role he/she had some time ago. ● The learner is a member of many institutions (e.g. work, family), most of which take precedence over the institution which gives the courses. ● The learner is an adult. ● Contact with fellow learners may not be easy. ● The learner's contact with the institution is infrequent and often takes place across a distance.

Thus, a learner in the conventional system has to attend classes on a full time basis unlike his/her counterpart in the distance education system who needs to devote only a part of his/her time to his/her studies. Distance learners who are mostly adults, have equal responsibilities towards their job, family and other commitments. A “conventional” learner is not burdened with such commitments; he/she mostly identifies himself/herself with the institution and the peer group that he/she is associated with.

According to Koul (1989), generally we find three categories of learners in distance learning system. The first category is that of learners who have confidence in their ability to work on their own. They are confident enough to think that they can succeed without any guidance from the counsellor. They are the ones who may not make any contact with counsellors throughout the programme. However, it should be remembered that simply having confidence in their ability to succeed without the help of a counsellor need not necessarily lead to success. Many of them, in spite of being very sure of their abilities may finally need help. This help should, therefore, be available for them as well.

The second category of distance education learners are the ones who actually need talking to. Having someone to help in solving their problems gives them reassurance about the system as well as builds a little more confidence in them. For them, a face-to-face support system can make all the difference between withdrawing from the course and completing it.

The third category of learners, who fall between the above two types, are the ones who are really sitting on the wall. If only they run into intractable problems they approach the counsellor for help.

1.3.2 Characteristics of learning material

The need for learner support also arises because of certain characteristic features of our learning materials. Our learning package consists of self-learning materials which learners joining the distance education system for the first time may not be quite familiar with.

In fact, some of the learners may find it difficult to handle the self-learning materials with their various access devices, activities and assignments. These would require knowledge of study skills, which can be provided through human support.

Whatever be the merits of the self-learning 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. They cannot go beyond a point. On the other hand, learner needs are ‘infinite’ in their variety, since all human beings are thus. So distance education has to cater to 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 the counsellor becomes important in distance education. This is dealt with in Block 2, Unit 1 of this course.

Check Your Progress 3

What are the differences between distance learners and conventional learners?

Notes: a) Please don't proceed unless you attempt the question.
b) Write your answer in the columns given below.

Conventional Learner	Distance Learner

1.3.3 Academic socialization

A very important issue is that of academic socialization. In view of the fact that open and distance learning is different from correspondence study and teach yourself programmes, systematic efforts need to be made to orient the new entrants into the system. Also distance learners are mostly adult learners 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 extent and type of formal education, recent use by learning procedures and current circumstances that give rise to the need for increased competence.

However, if learners are inducted into the open and distance learning system they are bound to respond better to the system and thereby perform better. It would be ideal for all distance and open education institutions to organize induction programmes for their new entrants as these programmes are designed to assist learners in many ways which are listed below:

- help in their transition to life as a tertiary learner particularly as distance learners;
- develop a sense of identification with the institution and familiarize them with its functioning;
- introduce them particularly to the instructional package and delivery system;
- introduce them to facilities they may access during their period of study;
- familiarize them with the self directed learning method and thereby structuring goal independence and individual accountability;
- help, encourage and motivate learner by using a local environment;

- help minimize a number of post-entry problems, thereby reducing the dropout rate.

Therefore, induction into the system is very essential as it prepares the learner for his/her academic socialization with distance learning methods and contributes to his/her preparation for distance learning.

1.4 HOW TO PROVIDE SUPPORT

There is no set pattern of learner support in distance education. The nature of learner support services varies from institution to institution.

Among distance educators there are basically two different approaches to learner support: one relying exclusively or almost exclusively on non-contiguous communication, i.e. communication by media like the written, recorded or tele-transmitted word; the other contiguous, including face-to-face contacts as more or less self-evident elements of distance education.

This difference is that — although it does not completely coincide with two other dichotomies: there are two distinct types of learners, those taking the odd course to supplement their education and those who study at a distance to acquire a degree or a similar measure of formal competence. Furthermore, there are large-scale and small-scale approaches to distance education.

The large-scale approach implies developing courses for very large numbers of learners, which means printing or producing in other forms hundreds or thousands of copies of each individual course, while at the same time providing individual tuition through the tutors' marking and commenting on individual learners' work as well as, in some cases, offering face-to-face tutorials. The small-scale approach usually expects of a course author that he/she should teach his/her learners at a distance and also at times, face-to-face. Whereas the large-scale approach in most cases consciously benefits from the economies of scale (Sewart et al., 1983).

It is evident that the differences indicated result in different views of how learner support should be provided and in the actual practice of providing it. This applies to counselling as well as to teaching. A common denominator in most systems where responsibility is taken for learner support is what David Sewart has called a continuity of concern (Sewart et al., 1983).

We shall now have a look at the factors which affect the provision of support services.

1.4.1 Factors affecting the provision of support services

Many factors contribute to the development of a learner support system. No learner support system can be designed in isolation. The factors that need to be considered while designing a learner support system are: the aims and resources of the organisation; the instructional package employed; the delivery form; the target audience and also the socio-economic educational culture in which it operates and the level of availability of media at the homes/workplaces of the target audience.

1.4.2 Different models of learner support

Examples of systems of distance education are legion. Sewart (1989) has classified them into three broad groups. The first group covers the traditional correspondence schools who send materials by post to the learners who study in isolation and send back assignments to the school for marking and comments. This postal communication is the only interaction between the institution and the learner. The second group is found mainly in Eastern Europe and is less well known. The learners receive the materials at regular (normally fortnightly) intervals and have compulsory seminars. They study alone but receive motivation, explanations and assessment through the compulsory classes. This group is not dissimilar to the conventional patterns of teaching in higher education where learners study alone but also attend lectures and seminars. Hence some theorists of distance education would not accept this as "true" distance education.

The third group embraces the UK Open University model. An enormous variety of forms of communication and support is offered to the learners and the learners choose whichever forms of communication suit them best. These institutions use either mediated or face-to-face means or a combination of both through the medium of study centres, regional centres or communication networks. We have dealt with the institutional arrangements for learner support in Unit 4 of this Block.

The latter group represents a change from the traditional "industrial" model that is represented by the first group mentioned above. The focus of the distance education institutions of the first group is characterised by course design and production of instructional packages, whereas the third model represents a more "distributed" model based on study centers or communication networks. Coincident with the movement from industrial to distributed model is a curricular shift from what Boot and Hodgson (1987) term the "dissemination" approach which takes as its primary purpose the intellectual and personal growth of the individual. The bases for the "development" approach include a reconsideration of the position of learners in the instructional transaction — one which views them less as recipients of information and more as active participants in the learning process. A further change in perspective involves the adoption of an essentially constructivist approach to curriculum development. This involves the use of relevant instructional designs that are linked to the personal situations of learners, especially to their work and career expectations, and more social or interactive arrangements for learning. Interactive learning can occur in mediated settings available through audio and computer conferencing technology or in face-to-face situations such as are provided in study centres (Commonwealth of Learning, 1993).

Check Your Progress 4

What are the different models into which distance education institutions can be classified based on the nature of learner support provided by them?

- Notes:** a) Read this section carefully and write your answer in the space given below.
b) Please don't proceed till you answer the question.

In section 1.4 we briefly touched on how distance education institutions provide learner support. In Unit 4 of this block we have discussed in detail, the institutional arrangements for learner support with examples from a few countries. Also, Block 4 of this Course ES-313, is comprised of case studies of learners support systems of open and distance education institutions in both industrial and developing countries.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we:

- explained what learner support services are
- described the types of support a distance learner needs
- discussed the need for providing learner support services
- explained how learner support is provided.
- categorised distance education institutions into three groups based on the learner support systems provided by them.

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1

In your answer you would have described the various services which are provided to distance learners in supporting their independent study such as counselling, tutoring, feedback on assessment, administrative support, libraries, laboratories, peer group interaction etc. which put together are termed as 'learner support services' in distance education.

2

Pre-entry	During the Course	Post Course Stage
guidance about types of programmes	induction into the system	final results (grade card)
pre-admission counselling	self-instructional materials and assignments	convocation
information regarding the system	regular broadcasts and telecounselling	advice regarding career/other prospects
advice regarding fee concessions etc.	library facilities	giving feedback to the institution
	practicals	

Pre-entry	During the Course	Post Course Stage
	assignment evaluation and feedback on assessment	
	counselling & tutorial sessions	
	examinations	
	results	
	information from time to time	

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Conventional Learner	Distance Learner
is a full-time learner	is a part-time learner
belongs to an institution	is a member of many institutions
is usually young	is an adult
is in easy contact with peer group	contact with peer group is not easy
has easy access to institutional resources	contact with the institution is very infrequent and access is often at a distance

4

You would have considered all the three models: i) namely the traditional correspondence schools where all interaction is through pure postal correspondence; ii) the second model is rather uncommon where the learners receive materials by post but attending (face-to-face) seminars is compulsory, iii) the third group embraces the UKOU model in which type a variety of communication and support is provided both through mediated and face-to-face means.

UNIT 2 READING SKILLS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Basics of Reading
 - 2.2.1 Defining reading
 - 2.2.2 Reading: an integrative process
- 2.3 Taxonomy of Reading
 - 2.3.1 Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension
 - 2.3.2 Stages in reading
- 2.4 Reading: SQ3R Technique
- 2.5 Teaching Reading Comprehension Skills
- 2.6 Reading and Distance Learning
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have attempted to make you aware of what 'reading' means in general and to locate its place in the process of distance education.

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- define 'reading';
- identify the levels of 'reading';
- teach SQ3R technique to your learners, dependents or friends, and adopt it effectively for your study purposes;
- list the important reading comprehension skills; and
- relate teaching of 'reading' to distance education.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

There is virtually no systematic teaching of reading skills either at the lower or at the higher levels of education. Consequent on this, learners suffer considerably at advanced levels. But many of us are not aware of the value attached to reading; and some of us tend to ignore the significance of teaching reading systematically. The primary reason for such attitudes, perhaps, is our naive concept of 'reading'. In this unit, therefore, we present the basic concept and the underlying theories of reading. Further, we try to establish that reading is not an unconscious use of a set of skills. Instead, good readers use knowledge from a variety of sources to derive meaning embedded in the text, adjusting these derivations as they go along. Studies of learning theories have also shown that learners retain information over an extended period of time, if they are able to relate what they are reading to the materials which they have already read. Learners as active consumers of information must have strategies to process, assimilate and accommodate information. In other words, they should be able to relate new experiences to what they already know. No one can do this for the reader. Nevertheless, teachers can *help* facilitate reading and the instruction and putting together

An attempt is made in this unit to demarcate the levels of reading—of course, with a cautionary note that it is difficult to draw a fine boundary line between any two or more of them. Further, a complete section (2.6) is allocated to highlight the significance of 'reading' with reference to distance teaching/learning.

2.2 BASICS OF READING

Reading can be loosely defined as the ability to make sense of written or printed words. The reader uses the symbols to activate the information from his/her memory and subsequently uses this information to arrive at a plausible interpretation of the writer's message.

However, it is easy to ignore how complicated this process is. For most people, reading is an automatic process and there is rarely any occasion for them to pause for a minute and consider what the process entails.

A skilled reader is normally able to identify any one of the words in his/her repertoire in a fraction of a second. He/she can do this, despite the fact that the constituent letters are frequently represented by different shapes from one text to another—in the case of handwriting, from one instance of the letter to the next. He/she can even identify words which have been misprinted or misspelt. Accomplished readers can thus cope with the fact that many words have different meanings in different contexts. They can use this knowledge to unfold ambiguity and appreciate equivocations. They can combine the meanings of individual words to derive meanings of sentences and more extended passages of prose and poetry. This may involve them in drawing inferences, recalling relevant experiences, constructing images of scenes, and appreciating nuances of meaning.

Considering the fact that reading involves a number of processes, we cannot be content with the statement that reading is to decode printed or written words. It is necessary therefore to attempt to define reading—even though it is a difficult task.

2.2.1 Defining reading

Different people use the term 'reading' differently and much confusion can arise from the possible consequent misunderstanding. The term has a number of meanings. Since the meaning of the word on any particular occasion depends largely on the context in which it occurs, we should not therefore expect to find a single definition for reading.

A look at the range of reading styles will show the inadequacy of definitions, such as, 'reading is the identification of written words' or 'reading is the appreciation of the author's thoughts'. Neither of which, for example, would seem to apply to all the words we skip when we are trying to identify a number in a telephone directory.

Consider the following and say who, according to you, performs the act of reading.

- Amar is able to decode correctly all the words in a passage; however, he cannot answer any questions on the passage.

- Beeni makes a number of mistakes in decoding words, but the mistakes which she makes do not seem to prevent her from answering any of the questions on the passage.
- Cinthia reads a passage on 'Nuclear Weapons'—a subject about which she has very strong feelings. She has difficulty in answering the questions based on the passage because of her attitude towards the theme of the passage.
- Durai can decode the words in the passage; and he thinks that he knows the meanings of all the words. However, Durai cannot answer the questions on the passage.

Record your response in the space provided below:

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It is likely that you may have thought of words from at least one of the following groups to defend why you have chosen a particular person (of the four given above) as actually engaged in reading:

- understand, interpret, meaning, sense, etc.
- decode, decipher, identify, etc.
- articulate, speak, pronounce, etc.

(Or, perhaps you have thought of words connected with the ones given in the list above.)

If you have used the ideas reflected in group (ii), you probably wanted to say that unless we correctly recognise the words we read in print, we cannot even begin to read. And, if you have used words similar to those in group (iii), you probably recollect your own experience both as a learner and a teacher. Whatever the reason for your reading of some materials, it is unlikely that you are interested in the pronunciation of what you read, except in a tiny minority of cases. It is even less likely that you are interested in the grammatical structure used. You read, because you want to get something from the writing—facts, ideas, enjoyment. Whatever it may be, you want to get the message that the writer has encoded. In other words, you are interested in what the message means.

With this in view, if we look at the first group of words once again, we realize that it is the most important group of words.

Now probably you can say more confidently who among the four is actually reading.

Beeni is the only person who is actually *reading* because she is the only one who understands what she is reading. Although Amar can verbalise the

words, he has no comprehension of them. Cinthia can also decode the words but her strong feelings about the topic have prevented her from getting the message which the writer has tried to convey. Durai can decode the words, and he knows the meanings of the individual words but he is either not able to get the sense of the whole passage or does not know the meaning of the words as used in the given context. We should mention here that we do not deny the significance of word-recognition for reading comprehension. However, word-recognition alone does not guarantee reading comprehension.

A broad definition that has been widely used and accepted is that reading is a process whereby a reader brings meaning to and gets meaning from print. (It, of course, applies to other media too.) This implies that readers bring their backgrounds, their experiences, as well as their emotions into play in order to derive meaning from a text. If we are in conversation with someone, we can stop him/her and ask for explanations whenever we need them. Similarly, when we have difficulties in reading, we need to interrogate the text. Since the writer is seldom available for consultation, the text is our only reference; and reading can be, therefore, described as our active interrogation of or interaction with a text.

To elaborate, the message that a writer wants to convey does not merely lie in the text, waiting to be passively absorbed by the reader. Instead the reader with his/her background knowledge and experience breathes meaning into the text so as to tailor it into comprehensive chunks to suit his/her purpose. Thus, the reader is actively involved in getting the meaning out of a given text. Reading is thus an interactive process

By putting together what has been said so far about reading, we may define it as a multifaceted and layered process in which a reader by actively interacting with the text, tries to decode what has been encoded by the writer/author. In the process he/she establishes a meaningful communication with the writer/author.

Check Your Progress 1

Say why *reading* is seen as *active interaction* with the reading material. Your answer need not exceed 9 lines.

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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2.2.2 Reading: an integrative process

By using a broad or global definition of reading, we are looking upon reading as a total integrative process that includes the following three domains of learning:

- i) the cognitive;
- ii) the perceptual (note that here we are not talking about the *psychomotor domain*; recall Block 1, ES-312); and
- iii) the affective.

We shall touch upon each of these domains in the given order.

The cognitive domain

When we say that a reader constantly interacts with a text to get the message of the writer, we imply that reading is an act of thinking. If a reader does not spend at least as much time in actively thinking about what he/she has read as he/she has spent in reading, he/she is simply insulting the author. Moreover, in such a case the reader fails to gain optimum benefits from his/her reading.

Learners who have difficulty in working at different levels of cognition will have difficulty in comprehending what they are reading. That is, they cannot involve themselves in selecting, transforming, organising, and remembering information. If we look at the brain as an active consumer of information, able to interpret information and draw inferences from it as well as ignore some information and selectively attend to other information, we give the learner an important active role and responsibility in learning from instruction. Readers have to, therefore, relate what they are reading to their past experiences, interpret information, infer meanings from it, ignore some information and attend to other relevant information.

The cognitive domain, thus, includes all the comprehension skills. Teachers can help learners in developing thinking skills by helping them acquire necessary strategies and by giving them practice in using these strategies.

The perceptual domain

The term 'perception' can be defined as giving meaning to sensations, or the ability to organise stimuli on a particular area. Our background, experiences and our sensory perceptors organise our stimuli. For example, if our eyes are defective then those perceptions involving sight would be distorted. And in the act of reading, visual perception is the most important factor as eye-movements influence and control what the reader perceives.

Generally, depending on how a learner perceives a word—as a whole or individual letters—he/she will be called either a good or a bad reader. (This once again depends largely on how we perceive *reading*.) The adult readers are able to perceive more complex and extensive graphic patterns as complete units. They are also able to give meaning to mutilated words.

Besides sensory perceptors, the perceptual process is also influenced by affective factors. If the reader, for example, is biased towards a topic, he/she deletes, adds to, or distorts what is being read.

The process of decoding the written words and interacting with the text depends mainly upon the following factors:

- i) motivation—the attitudinal factor, the need to identify the unknown part or parts of a particular text/word;
- ii) attention—as a powerful selector or stimulus;
- iii) grouping of stimuli—recognisable syllables and other patterns for making optimum use of a limited span of attention;
- iv) contrast—the contrastive letter patterns that represent contrastive sound patterns; and
- v) feedback—a cyclic process ranging from the examination of letter groupings of the written word to the sounds of the spoken one; for example, the application of the skills of word-perception to the written word during silent reading.

The affective domain

This domain includes our feelings, emotions and attitudes. As mentioned earlier, the perceptual process is influenced by affective factors. For example, if we are angry and see the word 'food' we would perhaps read it as 'fool'. If we have adverse feelings about certain things, these feelings will influence how we interpret what we read. Our feelings also influence what we decide to read. (See page 21 where we said that Cinthia has difficulty in answering questions on a subject about which she has strong feelings.) Obviously, attitudes exert a directive and dynamic influence on our readiness to respond to what we read.

Check Your Progress 2

Substantiate, in not more than 10 lines, the statement 'reading is an integrative process'.

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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2.3 TAXONOMY OF READING

Before we discuss the topic under consideration in detail, we should mention here that one cannot ask such a straightforward question as to whether the process of reading necessarily entails comprehension, for the answer is that sometimes it does and sometimes it does not entail comprehension.

Let us give an illustration. If we suggest that someone should read a particular text, we obviously intend that he/she should comprehend it. It would be redundant to say that we wanted him to read and comprehend the book. But on the other hand, it would be quite reasonable for a learner to reply that he/she has already read the book but could not comprehend it. We could not then conclude that the learner did not read the book just because he/she did not comprehend it. However, we assume that reading subsumes comprehension. And so for our purpose, *taxonomy of reading* or *of reading comprehension* would mean one and the same thing.

2.3.1 Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension

A number of taxonomies of reading comprehension exist and many appear to be similar to one another. Perceived inadequacy of the earlier taxonomy or taxonomies prompts the development of a new one. As a result, different terminologies may be used for category headings, but descriptions of the categories may be kept unchanged. Most of the existing taxonomies are adaptations, in one way or other, of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives in the cognitive domain. Bloom's taxonomy is based on an ordered set of objectives ranging from the more simplistic skills to the more complex ones.

Of the many taxonomies which have tried to categorise reading comprehension, Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension, is widely accepted. Now, we shall talk about Barrett's taxonomy in some detail here.

This taxonomy consists of four categories. These are:

- i) literal comprehension;
- ii) inferential comprehension;
- iii) evaluation; and
- iv) appreciation.

We shall touch upon each of these categories in the given order.

Literal comprehension

Literal comprehension requires the recognition or recall of ideas, information and happenings that are explicitly stated in the material read. By implication, it requires the learner to locate or identify explicit statements in the reading material itself or in the exercises that use the explicit content from this material. And literal comprehension tasks demand that the learner produces from memory explicit statements from a given bit of reading matter.

Literal comprehension tasks may be looked down upon at higher levels of education. But the importance of these tasks cannot be denied, as a learner's ability to deal with them is essential and fundamental to his/her ability to

deal with other types of comprehension tasks. We should also mention here that all literal comprehension tasks are not necessarily of equal difficulty. For example, the recognition of a single fact or incident may be somewhat easier than that of a number of facts and incidents. A more difficult task might be to recall a number of events or incidents and the sequence of their occurrence in a text.

Some samples of literal comprehension tasks are:

- recognition of details, main ideas, sequence, comparison;
- recognition of cause **and** effect relationship (i.e. the learner in this instance may be asked **indicate** or identify or produce from memory reasons for certain incidents, events or a character's actions explicitly stated in the text);
- recognition of character traits (i.e. the learner may be asked to call up from memory statements about a character).

Inferential comprehension

The term 'inference' means something derived by reasoning—something, that is not directly stated but only suggested in the text. This may be a logical conclusion **that** is drawn from statements through deduction or induction.

Inferential comprehension is demonstrated by the learner when he/she successfully synthesising content of the selected reading matter. His/her personal knowledge, **intuition** and imagination are the bases for conjectures or hypotheses in such a case

Inferential tasks related to any narrative text (novels, for example) may permit divergent or creative conjectures because of the open-ended possibilities provided by such writing. On the other hand, expository texts, more often than not, call for convergent hypotheses.

Examples of inferential tasks related to reading are:

- inferring the main idea, supporting details, sequence, comparisons, cause and effect relationship, character traits;
- inferring outcomes (i.e. the learner is required to read a part of the text and guess the outcome of the text);
- inferring about figurative language (i.e. the learner may be asked to infer literal meanings from the author's figurative language);
- 'reading between the lines' or drawing general inferences.

Evaluation

Evaluation requires learners to make judgements about the content of their reading. Evaluation is demonstrated by a learner when he/she makes judgements about the content of a reading selection by comparing it with external criteria—information received from outside the text, his/her own experience and background, etc.

Examples of evaluation tasks related to reading are given below:

- judgements about reality or fantasy, facts or opinions;

- judgements about appropriateness (i.e. the learner is required to determine whether or not certain chunks/parts of a text are relevant to the development of the theme of the text etc.);
- judgement about worth, desirability and acceptability (i.e. the learner may be asked to comment on the suitability of a character's action in a particular incident or episode etc.).

Appreciation

Appreciation has to do chiefly with the learner's awareness of the literary techniques, forms, styles and structures employed by the author to stimulate the desired response. Obviously, tasks which fall into this category require varying degrees of inference and evaluation, yet the prime motive of the tasks is to heighten the learner's sensitivity and help them to appreciate the techniques used by the author.

Examples of tasks that involve appreciation are:

- emotional response to a plot or theme;
- identification with characters and incidents;
- reaction to the author's use of language;
- sensitivity towards imagery, diction etc.

A word of caution

The tasks listed within each category should not be taken as discrete comprehension skills to be specifically developed. They should be viewed as examples of tasks that contribute to the development of the general ability prompted by the category. Moreover, the tasks listed are not exhaustive, rather they are only illustrative. You should also keep in mind that the order of the categories in the taxonomy does not mean that one category will always be more or less difficult than the other categories. Further, it is not always easy to distinguish between tasks of inference, evaluation and appreciation. Certainly, there is overlap among the categories. The primary criterion for placing a task in a particular category is the response the task intends to stimulate in the learners.

The taxonomy presented here intends to provide you with an understandable and manageable framework for planning, teaching, learning through reading, and evaluating in the area of reading comprehension. In general, this taxonomy can help teachers determine what reading materials they use or intend to emphasise with respect to comprehension. Further, it helps them to provide tasks that enable the learners to think and react in different ways when they read a text and to emphasise the comprehension ability or abilities that a given text can easily contribute to.

Check Your Progress 3

The following are the four different types of comprehension questions. Identify them with the appropriate categories.

- Could we live without the sun? Explain.
- Name the seven kinds of energy presented in this selection.

- iii) Suppose we were able to harness the sun's energy efficiently, what do you think would be the consequence of this for humanity?
- iv) What conclusions can you arrive at about the relationship between humanity and energy?

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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2.3.2 Stages in reading

Keeping Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension as a model, we have presented here the stages a reader systematically passes through in the process of reading, when he/she moves from lower to higher education.

The stages we have identified are:

- recognition of words;
- association of meaning with symbols;
- literal comprehension;
- interpretation;
- critical reading;
- creative reading.

Let us talk about each one of these in the given order.

Recognition of words

By word-recognition, we mean the ability to translate orally or subvocally the written symbol into a spoken word. No reading can take place without word-recognition.

A majority of learners will have mastered the skill of word-recognition by the time they come to higher education. The adult reader uses four clues to identify words which are not part of his/her instant recognition vocabulary—context clues, phonetic clues, structural clues and the clues from the dictionary. However, even at higher levels, learners need consistent review and practice of the principles and procedures necessary for ease in word-recognition. Problems with word-recognition may occur in any subject. For instance, quite often in sciences a reader is faced with a conglomeration of new words with unknown pronunciations. These words have to be read, understood and learned.

Association of meaning with symbols

The learner may readily pronounce gypsum if he/she is familiar with a few phonetic principles, but the word may be just a mouthful of sounds and

nothing more than that. Similarly a mathematical or scientific symbol often stands for a complex relationship, which may be as difficult to understand as abstract verbal symbols (say imperialism, irony etc.). When the learner comes across a new word and learns it, and then recognises it in different contexts, we say he/she has learnt a new concept. Let us give an example. A word like 'approximation' is useful in Mathematics, English and Social Studies—in fact, a learner may come across it almost everywhere. There are words which have both highly generalised and technical meanings. The word 'rational', for example, besides its general use, is used in mathematics in a special sense. There are also words which have only the technical meaning, they often belong to one particular area. For example, 'scoop' in journalism. Of course, with the passage of time such words also get generalised as they are used in more and more diverse contexts.

All the three types of words mentioned above have to be learnt because accurate communication takes place only when the writer/author and the reader (the learner) share a common understanding of the concept behind each symbol.

Literal comprehension

It involves some very important sub-skills—reading for facts and central ideas, noting down supporting arguments etc. Various patterns of organisation of details produce different effects, though the facts themselves may be essentially the same ones. Learners, therefore, must learn not only to read for an accurate literal understanding of individual facts but also to understand the particular relationship these facts may have to other facts in the material.

Interpretation

Interpretation takes the reader beyond the printed page by requiring him/her to put together ideas which the author has not explicitly related to one another in the text. It also requires him/her to see the connections between what he/she is reading now and his/her past reading and life experience. As an outcome of this process, the reader is able to make inferences and draw conclusions. In other words, he/she learns to understand implied meanings. This process is at work in the reading required in all subject areas though with differing degrees of complexity.

Critical reading

The evaluation aspect of the reading act—often called critical reading—requires the reader to depart from the printed page in a different direction. At this stage, he/she makes judgements rooted in what he/she has read. His/her personal feelings and prejudices have little role to play, as he/she sorts out facts from opinions and evaluates the logic of the reasoning presented in the material he/she has read. He/she considers the relevance, authenticity and utility of factual material. If the reader is working on a novel, he/she evaluates the logic of a character's behaviour in comparison with his/her own experiences or by his/her observation of characters in others' works. In yet another novel the learner may evaluate the style the author has used rather than the content and so on.

Creative reading uses divergent thinking skills to go beyond the literal comprehension, interpretation and critical reading levels. At this stage, the reader tries to come up with new or effective alternative ideas, solutions, etc. to those presented by the writer.

It is the process through which the reader makes use of his/her reading. Every act of reading potentially affects not only every other act of reading but also the non-reading acts which a learner will perform. The simplest, most direct way in which assimilation affects the learner is in the growing confidence he/she acquires in the use of the skills. These skills, at a certain stage, become so natural to him/her that he/she develops an automatic approach. When he/she needs to skim, he/she automatically does so. When he/she needs to read for complete recall, he/she does so. Thus he/she learns to assimilate skills, concepts, attitudes derived from reading. At this stage the reader comes to know how to get into a printed page, how to get what he/she wants from it, and how to get out of it when anymore time spent on it would be a waste.

The skills involved at the various stages of the reading act can be grouped into the following three categories:

- set purposes for reading, ability to survey material and determine an appropriate technique for the reading of any given piece of material;
- ability to handle graphic and illustrative materials;
- ability to locate, comprehend and combine information from a variety of library resources.

(These three categories have been touched upon in Unit 3).

Having given you a general perspective of various aspects of reading, we should also reinforce that reading can never be fully mastered by even the most competent of learners. As mentioned, the dispute as to whether or not reading entails comprehension depends upon how one interprets 'reading'. To come to grips with the reading matter, the learner should activate some relevant reading comprehension skills. In the following section, we shall look into some of the basic skills which the learners require to understand the subject matter better.

2.4 READING: SQ3R TECHNIQUE

It is customary to give the learners a lengthy reading list at the beginning of every term. Clearly, they cannot afford to spend time to read everything. Moreover, different texts require different approaches, depending on what the learners are expected to get from them. The learners may need to read some books in parts, some fully from cover to cover but not necessarily carefully, and a few diligently and with attention. The implication here is that the strategy should be flexible in tackling text materials. One strategy that gained wide acceptance is the SQ3R technique. Here we shall write about this technique in detail.

'SQ3R' stands for the initial letters of the five steps that should be taken in studying a text: The five steps are:

- i) Survey
- ii) Question
- iii) Read
- iv) Recall
- v) Review

We shall discuss each one of these steps in the given order.

Survey

It refers to a quick glance through the title page, preface, chapter headings, etc., of a text. Surveying a text helps the learners grasp the main ideas. • A glance at the title page may give you:

- i) the general subject area;
- ii) the level of approach;
- iii) the author's name; and
- iv) the date and place of publication.

Naturally, a preface will give you more details. It helps you decide whether or not the book deserves your attention. The table of contents is yet another source you should never ignore when making a preliminary survey. A quick survey of the 'contents' tells you what topics the author is dealing with and how he/she has organised the themes.

A survey of the index will tell you instantly whether or not the text contains what you need. It also helps you save time and effort by directing you straight to the most relevant pages.

Question

Your survey of the text will raise some questions in your mind—general ones, though. For example, after glancing at the title page, preface and contents, you might ask yourself:

- How far can I depend on this book?
- Will the book be helpful to me as its preface suggests?
- Why should the author devote a whole chapter to this or that topic?

Even these general questions are of some help to you in deciding how to treat the book.

Of course, when you turn from surveying the book as a whole to a specific chapter/topic, your questions will become more specific. At times, the author himself/herself will pose questions at the beginning or the end of a chapter. Since questions are generally more helpful if given at the beginning of a chapter, it is always better to take note of these end-of-chapter questions during a survey. Learners, unfortunately tend to overlook the author's questions and thereby pass by a very helpful guide to effective reading.

Having made your survey and started to question, you are now ready for the third step in the SQ3R technique—reading the text.

Read

Reading text material demands a critical mind. That is, when we read a text we apply our minds with all their critical skills. Unless we read 'actively' the questions which have been formulated can never be answered satisfactorily.

Two important suggestions should be listed here:

- i) It is not advisable to make notes at this stage. We may tend to note down the author's opinions/words rather than our own. This does not help understanding and learning.
- ii) This is not the stage to underline words or phrases either. For, in our second reading we may find that whichever words/phrases have been underlined are not very critical for our purpose.

Keeping these two points in-view, what we should do at the first reading is just to look for the main ideas and the supporting details.

Recall

Reading a text is not the final step in learning. It is, instead, the first step in learning. What is read needs to be recalled for retention? Regular attempts to recall will help improve your learning in three ways—help improve concentration, give you a chance to remedy misinterpretation(s) and develop critical reading.

How often to recall?

This is a pertinent question. But 'how often' chiefly depends on 'how good' a reader you are.

Review

The purpose of reviewing is to check the validity of our recall. The best way to do this is to do a quick repeat of the other four steps—survey, question, read and recall.

Check Your Progress 4

Suppose that you are teaching SQ3R technique to your learners. Say, in about 10 lines, whether you would ask your learners to strictly follow the logical order in which SQ3R is presented. Substantiate your answer.

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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2.5 TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

Because *reading* in itself has no inherent, fixed subject matter, whatever the reader reads constitutes the practice of reading—whether he/she is reading a newspaper, a menu, a journal, a road map or a text-book, the efficiency of his/her reading depends greatly upon:

- his/her basic reading skills;
- his/her experiences in the area in which he/she is reading;
- his/her interest in the material;
- his/her purpose(s) of reading; and
- the level of difficulty of the material.

This section presents some important reading comprehension skills which the teachers—no matter whether they are subject teachers or language teachers—should teach in order that the learners may become mature readers.

Before we begin the discussion, we want to make it clear that the skills that we shall be talking about are not confined just to classroom teaching. Instead, they pertain to all learners—all readers. The implication is that distance learners also need these essential skills to become successful in their academic pursuits. In fact, a distance learner needs them more than anybody else, as he/she depends entirely or mostly on *reading*.

Now let us talk about the essential reading comprehension skills.

Finding the main/central idea

To find the main idea in a paragraph, readers must find what common elements the sentences share. Some writers place the main idea as the sentence presenting the topic and may put the topic title in bold print. However, in literature for example, this is not the common practice—the main idea may not be stated directly but implied. In such situations, the reader has to find it from the clues provided by the writer.

There is no foolproof method for finding the main idea. However, a common suggestion is that the reader/learner should first determine what the theme of the paragraph is and then find out what in particular (special or unique) the author is trying to say about it. Once he/she does these, the learner must be able to locate the main idea.

We generally use the term **central idea** rather than **main idea** when we refer to a group of paragraphs, a story etc. To find out the central idea, the

introductory paragraph is usually helpful because it either contains or anticipates what the central idea is and how it will be developed.

Check Your Progress 5

Read the following paragraph. Write down the *topic* and what is special *about the topic*; then write down the *main idea* of the paragraph.

"I keep wishing you were alive: so we could start over. I tell myself that I'd do it differently, be patient with you, try to understand... When I guess I'd just act the same way. There aren't many chances in life. You grow up and become what you are without realising it. I plan to be a better person and find myself repeating all the old patterns, being selfish, not seeing people for what they are. And I don't know how to change them... There are times when I feel beautiful, sexless, light, wanting nothing—but then I crash to earth again and want everything. Myself, most of all." (Rubin, 1983)

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

Topic:

What is special about the topic?

.....
.....
.....

Main idea:

Reading between the lines

Many writers do not directly state what they mean but present ideas in a more indirect, roundabout way. That is why *the ability to infer* is called the ability to *read between the lines*. Mystery writers find inference essential to the maintenance of suspense in their stories.

For example, stories by Sherlock Holmes and Perry Mason are based essentially on the ability of the characters to uncover evidence in the form of clues that are not obvious to the others around them.

Textbook writers, however, present information in a more straightforward manner than fiction writers do, yet most texts include implied meanings that readers must deduce or infer. For example, when learners read about the actions and decisions of some important persons in history, they can deduce something about their characters. When learners read about North Pole they can infer the kind of clothes the people have to wear, as well as the kind of life they have to lead there. *Good* readers, while reading, try to gather clues to draw inferences about what they read. Although *accomplished* readers do this whenever they read, they are not usually aware of it.

Asking key questions about the material which the learners are reading will encourage them to draw inferences from what they are reading. They should

also be asked to supply data to substantiate their inferences. Another technique the teacher could use would be to present certain statements to the learners concerning what they have read and ask them to determine whether the statements are true or false. This technique can be used at all levels of learning with varying degrees of complexity.

Categorising

The ability to divide items into categories is a very important reading skill and one that is necessary for developing concepts. As learner's progress through standards/levels, they should develop the skill of categorising. The learners should be able to differentiate and group items into more complex categories, they should also be able to proceed from more generalised classification to more specialised classifications. Let us give an illustration.

Given a set of words, the learners should be able to see what they have in common and identify a word which does not fit into the set. (Even at higher levels of learning, this practice is often followed and found useful.)

Example

Identify the word in each set of words given below which does not belong to the set.

- i) frogs, snakes, turtles, lizards
- ii) mean, median, mode, range
- iii) kilometer, decimeter, centimeter, lactometer

Learners who have difficulty in classification will usually have difficulty working with analogies. Teachers could use *analogy activities* to teach and test learners understanding of concepts in particular areas.

For example,

- i) *Rock is to geologist as bird is to (ornithologist).*
- ii) *Distance is to odometer as direction is to (compass)*
- iii) *One is to thousand as meter is to (kilometer).*

These activities could be made easier by supplying a word list from which learners can choose appropriate answers.

Distinguishing between fact and opinion

The ability to differentiate between facts and opinions is a very useful skill for critical reading which learners need to develop.

Teachers should help their learners to recognise that everything that they read is not necessarily true or correct. If the learners read something that does not make sense even if it is in a textbook written by an authority in the field, they should be able to question it.

Besides, the learners should be helped to detect the presence or propaganda or bias in what they read. This is another essential critical reading skill.

Creative reading

It involves divergent thinking. Good readers are able to look beyond the obvious and come up with new or alternative solutions. To develop this skill in the learners, they should be encouraged to try to solve problems in many different ways and try to be intelligent risk-takers, or to make educated guesses.

Brainstorming, i.e., generating many different ideas without inhibition, is a technique that has been popularised in business and industry. Teachers can use this technique very effectively to help stretch learners' imagination. It is an excellent way to break the ice among learners at any level. Certain principles adopted for effective brainstorming are:

- i) anything goes;
- ii) no criticisms/comments; and
- iii) build on other's ideas.

Check Your Progress 6

List the characteristics (at least 5) of a good reader.

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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2.6 READING AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Notwithstanding the fact that distance learners are mostly adults and most of them know how to read, we feel that a special mention of reading in the context of distance teaching and learning is essential. Like any other learner, the distance learner also spends much of his/her time in reading. By implication, our discussion on reading should not be construed as relevant only in the classroom situation. In fact, the distance learner's dependence on reading is more than that of his/her counterpart in the classroom. Unlike the learner in the formal set up, the distance learner's access to teacher(s) is limited. Consequently, he/she has to, most of the time, depend upon the course materials—print and other media.

The distance teaching materials, by and large, are conversational in style. This helps the learners feel that they are interacting with the writer and questioning the text. The materials also provide questions—polemic or rhetoric—at crucial junctures to help raise further questions in the learners.

In doing so, the learners come to grips with the subject. Besides, the questions set in the self-check exercises take the learners through various stages of reading comprehension. That is, some exercises require the learners to infer ideas from the text, but some others may demand the learner's reaction to what is presented in the text.

Advanced organisers—introduction, statements of aims, objectives, etc.—also help the learners set themselves the purpose of reading. For example, aims and objectives would present what the text contains and what the text expects from the learners. Glossaries are provided wherever necessary to ensure easy and better comprehension of the text. Distance teaching materials, thus, are designed in such a way as to help improve the reading skills of the learners.

Distance teaching system also requires the learners to efficiently read and learn from tutor-comments. (We have discussed the significance of tutor-comments in Block 3 of this course.) Here, however, we shall give some important types of comments that help learners read and learn more effectively. These are:

- comments which acknowledge the learner's point of view;
- comments which suggest new ideas, different examples, etc.;
- comments aimed at helping the learners make their written expression clearer;
- comments guiding the learner to the proper use of evidence/reference;
- comments which evaluate the learner's work as a whole (explaining a grade/mark etc.);
- comments relating the piece of work under consideration to past and future assignments;
- comments offering plenty of explanations to make sure that the learners understand the rules of marking and grading;
- comments asking quite specific questions and encouraging the learners to reply regularly;
- comments asking learners to evaluate their own work and send in their evaluation notes with the work itself;
- comments making a positive effort to help the learner realise the value of assignments as reading and writing exercises.

Further, all comments should end with an invitation to ask for further explanations.

(A detailed description of how distance teaching materials help develop reading and study skills of the learners is presented in Unit 3 of this block.)

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we learnt that

- reading is an integrative process and it is difficult to give a single definition of reading;

- Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension has four categories—literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, evaluation and appreciation;
- reading subsumes comprehension;
- it is necessary to expose the learners to essential reading skills;
- the discussion of reading is not confined to classroom teaching only, as it is highly relevant to distance teaching/learning too;
- the questions built in the text help the learners assimilate what they are reading and relate it to what they have already read. These built in questions function as catalysts.
- Besides, we discussed SQ3R technique—survey, question, read, recall and review.

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1

When we read a text, whatever it may be, we do not passively absorb what is given in it. We normally interact with it actively and breathe meaning into the words to get the writer's message. Hence, reading is defined as active interaction with the text.

2

When we read we integrate the three domains—cognitive, perceptual and affective. That is, when we read we select, transform, organise, remember and react to the information available in the reading material in accordance with our attitudes and needs. Further, when we read, our experiences and sensory perceptors organise our responses. Eye movements, for example, influence and control what we perceive from the text. As all the three domains are activated during the process of reading, it is considered an integrative process.

3

- i) Evaluation (creative)
- ii) Literal comprehension
- iii) Appreciation
- iv) Inferential comprehension (interpretative) Note that overlapping of categories is possible.

4

Although the steps of SQ3R are in the logical and natural order, there may be overlappings and repetitions among them. For instance, even while the emphasis is on survey or reading we may still be asking questions or we may want to interrupt the third step (i.e. read) for the purpose of recalling and review or even for the purpose of repeating our survey. (Nevertheless, there is no harm in explaining SQ3R in the order of symbols S.Q. etc.)

5

Topic: Writer's pattern of life.

What is special about the topic: Writer's pattern of life difficult to change.

Main Idea: The writer feels that it is difficult to change one's pattern of life.

6

Good readers are able to:

- i) do inferential reasoning;
- ii) state the main/central ideas available in a given piece of information;
- iii) assimilate and categorise information;
- iv) make analogies, analyse, synthesise and evaluate information;
- v) think beyond the obvious message communicated by what is read.

UNIT 3 STUDY SKILLS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Defining 'Study Skills': An Attempt
- 3.3 Significance of Teaching Study Skills
 - 3.3.1 Building good study habits
 - 3.3.2 Knowing the text
 - 3.3.3 Concept mapping
 - 3.3.4 Test taking
- 3.4 Study Skills and Distance Teaching/Learning
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have given you some useful information regarding study skills. After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- define the term 'study skills';
- state the significance of teaching/learning study skills;
- relate the teaching/learning of study skills to distance education;
- arrive at a conclusion that study skills are essential for distance learners and distance teachers; and
- employ all the study skills successfully in your own studies.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Studying has long been the primary means by which learning—irrespective of the levels of learning and modes of teaching—takes place outside the classroom. Through take home assignments, independent study on special projects and guided study under a supervisor, the learner organises materials, formulates ideas that may be evaluated by the teachers and works on exercises to gain specific skills.

Besides course materials, the learner very often relies upon a library to collect specialised information, as also upon new learning sources such as audio/video cassettes, filmstrips, etc. Whatever be the educational atmosphere, study habits, a motivation to learn and a positive general attitude are the key factors in determining the success or failure of a learner's educational pursuits.

With the advent of new educational technology—systematic approach to writing course materials, programmed learning, television and computer-assisted instruction—*studying* has become less distinct from the instructional process itself and more intertwined with the presentation of subject matter. Yet, there have been and still are cases of dropouts. One's failure in educational pursuits may be attributed to the fact that little systematic effort is made in teaching one the study skills required for success.

In this unit, we highlight the significance of and the need for teaching study skills. At many places we have referred to formal classroom situations. It should not, however, be construed that we restrict ourselves to teaching of study skills in the context of formal classroom. We have devoted an entire section (3.4) to discuss the relevances of teaching study skills in the context of distance education.

This unit is closely related to the previous one which focuses on *reading skills*. These two units together should give you a reasonable *command* over your *studies*.

3.2 DEFINING 'STUDY SKILLS': AN ATTEMPT

Depending upon different needs, different thinkers give different labels or definitions to the term 'study skills'. The labels commonly associated with study skills are:

- a tool kit;
- the best ways of acquiring knowledge;
- a set of organisational skills;
- micro-skills or sub-skills; and
- systematic study habits and so on.

For some, study skills are 'strategies' to be developed by a learner to derive the greatest possible benefit from activities like listening, speaking, reading and writing. For others, study skills are 'advanced skills' which are not purely mechanical but essentially involve some amount of creative thinking. These skills require active mental exercise on the part of the learner.

The idea in presenting a brief sketch on how the term 'study skills' has been interpreted differently is not to deny the significance each definition deserves but to show you the difficulty in describing this concept.

Therefore, by collapsing all the labels or definitions which have hitherto been in existence, we use this term to mean all the essential skills that a learner requires in order to gain maximum benefits from his/her studies. To elaborate, study skills are the skills or strategies that a learner employs to study and come to grips with the study materials independently and efficiently. It is, however, difficult to categorically specify all the skills that a learner uses either to get across his/her message or to decode someone's message.

The failure or success of the learner in his/her academic career is, thus, chiefly attributed to the poorly or well developed study habits respectively.

Why is it difficult to define or list study skills?

Obviously, each one of us approaches a problem in many different ways. Wide variations in methods and habits of studying typically practised by learners make it difficult to define and list study skills comprehensively.

Let us elaborate on this.

The time of day/night preferred, the time lapse between study sessions, the degree of noise or music tolerated or invited as background, the physical conditions in which one studies, the extent to which extra curricular activities interfere, and the particular study mechanics employed are only a few of the many such factors that vary in every conceivable way from individual to individual. Many study habits appear detrimental to efficient learning, whereas others would seem to be conducive to learning.

By implication, we mean that a definition of study skills is open. It would be futile, therefore, to attempt to define study skills conclusively and list the skills a learner uses to tackle a problem or an issue. Thinking and re-thinking over this issue will add more and more dimensions to the existing definitions.

Before we go any further with our discussion on study skills, we should better try to come to a consensus regarding what the term 'study' means.

Consider the following statements:

The term 'study' refers to

- following a course of lectures and taking notes;
- being acquainted with and being taught all that is necessary to know about a subject;
- cramming chunks out of, or the whole of subject matter;
- the diligent and systematic pursuit of understanding; and
- dedicating one's thoughts and energies to learning.

Given an opportunity to define 'study' some of you would have chosen any one of these statements and some others a combination of them. A few of you would prefer to have a combination of all the statements. Still, there will be some who do not agree with any of these statements. What is our reaction to these statements? We are with those few of you who go in for a combination of these statements.

We shall elaborate on this.

Any one statement or a combination of a few statements will not explain 'study' sufficiently. Study involves you in setting up goals and choosing methods, solving problems, performing experiments, going through tests, collecting information, segregating facts from opinions or suggestions, comparing facts, weighing up opinions and considering suggestions and finally looking for proof and truth.

'Study', thus, demands you to analyse and criticise not only your own ideas but also those of other people—whether you hear them in lectures or discussions or read them in books. You will have to, further, make brief but sufficient notes and summaries to help yourself remember what you have read and to clarify your thinking. In fact you will have to apply all your critical powers to the quick and effective handling of information as you make your way towards definite goals. Having said this, we should also touch upon the importance of motivation. We agree that not all learners are really prepared to put in the amount of effort and practice needed to learn new habits, i.e., study habits. Some tend to believe that they can manage as

they are. Such learners are obviously not motivated to learn. Lack of motivation thus mars effective learning.

Having attempted to understand *study skills*, we shall now look into the significance of teaching *study skills*.

3.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHING STUDY SKILLS

On many occasions you may have heard learners making the following statements. Or many times you yourself as a learner would have uttered them.

“I spent the whole day studying but could not fare well in my exams.

“I don’t even remember what I read, though I spent the whole night studying.”

“I don’t know how to study.”

“I always listen to music when I study.”

Perhaps, you have heard or made many more statements of this kind.

The fact is that difficulties with studies are not uncommon. Many of us have felt this pinch only when we go for higher education.

Higher levels of education demand more ‘studying’ than we did at school. Accordingly our approach to ‘studying’ also changes. The help given to us at the school level is gradually withdrawn at every step we take towards higher education. That is, the learner is held responsible for his/her learning. Of course, the teacher or the tutor may help create a stimulating atmosphere in which learning can take place, but it is not the kind of teaching which we experience at school. At higher levels the learner should develop his/her own study habits/methods, set his/her target and be his/her own guide.

In order to enable the learners to do this they should be taught study skills at the school level itself.

Many learners do poorly in their studies because they have never learned how to study. Elementary school teachers usually do not spend or find time in helping children to acquire study skills. Moreover, they tend to believe that it is the job of the high school teachers. Ironically, many high school teachers do not spend time in this area because they assume that their learners have already acquired the skills they need. Consequent upon this, at no stage do the learners get any help to acquire study skills. It affects their studies when they go for higher education or take up courses through distance education. Learners should be helped to acquire good study strategies as early as possible, certainly before they develop either poor study habits or wrong concepts concerning studying. Teaching study skills would help the learners spend less time in studying and learn more. We have already mentioned that it is difficult to make an exhaustive inventory of skills to be taught. Nevertheless, we have here attempted to list a few essential skills that a learner should acquire to study independently and efficiently. We should admit that there is no simple formula that will apply

to all learners. Yet educational psychologists have found that some procedures help all learners. Our discussion in the following sub-sections centres around the teaching of these procedures in the classroom. In section 3.4 we shall discuss the significance of study skills for a distance learner and how he/she may be helped to improve his/her study strategies.

3.3.1 Building good study habits

Planning and organisation are the two major factors that accelerate the progress of a learner's academic activities. He/she should therefore be taught to plan and organise his/her work—how much time he/she needs to devote to his/her studies; which subject(s) he/she will study and when; what he/she intends to achieve during each study session, and how to organise these activities in order to accomplish his/her goals.

Can a person relax and study at the same time?

Studying requires a certain amount of tension, concentration and effort in a specific direction. Of course, the amount of tension varies with different individuals. The point that we want to make here is that studying is essentially hard work, and learners who are not prepared to make the required and appropriate efforts are wasting their time. Keeping this in view, we have suggested three vital concerns in building good study habits. They may sound elementary, because they are the oft-repeated suggestions, yet they are vital. The three concerns are:

- when to study?
- where to study?
- how much time to spend on study?

We do not attach any less or more importance to any of these steps. Therefore, there is nothing sacrosanct about the order in which they are presented.

When to study?

Some learners study only just before the terminal examination or an announced test. Some may even study the whole night and cram answers. All of us, have probably done this at least once or twice. Rote-learning, however, does not bring about any real learning.

To be a good learner, one must plan one's study time and spread it over a period of time. Of course, the ability to study and more so, the ability to plan our studies is not something we are born with. It is a set of skills that must be learned. Teaching the learners to plan their study is therefore a major responsibility of the teacher. Learners should be made to realise that regular planning would prevent confusion and help them to retain and organise what they are studying.

In a classroom situation, for example, the learner may be advised to study each subject as close as possible to the class period for that subject—before or after the class period. This chiefly depends on the form that class period usually takes. That is, if it is a straight-forward informational lecture, a study session right after the lecture will be useful to review notes and check

whether it has been understood. A study session just before a seminar/discussion gives learners a chance to read upon the background information that will help them make an effective contribution in the classroom. We should admit here that we have not touched upon the whole range of forms of class periods. We have presented just one example, you could yourselves think of others.

Where to study?

Ideally you should be able to study anywhere—in a quiet library or on a crowded bus or train. But let us be realistic. Most of us cannot entirely shut off our minds to distractions. By implication, the place of study should be as free as possible from such surroundings as might steal away the attention of the learner. As for the conditions for study, the place should be well-lit and properly ventilated and neither too hot nor too cold. We should also mention here that it can be difficult to get everything the learner wants; for example, if staying in a hostel or someone else's house he/she cannot find everything of his/her own choice.

Let us see whether our physical postures have some thing to do with our study. The best position for study is to sit upright at a table or a desk. Bed, of course, may be attractive and enticing but once you lie down, the ensuing sleep is inevitable. Even an easy chair may prevent you from effective effort.

How much time to spend on study?

The third step is to determine the amount of time to spend in studying. It must be recognised that the amount of time the learners spend in studying will depend on the subject and how well they know it. It is, therefore, unrealistic to set a hard and fast rule about the amount of time learners should spend on a specific subject. It varies, yet 'overlearning' is generally helpful. It helps learners retain information over a long period of time. ('Overlearning' happens when individuals continue practising activities, exercises, etc. even after they think that they have learned them.) In this context, it should also be remembered that recreation and leisure activities are vital. They should also find their places in the timetable. Fortunately, the more a learner plans his/her work the more time he/she will get for repose.

Besides making learners aware of these three concerns, teachers need to help learners recognise that even though they acquire some good study habits, they may still have some difficulty in studying.

3.3.2 Knowing the text

The learners should be introduced to the various parts of their textbooks. Helping them know the parts of the textbooks can save their time and effort. Here are a few suggestions that you should take note of:

- i) **Survey the textbook:** A quick glance through the text helps the learners to see how the author presents the information—whether he/she presents topic headings in bold print or in the margins, has introduced diagrams, charts, graphs, etc. or not.
- ii) **Read the preface/introduction/foreword:** It contains the author's explanation of the book—his/her purpose/plan in writing the book, and

his/her description of the organisation of the book. The preface also explains how the book is either different from others in the field or a further contribution to the field of knowledge.

- iii) **Read the contents:** The list of contents will give the learners a comprehensive idea of what to expect from the book. This also helps the learners to locate the topic(s) they want to lead.
- iv) **Glance through the index:** The index helps the learners identify whether or not what they need is included in the text. It really is a valuable aid because it helps learners find specific information that they need.
- v) **Check for a glossary:** A glossary is helpful because it gives the learners the meanings of specialised words or phrases used in the book. (Before we go further we should mention here that not all books will necessarily have a glossary.)

Interpretation of non-verbal items

By non-verbal items, we mean maps, charts, tables, graphs, etc. It is not unusual to bring in non-verbal items in course materials. Many textbook writers employ these techniques to make their ideas clearer. If learners are given opportunities to work with various types of illustrative materials, they will certainly be in a better position to decipher what they are reading. But unfortunately, the learners tend to overlook the non-verbal items. What could be the reasons for this? Perhaps

- the teachers have not taken any time to stress the value of non-verbal items; and
- the learners do not know how to interpret them.

Whatever the reasons, the learners need to gain skills in interpreting illustrative materials. Maps, charts and graphs are the items the learners generally come across in the course materials.

Maps

There are many different types of maps, and each stresses a particular feature or a bit of information. Each one of these maps has a key that needs to be interpreted correctly to get the relevant information. For example, political maps use colour coding and definite boundary line types to indicate political divisions, administrative divisions, etc. Usually, maps present keys indicating what various colours represent.

Check Your Progress 1

Suggest in about 10 lines at least two activities you would use to stimulate a learner's interest in map-reading.

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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Graphs and charts

These are used to display data concisely. Most of us have at one time or the other prepared a chart to exhibit some information.

There are a number of different types of charts and graphs. The kinds of information that can be charted, moreover, are too numerous to state. It would be superfluous to list all the different types of charts, graphs and kinds of information. Our purpose is to give a general awareness of the use of charts and graphs.

We should mention here that a graph is more limited in what it can illustrate than a chart because the former is usually more structured and gives some specific information, while the latter is a broader display and it can display many different kinds of information at one and the same time.

There are mainly three kinds of graphs—bar graph, line graph and circle graph.

Bar graph: It is used to show comparisons between or among the qualities, quantities or measures of something, some persons, some places, etc.

Line/profile graph: It is helpful in showing whether there has been an increase or decrease in something over a period of time. This type of graph is useful in showing 'trends'.

Circle graph: It is used to show how a total amount of something has been divided. We could also say that the entire graph is equal to 100% and each bit or segment is a fraction of the 100%. The total is represented by a circle and the components by appropriate segments of this circle.

Using reference sources

Because of the vast amount of knowledge that already exists and the information compounded each year as it grows very fast, it is unrealistic to say that a person knows everything. However, a person can learn about any particular field or area, if he/she knows where to look for the details. For example "Guinness Book of World Records" will help one to find 'world records' in any field. There are reference books on language and usage, such as 'Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases' which would help us in finding synonyms and less trite words to use in writing. There are reference

books available that can supply information about a famous writer, a player, an eminent scientist and so on. What is important is to know which reference source/book to go to for the required information.

Probably the most often used of all reference sources is the 'dictionary'.

Let us therefore make a special mention of the use of the dictionary.

Dictionary

Teachers should help their learners recognise that the dictionary supplies a great amount of information, besides word meanings and pronunciation.

The items generally found in a dictionary can be grouped into two main headings:

- i) information concerning words (spelling, definitions, tenses, etc.);
- ii) other useful information (i.e., list of abbreviations, forms of address, etc.).

The learners should be taught what dictionary they may use, for which purpose as there are different kinds of dictionaries for different purposes. To enhance the learners' awareness of the amount of information they can gain from the dictionary, the teachers may pose a number of questions related to the particular field he/she is teaching. We give you some samples:

- i) Is *litter* a term in the metric system?
- ii) Is 'haiku' a garment or a Japanese verse form?
- iii) What system of money is used in Sweden?

(You should note here that the difficulty level of the questions depends on the levels of learning.) Broadly speaking, we have so far talked about some of the crucial sub-skills (study strategies) pertaining to 'reading'. In the following sub-section we shall talk about study skills directly related to 'writing'.

3.3.3 Concept mapping

When learners study, they can make a chart like graphic representation of the material they are studying or have studied. This chart is the 'concept map' representing what they have studied. Preparing a good concept/semantic map requires that learners be good critical thinkers because they must make insightful judgements on what format, words and phrases best represent the information which they have gone through and what will help them to recall the information whenever they need it.

Here is a technique learners could use:

- i) Choose and determine the amount of information for studying.
- ii) Read through the whole material that has been chosen for studying.
- iii) Locate the central idea/theme of what is being read.
- iv) Re-read each paragraph. This will enable them to identify the main topic (of each paragraph).

- v) Note down the central idea and the topics of the paragraphs studied in an easily accessible format. This is the concept map we are talking about.

There is no correct way to construct a concept/semantic map because what works for one learner will not necessarily work for another. The test as to whether or not the semantic map is correct comes when the learner uses it for study purposes and finds that it ~~does~~ help him/her to recall significant amount of information.

The correct way, therefore, is the one that works for the learner.

Related to this concept are outlining, note taking/marketing and summarising. We shall touch upon each of these, though briefly.

Outlining

Outlining helps learners organise long, written compositions, assignment responses, etc. An outline is useful also for study purposes because it serves as a guide for the logical arrangement of the material.

The learner should be, therefore, taught 'outlining'. The teachers can give activities asking the learners to identify and write the main topic and sub-topics of a given paragraph. Yet another technique of teaching 'outlining' is to ask the learners to complete a partially completed outline of a chapter or a lesson.

Note taking

It is a study skill which helps the learners to learn better. The teacher should therefore convey important information about note taking to the learners and give them practice in taking notes. Notes usually consist of words and phrases that help one remember important points. They need not be complete sentences. However, unless an individual's notes are clear and organised, he/she will have difficulty in using them for study purposes. Notes can be taken while listening to a lecture, reading a text, watching a video programme, participating in a discussion or even while thinking on a subject/issue.

Summarising

Summarising learning materials is a mode of learning that helps one to retain the most important concepts and facts in a unit/lesson/long passage. It forces learners to think about what they have read and to identify and organise the essential information.

Check Your Progress 2

Summarise the following paragraph:

Humans are either male or female. This seems obvious, but until recently in sociology, the existence of two sexes has been given scant attention. Sociologists have of course studied courtship, marriage, family, divorce, labour force participation and other social patterns where sexual differences are involved. Yet they have

typically ignored the fact that virtually all facets of the human system are punctuated by sexuality, by the existence of two sexes. Social interaction patterns of social organisation, cultural symbols, socialisation practices and processes of deviance and social control involve components of sex. The sex and gender are thus a basic element of the human system. (Rubin, 1983)

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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Having talked about the study strategies which are generally being associated with the sub-skills of 'reading' and 'writing', we shall now look into yet another crucial skill which the learners need in order to get through examinations—the skill of test-taking. In the following sub-section which deals with this theme, we use 'test' and 'examination' interchangeably.

3.3.4 Test taking

There are no short-cuts to studying, and the best way to do well in a test is to be well-prepared. However, it is important to note that persons do better on tests, if they know test taking techniques and are familiar with the various types of tests. Teachers could acquaint learners with various kinds of tests by giving them sample questions and discussing with them how they would answer those questions.

We shall, however, briefly touch upon essay tests and objective tests as they are the most commonly used test types.

On an essay test, learners spend most of their time in thinking and writing, whereas, on an objective test, they spend most of their time in reading and thinking. Learners are free to express their ideas on an essay test than on an objective test. But the latter has a drawback—it may encourage guessing. The implication is that a test should be properly constructed.

Many tests are composed of both objective and subjective (essay) test items. On such tests the learner must plan his/her time wisely. The teachers normally suggest that the learners should:

- read through the whole test;
- notice how many points/marks each part of the test is worth;
- put down any special formulas, principles, ideas or other details they have memorised and may be relevant to essay questions; and

- do the objective parts first (it may give the learners clues for the essay questions).

The suggestions given alone may be the often repeated ones. We admit, however, that they deserve to be mentioned repeatedly. Having, thus, touched upon some of the relevant study skills, we shall now talk about how they may be used in the context of distance education.

3.4 STUDY SKILLS AND DISTANCE TEACHING/LEARNING

In the previous section we talked about the significance of teaching study skills in general. In this section we shall highlight how essential study skills are for a system in which teachers and learners are at a distance for most of the teaching/learning process. We shall also touch upon the means used in distance education to improve the study skills of distance learners.

Study strategies play a vital role in distance education. The learner, being away from the teacher and the institution, depends mainly upon his/her course materials for his/her studies. If he/she has not developed proper study skills to tackle the text, he/she is certainly at a disadvantage. He/she has to await for the tutors' comments (see the unit on Tutor-Comments in Block 3, ES-313 for details) to clarify his/her doubts. But then he/she should be able to interpret the comments rightly. (A major part of the responsibility, thus, lies on the tutor, the way he/she writes the comments.) A distance learner for his/her study depends also on audio and video materials. Again how efficiently he/she deduces meaning out of them primarily depends on how well he/she has developed his/her study strategies. However, we should mention here that whether audio/video materials have any impact on the learner depend on how well the materials are prepared.

How do we, then, help the distance learners develop study strategies?

Distance learners are mostly adults. The assumption then is that they know how to study. But many, for one reason or the other, drop out of courses. Lack of effective study strategies is one of the major reasons for this problem.

The design of distance teaching materials, however, helps develop the study skills of the distance learners.

Appropriate questions

The use of questions that elicit higher level comprehension responses is regarded as one of the important study strategies. Appropriate questions are asked at crucial junctures, primarily for:

- developing the skill of questioning the text, and
- registering the important points.

The types of in text questions which are usually incorporated in distance teaching materials are those which ask the learners:

- to derive ways to solve a problem; and

- ii) to find analogies between certain problems/views to analyse, synthesise and evaluate.

(In distance teaching materials, these questions are either dovetailed into the body of the text itself and/or asked in the form of self-check exercises and assignments. If a learner takes these questions seriously and works on them properly, his/her study skills improve considerably.)

Non-verbal aids

Illustrations, diagrams, charts, tables, etc. play a vital role in distance teaching materials. The reason behind this is that non-verbal aids are more effective than verbal representations, when it comes to registering information. However, non-verbal items are not looked upon as an alternative technique of presenting knowledge as they cannot present all types of knowledge or information, and therefore they are not a substitute for written/printed exposition. They are simply complementary or supplementary aids to the interpretation of verbal representations. The use of non-verbal aids helps learners develop the skill of *information transfer* and *information storing*.

Conjunctive features and glossaries

Distance teaching materials use conjunctive features such as, 'however', 'moreover', etc., to ensure easy reading and better comprehension. Besides helping to link sentences and paragraphs, these markers help the learners understand easily where the writer contrasts or supports a statement.

In distance teaching materials, 'glossaries' either precede the reading passage with the aim of preparing the learner beforehand for his/her encounter with possible problems in the passage, or appear as explanations to particular problems as the learner actually encounters them in the context. (The former are called 'priming' glossaries and the latter 'prompting' glossaries.) Glossaries may appear at the end of the text also; in such a case, they may be called 'reference' glossaries. We need not discuss which of these is more effective—their effectiveness primarily depends on the habits and attitudes of the learners.

Advance organisers

Distance teaching materials shun the idea of compartmentalisation of units or lessons. Each unit/lesson usually contains a brief introduction which, while summing up what the learners have already read in the previous unit, introduces the new items to the learners. This helps in establishing a bridge between the two units. Such bridges, in turn, help in building coherence more economically. Advance organisers, i.e. information given to learners prior to their reading of the unit, provide educational scaffolding for the retention of the material that follows.

Sum-ups

The use of 'sum-ups' is self-explanatory. They are introduced within a lesson when a move is made from a particular idea over to another. Thus the shift in theme is made explicit or highlighted. Sum-ups are also used at the end of each unit to help the learners integrate what they have already read.

Moreover, sum-ups help make the process of reference easier. The learners need not read the whole unit just to grasp the main ideas presented.

Narrative style

Distance education materials usually favour the narrative style. It makes the learners feel that they are constantly interacting with the author/teacher. Moreover, narratives are more easily read and better retained than expository texts.

The features discussed above help the distance learners develop many important study skills such as the following:

- determining word meanings from the context;
- finding main ideas;
- drawing inferences;
- drawing conclusions;
- making generalisations;
- recognising cause-and-effect relations;
- recognising analogies;
- categorising and concept mapping;
- distinguishing between facts and opinions;
- finding inconsistencies; and
- detecting propaganda and bias.

But then, incorporating helpful features in the distance teaching materials alone does not improve the study skills of the learners. It also demands serious and systematic efforts from them.

'Print' has been the chief medium of instruction in distance education in most countries. Accordingly, we dealt with 'study skills' pertaining to 'print' at great length. But considerable attention has been given to other media too. We should, therefore, touch upon some of the 'study skills' pertaining to these media. Here we use 'media' in a broader sense encompassing audio/video cassettes, telephone, radio, television, etc. and counselling.

The basic skills we talked about with reference to print are also applicable to media, for example, note taking, summarising etc. The learner should be able to take notes, summarise, deduce the meaning implied, etc. when he/she listens to or watches a programme—as he/she perhaps does while reading a text.

What do these media usually cover in terms of academic inputs? Some of the media, especially learning materials presented on audio/video cassettes, share many of the advantages inherent in a written text—skimming, reviewing (i.e., the learner can pause, rewind and stop whenever he/she wants to) control of pace, etc. Further, the use of media, on the whole, makes the learners feel the physical presence of a teacher.

What perhaps we would suggest that the learners should do is that they:

- pay close attention to what is said or shown;
- pick up the main line of argument from the programme;
- make a few key notes;
- recollect/reconstruct the programme in mind so that they can retrieve it whenever the need arises; and
- take notes on crucial items in order that they may be discussed with the peers or tutor(s) whenever such a provision is available.

(We should, however, accept that the socio-economic situation in India does not allow all the learners to own media-equipment, but open universities make it available at study centres usually.)

The distance learners should also gain maximum benefit from counselling. (That counselling is significant in distance education, etc. will be discussed in Block 2 of this Course. What we are interested here is in suggesting how distance learners can gain optimum benefit from counselling.)

Distance learners lack the assurance which regular contact with other learners and/ or with the teaching staff would bring. They may have pre-conceptions/prejudices about what constitutes the relationship between a teacher and a learner, what the course should cover, how the tutor should teach and what learning is, etc. This implies that the learner needs more than a prospectus and course materials. This learner needs particular help at various stages in his/her distance learning career. The stages may be:

- the stage prior to enrolment;
- at the time of entry to the course/first tutorial;
- at the time of tackling the first assignment;
- while on the course for maintaining the momentum;
- at the time of the examination; and
- after the course is completed successfully.

The learners should be thus able to say 'where' and 'for what' they need academic-counselling. Unless they have clear answer to these questions, they may not benefit from academic-counselling as much as one would like them to.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we:

- i) said that it is not easy to define study skills conclusively;
- ii) attempted to explain the term 'study skills' appropriately;
- iii) highlighted the significance of teaching study skills and said that what is discussed with reference to classroom situations is also relevant to the context of distance education;
- iv) listed the important study skills—building good study habits, knowing the text, concept mapping and test taking; and

- v) talked about the significance of study skills in distance education and about the responsibilities of the learners in developing their study skills.

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

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- i) Teachers can ask learners to bring in a road map of the community area in which they live and challenge one another to find the shortest route for a certain destination.
- ii) Another activity could be for teachers to bring in maps of foreign countries and challenge learners to find certain locations or the distance between two different locations.
- iii) Teachers could ask learners to prepare their own maps of regions they are studying. Practice in constructing maps is probably one of the best ways to have learners gain an appreciation of their importance. It also helps learners understand maps better.

2

'Gender' is a basic element of all human systems. However, sociologists until recently have ignored this fact even in studying all the social patterns where sexual differences are involved.

UNIT 4 INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR LEARNER SUPPORT

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Study Centres
 - 4.2.1 What is a study centre?
 - 4.2.2 Equipment
 - 4.2.3 Staff
 - 4.2.4 Summary of the characteristics of study centres
- 4.3 The Functions of a Study Centre
 - 4.3.1 Teaching groups
 - 4.3.2 Teaching using media
 - 4.3.3 Individual teaching
 - 4.3.4 Access to resources
 - 4.3.5 Contact with other learners
 - 4.3.6 Administrative activities
 - 4.3.7 Counselling in study centres
- 4.4 Regional Centres
 - 4.4.1 What is a Regional Centre?
 - 4.4.2 Facilities
 - 4.4.3 Staffing
 - 4.4.4 Functions
- 4.5 Institutional Context for Change in the Nature of Support Services
 - 4.5.1 Change in learners' needs
 - 4.5.2 Access and achievement
 - 4.5.3 Curricular changes
 - 4.5.4 Repositioning the learner
 - 4.5.5 Advent of multimedia systems
- 4.6 Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning Systems
 - 4.6.1 What is quality assurance?
 - 4.6.2 Quality assurance through performance indicators
 - 4.6.3 Performance indicators for learner support
- 4.7 Let Us Sum up

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- list the functions of study centres;
- describe and explain their role in counselling;
- discuss how this can be organised in your country;
- list the functions of regional centres;
- explain their role in counselling;
- discuss how regional services could be organised in your country;
- describe how regional centres, study centres and the central institutions relate to each other in teaching and supporting learners;
- describe quality assurance through performance indicators; and
- list performance indicators for learner support.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

So far in this block we have discussed the difficulties learners face while studying at a distance, and what they themselves may do to overcome them. Now we turn to institutional mechanisms which further help resolve those difficulties. Counselling, which we shall discuss in detail in the next block of this course, is the basis of these mechanisms. We can consider counselling as one of the sub-systems of the overall system of distance education. You will remember that in a systems approach to course design, we weigh needs and objectives against resources available. That is, once we have decided what is necessary or desirable, we consider what we can actually do, and how we can do it, with the media and staff at our disposal. Besides deciding what media and methods to use to present the content of the course, we have to consider how to provide feedback and advice to learners. In previous units you have seen how distance educators have tried to develop such support services. An underlying difficulty remains, however, that of distance—distance between counsellor and learner. To combat this, many institutions have taken on the idea of establishing local study centres as a site for contact. In this unit we shall consider the potential role of study centres. We shall also consider the role of regional centres, as established by many institutions with large numbers of learners, in providing a bridge between the central institution and local study centres. Besides, we have also discussed how the role of the institution in providing learner support has undergone changes as a result of the change in the needs of learners, curricular changes, and advent of multimedia systems which have also resulted in a move towards learner centred learning. This has led to the redefinition of the very concept of support services and has taken them from a marginal to an integral role in the instructional package actively promoting the intellectual development of the distance learner through continuous interaction and learner's active participation in the learning process.

Much of the unit is devoted to describe study centres and their functions. It is no easy task to provide a general summary, as the design and establishment of a system of study centres is a complex affair. We have discussed regional centres as well. You can also have a look at Block 4, wherein we have included case studies of learner support systems at 18 institutions located in developing as well as industrial countries.

Towards the end of the unit we have also discussed the shifting of concerns of support services as a result of the changes in the needs of the learners as well as the other interest groups in the society; transformation in the curricular design and wider access to new technology. Lastly, we have touched upon quality assurance and learner support and also listed performance indicators for learner support.

4.2 STUDY CENTRES

The nature and functions of a study centre vary considerably from country to country and institution to institution. Nonetheless it is possible and useful to highlight some general characteristics of study centres.

4.2.1 What is a study centre?

A study centre is part of an overall system of support for learners. This system includes basic support, contained alongside the subject matter within the teaching materials. Course units should contain written advice on study skills, help with difficulties and feedback on activities and exercises, in the form of printed answers. Tutors provide advice and comments when they mark correspondence assignments, and help from tutors or counsellors is sometimes available over the telephone, or face-to-face at residential courses. The main source of regular face-to-face support is usually, however, available at the study centre.

A study centre is a place which is regularly open to learners who wish to attend. Learners may come for seminars, private study or individual meetings with a tutor or counsellor, or to meet with other learners. Usually, the times that learners may attend are restricted, for two main reasons: first, study centres are usually borrowed rooms in buildings such as conventional educational institutions and second, the staff is usually part-time. Study centres are often, therefore, only open outside normal working hours, in the evenings or at weekends. In countries where the majority of distance learners are working adults, the limitations of access resulting from these constraints are of little importance, as these are the very times that learners are free to attend. In some countries study centres are open during working hours.

Many study centres are in schools. A classroom is opened for the use of distance learners in the evenings or at weekends. The room is already furnished for study, with blackboard, chairs and desks, although sometimes adult learners have found they are expected to use miniature chairs designed for small children. In fact, rooms in colleges or conventional universities are often more suitably equipped for adult learners, and are also used for study centres. Some small towns, however, have institutions of higher education and their schools or other premises such as community centres are often used. It would be expensive to rent permanently, or even build, classrooms for distance learners in every town in a country. Fortunately it is usually unnecessary to do so, as schools and colleges are normally empty at the very times that learners need to use them, in the evenings or at weekends. It can therefore be relatively cheap and easy to find premises for study centres.

When a distance-teaching institution sets up a network of study centres, it has to decide on what criteria to locate them. A major consideration will be the proportion of learners that can attend. The institution will look for a way to enable as many learners as possible to attend, insofar as this is desirable. One criterion might be travel time. What is the maximum time learners can be expected to travel to reach the centre? Then one can consider how they will travel. What will it cost them? What will it cost the institution? What kind of distance is acceptable? Another consideration is how often learners will want or need to attend. As soon as such questions are asked, it begins to be evident that the location of study centres is problematic. It is not easy to provide most learners with easy access to a study centre. Moreover, it is always impossible to set up study centres that are easily accessible for all learners. For those learners who cannot attend, or who can attend very infrequently, it is necessary to think of alternatives, such as telephone contact or audio-tapes through the post, or even letters.

4.2.2 Equipment

The study centre will normally need some equipment and facilities, besides basic furnishings, in order to serve its learners. Head teachers and college principals may be reluctant to allow distance learners and their tutors to use the institution's video recorder or laboratory equipment, even though they may be happy to allocate a room to learners. While study centres in non-educational institutions may not have such facilities anyway.

Let us consider what equipment may be needed (noting that how much will actually be needed will depend on what functions are allocated to a particular centre):

- books (course texts, reference books, background reading books);
- laboratory equipment and supplies for science subjects, and equipment and supplies for any other subjects with a practical component;
- audio-visual or computing equipment (video playback or television set, radio set, audio-cassette playback, language laboratory equipment, slide projector, computer, etc);
- information leaflets (on the distance teaching institution and its facilities, on career possibilities for graduates, etc);
- basic office equipment (typewriter, simple duplicator, photocopier);
- classroom equipment (overhead projector, blackboard, etc);
- stationery and office supplies;
- cupboards and filing cabinets to store many of the above items.

Often, study centres are equipped with only a few of these items.

Though a full range of equipment may be desirable, we may not propose a lot of equipment for each study centre as it would be expensive to acquire so much equipment for only the few learners who may use that centre. What do you consider to be the minimum equipment required? Your choice will depend on the functions you envisage for a particular centre. The absolute minimum is the furnishing of a meeting room—tables and chairs.

If, however, we decide that a study centre should have some special equipment, the *basic minimum is probably a complete set of the institution's course material, including texts, set books, audio-visual materials and playback facilities.*

The choice of further equipment is difficult, and depends largely on the functions of the study centre. If the centre is expected to serve as a source centre for learners as well as a meeting place, it will need a wider range of equipment. But the desire for equipment has to be set against its cost, and equipping large numbers of study centres is very costly. Sometimes learners have alternative access to equipment, at residential courses or public libraries, for example. Such factors can help cut down costs.

It would be inequitable to equip urban centres which attract many learners better than rural centres which attract only a few, and distance-teaching institutions generally try to make sure that all learners have access to equal resources by providing similar facilities in all study centres.

The storage of equipment may pose some problems. There needs to be a permanent and secure storage place. This **may** increase the cost of hiring space and may even not be available in the building used as a study centre. If an institution decides that its study centres must have most of the items suggested above, it will probably have to bear the cost of hiring a permanent, dedicated space for its learners, rather than making use of empty rooms out of normal hours. An alternative is to hold equipment in a main centre, and transport it to local centres as and when necessary. Such an arrangement has transport **and** cost implications, and is administratively demanding and difficult; **for example**, special arrangements have to be made for early access to rooms **if equipment** has to be set up in advance of a seminar, equipment has to be **checked** after use, and schedules of use have to be developed and followed. **While** costs of equipment may be reduced through central storage, the overall costs of using it may actually increase.

Another constraint relates to how easy it is to use the equipment supplied in every locality. Audio-visual equipment and computers need electricity. Electricity from a main connection is probably available in the kinds of public building used as study centres in most countries, but it may be intermittent and unreliable in rural areas. A learner who has travelled several kilometres at a weekend in order to watch a video crucial to his or her studies will not be well pleased if a power cut of several hours makes viewing on that day impossible. Further difficulties arise if equipment goes wrong or a part needs replacing: service facilities are inevitably poorer in remote areas than in urban areas.

4.2.3 Staff

Usually a distance-teaching institution employs part-time staff in its study centres. The first need is for a coordinator with administrative and supervisory responsibilities. In order to operate effectively, the coordinator needs to live near the study centre, and often a senior member of staff of the school or college where the centre is located takes on this role. In addition, teaching staff are needed to run seminars and to hold tutorials. As far as possible, the central distance-teaching institution will seek to find and appoint such staff locally, drawing on local graduates and professionals as well as school teachers and lecturers with appropriate specialisations. In some subjects, particularly those of minority interest, it may not be possible to find local specialists. In such cases, the institution may have to appoint touring tutors who could then serve a number of study centres.

This last option increases costs to the institution and is difficult to arrange. In cases where a shortage of tutors is foreseen, an alternative is to appoint local study supervisors. These do not need to be subject specialists and could have a variety of functions: they might simply be administrators, supervising the study centre during the hours when it remains open; they might lead discussions in study groups—a non-specialist can do this effectively after a brief training in adult education techniques; or they might act as conveners of learner self-help groups.

As soon as a distance-teaching institution embarks on establishing study centres, it has to take on the task of supporting the local staff. They need briefing in techniques of working with distance learners, and they need a thorough introduction to the objectives and content of the courses they are to

teach. Besides providing face-to-face orientation, the institution usually has to develop handbooks and notes for part-time staff at study centres, including written suggestions for activities in seminars and tutorials which the course team feel would be useful. In some cases, radio programmes as well as print may be used for staff support.

In higher education institutions such as distance-teaching universities, academic staff sometimes have difficulty in accepting that people without high-level qualifications may be asked to teach their courses. In fact with appropriate guidance such local tutors and supervisors have an important contribution to make, and therefore should be acceptable in difficult situations.

A study centre also needs support staff such as laboratory technicians, clerical assistants or caretakers. Usually, such staff are shared with the host institution.

4.2.4 Summary of the characteristics of study centres

Study centres are normally established with a view to making their facilities accessible to as many learners as possible. In order to be close to most learners, an institution therefore normally has to open a large number of study centres. The capital and running costs of each centre must therefore be low.

As a result, study centres usually have the following characteristics:

- shared space or small reserved space in a local institution;
- modest equipment and facilities;
- local part-time staff, not necessarily high-level specialists;
- restricted working hours.

We have seen that the choice of location and equipment and staff for study centres is difficult. While it would be desirable to equip all learners with reasonable access to well-equipped study centres, it is extremely hard to do so. Those who plan a system of study centres have to try to balance resources against constraints. One criterion for decision-making will be the functions of the study centres, and we shall consider that in the next section. First, however, spend some time working on the activity below to help you comprehend the material you have just read.

Check Your Progress 1

In the light of what you have just read, you should now be able to consider the possibilities for developing existing or new study centres.

Either:

Consider a local study centre that you are familiar with. List its **equipment** and teaching resources. What other resources might be **useful**? What difficulties do you foresee in providing these? What criteria would you see as most important in considering what to provide?

Or:

If you have no study centres for distant learners locally, where might you locate such a centre? What criteria would you apply in deciding whether such a centre is feasible? What equipment, etc. would you consider providing? What difficulties are likely to arise in doing so?

Please make notes on one of the questions above. When you have finished your notes and decided what resources you need, answer the question below.

Can you think of any ways of getting access to extra resources that we have not mentioned above?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Check your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

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4.3 THE FUNCTIONS OF A STUDY CENTRE

Activities in study centres are very different from those in a conventional classroom or lecture room. In distance education, some teaching in study centres is similar to teaching in conventional education. But such teaching only covers selected topics, while learners spend most of their time in the centre engaged in other activities. Thus teaching takes its place as only one of the functions of the centres and, as we shall see, has its own characteristics.

4.3.1 Teaching groups

Why does any teaching at all take place in study centres? Surely this is a contradiction in terms. Good distance-teaching materials can and must cover everything that learners need to know to succeed in their course.

Face-to-face teaching is an extra component, but an important one. It has five main functions:

- teaching learners the study skills that they need to study at a distance;
- dealing with problems and difficulties encountered in understanding the subject matter;
- practical work;
- teaching learners to learn from each other; and
- individual teaching.

Usually class or group teaching takes place in study centres, with regular seminars arranged for the main subjects. *The major difference between such arrangements and conventional education is in face-to-face there is no attempt to cover the complete syllabus.*

Learners tend to start their studies lacking in confidence. The teacher has to help build up their confidence. This can be done by encouraging learners to express their opinions, and talk about their own experience, and by supporting individuals in the group as they make their contributions. You will no doubt already have recognised that this role combines teaching and counselling. It is a demanding and difficult role, particularly since sessions in study centres, though regular, are usually infrequent and short.

In any group of learners, whatever their age and their level of study, there will be some who are more in need of support and assistance than others. A good working principle is that learners early in their career are likely to need more face-to-face support than those who are experienced in order to build up the skills they need for studying at a distance. At the British Open University, for example foundation level learners are given more access to face-to-face seminars than higher-level learners. When the same university admitted a trial group of 18 year-olds, the non-completion rate was higher than it was for older adults. One probable explanation is that younger learners lacked strong motivation and needed an even greater degree of support.

In distance study, *contact hours in study centres are not intended to cover additional subject matter*, which is all in the written units and media inputs. Indeed, one task for the face-to-face tutor in distance education is to resist pressure from learners to cover everything like a class teacher. Rather, time is needed to help the learners become oriented to distance education and to help them gain the study skills they need in order to achieve self-reliance and the ability to study independently, in other words helping them learn.

A further function of contact is to help learners to approach assignments. A **tutor** may explain the kind of answer that a question requires, and give some **items** for approaching the question. Distance learners cannot easily get help **with** such matters once they return home, and may even abandon their courses if they get stuck on an easy question. Similarly, tutors may help **with pre-exam** revision sessions, discussing typical exam questions, for

example. Such sessions concentrate on general help with *approaching* assignments and exams but *do not* attempt to provide model answers in advance.

This kind of help can be called help with study skills, and is an important element of face-to-face teaching in distance education. In conventional education, it tends to take place incidentally in class, or informally when learners chat with each other or snatch a few moments for discussion with a teacher. It should not be overlooked in distance teaching.

Some topics are difficult to present through the media, and in such cases a small amount of direct teaching may take place. It may be that the topic benefits from face-to-face demonstration (possibly followed by practical work done by the learner). One of the strongest cases for additional face-to-face teaching is when affective learning is involved. When learners, particularly adults, are asked to evaluate and reconsider their opinions or attitudes, group discussion and interaction is more or less essential. If learners at home have access to materials in several media, particularly if the course is designed as an integrated package, less reliance is put on face-to-face sessions. Thus science experiments can be demonstrated on television and mathematical problems can be explained audio-visually with combined text and audio cassette. Even affective learning can be assisted with dramatic presentations and discussions on radio or tape, to reinforce messages in text. We can therefore say that the more limited the access learners have to different media at home, the more likely they are to make use of supplementary face-to-face teaching in study centres.

Group teaching designed to reinforce understanding may well include a review by the tutor of material covered at home, but is more likely to concentrate on discussion of specific study problems experienced by learners. Such problems can be identified in advance by looking through assignments learners have submitted to see where they encountered difficulty, or questions may be raised by learners during the session.

Practical demonstrations, step-by-step analysis of problems, group discussions and question and answer sessions: none of these can be dealt with by the lecture method and all require small groups—small enough for each learner to ask questions and for open discussion to take place. Most tutors coming to distance education have to learn to handle such small groups. As they work in groups, learners will learn to help each other. The tutor can encourage this, and thus facilitate the establishment of self-help groups.

Through these various activities, the study centre becomes an important source of reinforcement and encouragement. Attendance may lead to improved course completion rates and better marks in examinations. It is, however, always necessary to remember that this supplementary assistance is only available to those who can attend. Those who are regularly unable to attend will need some alternative arrangements for support.

4.3.2 Teaching using media

In some distance-teaching systems, learners watch video programmes or listen to audio cassettes in groups. This procedure may be adopted in countries where **individual ownership of receivers** is low, or it may be deliberately **chosen as a powerful educational method**. Recorded video or

audio is under the control of learners and tutors who can stop or replay programmes when they wish.

The tutor in the study centre should know how to explore these media, and this requires some training and guidance from the central institution. Tutors can use the media as a stimulus for discussion or for thorough coverage of a topic, stopping or repeating segments as necessary. Once they have grasped the techniques of managing viewing or listening sessions, they need specific guidance, usually in the form of notes, on how to use each individual programme to its best effect.

Recorded media can be particularly useful if specialist local tutors are in short supply. A non-specialist supervisor can learn to manage group viewing or listening sessions most effectively

4.3.3 Individual teaching

In most distance education systems, the main individual contact between the tutor and the learner takes place by correspondence, when assignments are marked. The feedback from the correspondence tutor is vitally important to the learner. Considerable attention is therefore paid by distance-teaching institutions to ensure that correspondence teaching is of high quality. Ideally, the correspondence tutor is also the tutor at a local study centre, and the learner has a chance for personal contact. But often the correspondence tutor and the face-to-face tutor are different. This means that when learners ask tutors about individual work-related problems, the reply is seldom based on a detailed knowledge of the individual learners performance. While local tutors will always try to help individual learners with their problems, in most cases numbers of learners are large and time is short, so that individual contact of this kind must remain occasional and informal.

Check Your Progress 2

What qualities and skills would you hope to find in a tutor at a local study centre for distance learners? How might these be acquired?

Notes: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

[illegible]

4.3.4 Access to resources

Let us start with two reminders: first, equipping study centres is expensive. In many cases, it is only possible to equip them with the basic minimum, a stock of all the course materials, and playback facilities for audio-visual components; second, ideally, the learner at home has access to all the essential teaching materials, such as textbooks, television programmes, audio cassettes etc. If this is not the case, then either attendance at study centres (or an alternative venue) is essential, or the relevant course component must be considered optional and supplementary. For example, if all learners on a particular course must watch a particular television series, then attendance at a study centre is compulsory for those who do not have television sets at home, or some alternative arrangement for individual access has to be made. If such a requirement is unrealistic, the course must be redesigned, so that viewing is supplementary and optional.

The study centre is thus an additional resource for learners. It should be the first place that they turn to for finding the resources they need to supplement the materials they receive at home. Let us consider how far it may be possible to provide them.

A first category of additional resources is course-related items. A number of learners will want to go beyond the essential material, and will want additional reading matter. This may be background books or articles referred to in the course texts, or items recommended by teachers, or reference books. The study centre might have a library and a space for reading. If possible, it should also have borrowing facilities. The supply of books to study centres is particularly important, at the university level where reading is traditionally seen as a key learner activity. Distance learners, especially those living in remote areas, seldom have access to good libraries or good bookshops. But it is never possible to supply many books to study centres; the cost is too high. *Courses should therefore be self-contained, and additional reading may be optional.* Alternative sources of books also need to be explored, such as public libraries or a central book-loan system.

Study centres should also hold recordings of all video or audio components of a course. If courses are broadcast, some learners may miss a broadcast, and need to view a recording at the centre. Often, learners will want to replay a programme they have watched before. This could be the case after group viewing sessions as well as after watching a live programme at home.

In addition, some courses require special components to be available in study centres, such as scientific equipment or computing activities.

A second category of resources relates to learners' wider needs and future plans. They will need information and reading material to help them develop individual interests and decide on future study plans or careers. Thus, if possible the centre should hold a range of information leaflets, general vocational and reference books. Learners will also refer to the library for the entire course material issued by the institution, to help select their next courses.

The provision of such resources does not guarantee access. Learners need space to sit and study quietly, time to do so when the centre is open, and help

from a librarian or supervisor to identify and find the resources they need. In certain cases need for space for longer periods of time during a day can't be ruled out. Providing such space has cost implications. Perhaps, community involvement can help to some extent in such cases.

4.3.5 Contact with other learners

A learner in a conventional institution has regular contact with others, and this contributes in many ways to learning. Such contact enriches experiences, helps build up confidence, and contributes to know-how in handling assignments and examinations. The distance learner lacks this interaction most of the time, and it is important that it takes place at the study centre. As time at the centre is restricted, this is one of the reasons why tutors need to make particular efforts to encourage activities in small groups to help stimulate learner-to-learner interaction.

Of particular importance in this context are learner self-help groups. These are groups of learners who discuss their study together without the intervention of a tutor. Learners can learn a great deal from each other; this may come as a surprise, and groups seldom start spontaneously. The tutor at the study centre can help by convening a group or putting learners in touch with each other, and by helping a group get started on its activities. The most important task is to convince learners that such groups are worthwhile.

4.3.6 Administrative activities

So far, we have considered only the educational functions of a study centre. Centres will also have some administrative functions, although these will vary from country to country, institution to institution, and usually most administration is done at regional or central levels. Let us simply note that local study centres may hold some records of local learners, and may be local enrolments, for local distribution of materials, for appointment of local tutors and counsellors, and for conducting examinations.

Check Your Progress 3

So far in this unit, we have not separated counselling activities from others such as tutoring. Counselling is, however, an important function of study centres. Can you think of some support services that may help different kinds of learners? List in the space given below as many as you can, and consider whether each of them could materialize by a mechanism other than a study centre.

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4.3.7 Counselling in study centres

The study centre has many functions, and the learner returning home after a weekly session may well best remember a particular discussion or an excellent video he/she has seen. It is at the study centre, however, that the learner has the best opportunities for counselling of all kinds, as there is access to advice from subject specialists, help with study skills, information about choice of courses, and assistance with non-academic problems. The environment of the study centre, the resources available, and the way in which the contact programme is organised, all contribute to providing opportunities for counselling to take place informally and naturally. In the next block we will be discussing counselling and tutoring in detail.

4.4 REGIONAL CENTRES

In this section we shall look briefly at regional centres from a bottom-up perspective, that is as centres which provide service to local study centres.

A regional centre in distance education is intermediate between the central institution and local study centres.

4.4.1 What is a Regional Centre?

Not all distance teaching institutions have regional centres. Large open universities have generally chosen to establish them for greater administrative efficiency and to serve as a channel of communication between the central institution and the local study centres. Regional centres are established to look after clusters of study centres. The UK Open University, for example, has 13 regional centres, the smallest of which has 9 study centres catering for approximately 8000 learners. The IGNOU (India) has twenty-two regional centres, each catering to approximately 5000 to 15000 learners, and 10-25 study centres per regional centre.

Regional centres have important administrative functions, in particular organising the operation of the study centres and the teaching in them at the local level. This may well include staff recruitment and the all-important briefing and training in distance education of such staff. Regional centres may also have a role in handling learner enrolments and records. The degree

of responsibility will depend on the level of autonomy granted by the central institution to the regional centres.

Regional centres may engage in a variety of promotional activities in order to create more public awareness in the region and a positive attitude towards open and distance education among academics, provincial and local government officials and employees.

Regional centres may further have a number of academic functions. Apart from the briefing and training of tutors implied above, their academic staff may also serve as a source of specialist tutors for study centres. In some open universities, learners' assignment responses are evaluated at Regional centres. Regional Centres may also be involved in organisation of term-end examination.

Regional academics are additionally, in a good position to give feedback information to course teams on how the courses are received by learners, highlighting areas of difficulty, points which need further explication and problem areas. Such feedback is an essential aspect in helping course teams to produce courses which are readily accessible to those studying at a distance.

Regional centres have an important role to play in counselling. They can act as the reference point for serious problems, sometimes resolving the problems themselves, sometimes sending them to the central institution. They may also organise summer schools, residential schools, field work, laboratory work for the benefit of those learners who are geographically dispersed or whose numbers are low.

One of the major functions of Regional centres is to closely monitor the functioning of study centres of their regions in order to maintain and enhance quality of support services provided to learners.

Many Regional centres also organise annual convocations (degree awarding functions) such as UKOU and IGNOU.

Regional centres may also be involved in promoting systems research. They may also serve as resource centres for distance education in the region.

4.4.2 Facilities

Regional centers, the sub-offices of the university for all practical purposes, are also intended to act as resource centers of the university in respective regions. Regional centers are centers for training of coordinators/counsellors/other functionaries and provide a venue for the learners and the academic-counsellors to express their problems.

Responsibility for random checking of student assignment, if needed, would also lie with regional centers. Therefore, the following facilities are usually provided by Regional centers :

- Reading Room
- Audio/Video Room
- Audio/Video equipment
- Reprographic facilities

- Information materials including bibliographical information, information about policies and programmes of the open university
- Seminar Room
- Internet and E-mail connectivity
- Library
- Student records
- Audio and Video cassettes
- Dish antennae
- Books and Journals
- Office equipment
- Training equipment and materials
- Records of Study Centres
- Stationery and Office supplies
- Office furniture

The choice of equipment at a Regional Center depends largely on the functions of the regional center and the resources provided by the concerned Open University.

4.4.3 Staffing

The regional center is headed by a Regional Director who is overall in-charge of activities of the university within the region. The principal responsibilities of the Regional Director are to direct and monitor academic operations and to coordinate the working of the study centers. Regional Director is provided with both academic and non-academic staff for discharge of academic and administrative responsibilities of the regional center. The Regional Center functions under the supervision and control of the Support Services Division at the Headquarters. The duties and responsibilities of the Regional Director are given below:

Regional Director

Appointment and Status

The Regional Director is the head of the regional center. He/she is usually a senior academic appointed by the university following the approved selection procedures. He/she occupies a key position and plays a vital role in implementing the policies and academic programmes of the university. He/she is the representative of the university in his/her region.

Duties and Responsibilities of the Regional Director

The duties and responsibilities of the Regional Director in relation to the region assigned to him/her are as under:

- Awareness about distance education system, the University's policies, programmes and procedures.
- General management of the regional center.

- Management of finances and accounts, purchase, maintenance and utilization of furniture and equipment.
- Handling of admissions
- Development, coordination and monitoring of support services network in the region
- Establishment of new study centers
- Supervision and monitoring of existing study centers including monitoring of counselling and assignments
- Liaison with State Government, educational institutions and other organizations in the region
- Provision of support services at the regional center
- Guidelines to study centers for their smooth functioning
- Staff Development
 - Training of regional center staff
 - Training of coordinators and assistant coordinators
 - Orientation of academic counsellors
 - Training of part-time administrative staff of study centers
- Academic activities
 - Development of region-specific programmes
 - Support to schools in course writing
 - Organization of seminars and workshops
 - Programme evaluation
 - Need-assessment and research
 - Translation of materials
 - Selection and appointment of academic-counsellors
 - Contribution in the development of new courses
- Development of administrative and academic systems at the regional center
- Promotion and publicity of the University and its programmes
- Development and use of regional center library
- Maintenance of records
 - Student records
 - Service records
 - Equipment utilization records
 - Data pertaining to study centers
 - Records pertaining to counsellors
 - Counselling data
- Feedback Mechanism
 - Feedback to headquarters on various activities including counselling,

evaluation of assignments, academic programmes, orientation programmes and student grievances

- Interactive activities
Meetings with heads of institutions, meetings with coordinators, counsellors, students, State Government departments and also headquarters
- Official visits to study centers and follow-up activities

Thus, the Regional Director occupies a central position in the delivery system of an open university. He/she serves as a vital and effective link between various schools and divisions at the headquarters on the one hand and the study centers on the other and also between the Open University and the respective State Governments, between the study centers and learners enrolled there, between the counsellors and the coordinator and the learners between the learners and various Divisions at headquarters between open university and the media, between the open university and other educational institutions, voluntary and private organizations located in that area, and between the open university and the general public. With his/her skillful dealings and prompt action, the regional director can alleviate the problems of the learners in the region, can create better support facilities for them and can generate proper public response for effective implementation of programmes in that region. The success of the university's programmes and policies in the region largely depends on the pivotal role played by the regional director.

4.4.2 Functions

The principal functions of the regional center can be broadly classified under three heads.

- a. Academic Activities
- b. Administrative Activities
- c. Promotional Activities

Academic Activities

The academic activities of the regional center encompass functions pertaining to admission, evaluation, student records, selection and orientation of academic-counsellors, launching of new programmes, research and development of academic programmes wherever entrusted, organization of academic seminars and workshops, monitoring of counselling and assignments, conduct of intensive contact programmes and maintenance of library services.

Distance educators all over the world are convinced of the view that regional centers should become academic centers rather than administrative units carrying out semi-academic and coordination functions alone. Considering this emphasis, a few of the academic activities mentioned in the above paragraph are highlighted below:

As the regional center is responsible for organizing and monitoring the open university's programmes in the region, it is expected to undertake a variety of academic activities both of routine and innovative nature.

Identification of region-specific courses and support to the Schools in course-writing

The regional center has to organize and implement in the region the academic programmes launched by the open university. Apart from that it can play an important role in identifying, developing and implementing such academic programmes as may be required and feasible in the region. For this purpose, the regional director must keep constant contacts with various academic and research institutions, other organizations, leading individuals in various walks of life, and the State Government.

Organization of seminars/workshops

A regular feature of the academic activities of a regional center is the organization of seminars and workshops for promoting and further strengthening the distance education system, and also for obtaining greater involvement of the academic community of the region in the activities of the open university. Such seminars may discuss present developments and future possibilities in distance education in regional, national or global contexts as well as specific programmes/courses of the open university. These can be organized by the regional center itself or in collaboration with other institutions/organizations at either the regional center or any other suitable place in the region.

Research and new academic programmes

With a view to strengthening the existing academic programmes of the open university and helping the university in designing and developing new academic programmes, research in the following areas may be undertaken at the regional center as an ongoing activity:

Programme Evaluation

This involves research on or evaluation of the open university's academic programmes in their entirety by means of a sample survey through questionnaires, personal interviews with learners, counsellors, coordinators, other academic bodies and agencies concerned. The data collected may be sent to Schools/Divisions concerned for taking, if necessary, remedial measures. This activity can go a long way in minimizing the dropout rates.

Need-assessment research

This can be an effective way of getting ideas and help for development of new academic programmes. The regional director can develop a mechanism for keeping contacts with a cross-section of society including academic and professional institutions as well as individuals, Government departments and voluntary agencies. This research can be undertaken by the academic staff of the regional center, which would be beneficial particularly for that region.

Systems Research

Systems Research is an important activity as it contributes to improvement in the functioning of the Open University System.

Selection and Appointment of Academic Counsellors and other Part-time staff of Study Center

Selection and appointment of academic counsellors is one of the most important functions of a Regional Center. The concerned Schools develop the criterion for selection of academic counsellors which is followed by the Regional Center in the selection process. Also appointment of part-time staff at study center is the responsibility of Regional Centers.

Orientation and Induction

Orientating the newly appointed academic counsellors to the open and distance learning system, particularly to their specific tasks of tutoring and counselling is a vital activity performed by regional centers in collaboration with the concerned Schools. Also organizing induction programmes for the part-time staff of study centers and more so for the distance learners (through its study centers), is a major responsibility of the regional center.

Setting up a Support Services Network

Providing effective support services to all distance learners of the region, by informing, advising and counselling them is one of the key functions of the regional center. Setting up a network of study centers and expanding the support services network in the region, based on the distribution of learners, the nature of the programmes and existing facilities available is again one of its most important functions.

Student Admission

The regional center is responsible for student admission in the region. Maintenance of student records is another very important activity. The regional center also provides pre-admission counselling to prospective distance learners.

Organization of Counselling sessions, Practicals, Evaluation of Assignments and Examinations

The regional center is mainly responsible for the organization of counselling sessions, practicals etc., based on the specific requirements of the programmes being offered and guidelines laid down by the concerned Schools. It also supervises the evaluation of assignments and conduct of term-end examinations at its study centers and sometimes at the regional center itself.

Monitoring

Lastly monitoring the academic and administrative services offered by the study centers is one of the most important functions of the regional center. Providing regular feedback to the Headquarters is equally important.

Administrative Activities

The administrative activities of the Regional Center include appointment of staff at regional centers and study centers, maintenance of records, purchase and maintenance of furniture and equipment, financial management of the

regional center as well as study centers, library records and preparation of budgets for the regional center and study centers. Payments to study centers for their staff and their activities is also its major function. Periodically reviewing the expenditure incurred by study centers and also stock verifications are other important activities. Regular remittance of student fees to the Headquarters is yet another vital function of the regional center.

Promotional Activities

Promotional activities include adequate publicity of the open university system within the region, developing suitable publicity material, identifying journals for publicity, establishing regular contacts with various institutions and voluntary organizations within the region, organization of public seminars and symposia on open university system, participation in exhibitions and book-fairs, radio, television and press interviews, regional director's visits to institutions/organizations, liaison with state government and voluntary organizations etc.

These promotional activities can be group specific (for potential students, prospective employers etc.), program-specific and time-specific (for example, during the admission period).

Thus regional centers play a key role in the support services being offered to distance learners.

Check Your Progress 4

From what you have read in this unit, summarise as best you can the ways in which each of the following normally contributes to (a) teaching learners and (b) supporting learners.

- 1) The central institution
- 2) Regional centres
- 3) Local study centres.

Notes: i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Check your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

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4.5 INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR CHANGE IN THE NATURE OF SUPPORT SERVICES

We have so far discussed the standard form of institutional arrangements for learner support in distance and open learning institutions. This method of discussion represents a top-down approach which has not resulted from an analysis of who and where the learners actually are. The idea being to provide a range of services which is as local as possible with the objective of preventing drop outs, assisting weaker learners and counselling individuals with personal problems.

Developments in support service operations today involve a shifting of concerns of support services away from the amelioration of individual learner problems towards a more obvious involvement in the interactive instructional process. Thus redefining the very concept of support services, which will no longer be regarded as a supplementary service in the instructional package but instead will have an integral role in the instructional package: actively promoting the intellectual development of the distance learners.

4.5.1 Change in learners' needs

This shift is a normal reaction of distance and open learning institutions to the changes in the needs of their learners and other interest groups in the society. Some of these pressures are expressed in the changing patterns of enrolment: factors such as the necessity for life-long learning, geographic mobility, and the recognition of equity groups have combined to significantly increase the number and variety of part-time learners. These shifts in demand and institutional response imply corresponding changes in the nature of support. The institutional context for this changed support role is outlined in this section, where it will be seen that the movement to a learner-centred institutional model represents the anticipated form in which learner support will be provided. Thus learner support will become a more

integrated and comprehensive system and an all pervasive and central educational component of distance education.

4.5.2 Access and achievement

The principles of open learning and the practice of distance education were initially established to improve accessibility to post-secondary education. The essential elements of most institutional access policies included rolling enrolment dates, the removal of entry requisites, and the convenience of home study — the latter designed to accommodate the personal situations of learners with job and family responsibilities. More recently the concept of accessibility has been expanded from access-of-entry to include access-of-results. The institution is obliged to provide the necessary support to ensure achievement and completion. This has resulted in the changes in institutional views about their responsibility to support learners and effectively encourage them to complete their courses.

Tinto (1975) suggests that an institution's response should not be limited to the problem of retention but should consider also the broader goal of learner development which essentially means adopting a learner-centred approach.

A second area of concern in promoting learner attainment is the availability of resource materials needed for university level study and scholarship. Garrison and Baynton (1987) make an interesting distinction between support for the learning process and support for the mediation (communication) process: "... the resources of the learning process include the availability of access to courses, teachers or facilitators, learning materials, library facilities, media equipment and community experts. The need for resources associated with the mediation process results from the geographic distance between the teacher and the learner, and requires some type of mechanical or electronic transfer of information through telecommunications or mail to carry out the two-way communication in the learning process."

4.5.3 Curricular changes

The notion of learner centred learning lies at the heart of the transition from the transmission mode, through the transaction mode to the transformation mode in curricular design. Briefly we would like to explain that the function of education in the transmission mode is to convey facts, skills and values to learners. These are transmitted in one direction, with an emphasis on control and on the prediction of the learning process.

In education as a transaction, the individual is seen as purposive and intentional and, in the role of learner, as being capable of rational problem solving. The central element of transaction is that learning involves a dialogue between the learner and the curriculum, during which the learner reconstructs knowledge through dialogue.

The transformation mode focuses more on personal and social change than the others. In this mode of instructional design the learner and curriculum are seen as interrelated. It is based on the assumption that individuals need to seek personal fulfilment and they can do so through the learning process. Thus moving towards a learner-centred view of learning.

4.5.4 Repositioning the learner

In the conventional model of distance education, the learner was considered as a consumer of packaged information. This characterises the traditional “industrial” model of distance education as articulated by Peters (1989). In contrast learners are today seen as more active participants in the learning process. Kaye and Rumble (1991) attribute this change to a number of factors such as:

- wider access to new technology;
- growing demand from the business community for continuing education for employees;
- increasing competition for part-time learners; and
- a move towards a “post Fordist” society with its emphasis on addressing the needs of the individual before those of the institution.

Thus contributing to the concept of learner-centred designs with support systems being more responsive to learners personal and intellectual growth.

4.5.5 Advent of multimedia systems

Telecommunications have the potential to create a richer learning environment. We shall be discussing the role of media and telecommunication in distance education in greater detail in a separate course ES-318 and its role in Counselling and Tutoring in Unit 2 Block 2 of course ES-313. Here we shall only refer to particularly those two media that are providing mediated interactive instruction namely: audio conferencing and computer-mediated communication. Both allow many-to-many exchanges (including one-to-one) and overcome problems of distance. Both are ideally suited for cooperative learning and are also examples of “electronic classrooms” or “virtual study centres”. We have now reached a stage when it is possible to operate distance education programmes worldwide using the multimedia systems for administration of courses as well as for offering learner support.

[Extract from *Commonwealth of Learning, Perspectives on Distance Education-Learner support services: Towards More Responsive systems Report of a Symposium on Learner Support Services in Distance Education* (ed.) R. Sweet, Vancouver, COL, 1993. Reproduced with the permission of the Commonwealth of Learning.]

Check Your Progress 5

What are the factors responsible for bringing about a change in the nature of support services being offered by distance/open education institutions?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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4.6 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEMS

Accompanying the rapid growth in open and distance learning systems, there has been an increasing interest in the quality of education by this relatively new mode. Even the funding for open and distance education has been increasing year after year. Whether these funds are being utilised in a more productive manner as compared to that in conventional education, is one of the issues that has brought enhanced scrutiny from the public and the government about the quality and value of education being offered by open universities offering distance education programmes.

Distance education being predominantly a private form of learning based upon pre-packaged course materials produced to achieve economies of scale. The primary purpose of this industrialised model is to instruct large numbers regardless of time and location. Access is the driving motivation behind this design and delivery model.

More recently educators have begun to focus on the quality aspects of the educational transaction itself. The assumption is that education is based upon two-way communication. Quality is reflected in the nature and frequency of communication between teacher and learner as well as between learner and learner.

In conventional education the focus is more on product evaluation, as the processes are highly individualised and taken place within the four walls of classrooms and laboratories. In open and distance education the focus of evaluation has to be on the product but more so on processes.

Check Your Progress 6

Substantiate, in not more than 5 times the statement that "there has been an increasing interest in the quality of education being offered through distance mode".

4.6.1 What is quality assurance?

Quality means different things to different people. In higher education there are a variety of “stakeholders” namely — learners, employers, teaching and non-teaching staff, government and its funding agencies, accreditors, validators, auditors, assessors and others, each with a different perspective on quality. Green and Harvey (1993) have identified five different approaches to viewing quality that are used in higher education. These include the definition of quality in terms of:

- exceptional (high standards);
- consistency (zero defects);
- fitness for purpose (meeting stated objectives);
- value for money; and
- transformative (transformation of the participant).

Given the relative nature of the concept it is difficult to identify a single substantive definition of the concept that is most appropriate for the field of higher education. Rather than searching for a single definition, it appears to be most important that those who use the term explicitly address the nature of quality to which they refer. It is imperative that quality be initially defined before specific mechanisms are identified (Warren et al., 1994).

Due to lack of any universal definition of “quality”, a specific definition of quality assurance is unavailable. However, a more inclusive definition is provided by Green and Harvey (1993) who refer to quality assurance as “those mechanisms and procedures designed to reassure that various ‘stakeholders’ in higher education that institutions accord a high priority to implementing policies designed to maintain and enhance institutional effectiveness”

There is distinction between quality assurance and quality control. Tannock (1992) for example, states that quality control, “controls merely of the operational techniques and activities that are used to fulfill requirements for quality, usually interpreted to mean conformance to the required specification”. While quality assurance, refers to a process of continuous and never-ending quality improvement which include:

- inputs to the teaching learning process;
- the process itself;
- outputs (e.g. the number of graduates, standards achieved);
- the individual university and its (quality) management;
- the discipline; and
- the course/programme of study.

4.6.2 Quality assurance through performance indicators

If you can recall the first unit, you have read about learner support in open and distance learning system. You are also familiar with the range of services that are provided to distance learners.

The assessment of quality is a highly complex phenomena as the process takes cognisance of both the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of the quality of the institution. Higher education institutions would have better quality perception through effective and sound combination of internal self appraisal, along with unbiased and transparent review by an independent agency. Accreditation is generally the term used for certifying the process of evaluation of quality which takes into account the entire activities of the institution. The evaluation of an institution is based on certain established criteria which are termed as performance indicators, which indicate the minimum acceptability and desirability.

Cuenin (1986) draws a distinction between simple indicators, performance indicators and general indicators. Simple indicators he suggests are usually expressed in the form of absolute figures and are intended to provide a relatively unbiased description of a solution or process. Performance indicators differ from simple indicators in that they imply a point of reference, for example a standard, an objective, an assessment. Although a simple indicator is the more natural of the two, it may become a performance indicator if a value judgement is involved. There are in addition, Cuenin suggests very general indicators which in the main are derived from outside the institution and are not indicators in the strict sense — they are frequently opinions, survey findings or general statistics. They are however used in decision making.

A somewhat broader definition was adopted by the CVCP/UGC Working Group (UK), that defined performance indicators as statements usually quantified of resources employed and achievements secured in areas relevant to the particular objectives of the enterprise and went on to suggest that the emphasis is on indicators as signals or guides rather than absolute measures and that whilst indicators do not necessarily provide direct measurements of inputs, processes and outputs they can offer valuable information relating to them.

Although there is no large measure of agreement on the definition of indicators, there is a large measure of agreement over their purpose, namely that they are designed to give information to policy makers about the state of the educational system, either to demonstrate its accountability or more commonly to help in policy analysis, policy evaluation and policy formulation. They also serve the purpose of institution management and evaluation and strategic planning and above all maintenance of quality in the systems. It may also be useful for the consumers in selection of the institution as it is for the employers in recruiting candidates.

In order to provide quality assurance in learner support it is necessary to develop benchmarks for both process product evaluation. In this context the concept of constructing performance indicators for educational organisations is gaining ground.

In the UK, the Jarrat Committee Report (1985) proposed the following performance indicators.

“Performance indicators proposed in the Jarrat Report.

Internal performance indicators include

- *market share of undergraduate applications (by subject)*
- *graduation rates and classes of degrees*
- *attraction of masters and doctoral learners*
- *success rate of higher degrees (and time taken)*
- *attraction of research funds*
- *teaching quality.*

External performance indicators include

- *acceptability of graduates (post-graduates) in employ.*
- *first destination of graduates (post-graduates)*
- *reputation judged by external reviews*
- *publications by staff and citations*
- *patents, inventions, consultancies*
- *membership, prizes, medals of learned societies*
- *papers at conferences.*

Operational performance indicators include

- *unit costs*
- *staff/learner ratios*
- *class sizes*
- *course options available*
- *staff workloads*
- *library stock availability*
- *computing availability.*

Johnes and Taylor (1990) used the following five indicators to rate the performance of U.K. universities:

- *the non-completion rate (NCR)*
- *the percentage of graduates obtaining a first or upper second class honours degree (DEGREE RESULT)*
- *the percentage of graduates obtaining permanent employment (EMPLOY)*
- *the percentage of graduates proceeding to further education or training (FURTHER)*
- *the average research rating obtained by each university in the University Founding Council's (UFC) 1989 Research Selectivity Exercise (RESEARCH).”*

Crooks (1987) suggests twenty-three performance indicators suitable for open learning systems. Some of which are:

- Finally registered learners
- Undergraduate output in terms of the awards given
- Assistance to disadvantaged groups in population
- Cost per learner
- Learner satisfaction with course content
- Input qualifications of learners for professional, updating and retaining courses
- Amount of external funding obtained
- Community service
- Amount of course material used by other higher education institutions

Thus at the macro level the concept of performance indicators has been gaining ground. At the micro level, course evaluation, course validation, course review and course monitoring have been taking place in between the open and distance learning and the conventional systems.

(Extract from an article by P.M. Deshpande (1993) Validation of Programmes & Courses offered by Indian Open Universities, published in Indian Journal of Open Learning, Vol. 2, No. 2, P. 1-7. Reproduced with the permission of the editor of IJOL).

Check Your Progress 7

Define performance indicators?

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.....

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4.6.3 Performance indicators for learner support

The key activities of open universities are as follows:

- planning of academic programmes/courses;
- development of curriculum and learning materials;
- production and distribution of learning materials;
- learner support services;
- learner admissions and evaluation;
- human resource development.

Given below is a framework of performance indicators that embodies the activities involved in providing learner support on the basis of factors of inputs, processes and outputs of these activities. Each key activities is taken as a basic unit and a set of indicators have been identified to describe/assess the performance of that activity based on the UK model of input (resources utilised), process (utilisation of the resources) and output (products achieved) of the institution developed by Manjulika and Reddy (1999):

	Input	Process	Output
Learner Support Services/Design of Support System			
— Mechanisms developed are accessible and available to all learners	—	x	—
— Mechanisms developed are appropriate for special target groups	—	x	—
— Mechanisms adopted for two way communication in the Support System	—	x	—
— Flexibility in the design and operation of the Support System	—	x	—
— Resource allocation for Support System	x	—	—
— Infrastructure provided for Support System	x	—	—
Counselling			
— Availability of Counsellors at Study Centres	—	—	x
— Procedure for appointment of Counsellors	x	—	—
— Mechanism for attracting the best persons as counsellors	—	x	—
— Type of training provided to counsellors	—	x	—
— Facilities provided to counsellors	x	—	—
— Number of learners attached to a counsellor	x	—	—
— Arrangements for conduct of counselling	—	—	x
— Dissemination of information on Counselling sessions	—	x	—
— Adherence to counselling schedules	—	—	x
— Regularity of Counsellors	—	—	x
— Learner attendance at Counselling sessions	—	x	—
— Duration of Counselling sessions	—	x	—
— Suitability of timings of Counselling sessions	—	x	—
— Number of counselling sessions held (course specific)	—	—	—
— Methods of Counselling adopted	—	x	—
— Mechanisms adopted for monitoring counselling sessions	—	x	—
— Mechanisms used for ensuring accountability of counsellors	—	x	—
— Number of feedback responses on counsellors performance	—	—	x
Audio-Video Sessions & Teleconferencing			
— Media used for Counselling (other than face to face)	—	x	—
— Dissemination of information to learners regarding teleconferencing and audio-video sessions	—	x	—
— Number of audio-video sessions	—	—	x
— Arrangements made for Audio-video sessions	—	x	—
— Content presentation of Audio-video cassettes	—	x	—
— Quality of audio-video cassettes used	x	—	—
— Dissemination of information on teleconferencing sessions	—	—	x

	Input	Process	Output
— Number of teleconferencing sessions	—	x	—
— Frequency of teleconferencing sessions	—	x	—
— Arrangements made at teleconferencing sessions	—	x	—
— Accessibility for teleconferencing sessions	—	x	—
— Suitability of teleconferencing timings and days	—	x	—
— Content presentation in teleconferencing sessions	x	—	—
— Learner Attendance at Teleconferencing sessions	x	—	—
— Mechanisms adopted for monitoring teleconferencing sessions	—	x	—
— Mechanisms for providing feedback on Teleconference	—	x	—
— Number of Teleconference sessions cancelled/postponed	—	—	x
Practicals			
— Dissemination of information regarding practicals	—	x	—
— Number of practical sessions	—	—	x
— Frequency of practicals	—	—	x
— Arrangements made for practicals	—	x	—
— Accessibility for practical sessions	—	x	—
— Suitability of timings and days of practicals	—	x	—
— Learner attendance at practical sessions	—	—	x
— Mechanisms adopted for monitoring practicals	—	x	—
— Number of Teleconference sessions cancelled/postponed	—	—	x
Assignment Evaluation			
— Average number of assignments per course/programme received	—	—	x
— Time given to learners for submission of assignments	x	—	—
— Turn around time taken for evaluation of assignments	—	x	—
— Mechanisms adopted for assignment handling	—	x	—
— Mechanisms adopted for monitoring of assignment evaluation	—	x	—
— Practice followed for assignment evaluation as a teaching tool	—	x	—
— Mechanisms for follow up action on assignments evaluated without tutor comments/non teaching comments	—	—	x
— Number of learners who have received evaluated assignments after deadline	—	x	—
— Number of learners not received evaluated assignments back	—	—	x
— Number of learners submitting assignments	—	—	x
— Number of Feedback responses on counsellors works	—	—	x
Library Services			
— Accessibility of library facilities	—	x	—
— Number of Library books available at libraries	x	—	—
— Utilisation of library services by learners	—	x	—
— Timings of libraries	—	x	—
Administrative Support (including General Queries)			
— Number of learners attached to a study centre	—	x	—
— Accessibility of study centre and Regional Centre to learners	—	x	—

	Input	Process	Output
— Number of Learners visiting study centres & Regional Centres	—	—	x
— Number of learners contacting study centres & Regional Centres over telephone	—	—	x
— Number of learners letters received by Regional Centres and study centres	—	—	x
— Mechanisms for monitoring the learner queries attended to in person/overphone/through letters	—	x	—
Learner Registration & Evaluation Registration			
— Appropriateness of media used for admission notification	x	—	—
— Accessibility of media for prospective learners	—	x	—
— Clarity and appropriateness of information through notification	x	—	—
— Accessibility of prospectus	x	—	—
— Availability of prospectus on time	x	—	—
— Clarity of information provided in prospectus	x	—	—
— Simplicity of admission procedures	—	x	—
— Lead time taken for completion of admission formalities	—	—	x
— Adherence to admission schedule	—	—	x
— Induction for newly enrolled learners	—	—	x
Term end Examination & Results			
— Methods used for dissemination of information regarding exams	—	x	—
— Mechanisms developed for fair conduct of examinations	—	x	—
— Arrangements for conduct of exams	—	x	—
— Intimation to learners with regard to exams	—	x	—
— Suitability of examination	—	x	—
— Suitability of scheme of examination	—	x	—
— Learner attendance at examination	—	—	x
— Number of learners qualifying in the examination	—	—	x
— Number of learners who do not take any examination (drop out)	—	—	x
— Mechanisms used for monitoring conduct of exams.	—	x	—
— Adherence to time schedules in declaration of results	—	—	x
— Number of learners not received intimation slips for attending exams.	—	—	x
— Number of learners submitted exam form after due date	—	—	x
— Number of requests received for rechecking or re-evaluation	—	—	x
— Number of requests received for non-inclusion of awards	—	—	x
— Number of requests received of wrong inclusion of awards	—	—	x
— Number of requests received of non-receipt of award cards	—	—	x
— Number of degrees (awards) conferred (year-wise)	—	—	x

(Extract from a chapter by Manjulika and Reddy (1999) *Unexplored Dimensions of Open Universities*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.)

Input

Process

Output

PGDDE-03/87

4.7 LET US SUM UP

We started by suggesting our subject was complex, and we end on the same note. We have seen that there is no standard pattern for support services—indeed where patterns have been established, evolution and change are common. You may go through Block 4 of this course to study the different models of learner support operating in both developing as well as industrial countries. We have also seen that with the advent of new telecommunication technologies, the change in learners' needs changes in curricular design, and a movement toward learner centred learning, the institutional arrangements for providing learner support through study centres and regional centres have also changed. New institutions can provide learner support through virtual study centres and electronic classrooms.

1

In your answer to the first part of this question, you will have considered what space is available locally, you will have thought about local learner numbers for any institution you are involved with, and the local availability of experts for teaching. You will also have considered the costs of equipment, relative to learner numbers.

In your written answer to the second part of the question, you might have considered the following possibilities:

- i) Sometimes an institution hosting a study centre will agree to share its equipment in return for access to equipment belonging to the distance-teaching institution. For example, a college may agree to let distance learners use video playback facilities in return for use of a micro-computer provided by the distance-teaching institution for its learners.
- ii) Sometimes certain seminars can be held in a different site near a study centre, where equipment is available. For example, a study centre may be in a community centre, but science learners may meet in a nearby secondary school for laboratory or practicals sessions.

You may have thought of other possibilities. If you can, discuss your ideas with a colleague.

2

Your own ideas are required to answer this question. We list here some key points, but we hope you have thought of some more.

- Good knowledge of the text and the course;
- An ability to plan and organise meetings;
- Skill in leading groups;
- Patience and willingness to listen;
- Sensitivity to learner needs.

Methods used to help learners to acquire these skills include:

- **Simulation:** A tutor has to work through the course material as though he or she were a learner. The tutor thus gets to know the material well, and may experience the kinds of problems learners meet.
- **Role play:** One tutor or a group of tutors take the roles of learners, while another plays the role of discussion leader and tries to deal with problems.

3

You may have thought of contact programmes (summer schools or residential courses). These take place regularly in many distance

programmes and give learners access to facilities unavailable at local centres.

Group work can also be organised through teleconferencing. Several small groups of learners or even individuals in especially equipped centres can be linked by telephone for a discussion with a tutor. Such an arrangement could hardly cater to learners in their thousands. It is suitable for small programmes, or as a special arrangement for those few learners in scattered or remote communities who cannot reach normal study centres.

Another interesting possibility is to take study resources to learners, by bus, boat or even plane. In Britain, for example, learners of foreign languages have been visited by a language laboratory on a bus, while in Venezuela learners on technical courses were visited by laboratories on vans. A study centre boat used to ply up and down the West Coast of Canada, while in remote parts of Western Australia tutors even used to take a small plane tour to visit their most distant learners one by one.

4

The central institution:

- teaches** by providing all teaching material and examinations
by appointing and monitoring correspondence tutors
by organising residential courses or summer schools
- supports** by providing printed study advice and information
by responding to individual requests for advice
by handling special cases

Regional centre:

- teaches** by supporting local study centres
by running occasional seminars at the regional level/
teleconferencing sessions
- supports** by supporting advisers at local study centres
by handling special cases

Local study centre:

- teaches** by providing regular learner-tutor contact, in groups or one-to-one.
- supports** by providing an opportunity for regular counselling/
tutoring for most needs
by providing a friendly first point of reference for problems
which cannot be handled at the local level.

You could have answered this in many ways. Whatever details you have offered, you should stress the importance of local study centres for both teaching and support.

5

You would have considered all the factors namely:

- movement towards a more learner-centred instructional model against the changes in the needs of learners.
- concept of accessibility has been expanded to include access to completion and consequently.
- changes in curricular design from transmission to transaction and finally transformation mode.
- repositioning of the learner from being a consumer of packaged information to being a more active participant in the learning process.
- lastly, the advent of new telecommunication technology that has made it possible to have electronic classrooms and virtual study centres.

6

You would have considered all the important factors namely:

- relatively new mode of education
- increased funding hence enhanced scrutiny from government as well as public
- quality aspects of educational transaction itself.

7

You would have mentioned that performance indicators are basically the criterion used to evaluate an institution. That they are not diagnostic in nature, as they do not prescribe any remedies, they are simply suggestive of the need for action. They can be viewed as warning devices. You would have also distinguished between simple indicators, performance indicators and general indicators.

8

You would have listed out all the activities related to learner support namely:

- Design of the support system
- Counselling
- Audio/video sessions & teleconferencing
- Practicals
- Assignment evaluation
- Library services
- Administrative support
- Learner Registration & Evaluation
- Term-end Examination & Results under each activity you would have given 3 examples of performance indicator.

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Dear Student,

While studying the units of this block, you may have found certain portions of the text difficult to comprehend. We wish to know your difficulties and suggestions, in order to improve the course. Therefore, we request you to fill out and send us the following questionnaire, which pertains to this block. If you find the space provided insufficient, kindly use a separate sheet.

Questionnaire

Enrolment No.

1. How many hours did you need for studying the units?

Unit no.	1	2	3	4
No. of hours				

2. Please give your reactions to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Items	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Poor	Give specific examples, if poor
Presentation Quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Language and Style	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Illustrations Used (diagrams, tables, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conceptual Clarity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Check Your Progress Questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Feedback to CYP Questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

3. Any other comments:

Mail to:
Course Coordinator (ES-313)
STRIDE, IGNOU, Maidan Garhi
New Delhi – 110068, India.



Block

2

COUNSELLING AND TUTORING SERVICES

UNIT 1

Definition, Importance and Categories	7
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UNIT 2

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UNIT 3

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Block 1 Support Services: Need and Mechanism

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- Unit 3 Study Skills
- Unit 4 Institutional Arrangements for Learner Support

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- Unit 7 Designing Collaborative Learning Environments Mediated by Computer Conferencing: Issues and Challenges in the Asian Socio-Cultural Context

BLOCK 2 COUNSELLING AND TUTORING SERVICES

Introduction to the Block

The course on the theme of Support Services is divided into five blocks of which this is the second. It comprises three units in all. Having discussed the need for learner support, as well as institution based means for providing learner support services, in the first block of this course, we now turn to the theme of 'counselling'.

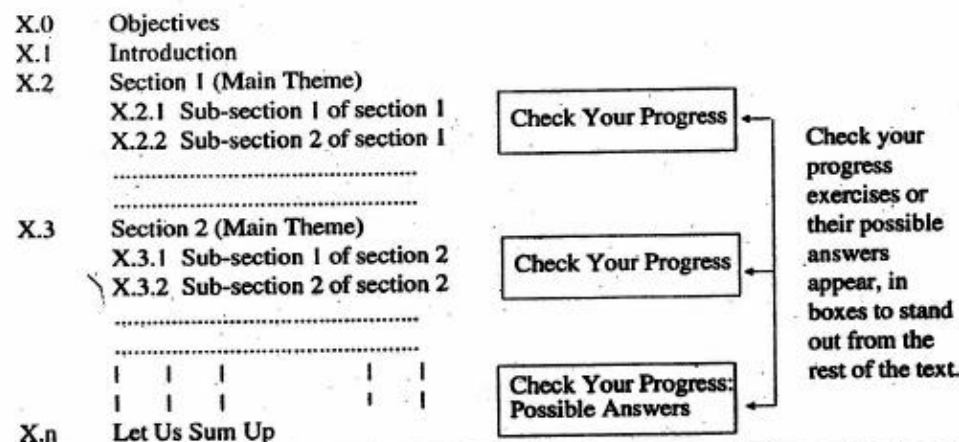
Counselling means giving advice. Why should it have such an important place in distance education that we devote a whole block to it? We hope the block itself will provide an adequate answer to this question.

The use of the term 'counselling' needs some introduction. In distance education, it is widely used for giving advice—academic or non-academic—to learners. Counselling is undertaken by many staff members, but often it forms an important part of the work of the tutors—those who mark the correspondence assignments. To acknowledge this, the UK Open University uses the term 'tutor-counsellor' to describe those who teach learners in the first years of study. At IGNOU they are called 'academic counsellors' or 'tutors'. The functions of correspondence teaching and counselling are, however, distinct and separate ones and *in this block we shall be dealing with counselling in its traditional sense*, of 'giving advice'. Tutoring or teaching by correspondence has been taken up in block 3 of this course.

An effective way to learn about counselling is to put yourself in the position of a counsellor, and the activities in some of the units of this block will ask you to do this. You will thus discover the importance of counselling and learn something about the various media used in distance education for the purpose of counselling distance learners. We have also discussed the need and importance of face-to-face sessions in distance education, as an important medium of counselling. Lastly we shall look at the role of support services staff in providing these services.

A schematic representation of the design of the units is given below to facilitate your access to the subject matter presented here.

Unit X*



* 'X' stands for the serial number of the unit concerned

As the scheme suggests, we have divided the units into sections for easy reading and better comprehension. Each section is indicated distinctly by bold capital* and each sub-section by relatively smaller but bold† lower typeface. The significant divisions within sub-sections are in still smaller but bold** lower typeface so as to make it easier for you to see their place within sub-sections. For purposes of uniformity, we have employed the same scheme of 'partitioning' in every unit throughout the course.

We begin each unit with the section 'Objectives'. It articulates briefly

- what we have presented in the unit, and
- what we expect from you once you complete working on the unit.

In the last section of each unit, under the heading, 'Let Us Sum Up', we summarise the whole unit for purposes of recapitulation and ready reference.

Besides, we have given self-check exercises under the caption 'Check Your Progress' or Self-check Exercises at a few places in each of these units which invariably end with possible answers to the questions set in these exercises.

What, perhaps, you would like to do is to go through the units and jot down important points as you read in the *space provided in the margin*. (**Broad margins in the booklet are there for you to write your notes in.** Make your notes as you work through the materials. This will help you prepare for the examination as also in assimilating the content. Besides, you will be able to save on time. Do use these margins.) This will help you keep track of and assimilate what you have been reading in the unit, answer the self-check exercises and the assignment questions and easily identify the item(s) to be clarified.

We hope that we have given enough space for you to work on the self-check exercises. The purpose of giving self-check exercises will be served satisfactorily if you compare your answers with the possible ones given at the end of each unit after having written your answer in the blank space. **You may be tempted to have a furtive glance at the possible answer(s),** as soon as you come across an exercise. But we do hope that you will overcome the temptation and turn to these possible answers (which are not the best answers necessarily) only after you write your own.

These exercises are **not** meant to be submitted to us for correction or evaluation. Instead, the exercises are to function as study tools to help you keep on the right track as you read the units.

On an average, each block will have at least one or a part of one assignment. At times an assignment may expect you to work through more than one unit to prepare your responses. You have to send your assignment responses to us for assessment and comments. In all, you may have to work on two/three assignments per course. Assignments are sent separately and are changed every year.

We suggest the following norms to be strictly practised while you are working through the assignments:

- Write your roll number legibly as indicated in the Programme Guide.
- Before you put down anything in words, assimilate what you have read and integrate it with what you have gathered from your experience to build your answer.
- Make the best use of the block and the additional reading materials for diligently working through the assignments.

UNIT 1 DEFINITIONS, IMPORTANCE AND CATEGORIES

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction—Supporting Learners in Distance Education
- 1.2 What is Counselling?
 - 1.2.1 Defining counselling
 - 1.2.2 Transferring queries
 - 1.2.3 Counselling and tutoring
- 1.3 Counselling in Distance Education
 - 1.3.1 Interest in counselling in distance education
 - 1.3.2 Attitudes to counselling
- 1.4 Why is Counselling Important in Distance Education?
 - 1.4.1 The characteristics of distance learners
 - 1.4.2 The characteristics of the institution
 - 1.4.3 Learning characteristics
- 1.5 When does Counselling Take Place and for Whom?
 - 1.5.1 Decision points
 - 1.5.2 Barriers
 - 1.5.3 Who seeks counselling?
 - 1.5.4 Who does not seek counselling?
 - 1.5.5 Counsellor-initiated counselling
 - 1.5.6 Counselling colleagues
- 1.6 Categories of Counselling
 - 1.6.1 Developmental counselling and problem-solving counselling
 - 1.6.2 Academic and non-academic counselling
 - 1.6.3 The dangers of classifying
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- list the ways in which learners might be supported in distance education;
- define counselling and explain how it differs from tutoring;
- say why there is interest in counselling in distance education, what the attitudes to it are and why it is widely held to be important;
- suggest when counselling is likely to take place and for whom; and
- categorise counselling in distance education along two different lines—developmental/problem-solving and academic/non-academic.

1.1 INTRODUCTION—SUPPORTING LEARNERS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

In Unit 1 of Block 1 you have read about the need for learner support and also about the different types of support services that distance learners need at different stages of their endeavour. Let us list some of them.

Kinds of learner support

Possible examples

Tutoring Feedback Grading	} }	Giving a lecture. Marking an essay.
Taking action Advocacy Assessment		Arranging transport for a disabled learner. Giving a reference. Testing if someone has the right qualifications for a course.
Informing Advising Counselling		Telling someone about a university regulation. Advising someone on the best way to study. Helping someone choose the right course for the future.

You may have thought of other activities as well. So it might help to fit the above activities (and the ones you have thought of) into three broad classes:

Tutoring Feedback Grading	} }	Teaching
Action Advocacy Assessment		Administration
Informing Advising Counselling		Counselling

This is a rather arbitrary classification and you have probably thought of some activities that either do not fit into any of our classes, or fit into all three.

Nevertheless, we think you will find it helpful to keep these broad distinctions in mind during your study of this block and whilst you are at work, stop and ask yourself occasionally, 'At this moment am I a teacher, an administrator or a counsellor? And how should I be working in accordance?' This Block is to help you answer the second question — when counselling seems the most appropriate answer to the first.

You may also remember that it is the type of institution which greatly affects the organisation of support services. Distance education departments/directorates within conventional universities may have a different learner support structure as compared to a single mode open university. There are other factors affecting the provision of learner support services, namely: the learner needs; locational factors; media constraints; and cost factors.

1.2 WHAT IS COUNSELLING?

You will already have spotted one semantic problem. The term 'counselling' appears twice in the list; once to describe the group of activities and again as one of those activities.

This is historical misfortune arising from the way the subject has grown and developed. It would have been better if the description of the group had been a word like 'guidance' or 'consultancy', with 'counselling' as one of its elements. Things have now gone too far to change (it would mean altering the title of this Block for instance!).

In practice, such confusion does not often arise as the intended sense is usually clear from the context, in the same way as, till recently, the word 'Russia' was used to describe a Union of States, one of which was individually called 'Russia.' This will become clearer in the next section.

1.2.1 Defining counselling

Let us start by defining more closely the three activities that constitute counselling:

Informing—giving appropriate and correct information to learners—e.g. 'I'm sorry, the University's regulations don't allow you to submit that assignment late'.

Advising—suggesting appropriate course of action to learners, perhaps offering several options but recommending one especially for that particular learner—e.g. 'Well, we have two maths courses. You could take anyone but as you want to be an engineer, I suggest the Applied Maths course.'

Counselling—helping learners clarify their needs, feelings or motivations so that they can make an appropriate decision for themselves—e.g. 'So you're not sure what you want to do with your life but you'd like to do something interesting. Describe to me what you mean by interesting'.

Informing is about knowledge which is largely independent of the learner—course requirements, regulations, statistics and so on. So you do not have to take the learner very much into account when offering such information. You do, however, have to have a high level of appropriate knowledge and the ability to communicate it clearly.

Counselling is about helping learners decide for themselves what is best for them as regards choice of course and career, overcoming of obstacles and so on. So, it is entirely learner-dependent rather than knowledge-dependent. As a counsellor you need clarifying skills rather than knowledge skills.

Advising is a mixture of knowledge and learner-dependence — something between informing and counselling.

You can think of these three activities as a 'continuous spectrum' of areas which merge into each other.

Informing	Advising	Counselling
	Increasingly knowledge dependent ←	
Higher levels of information skills needed		Higher levels of 'interpersonal' skills needed
	Increasingly learner dependent →	

Check Your Progress 1

Imagine you are a counsellor answering the following queries from the learners. What kind of response would you make in each case—informing, advising or counselling?

- 1 'Can I take these two courses at the same time?'
- 2 'What is the best way to study at IGNOU?'
- 3 'I'm interested in management—which course would be best for me?'
- 4 'I'm finding the course very hard—I shall have to withdraw'.
- 5 'Must I do all the assignments for the course?'
- 6 'I cannot sit for the exam—I am terrified of exams'.

Notes: i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Compare your answer with the ones given at the end of the unit.

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1.2.2 Transferring queries

Working through the above 'Check Your Progress' will have introduced you to the 'transferring query' syndrome. This occurs when:

- i) a query apparently aimed at one part of the 'spectrum' and really needs a response from another part. Usually this is in the form of an apparent *information request* that actually needs a *counselling response* to clarify what is needed e.g. 'Can you tell me of a good way to increase my powers of concentration?' It looks like a straight request for information. Yet it needs a little closer examination. Why is the

learner finding it hard to concentrate? Could it be (for instance) that he/she is in the wrong course? Some further clarification is needed—so you need to do a little counselling first.

- ii) a query moves naturally through several areas of the spectrum before it is resolved. You may start by giving a piece of information; the learners then need some counselling to clarify their response to this information and you finish by advising them on a particular course of action. e.g. 'Can I submit this assignment late?' initially needs an informing response, but then perhaps the learner needs some counselling—why is the assignment late, what problem has the learner been facing—before finishing with some advice to the learner on how best to catch up.

1.2.3 Counselling and tutoring

We hope by now you are beginning to have a clearer idea about what counselling is. The problem, however, that occurs to many people at this stage is, 'I can see the difference between administration and teaching. But I am not sure about the difference between teaching and counselling'

And it is a very fair question because the two activities are so closely related as to be often indistinguishable. A good teacher is always a good counsellor because counselling is part of all successful teaching methods. But it is still helpful to compare the two activities:

Teaching—ultimately course-centred; communications are directed substantially from the teacher towards the learner; the teacher needs to be a good talker.

Counselling—ultimately learner-centred; communications take place the other way around, from the learner to the counsellor; the counsellor needs to be a good listener.

So the activities are essentially complementary—especially in distance education, for reasons that I hope will become clearer as we work through this unit and the next.

Check Your Progress 2

Which of the following activities could be classified under teaching, and which under 'counselling'? If they come under 'counselling', are they informing, advising, counselling or transferring queries?

- 1 A learner asks why $(a + b)^2 = a^2 + b^2 + 2ab$.
- 2 A learner fails to submit an assignment without contacting you.
- 3 A learner asks if you can explain why she got such a low grade on her assignment.
- 4 A learner tells you he has fallen off his bike and broken both arms.
- 5 A learner writes to say she has withdrawn from the course because it is too difficult for her.
- 6 A learner submits an assignment that you have to mark 'fail' because it does not answer the question.

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Compare your answer with that at the end of the unit.

1.3 COUNSELLING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

So far everything we have said could apply to counselling in any educational setting. This section and section 1.4 ask why we should be interested in counselling in distance education and why it is considered so important.

1.3.1 Interest in counselling in distance education

That there is a deep and growing interest in this area now. It is undeniable. In 1984 the International Council for Distance Education and the British Open University held a joint conference on Counselling in Distance Education; a second conference was held in 1987. The British Open University has developed a range of correspondence, video and face-to-face staff development materials, including a section on counselling. The Association of European Correspondence Schools has instituted a Diploma in Correspondence Education which also contains a counselling module.

Principal journals of distance education such as 'Open Learning', 'Distance Education' and 'Indian Journal of Open Learning' now frequently carry articles on counselling.

1.3.2 Attitudes to counselling

This is not to say that counselling meets with unqualified approval from everyone in distance education. Counselling will always face competition from other areas for resources and there will always be opposition from

those who would prefer to see such resources going into extra tuition, three-colour print, TV programmes, or something else.

There is also a more complex opposition to counselling, that is particularly characteristic of university level education. University academics are accustomed to working on a purely intellectual and cognitive level. Counsellors sometimes find themselves dealing with learners' feelings and generally working on an affective level. Thus a cognitive/affective dichotomy can underlie many of the controversies between course writers and learner services or between central and regional academics.

The value of counselling is indeed hard to assess, in any rigorous way. You cannot for instance assume that a lower rate of dropout or withdrawal from a course indicates that counselling has had a positive effect. In some cases, a counsellor might actually advise learners to withdraw.

Nevertheless, the best corrective for anyone who is unconvinced of the value of counselling is to work with learners directly for a while, as we shall see in the next section.

1.4 WHY IS COUNSELLING IMPORTANT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION?

Any one who does work directly with learners in distance education is likely to realise that it possesses three characteristics that make counselling important: the characteristics of the learners, of the institution and of the learning process.

1.4.1 The characteristics of distance learners

It has already been mentioned for instance in Unit 1 of Block 1 of this course, that distance learners

- may be isolated, both from other learners and the institution;
- will certainly have had previous educational experience which may have been positive or negative;
- are very likely to have other substantial time commitments in terms of their home and work;
- will come from a wide variety of backgrounds, both educational and occupational;
- will be thoroughly committed, provided the courses they are taking are at a suitable level and are meeting their real needs.

Counselling is important because it is the only way of clarifying real needs, reconciling the conflicting demands of home and work, and coming to terms with isolation and with problems resulting from previous experience.

1.4.2 The characteristics of the institution

It is clear that distance teaching institutions tend to develop certain common characteristics, particularly during the process of settling down. They are, or can become:

- **Remote:** Even an institution which develops a regional network of services is still likely to have its offices hundreds of miles away from its learners. But in countries where communications are difficult, that remoteness is compounded by delays and problems in the delivery of course materials.
- **Complex:** An institution that is trying to produce course materials of several different kinds, and deliver them to learners as well as provide support services is likely to develop a complex bureaucratic system of administration. Such systems can be very effective in dealing with large numbers of learners but may be inflexible and damaging when dealing with individuals.

Counselling is important in helping to individualise services to learners and in overcoming the problems of system malfunctions.

1.4.3 Learning characteristics

Both learner and institutional characteristics suggest that the nature of the learning process is different in distance education. In particular, a learner must develop an effective set of appropriate learning strategies or study skills. Some learners may already possess these; some may need help. The process of acquiring such skills may be a cognitive one. However, for some learners, for example, those who have a previous history of educational failure, it may be an affective process, consisting in part of coming to terms with that previous failure.

Counselling is important in helping people to develop their own individual strategy for studying under a distance education system.

Check Your Progress 3

Here are some comments about counselling made by people working in distance education. How do you respond to what they are saying? How far do their comments reflect your own view at this stage? If you are working through the course with some colleagues or fellow learners, then also discuss your reactions with them, and compare them to the reactions of other people presented in the possible answers at the end of the unit.

Teacher 1: "When I started in distance education I really didn't know what counselling meant. But my supervisor thought I was already becoming an excellent counsellor!"

Learner 1: "I found the counsellor very helpful—I think it was just having someone to talk to, who seemed to care."

Teacher 2: "I'm always surprised how much learners appreciate someone just listening to them. Often I've been surprised how grateful they are for that and some simple advice."

Learner 2: "No I've never used the counselling service. But it's nice to know it's there."

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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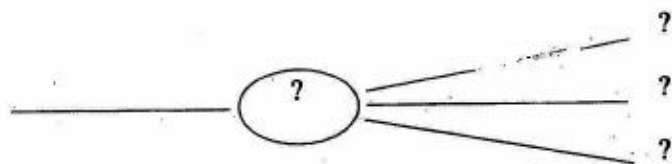
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1.5 WHEN DOES COUNSELLING TAKE PLACE AND FOR WHOM?

So who needs counselling and when do they need it? To take up the second question first, there appear to be two points in a learner's progress at which counselling may be appropriate—at a decision point or when some kind of barrier appears.

1.5.1 Decision points



Decision points (as depicted above) can occur at several stages of a learner's progress, such as:

- whether to apply for a course or not;
- which course(s) to take;
- what career possibilities to aim for;
- whether to withdraw or to keep going;
- how much time to devote to family/job/course.

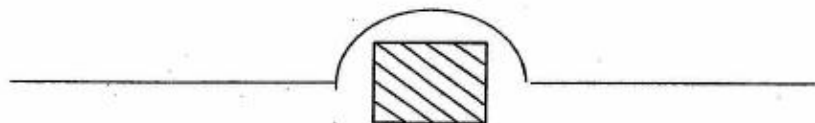
These are substantial decisions. But there can be less weighty decisions as well:

- whether or not to miss an assignment;
- which method of taking notes to follow;
- whether or not to ask questions in tutorials;
- the best way to approach the topic in an essay.

The amount of energy expended on a decision does not necessarily reflect its importance, as you probably know from your own life. Some people need no help in making such decisions. But some appreciate the chance that

counselling gives to reflect on the criteria involved in making the decision and clarify the possible consequences.

1.5.2 Barriers



Barriers (as depicted above) can occur at many stages of a learner's progress. They can be:

Study-related: to do with finding ways of studying effectively, and completing assignments and exams.

Time-related: finding or rationing time adequately.

Personal: domestic/career/financial/health barriers.

Institutional: barriers erected, probably unintentionally, by the institution—regulations, mailing delays and so on.

Again these can be substantial barriers. But small barriers at the wrong time can be equally difficult. Such barriers could be:

- a tutor returns work late;
- a badly timed holiday;
- extra pressure at work;

and so on. Again some people negotiate these barriers, both big and small, with ease; some need help which can range from intensive counselling to analysing the barrier and ways of surmounting it, to a sympathetic acknowledgement that the barrier exists and that lots of people share it with them.

1.5.3 Who seeks counselling?

There is no easy way of predicting who is likely to seek counselling. A self-sufficient learner can study for years, ignoring the counsellor, until suddenly one day he/she runs into an intractable problem and needs help.

Here are some very general patterns from the British Open University:

- i) (Very) approximately 60% of learners ask for some counselling support at some point in their careers.
- ii) Requests need responses ranging from the mainly informative (30%) to the mainly advisory (50%) to those which are mainly counselling (20%). Again, the percentages are very approximate.
- iii) The most common times for seeking help are at the pre-entry stage and during the first year of study—up to 60-70% of requests received are during this time.
- iv) The most common areas of request appear to be divided equally between decision points and barriers.

- v) The most common topics raised (more or less equally and on the whole about 50% of all topics) are:
 - a) institution-related problems;
 - b) course/career choice issues;
 - c) study issues—assessment, exams and so on;
 - d) withdrawal issues.

(We shall be dealing with the appropriate categories of response in the next section.)

- vi) There do not appear to be any consistent links between the probability of learners seeking help and their educational background. Well-qualified learners seem as likely to seek help—even with study problems—as those who are less qualified.
- vii) More women seek help than men and more arts/social science learners seek help than maths/science/technology learners. But since more women study arts/ social science than maths/science technology, this may be two ways of saying the same thing.

Let us emphasise that all these statements and statistics are very approximate indeed and that they might well be quite different in a different socio-economic and cultural climate.

1.5.4 Who does not seek counselling?

There is a reason for asking the complementary question to the previous one, as the answer affects the way in which counsellors go about their work.

Clearly there are many learners who do not need counselling and who do not seek it. But equally any experienced counsellor will have come across significant categories of learners who (and it is usually in retrospect) might well have benefited from help but who did not ask.

For instance, we have already noted that in the UKOU more women than men ask for help. And indeed women may be more likely to experience barriers to learning arising from, say, their domestic circumstances. At the same time it is noticeable that more men than women permanently withdraw from their courses. So it may be that women are simply better than men at identifying when they need help and better at asking for it.

There are a variety of reasons why people do not seek help. For example:

- i) The 'I didn't want to bother you' syndrome—learners who find it difficult to ask for another person's time and energy or who are afraid of what that person might think of them. This of course is a classical medical syndrome—the person who does not seek a doctor's aid, sometimes until it is too late.
- ii) The 'superman' or 'perfectionist' syndrome. The perfectionist believes that he/she ought to be able to manage without help.
- iii) The 'ashamed to admit to failure or inadequacy' syndrome. We doubt if there is anyone who does not feel this at times. It is hard to admit to someone that we cannot manage or have failed at something, especially

if we see that person as a kind of figure of authority, as learners often do perceive the staff of their institutions.

- iv) The 'there's no way anyone can help me' syndrome. This is the person who has come to believe that his/her problem is so deep-seated or intractable that no help is adequate. Such learners can be very frustrating to help because of their marked lack of self-confidence and esteem.

1.5.5 Counsellor-initiated counselling

Clearly counselling can be initiated either by the learner (very largely the assumption we have made so far) or by the counsellor. Counsellor-initiated counselling must obviously be appropriate when trying to work with the kind of learner described in the previous section.

Some of those learners (especially perhaps the 'didn't want to bother you' and 'no way you can help me' groups) will actually welcome contact positively and with relief. Some however (the 'superman' and 'ashamed to admit failure' groups) may find such contact threatening; they may associate it, however gently it is made, with the 'call to the headmaster's office' they may have experienced during their school days. Perhaps you can remember that feeling yourself.

We mention this problem at the moment only to note it for later attention. Some of the counselling media we will be studying in Unit 2 are more suitable for this kind of contact than others, so it is a topic we shall return to.

1.5.6 Counselling colleagues

Finally, it is worth mentioning in this section that you may sometimes be called upon to counsel your institutional colleagues. We have sometimes found ourselves counselling colleagues (who have been dealing with a particularly difficult or frustrating appeal case) or simply talking over their career prospects. If you develop counselling skills, you will inevitably find people drawn to use them.

1.6 CATEGORIES OF COUNSELLING

In the last section we made an attempt to classify the points at which learners might seek counselling of some kind. In this section we shall try to classify the counselling responses appropriate to particular issues raised by learners.

We shall do this not because classification is useful in itself, but because counselling can be such an amorphous, diffuse, open-ended activity that it is often helpful for counsellors to stop and ask themselves 'What am I doing at the moment? Does this fit into any general pattern and, if so, are there helpful guidelines I might follow?'

There is certainly more than one way of classifying counselling and indeed we have already covered the informing-advising-counselling (IAC) spectrum which is not only a definition but an activity-based classification as well.

The IAC spectrum classification relates to two other possible classifications: developmental/problem-solving and academic/non-academic.

1.6.1 Developmental counselling and problem-solving counselling

This is both an activity and topic-based classification and relates closely to the two main points at which learners raise issues, the decision and barrier points respectively.

- **Developmental counselling** is often the most appropriate response to decision points. It is concerned with the development of learners so it covers issues such as:

pre-entry	:	for example, course information, alternative courses and institutions, preparatory advice, motive clarification, time allocations, institutional information, and entry requirements;
entry	:	for example, study skills, institutional requirements, orientation to study at a distance, and preparing assignments;
course choice	:	for example, course information, recognition of courses, levels of difficulty, possible prerequisite courses and knowledge, relationship to other courses, and possible career directions;
career choice	:	for example, dealing with overall career directions, specific career wishes, qualifications, experience, possibilities of employment, and job-hunting skills;
withdrawal	:	for example, clarifying reasons for, and helping to deal with the sense of frustration and disappointment, suggesting alternative courses, and encouraging return to study;
motivational	:	clarification of motives for study, remotivating, relating motives to appropriate courses, organising and structuring time and social demands.

To some extent developmental counselling is easier than problem-solving counselling. It is usually unstressed, the learners are not in a particular hurry to make a decision and so there is time to explore appropriate directions. Withdrawal counselling is of course the exception; this can be more difficult.

- **Problem-solving counselling** is often the most appropriate response to barriers in the learner's progress. Sub-categories of this might be:

institutional	for example, dealing with system breakdowns, discussing cases for exception and appeal against regulations, dealing with unsuccessful appeals, changing tutors and so on;
personal	for example, illness, disability, marital breakdown, childcare, bereavement, ageing, unemployment,

		re-employment, work pressures—all in so far as they affect a learner's progress;
study	:	for example, developing appropriate study methods, helping to improve concentration and reading speeds, adapting to distance learning, overcoming negative study habits such as late assignments, and developing group study methods;
assessment	:	for example, essay writing skills, providing assessment and dealing with exam anxiety;
time	:	organising and structuring time, prioritising activities, clarifying motivation and so on.

One of the reasons why we find this classification helpful is that it suggests general approaches to specific issues, particularly in the last four areas. For instance, when dealing with these areas, we carry mental algorithms as follows:

personal barriers	:	how far can we help;
study and assessment barriers	:	check anxiety levels;
time barriers	:	check motivation.

- a) **Personal barriers:** how far can we help? If we are trying to help someone deal with a personal problem affecting his/her studies, then we have to remember our limitations especially those of a lack of skill or time.

We cannot for instance help someone solve a difficult and long-standing marital problem. What we may be able to do is to help them:

- contain that problem so that they can continue studying if that is important to them;
- refer that problem to someone better equipped to help such as a doctor, priest or psychotherapist;
- to be enabled to temporarily withdraw (and help them feel alright about it) while the problem is being dealt with.

These processes are together known as 'holding'—helping someone at least to maintain their position in the face of unresolvable difficulties.

You may find it helpful to think of an extended IAC spectrum, as shown in Figure 1.1

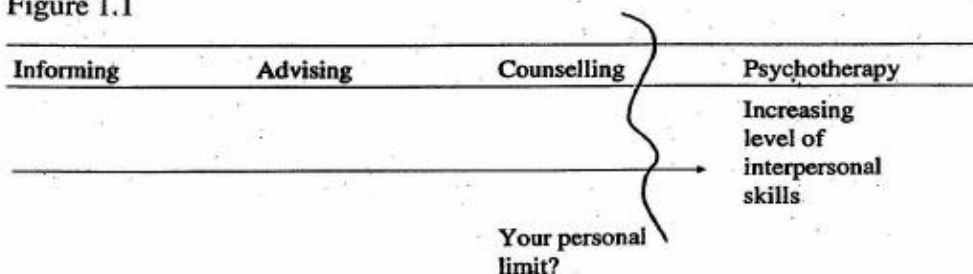


Fig. 1.1: IAC—Extended Continuum

Only you can decide how far you feel able (in the sense of being skilled and qualified) to go. Fortunately learners will always respect that limit and will very seldom ask you to offer skills that you feel are beyond you.

- b) Study and assessment barriers:** check anxiety levels. Say someone approaches us with a study or assessment problem, typically, in this form (and you will note some of these are transferring queries):

'It just doesn't go in when I read something'.

'I'm finding it hard to concentrate—can you give me a few tips?'

'How do you get started on an essay?'

'I'm sorry, this assignment is late again'.

'I must learn to read faster'.

First we check that they are actually working in a sensible way. For instance, in the first query, we would get them to describe how they read. Do they survey and question the material to get an idea of what it is about or do they just read straight through? If they have an apparently reasonable approach to reading then we would begin to wonder if some basic anxiety about study is getting in the way.

- c) Time barriers:** check motivation. Again someone raises a time problem such as:

'I just don't seem to be able to find the time to study'.

'Give me a few tips on organising my time'.

'I'm just getting further and further behind'.

'My tutor says I'm taking too much on'.

Again, we would first check the realities of the situation—what are the demands on their time? How do they organise and prioritise their time? If it begins to emerge that time is available to them, then we would begin to wonder if their motivation was beginning to fail them in some way. In Unit 2, we will come back to show as to how classification can be an aid to clarification.

Check Your Progress 4

Which category—developmental or problem-solving—might be appropriate to the following queries or issues? And what is the first thing you would say in response and why?

- 1 'I'm finding the course rather boring'.
- 2 'My tutor just seems to ignore my comments totally. Can I change tutors?'
- 3 'Is this qualification really recognised by employers?'
- 4 'I appealed against my exam failure but they wouldn't change it. I'm wondering whether to give up'.
- 5 'Do you have a course in journalism?'
- 6 'I've lost my job and don't really know what to do next. Can I get any financial help with the fees?'

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Compare your answer with the one at the end of the unit.

1.6.2 Academic and non-academic counselling

This is a topic-based classification and is an alternative perspective that you may find useful. It is particularly helpful when considering the way in which counselling services are organised in an institution and the time of year at which they occur, that is, who does what and when. The informing-advising-counselling spectrum still applies.

- **Academic counselling:** covers all course and course-based topics. Examples of this might be preparation, specific course study difficulties and exam techniques. Academic counselling tends to relate to specific and cognitive issues.
- **Non-academic counselling:** covers all other areas of counselling. Examples here might be course choice, general study difficulties, and exam anxiety. Non-academic counselling tends to relate to general and affective issues.
- **Academic and non-academic counselling during the year:** as this classification is topic-based, examples can be illustrated in calendar form as shown in Table 1.1 (you will see that we have also retained the IAC classification).

Table 1.1: Academic and Non-academic Counselling

Stage	Academic Counselling	Non-academic Counselling
Pre-entry	Information on courses, entry requirements, registration procedures etc. Preparatory course advice. Course choice counselling.	Information on alternative instructions. Advice to special cases e.g. disabled candidates. Return-to-study counselling.
Entry	Information on course use—tutorial times, assignment dates etc. Advice on studying the course. Course change counselling.	Information on regulations and procedures. Advice on general orientation to studying at a distance. Withdrawal counselling.

During the course	Information about delivery problems. Advice on dealing with late delivery or incorrect material. Counselling on assignment difficulties.	Information about other (i.e., outside the course) aspects—e.g. summer schools. Advice about payment difficulties, counselling on personal difficulties, problems between tutors and learners.
Exam	Information about time/place conduct of exam. Advice on exam techniques and revision.	Information about special support available—extra time for disabled learners etc., exam anxiety, counselling.
Post-study	Information about further related courses. Advice on further course choice. Counselling for results.	Information on possible career options. Career advice and counselling. Counselling failed learners.

- **Academic and non-academic counselling—who does what:** depending on the way in which counselling is organised in an institution (see unit 3) the academic/non-academic split can be useful in deciding who does what.

For instance, academic counselling could be deemed to be the business of the tutors, and non-academic counselling the business of the central institution. Ofcourse, the learners would not draw this finer distinction, so both sides would need the necessary training.

Check Your Progress 5

Look back at 'Check Your Progress 4' and decide into which category of counselling, academic or non-academic, each query might fall.

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Check your answer with the one at the end of the unit.

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1.6.3 The dangers of classifying

We have talked at some length about classifying counselling because it is helpful in making some pattern of the thousands of different queries/problems/issues that can arise for learners in distance education. Yet after

over ten years of working in distance education we still daily come across questions we have not met before.

So remember—people do not fit into neat classifications. Use these distinctions if you find them helpful but do not let them impose a pattern on your perceptions.

*'For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been'*

—T.S. Eliot

1.7 LET US SUM UP

There are at least nine ways of supporting learners in distance education

Tutoring	}	Teaching
Feedback		
Grading		
Taking action	}	Administration
Advocacy		
Assessment		
Informing	}	Counselling
Advising		
Counselling		

Counselling covers a spectrum of activities — those of informing, advising, counselling. A query can be answered from the most obvious place on the spectrum or from elsewhere — it could be a transferred query.

Counselling is important in distance education because of the particular characteristics of the learner, of the institution and of distance learning itself.

Counselling takes place at decision points and barriers and can be initiated by the counsellor as well as the learner

Counselling can be categorised in two ways:

- developmental and problem-solving, or
- academic and non-academic.

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1

- 1 This probably starts as a straight informing response depending on your institution's regulations. But perhaps some advice is needed too—is it desirable for the learner to take two courses?—can they manage the work load?

- 2 An advisory response that perhaps takes into account the learner's previous study experience.
- 3 An informing response. But you also need to know more about what your enquirer really wants, so perhaps some counselling is needed along the way.
- 4 A counselling response is needed to find out what the learner means by 'hard work'. Have they for instance, found it too hard because it is the wrong course? Getting the answer right could mean the difference between just dropping out of a course and withdrawing from the institution altogether.
- 5 An informing response initially, but some counselling also needed for the same reasons as in 4.
- 6 A counselling response initially, perhaps followed by advice when the problem has been clarified.

2

- 1 A fairly straightforward teaching activity, unless the answer uncovers other problems.
- 2 A counsellor-initiated contact which may result in a tutorial or counselling response from the learner (if any response at all).
- 3 If the learner has received apparently adequate feedback from her/his tutor, then this might well be a counselling request rather than a tutorial one—a transferring query in fact.
- 4 A counselling activity—probably an advising query.
- 5 This sounds like a counselling activity that might lead to a teaching activity once the learner's problem is clear.
- 6 This might well depend on the learners' previous record. If they have received adequate teaching and feedback previously but are still failing to answer the question, then perhaps there is some other problem affecting them, such as assessment anxiety.

3

Here are some reactions to the comments from distance education staff.

Teacher 1: 'I think this feeling is very common. It's sometimes hard to know whether one is counselling well because the end-product is often unclear. In the end, it's learner feedback that tells you'.

'So many people think counselling is a difficult and highly technical job when often all it means is warm friendly listening. In some ways I think it would be best to use the word 'befriender' instead'.

Learner 1: 'I'll bet the counsellor was using a lot more skill than the learner noticed! But if the learner found her helpful it doesn't matter'.

'So many learners have said this kind of thing to me that it must be true. It's because distance education is potentially so isolating'.

Teacher 2: 'It's interesting how difficult some teachers find it to just listen—as teachers they're used to talking I guess! But if you can

stop talking and listen sometimes it makes a world of difference to your success

'The point of course is that it's no use giving advice **before** you've listened'

Learner 2: 'Yes of course there are many learners who never need counselling of any kind. But it's essential to be seen to be easily approachable, friendly and informal so that they know you're there if needed'.

4

- 1 This sounds like a barrier with some development to come. My first response might be 'I'm sorry to hear that—what is it about the course that you're finding tedious?' I would want to find out if it was the whole course or just a part that was a problem.
- 2 Another barrier. My response would be 'Well, yes you can. But can you tell me first what exactly it is that you're finding frustrating about the tutor?' My intention would be to find out if this was a case of individual antipathy or whether there was more to it than that.
- 3 Possibly a barrier, possibly developmental. Sometimes a query about course recognition is a way of saying 'Is it worth it? I've run out of motivation'. So my first response might be 'Yes it is recognised. Were you beginning to wonder if it wasn't?'
- 4 This sounds like a developmental problem disguised as a barrier. Assuming the failure is final, some developmental counselling is needed. I would say, 'I'm sorry about the exam result. But why are you wondering about going on?'
- 5 At last, a straightforward developmental counselling query! I would say 'Yes we do. What was it about journalism that interested you, though?' My intention would be to ensure that a journalism course was what was wanted.
- 6 A confused query mixing developmental and barrier queries. Deal with them separately and say 'Yes we can get you help with the fees. What is it you're wanting to do now?'

You might like to look back at these answers and ask yourself whether they are informing, advising and counselling or transferring responses.

5

- 1 This could be either academic or non-academic, depending on whether it is the course content or general demoralisation of the learner that is the problem.
- 2 Relationships with tutors are often non-academic and could be based on all kinds of previous experience.
- 3 An academic counselling query.
- 4 A non-academic query.
- 5 An academic query since it is about a specific course.
- 6 A mixed query but mainly non-academic.

UNIT 2 THEORY, PRACTICE AND MEDIA OF COUNSELLING

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Theories of Counselling
- 2.3 The Qualities of a Counsellor
 - 2.3.1 Warmth
 - 2.3.2 Acceptance
 - 2.3.3 Genuineness
 - 2.3.4 Empathy
- 2.4 The Skills of a Counsellor
 - 2.4.1 Selecting
 - 2.4.2 Listening
 - 2.4.3 Structuring
 - 2.4.4 Epilogue
- 2.5 The Media of Counselling
 - 2.5.1 Face-to-face counselling
 - 2.5.2 Group counselling
 - 2.5.3 Telephone counselling
 - 2.5.4 Counselling by letter
 - 2.5.5 Counselling by handbook
 - 2.5.6 Counselling by audio and video cassettes
 - 2.5.7 Counselling by broadcasting
 - 2.5.8 Counselling by computer or interactive video-disc
 - 2.5.9 Counselling by internet
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- describe non-directive Rogerian counselling and say why it is suitable for distance education;
- list and describe the qualities of a counsellor and give examples of their use;
- list and describe the skills of a counsellor and give examples of their use; and
- describe the media used in counselling in distance education, give examples of how they may be used, and recognise the limitations of each.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 1 of this block we dealt with the why, when and what of counselling in distance education. In this unit we shall be looking at the 'how' aspect—how you counsel, and what skills, qualities and media you use in doing so.

2.2 THEORIES OF COUNSELLING

Counselling in its general sense can be seen as a branch of psychotherapy bearing the same relationship to psychotherapy as a local doctor might to the nearest hospital. Such doctors can deal perfectly adequately with the most common ailments; occasionally they may have to refer patients to the hospital for much more drastic treatment. However, the medical theories underlying both the doctor's and hospital's work are the same.

Psychotherapy was originally associated with the work on psychoanalysis of Freud, Jung and others—the process of probing the sub-conscious in order to lay bare inner motivations.

Recently however there has been a reaction against psychoanalysis in the form of the 'humanistic psychology' movement. In this movement the role of the psychotherapist is as an enabler rather than a prober; the humanistic psychologist helps his or her clients explore their situation for themselves so that they can move towards understanding and dealing with their problems on their own.

There are various humanistic psychotherapies—gestalt, transactional analysis, psychodrama, bio-energetics and so on, some with a degree of rationality and success, some less well founded. One in particular has been found by many people to be relevant in educational settings and is known as 'Rogerian' therapy after its founder Carl Rogers (1902-1987).

The underlying theory of Rogerian therapy is essentially simple. It is 'non-directive'—i.e. clients are helped to talk over and clarify their problems for themselves, taking charge of their own therapy. The therapist (and therefore to a lesser extent the counsellor) brings certain qualities and skills to the relationship that enables clients to do this in their own way and in their own time.

We have over-simplified the theory, but in a sense it may not be unfamiliar to you. Rogers has re-invented the concept of meditation and prayer, where troubled persons commune with God and themselves and try and move towards finding solutions to their troubles. Roger's contribution is to suggest that a second person with particular qualities and skills can help this process.

So what are these qualities and skills? We shall see in the next section.

Check Your Progress 1

'Rogerian' counselling is non-directive. That does not mean counsellors cannot make suggestions to their clients. But it does mean that those suggestions must arise naturally out of the counsellor-client dialogue.

- i) What do you think are the difficulties of being non-directive?
- ii) What might happen if counsellors give advice and suggestions at too early a stage in the dialogue?

Notes: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Compare your answers with the one given at the end of this unit.

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2.3 THE QUALITIES OF A COUNSELLOR

Rogers identified **four** particular personal qualities that appeared to be essential to working as an effective counsellor. They are warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy.

2.3.1 Warmth

The ability to communicate personal warmth and to make learners feel welcome and valued as individuals.

Rogers called this 'non-possessive warmth' which means that it should be appropriate and genuine but not overdone; it should not make the recipient feel taken over or manipulated in the way that, say, they might feel by the behaviour of some kinds of salesmen.

Warmth means saying 'Hello, can I help you?' not 'I'm sorry, I'm rather busy, please keep it short'.

People are sometimes not warm for various reasons: tiredness, overwork, consciousness of status, and may be unfavourable attitude. That apart, without an initial welcoming start, a counsellor is unlikely to have a chance to practise the other qualities and skills.

2.3.2 Acceptance

The quality of being able to accept other people and their feelings for what they are without criticising or judging them personally (which of course is different from judging their behaviour).

Criticism, whether in the form of moral injunctions or negative statements, has little role to play in counselling, as it tends to shut down communication.

But let me try to illustrate this: a learner says to you 'I think these regulations are very stupid!'. Which of the two following responses would you make?

- a) 'The regulations all have a purpose, you know'
- b) 'It sounds as though you're pretty angry about this business'.

I hope that you chose response (b), since response (a) is defensive and somewhat critical and is not likely to encourage the learner to think sensibly about how he/she feels.

People are sometimes not accepting because of authoritarian personalities, prejudices of various kinds about class, race, age and sex, and because of fixed, often wrong ideas about their roles ('I'm a teacher—a teacher's job is to criticise').

2.3.3 Genuineness

The ability to be naturally yourself, open, friendly and undefensive.

It means not adopting a superior role as in the 'white-coat syndrome' of the person who has the answers and must be respected. It also means being honest with yourself and your learner about your own feelings and activities.

Which would be the 'genuine' response to the following comment from a learner: 'I'm just finding this part of the course so boring'?

- a) 'But you chose the course—you'll just have to work at it'.
- b) 'To be honest I've found parts of my job boring sometimes! Do you think you'll be able to carry on through to a more interesting part?'

Again we hope you would choose (b). Response (a) is not likely to help the learner very much; response (b) at least admits that you have the same experience from time to time and will encourage the learner to think about ways he/she can keep going. People are sometimes not genuine because of status-consciousness or feelings of their own inadequacy which are hard to admit.

2.3.4 Empathy

The ability to sense the feeling and experience of another person, and so to fully appreciate them as if you were that person.

This is not quite 'sympathy' in which you take over the feelings for yourself. It is being able to say, 'I think I can see you feel that', not 'I felt exactly the same when that happened to me'. The latter statement takes over the learners' feeling and in a sense takes it away from them.

Which is the most empathetic response to the following statement 'If I don't pass this exam, I shall have failed completely'?

- a) 'Oh you mustn't feel that. I mean, it's not a difficult exam'.
- b) 'You feel that if you fail this exam all your work will have been wasted'.

You may find (b) as the empathetic response that will ensure that the learners feel you understand and appreciate their feeling.

Empathy can be a difficult quality to acquire, sometimes because of the difficulty of understanding that every person's experience is unique and that our own experience can only be a fallible guide to how other people might feel about an ostensibly similar experience. But it is important to try to feel empathy in all circumstances.

These, then, are the qualities of a counsellor. How can a person develop them? If that question is considered objectively as a teaching exercise it sounds faintly absurd. Can you really teach someone to be warm and genuine?

In fact that is not necessary. Most people—certainly most people who are attracted to distance education—already possess these qualities to a high degree and are already well on the way to being effective counsellors on that count alone. The challenge is to recognise that these interpersonal qualities are essential and to give yourself permission to express them professionally.

In order to remember the individual qualities, it might help you to think of the word WAGE (warmth, acceptance, genuineness, empathy).

Check Your Progress 2

Imagine that you are writing a handbook for new learners just about to start their course. How do you think they are feeling and how might you take those feelings into account in your writing?

Notes: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Compare your answer against the one given at the end of this unit.

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2.4 THE SKILLS OF A COUNSELLOR

There are three essential skills of a counsellor: selecting, structuring and listening. There are a host of other subsidiary skills, but these are the core ones.

2.4.1 Selecting

We have already mentioned selecting: It is the process of deciding what kind of response from the informing-advising-counselling spectrum is appropriate at any particular stage in an interview.

An inappropriate response can halt progress in its tracks. Giving information to someone who really needs advice or counselling may satisfy him/her temporarily but will not answer his/her real or long-term needs; giving counselling to someone who would like a piece of straight information is likely to be very frustrating for him/her.

We will not give any more examples at this stage. Turn back to Unit 1, and take another look at sections 1.2.1 to 1.2.3.

2.4.2 Listening

The skill of *active intelligent* listening is central to counselling of any type, whether informatory, advisory or counselling. As Rogers himself wrote '...I discovered that simply listening to my client was an important way of being helpful. So when I was in doubt as to what I should do in some active way, I listened. It seemed surprising to me that such a passive kind of interaction could be so useful'.

So is that all then a counsellor simply listens? Of course, it is not as simple as that; the key lies in the words 'active' and 'intelligent'. The counsellor listens actively by encouraging learners to think through their query or problem for themselves; the counsellor listens intelligently by clarifying what is being said and looking (sometimes) for what is not being said—the implications of omitted or unclear statements

There are some useful but simple techniques to help you listen better. They are open-ended questions, acknowledgements, reflections, and silences.

- i) **Open-ended questions:** Use questions that encourage a learner to think and to develop rather than giving straight mono syllable answers.

For example, a counsellor asks the same question in two different ways; which do you prefer?

- a) 'So you think you want to be a maths teacher?'
- b) 'How do you feel about maths teaching as a career?'

As usual we hope you have chosen (b), the open-ended question. Question (a) encourages the answer 'yes' or 'no' and no further; question (b) encourages the learners to think more about the implications of what they are saying.

- ii) **Acknowledgements:** This simply means that counsellors do not sit listening in inscrutable silence. They are always indicating that they are listening—nodding, saying 'Ah-ah' (or 'Umm' if you prefer), and using positive 'body language' (maintaining reasonable eye-contact, sitting alertly on the same side of the desk as the learner and so on). It also means not interrupting the learner unnecessarily.
- iii) **Reflecting:** The most useful listening skill is 'reflecting', sometimes called 'mirroring'. It simply means saying back to the learner something that they have just said but in such a way as to clarify it, reassure the learner that they are being heard correctly and encourage them to go on. It is best illustrated by a simple example:

Learner: 'So you see I just don't think I can keep up'.

Counsellor 1: 'Oh well, I'm sure it's not really that bad. With a bit of effort...' etc.

Counsellor 2: 'You're worried that you'll fall so far behind that you'll have to withdraw?'

Counsellor 1 is certainly trying to encourage the learner, but fails to accept the learner's real fears. The learner is likely to feel that the problem expressed simply has not been heard or has been denied.

Counsellor 2 on the other hand has reassured the learner that the problem has been heard and also gives the learner the opportunity to clarify what is worrying him/her.

Note that 'reflection' does not simply consist of repeating the learner's words but rephrasing them and clarifying them before reflecting them back.

- iv) **Silence:** This is at once a simple and most difficult skill. It means not feeling compelled to fill every gap in the conversation but being able to give the learners space to think through what they are trying to say. It means being able to distinguish between the negative silence of someone who is stuck and the positive silence of someone who is just trying to work out how to phrase his/her next statement.

For Example:

Learner: 'I'm not sure what kind of course I want...' (silence).

Counsellor: Mm?

Learner: 'I suppose I really want to feel I'm helping others'.

This example was taken from a real experience and although it sounds almost trivial it was the start of a useful session on choice of course.

These then are the practical skills of listening. It may help you to remember them as OARS (open-ended questions, acknowledgements, reflections, silences).

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Here is a learner statement with two counsellor responses. In which response do you think the counsellor is best using relevant qualities and listening skills?

Learner: 'You see I haven't studied since leaving school nearly 20 years ago. So I'm rather worried about starting again'.

- a) **Counsellor 1:** 'Oh studying's just like riding a bicycle you never forget'.

Learner: 'Yes, well, thank you for the reassurance'.

Counsellor 1: 'You'll be fine'. (And so on.)

- b) **Counsellor 2:** 'You're worried about being able to cope after so long?'

Learner: 'Yes, that's right'.

Counsellor 2: 'I think a lot of people feel like that. I'm sure we'll be able to help you overcome any problem. But tell me how did you get on at school?'

(And so on.)

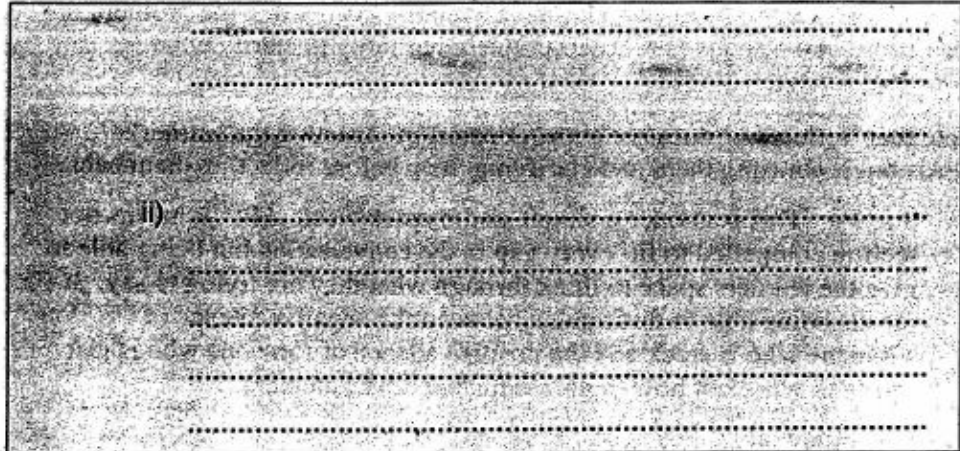
- ii) Here's another learner statement. How would you respond?

Learner: 'It's my parents. They are pushing me so hard and I just want to do something for myself'.

Notes: i) Write your answers in the space given below.

- ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

i)



2.4.3 Structuring

By now you may be asking how, after listening to the learner, do we actually move towards solving their problem, answering their query, choosing the right course etc.

This is the heart of counselling. It is knowing when, for example, is the right moment to stop counselling and give advice, when a learner has solved a problem for himself/herself or at least come to terms with it, when you have done as much as you can. This is the process of structuring your counselling and the interviews in order to move towards the best solution.

Structuring consists of three stages: clarification, checking and consequences.

- i) Clarification—the basic counselling process of clarifying the issue or problem by dialogue with the learner.
- ii) Checking—going back to the learner to ensure that the problem or issue is now completely clear or at least that it is as clear as it is possible to be at this stage.
- iii) Consequences—settling with the learners what will be done by them and by the counsellor (action or advice) as a result of the interview.

These stages can be short or long but they are almost always present even in the simplest 'informing' interview.

For example:

Learner: 'I'm interested in a career in nursing'.

Counsellor: 'Is that mental nursing, district nursing or hospital nursing?'

CLARIFYING

Learner: 'Oh, I meant in hospitals'.

Counsellor: 'Hospital nursing—right. I have a leaflet about that; I could send it to you if you'd like'

CHECKING

Learner: 'Oh yes, please'.

Counsellor: 'Fine—I'll put that in the post to you today. And then if you have any questions after reading it you're welcome to contact me again'.

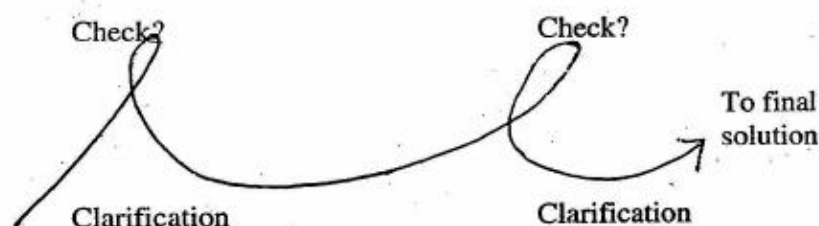
CONSEQUENCES

Learner: 'Thank you very much'.

Clarification is important because it is essential to find out what the learner's needs are. This is often a short process but can be much longer when, for instance, learners are not fully aware of what they need.

Checking is important before deciding on any action, to be sure that it is appropriate. Consequences agreed upon mutually are important because any action or advice not mutually agreed upon is almost certain to fail. Think how often you have been given advice which you failed to take because you found it unconvincing or inappropriate.

In a complex problem the stages may well be repeated for different states of the same problem. Think of it as a cycle.



2.4.4 Epilogue

This has been a long and complex section and you should not worry if it feels rather like learning to drive a car. Remembering how to steer and change gear simultaneously is not unlike remembering to listen, select and structure all at the same time.

If it helps, remember the various mnemonics:

Qualities—WAGE (warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy)

Skills—SLS (selecting, listening, structuring)

Selecting—IAC (informing, advising, counselling)

Listening—OARS (open-ended questions, acknowledgements, reflecting, silences)

Structuring—3C's (clarification, checking, consequences)

Much of your counselling will be very straightforward, needing more information than skill. Indeed it is probably true that 80% of your counselling will only need 20% of your skill. But there will certainly be 20% of the counselling needing 80% of your skill and it is often very difficult to tell at the outset of what sort of query you will get.

So we hope you will have found the emphasis on skills in these last sections helpful, even if you only exercise the whole battery of skills on the rarest minority of occasions.

Check Your Progress 4

Here is a dialogue between a counsellor and a learner. Read through it and ask yourself how the counsellor is using her qualities and skills to clarify the query and how well she is structuring the interview.

- 1 **Learner:** 'I'm worried about my studies. They don't seem to be going very well'.
- 2 **Counsellor:** 'Mmm. What's the problem?'.
- 3 **Learner:** 'Well, I spend a lot of time reading but nothing seems to go in'.
- 4 **Counsellor:** 'So you read a lot but you don't feel you're remembering what you've read?'.
- 5 **Learner:** 'Yes that's right'.
- 6 **Counsellor:** 'Tell me exactly how you set about studying'.
- 7 **Learner:** 'Well I simply read through the text, sometimes three or more times but I can't get a feel for what it all means'.
- 8 **Counsellor:** 'Do you try to ask yourself specific questions about the meaning?'.
- 9 **Learner:** 'Well no not really. Should I?'.
- 10 **Counsellor:** 'It might help. You see I get the feeling that perhaps you expect that the text will sink into your mind just by reading a lot. But in distance education you have to work with the text as well. Look, here's a different method of reading. It's called SQ 3R—survey, question, read, recall and review. (The counsellor goes on to explain the method.)
So will you give that method a try for the next unit?'.
- 11 **Learner:** 'Yes I will'.
- 12 **Counsellor:** 'Good. Come back to me next week and let's see how you got on'.
- 13 **Learner:** 'Right. Thank you'.

Notes: i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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2.5 THE MEDIA OF COUNSELLING

We have now dealt as comprehensively as we can in a short space with the skills of counselling. If this were a course on counselling in conventional educational settings, then the unit could have almost ended here.

But, as you are now well aware, in distance education the varied media, such as face-to-face, correspondence and telephone make a critical difference to everything we do.

For instance so far we have made at least three implicit assumptions about how counselling is conducted. However, these assumptions may not be true of all media. What are those assumptions?

- That counselling is a two-way process between a counsellor and a learner.
- That counselling is directed at individuals.
- That it can be initiated by either the counsellor or the learner.

You may be able to spot other such assumptions. But let us look at the different media and ask how far counselling (informing, advising, counselling) is possible in each medium, and what are the relative advantages and disadvantages.

We have summarised this below (Table 2.1) and we will go over each medium in detail subsequently.

Table 2.1: Media and Counselling

Media	1 Is two-way communication possible?	2 If not, is 'interactive' communication possible?	3 Can it be initiated by the counsellor?	4 So is it suitable for informing, advising and counselling?
Face-to-face	Yes	—	Yes—but can be threatening	All
Group face-to-face	Yes	—	Yes—much less threatening	All
Phone				
-one-to-one	Yes	—	Yes, but can be threatening	All
-teleconferencing	Yes	—	No	Informing only
-answerphone	No	No	No	
Writing				
-letters	Limited-slow		Yes—Less threatening	Informing/advising
-handbook	No	Yes	Yes— unthreatening	Informing/advising
Audio or video cassette	No	Yes	Yes	Informing/advising
Broadcast				
-Radio & TV	No	No	Yes	Informing
Computer & interactive video-disc	Yes	—	No	Informing/advising and limited counselling
Internet	Yes	Yes	Yes	
On-line discussion				Informing
E-mail				All Informing
WWW computer conferencing				Informing/advising

	5	6	7	8
Media	Suitable for development or problem solving	Individual or group	Any particular advantages or disadvantages?	Examples
Face-to-face	Both	Individual	Best—but expensive	
Group face-to-face	Usually developmental	Group	Much less expensive—uses other learners' experience	
Phone				
—one-to-one	Both	Individual	Relatively cheap and quick	
—tele-conferencing	Developmental	Group	Available 24 hrs	
—answerphone	Problem-solving	Individual	'Adviceline' UKOU	
Writing				
—letters	Usually problem-solving	Individual	Permanent record, unthreatening	
—handbook	Usually developmental	Both	Permanent record, unthreatening	'Taking off' UKOU, 'a package of shoelaces'—Athabasca Univ., 'Counselling Package'—Deakin Univ.; many others.
Audio or video cassette	Both	Both	Can be replayed—audio cheap	'Telling it like it is', Athabasca; 'Relaxation for exams'; UKOU
Broadcast				
—Radio & TV	Usually developmental	Both	Can be very fast and sophisticated—reaches many people	TV & Radio 'Open forum'; UKOU
Computer & interactive video-disc	Developmental	Individual	Relatively cheap after capital outlay	CASCAID—Careers Advisory, Programme—UKOU Entry Programme — Fernsehen Universität (Germany)
Internet	Developmental Problem Solving	Both	Permanent record Immediate communication Reaches many people independently of time and space	Open University of Hong Kong

2.5.1 Face-to-face counselling

Everything that we have said so far applies to face-to-face counselling and in many ways this remains the most important medium for counselling of all

kinds. However, it can be extremely expensive in terms of staff, time and travel and could also be inaccessible to distant learners. One way of at least reducing the first problem is through group counselling.

2.5.2 Group counselling

Counselling is possible in a group situation. Normally a group might consist of any number from three upwards, commonly a dozen but it is perfectly possible for it to go up to thirty or more. We have seen counselling attempted in groups of 200, but this really then becomes another activity.

Although a group loses the one-to-one relationship of counsellor and learner, it gains something almost as valuable, the opportunity for learners to share their concerns with each other. Inevitably, in doing so they discover that their concerns are common and find this immensely reassuring.

The skills in group counselling are just the same as one-to-one counselling, except that the counsellor is using them primarily to encourage learners to talk about their concerns (and solutions) with each other, and not with him/her. In addition the group counsellor must develop some sensitivity to the dynamics of the group.

For example, let us assume that you are a counsellor who has gathered together a group of dozen or so learners about to start their distance education course at a local centre. How would you help them talk about the issues, concerns, anxieties and hopes that will certainly be present in that group? Here is a possibility:

- 1 You introduce yourself within 2-3 minutes.
- 2 You say 'Now I want you to get together with any other learner in pairs. Introduce yourselves and say briefly why you are taking the course and how you feel about it. Take 5 minutes'.
- 3 After five minutes you say 'Now I want each pair to get together with another pair and share your introductions and see what motives and feelings you all have in common. Take 10 minutes'.
- 4 After 10 minutes you say 'Now let's all come together and share our introductions and what we've been discussing'.
- 5 At this point the learners will have discussed their feelings in pairs and in groups of four. They will have discovered that many of their concerns are mutual and will now have no difficulty in talking about their feelings in the larger group. (Indeed you may have difficulty in getting them to stop talking!) As they talk, you will be able to listen, clarify, reflect and decide upon general consequent action (such as preparation) with the whole group.

This particular group process of discussion in pairs, threes, fours and so on is known as 'pyramiding' or 'snowballing'. It can be used in many different situations.

In the next unit (Unit 3) of this block we shall be discussing face-to-face contact in distance education in greater detail as it is an important medium of counselling.

Check Your Progress 5

Imagine you have groups of learners at the following stages of their studies. Devise a suitable group counselling activity for each.

- i) About to tackle the first assignment.
- ii) Choosing future courses.
- iii) Coming up to the exam.

Notes: i) Write your answers in the space given below.
ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- i)
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- ii)
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- iii)
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2.5.3 Telephone counselling

i) One-to-one

There is a curious myth attached to telephone counselling that it is somehow very different from face-to-face counselling. The experience of organisations like the UK suicide-counselling service, the Samaritans*, suggests that this is not so and that the similarities are far greater than differences.

There is one very obvious difference—the absence of visual clues. This is not an entire disadvantage, as such clues can mislead as well as help. Possibly a more serious problem is that the absence of visual clues makes it harder to find ways of disengaging the process of learning from the call.

* Samaritans is a voluntary organisation which gives advice by telephone (only by telephone so as to preserve anonymity) to individuals suffering personal distress and contemplating suicide.

But undoubtedly the biggest problem of telephone counselling is the feeling that it is different from face-to-face counselling and that the skills are different. They are not. Apply your WAGE, SLS, OARS, and 3C's, with an additional emphasis on verbal acknowledgements and you will be as successful a telephone counsellor as a face-to-face one.

ii) Teleconferencing

It is now possible to link a number of people at different locations to the same telephone line; for technical reasons the maximum number is about six. So in theory it should be possible to run group counselling sessions over the telephone.

However we are not aware of any significant reports on group telephone counselling sessions as distinct from group telephone tutorials. One related development was the 'Dial'n Learn' project run in the London Centre of the British Open University. In this project learners could dial a given number between certain hours and be automatically connected to other people who had also dialled the same number. The hope was that learners would use this facility to engage in counselling less group counselling

In actuality the project was let down by technical difficulties including the quality of the telephone lines (this is a constant problem with group telephone tutorials). However, with better equipment and improved technology (such as the use of satellite communication for the purpose) teleconferencing is now being used successfully in some advanced countries. Besides, two-way-audio and one-way-video teleconferencing is also being used successfully these days. (More of this in the course ES-318.)

iii) Answerphones

Telephone answering machines which give an automatic taped message when dialled are now in relatively common use in many parts of the world. Since most offices have more than one telephone line, it is relatively simple to use one of those lines out of office hours to provide an appropriate counselling message.

There is a report on such a system in the journal 'Open Learning', February 1987, called 'Adviceline'. 'Adviceline' provided a taped message which could be dialled at any time outside office hours. The message depended on the time of year: 'Choiceline' for course choice time, 'Examline' about exam time, and so on.

Clearly 'Adviceline' could provide only a very elementary counselling service. Yet it did have two very special advantages: it was available at times such as 2 o'clock in the morning to any learner with access to a telephone when no other form of help was available, and it was completely anonymous and non-threatening.

In over two years of operation, about 400 learners found 'Adviceline' sufficiently valuable to be worth dialling.

2.5.4 Counselling by letter

There is probably still more counselling carried out by letter than in any other way, especially in distance education in the developing world, where other forms of communication can be tenuous. Such correspondence counselling has obvious limitations: it is slow, two-way dialogue is difficult, it is hard to convey feelings accurately, and so on. Yet there are advantages: the counsellor has time to think carefully over both the originating letter and the reply, there may be helpful clues in the writing, and a counsellor-initiated letter is generally less threatening than a face-to-face interview or telephone call. Above all, the learner has a permanent record to pursue at leisure and think over.

The process of writing such a counselling letter, whether as a counsellor initiative or a response to a letter received, is still informed by basic counselling principles. Active intelligent listening is replaced by careful reading to try to clarify the feelings and issues in the learner's letter. It should then be possible to respond with warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy, structuring the letter to ensure its meaning is clear.

For example consider the following letter received from a would be learner and two possible replies:

Dear Sir

Do you have any course in journalism at IGNOU? Now that my family is all grown up. I find time hangs heavy on my hands and I would like to develop a new interest.

Yours faithfully,

(Mr.) P

a) Dear Mr. P,

Thank you for your letter. I regret that we do not run courses in journalism.

Yours sincerely,

Learner Adviser No. 1

b) Dear Mr. P,

Thank you for your letter. I can understand your desire to use your new-found leisure constructively.

Unfortunately we do not have any course in journalism yet. You could try my colleagues at Veracity College, (address...).

However, I did wonder if you have considered alternatives to journalism. If you are interested in improving your writing skills and perhaps making some money we have an interesting course called 'Creative Writing' of which I enclose details.

I do hope you find what you are looking for. Please contact me again if I can help you further.

Yours sincerely,

Learner Adviser No. 2

Which reply do you prefer? Adviser No. 1 has been business-like but no more. Adviser No. 2 has read the letter carefully noting that journalism might not be what Mr. P is looking for. She has then responded with warmth and empathy to the enquirer's feelings and tried to clarify what he wants. Which letter would you have preferred to receive?

Check Your Progress 6

Imagine you have received the following letter from a learner. Write a 'counselling' reply.

Dear Adviser,

I am writing to tell you that I have withdrawn from IGNOU. I am very sorry to have let you down but our new baby is taking up much more time than I thought and I cannot keep it up.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. P

Notes: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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2.5.5 Counselling by handbook

Many institutions have developed counselling materials in handbook form. We gave some examples in the summary chart. These handbooks are usually aimed at learners at particular points in their careers. For instance, the text from UKOU 'Taking Off' is designed for pre-entry learners and there is a similar text called 'Bailing Out' for learners who are withdrawing from the course.

Clearly such handbooks are an economical way of providing some kind of counselling to a large number of learners. They are also about as unthreatening as it is possible to be. They are always written with the usual counselling qualities but obviously unless a learner responds in some way there cannot be any two-way communication.

So these handbooks are often written in an 'interactive' style. They contain text which encourages learners to ask themselves questions about, for

example, their motivation, needs, and so on. The hope is that such reflection will enable learners to clarify such issues on their own or at least encourage them to raise appropriate questions with a counsellor.

For example a section in a handbook for pre-study learners might read:

“Why have you applied to IGNOU?”. Listed below are some of the reasons people have given in the past. Tick the ones that apply to you and add at the end any other reasons you might have.

- 1 to improve my qualifications to get a better job;
 - 2 to prove I can get a degree;
- and so on, for about a dozen different reasons.

The text then ends:

“Does that help you clarify why you have applied? It is useful to be clear about your reasons as they may affect your wish to study, and your choice of course.”

There might be other pages dealing with feelings about **study, preparedness for study** and so on.

Another form of interactive text **uses quotations from existing learners** for new learners to react to. Such handbooks can be used with groups of learners in reactive discussions. An example of this approach is ‘How to Tutor in an Open Learning System’ (Lewis, 1984), which consists almost entirely of a series of quotes and responses from Open Learning tutors. We have occasionally used this approach in these units, as you will have noticed.

2.5.6 Counselling by audio and video cassettes

For obvious economic reasons, the use of audio-cassettes is much wider in distance education than that of video cassettes and some attempts have been made to use them for counselling .

Often this use is similar to that of a counselling handbook and tapes can be made interactive in a very similar way. For instance the tape ‘Telling it like it is’ from Athabasca University consists of a series of learners talking about their experiences of distance education. The tape is designed to be stopped at particular points for listeners to think about their reactions.

A different and unique use for audio-tapes is in anxiety counselling. There could be different tapes for different types of anxiety. For example, you could have an exam counselling tape of ‘relaxation exercises’ designed to help anxious learners to reduce their levels of tension before the exam. The advantage of such tapes is that they can be heard whilst the learner is actually undertaking the exercises, for example whilst lying on the floor.

2.5.7 Counselling by broadcasting

Very little counselling use appears to have been made of broadcasting in distance education except for relatively ordinary informing purposes. Perhaps this is not altogether surprising since broadcasting offers very little

possibility of either two-way or interactive working. Although for instance it would be easy to make a programme about learners talking about their feelings and experiences, it would be difficult to make that interactive as it cannot be stopped and started, and proceeds at its own pace.

Nevertheless broadcasting can uniquely enthuse, enrich, motivate and excite, and it is surprising that no one has given attention to it. Perhaps one way would be to run a problem question and answer session or a phone-in. There is much work to be done in this area.

2.5.8 Counselling by computer or interactive video-disc

We shall deal with these together as they are very similar. (Video-discs offer a superior quality but at considerably greater expense.) The advent of relatively cheap micro-computers has made them accessible at Study Centre and Regional Centre Levels if not at home in the developing world. Computer programmes can be made interactive relatively easily; for example, they can respond to different choices made by learners.

So it is not surprising that there has been some interest in the use of micro-computers, particularly in developmental counselling.

The most obvious example is in career counselling. A typical example of this is the programme called CASCAID.

CASCAID—the 'Careers Advisory Service Computer Aid' is a programme in which learners are asked to respond to a series of preferences: 'How would you like a job in which you would (e.g.) 'gather information', 'cope with members of the public', and so on.

The programme then analyses those preferences and produces a list of career suggestions for the learner together with a note of the preferences most relevant to each career.

An example of such a list is:

- 1 Teacher in higher education
- 2 Social Worker
- 3 Priest
- 4 Lawyer.

The relatively cheap interactive and non-threatening nature of computer-counselling means that many learners appear to enjoy it and find it useful. It cannot stand on its own. It is essential when using CASCAID, for instance, that learners are 'talked through' the results with an experienced CASCAID counsellor.

Nevertheless computer counselling is here to stay and is likely to become more useful in other areas as well, specially since the introduction of programmes on-line.

2.5.9 Counselling by internet

The internet as a counselling medium for distance education programmes remains a largely untapped resource. The use of the internet demands access to both computers and telecommunication equipment. The lowest level of connection to the internet requires dial-up telephone access, which remains problematic for many distance learners in developing countries. Even those located close enough to highly developed telephone infrastructure may find that long distance tolls or hourly connection charges restrict access to those with limited disposable income.

Let us look at the methods and devices that internet based distance education can use for counselling distance learners:

Online discussion, which is also conducted in computer networks. The counsellor interacts with one or more learners simultaneously at different terminals. The counsellor announces his/her "contact time" in cyberspace, and distance learners log-in to discuss questions in that period. The counsellor acts as the chairperson of the discussion. It is known in bulletin board systems as the 'chat room' or 'talk room' which holds one-to-one or to many conversations respectively.

E-mail is another commonly used example of correspondence or an asynchronous interaction between counsellors and distance learners. Instead of writing letters and waiting for several days to get the reply by post, counsellors can post assignments, announcements, supplemental materials, as well as give feedback or responses to distance learners individually or in a group. Distance learners who are "quiet" and "shy" are able to respond in a comfortable and private atmosphere.

Another way used by the counsellor of reaching out in a 'one-to-many' way is by the use of the World Wide Web (WWW). WWW can be used to put out articles, study guide and whole textbooks and slide shows. In the context of counselling it could be used for posting information, messages, assignments etc.

The most interesting part for distance education is group communication, (many-to-many communication), for which we could use the device of computer conferencing. Computer conferencing connects the counsellor and distance learners present at different locations, through computer networks. If a camera is attached to the computer, the computer conferencing gets converted into video conferencing. All the participants can be seen on the monitor whenever they log-in. In this way the counsellor can see the distance learner and the learners can see the counsellor.

Basically videoconferencing is similar to regular face-to-face interaction except that the learners and the counsellor are located at several different locations, thus providing an opportunity for group discussion and team learning, independent of space and time.

It is interesting to note that this medium has the potential to offer opportunities for collaborations between institutions across the globe.

Check Your Progress 7

Imagine you are setting up a counselling system for the new Veracity College from scratch. Which media would you adopt and what would be your priorities?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

The unit covers the following topics:

Theories of counselling: 'Rogerian' or non-directive counselling.

Qualities of a counsellor: warmth, acceptance, genuineness, empathy (≡ WAGE).

Skills of a counsellor: selecting, listening and structuring (≡ SLS).
Selecting skills—informing, advising, counselling (≡ IAC). Listening skills—open-ended questions, acknowledgements, reflecting, silence (≡ OARS). Structuring skills—clarification, checking, consequences (≡ 3C's).

Media of counselling: face-to-face; group; telephone (including teleconferencing and answering machines); letter; handbook; audio/video cassette; broadcasting; computer and internet.

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1

- i) One of the principal difficulties you may have thought about is that as teachers we are often expected to be directive, writing and running syllabuses, testing learners and so on, and it is very difficult to step out of that role.

Another difficulty is the feeling (well-expressed in the quote from Rogers) that being non-directive is 'doing nothing'. That of course is not so: in some ways your undivided attention and time are the most important things you can give anyone.

- ii) If advice is given too early, before someone is in the right frame of mind to accept it, then it is simply unlikely to be acted on. Advice must be seen to be appropriate both in quality and timing.

2

Think back to your own experience of starting something new. A new learner may be excited, hopeful, looking forward to new career or leisure prospects. At the same time they may be anxious, wondering if they can cope, wondering if they will be shown up in front of teachers and fellow learners. After all there can be an element of exposure in becoming a learner. You are saying in effect 'I am ignorant and need to be taught; I am likely to get things wrong and need correcting'.

When writing a handbook for such learners it will be important to acknowledge that some of them may share some of these feelings. Your 'cognitively-based' colleagues will argue against this, saying that to talk about such fears is to aggravate them: survey work carried out at UKOU shows that this is not true. Learners are grateful and relieved to know that others feel the same way as they do.

So include some 'interactive' material (see Section 2.5.5) in your handbook. Perhaps quotes from learners about how they felt when starting. But finish on a positive note touching upon their hopes and expectations of the future.

3

- i) Counsellor 1 is trying to be encouraging but is trying too hard. He does not really listen to what the learner is saying at all, and the learner, although polite, can sense that and draws the interview to a close.

Counsellor 2 reflects the learners statement. He then empathises ('I'm sure a lot of people feel like that') and offers some appropriately timed reassurance, before exploring the issue further.

- ii) It can be particularly difficult on the (relatively rare) occasions that a learner introduces personal issues into the conversation. But remember you have a resource that is always available to you at difficult moments—your own humanity. Respond as one human being to another and you will not go far wrong.

In this case I would say something like 'you are under a lot of pressure from your parents and you would like to escape?' and see where we went from there.

4

In exchange (1) to (6) the counsellor is clarifying what the learner means by his studies 'not going very well'. She is drawing on her previous experience and recognises a pattern—the learner who

(perhaps because of study anxiety) simply reads and re-reads his units without assimilating them or interacting with them at all.

By (8) the counsellor has a clear enough idea not to need to check the query any further and feels that some advice might be appropriate – (10).

(11), (12) and (13) are the consequences. The learner has 'contracted' to try a new method of reading and the counsellor has 'contracted' in turn to give further help.

5

- i) About to tackle the first assignment. Learners will be wanting some practical help with this, but there will be some for who it is the first thing they have done since leaving school which will be assessed in this way. So it will be helpful to demystify the assessment process.

Find an old assignment answer (or part) and give copies of it to the learner. Tell them 'pretend you are the teacher and mark this assignment on your own' (5 minutes). 'Now get together with another person and compare your results. What things did you find yourselves looking for? Where was the assignment good and why, where bad and why?' (10 minutes).

In the ensuing group discussion it should be possible to bring out the importance of answering the question, planning the essay and so on.

- ii) Choosing future courses. For some learners the leap to the next course can seem intimidating. So invite some experienced learners to your group to talk about how they choose their future courses and to lead a discussion of course choice.

- iii) Coming up to the exam. There is always a lot of anxiety focusing on exams and group sessions can be very helpful in sharing and ameliorating this anxiety.

Suggest to the learners that they are examiners reporting on this year's paper. What sort of things will they have identified as losing learners' marks? This can be run as a simple 'brainstorming exercise', with learners calling out items for you to list on the board for subsequent discussion.

The list might end up including:

- a) not following the paper's instructions about how many, and which questions to answer.
b) misreading the questions.
c) spending too much time on some questions and not enough on others.

6

Here is my answer; yours may be different but I hope you have responded not too dissimilarly.

Dear Mrs. P

I am sorry to hear that you have withdrawn from IGNOU.

- 1 Although as a father myself I know how demanding a new baby can be sometimes.
- 2 Please do not feel you have let anyone down; these things can happen and we are prepared for them.
- 3 When life is a little calmer please write to me again and we will work out a way of getting you back on the course.

My warmest wishes for happiness with your 'new arrival'.

Yours sincerely

Learner Adviser

- 1 The counsellor empathises with the learner's concerns by drawing on his own experience in this case.
- 2 He deals with the learner's feeling of having let someone down by meeting it head on: such feelings of embarrassment are not uncommon and can be a barrier to further study.
- 3 He deals with the consequences, trying to encourage the learner to return when she feels ready.

7

The media you would adopt would depend on Veracity College's situation. In a technically advanced society with a reliable and accessible telephone system you might place most emphasis on telephone counselling, and usage of the internet, which has several devices for counselling distance learners.

In a developing country the most important counselling medium would be correspondence both by letter and handbook and perhaps your most important initial task would be to write such handbooks.

UNIT 3 FACE-TO-FACE SESSIONS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Need for Face-to-Face Sessions
 - 3.2.1 The human factor
- 3.3 The Organisation of Face-to-Face Sessions
 - 3.3.1 Personal contact programmes: A case study of correspondence institutes (CCIs) of India
 - 3.3.2 Learner Opinion of Counselling Sessions: A case study of IGNOU
- 3.4 The Role of Support Services Staff
 - 3.4.1 Role and functions of tutors and tutor counsellors at the UKOU
 - 3.4.2 Role of academic counsellors at the IGNOU
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- state and describe the need for face-to-face sessions;
- study the aims of face-to-face sessions and the purposes they serve;
- be familiar with a case study of personal contact programmes;
- describe the organisation of face-to-face sessions;
- be familiar with the role of support services staff with the help of a case study of the UKOU.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Units 1 and 2 of this block introduced the concept of counselling, considered different categories of counselling and looked at counselling theories in relation to opportunities in different media. This unit is devoted to face-to-face sessions in distance education, which is an important medium of counselling.

As we all know that in distance learning, learning takes place through both individual interaction with the self learning materials and social interaction with peers/tutors. Face-to-face meeting, therefore, is an occasion for this social interaction. Although communication between the learner and the counsellor/institute takes place through various media as discussed in the previous unit (section 2.5), the loneliness of the distance learners cannot be effectively compensated for unless there are some opportunities for them to meet their counsellors in person and discuss their problems and exchange their views with them. Face-to-face sessions also give the learners opportunities to discuss their problems — academic and personal — with their counsellor and also their peer groups.

Most of the institutes of distance education and open universities all over the world organise face-to-face contact sessions for their distance learners. Of course, these are limited as compared with the face-to-face lecture sessions organised by conventional universities.

3.2 NEED FOR FACE-TO-FACE SESSIONS

Many distance learners may find it difficult to handle the self-learning materials with their various access devices, activities and assignments. These would require knowledge of study skills which can be provided through human support. You may also bear in mind the characteristics of distance learners which have been discussed in course ES-313, Block 1, Unit 1, which will further make you understand the need for face-to-face contact counselling sessions.

As we discussed in Unit 1 of Block 1 and also in Unit 4 of Block 1 that distance learners are independent, and also lonely. They are independent to the extent that they need not attend the classes at regular timings and do not depend on the oral instruction of a teacher. They can study at their own homes and choose their peer groups as well. They cannot get immediate clarification for the doubts that come up during their studies. They may not be in a position to discuss their academic problems with their fellow learners. Similarly, they may not possess the study skills necessary to cope with the requirements of courses offered by a distance teaching institution. If the distance learners happen to live in economically and technologically backward societies, they may not be able to make use of the audio-video programmes, nor the educational broadcast, since the majority of them will not have access to the media in their homes. Apart from these, the learners may like to know many things regarding the scope of their courses, their performance in assignment responses, examination pattern, the modes of assessment and evaluation, the attitude of their peer group, etc. Precisely to meet such needs of the distance learners, study centres are established and face-to-face contact sessions are arranged at these study centres. Thus, contact-cum-counselling sessions give the distance learners the opportunities to discuss their problems (academic and personal) with their teachers and also their peer groups.

Thus, whatever the merits of the self-learning materials to the extent they try to build the teacher in the text, try to simulate a classroom situation, they remain finite in their character. They cannot go beyond a point. On the other hand, the needs of the learner are infinite in their variety, as all human beings are. So, distance education has to cater to these infinite variations, which the self-learning materials however good, may not completely succeed in doing. To satisfy these variations, it thus becomes necessary to offer some face-to-face support.

We have said so far that face-to-face sessions are very useful. However, there could always be some distance learners who could probably do equally well even without attending these programmes. If open learning materials are perfect, and if learners' learning skills are highly developed, there might be no need for the learner to attend face-to-face sessions. On the other hand, even with imperfect learning materials, many learners shoulder responsibility and succeed without the help of a counsellor.

There are two schools of thought whether face-to-face sessions are necessary or are unnecessary. One school of thinking finds face-to-face sessions essential, but another finds them unnecessary and even, in some cases harmful as they are felt to represent interference, disturbing the individual study. No conclusive proof has been established either to prove the necessity of face-to-face elements or to reject them as conventional embellishments. However, philosophically the organisation of face-to-face sessions is a dilution of the very concept of distance education. But this should not be taken to mean that face-to-face sessions have no place in distance education. Holmberg (1986) and Keegan (1989) suggest a variety of aims and purposes that face-to-face sessions serve in distance education. According to Keegan, "Occasional face-to-face sessions are organised for both didactic and socialisation purposes unlike the conventional system, where it is a major teaching medium" (Keegan, 1989).

Holmberg (1986) also endorses the same view. He feels they are useful as opportunities to consult subject specialists and to exchange views with tutors and fellow learners as well as to benefit from tutors' expositions and criticism of work done. Face-to-face interaction seems mainly suitable for:

- practising psychomotor skills in laboratories and under similar conditions, also verbal skills through personal communication;
- facilitating the understanding of the communication process and human behaviour;
- encouraging attitudes and habits of relevance for the study;
- mutual inspiration and stimulation of fellow learners;
- training in co-operation.

Discussions in groups appear the most valuable supporting functions of face-to-face sessions apart from those that require special equipment (labs, machinery, computers etc.)

Another form of integrating distance study with face-to-face sessions that has been found profitable is running intensive residential courses. As they take place during concentrated periods (pre-scheduled) they do not interfere or disturb the learner's routine/regular study.

Another form of face-to-face instruction according to Holmberg is supervised correspondence study. The learners work in libraries or classrooms and have a teacher available there as a resource (individual helper and adviser) rather than as an instructor; this teacher answers questions, explains when asked to, motivates, organises group activities and administers.

In spite of this there remains a basic controversy between those who are in favour of as much face-to-face contact as possible and those who mainly rely on non-contiguous communication. To the former distance education is merely a substitute for interaction when this is not available and learning is seen as something of a social activity. To the latter learning is basically individual and distance education has considerable potentials of its own, different from but not inferior to traditional types of education. Both approaches, as we can see, represent individualisation. Even the former viewholders stress that self-learning materials are provided for hundreds or

thousands of learners in general, but the counsellors (tutors) counsel or tutor the distance learners as individuals.

There is a continuum between the two. At one end there are programmes that employ primarily face-to-face learning supplemented with texts and audio-visual aids. At the other end lie the programmes being offered online without any face-to-face component. In between the two there are many programmes that strive to combine (limited) face-to-face communication, either between teachers and learners or among learners themselves and also interactive media based dialogue with carefully structured printed, audio-video materials which make central inputs to the teaching-learning processes.

Check Your Progress 1

Why do you think face-to-face sessions are an essential component of the distance education system?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

The human factor

In the foregoing section we have highlighted the controversy regarding the need for face to face contact in the distance education system. It has also been pointed out that whatever the merits of the self-learning materials, they remain finite in character, therefore the human factor is very important to take the distance out of distance education and resolve the infinite problems of the learners.

As we all know distance education revolves around a learner centered system with teaching activity focussed on facilitating learning. The institutional function, and the task of its instructional personnel, is to facilitate and enhance that process — despite the distance to achieve optimum learning outcomes. The faculty engaged in distance education must be adept at facilitating learners' learning through particular attention to process, unlike, classroom based teachers whose traditional role is largely confined to selecting and sharing content. Also the faculty must recognize the role of instructional technology as a learning resource. Thus, the human factor in distance education has a very crucial role to play in the teaching learning process. The task of the distance instructor is more than merely grading learners submitted material (assignments, projects, examination papers etc.) Ideally the instructor's role involves:

- diagnosing the learner's readiness to learn;

- monitoring learner progress towards objectives sought;
- recognizing and discovering a learner's learning difficulties;
- stimulating and challenging learners to further efforts;
- evaluating the quality a learner's learning and assigning a grade to estimate learning outcome; and
- maintaining an effective two-way communication between the institution, the teacher and the taught and also among the peer groups.

Hence, distance education is a highly specialized branch of education requiring a special set of skills and attitude on the part of teachers (instructors) who take to distance teaching and function at any of the different levels in the system, such as: course designing, course developing, course production, tutoring, counselling, evaluation, etc.

3.3 ORGANISATION OF FACE-TO-FACE SESSIONS

Local support centres or study centres are the best places to provide face-to-face sessions, which you had read about in Block 1, Unit 4. The distance learners are informed well in advance about the specific period and place where the face-to-face sessions are to be held. The distance education institutes/open universities differ widely with respect to the number of face-to-face sessions organised by them for each course during the academic session.

Also as regards the frequency of face-to-face sessions in the time and interval with which they are organised, the institutions again adopt different policies.

Open universities mostly organise limited face-to-face sessions throughout the academic session on weekends or holidays in the evening hours whereas personal contact programmes are mostly organised by correspondence course institutes during the end of the academic session, in order to prepare the learners with the end of the course examination.

To give you some insights with regard to the organisation of face-to-face sessions in distance education, we think it appropriate to take you through a case study of personal contact programmes being organised at correspondence course institutes (CCIs) attached to conventional Indian Universities. It is a well known fact that these CCIs rely heavily on face-to-face sessions for tutoring distance learners. We have also included a study on the learners' opinion on counselling sessions. These learners are enrolled at one of the Regional Centres of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), India.

3.3.1 Personal contact programmes: A case study of correspondence course institutes (CCIs) of India

The study conducted by H.C.S. Rathore has made an attempt to look at the adequacy and the relevance of the face-to-face sessions popularly known as personal contact programmes (PCPs) organised at 14 CCIs. He also surveyed the perceptions of the learners and staff of these institutes. Two hundred learners were selected from 14 CCIs.

Now let us look into the findings of the study under various headings.

Organisation of PCPs

In principle as per the UGC guidelines a PCP is required to be held at places wherever there is a concentration of more than 200 learners. It may be noted that most of the institutions were not able to abide by it for reasons like unavailability of an institution willing to host the programme; lack of funds; lack of expertise in the city in question; lack of accommodation for learners etc. The CCIs also differed widely with respect to the number of PCPs organised by them for each course during the academic session; the frequency of PCPs, the venue of PCPs and nature of participation at PCPs. Mostly the CCIs did not have sufficient staff to conduct PCPs. Thus they had to hire experts from local colleges or universities. 71.42% of the institutions hired experts to conduct PCPs.

Aims of PCPs

All the correspondence institutes organised the PCPs mainly for formally teaching the course contents to their learners — this is the main aim behind organizing the PCPs. The second priority was given to the aim of preparing learners for the coming final examination by 10 out of 14 institutions. Similar number of institutions used PCPs as platforms for removing learners' isolation and this was the third priority aim. It may be quite disheartening to a number of learners that the PCP sessions to remove their learning difficulties were held only by 9 institutions and they too gave only a fourth priority to the issue. Again, a very important aim behind organizing PCPs was to provide individualized tutoring and counselling to the learners; but surprisingly it came as a fifth priority aim and that too only in the case of 5 (i.e. 35.71%) institutions. The other aims too such as, to use PCPs as a platform for seminars and group discussions, to orient learners with distance teaching and learning methods etc., which are important to be achieved through PCPs. But this study reveals that they were almost neglected in the system of correspondence education in India.

Suitability of the PCPs

The study revealed that the venue of the PCPs suited 65.51% of the learners. Similarly in the case of 59.21%, the PCPs were organized during the time when they really needed them, but this was not the case for 40.78% of the learners. As regards the suitability of the activities during the PCPs, 65.68% of the learners were satisfied with the quality of the organized activities and only 34.31% were not satisfied with them.

Academic value of PCPs

82.74% of the learners reported that they benefitted in their studies from the teaching given during the PCPs, and barely 17.25% reported that they did not benefit from the formal teaching during the PCPs. 33.9% of the learners wanted participation in the PCPs to be made voluntary. Although the PCPs were considered worth the time and money spent to attend them by 61.77% of the learners, almost an equal number of learners felt that sufficient time during PCPs was not given to enable them to individually consult the teachers to discuss their academic problems. Perhaps this is the reason why every second learner felt that PCPs did not serve the purpose of removing their academic problems. However, on the basis of these findings it was clear that on the whole PCPs are beneficial to the learners.

(Extract from an article by H.C.S. Rathore, (1995), *Personal Contact Programmes of Correspondence Course Institutes in India, An Evaluation*, published in *IJOL*, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 15-21. Reproduced with the permission of the editor of *IJOL* and the author).

Check Your Progress 2

How have you benefitted from the face-to-face sessions organised by your institution?

Notes: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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Some Observations

- From Rathore's study (1995) of PCPs organized at CCIs attached to conventional Indian universities, it is clear that: PCPs are a compulsory component of the teaching learning process. The learning materials supplied to learners are supplemented by teaching through PCPs. The stress is more on spoon feeding i.e., teaching the course content (through lectures) rather than using PCPs for interaction and solving problems of distance learners.
- Majority of the learners have viewed them positively. Hence the general notion that distance learners being adults and generally employed, are independent and do not prefer any kind of compulsion to participate in PCPs. But from this study it is obvious that the same cannot be said of the Indian learners. Rathore (1995) has also pointed out in his study that the probable reason for this is that most of the learners studying at these CCIs were dropouts from conventional system who failed to get admission in the conventional system. Their traditional habits of being taught by a teacher in a classroom situation dominated their thinking and hence their preference for more compulsory face-to-face sessions. Also the unemployed learners would view their study as full time work. Barely 33% of the learners expressed that PCPs should be made optional as they were probably the employed or adult learners. They could also include those persons who are residing in rural and remote areas, who found it cumbersome and expensive to attend PCPs organized continuously over a period of 7-14 days at a few places. Above all, it should not be forgotten that PCPs are utilized for imparting instruction (course content). Hence the learners have no other alternative but to view them positively.
- Every second learner felt that PCPs did not serve the purpose of removing their doubts and clarifying their problems. Therefore, in their suggestions the learners have expressed their need for individualized tutoring. Since PCPs are utilised mainly for imparting instruction, there is no provision of tutoring and counselling as in the case of counselling

sessions organised by open universities. In fact, counselling sessions are utilised mainly for providing problem solving and developmental counselling to distance learners and not for imparting instruction.

- The learners had also suggested that PCPs should have been conducted at least 3 to 4 times in a year and should be completed at least 2 months before the examinations were held. This reflects on the need and importance of spreading out the support provided through PCPs throughout the academic year instead of providing it only at one time of the year and at a few places as is being done in the case of counselling sessions organised by open universities.
- The learners' suggestion that necessary accommodation for outstation learners need to be arranged by the institution at subsidized rates, indicated that the venue of the PCPs was not suitable for many learners. The places where PCPs are conducted are limited, there is a need to increase the access points for the learners by the institution when PCPs are conducted.

Check Your Progress 3

In your opinion should participation in face-to-face sessions be made compulsory?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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3.3.2 Learner opinion of counselling sessions: a case study of IGNOU

A study was undertaken by Srivastava, Reddy and Fulzele (1996), on counselling organised by IGNOU. The major objectives of the study were to examine the:

- pattern of attendance at counselling sessions;
- usefulness of counselling sessions;
- reasons for not attending counselling sessions;
- activities undertaken at counselling sessions;
- preparations made by students before attending counselling sessions.

Although the study was conducted in 1995, the universe of the study included the 2036 learners enrolled at IGNOU Regional Centre for the post-graduate and undergraduate level programmes in the year 1992. Deliberately 1992 batch learners had been selected

as they had been in the system for over 2 years and therefore their opinion would be more valuable than the freshly enrolled learners. Using the random sampling method 25% of the learners were selected for the study giving due representation to women, rural residents. Let us now look at the findings of this study.

Pattern of attendance at counselling sessions

62.5% of the respondents had attended counselling sessions. Age-wise analysis showed that the participation in counselling sessions was cent percent in the case of learners who were in the age group of above 60 years, 80% in the 46-60 years, 66.7% in the below 25 years age group and 54.5% in the 26-45 years age group. The percentage of women and men who had attended counselling sessions was identical i.e., 62.5%. However, only 50% of the rural residents attended counselling sessions.

Usefulness of counselling sessions

39.7% of the respondents found the sessions useful, 39.0% to some extent useful and 21.3% not at all. The respondents had given highest rating to the point relating to meeting with fellow learners at sessions which created more enthusiasm to complete the course on time viz., 45.3%. The next point i.e., counselling sessions encouraged further readings and increased the interest in the course (32.8%) as an important reason, for attending sessions. 29.7% found the sessions useful because of the fruitful discussions at counselling sessions on assignments, 28% of the respondents found it useful because of the audio-visual aids used by the Counsellors, 23.4% said that their doubts were clarified; 29.1% found the discussions comprehensive; 20.3% felt the sessions covered more content than was given in the lesson, scripts/units and 26.6% were happy at the convenient time chosen for the sessions.

Interestingly, all the respondents of the above 45 years age groups have found the sessions useful whereas 75% of the below 25 years and 57.6% of the 26-45 years age groups have found them useful. The responses of the rural and urban group was almost identical viz., 67.2% urban and 66.7% rural respondents had found counselling sessions useful. More men (70%) as compared to women (62.5%) had found the sessions useful.

Reasons for not attending counselling sessions

The respondents who had not attended counselling sessions had also given their reasons for not attending the sessions. 45.3% had expressed that they could not attend sessions as the study centre was too far away for them to attend sessions; 29.7% could not attend due to demands of full employment; 21.9% found that the sessions were not upto the mark, 21.9% had no difficulty with the SIMs, 17.2% could not attend due to family duties; 14.1% felt that the counsellors were not well-versed with the SIMs; 10.9% due to inconvenience of tutorial time and 7.8% due to financial difficulties could not attend the sessions.

The major reasons given by the urban respondents (44.8%) for not attending sessions was that the study centre was located too far away though the centre was located within the city itself. The rural respondents (50%) had also given the same reason. In addition, to that 50% of them also felt that they had no difficulty with regard to the SIMs. 37.5% women felt that the study center was too far away, 32.5% said that they could not attend sessions due to demands of full employment and 25% of the women respondents could not attend due to family duties.

Activities during contact/counselling sessions

It is interesting to note that 50% of the respondents had mentioned in the questionnaire that they listened to lecture/discussion and even took notes whereas 15.6% only listened to the lecture/discussion, 46.9% participated in the sessions by asking questions, 45.3% by participating in the group discussions, 40.6% by talking to their peer group, 35.9% by watching video cassettes and 15.6% by listening to audio cassettes. 50% of rural and urban respondents had taken notes during the discussions but in all other aspects the urban respondents had been more participative than their rural counterparts. Sexwise analysis shows that men had been more participative than women, except for one activity of taking notes in the sessions where the ratio is fifty-fifty.

Preparations of distance learners for attending counselling sessions

The active participation of the distance learners at counselling sessions is directly linked to the preparations they made before coming to the sessions. 54.7% of the respondents read the relevant course materials before coming to a session; 48.4% attempted the self-check exercises before coming to the session; and 39.1% brought the list of questions they wanted to ask.

All the learners in the age group 46-60 years had gone through the relevant course materials, attempted all the self-check exercises but only 40% had listed the questions to be clarified. The oldest age group i.e., above 60 years, only 50% had read the SIMs, had done the self-check exercises and listed out their doubts before coming to the session. The response of the below 25 years age group is also quite similar. There is no noticeable difference in the response of the rural and urban respondents. Sexwise analysis shows more than men (60%) had read the SIMs than the women (45.8%) before attending the session. But interestingly more women had attempted the self-check exercises than the men in terms of percentage. But it is the reverse in relation to listing of questions before coming to the sessions.

(Extract from excerpts of the study published as an article by Manjulika, S., Reddy, Venugopal, V. and Fulzele (1996). Student Opinion of Counselling: The Experience of Indira Gandhi National Open University, IJOL, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 19-29. Reproduced with the permission of the editor of IJOL.)

Some Observations

- The study conducted on counselling sessions at IGNOU (1996) (an open university), has brought out the fact that all learners had not attended counselling sessions. In the previous case study of CCIs this point of attendance was not raised as PCPs are a compulsory component. Whereas at IGNOU or, for that matter, at any other open university, it is not compulsory for learners to attend counselling sessions. Hence 37.5% of the learners did not attend counselling sessions.
- Since counselling sessions are conducted at study centers, which are located in urban areas, barely 50% of the rural residents attend counselling sessions. 45% of the learners who did not attend counselling sessions said that they could not do so because of the distance of the study center. The university therefore needs to set up more centers in rural areas to facilitate the learners living in rural areas. It could also provide/make alternative arrangements for providing counselling support by making use of the new telecommunication technologies available for reaching out to all parts of the country.
- Nearly 80% of the respondents found the counselling sessions useful. The major reason mentioned by them is the opportunity it gave them to meet and discuss with their peer group which not only motivated them but also increased their interest in their course. Also through individualized tutoring and counselling many of their doubts were clarified.
- The active participation of over 50% learners in the counselling sessions reveals the preparations that they must have made before attending the counselling sessions. Since counselling sessions are not lecture sessions like PCPs, the learners are expected to have read the self-learning materials provided to them before coming to the counselling session. The counselling session is to be utilized for clarifying doubts, reinforcing learning, improving study skills and finding solutions to the problems/hindrances coming in the way of successfully completing the course.

- On the other hand more than 40% of the learners had not read the relevant study materials before attending counselling sessions. It is therefore necessary to make induction programs compulsory for new entrants. Distance learners need to be familiarized with the *modus operandi* of the distance education system, particularly the integrated role of counselling sessions in the teaching-learning process.
- Identification and appointment of the right academic counsellors is equally important as it has a long term impact on the system. In order to make the counselling sessions more interactive and beneficial to the learners, counsellors/tutors should be trained. Since most of the counsellors/tutors are teachers in the conventional system, they are not familiar with their tasks and responsibilities about which you have read in Unit 1 of this Block.
- In the next section you will be reading more about the role of counsellors/tutors who are responsible for handling face-to-face counselling sessions. Before you go to section 3.4, you may do the check your progress exercise that is given below.

Check Your Progress 4

Do you attend counselling sessions regularly? If yes, what are the reasons that make you to attend counselling sessions. If no, what are the reasons. Explain.

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3.4 THE ROLE OF SUPPORT SERVICES STAFF

Conscientious counsellors/tutors plan things to do at a face-to-face session. Ideally, in a face-to-face session all the learners should be involved. There are all sorts of ways of doing this, all of which depends on breaking down the initial formality of the atmosphere and allowing even the shyest in the group not to feel threatened or pressurized. It helps a lot to seat the learners in a circle rather than in rows. That stops people at the back being excluded

or cut off. If everyone in the group can see each other's facial expression, the group soon becomes more relaxed.

It is important to always regard the processes as much more important than the context. Processes such as questioning, sharing ideas, discussing, and solving problems contribute to the learning process. If the counsellor/tutor were merely to provide a long lecture, there is no guarantee that effective learning would occur.

Some learners may be quite shy in face-to-face sessions. If the whole group is asked a question, the same one or two voices would reply. It would be uncomfortable for the shyest learners if they were forced to give their views. An easy way out is the use of brainstorming sessions in the group.

Everyone may be given a question to answer on a slip of paper or a post-it. Learners after writing their answers may stick or post it on the wall and all of them can then look at each others responses. This method of 'joining in' is much kinder to shy learners and allows them to participate equally. In fact their contributions are often better than those from the one or two learners who would have answered all the questions orally (Race, 1994).

There are several other group learning techniques that can be used such as buzz sessions, debates, seminars, brainstorming, panel discussion, etc.

It is more helpful to highlight the responsibilities of staff who will normally be locally-based Academic Counsellors as:

- *to respond on the assignments to the dialogue initiated by the learner in their written work and to assess that work;*
- *to foster further discussion in face-to-face sessions at the Study Centres;*
- *to respond to learners' queries and/or confusions about the course material;*
- *to assist learners to become independent learners by helping them to develop sound study skills appropriate to distance education;*
- *to encourage and support learners' when they reach barriers to learning or points of decision, e.g. at the start of the course, the first assignment and the examination;*
- *to maintain adequate records, interpret the institution's regulations and to liaise with supervisory staff.*

This is a different role from that of conventional face-to-face educators and it can be highlighted further by stressing the differences. Some of these are:

- *teaching a course designed and written by other people;*
- *making greater use of a multi-media system;*
- *much greater concern with study skills in a novel way of studying;*
- *possibly dealing with older learners who have a wider range of experience and higher motivation;*
- *possible tensions between the roles of counsellor and assessor.*

This is a novel role offering new challenges and making different demands on academic staff and to take it on with a positive approach can be exciting. The institution itself needs to be clear in its expectations of its staff. It needs to:

- *provide a clear description of duties and procedures;*
- *establish a clear contractual position;*
- *provide well thought out and comprehensive briefing and training.*

Very often staff providing academic and counselling support in areas remote from the centre will be recruited from the staff of other institutions on a part-time basis. This can be beneficial to the distance education institution as it can involve experienced educationists who will, hopefully, find that their fresh experience with distance education provides new insights in their full-time jobs. It is also our experience that graduates not currently working in education have a lot to offer, particularly if the work becomes their major professional outlet. We shall not look at a few examples of the role and functions of tutor counsellors at UKOU and IGNOU.

3.4.1 Role of Tutors and Tutor Counsellors at the UKOU

A brief check list of the tasks performed by the learner support staff at the UKOU includes (Kaye & Rumble 1981):

a) commenting on written work sent in

- *grading written work submitted;*
- *assisting learners to understand course materials through discussion;*
- *conducting discussions face-to-face or occasionally by telephone;*
- *organising self help groups of learners;*
- *providing feedback on course materials and learner problems to full-time staff;*

b) answering learner queries about the system

- *helping learners plan their work;*
- *negotiating with the institution on behalf of learners when problems occur;*
- *advising applicants if required;*
- *inducting new learners into the course;*
- *advising learners on course choice;*
- *giving guidance on problems of an administrative nature such as fee payment, late submission of work;*
- *helping learners develop study skills.*

This is a fairly comprehensive list of requirements for any distance education support service. In the UKOU, two categories of staff are recruited to carry out these functions and in UK terminology they are

entitled Tutor and Tutor Counsellor. Their relationship with the learner is shown in the diagram below:

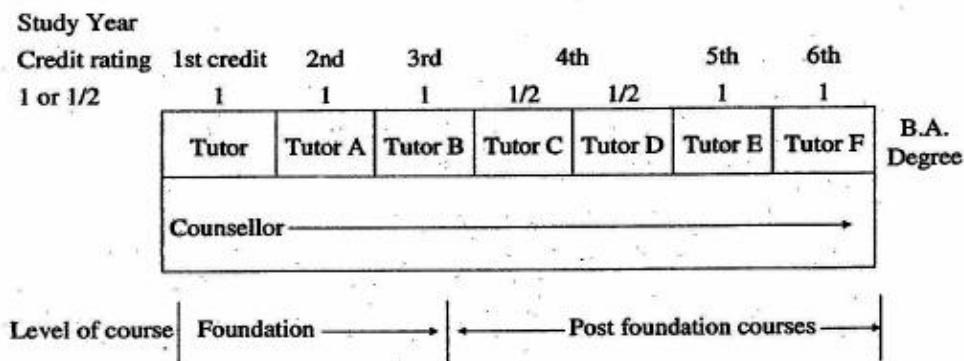


Fig. 3.1: Responsibilities of Tutor Counsellors and Tutors

The tutors carry out all the tasks listed above the gap in the checklist [see part (a) of the check list above] and are specialists in the subject taught by the course. The tutor counsellors teach one of the five foundation courses all learners start with and they also concern themselves with the educational support matters listed below the gap [see part (b) of the checklist above]. The university allocates greater resources to foundation course support as it recognises that learners need most help in the first year of distance education. As the diagram shows, the tutor counsellor continues to act as educational advisor [the duties listed under (b) above] throughout a learners study life, providing continuity of contact.

There has been some debate in recent years about the continuing role of the Tutor Counsellor, and some staff advocate moving to a model similar to that of IGNOU, whereby all duties are carried out by one member of staff namely the academic counsellor.

A diagram showing the complexity of the Learner Support System is given below (Fig. 3.2).

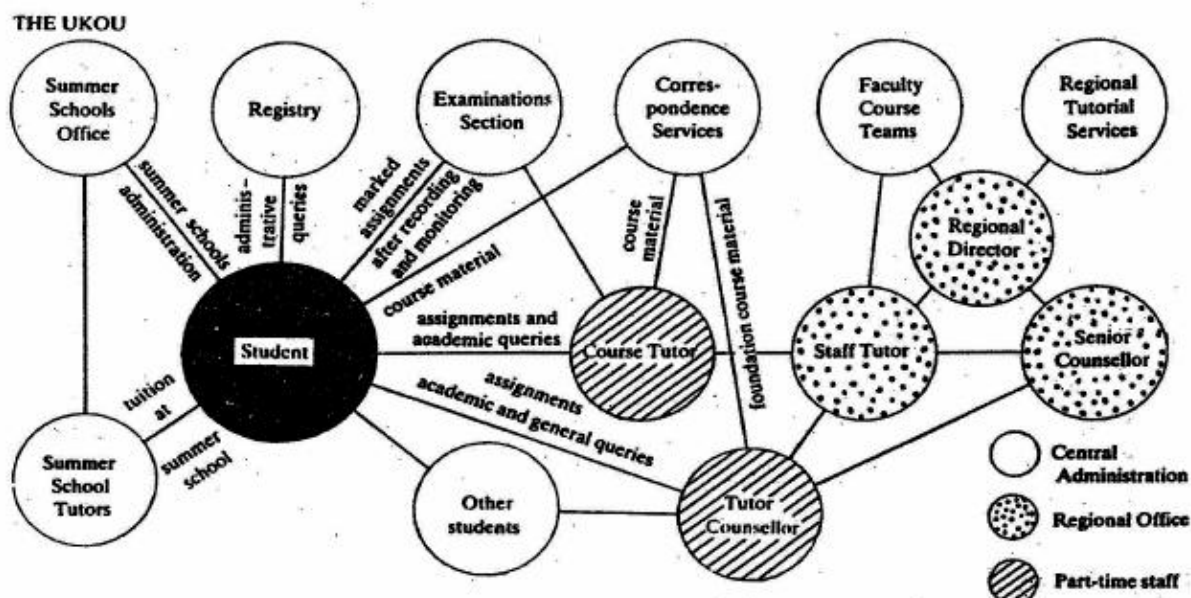


Fig. 3.2: Communication within the University

This concludes the description of a large relatively well resourced system in a densely populated country. In the next section we will study the rôle and functions of an Academic Counsellor at the IGNOU.

Check Your Progress 5

- a) Which of the following functions are likely to be performed at the Institution's Headquarters and which at the Study Centre:
- 1 run a computer terminal induction session for learners.
 - 2 organise a staff briefing and training session.
 - 3 arrange an end of term learner party.
 - 4 publish and distribute the Study Centre handbook.
 - 5 appoint a new part-time Academic-counsellor.
 - 6 revise the Study Centre financial payments.
- b) Which of the following do you think are not the Academic Counsellor's responsibility:
- 1 replacing a missing page from a course book.
 - 2 agreeing a timetable for assignments to be submitted late by a sick learner.
 - 3 guaranteeing a loan for a learner.
 - 4 devoting some time to questions and answers about examination problems.
 - 5 helping a learner who wants you to witness his signature on a paper.

Notes: i) Write your answer in the space provided.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- a)
1.
 2.
 3.
 4.
 5.
- b)
- 1 Yes/No
 - 2 Yes/No
 - 3 Yes/No
 - 4 Yes/No
 - 5 Yes/No

[Sections 3.4 and 3.4.1 were contributed by Derek Spencer, Senior Counsellor, Southern Region, UKOU and are taken from the unrevised version of Unit 3 of Block 2 of Course ES-313.]

3.4.2 Role and functions of academic counsellors at the IGNOU

As you already know, most of the learners who freshly enter the open system require general counselling to a large extent along with a small component of tutoring. This combination of general counselling and tutoring is known as academic counselling at the IGNOU and the person who offers academic counselling is called an academic counsellor.

As a general counsellor he/she is supposed to orient learners to learn at a distance, familiarise them with the system, and try to help them overcome their non-academic problems that are hindering their process of learning. As a tutor he/she assumes a role of a subject specialist where the emphasis is on dealing with problems related to the subject.

An academic counsellor is supposed to understand his/her partnership role allied with technology and has to make use of appropriate interventions of non-print media in order to facilitate the teaching learning process. Such as use of audio cassette recorders, video cassette recorders (both are available at the IGNOU study centres) during face-to-face counselling sessions; telephones; teleconferencing (available at limited study centres but at all Regional Centres); and more recently computers.

The role of an academic counsellor depends on the programme for which he/she is allotted. For instance, in the Bachelor's Preparatory Programme counsellor's responsibilities involve dealing with learners who have to be acquainted with study and mathematical skills likewise, the main role of a counsellor dealing with the Bachelor's Degree Programme (Foundation Course) is to foster confidence in the learner and to advise him/her to improvise on the aspects he/she is already familiar with. The change in approach of the counsellor between these two categories is primarily because of the difference in the nature of the learner needs; the former category consists of those who had no formal education, whereas those entering the Foundation Course stream are those who have had either a formal higher secondary school exposure or should have presumably prior acquaintance with the IGNOU's learning scheme in their BPP. On the other hand, a counsellor of the Management programme would be facing student participants who have had a good deal of work experience. However the basic responsibilities of the counsellor are the same to guide, to inform, to help and in short, to help the students to help themselves to make satisfactory progress in the system. Both the academic and personal needs of the learners have to be taken care of by the counsellor. The functions of an academic counsellor are as follows:

- Encourage the learner to keep contact through phone or correspondence and also have willingness to take the initiative to contact a learner.
- To guide learners how to make the best use of the library provided by the University at the Study Centre.
- To find during the contact programmes whether the learner has completed the self assessment tests given to him/her in the print media and provide feedback to enable the learner to know in which aspects of learning he/she is weak.
- To familiarise the learners with general study skills & even listening to their personal problems.

- Initiate discussion with a view to helping the learner consider all the relevant factors and reach a decision.
- The counsellor should be a friend rather than a teacher. Inherent in this new role is an element of advising which the counsellor would perform.

Major Functions of Academic Counsellors of the IGNOU

<i>Counselling</i>	<i>Tutoring</i>	<i>Use of Multimedia</i>	<i>Assessment & Evaluation</i>
(helping overcome learning difficulties)	(helping to achieve satisfactory academic standards)	(making appropriate interventions of non-print media)	(give feedback and establishing interpersonal links)

Another very important responsibility entrusted to an academic counsellors is that of grading a learner's assignment response and writing tutor comments on the assignment response. These tutor comments should be positive and constructive. The comments should keep up the morale of the learner. At the same time these comments should also provide distance tuition (teaching) to the distance learner.

Check Your Progress 6

Can you list out the specific tasks of an academic counsellor of the IGNOU?

Notes: (i) Write your answer in the space given below.

(ii) Compare your answer with the one at the end of the unit.

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Thus the basic requirements of an effective academic counsellor are:

- Good knowledge of the course he/she is taking up for counselling.
- He/she should have a genuine and sustained interest in the learner as a learner and also as a person.
- An ability to observe accurately and empathize: i.e. looking and listening carefully to what a learner says, and putting himself/herself in the learner's place so as to understand his/her problems sincerely.

A thorough knowledge about the University which enables him/her to help the learners achieve their goals without much disruption.

At IGNOU the concerned school, that designs the programme of study, decides on the academic qualifications and experience required of a suitable academic counsellor for its programme. Thus for each programme there is an eligibility criterion with regard to the selection of academic counsellors.

A two day orientation programme is normally arranged for the newly appointed academic counsellors at the regional centre utilising the services of resource persons from concerned schools at headquarters, academic staff from the regional centre and distance education experts drawn locally or from other regional centres/headquarters. These trained academic counsellors have these basic responsibilities to perform at the study centre as (a) informer (b) counsellor, and (c) evaluator.

In order to maintain standards, the university monitors the performance of academic counsellors through various mechanisms: namely monthly reports of study centres, visits of IGNOU centre staff to study centres, and monitoring 2% of the evaluated assignments by the faculty members of the concerned school.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have sought to draw your attention to the factors responsible for the provision of face-to-face sessions in distance education and the aims and purposes they serve. We have also given you a glimpse of the organisation of face-to-face sessions and the role of support services staff involved in providing this type of support.

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1

In your answer to this question you will have considered the factors responsible for the provision of face-to-face sessions in distance education. We are sure you would have considered all the key factors listed below:

- human factor in distance education
- need to break the isolation of the distance learner
- need to cater to the learners' needs which are infinite
- need to impart instruction and provide individualised tutoring and counselling.

2

Your own experiences are to be stated in order to answer this question. We list here some key points, but we hope you have thought of some more:

- your isolation was removed

- your academic and non-academic problems were removed/partially resolved
- you were encouraged to discuss your problems
- you benefitted from interaction with the counsellor and your peers (fellow learners)
- you were encouraged to make better and effective use of the facilities provided at your study centre
- you felt motivated to complete the course on time.

3

Your own ideas are required to answer this question. You would have felt that face-to-face sessions should either be made compulsory or they should be voluntary. Depending upon your choice you would have also given reasons for the same.

4

Your own opinion and experiences are required to answer this question. If you are attending counselling sessions, you would have spelt out the benefits that you have derived from counselling sessions. In case you are not attending counselling sessions, you would have given your reasons for the same.

5

- a) At the headquarters 2, 4, 5, 6 (all administrative functions). At the study centre 1, 3 (learner involved activities)
- b) Ideally the central despatch department should see to this; 2 and 4 are clear responsibilities; 3 is a personal matter and not for you; 5 is a difficult one as you might help as an individual, but you have no duty to do so.

6

Specific tasks of an academic counsellor of IGNOU:

- initiating learners into distance learning
- guiding the self learning in a desirable direction
- identifying mislearning and undoing the same
- providing non-print instructional interventions
- promoting and sustaining learner motivation
- identifying person specific problems and helping to overcome learning handicaps
- providing distance tuition (teaching) through tutor comments on assignment responses
- grading learners' assignments.

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Dear Student,

While studying the units of this block, you may have found certain portions of the text difficult to comprehend. We wish to know your difficulties and suggestions, in order to improve the course. Therefore, we request you to fill out and send us the following questionnaire, which pertains to this block. If you find the space provided insufficient, kindly use a separate sheet.

Questionnaire

Enrolment No.

1. How many hours did you need for studying the units?

Unit no.	1	2	3	4
No. of hours				

2. Please give your reactions to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Items	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Poor	Give specific examples, if poor
Presentation Quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Language and Style	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Illustrations Used (diagrams, tables, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conceptual Clarity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Check Your Progress Questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Feedback to CYP Questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

3. Any other comments:

Mail to:
Course Coordinator (ES-313)
STRIDE, IGNOU, Maidan Garhi
New Delhi - 110068, India.



Block

3**INTERACTION THROUGH ASSIGNMENTS****UNIT 1****Tutor-Comments****7****UNIT 2****Tutoring Through Correspondence****24****UNIT 3****Assessment and Grading****39****UNIT 4****Supplemental Interaction****52**

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 - Unit 2 Reading Skills
 - Unit 3 Study Skills
 - Unit 4 Institutional Arrangements for Learner Support
-

Block 2 Counselling and Tutoring Services

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 - Unit 2 Theory, Practice and Media of Counselling
 - Unit 3 Face-to-Face Sessions
-

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-

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-

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 - Unit 5 Consumer Preference for Flexible Education
 - Unit 6 Information Handling Skills and Resource-based
Learning in an Open University Course
 - Unit 7 Designing Collaborative Learning Environments
Mediated by Computer Conferencing: Issues and
Challenges in the Asian Socio-Cultural Context
-

BLOCK 3 INTERACTION THROUGH ASSIGNMENTS

Introduction to the Block

The course on the theme of 'Support Services' is divided into five blocks, of which this is the third one. It comprises four units. The first block discusses the need for support services and the means by which learners may help themselves as also the institutional mechanisms used to provide such services. The second block brings into focus 'counselling' which is a major component of such services. The term has been discussed in its conventional sense as well as in terms of its extended meaning when used in the context of distance education. Another important component of these services is provided by tutors who work on assignments, which have been discussed in this (i.e., the third) block.

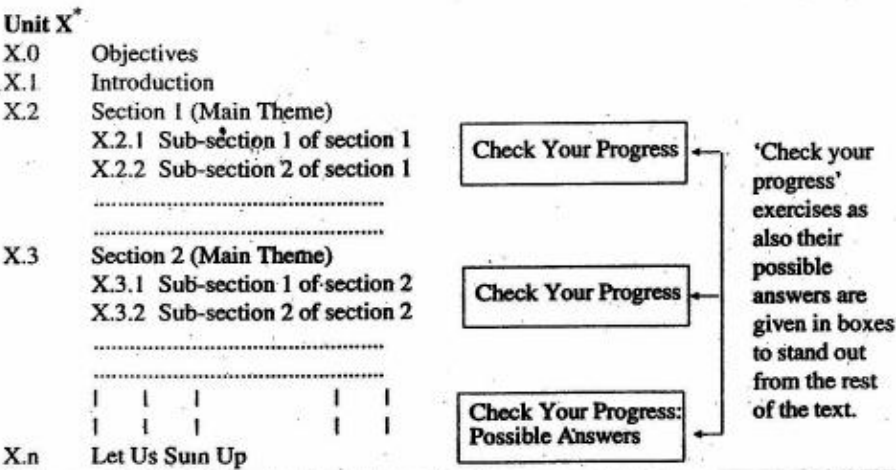
It is customary to say that classrooms provide lively learning situations in which a human agent, i.e., the teacher, effects learning. The contention, therefore, has been that distance education cannot provide the teaching/learning process as there is nobody to play the teacher's role.

In this block we have identified the professional tasks of the distance tutor, which are discernibly different from those of his/her counterparts in the conventional setting of the classroom.

Face-to-face contact between the tutor and the learners being relatively minimal, the tutor's comments on the assignment-responses play a vital role in the distance teaching/learning process. In the first unit, we present the types of comments — teaching and non-teaching — and suggest that a tutor should ideally write the teaching type of comments to effect learning. In the next two units (i.e., Units 2 & 3) we talk of the biases and fallacies the tutor suffers from and explain how they may be overcome through training and application.

The task of a tutor does not end with grading and writing purposeful comments on the assignment-responses. He/she should also respond with understanding to the queries of the learners for what we call 'supplemental communications' to take place. This sub-theme has been discussed in Unit 4 which concludes the block.

A schematic representation of the design of the units is given below. This will help you access the contents easily while reading the units.



* 'X' stands for the serial number of the unit concerned

As the scheme suggests, we have divided the units into sections for easy reading and better comprehension. Each section is indicated distinctly by bold capitals* and each sub-section by relatively smaller but bold† lower typeface. The significant divisions within sub-sections are in still smaller but bold** lower typeface so as to make it easier for you to see their place within the sub-sections. For purposes of uniformity, we have employed the same scheme of 'partitioning' in every unit throughout the course.

We begin each unit with the section 'Objectives'. It articulates briefly

- what we have presented in the unit, and
- what we expect from you once you have finished complete working on the unit.

In the last section of each unit, under the heading, 'Let Us Sum Up', we summarise the whole unit for purposes of recapitulation and ready reference.

Besides, we have given you self-check exercises under the caption 'Check Your Progress' or Self-check Exercises at a few places in each of these units which invariably end with possible answers to the questions set in these exercises.

What, perhaps, you would like to do is to go through the units and as you read, jot down important points in the *space provided in the margin*. (**Broad margins in the booklet are there for you to write your notes on.** Make your notes as you work through the material. This will help you prepare for the examination and also be useful in assimilating the content. Besides, you will be able to save on time. Do use these margins.) This will help you keep track of and assimilate what you have been reading in the unit, answer the self-check exercises and the assignment questions and easily identify the item(s) to be clarified.

We hope that we have provided enough space for you to work on the self-check exercises. The purpose behind these exercises will be served satisfactorily if you compare your answers with those given at the end of each unit after having written your answer in the blank space. **You may be tempted to have a furtive glance at the possible answer(s),** as soon as you come across an exercise. But we do hope that you will overcome the temptation and turn to these possible answers (which are not necessary the best answers) only after you have written your own.

These exercises are **not** meant to be submitted to us for correction or evaluation. Instead, the exercises are to function as study tools to help keep you on the right track as you read the units.

On an average, each block will have at least one or a part of one assignment. At times an assignment may expect you to work through more than one unit to prepare your responses. You have to send your assignment responses to us for assessment and comments. In all, you may have to work on two/three assignments per course. Assignments are sent separately, they are changed every year.

We suggest the following norms be strictly adhered to while you are working through the assignments:

- Write your roll number legibly as indicated in the Programme Guide.
- Before you put down anything in words, assimilate what you have read and integrate it with what you have gathered from your experience to build your answer.
- Make the best use of the block and the additional reading materials by diligently working through the assignments.

* BOLD CAPITALS

† Relatively smaller but bold

** Still smaller but bold

UNIT 1 TUTOR-COMMENTS

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Discovering the Distance Tutor
 - 1.2.1 General functions of a classroom teacher
 - 1.2.2 Identifying a distance tutor
- 1.3 Significance of Tutor-Comments
 - 1.3.1 Academic communication
 - 1.3.2 Personal communication
 - 1.3.3 Supplemental communication
- 1.4 Types of Tutor-Comments
 - 1.4.1 Harmful (HL) comments
 - 1.4.2 Hollow (HW) comments
 - 1.4.3 Misleading (MG) comments
 - 1.4.4 Null (NL) comments
 - 1.4.5 Negative (NE) comments
 - 1.4.6 Positive (PE) comments
 - 1.4.7 Constructive (CE) comments
 - 1.4.8 Global (GL) comments
 - 1.4.9 Personal (PL) comments
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have attempted to identify the distance tutor, and then to highlight the significance of his/her (written) comments. Having done so, we have touched upon the types of comments and 'commented' on them adequately.

After working through this unit, you will have developed useful insights into the significance and various functions of tutor-comments. Besides, you should be able to:

- distinguish between different levels of 'communication',
- identify various types of tutor-comments, and
- write appropriate comments when you are asked to.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Tutor-comments play a crucial role in most schemes of distance education. The distance learners' face-to-face contact with their tutors being relatively minimal, teaching has to be carried out mainly by means of 'comments' on assignment-responses. To elaborate, unlike a learner at a conventional educational institution, it is usually difficult for a distance education learner to meet the tutor or the teacher just whenever when he/she wants to.

Most of the help which a distance learner gets in terms of academic support is the tutor's comments on his/her assignment-responses. If the tutor is unable to write appropriate didactic comments (i.e., the comments which

effect learning), his/her comments are bound to fail to serve the purpose. Besides, written comments can easily yield to misinterpretation and the consequent confusion is inevitable.

Keeping in mind the difficulty involved in conveying warmth and sympathy on paper, this unit is designed to give you a comprehensive idea of tutor-comments. To serve this purpose, we have outlined the general functions of a classroom teacher and identified the crucial tasks of a distance tutor, which is to *teach effectively through written comment*. (We shall talk more about the conspicuous difference between a classroom teacher and a distance tutor with regard to their comments, in units 2 and 3 of this block).

Of the several so-called drawbacks which distance education suffers from, the most significant one is that it does not allow genuine and concrete academic contact or interaction between the teacher and the taught, and therefore, the system is accused of not **creating teaching/learning** situations and thus of not **causing** teaching/learning. On the contrary, the classroom, it is argued, provides a lively teaching and learning situation in which a human agent, i.e., the teacher, effects learning among the learners.

An attempt at discovering the 'distance-teacher' and the 'preliminaries of his/her teaching techniques' will enable us to react critically to the above argument. You may recall what we said in Section 4.1, Unit 4, Block 1 of this course: the term 'tutor' is being used for one who teaches by correspondence or conducts face to face sessions in the context of distance education.

1.2 DISCOVERING THE DISTANCE TUTOR

An outline of a part of the teaching/learning process in distance education does not seem to account for the role of the distance teacher or the tutor except as an examiner. For, a typical institute of distance education collects information relevant to a particular course of study and shapes it into lessons, prepares the essential reading lists and designs the learning tasks (assignments) or other types of worksheets suitable for its objectives. All these put together take the form of a course-unit. The distance learner is expected to study the course-units and write answers to various questions or perform learning tasks, which are then assessed and graded by the tutor, and subsequently sent back to the learners. The average of grades obtained at the final examination and in internal assessment decide the final grades, and a certificate/diploma/degree is awarded accordingly.

It should not, however, be construed that every course given through the distance mode of education follows the same system of grading. There can be numerous variations, but the basic principle that the final grades be computed on the basis of a learner's performance at the final examination together with the quality of his/her work throughout the period of study is usually followed all over the world.

To reiterate, in this brief outline of a part of the teaching/learning process, we identified the distance tutor as an examiner. Granted that the course-units, assignment-responses, and examinations have their respective counterparts in the form of the chapters of prescribed texts, exercises written by learners and corrected by teachers, and examinations held in the same

way as in the conventional system of classroom teaching, the counterpart of the classroom teacher is not clearly discernible in distance education.

What does a classroom teacher generally do?

To find an answer to the question posed above, we shall look at the following sub-section.

1.2.1 General functions of a classroom teacher

It should be mentioned here that in a classroom situation textbooks alone do not effect learning. The 'information' presented in the textbooks becomes the 'knowledge' of the learner through the active agency of the classroom teacher. He/she is believed to effect the transformation with the help of explanations, demonstrations etc. His/her smiles and scowls too are believed to contribute to this process of transformation — at the two ends of which is the learner, who is said to have been taught, and the classroom teacher, who is said to have taught. The teacher is the 'agent' and the learner the 'affected'. The obvious implication is that teaching is not possible without a teacher.

To further such claims, it is customary to label the teacher an 'inspirer' and a 'holy guide'. However, the usual examination results belie these claims. In the Indian situation we can hardly think of a public examination (matriculation, intermediate, etc.) which does not show a good percentage of failures. If the teaching of the classroom teacher were the only factor responsible for a learner's success, there should be no failures of the kind we just mentioned.

A more important factor, therefore, is the learner himself/herself. This fact is reiterated time and again when we look into newspapers for the results of this or that examination. These results seem to suggest that the question is less of the classroom teacher's instruction than of the learners process of learning. The way he/she learns, his/her capacity for learning, his/her attitudes to learning and other learner-centred factors are much more significant than the mode of learning. What we are trying to suggest is that 'learning' is mainly a 'learner-centred activity', and

- i) a learner should also be able to learn in non-classroom situations;
- ii) the so-called 'inspirer' should, in most cases, be more of a facilitator than anything else; and
- iii) 'word of mouth' need not be the only means of help.

1.2.2 Identifying a distance tutor

The truisms mentioned above [items (i), (ii) & (iii)] outline some of the fundamental notions on which the system of distance education is based. It is in these truisms that we trace the genesis of the distance tutor, who can and should do as much or as well as, and often more than a classroom teacher can.

A classroom teacher helps his/her learners to communicate with written materials presented as bits of information or with material delivered orally or them referred in to be locked up in libraries, and a distance teacher does

much the same **not** through 'word of mouth' **but** through 'word of hand' the comments on the assignment-responses. Thus, at the theoretical level there is a semblance between the classroom teacher and his/her counterpart at the distance teaching institution. But this obvious resemblance between them might be obliterated at the level of performance because of the differing operational modes they follow. And this makes all the difference — a teacher who comes to the classroom will, in any case talk, and therefore, by implication, inform, guide, inspire or at least help the learner. On the contrary a distance tutor who works through an assignment-response or a letter may choose not write any comments/replies at all.

The most significant implication of this contrast is that a distance tutor, if he/she is to help the learner, should not rest content with scribbling a grade at the top of an assignment-response. He/she must find ways to communicate with and help the learner respond to the course-units. By not writing any comments on the assignment-responses, in spite of having graded them, he/she ceases to be an effective tutor and exists as a mere examiner who grades/marks an assignment-response and is not called upon to explain his stand.

There is no lack of evidence to establish the fact that *not all* teachers/tutors handle assignment-responses with the attention and devotion expected of them.

What could be the possible reasons for such indifference? They might be as follows:

- i) the teacher/tutor does not like his/her work, and is working under some kind of compulsion;
- ii) he/she does not really read the assignment-response, but grades them to record an overt evidence of having done his/her duty;
- iii) he/she reads the assignment-response but does not have enough time to write his/her comments;
- iv) he/she does not realise how significant his/her comments are from the pedagogic point of view; and
- v) he/she does not know what comments to make and how to put them across.

The problems outlined under (i), (ii) and (iii) have obvious solutions, but those presented under (iv) and (v) deserve to be discussed in detail.

The cases listed under (i), (ii) and (iii) are not hypothetical cases. Often it so happens that academic staff are seconded from the parent departments of conventional universities to the directorates of correspondence or distance education. If a particular teacher is not happy about the secondment, for whatever reasons, he/she tends to be indifferent to work at the directorate [case (i)]. But then he/she must in certain cases, show that he/she is working; for this he/she has to manipulate some kind of a semblance of work being done by him/her [case (ii)]. Neither of these problems has pedagogic solutions, as they are in essence administrative problems. The obvious solution is that unwilling teachers should not be seconded for distance teaching, nor should we appoint people who are not willing to undertake the

tasks peculiar to distance teaching, such as evaluating and writing comments on an assignment-response.

Turning to the cases listed under item (iii), we feel inclined to be sympathetic with someone who is overworked, and in a situation, that obviously, requires more staff, who should be provided without any hesitation. It is obvious that this third case too is an administrative problem that has to be resolved accordingly.

But, the last two cases, listed under items (iv) and (v) are of a different nature; they belong to the domain of pedagogics. This explains why we intend to study them in greater detail.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF TUTOR-COMMENTS

Most distance learners are new to the distance mode of education. It is, therefore, the duty of a teacher to initiate communication straightaway, and he/she can best initiate it through his/her comments. As such, tutor-comments are of undoubted significance to distance education, as they are both the content and the vehicle of communication which effects learning. So as to effect the gradual initiation of learners into the ways of distance education, the tutor has to be aware of the following three levels of communication:

- i) academic communication;
- ii) personal communication; and
- iii) supplemental communication.

We shall highlight the significance of tutor-comments by discussing these three levels of communication in the order given above.

1.3.1 Academic communication

At the academic level, the function of the distance tutor is to:

- i) read the assignment-response;
- ii) write comments on the answers/responses; and
- iii) evaluate the answers/responses by grading/markings them.

The tutor's comments are born of the attempt at correlating and comparing his/her own interpretation of a particular course-unit with the corresponding learner-response, in terms of both content and presentation. The content of the course-unit, the tutor's own expertise in the field, the corresponding expertise of his/her colleagues, and his/her own idea of the ideal response (to a particular assignment) form the basis of comments and grades finally given. It should also be mentioned here that the tutor's idea of the ideal response is a variable that is affected as much by personal views as by the range and variety of the assignment-responses received.

Further, to distance teach effectively the tutor must understand each learner. Unlike a classroom teacher who addresses a collective mass of learners, the distance teacher/tutor has to address every learner individually, a major way is to write comments on the assignment-responses. Obviously, this makes

his/her tasks much more difficult and challenging than that of the classroom teacher.

The teacher/tutor must:

- i) correct the learner and offer guidance where he/she may have gone wrong;
- ii) elaborate on what he/she may have attempted summarily;
- iii) point out and confirm the acceptable aspects of his/her responses; and
- iv) assess the level of his/her achievement and explain the basis of that assessment so as to ensure better learner performance in the future.

It is the duty of the tutor to repeat all the above mentioned tasks over and over again with every learner. This certainly is work that demands great attention, as well as patience.

Let us elaborate on this:

The tutor has to be conscious of the fact that the distance learner is 'isolated' from his/her peers and is, in most cases, an adult with several social commitments and domestic responsibilities. Consequently, he/she is more susceptible to anxiety, slackness and frustration, and, therefore, may suffer from one or more of the following handicaps:

- i) Isolation from other learners seems to hang heavy on a distance learner. The feeling that other learners think, work and achieve differently may have a dampening effect on his/her enthusiasm and work.
- ii) Isolation from the tutor breeds discontent and invariably accompanies the feeling that one can impress one's teacher better in a face-to-face learning situation.
- iii) A long time-gap between the points raised by the learner and the corresponding clarifications received may slacken interest and enthusiasm.
- iv) Since in most cases, no two learners can compare their assessed assignment-responses, the scope for healthy competition or peer group interaction is minimal.
- v) The distance learner has to depend mainly on the written word so he/she must be able to exploit it to the maximum for comprehension as well as utilisation.

Since these factors cannot be taken care of in course-units, it is the teacher/tutor who should help the learner to overcome difficulties caused by 'isolation' and make his/her communication — through written comments — academically useful.

Having discussed communication at the academic level, we should also look at the non-academic level of communication. We shall do so, after pausing for a while to work on the following exercise.

Check Your Progress 1

Give at least one reason to show that 'tutor-comments' are academically significant.

Note: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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1.3.2 Personal communication

An assignment-response is a product of the learner's 'reaction' to the course-unit. It is, therefore, a manifestation of the learner's personality, a fact which the tutor is expected to recognise. Distance learners, by and large, are inclined to hide their weaknesses — they do not like to look small. Then there are others who would like to look bigger than they are. To illustrate the above statement, let us give an example.

"Some of my friends doing your course with me feel that the conceptualisation and verbalisation in your lessons require betterment. I could adduce special illustrations if it were not for lack of time, stationery, stamp expenses and labour.... I request you to prefer honesty to smartness and render your lessons useful!" (Koul, 1976).

Sometimes, a learner spends valuable time and effort in eulogising the tutor, his/her comments or the course-units. Look at the illustration given below.

"I shall continue to remember you as a very clear headed scholar with a deep study of the subject; clarity of expression, keen observation, capacity for right and dispassionate assessment, dedication to work in hand, punctuality and integrity of purpose and intention and also as a man not susceptible to praise or flattery having a calm and unruffled nature, perseverance and assiduity in the performance of assignments entrusted and..." (Koul, 1976).

Such attitudes/feelings might be genuine, but they can prove to be real hurdles in distance education, and may lead the tutor to think that the learner is trying to flatter him/her in order to gain better grades. Further, the root of such attitude may be traced back to the learner's social status, family background, occupation, previous academic achievements, etc. No distance learner can avoid being influenced by the fact that he/she interprets the

course-units in term of personal experience, and answers carry a stamp of consequently, the personality of the learner.

One of the most obvious ways of modifying the learner's approach to 'distance studies' is to influence his/her attitudes towards the tutor, the course-units, the distance teaching institution, and the various learning strategies being used.

Therefore, there has to be a non-academic level of tutor-comment which will dispel the learner's misgivings and mould his/her attitudes to reform his/her concept of the tutor's role, the course-units, the distance institution and the learning strategies used. The tutor will have to find occasions when he/she can come across as the most sincere 'confidant' of the learner, the most dependable exponent of the course, as one who has a comparatively superior understanding of the academic issues at hand, as one whose prime aim is to assist the learner in studying. The tutor's written comments must compensate for personal mannerisms — peculiar gestures, smiles and tilts of the brows, etc. — which accompany modify the teacher's remarks in a classroom situation, so that the tutor-comments may not hamper the motivation of the distance learner. The comments, therefore, will have to be well thought out, deliberate, palatable, precise and pedagogically purposeful.

1.3.3 Supplemental communication

Communication at the academic and personal level gives rise to a third level of communication which may be called the 'supplemental level of communication'. Such communication may emanate either from the learners, or from the teachers. In the former case, a learner might want to question a particular comment written by a teacher, or ask for an explanation regarding a grade awarded or a remark recorded on the assignment-response. In the latter case, the tutor may discover that a particular assignment is difficult, and most learners need help in handling it. In such a situation model answers or such hints as would help learners must be prepared and made available to them.

Having brought in the notion of the 'supplemental level of communication', we need to add a word of caution here and provide further elaboration on this third level of communication in unit 4 of this block.

A word of caution

The system of tutor-comments which has been suggested here is in itself, not foolproof. The most striking weakness in the system, one may point out, is that it depends on the sincerity of the tutor. Therefore, in order to make the system work efficaciously, it is advisable to monitor the work of tutors and remind them from time to time of the standards they are expected to maintain. Such an approach should provide ways and means for learners to comment on the course-units and the work of their tutors. The tutors themselves might come up with constructive suggestions regarding course-units or the system as a whole.

All these possibilities are visualised as healthy steps towards a really effective distance teaching and learning transaction.

Having analysed the two dimensional significance of tutor-comments, and having touched upon the third level of communication, we shall now discuss the most crucial of the problems — **what** comments to make and **how** to write them.

1.4 TYPES OF TUTOR-COMMENTS

In section 1.3, our focus was on the 'why' of tutor-comments. In other words, we tried to suggest why such comments need to be written, and what they are all about. In this section we shall try to show that it is not always possible to write what we call 'well thought out' comments; it is even more difficult to make them precise and pedagogically purposeful. On the basis of a sample of comments written by untrained distance teachers, we shall identify a few general categories of comments which should improve our understanding of the what and how of teacher/tutor-comments. But, before we display a list of comments we would like to raise and answer a question — why have we chosen to discuss the what and how of tutor-comments? There is a lot of literature available on how a teacher should teach a particular subject in a classroom situation. Classroom teaching techniques are an academic discipline in their own right, but not much has been done in evolving techniques of teaching at a distance.

The dispute — whether or not correspondence education really exists and if so, whether the term means the same from one correspondence school to another or even from one course to another of the same school — is quite relevant to distance education too. Though distance education uses as many media as an institute can possibly afford and manage, yet in a multi-media package, the greater bulk of material depends on 'print'.

The fact that most home-study programmes conducted the world over use written course-units as the major channel of transmission, and that it is the only channel in most distance education in our country, warrants a certain degree of sophistication in formalising the 'comment-types'. We hope we have adequately answered the question we raised.

Let us now consider the following extracts which have been selected from comments actually written by untrained distance teachers working on assignment-responses.

- 1 Horrible language! Pay some more attention to your language.
- 2 You have beaten about the bush.
- 3 Try to avoid the jargon if it is not clear to you.
- 4 What do you mean by this? Where is the illustration?
- 5 Is that all there is to say? Do you think you have put in all the relevant information? Read the topic of the assignment again and go back to the teaching unit.
- 6 Please go through the lesson once again and also the question in the assignment.
- 7 Since you almost fulfilled the criteria of effective language teaching materials you have been awarded an 'A' grade.
- 8 You can improve the organisation of your answer.

- 9 You could improve your answer by spending more time on it.
- 10 Please read the question again. It seems you have not fully understood it.
- 11 A lot of unnecessary material has crept in.
- 12 Read the answer again and strike out all the unnecessary details.
- 13 Go through the lesson once again.
- 14 You have some problems with the language about which you need not worry much.
- 15 Your answer is a faithful summary of the lesson.
- 16 You have not followed the question at all.
- 17 Is this necessary here?
- 18 Please read the lesson once again and re-do the assignment.
- 19 Examples and illustrations are okay. but one example could have served the purpose.
- 20 Beginning of the essay is quite good, try to keep up the same level.
- 21 Not clear, not to the point.
- 22 The treatment of the topic is not adequate.
- 23 You have failed to give a single illustration of how...
- 24 You need a bit more clarity in your understanding of the task given.
- 25 Your answer is too brief and incomplete.
- 26 Your argument about situations/themes determining vocabulary is acceptable and the illustration given about cricket is good.
- 27 Instead of giving negative illustrations (i.e. illustrations of what is not wanted) you could have given positive illustrations.
- 28 You could have discussed the issues further with the aid of your illustrations. Besides, you should also have talked about the following points:
i..., ii..., iii..., and iv...
- 29 Please try to test the suggested reforms in your own classroom teaching situation. Prepare illustrations, based on your experience and send them to us for evaluation.
- 30 You will notice that you have overlooked the role of experimentation in the teaching of sciences. You should have touched upon this point to make your answer more convincing.

We have chosen these comments to identify a few comment-types. You must have noticed that these comments are not subject-specific, i.e., these comments do not pertain to any subject in particular. While selecting these comments, care was taken not to include comments on content/discipline, as we want to arrive at broadly applicable generalizations and not be restricted to the subject specific ones.

We will now classify these comments and comment on them.

1.4.1 Harmful (HL) comments

Consider comments 1 to 5. Comments like 'Horrible language...', 'You have beaten about the bush...' are harmful insofar as they put off the learner. Such comments are 'rude' by themselves — they fail to build any purposeful rapport between the distance learner and the distance teacher. Conversely, they build barriers between them and consequently, all possibilities of 'communication' get blocked. Often distance learners who are sensitive feel hurt by such remarks. They not only start hating the tutor concerned, but also become indifferent to the subject dealt with. As a result, they drop out of the course. Others may write back objecting to the 'rude' remarks of the tutor. In most cases, the tutor justifies the remarks, but that does not serve the purpose.

In essence, more often than not, the tutor who uses harmful comments fails to communicate purposefully, and so the interests of the learner are damaged — in certain cases irrevocably.

1.4.2 Hollow (HW) comments

Take a careful look at comments 6 to 15. They are nothing more than words. They read like sentences with meanings, but those meanings are 'hollow', for one cannot make anything out of them. For example, 'please go through the lesson once again and also the question in the assignment' appears to be an instruction, but it is not clear 'what' is going to happen, 'how' and 'with what effect', if the instruction is followed. Or, consider comment 12. If the learner knew which details were 'unnecessary' he/she would not have given them. Nor is 'reading the answer again' going to help in treating those 'unnecessary details'. In effect, the comment is a 'hollow' one — it is a set of words, even a sentence, but it does not convey anything purposeful.

Comments 16 and 17 display the characteristics of both the **harmful** and the **hollow** comments. On the one hand they are 'rude', on the other they do not seem to serve any purpose.

1.4.3 Misleading (MG) comments

Tutors sometimes make comments which put the learner on the wrong track — the learner is asked or made to do something which does not serve any purpose, or is made to build untenable perceptions about himself/herself, his/her method of learning and the environment in which it takes place. For example, let us consider comment 18. The learner is asked to read the lesson once again; in all probability he/she will follow the direction honestly, read the lesson once again, and then re-do the assignment, but since the mistakes, weaknesses in his/her first attempt were, not pointed out, they are likely to be repeated. Just reading the lesson once again or redoing the assignment in itself is not going to make any contribution to the learner's learning; instead he/she will be under the wrong impression that by having done what the tutor asked he/she has gained something quite substantial academically.

So far, we have talked about three types of comments — harmful, hollow and misleading. For obvious reasons, the tutor should take care not to write such comments. We shall see, in Units 2 and 3 of this block that to avoid writing a harmful comment is not a difficult task, but it is rather difficult to

do away with 'hollow' and 'misleading' ones. It needs deliberate effort and caution to avoid writing such comments. Our straight-forward suggestion in this connection is that in no circumstances whatsoever should a tutor write any of these three kinds of comment.

1.4.4 Null (NL) comments

These comments which do not confirm or question, illustrate or explain, refute or approve of anything, may be called 'null comments'. These comments include all types of non-verbal remarks — question marks, double question marks, double check marks, underlining, side brackets, etc. These symbols seemingly indicate that the answer has been read by the tutor, but they are not helpful to the learners. They do not decode them and in fact, cannot do so.

Such comments could be made useful by giving every non-verbal symbol a predetermined verbal value known to both the learner and the tutor. In which case such symbols can have reasonable communicative value.

In a different situation, the tutor could use these symbols to tone down the adverse effects of writing discouraging comments repeatedly. Also consider a situation in which the tutor feels like repeating a comment, or more or less similar remarks at half a dozen places in the same assignment-response or on the same page. Instead of wasting his time in writing such remarks repeatedly, he may write the comment once and use one particular symbol which denotes such a comment, at all six places. This method may have significant psycho-pedagogical advantages. In such a situation one could use numbers, Greek letters or any other set of symbols. This suggestion notwithstanding, it is worth spending time in repeatedly writing down comments for greater effect. For, repetition of such comments reinforces the achievements of and ensures greater involvement from the learners.

The distance tutor, therefore does not necessarily have to resort to symbol a particular **teaching type comment** (see p. 19-20) is to be repeated. By all means the comment may be repeated if required. Of course, the time needed for this purpose must be available to the tutor.

Check Your Progress 2

Look at the sample comments given below.

- i) Since you almost fulfilled the criteria of effective language teaching materials you have been awarded an 'A' grade.
- ii) Please read the lesson once again and redo the assignment.

Sample (i) is a 'hollow' comment and sample (ii) is a 'misleading' comment. Give at least one reason each to justify the terms 'hollow' and 'misleading' for these samples respectively.

Note: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1.4.5 Negative (NE) comments

Such comments which negate facts, concepts, explanations, illustrations, analyses, elaborations and the relevance of the content of an answer, or the very approach to a particular problem presented by the distance learner in the assignment-response may be termed 'negative comments'. These are, perhaps, the most important of all the comments a tutor has to make, because these are the correctives most needed by the learner, who, when deprived of such guidance gets exposed to the danger of 'mislearning'. These comments may be written in the margin beside the particular fact(s), explanation(s) etc., which are being pointed out as irrelevant and/or wrong. Whenever possible, references should be made to the lesson number, page number and section number where the correct answer might be available. In certain cases, the tutor will have to explain why a particular answer is incorrect; and might have to supply written or prepared answers, illustrations or examples to support his/her stand. (Items 21 to 25 on page 16 are some examples of negative comments.)

1.4.6 Positive (PE) comments

Consider item 26 on page 16. It approves of what the learner has written.

Positive comments approve of the stand taken by the distance learner. They indicate that his/her answer is upto the mark, or excellent, or that in spite of some flaws in the answer, it is original or even brilliant.

It is surprising that most tutors don't even think of such comments. Such comments encourage the distance learner to repeat and better his/her performance, because of the realization that he/she is on the same 'wave length' as the tutor and to repeat the achievement as many times as possible. It is these comments that actually result in and then further mutually advantageous communication between the tutor and the learner. Such comments may be written in the margin beside that portion of the answer to which they are relevant.

1.4.7 Constructive (CE) comments

Items 27 to 30 on page 16 do not negate what the learners have written, nor do they approve of it. Instead, they offer constructive suggestions as to how the answer could have been improved, so we call them 'constructive' comments. They are immensely helpful in effecting purposeful didactic communication. It should be noted that a 'constructive' comment added to a 'negative' or a 'positive' comment enhances the pedagogic utility of the latter. Those comments like the 'negative' and 'positive' ones, may be written on the margins next to the relevant portions of the answer-script.

1.4.8 Global (GL) comments

Having offered the comments at relevant places in the main body of an assignment-response, the tutor must prepare a global comment to cover the entire assignment-response with reference to various aspects of the answer. Such comments will have to be on a separate sheet of paper, or better still on a specially designed table of instructions. They may also refer to such drawbacks as are not necessarily related to the course-unit — spellings, syntax, legibility, etc. Perhaps the most important function of this class of comment is to 'explain the grades'. Every learner is keen on knowing his/her grades. The first thing he/she looks for in the corrected assignment-response is the 'grade', and the reason behind it, whether it is an A or a C. If every assignment-response is returned with a comment on the grades it bears, there is a greater possibility of improved learner performance. *What a 'global' comment should look and read like is illustrated with the help of a sample given on page 21.*

1.4.9 Personal (PL) comments

Personal comments are thought of as a means of undoing the 'isolation' which a distance learner has to suffer from — he/she has no way of assessing his/her performance in relation to that of the others on the course. Breaking this isolation is much more difficult than writing the 'teaching' type of comment.

A distance tutor who intends to build communication with the learners on a personal level needs to have the following extra-academic attributes:

- i) a very high degree of patience;
- ii) a feel for the appropriate placement of personal comments; and
- iii) a certain degree of linguistic sophistication which is required to successfully blend academic comments, instructions and information into an 'intimate' whole.

A distance tutor may write as many personal comments as possible, but we believe that even a single well placed and appropriately worded comment of this kind per assignment-response will go a long way in breaking the isolation of distance learners. Given below are a few examples of such comments:

'Yes, that is what most other learners have been writing about the conventional methods of teaching a language.'

ASSESSMENT

STUDENT'S NAME:

STUDENT'S NUMBER: IND 779

UNIT: 6

COURSE

GRADE: A 80

TUTOR'S COMMENTS

This is a very thoughtful and perceptive essay. You have very lucidly and systematically set out the essential points, and you have conveyed the spirit and the practice of the Montessori approach very effectively.

You are, of course, correct to refer to the cost of apparatus. I think one needs to think in terms of gradual acquisition, perhaps with a rota system of work. The basic principles can to some extent be applied with ^{an} imaginative approach even if the school is not fully equipped.

CONTENT

Accurate Information ☒
 Inaccurate Information ☐
 Comprehensive ☒
 Lacking Content ☐
 Logical/Good Conceptual Analysis ☒
 Illogical/Poor Conceptual Analysis ☐

PRESENTATION

Well Planned ☒
 Inadequately Planned ☐
 Concise ☒
 Clearly Expressed ☒
 Not Clearly Expressed ☐
 Weak Grasp of English Structures ☐

	Grade	%
Excellent	A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	80
	A- <input type="checkbox"/>	
Very Good	B+ <input type="checkbox"/>	
Good	B <input type="checkbox"/>	
	B- <input type="checkbox"/>	
Good Average	C+ <input type="checkbox"/>	
Average	C <input type="checkbox"/>	
Below Average	C- <input type="checkbox"/>	

Borderline (to be moderated) D ☐
 Fail (Re-submit) E ☐

Tutor's Signature

Received 17/3/86

Date Assessed 12/3/86

Moderation

Date

'Your answer is quite upto the mark. In fact I couldn't have thought of a better answer myself...'

'Your answer seems to have an edge over most answers we have received so far. It is so because your approach to the course-units has been flexible and you have tried to think in an unconventional way.'

Check Your Progress 3

We have used some letter symbols to denote each comment-type. Say, in about 5 lines, what these letters stand for.

Note: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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Of the nine comment types which we have identified above, the first five may be said to belong to the 'non-teaching' class, and the last four to the 'teaching' class of comment. The terms 'non-teaching' and 'teaching' are self-explanatory. We do not intend to elaborate on them. However, it should be noted that 'null' and 'negative' comments, which in their pure form are 'non-teaching' kind or comment in character, can be transformed into the 'teaching' class if additional instructive notes are added to them. (Suggestions regarding how we may effect this transformation have been added under the discussions of respective comment types — see pages 17 to 20.)

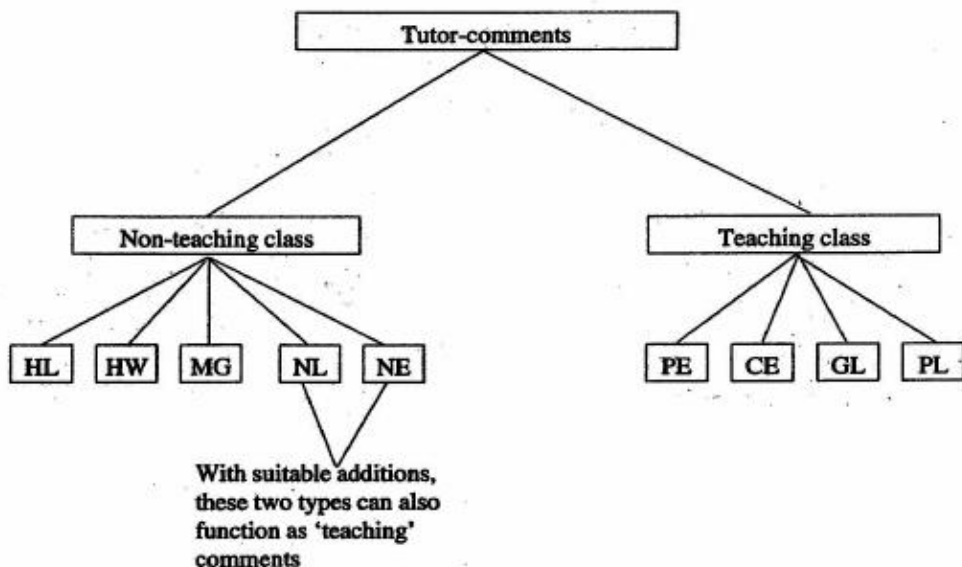


Fig. 1.1: Tutor-comments: A Schematic Representation

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have:

- i) described the general functions of a classroom teacher as well as identified the distance tutor (The fact that the latter ceases to be an effective distance tutor, if he/she does not write apt comments on assignment-responses, is highlighted here);
- ii) discussed the significance of tutor-comments and the three levels of 'communication' — academic, personal and supplemental;
- iii) touched upon nine types of tutor-comments and subsequently classified them as teaching (PE, CE, GL and PL) and non-teaching (HL, HW, ML, NL and NE) types of comment.

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1. Unlike the classroom teacher who addresses a collective mass of learners, the distance teacher has to address every learner individually — and that too at a distance. To communicate with the learners individually, the teacher mainly depends on his/her comments. Using these comments as a tool the distance teacher guides and corrects the learner where he/she may have gone wrong, points out and confirms the acceptable aspects of the assignment-responses, assesses the level of the learner's academic achievement and explains the basis of that assessment so as to ensure better learner performance in future. Written comments thus help lessen the sense of academic isolation that the learners might otherwise suffer from. More importantly the comments show the learners where they stand academically.
2.
 - i) Superficially, this comment appears to have a definite meaning but it does not serve any academic purpose. A close reading of this comment distinctly reveals that the meaning it suggests is empty/hollow, for one cannot derive anything from it.
 - ii) This comment asks the learner to reread the lesson and do the assignment again. It does not however, explain why the learner is asked to do so. That is to say, the comment does not give the learner an idea of where the answer is weak/inadequate, where he/she has gone wrong, etc. Without having been informed what the weaknesses in his/her first attempt were, the learner will in all probability, repeat the mistakes in the second attempt. By rereading and redoing the assignment, the learner is not going to achieve any academic gains. He/she will be left with the misconception that by having carried out the tutor's instruction, he/she has achieved something quite substantial academically. The learner is thus, obviously misled and subsequent academic disaster is inevitable.
3. The first and the last letters of each comment-type are put together to denote the respective comment-type. For example, 'NL' stands for null comments; 'MG' for misleading comments and so on. [The purpose of this question was to make you look at these terms with greater attention — the final effect should be that of a thorough *revision*.]

UNIT 2 TUTORING THROUGH CORRESPONDENCE

Unit Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Distance Teaching: Tasks and Problems
 - 2.2.1 Tasks of the distance teacher
 - 2.2.2 Difficulties involved in distance teaching
- 2.3 Preparing to Distance-Teach — Two-way Communication
 - 2.3.1 Problem of motivation
 - 2.3.2 Problem of isolation
 - 2.3.3 Problem of study-skills
 - 2.3.4 Summative comments
- 2.4 Distance Teaching-1
 - 2.4.1 Distance teaching — a four-step process
 - 2.4.2 Assessor's ideal response
 - 2.4.3 Assessor's comments
 - 2.4.4 Improved didactic communication
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we intend to:

- i) inform you about some **fallacies** which continue to stand in the way of the successful functioning of distance education programmes;
- ii) identify the significant **biases** which stand in the way of successful two-way communication between distance learners and distance teachers; and
- iii) suggest means for overcoming these **fallacies** and **biases**.

After having studied and worked through the unit, we expect you to:

- i) identify the sources/causes of the fallacies mentioned above;
- ii) identify and explain the biases we have talked about; and
- iii) overcome these drawbacks (fallacies and biases) to render the much needed two-way communication pedagogically purposeful.

At the operational level you should comment on assignment-responses with the understanding and care which they deserve, and thus make your communication with the learners successful, i.e. you should be able to **distance teach** successfully.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 1, we gave you an account of the types and levels of communication that take place between a distance teacher and a distance learner. We also suggested the parallels and contrasts which exist between the functions of the conventional teacher and those of the distance teachers. Besides, we

suggested why comments need to be written on assignment-responses, and how to make the comments purposeful. This information, though valuable in itself, is not enough. In order to benefit from it at the operational level we need to know about the difficulties and the impediments we may face in putting into practice such information and also the means for resolving those difficulties/impediments.

To achieve this aim we shall be guided by a few experiments and the conclusions drawn from them. The advantage in doing so is that we will be able to present some supporting evidence for whatever difficulties we may identify and also for whatever solutions we may suggest. Consequent upon which, we hope, you will be convinced that such difficulties really do exist, and that they can be resolved, which, realization, we believe, is immensely significant for successful **distance teaching**.

2.2 DISTANCE TEACHING: TASKS AND PROBLEMS

In unit 1 we did suggest that **distance teaching** consists mainly of the academically useful conversation between the distance learner and the distance teacher ('mediated didactic conversation' in Holmberg's words), and that the basis of this conversation is in the assignment-responses written by the former. What are the tasks involved in building this conversation? What are the problems in performing these tasks? Let us look into these issues below.

2.2.1 Tasks for the distance teacher

Think of this situation: a distance teacher has received an assignment-response on the basis of which he/she is to build his/her conversation with the distance learner who has sent it. What is the distance teacher expected to do?

- i) compensate for the weaknesses of the units/lessons and the assignment;
- ii) break the 'isolation' of the distance learner (see unit 1);
- iii) sustain the distance learner's motivation;
- iv) evaluate and grade the assignment-response;
- v) help the distance learner in improving and advancing his/her learning through purposeful comments; and
- vi) answer the questions raised by the distance learner.

These six tasks put together constitute the process of distance teaching. Let us call them **the major tasks**. Seemingly simple operations, these tasks require reasonable effort. Experience and experiment has shown that to perform these tasks effectively a distance teacher needs to fulfil certain prerequisites, some of which are operational in nature and some psychological. In other words, to perform the task of distance teaching successfully distance teachers have to perform certain basic tasks (which we may call **the minor tasks**), and also approach their work with a certain required state of mind. If they do not perform the minor tasks, they can't

perform the major tasks successfully, and if they do not also approach their work in the required state of mind, they can't **distance teach** effectively.

2.2.2 Difficulties involved in distance teaching

What are these minor tasks which we mentioned above? And what is the required state of mind?

The best that we can expect from an academic (employed by a distance teaching institution) is specialization or expertise in a particular subject. We can't depend on his/her experience as a classroom teacher, for an equation in terms of job requirements between conventional and distance teachers does not exist. Besides, this academic comes from a particular educational culture, and we expect him/her to function in a very different one, a situation which will inevitably result in difficulties.

In what we have said, we are making two assumptions which define the problems/difficulties which a conventional teacher will face when he/she switches over to distance teaching. Let us put forward these assumptions explicitly:

- i) A qualified academic (say a person with an M.A./M.Sc.... in the relevant subject) trained for, or experienced in handling face-to-face teaching and learning situations (i.e. face-to-face classroom teaching/learning) may not necessarily function as a successful and effective distance teacher. He/she needs certain specific skills to do so.
- ii) Besides acquiring the skills specifically needed for distance teaching, the prospective distance teacher must overcome his/her 'unconscious culturally induced bias'!
- iii) If the prospective distance teacher is made aware of those biases, helped to overcome them, and also given the specific skills needed for his/her new job, he/she is sure to prove successful as a distance teacher.

In assumption (i) and (ii) above, we have stated the problems which a prospective distance teacher may face, and under assumption (iii) we have suggested the solution. Once these problems are resolved with the help of the suggested solution, the tasks listed in sub-section 2.2.1 can be performed successfully, i.e., the prospective distance teacher will succeed in **distance teaching**.

To identify these problems, Koul (1981) worked with a group of 58 prospective distance teachers (henceforth called trainees) who were adequately qualified in their subjects of specialisation, and also trained in the techniques of face-to-face teaching. These trainees were made to undergo a thirty hour training programme spread over twenty days. The training programme comprised lectures, reading assignments, take-home assignments, workshop sessions, discussions, preparation of reports and evaluation of course materials and assignments. The programme as a whole was divided into three phases:

- i) Pre-teaching tasks — Problems and solutions (phase 1 presented in this unit).
- ii) Teaching tasks — Problems and solutions (phase 2 discussed partly in this unit as 'commenting' and in unit 3 as 'grading').

iii) Post-teaching tasks — Problems and solutions.

We shall take up these phases one by one in what follows i.e., Units 2, 3 and 4 of this block.

2.3 PREPARING TO DISTANCE-TEACH — TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Usually a conventional teacher assumes that, given his/her subject expertise and training, he/she can **distance teach** with the same facility as in a classroom situation. But is this assumption tenable? Does a distance teacher need to perform any pre-teaching tasks? Is any preparation needed to distance teach? And if the teacher needs this preparation, to what degree would he/she be willing to undergo it? Let us look for answers to these questions.

2.3.1 Problem of motivation

The 58 trainees (mentioned above) were told about the relevance of distance education, and the strengths and weaknesses of the 'written word' as a medium of academic communication. This lecture was followed by a workshop session, which began with the instruction that henceforth all of them should consider themselves distance teachers, and that whatever task was assigned to them, should be performed with this role in mind, though their perception of what a distance teacher should or should not do in a particular situation was left to their judgement.

In the workshop session they were asked:

- i) to study a teaching unit which was prepared for actual distance learners; and
- ii) to prepare a brief outline of its contents, which could be used to distance teach the learners for whom the unit was prepared.

After the reading exercise was over, it was found that only 46% of the trainees showed interest in the exercise by preparing fairly accurate content outlines; 18% showed a half-hearted interest, 20% showed indifference, and 16% showed disinterest as they returned blank pieces of paper.

The first step in distance teaching is to study the teaching unit to get acquainted with its actual contents, its scope and the depth of treatment. It is not suggested that the distance teacher has to learn the contents, for he/she already is a subject expert. However, he/she must be acquainted with what the unit presents as he/she must see what the course writers want to achieve through it.

As already mentioned, only 46% of the trainees showed an inclination to perform this initial task.

Check Your Progress 1

Why did the remaining 54% of the trainees ignore the exercise?

- Note:** a) Attempt an answer to the above question, and list your views in the space given below.
b) Do not proceed till you record your views clearly.

.....

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There could be three possible reasons why the trainees may have shown complete or partial disinterest in this exercise:

- i) Had the trainees been informed in explicit terms that they were to read the unit with a view to correcting assignment-responses based on the unit, they would have studied it thoroughly.
- ii) As the theme of the unit was familiar (known) to all the trainees, it may not have attracted their attention.
- iii) The trainees had little motivation to do the task, and were thus not favourably inclined even to take the very first step in the process of distance teaching, i.e., to study the teaching unit and prepare a brief content outline.

The first of these views/reasons may be correct, but it does not explain why 46% of the trainees did really show interest in the exercise, though they too had no additional explicit or implicit information about the purpose. So the first view does not account for the complete data.

The second view/reason too fails to explain the whole data, i.e., if the topic was familiar and, therefore, held no attraction for some reader, it should have been so for all.

There seems to be a lot of strength in the third view/reason. It is trainee-centred, unlike the first two reasons, and sees that depending upon the degree of their motivation the trainees either did or did not study the unit properly. Obviously, the problems of motivation or of desirable attitudes are not exclusively learner-centred issues. It is not only the distance learners who face problems caused by the lack of motivation, distance teachers too face them, and they need to overcome them before they can do any good for the distance learner.

However, there could be many other causes for the phenomenon discussed above, some of which we will now discuss.

2.3.2 Problem of isolation

On being informed that only 46% of them had shown interest in the first exercise, one could see that some of the trainees felt sorry, while others were amused about it. We were now ready for the second workshop session, which started with a lecture about a check-list that could be used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the unit/lesson (under consideration) as a self-instructional unit. It was explained that the check-list consists of the following points:

- i) Are there any access devices (learning aids such as glossaries, self-check exercises, summaries, etc.) built into the unit? If so, are they effective?
- ii) Have the objectives of the unit been stated? If so are they explicitly and clearly stated?
- iii) Does the content agree with the objectives? If it does, does it maintain a desirable standard?
- iv) Does the structure of the unit conform to the principles of course-design? If it does, does it promise to contribute the maximum possible to the learning process?
- v) What is the nature of the presentational features of the unit? Are they pedagogically useful?

It was suggested that the above check-list could be used for an adequate assessment of any course-unit. So, it was used to evaluate the given unit that they were working on. To perform this task, the group of trainees was divided into fifteen smaller groups, with at least three trainees in each group, which was then asked to perform the following three tasks:

- i) read the same unit more carefully than before;
- ii) discuss (within the group) the content and the various features of the unit; and
- iii) prepare a report (groupwise) on the strengths and weaknesses of the unit on the basis of the check-list given above.

The exercise was done, and the group reports submitted. It was interesting to note that in spite of repeated readings of the unit and group discussions within the framework of the check-list provided for the purpose, the assessments of the unit made by various groups did not agree with one another on some of its most significant portions. It was a clear indication of the fact that distance teachers (trainees in this case) may be 'isolated' from one another, i.e., they think differently; react and respond to a unit differently. Thus, it is not only the distance learners, but the distance teachers also who have to face the problem of 'isolation'. Of course, the nature of 'isolation' in the two cases must differ (see Unit 1 of this block).

Obviously, the various groups interpreted the unit and its structure differently in so far as the points of emphasis in the reports prepared by them differed quite clearly; and some of the groups were not ready to change their stand even after they were allowed time to discuss the issues among themselves once again.

This exercise points to the fact that a distance teacher may take a definite and rigid 'personal' stand about the content, the structure and the purpose of a unit, and his/her stand may or may not be in agreement with what is intended by those who prepare the unit.

This 'isolation', as indicated by the disagreements mentioned above, is a serious issue. In most cases, various distance teachers will be working on the same unit with hundreds of learners. These distance teachers need to interpret the units in nearly the same way, otherwise differing messages will go to different groups of learners.

One way to overcome this difficulty is that the structure of the unit be clear, thematic presentation be unambiguous, and that provision be made for giving an adequate orientation to distance teachers wherever necessary. This brings in a strong argument for 'training' distance teachers before they are commissioned for the task of distance teaching.

2.3.3 Problem of study-skills

From the second workshop described in sub-section 2.3.2 above, we moved on to the third workshop, which, in effect, was an extension of the second one.

Now all the group reports were put together in an open session. The weaknesses of each report were identified and a better understanding of the structure and the content of the unit was developed by moderating the inconsistencies in them, removing internal contradictions, weeding out some baseless remarks, etc. (For example, whereas group 12 had written that each section of the unit had an adequate range of self-evaluation exercises, group 3 wrote that the self-evaluation exercises did not cover all the points presented in the unit.) After a long discussion we succeeded in effecting convergence in the case of a number of divergent views. At every stage of this discussion, the course/unit writer's views and the objectives of the unit were used as focal reference points. Consequently, a collectively agreed upon understanding of the structural and thematic components of the unit was accomplished.

During this long discussion, it was realised that at least one of the reasons for divergent views and reports was the difference in the level of study-skills which the trainees brought into use to prepare those reports. Some of the trainees did not appear to bother about the details, some appeared to interpret words and phrases too literally, some attached as much importance to essential details as they did to non-essential ones. (An interesting example: one remarked that there was no spelling mistake in the unit, though such mistakes did exist there.)

Obviously, no two people can have exactly the same range of study-skills, but if the differences in study-skills are going to affect the interpretation of units, something needs to be done to help the prospective distance teachers—which, again, points to the proposal that they need to be trained. Once again, we need to remind ourselves that study-skills do not pose problems only for learners, they also pose problems for distance teachers. This, however, is not to suggest that conventional teachers do not face these

problems. In fact, they face them as well, but we need not go outside the context at this moment.

Check Your Progress 2

Turn to section 1.0 (Objectives). We proposed to talk about some 'fallacies' and some 'biases' there, some of which we have already discussed. List the 'fallacies' and 'biases' we have talked about. You will experience the benefit of this exercise only if you work on it before you move on to sub-section 2.3.4.

Note: Space for your answer is given below.

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2.3.4 Summative comments

In this sub-section we have attempted to identify three common fallacies which we need to take note of (See sub-section 3.3.6 also). It is commonly believed that distance learners face the problems of motivation, isolation and a of lack study-skills. Having accepted this, it is suggested that distance teachers must help distance learners overcome these problems [(see items (ii), (iii) and (v) under sub-section 2.2.1)]. However we little realise that uninitiated distance teachers themselves face the same problems.

It is therefore quite possible that an uninitiated distance teacher cannot effectively help a distance learner. It is only a highly motivated distance teacher who can motivate his/her learners; it is only a distance teacher who has overcome his/her own isolation who can help break the isolation of a distance learner; and it is only a distance teacher who has mastered a variety of study-skills, who can help distance learners improve their study-skills.

These fallacies pertaining to the three factors — motivation, isolation and study-skills — have their roots in the 'unconscious culturally induced biases' of our society. And the teaching community is a part of the same society. Having grown up in the classroom situation and having acquired the education, it provides, the conventional teacher unconsciously, i.e., without making any conscious effort for the purpose, develops a few biases. In other words, the culture such a teacher grown up in induces a few biases in him/her — among them the belief that the problems mentioned above are exclusively those of the learners, above them all. Society that the teacher is away from accepts this stand but the institution of distance education cannot. One of the ways to break these biases is to expose them — in our experimentation with 58 trainees, we attacked these biases by slow degrees as we exposed their weaknesses one by one. The trainees had to see and be convinced that:

- i) social acceptability and academic tenability of distance education;
- ii) socio-economic significance of distance education; and
- iii) the question of 'equivalence' with regard to face-to-face education and distance education.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: a) Space is given below for your answers.
b) Compare your answer with the last paragraph of sub-section 2.3.4.

[illegible]

2.4 DISTANCE TEACHING-1

In the second phase of the training programme the trainees were made to work on assignment-responses pertaining to the unit they had worked through in phase 1, which we have described in section 2.3 above.

All the 58 trainees were given:

- i) an assignment on the unit which they had studied in phase 1;
- ii) nine responses to this assignment prepared by nine different distance learners who had studied the unit earlier and worked on the assignment.

Having handed over the copies of the assignment and those of the nine responses to all the trainees at the same time, we asked them to **distance teach** those nine learners, i.e., evaluate the responses and write whatever comments they thought appropriate. With this began the actual process of distance teaching.

2.4.1 Distance teaching — A four-step process

Having studied the teaching unit and assessed its weaknesses and strengths, structural as well as thematic, the distance teacher must be able to assess the assignment too, so that he/she may assess the responses in the light of the characteristics both of the corresponding unit and of the learner. The process that follows appears to consist of four steps.

- i) The distance teacher **must understand** (from the point of view of the course writer) what the assignment demands of the learner, and build what may be called the '**assessor's ideal response**' (**AIR**, for short) to the problem posed in the assignment. **AIR** is essentially a hypothetical answer, for the distance teacher is not expected to write it down, though in subjects like mathematics or physics this can also be the real answer too. An assignment-response which matches the **AIR** (of the concerned assessor, i.e., the distance teacher) will be rated high. Thus, **AIR** serves as a measure for the assessment of the various responses the distance teacher receives.
- ii) Having decided on the **AIR**, the distance teacher must be able to discover such weaknesses in the responses as might be traced back to the weaknesses/defects of the **assignment** and/or the **teaching unit**. This ability on the part of the distance teacher is of great pedagogic significance, for if carried away by his/her own **AIR**, irrespective of the weaknesses of the **assignment** and the **teaching unit**, his/her assessment of the response is likely to be biased, and most probably the comments made will be lopsided.
- iii) Thirdly, the distance teacher has to consider the organisational aspects of the responses. Here, he must take into account how the response has begun, what the middle is like, and how effective the ending is. Considerations like the logical development of the response, the language used — its correctness and clarity — the presentation of arguments etc. come under the organisational aspects of the response. Here, again, the distance teacher will depend on his/her **AIR**. However, it is possible for a distance teacher to be carried away by the language and style of a response despite poor or even irrelevant content. It is,

therefore, necessary that fairly precise values are assigned to the various organisational aspects of responses.

- iv) Lastly, the distance teacher must grade the response, and this grade should very clearly be reflected in the comments he/she writes on the response. These comments may have one, more or all of the following functions:
- a) keep the distance learner motivated, i.e., on the course;
 - b) break the walls of 'isolation' which the distance learner is surrounded by; and
 - c) help the learner improve his/her learning through comments that teach, i.e., the 'teaching type' comments (see unit 1).

Whatever may be the occasion of these comments (whether they are written as comments on responses, as explanations for the grades awarded, as replies to letters or representations), the distance teacher has to direct his/her efforts towards one aim, namely to 'effect teaching successfully'.

Can an uninitiated distance teacher perform these tasks satisfactorily?

2.4.2 Assessor's ideal response

To answer the above question, we once again turn to the activities of our experimental group of 58 trainees. (To build appropriate links in the argument, please turn to the introductory note under section 2.4 above.)

The trainees had already gone through the unit thoroughly (see section 2.3) when they were asked to study the assignment, and prepare a note indicating what each of them thought was the ideal response to the assignment. Only 51 AIRs were collected as 7 of the trainees did not take part in this activity. It is interesting even in a sense incredible, that only 4 AIRs depicted an accurate understanding of the assignment, while the rest touched upon items which were not dealt with in the unit. You may recall that all the trainees had agreed to a common interpretation of the unit (see section 2.3). Yet when it came to the preparation of the AIRs they ignored this consensus. Most probably in an attempt to prepare a good answer/response, most trainees depended on their own knowledge of the subject matter while formulating their AIRs. It appeared as if bits of the teaching unit and those of the assignment became 'invisible to them' and the focus of the assignment was lost by many of them.

This phenomenon brings to light yet another aspect of 'unconscious culturally induced bias' (UCIB, for short) — it is quite likely that while assessing the assignment-responses, the uninitiated distance teachers will look at the assignment in terms of their own subject expertise, rather than what is available and/or intended in the unit/lesson concerned. Such a bias must affect both the process of distance teaching (in the sense of making purposeful comments), and the process of assessment (in the sense of grading the responses). Let us stop for a moment, and think of ways to solve this problem.

Check Your Progress 4

Do suggest a way or two, which may help a distance teacher overcome the difficulty in preparing his/her **ideal response** for an assignment.

Note: Please proceed only after you answer the above question in the space provided below.

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One answer to this question is that the course-writer prepares an outline of the **ideal response** and sends it to the distance teacher to guide him/her in assessing the responses.

Another way is that the distance teacher is oriented towards using the unit/lesson concerned alongwith the corresponding assignment to build an **deal response**. Whatever the case the distance teacher should not start assessing responses, before he/she conceives the ideal answer — not necessarily in writing — for otherwise the assessment is bound to be faulty.

2.4.3 Assessor's comments

Please turn to the last sentence in sub-section 2.4.1. It is a question, to which we replied only partially in sub-section 2.4.2. Now, we shall present another part of the answer.

After the trainees had finished writing their AIRs, they were asked to assess and write comments on the **first three** of the nine responses we had given them. (Before you proceed, take a quick look at Unit 1 of this block).

Ample time was given for this exercise, which was attended by only 50 trainees. Of these fifty, eight did not write any comments at all. Data on the nature of the comments is the presented in the table below:

Table 2.1 : Comments by uninitiated distance teachers — a profile

Response Nos.	Details of the Comment-types given					
	Non-teaching Type			Teaching Type		
	No comments	Hollow	Negative	Positive	Constructive	Total
1	13	20	10	6	1	50
2	8	23	65	0	0	96
3	7	23	45	1	0	76
Total	28	66	120	7	1	222
Percentage	12.6	29.8	54.0	3.2	0.4	100.0

You will notice from the above table that out of 222 comments written, 29.8% were hollow comments, 54% negative comments (the highest among all), and only 3.6% were teaching type comments (3.2% positive and 0.4% constructive multiplier types). Of these we picked up 87 non-teaching type comments to analyse the variations in the focus of the comments. Thirty comments of the negative type (432 words) attacked the content of the responses, 23 negative comments (160 words) focused on errors in the language used, and one negative comment (54 words) attacked the organisation of the response. 6 comments (41 words) were quite rude.

It is true that the comments on content, the language used and the organisation of the responses presented are desirable, as they are pedagogically relevant, but unless they are constructive (see unit 1), they turn out to be of the non-teaching type and serve no real purpose at all. Some distance teaching may have taken place at this stage, but it is clear that such teaching was not effected consciously. If any real distance teaching had been effected, the table would have shown a good number of constructive and global type comments, which it does not.

What could be the causes of this phenomenon?

In the first place, we believe that if an 'assessor's ideal response' is defective, as was the case with many of them in this experiment (see sub-section 2.4.2 for details), the comments are bound to be off the point. Secondly, an uninitiated distance teacher, because of his 'unconscious culturally induced bias' handles assignment-responses the way he/she would mark an exercise book or an examination answer-book. In the former case, he/she marks the mistakes to be looked into by the learner and, if possible, discusses them; in the latter case he/she puts dashes and crosses here and there, and then the marks or a grade at the top of the response. In either case there is no room for any kind of comment, not to speak of **teaching type** ones. The writing of comments in such cases is a rare phenomenon. Thirdly, once again because of his/her 'unconscious culturally induced bias' the uninitiated distance teacher feels most concerned with the **content** of a response, and feels satisfied if he/she marks his/her disagreement or disapproval. That he/she has to write teaching type and global comments does not appear to him/her to have any importance.

However, to draw the above conclusions after just one trial may not be reasonable. Accordingly, we asked the trainees to take up another set of three assignment responses (i.e., nos. 4, 5 and 6) for assessment and write comments on them.

2.4.4 Improved didactic communication

Before the trainees started their second exercise, i.e., writing comments on assignment-responses 4, 5 and 6, they were instructed to, as a rule

- i) write comments; and
- ii) try not to write **harmful** comments.

The results of this exercise are given below:

Table 2.2: Comments on the second set of responses — a profile

No. of trainees who took part in the exercise	No. of hollow comments	No. of negative comments	No. of positive comments	No. of constructive comments	Total No. of comments
48	52	128	17	11	208
—	25.0%	61.5%	8.2%	5.3%	100%

A comparison (of Tables 2.1 and 2.2) shows that there was no appreciable difference between the two attempts as far as the profile of the comments was concerned, except that no harmful comments were written this time, and that each one of the trainees wrote comments unlike in the first attempt when eight trainees didn't write any comments at all.

This second exercise in writing comments was followed by a series of lectures and seminars covering topics like tutor-comments (non-teaching and teaching type comments), the pedagogic and psychological purpose of such comments, the significance of two-way purposeful communication and the main role of a distance teacher — writing comments to help the distance learner improve his/her performance.

These activities were followed by the third exercise in making written comments using assignment responses 7, 8 and 9. The results were as follows:

Table 2.3: Comments on the third set of responses — a profile

No. of trainees who took part in the exercise	No. of hollow comments	No. of negative comments	No. of positive comments	No. of constructive comments	No. of global comments	Total No. of comments
45*	58	92	27	23	28	228
—	25.4%	40.4%	11.8%	10.1%	12.3%	100%

(* In this third exercise three trainees did not participate, and so the total number of trainees was reduced from 48 to 45.)

Check Your Progress 5

Compare the results shown in Tables 2 and 3 and write down the improvements you notice in the profile of comments.

Note: a) Please do not proceed until you work this exercise out.
b) Write your answer in the space given below:

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We notice that:

- i) 'global' comments were written for the first time during the third exercise;
- ii) the percentage of 'teaching type' comments went up by 20.7% (from 13.5% to 34.2%); and
- iii) the percentage of 'negative' comments went down by 21.1% (from 61.5% to 40.4%).

However, the percentage of 'hollow' comments recorded a marginal rise, showing that it may not be so easy to do away with them. Besides, even at this stage, no trainee wrote any 'personal level' comments. But, more and more experience, we believe, should help the distance teachers to overcome these weaknesses.

It is evident that uninitiated distance teachers can't enter into purposeful communication with distance learners straightaway. They might do so, successfully, as they get more and more experience, which may take a long period of time. A trained distance teacher, on the other hand, should be able to function purposefully right from the very beginning of his/her career:

In essence, the conventional teacher will have to do away with the 'unconscious culturally induced biases' to make his/her way as a successful distance teacher.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

We identified and discussed a few fallacies pertaining to the notions of motivation, isolation and study-skills. We concluded that problems of motivation, isolation or study-skills don't trouble learners only (as is commonly believed), but also by distance teachers who need to overcome them to work effectively.

Secondly, we tried to emphasise that most of the weaknesses of conventional teachers functioning as distance teachers arise from the biases which conventional educational culture forces on them. We identified some of these biases and suggested ways to overcome them.

Finally, we outlined the process of distance teaching, showing what difficulties may arise at different stages of the process, and how those difficulties may be resolved.

If we turn to the list of items in sub-section 2.2.1 (namely, the tasks of a distance teacher) we notice that we have yet to talk about:

- i) the problems involved in **grading**; and
- ii) **answering the questions** raised by the distance learners.

We shall take up **grading** in unit 3 and **answering the questions** etc. (i.e., Supplemental Communication) in unit 4 of this block.

UNIT 3 ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Unit Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Distance Teaching-2
- 3.3 Perfect Grading
 - 3.3.1 Assessor's perception of the lesson/unit
 - 3.3.2 Assessor's perception of the assignment
 - 3.3.3 Tendencies towards being lenient and/or strict
 - 3.3.4 Assessor's ideal response
 - 3.3.5 Assessor's attention span
 - 3.3.6 Summative comments
- 3.4 Comments in Relation to Grades
- 3.5 Queries about the Grades/Comments
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up

3.0 OBJECTIVES

We shall continue the description of the experiment which we introduced in unit 2, and report on the five exercise in **grading** which the trainees were involved in. The purpose is to acquaint you with:

- i) how a collectivity of uninitiated distance teachers may grade assignment-responses,
- ii) the problems that a distance teacher may have to face while assessing assignment-responses, and
- iii) what possible solutions we may work on to resolve these problems.

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- i) avoid the pitfalls one faces while grading an assignment-response, and
- ii) reduce the harm those pitfalls are likely to cause.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Unit 2 has been devoted to identifying some of the crucial tasks of the distance teacher, the difficulties that may arise while performing such tasks, and the possible ways of overcoming these difficulties. In the main, we focused on:

- i) pre-teaching tasks such as studying the lessons/units thoroughly before one starts working on the responses;
- ii) the need for guarding against some of the common fallacies and biases which can stand in the way of effective distance teaching; and
- iii) the teaching task of writing purposeful comments.

In this unit, we shall elaborate on the theme of teaching tasks with our focus on **grading**. In talking about **grading**, you will notice that we have to refer to the issue of comments as well.

In order to make the exposition clear, we shall introduce a few new concepts here and there in our discussion. We shall explain those concepts along with the main text to avoid any unnecessary difficulties.

3.2 DISTANCE TEACHING-2

Whether you consider learners at the primary level, the secondary level, the university level, or those adults who take in-service courses, bright learners or ordinary learners, all of them appear to show immense interest in what their teachers think of their performance.

Invariably, if a learner receives a corrected assignment-response (of whatever type) his/her first reaction is to look for the grade/mark scored. Having taken a look at the grade, one may then look for the remarks which the teacher has written. It is not unusual for a learner to get upset if the grade scored is below his/her expectations, and these expectations are not always well-placed.

In a classroom situation, the teacher concerned explains, in most cases, what may have gone wrong with an answer because of which it scored a low grade, or else, the learners themselves satisfy their curiosity by comparing their performance with those of their peers. Neither of these possibilities is available in the system of distance education. The distance teacher has to provide such possibilities as a matter of routine. How is this done? There appear to be three answers or solutions to this question:

- i) the distance teacher's grading be 'perfect';
- ii) the comments reflect the grades appropriately; and
- iii) the distance teacher explain the grades awarded.

Any combination of these three, we believe, must satisfy the distance learner. Consequently, he/she remains motivated and keeps improving his/her performance. However, it is not an easy task to achieve any of the three solutions suggested above. We shall discuss them one by one.

3.3 PERFECT GRADING

By **perfect** grading we mean flawless grading which implies that a response is awarded the grade which it actually deserves. Even if there be a way of effecting 'perfect' grading, it is very difficult to convince, or even tell, the distance learner that the score is what he/she deserved. Added to this problem are the problems of mass involvement in distance education systems in which a large number of distance teachers are involved in assessing a large number of assignment-responses. To appreciate the dimensions of these problems we take you back to the group of trainees we introduced to you in Unit 2.

Please turn to Unit 2, sub-section 2.4.3. You will find that after the trainees prepared their individual AIRs, they were asked to assess and write comments on the first three of the nine responses which we had given them. In sub-section 2.4.3 we talked about the comments they wrote, now we shall talk about the grades they awarded. See Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Grades awarded in Exercises 1 and 2 — a profile

Response Nos.	Norm	Number of Respondents	Grading (Exercise 1)							Regrading (Exercise 2)						
			Grades awarded on 5 point scale					Range of Dispersion	Dispersion %	Grades awarded on 5 point scale					Range of Dispersion	Dispersion %
			A	B	C	D	E			A	B	C	D	E		
1	B	45	12	28	1	4	—	+12 -9	15.5	4	34	5	2	—	+4 -9	9.6
2	E	45	1	1	4	—	39	+15 -0	8.3	—	2	3	—	40	+12 -0	6.6
3	D	45	1	7	7	4	26	+24 -26	37.0	—	8	4	9	24	+20 -24	32.6

Before we talk about the table, we need to explain a few terms we have used in it.

Norm : 'Norm' is the grade awarded to a response by the best judgement available for the purpose. For the nine responses which we used in this experiment, the NORMS were decided by a panel of four experts. Three of them presented their views on and awards for each of the nine responses, and the fourth, after a consideration of these views and awards decided on the most appropriate grades for the nine responses under consideration. In other words the NORM for a response implies its 'perfect' grade, the grade it actually deserves, or the grade it scores under the best judgement available

Dispersion : Dispersion is the scattering of grades away from the NORM. For example, let there be a response which deserves a C grade. Its NORM then is C. A particular assessor may award it an A; then, we shall say that in his/her grading there is a dispersion of 2 points above the NORM, i.e., the dispersion is +2. Similarly, if the award made is E instead, then the dispersion is 2 points below the NORM, i.e., -2. In the former case, we say, the awarded grade is +2 points away from the NORM, and in the latter case it is -2 points away from the NORM. Accordingly,

- the RANGE OF DISPERSION = $\sum d$, [where 'n' is the number of grades (or the number of assessors), and 'd' is the distance of 'n' from the NORM], and
- the percentage of DISPERSION = $(\sum d \times 100) \div$ the maximum possible $\sum d$.

Note : If you are not 'mathematically inclined' you need not bother about the last two notions presented above, till you find them interesting enough to work through.

Now, let us turn to Table 3.1 to see what it depicts. Of the 45 trainees who participated in the exercise, 12 awarded A to response no. 1, 28 awarded it B, 1 awarded it C, and 4 awarded it D. Obviously, most trainees, i.e., 28 of them, identified the NORM. Similarly, in the case of response no. 2 most trainees identified the NORM. But in the case of response no. 3, the grades awarded ranged from A to E on a five point scale, and the NORM was identified by a small number of assessors.

Check Your Progress 1

What inferences do you draw from the above data?

- Note:** a) One does not need to be a trained distance teacher to draw inferences from these data.
b) Please do not proceed till you have answered the above question in the space provided below.

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The range of dispersion in the case of response no. 1 is from +12 to -9 points, i.e., 21 points, for response no. 2 it is 15 points and for response no. 3 it is from +24 to -26 points, i.e., 50 points. It is both interesting and disturbing that the same response is awarded an A by one evaluator, and E or D by another. Imagine a hundred distance teachers assessing the responses of 20,000 distance learners (i.e., at the rate of 200 responses per distance teacher). In such a situation there does not seem to be any certainty that all the responses will be awarded the grades they actually deserve. This is a very disturbing problem which one has to face time and again when responses are given for assessment. Assignments consisting of the objective kind of question will in all probability be marked/assessed by the computer so the problem is one of the tutor-marked assignments. We must pause a moment and ask ourselves — why does such a thing happen?

To answer the above question, we bring in the notion of '**discrimination factors**'. We may define '**discrimination factors**' as the factors, which when favourable, help the distance teacher in discriminating between a weak response and a good one, and between a good one and a better one; and when these factors are not favourable, they affect the teachers judgement adversely. Some of these factors appear to belong to the distance teacher (assessor):

- i) perception of the lesson/unit;
- ii) perception of the assignment;
- iii) a tendency towards being lenient or strict;
- iv) ideal response to an assignment; and
- v) attention span.

One could add to this list. For example, we could say that indifference and absolute carelessness on the part of the assessors can cause dispersion. True, but we are considering only those factors which have pedagogic relevance. Indifferent and absolutely careless people shouldn't have any place in the systems of distance education, indeed, in any other system. Besides, we are looking into factors suggested by our data. We shall discuss these factors one by one.

3.3.1 Assessor's perception of the lesson/unit

We have discussed this issue in detail in Unit 2, where we suggested that the first task of the assessor is to study the unit carefully and see what the course-writers want to convey through it, and that while assessing an assignment-response he/she should not be carried away by his/her own knowledge of the subject-matter but should instead see what the learner is expected to achieve, and judge the learner's performance accordingly. In our experiment we had taken care of this factor by making the trainees go through the unit individually, and then in groups making sure that they knew for certain what the unit was intended to achieve. So, in this situation we rule out any dispersion because of this factor.

3.3.2 Assessor's perception of the assignment

You may recall that the exercise on grading was taken up when the trainees had prepared their individual AIRs (see sub-section 2.4.3). At this stage we did not talk about the assignment — its strengths and weaknesses. A faulty perception of the assignment may cause errors in assessment. To overcome this difficulty we have suggested (see sub-section 2.4.2) two ways — (i) guidance from the course writers, and (ii) appropriate orientation for the assessors to help them look through the assignment clearly.

In this particular case we used the second alternative by looking for the weaknesses of the assignment — its language, components or the difficulties it may cause for the learners. Having analysed the assignment and identified its weaknesses/defects (we need not talk about them here), we suggested that assessors could compensate for those defects by treating the responses somewhat leniently, i.e., not punish a learner for errors or faults which may be there in the responses because of defects in the assignment. This was agreed to by all the trainees.

Following this agreement, we started the second exercise in grading — the trainees were asked to **regrade** responses 1, 2 and 3 and grade responses 4, 5 and 6.

The results of **regrading** responses 1, 2 and 3 are indicated in the right hand part of table above (see Table 3.1), and those of **grading** responses 4, 5 and 6 in the left hand part of the table on page 37 (see Table 3.2).

Notice that in the **regrading exercise** (Exercise 2) the dispersion in all the three cases (response nos. 1, 2 and 3) was reduced as shown below (also see Table 3.1).

- i) Response No. 1: Range of dispersion reduced from 21 points to 13 points.
- Response No. 2: Range of dispersion reduced from 15 points to 12 points.
- Response No. 3: Range of dispersion reduced from 50 points to 44 points.

Table 3.2: Grades awarded in Exercises 2 and 3

Response Nos.	Norm	Number of Respondents	Grading (Exercise 2)							Regrading (Exercise 3)						
			Grades awarded on 5 point scale					Range of Dis- per- sion	Dis- per- sion %	Grades awarded on 5 point scale					Range of Dis- per- sion	Dis- per- sion %
			A	B	C	D	E			A	B	C	D	E		
4	C	48	1	16	18	8	5	+ 18 - 18	37.4	—	16	20	10	2	+ 16 - 14	31.2
5	C	48	3	19	12	10	4	+ 25 - 18	44.7	1	17	16	12	2	+ 19 - 16	36.4
6	C	48	12	21	14	—	1	+ 45 - 2	48.9	7	29	11	—	1	+ 43 - 2	46.8

- ii) The proximity movement of grades is towards the NORM in all the three cases, but it is weak in the case of response no. 3.

At this stage, we must explain what we mean by 'proximity movement'.

Proximity movement is a concept that helps in assessing whether or not a particular group of trainees has collectively improved their techniques of assessment of responses. It is independent of the range of dispersion, and is measured (in a repeated exercise) in terms of the number of grades that move toward or away from the NORM. Movement toward the NORM implies an improvement in the collective assessment of the response(s) under consideration.

With the narrowing down of the range of dispersion and proximity movement toward the NORM in all the cases we infer that the quality of assessment improved in the regrading exercise. Thus, we may conclude that a better understanding of the weaknesses of the assignment will result in better assessment in terms of grading a response.

3.3.3 Tendencies towards being lenient and/or strict

Again, take a look at Table 3.1. Notice that there can be assessors who may award an A, B or C for an assignment-response which deserves an E or D; and similarly, there are assessors who may award lower grades, i.e., E or D for a response that deserves higher grades such as A or B.

Table 3.2 also confirms the observations made above, as in the case of responses 4 and 5, assessors awarded grades ranging from A to E for what deserved a C grade.

A superficial inference may be that some assessors can be very lenient and some very strict. But we need to disclose some vital information at this stage.

On the basis of the assessment of responses 1, 2 and 3, we had identified 10 trainees who could be labelled 'lenient' or 'strict' as they had awarded grades quite far away from the NORMS. If being 'lenient' or 'strict' were an absolute attribute of an assessor, he/she should have displayed that attribute in the second exercise as well. But, interestingly, those who showed themselves lenient or strict in assessing responses 1, 2 and 3, did not appear to be so in assessing responses 4, 5 and 6 except in one case.

Obviously, then the notion of being inherently lenient and strict need not worry us as assessors. The broad deviation in grading by these trainees seems to have its base in other factors.

3.3.4 Assessor's ideal response

Having made sure that the trainees studied the unit (see section 2.3) thoroughly, and also the assignment (see sub-section 3.3.2), we now turned to their individual **ideal responses** which we had collected from them earlier (see sub-section 2.4.3). Differences among individual AIRs could be the cause for a dispersion in grades, as every assessor will mentally use his/her AIR as the yardstick for assessing a response. We tried to do away with this 'discrimination factor' in the following way.

We took up all the AIRs for discussion in an open session which was attended by all the trainees. Once again we discussed the assignment, its components, its relative significance and what weight it may have, how the assignment was related to the lesson/unit concerned, and what might be expected from the learners keeping in view the objectives of the lesson/unit, the weaknesses of the assignment and the lesson/unit, and the types of learners taking the course.

In the light of the discussion each trainee made the required changes in his/her AIR. In other words a commonly agreed upon, and, therefore, more valid, AIR was arrived at.

Now the trainees were requested to **regrade** responses 4, 5 and 6, and **grade** responses 7, 8 and 9. The results of this third exercise of regrading responses 4, 5 and 6 are presented partly in the right hand part of Table 3.2 and partly in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Grades awarded in Exercise 3

Response Nos.	Norm	Number of Respondents	Grading (Exercise 3)						
			Grades awarded on 5 point scale					Range of Dispersion	Dispersion %
			A	B	C	D	E		
7	B	45	9	26	7	3	—	+9	16.3 – 13
8	D	45	—	4	7	21	13	+15 – 13	20.8
9	B	45	2	16	11	12	4	+2 – 47	36.3

Let us take a look at Tables 3.2 and 3.3 once again, and study the differences in the pattern of the grades awarded (responses 4, 5 and 6) during the second and the third grading exercises (see sub-section 3.3.2), and those awarded during the third exercise (in the case of responses 7, 8 and 9 in this very sub-section). What do we notice? And what could be the possible references?

- Once again, the range of dispersion decreased when the responses were regraded. The inference is that a better understanding of what **the responses should be** does lead to an improvement in the quality of

grading. Accordingly, not only did the dispersion decrease, but the 'proximity movement' was also towards the NORM, except in the case of response no. 6.

- The range of dispersion is broadest in the case of response no. 6. It was so in the case of response no. 3 as well. We shall comment on this phenomenon in the following sub-section.

3.3.5 Assessor's attention span

The three exercises in grading, as indicated above, show yet another interesting result. In all the three cases (see Tables 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3), the range of dispersion is the broadest in the case of the third response, i.e., responses 3, 6 and 9. It might be so because of the assessor's 'attention span', which is one of the possible discrimination factors (see section 3.3). It is worth noting that this factor may be measured in terms of the number of responses an assessor can assess accurately in a single stretch of assessment activity. It does not appear to have any correlation to the period of time spent on the activity.

One possible conclusion is that in this particular group of trainees (assessors in this case), mostly had an 'attention span' of two responses, since they could work with good concentration/attention for the span of just two responses. By the time they took the third response for assessment, their attention became weaker, which resulted in broader ranges of dispersion in all the three exercises.

3.3.6 Summative comments

We notice that grading an assignment-response, which is one of the major tasks of a distance teacher, is quite a complex task, and to achieve 'perfect grading' is almost impossible (See sub-section 2.3.4 also). Discrimination factors will always remain major hurdles for the distance teacher to overcome. Obviously, the most successful distance teacher is the one who consciously controls these factors.

Check Your Progress 2

Suggest ways to control the five discrimination factors which have been discussed in this section.

Note: Please do not proceed before you have written your suggestions in the space provided below.

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It is obvious that the study units have to be studied thoroughly by the distance teacher and s/he must see what their weaknesses and strengths as self-instructional materials are. Secondly, s/he must study the assignment critically to see whether or not it matches the objectives of the study unit, (whether it is too demanding etc.) and compensates for its defects by attitudinal adjustments, i.e., not penalise learners for errors caused by the weaknesses of the assignment itself. Thirdly, the distance teacher needs to decide what s/he may expect from the learners as responses. Such a step will ensure uniformity in his/her assessment of varied responses, and keep him/her closer to the NORM most of the time. Lastly, s/he must find ways to increase his/her 'attention span' — this is possible through constant practice and a deliberate effort at achieving this aim.

However, this study of group grading throws up a serious question which should be of great concern to us.

3.4 COMMENTS IN RELATION TO GRADES

We have discussed **comments** in detail in unit 2, and **grades** in section 3.3. Earlier we suggested that **commenting** and **grading** put together become a dependable means of two-way communication between the distance teacher and the distance learner. Since the objective of both these activities is the same, i.e., effecting distance teaching, the two need to have a strong correlation between them. To appreciate this point we need to go to our data once again, which we present below in a different form.

Notice the following facts from Table 3.4.

- A high percentage of lower grades (54.1%) in relation to a low percentage of teaching type comments (3.6%) indicates that teaching has not taken place, as all those who have scored low grades need a sufficiently large number of teaching type comments.
- A low percentage (3.2%) of positive comments does not go well with a relatively higher percentage (45.9%) of higher grades, as all those who score higher grades should be given positive comments.

The inference is that there is no correlation between the comments written and the grades awarded. Of course, here we are talking about commenting and grading practised in a group exercise, but the same also applies to

Table 3.4: Comment types and grade-types correlated

Comment-Types Give (Table 1)						Grades Awarded					
Non-teaching type			Teaching type		Total	Higher grades			Lower grades		Total
N/I	Hollow	Negative	Positive	Constructive		A	B	C	D	E	
33	66	120	7	1	222	14	36	12	8	65	135
12.6%	29.8%	54.0%	3.2%	0.4%	100%	10.4%	26.6%	8.9%	5.9%	48.2%	100%
96.4%			3.6%		100%	45.9%			54.1%		100%

Now take a look at Table 8 given below:

Table 3.5: Comment types and grade-types correlated

Comment-Types Given						Grades Awarded					
Non-teaching type			Teaching type		Total	Higher grades			Lower grades		Total
Nil	Hollow	Negative	Positive	Constructive		A	B	C	D	E	
0	52	128	17	11	208	16	56	44	18	10	144
0%	25.0%	61.5%	8.2%	5.3%	100%	11.1%	38.9%	30.5%	12.5%	7.0%	100%
86.5%			13.5%		100%	80.5%			19.5%		100%

Try to see whether the grades awarded and the comments written display any correlation between them. Our answer to the question is that they do display some improvement in the correlation of the kind we have been talking about. But, we would like you to use the space given below to jot down the improvements, in comparison with the data in table 3.4, which are indicated in Table 3.5 above.

Having talked about the necessity of correlation between the grades awarded and the comments written, we would like to talk about yet another difficulty which the distance teacher may have to face in effecting this correlation.

Very often, in the initial stages of their orientation, distance teachers show a complete disregard for 'appropriateness'. For example, a grade A is accompanied by exactly the same comment which accompanies a grade C. The comments themselves may be relevant and useful in their places, but

when one looks at them in relation to each other one would expect a grade A and a grade C to be accompanied by different types of comments. Evidently, distance teaching is much more than writing teaching type comments. The distance teacher must be careful about the relationship between the comments s/he writes and the grades s/he awards — a really difficult task, which nevertheless, can be learnt and mastered.

3.5 QUERIES ABOUT THE GRADES/COMMENTS

If not many, there certainly are some cases when on receiving the evaluated response the distance learner would like to know the 'why' and 'how' of the grades s/he was awarded and/or the comments that were written on the response. It is the duty of the distance teacher to answer such questions with great understanding and sympathy. Personal comments (see Unit 1) can be written on the assignment-responses, but such comments can be written more effectively in response to the queries about grades etc.

To look for the general nature of responses to such queries, we had distributed some dummy-letters among those trainees who were found to have failed to assess the responses properly. The letters were passed on to them after the assessment exercises were over. Most letters asked for an explanation or a discussion on the grades awarded. In Unit 4, we have presented a detailed discussion on this issue along with the sample of these letters and also those of the responses which were written by the respective assessors (distance teachers). As answering such letters is a task that is naturally taken up after the teaching-task, i.e., after grading and commenting are over, we may call these activities post-teaching tasks.

However, here we need to highlight the point that this exercise brought to our notice what may be called the 'clash of egos'. Most of the trainees (assessors in this case) said that their awards need no revision. Many of them defended their stand (i.e., the comments they had written and/or the grades they had awarded) by whatever arguments they could think of, which included attacking the distance learner concerned. It appears that once a grade is awarded or a comment written by an assessor, s/he finds it difficult to change his/her stand even if s/he is convinced of the weakness of his/her stand. Thus, professional honesty gets sacrificed in a clash of egos. This clash of egos (the ego of the distance teacher on the one hand and that of the distance learner on the other) stands as a barrier between the teacher and the learner, as the two fail to reach each other and the process of distance teaching/learning as a whole, ends in failure.

In this connection, we must suggest that it is desirable on the part of the distance teacher to give up being egoistic, and, thus, weaken that barrier right from the very beginning. But, then, s/he needs to learn to do so. Personal comments promote academically purposeful communication between the teacher and the learner; they also help in reducing the possibilities of clashes caused by egoism.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

To view clearly what we achieved in this unit we need to turn back to sub-section 2.2.2 (Unit 2). We said that the experiment/workshop which these units (Units 2 & 3) are based on, was divided into three phases.

- Pre-teaching tasks (Phase I) — problems therein and solutions thereof were taken up and covered in unit 2 itself.
- Teaching tasks (Phase 2) — it was suggested that these tasks have two components — commenting on responses, and grading the responses. Of these two, **commenting** was taken up and covered in Unit 2. The second component, i.e., **grading** has been the theme of this unit, i.e., Unit 3.
- Post-teaching tasks (Phase 3) will be taken up in unit 4 which is to follow.

Grading being the theme of this unit, we outline here what it is all about.

- Grading, besides being an indication of what the teacher thinks of an assignment-response, is a pedagogic tool to help the learner to improve his/her learning effort and techniques.
- In order to make this tool really effective pedagogically, it needs to have three qualities:
 - i) grading should be 'perfect'.
 - ii) grading should agree with the corresponding comments; and
 - iii) the communication that follows (after grading etc.) should be helpful to the learner.
- There are at least four difficulties (called discrimination factors) which lie in the way of making grading 'perfect'. These are:
 - i) imperfect knowledge (on the part of the assessor) of what the unit presents and aims at;
 - ii) imperfect understanding (on the part of the assessor) of the assignment and of the learner's abilities;
 - iii) assessor's own view of a good/ideal response/answer to the assignment; and
 - iv) assessor's short or inconsistent attention span.

Ways and means of overcoming these difficulties have been suggested and discussed in the relevant sub-sections. We must remind you here that though we discussed the assessor's tendencies towards being lenient or strict, we decided not to give any importance to this factor.

Towards the close of the unit, we discussed two other significant issues:

- For bringing about the required agreement between the grades awarded and the comments written, we have suggested that the distance teacher has to go about it consciously with deliberate effort and care. S/he may do it naturally after a lot of experience but to begin with, one has to work consciously to master this technique.

Leaving the theme of post-teaching communication for unit 4, we have only suggested that such communication may have the tendency of turning into a clash of egos between the distance learner and the distance teacher, and that it is the duty of the latter not only to eliminats that clash but also to make such communication interesting and purposeful. For a fuller discussion/exposition of this theme please turn to unit 4 now.

UNIT 4 SUPPLEMENTAL INTERACTION

Unit Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Discussion of the Biases of the conventional teacher: A Justification
- 4.3 Significance of Supplemental Interaction
- 4.4 More About Supplemental Interaction
 - 4.4.1 Tasks of a distance teacher
 - 4.4.2 Submission density of assignments
 - 4.4.3 Tutorials
- 4.5 Let Us Sum up

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we aim at justifying our discussion on the biases of a conventional teacher and at highlighting the significance of supplemental communication. We have also touched upon issues such as the 'prerequisites' which a distance teacher may expect from his/her institution in order to better his/her performance and make his/her teaching more purposeful. Then, we have discussed the notions of submission density and tutorials.

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- analyse the inadequacies of an untrained distance teacher;
- list the reasons for supplemental communication in distance education;
- identify the 'pre-requisites' which a distance teacher needs to teach effectively; and
- identify the ways in which supplemental communication contributes to effective two-way communication in distance education.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 1 of this block we focused on tutor-comments — the need for them, their functions, the different types of tutor comments and how to present them. It was suggested that such comments may satisfy the academic and/or personal needs of the distance learner, and that they constitute the most significant means of building communication between the distance learner and the distance teacher. It was also indicated that for the 'uninitiated', it might not be an easy task to write purposeful (teaching type) comments. Of course, some teachers/tutors may write such comments intuitively, but many need to be oriented towards, and informed about, the basics of such comments in order to make them successful tools right from the earliest stages of their involvement in distance teaching.

Units 2 and 3 dealt with additional issues pertaining to distance tuition. In the main, we focused on the biases which a conventional teacher brings to the job, when called upon to function as a distance teacher. We have discussed these biases from various points of view quite elaborately, as

today in most cases it is conventional teachers who are appointed as distance teachers, and they need to know what biases may hinder their work as well as how and why. Such knowledge/information is likely to help them overcome these biases. Besides, we discussed the question of 'uniformity' in evaluation, when more than one evaluator is engaged in the task of evaluating the learners' work. (It should be noted that in most cases, evaluators in large numbers are employed to evaluate 'assignment-responses' received from hundreds of distance learners). We tried to show that it may not be possible to achieve absolute uniformity or 'objectivity' of assessment in such cases; however, training and practice should help in reducing the degree of divergence which might otherwise be very large.

An additional suggestion made was that a study of such divergences should help the institution in identifying and replacing assessors who are abnormally lenient or strict. Obviously, the issues discussed in units 1-3 are significant as far as effective distance teaching is concerned. Equally significant are certain other issues which we need to discuss to complete our exposition of the theme of distance tuition with special reference to developing countries. These issues are:

- i) Why did we choose to discuss and look into the biases of a conventional teacher at all or what was the motivation behind bringing in this theme for a discussion? (Note that this issue is an off-shoot of unit 2 of this block).
- ii) What are supplemental comments — their relevance and significance?
- iii) What are the other, significant though minor, issues that have direct relevance to efficient pedagogy/andragogy in distance education?

We shall take up these issues in the above order.

4.2 DISCUSSION ON THE BIASES OF A CONVENTIONAL TEACHER : A JUSTIFICATION

In the academic world distance education is an entirely new phenomenon (see unit 1, block 1, course ES-311), even more so in the developing world. It is not unusual, therefore, for reasonably knowledgeable people to raise questions like "After all, what does one mean by distance education"?

It is no wonder, then, that common school and college teachers too raise such questions. And when called upon to function as distance teachers, they go by the belief that they can function as distance teachers as effectively as they do in their classrooms, or that their new situations do not make any specific or different types of demands on their skills and attitudes. We cannot blame these teachers for such notions, as such misconceptions are propagated, wittingly or unwittingly, by the very bodies/institutions which are expected to remove them. We need not, in fact should not, blame teachers in this case. (The point that is being made here is very crucial, as it the-ents a significant aspect of our current educational environment). One such institution, for example, in the Indian case is the University Grants Commission.

we shall elaborate on this point.

Most distance education programmes conducted in India are based on the **untenable assumption** that a teacher brought up on and engaged in face-to-face teaching (let us call him the conventional teacher), is also an effective distance teacher.

The underlying claims in the above statement are:

- i) that the assumption has actually been made; and
- ii) that the assumption is untenable.

Now we shall investigate the validity of the above claims and if they are found to be valid, suggest ways to prevent the educational waste that is caused by the above assumption.

Are these claims valid?

To establish the first claim we must engage in a detailed discussion. It is sufficiently proved by the recruitment policy (with regard to the correspondence departments or directorates) which has been in force during the last two decades. It is stated that “the qualifications, designation, mode of appointment and the pay scales of teachers in correspondence course institutes should be the same as for teachers in the university teaching departments... All the future appointments for the correspondence institutions should be made in the corresponding teaching departments of the university and the incumbents seconded to the institute for a specific period, which may be renewed, if necessary”. [UGC Circular No. F, 19-1/74(ER), Jan, 1981. New Delhi].

Vagueness of UGC guidelines

Now, we shall look at the second claim, which also needs to be discussed in detail. To begin this discussion, we must make a brief mention of some of the relevant guidelines for correspondence courses circulated by the University Grants Commission, Government of India.

The two guidelines which are of immediate relevance to us are:

- i) The distance teacher may be called upon to perform the following duties:
 - a) edit, write, revise and translate lessons;
 - b) evaluate response sheets carefully and thoroughly, correct them, write detailed comments, explain faults and lapses in unambiguous terms. (To ensure that these duties are performed properly, the Commission suggests that 10% of the response sheets should be sample-checked, and for this purpose, provision has been made for utilising the services of outside experts); and
 - c) teach at contact-programmes. (It is said that teaching at a contact-programme is different from teaching in a classroom and that it can be done better by the distance teacher because, s/he is familiar with the material provided in the teaching units. Besides, it provides him/her the much needed feedback — s/he understands the distance learner, his/her requirements, and the shortcomings of the course materials).

- ii) In order to make distance education effective, care should be taken to:
- keep the learner motivated by reducing the time lag between reception and the returning of the response sheets;
 - develop useful rapport with the distance learner to mitigate his/her 'feeling of isolation' (Comments on response sheets play a significant role in achieving this objective); and
 - educate the distance learner about the significance of written assignments. (Good responses may be ensured if the awards scored by the distance learners in response sheets are counted in lieu of internal assessment.)

Failure to differentiate the distance teacher from the conventional teacher

Even a very superficial study of item i(a) shows that a distance teacher may be called upon to perform certain duties which the conventional teacher is not necessarily qualified or trained to perform, though there may be college and university teachers who engage in writing, editing or translating. Nevertheless, writing a teaching unit for the distance learner is a task entirely different from writing a textbook, a work-book or the like. Items ii(a), ii(b), and ii(c) imply that the problems of the distance learners, namely, their lack of motivation, their sense of isolation, and their possible indifference toward the assignments, have been identified and their adverse effects calculated. Accordingly, certain methodological steps have been suggested to overcome the difficulties caused by these problems. However, the corresponding problems of the distance teachers have not been identified, as there is no mention of them in the document under consideration. It is so obviously because the job of the distance teacher has not been conceived as an entity different from that of the conventional teacher.

It appears quite reasonable, however, to assert that the distance teacher is faced with the problems of lack of motivation, pangs of isolation, and carelessness toward assignments and/or 'assignment-responses', as much as the distance learner is.

Does the former need to be prepared to overcome these difficulties?

Why sample checking?

In item i(b) the tasks of the distance teacher in relation to 'assignment-responses' have been spelled out explicitly. However, the provision for 'sample-checking' for purposes of ensuring 'proper evaluation' makes it evident that unlike the conventional teacher, the distance teacher needs to be supervised. The conventional teacher may legitimately be expected to know and perform his/her tasks satisfactorily, for if not specifically trained for his/her tasks, s/he has, at least, observed his/her own teachers performing the said tasks over the years and may follow any of the models s/he knows. The distance teacher on the other hand, has no models to depend on. And, therefore, it is not without reason that s/he is made to face 'sample-checking'.

Contact-programme is different from classroom teaching

Under item i(c), it has been said that teaching at contact-programmes is a task entirely different from the conventional types of classroom teaching and that the choice of the distance teacher, (as against that of the conventional teacher) for this particular purpose finds support in the argument that the distance teacher is familiar with the 'content' of the course. The 'content' of the course, one may counter the argument, is also known to the conventional teacher. Perhaps a better argument in favour of the above choice might be that the distance teacher understands the distance learner better, for s/he is familiar with the difficulties of the latter. But the contact-programme, on the contrary is seen as the occasion when the distance teacher gets an opportunity to understand the distance learner better [see item i(c) above]. If this is so, why cannot the conventional teacher do so as well?

Is the 'outside-expert' different from the conventional teacher? Under item i(b) it is suggested that 'external experts' should be used for 'sample-checking'. This apparently supports the equation between the distance teacher and the conventional teacher. But when items i(b) and i(c) are read together the internal contradictions in the document manifest themselves explicitly. Does this 'outside expert' know the 'content', the distance learner, and the drawbacks of the teaching units which a particular distance teacher is working with? Who is s/he, if not a conventional teacher? If s/he is not a conventional teacher, what makes him/her an 'OUTSIDE-EXPERT'?

The following two points emerge from the above discussion:

- i) In terms of actual job requirements, an equation between the conventional teacher and the distance teacher just does not exist; and
- ii) The difficulties which the distance teacher has to face while on his/her job have not even been recognised, much less identified or dealt with.

Need to change the policies of the Directorates of Correspondence Courses

It should be noted that the 'guidelines' referred to in the above discussion are very old. The argument that the recent 'guidelines' issued by the UGC in this connection may be different and based on better information and knowledge is not only weak but also irrelevant, as most of the distance education directorates all over the country have hardly changed their policies and practices. It takes time to bring about socio-educational changes; and if the prestigious institutions themselves fail to rise to the occasion, it is understandable that common citizens (in this case teachers) should continue to be biased, and function according to the untenable assumptions they may have made about themselves and distance education.

To modify these assumptions, we need to be as emphatic as we can—this amply justifies the elaborate discussion above and the one we carried on in units 2 and 3 of this block. Having thus justified our concern for the biases of the conventional teacher, we established the fact that there are functional differences between a conventional teacher and a distance teacher. We shall now look into one of the many distinctive functions of the latter.

Check Your Progress 1

Identify at least three reasons to show that a good conventional teacher need not also necessarily be a good 'distance teacher'

Note: a) Space is given below for you to write your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

This image shows a full page of a handwriting practice worksheet. It consists of multiple sets of three horizontal dashed lines spaced evenly down the page, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The background is plain white, and there are no other markings or text present.

4.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF SUPPLEMENTAL INTERACTION

In unit 1, we did talk about three levels of communication, one of which we said, may be called 'supplemental communication'. Such communication follows primary communication (i.e. academic and/or personal) which appears in the form of tutor comments.

After a distance learner gets his/her evaluated assignment back from the institution, s/he feel a need for further explanations — she/he may not agree with the tutor's comments, or assessment, or some other significant point may emerge from those comments. In either case, the learner would continue communicating with and expect replies from the tutors. Such communication may be called 'Supplemental Communication', and it is welcome.

Though there is no way of saying what the theme of such communication might be, it is possible to talk about a few generalities. Diverse disciplines will give rise to diverse questions; differing learner backgrounds and abilities, and differing tutor comments will also give rise to different types of supplemental communication. Obviously, one cannot talk about all of them,

but we can certainly make a few generalisations which must prove helpful to a prospective distance teacher. We shall, in the main, focus on the generalisation pertaining to tutor-attitudes which is of immediate relevance to us.

We have touched upon 'tutor-attitudes' by presenting a few illustrations. Reproduced below are a few letters written by distance learners after they had received their tutor-marked assignments and the corresponding replies sent by the tutors. We have divided them into the following two categories:

- I) The letters (written by distance learners) with their corresponding replies (written by the distance teachers); and
- II) Different replies written by different tutors to one and the same distance learner or similar letters (written by more than one distance learner).

Before we look into these letters we need to make the following observations:

- i) The letters we are reproducing below are actual letters, written by actual distance learners working on an actual course provided by the distance mode of education. And the replies too have been written by actual teachers engaged in distance education. However, all the teachers are of the conventional type (see the use of the term in the previous section), i.e., they were not initiated or oriented into distance teaching, though they were experienced in face-to-face teaching.
- ii) We have not used the actual names of the learners and the teachers. Instead we have used numbers to indicate their identities. However, the language used by all of them has been left unaltered.
- iii) Wherever needed the teachers were provided with the assignment-responses once again to prepare their replies.

Now, here are the letters and their replies. Each letter is immediately followed by its corresponding reply. The letters from the learners are in the normal Roman type face, while the replies sent by the tutors are in *italics*.

Category (I), i.e., letters 1, 2, and 3 (L1, L2 and L3) with corresponding replies 1, 2, and 3 (R1, R2 and R3).

L1

Dear Sir/Madam,

I happened to see the grades of learner No. 3. He scores 'B'. On comparing our grades I feel I deserve 'A', for he has not listed as many points as I have. Besides, he has put in a lot of irrelevant material in his answer. Either he must get a lower grade, say 'C' or 'D' or I must get 'A'.

Could you kindly explain why I should not get 'A'.

Yours sincerely,

Learner No. 1

R1

Dear Learner,

I am sorry to say that I could not assess the assignments correctly. What led to the wrong evaluation is still not clear to me. I may tell you that I had

gone through every line of your assignment but still the most shocking thing happened unwittingly. It is good that you have come forward with your letter demanding reassessment of the scripts, thereby a demand for justice. I didn't think at the time that your answer deserves 'A'. However, after reading the scripts, I have assigned 'D' to learner No. 2 and 'C' to learner No. 3. This must I suppose come to you as cold comfort.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

L2

Dear Sir,

It was interesting to see that all three of us, namely learners No. 1, 2 and 3 have scored a 'B'. I wonder whether you came to know that we are friends, but I should thank you that you have helped to sustain our friendship. But, to tell you the truth, I do not like No. 2's getting that I have get from you. His answer is trash when I compare it with mine. I think only the same grade I, of all three of us, have covered most of the points that you listed in the specimen answer you sent to Mr. X. Don't I deserve better treatment? Perhaps, you should have given lower grades to Nos. 2 and 3. Kindly review our grades, and try to be fair.

Yours sincerely,

St. No. 1

R2

Dear Mr. St. No. 1,

Your comments on my grading. Thanks very much. Though you have stated the principles clearly your activity on the side of application is not very encouraging

As far as your friend learner No. 2 is concerned, he has paid equal attention to both, statement of principles and application alike. I am not very happy about his language but for which he would deserve grade 'A'.

Then your friend learner No. 3 is also in line with Mr. No. 2. Among the three it is you who seems to be very short. As you know being short is not precise.

I hope you would take a little pain in comparing your answers with learner No. 2 and 3 and would present better in your next set of assignments. Wishing you 'A' in future.

I remain,

Yours truly,

Sd/-

L3

Dear Sir,

I had prepared my answer in a great hurry, and I am sure I did not include all the points I should have. However, with your kindness I have scored an A. I am happy and thank you for your kindness. But, I think I should make the following point:

Learner No. 2 scores a 'B' grade. That throws me off my ground. His answer is entirely irrelevant and his language horrible. If I were to grade his answer, I would not award anything beyond an 'E'. Keeping this in view, the best I deserve is a 'B' and not an 'A'.

How do you react to my views?

Yours sincerely,

St. No. 1

R3

Dear Learner No. 1,

I highly appreciate this honest gesture of yours. I have gone through the answers carefully and found your reaction to my grading is correct. So I am regrading your A as B and B as an E for the second answer. Thank you for the enlightening note.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

Category (II) i.e. Letters 1, 2 and 3 (L1, L2, L3) and the respective replies [R1 (i), R1 (ii); R2 (i), R2 (ii); and R3 (i), R3 (ii)].

L1

Dear Sir,

I know my English is poor, but I tried to say all that I wanted to say, and my answer is longest. Yet I score E. This is the 5th E I have scored so far. My friend (St. No. 1) has written a short answer only. He has written many points, but they are not all the points. You must give me a higher grade. I very humbly say that, if not me, then my friend must get a lower grade. Kindly, your majesty, enlighten me about my grades.

Yours sincerely,

St. No. 2

RI (i)

Dear Learner,

I received your letter and came to know that you want to learn about the grade which I have awarded you. Before giving my reasons for awarding grade 'E', let me take your letter into consideration.

You have accepted that your English is poor and the grade awarded to you is your 5th 'E'.

These two things justify my evaluation of your answer script. We aim at language proficiency, correct reading, writing, speaking and listening. But your answer script tells me that you have paid no attention to language which has destroyed the meaning of your script, i.e., what you wanted to say. "Before me, four examiners have awarded you grade E" which again tells of lack of interest to know and learn, what the unit demands of you.

Now your friend has written a short answer and got 'A' while you wrote a long answer and got 'E'. We can talk about many things in a few sentences, if we will be brief, precise and to the point. This is possible only through the best use of language without making a mess of words and phrases uselessly. Your long answer hardly touches few points of real worth and the rest of it is only a 'play with words'. This is why I have awarded you 'E' which means that you need a lot of improvement while your friend has come up to the expectations of the unit.

Language proficiency is LSRW (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Your script demands only two of these i.e., reading and writing. Had you read with comprehension and answered with understanding, you would not have got 'E'. I hope that you will take note of these things and try to better your grades.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

RI (ii)

Dear Mr.

I wish that your English were half as good as in this letter of yours. You say that your answer is the longest and you will please realise that the length has only increased the disgust. you admit that your English is poor, but then choose to be sarcastic in addressing me as 'your majesty' and also to cast aspersions by suggesting that I have been unjust in awarding 'A' grade to your friend (St. No. 1). I assure you that this is an utterly unfounded notion. there all, it is language, and his language, is far more idiomatic and has a for clearer expression.

Even after a second thought, I notice I do not find it possible for me to award you a better grade. You have yourself said that this is the 5th 'E', you

have scored so far and I hope that you will manage to be not so consistent in future, by making efforts to improve.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

L2

Dear sir,

I was shocked to see that my friend is scoring A and I only E. My answer is not good, but his answer is not so very good.

I think if he gets A, I must get something as C or D. If I get an E he must not get more than B.

I know my English is weak, but I had written a very long answer. You have not given me anything for my long sentences and long answer.

Could you revise my grade. If not, can you lower Learner No. 1's grade.

Please write me, I am worried about the grades.

Your sincerely,

St. No. 2

R2 (i)

Dear Friend,

In response to your suggestions, I should like to inform you that my assessment was subjective. So you need not worry about it. One reason I can give you is, I read your answer soon after reading a very satisfactory answer, both in matter of content and in language. In the light of the above fact I am glad to award a D grade to you. You know some facts, but improve your English (So I have regarded the 2nd answer giving him a C).

You can improve by reading newspapers daily.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

R2 (ii)

Dear Learner

You have raised an objection to my awarding 'A' to your friend and your scoring 'E' only. It is not a matter of writing long sentences and long answer (refer to your letter), but the relevance of the answer. You had to discuss the principles for the selection of text books which you could not do even the least. I awarded you 'E' immaterial of the fact that your English is

weak but keeping the irrelevance of your answer in view. You have written whatever has struck in your mind without meeting any demands of the assignment.

It is because of the expected answer that I awarded 'A' to your friend. His answer is, no doubt, very precise but its every line is upto the mark which you cannot judge. If you could judge it, you would not get 'E'.

Sd/-

Distance Teacher.

L3

Dear Madam,

I was shocked to see that my friend learner no. 2 has scored a 'B' grade, and I only 'C'. As far as I can see, his answer is poor, he has not answered as many points as I have. Besides, he displays some kind of love for the irrelevant.

It appears to me that you look for longer answers, irrelevant or relevant does not seem to bother you.

Most shocking is that learner 2 also gets a 'B'. His answer is entirely off the point. I must get a better grade. Could you review your assessment of my answer.

Yours sincerely,

St. No. 1

R3 (i)

Dear Learner No. 1,

Very glad to receive your letter,

In this connection I am to state that the answer given by Learner No. 2 is not irrelevant as you think of it. He covered many other points in his answer which have not been covered by you. By saying this, I do not mean that your answer is irrelevant. If you think that long answers fetch you good scoring you can do so hereafter. But my assessment is based on points, paragraph answers and elaborate answering. The answer given by you has covered some points but the answer is too short I feel. It is an essay type of question and I expect you to write more on the subject.

As such I think that there is no need to revise the grade already awarded to you. Any how you have passed.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

R3 (ii)

Dear Learner No. 1

I am happy that you have come together, which I had, in fact, wished to happen. I am happier still that you have gone through the other answers; That itself is quite a good experience, isn't it?

Regarding your doubt no. 1, Learner No. 2 answers the two parts of the assignment whereas yours touches only the principles of a good Text.

No. 2 doubt - your English is alright. But you have still better chances of exhausting all the points. Whereas, Learner No. 2 if encouraged properly, will improve; in course of time.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

We shall reflect on the above replies to see what we may learn from them.

CATEGORY I

Letter 1, Reply 1

The evaluator admits he was wrong and makes the relevant corrections, but adds the last sentence which betrays the fact that he is annoyed.

Letter 2, Reply 2

This is quite a balanced reply. However, the evaluator displays carelessness in using the expression Mr. No. 2 at one place and St. No. 2 at another. Similarly, "You seem to be very short" does not convey what the evaluator wants to say.

Letter 3, Reply 3

This reply is somewhat sudden in nature. The evaluator is either fully convinced of what the learner has written, or else does not want to get into an argument. We hope that the former is the case.

CATEGORY II

Letter 1, Replies 1 (i) and 1 (ii)

Notice the difference between the two replies—while the first is explanatory in the main, the second is more like an attack than anything else.

Letter 2, Replies 2 (i) and 2 (ii)

Notice the cause for grading the response wrongly and reply (i) and then the explanatory reply (ii). The last two sentences in the second reply are in bad taste.

You may notice that the entire correspondence between the learners and the tutor(s) is about the grades awarded. The learners complain about 'unjust' grading, only after comparing their grades with those of their friends. Their complaints are emotional in nature rather than pedagogical. What is more significant is that the learner believes that s/he is the best evaluator of his/her own performance (Many learners have explicitly stated what grades they should have been awarded).

On the other hand, most replies given by the tutors indicate how conventional they (i.e., the distance teachers) are in reacting to the learners' queries. In some, their tempers flare up. In some others, the idea of the infallibility of the teacher is justified in many different ways. The obvious reason for such reactions from these distance teachers is that they had never really experienced or been prepared for the unique problems of distance teaching/learning.

Check Your Progress 2

Compare the Replies given to Letter 3 in Category II. To what extent do they answer the learner's question? What is your opinion of the **tone** of the 'letter' as well as the 'replies'?

Note: a) Space is given below for you to write your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

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4.4 MORE ABOUT SUPPLEMENTAL INTERACTION

In this section, we shall be talking about issues which appear to be minor but are in fact significant and vital for distance education. However, we have restricted ourselves to mainly the following three issues:

- tasks of the distance teacher;
- submission density of assignment;
- tutorials.

We shall take up each one of these issues in the same order as given above.

4.4.1 Tasks of a distance teacher

A distance teacher should be able to:

- i) motivate the distance learner to remain on course, help him/her get started again whenever or wherever s/he gets stuck because of whatever reasons—academic or extra-academic;
- ii) provide individualised guidance—each distance learner has to be approached and attended to individually, as his/her abilities, previous experience and the required reinforcement patterns differ from those of peers in a number of ways;
- iii) provide feedback on learner performance and also on one's success in the positive transfer and successful application of new learning;
- iv) remove the sense of isolation which the distance learner is bound to suffer from and make him/her feel that she/he is one among many fellow learners, though s/he does not meet them everyday;
- v) stimulate independent and original thinking, problem solving and discovering knowledge; and
- vi) help develop appropriate attitudes towards the course materials, the institute, and one's own needs and activities.

Certain prerequisites help the distance teacher fulfil his/her duties towards the distance learner. What are they?

- Distance teaching systems must find ways and means to enable the distance teachers and the learners to get to know each other. The usual state of anonymity in which the two groups work should be done away with.
- The system should provide for relatively frequent contacts (of course, through correspondence, telephone, etc. if possible), between the distance teachers and the learners. One way of making these contacts frequent is to increase the 'submission density'. (We shall discuss this concept in 4.4.2).

Special steps may be taken to introduce 'open' assignments and also permit learners to raise 'questions' to be answered by the distance teachers. Such practices may make the academic exchanges between the distance teacher and the learner more stimulating, facilitate better insights, encourage independence of thought and the discovery of knowledge.

But do distance education institutions make efforts to provide the above mentioned 'prerequisites' ?

Very often distance education institutions do not take any steps to promote a purposeful acquaintance between the distance teacher and the learner. Consequently, the two remain unknown to each other in many cases. If at all any closer contacts are developed, they are the result of an initiative taken by either the learner or the distance teacher. In such situations, at least the distance teacher must take the initiative to make his/her teaching more purposeful. There are distance education institutions in the West (for example in Denmark), where special measures are introduced to make such contacts a real possibility.

4.4.2 Submission density of assignments

Submission Density is a notion that indicates the relationship between the length of a course, be it in terms of pages or study hours, and the number of assignments that are to be worked through by a learner when on the course. For a given course, the larger the number of assignments to be worked through, the higher the "submission density" in that course. For example, if a particular course consists of four study units, each with an assignment, then the submission density is 4. Now, if the same course has eight assignments, the submission density will be 8, and if the course has sixteen assignments, its submission density will be 16.

The obvious point is that the larger the number of assignments to be submitted in a particular course, the larger the number of occasions of contact between the learners and the distance teacher, consequent upon which, the chances of the success of learners also are brighter.

There are some research studies which uphold this view, but, then, there are studies which do not support it. However, by and large, the distance learner, the distance institutions, and the distance teachers agree that the two-way communication generated by the work on assignments helps the learners in many ways:

- i) studies become more stimulating;
- ii) studies are better organised as the courses get divided appropriately;
- iii) learners are introduced to each other in the course;
- iv) learners build a closer acquaintance with the institution;
- v) learners are corrected where they might have gone wrong;
- vi) learning is reinforced through encouragement;
- vii) learning is applied to the solution of real and/or hypothetical problems;
- viii) significant parts of the course become clearly visible; and
- ix) revision of the course becomes easier.

At this stage we would like you to turn to unit 3, block 2, course ES-311, and try to look for links between the views of Holmberg and Baath and the material presented in this block. By identifying the links, it will be easier for you to appreciate the four hypotheses which Holmberg has presented (claiming that whatever evidence is available, they have not been falsified yet).

- The stronger the characteristics of guided didactic conversation, the stronger the learners' feelings of personal relationship between them and the supporting organisation.
- The stronger the learners' feelings that the supporting organisation is interested in making the study matter personally relevant to them, the greater their personal involvement.
- The stronger the learners' feelings of personal relations to the supporting organisation and of being personally involved with the study matter, the stronger the motivation and the more effective the learning.

- The more independent, scholarly and experienced the learners, the less relevant the characteristics of guided didactic conversation.

4.4.3 Tutorials

More than a century ago (in 1886 to be exact) Harper, the first proponent of correspondence education in the USA, said that "the correspondence teacher must be painstaking, patient, sympathetic and alive... Whatever a dead teacher may accomplish in the classroom, he can do nothing by correspondence... The man who does the work at all, must do it well" (Harper, 1971).

Similarly, there are thinkers who have variously emphasised the ability to encourage and inspire learners, the ability to visualise/imagine the difficulties and needs of the learners, and the ability to like their own work as the attributes of good distance teachers.

To inspire the learners individually, a distance teaching institution naturally arranges for tutorials. A tutorial, among other things, means a period of individual instruction given by a college tutor. This definition implies:

- i) that tutorials pertain to higher education (notice the use of the word 'college'); and
- ii) that the objective of a tutorial is to provide 'individual' instruction to the learner.

Whether tutorials should be used only in the area of higher education is a question we are not interested in—we may use tutorials at lower levels of instruction too. What interests us is the second implication, i.e., the purpose of a tutorial is to provide 'individual instruction'. Without going into the details of how and when the system of tutorials came into being, we need to emphasise that essentially a tutorial is supposed to provide effective didactic communication between the learner and the teacher. This effective communication is effected by:

- i) allowing more time for individual interaction with the teacher;
- ii) creating a more congenial academic atmosphere in which all types of learners find it convenient to express themselves; and
- iii) providing for close relationships among the learners on one hand and between the learners and the teacher on the other.

The significance of these three processes can be appreciated better, if we look for structural and operational differences between the general academic processes that obtain in a classroom and a tutorial. In a classroom situation the teacher addresses him/herself to a group of 30 to 100 (in certain cases more than 100) learners, whereas a tutorial group may consist of about 10/12 learners. This basic difference between the two structures results in various operational differences between them. These are:

- The classroom teacher addresses him/herself to a hypothetical average learner. The actual learners may be of much higher and/or lower cognitive abilities than this average learner. In a tutorial, on the other hand, the teacher will have to address him/herself to each individual learner by making appropriate adjustments with the cognitive abilities of

the latter. And the tutors will have to be more tolerant in order to accommodate all types of learner-abilities.

- Classroom teaching, in most cases, ends up as a process that is teacher-centered (in general, learners remain passive most of the time) unidirectional (overt classroom interaction is neither possible nor usually encouraged), and impersonal (a teacher cannot build personal relations with a large number of learners). The teaching and learning process in a tutorial can be learner-centred (if the teacher does not dominate the situation purposely), multi-directional (for every learner is made to contribute to the process) and intimate (as not only does the teacher come closer to learners, the learners also come closer to each other).
- Attitudinal problems which have their roots in learners' and/or teachers' biases, prejudices, inhibitions, idiosyncracies, physical handicaps, up bringing or behaviour, remain unresolved in classroom situations. But tutorial situations smooth out these problems to an appreciable extent.

What is obvious from the above analysis is that a tutorial 'individualises' learning. On the one hand, it complements what is achieved in an impersonal way in the classroom situation, on the other, it also functions as a corrective operation. In distance education, the purpose of the classroom appears to be served by the study materials sent to the learners, and the purposes of the tutorial get served through the work on assignments. In fact, as each assignment has to be looked into as an individual academic exercise, the didactic conversation between the distance learner and the distance teacher is much more 'individualised' than the live tutorial can be.

Recently, computer-assisted distance tutoring was introduced at various places in the West. Such tutoring consists of the computer processing the answers written by the learners, and then preparing tutorial comments which are computer-printed, and passed on to the learner. Whatever evidence is available today, it appears that computer-comments work better than the traditional tutor-comments. (Computers can, thus, lessen the heavy burden on distance teachers, and give them more time to work on 'open' assignments, which is also an advantage for the learners).

Check Your Progress 3

Point out at least two unique positive features in:

- a) The classroom-tutorial system in conventional education, and
- b) The two-way communication in distance education.

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

- b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

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4.5 LET US SUM UP

As a confirmation of our discussion on the biases of a conventional teacher (see units 2 & 3), in this unit we discussed:

- the complexities of distance teaching which even the supreme educational bodies such as the University Grants Commission could not visualise at initial stages, mainly because of lack of experience in offering education through a new mode;
- the consequences of forcing conventional teachers to function as distance teachers without examining whether or not they meet the prerequisites essential for distance teaching;
- the urgent need to drastically change the policies that have been followed by the Correspondence Courses Directorates all over the country; and
- the significance of supplemental communication in distance education through assignment submission, tutor comments, contact-programmes etc. which can, and must compensate for the absence of regular face-to-face contact in a classroom situation.

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

- 1) The assumption that a conventional teacher can function successfully as a distance teacher is untenable for the following reasons.
 - i) Teaching in a classroom is different from teaching distance learners.
 - ii) Writing, editing etc. of distance teaching materials cannot be managed in the same way that classroom lecture notes are prepared.
 - iii) Evaluation methods and contact-programmes demand from a distance teacher particular skills and approaches which a conventional teacher need not have.
- 2) Reply R3 (i) to letter 3 does not answer the learner's question at all. It is a **quarrel** with the learner, rather than an explanation to the query.
Reply R3(ii) answers the question partially. It needs elaboration. The tone of the letter is obviously rude and disrespectful.
Reply R3 (i) descends to the level of a street **quarrel**.
In reply R3 (ii) the first paragraph is ambiguous. It could be as seen being 'friendly' as well as 'teasing'. The rest of the reply is matter of fact.
- 3) a) i) Classroom lectures, followed immediately by tutorials enable the learners to get answers and clarifications for their questions and problems without any delay.

- ii) Everyday discussions which the learners may have with the teacher and with their peer group give them a deeper understanding of the subject.
- b) i) Self-instructional materials cannot be casual in the way that lecture notes may be.
- ii) Learners writing their assignment-responses, and tutors marking the responses and commenting on them have to do a lot of hard thinking.

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Dear Student,

While studying the units of this block, you may have found certain portions of the text difficult to comprehend. We wish to know your difficulties and suggestions, in order to improve the course. Therefore, we request you to fill out and send us the following questionnaire, which pertains to this block. If you find the space provided insufficient, kindly use a separate sheet.

Questionnaire

Enrolment No. ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

1. How many hours did you need for studying the units?

Unit no.	1	2	3	4
No. of hours				

2. Please give your reactions to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Items	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Poor	Give specific examples, if poor
Presentation Quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Language and Style	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Illustrations Used (diagrams, tables, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conceptual Clarity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Check Your Progress Questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Feedback to CYP Questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

3. Any other comments:

Mail to:
Course Coordinator (ES-313)
STRIDE, IGNOU, Maidan Garhi
New Delhi - 110068, India.



Block

4

**LEARNER SUPPORT — A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE:
CASE STUDIES**

UNIT 1

Case Studies of Developing Countries: India 7

UNIT 2

**Case Studies of Developing Countries:
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BLOCK 4 LEARNER SUPPORT — A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: CASE STUDIES

Introduction to the Block

By now you would have worked through the first three blocks of the course.

To help you become a self-learner, and thus to promote self-learning is one of our major objectives. Different institutions adopt different strategies to help their learners achieve this objective. Taking you on from structured materials to case studies of learner support systems across the world, is hopefully meant to serve this objective.

The purpose of this block is to show how support services are put into practice. Case studies of support service networks of some open universities as well as dual mode universities, operating in both industrial and developing countries have been included in this block. It is hoped that these case studies would prove to be beneficial to you and would help you to understand how learner support services are being provided in different parts of the world; what kind of networks have been set up; what technologies are being used for delivery of programmes and supporting distance learners. You may also note that due to technological changes, many changes are taking place in open and distance learning institutions. What is written in this block may become history soon, as changes are taking place so fast that a year from now there may be a new story to tell, at each of these selected institutions we have written about.

In this block, we have changed the format of presentation. Since this block comprises case studies, there are no 'check your progress' exercises given in each unit, as has been done in the earlier three blocks. Instead, at the end of each unit, we have listed an activity which would help you in assimilating what you have read.

A schematic representation of the design of the units in this block is given below to facilitate your access to the subject matter presented here.

Unit X*

X.0	Objectives
X.1	Introduction
X.2	Country Profile
	X.2.1 Sub-section 1 of Section 1

X.3	Section 2 (Main Theme) Case Study
	X.3.1 Sub-section 1 of Section 2

X.n	Let Us Sum Up

* 'X' stands for the serial number of the unit concerned

As the scheme suggests, we have divided the units into sections for easy reading and better comprehension. Each section is indicated distinctly by bold capitals* and each sub-section by relatively smaller but bold† lower typeface. The significant divisions within sub-sections are in still smaller but bold** lower typeface so as to make it easier for you to see their place within the sub-sections. For purposes of uniformity, we have employed the same scheme of 'partitioning' in every unit throughout the course.

We begin each unit with the section 'Objectives'. It articulates briefly

- what we have presented in the unit; and
- what we expect from you once you have finished working on the unit.

In the last section of each unit, under the heading, 'Let Us Sum Up', we summarise the whole unit for purposes of recapitulation and ready reference.

What, perhaps, you would like to do is to go through the units and as you read, jot down important points in the *space provided in the margin*. (**Broad margins in the booklet are there for you to write your notes in.** Make your notes as you work through the material. This will help you prepare for the examination and also be useful in assimilating the content. Besides, you will be able to save on time. Do use these margins.) This will help you keep track of and assimilate what you have been reading in the unit. At the end of the block you should be familiar with learner support systems of open universities as well as of dual mode universities across the globe.

On an average, each block will have at least one or a part of one assignment. At times an assignment may expect you to work through more than one unit to prepare your responses. You have to send your assignment responses to us for assessment and comments. In all, you may have to work on two/three assignments per course. Assignments are sent separately, they are changed every year.

We suggest the following norms be strictly adhered to while you are working through the assignments:

- Write your roll number legibly as indicated in the Programme Guide.
- Make the best use of the block by working through the assignments given at the end of the block.
- Before you put down anything in words, assimilate what you have read and integrate it with what you have gathered from your experience to form your answer.

We have freely made use of the data available on the International Council for Distance Learning Database of UKOU; websites of the following universities, namely: Open University of Hongkong; University of Southern Queensland (Australia); Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (Thailand); UK Open University, and Western Governors University (USA). The information brochure of University of the Air (Japan) and case studies of University of South Africa and Makerere University (Uganda) published elsewhere, have also been utilised in preparing this block. The extracts that have been taken from the above, have been put within quotes.

* **BOLD CAPITALS**

† **Relatively smaller but bold**

** **Still smaller but bold**

UNIT 1 CASE STUDIES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: INDIA

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Country Profile: India
 - 1.2.1 Country profile
 - 1.2.2 Rationale for the open university system in India
- 1.3 Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU): India
 - 1.3.1 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 1.3.2 Instructional system
 - 1.3.3 Support services network
- 1.4 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU): India
 - 1.4.1 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 1.4.2 Instructional system
 - 1.4.3 Support services network
- 1.5 Y.B. Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU): India
 - 1.5.1 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 1.5.2 Instructional system
 - 1.5.3 Support services network
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have attempted to describe the support services provided by three open universities operating in India. One is a national open university (IGNOU) and the other two (BRAOU and YCMOU) are state open universities. By the end of this unit you will have gained useful insights into the profile of the country and the backdrop against which these open universities have come into existence. Besides, you should be able to:

- list the types of academic programmes these universities are offering;
- familiarise yourself with the learner enrolment;
- describe their instructional systems; and
- describe their provision of learner support.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first unit of this block we are going to cover three important Indian open universities. Indeed the development of distance education in India has been one of the most systematic efforts made in this direction. The period between 1962-72 can be termed the “pre-take off stage”, when the first distance education institutions were set up as sub-systems of conventional universities. From 1972-82 was the “take-off stage” when similar distance education institutions were set up at more conventional universities. From 1982 to the present may be termed the “mature phase”, when independent single mode distance education institutions were set up with the establishment of open universities (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996). India has

the unique distinction of having by 2000 one national open university and 9 state open universities, and 62 dual mode universities.

In this unit we have studied only 3 open universities and have not discussed any dual mode university as the learner support system at the latter institutions is still in the developing stage unlike the open universities

1.2 COUNTRY PROFILE: INDIA

India is a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic in South Asia covering an area of 1269919 square miles or 3287782 square kilometres. The population of India is estimated at 929.0 millions in 1995 and the annual growth rate was 2.1% during 1970-95 (UNDP, 1998). It is a developing country, with 69% of its labour force engaged in the primary sector (agriculture, livestock, forestry, fishing, plantations) (NIME, 1994). The adult literacy rate is 52.0% (1995). Its expenditure on education is 3.5% of the GNP (1995), accounting for 12.1% of the total government expenditure between 1993-95 (UNDP, 1998). It has a complete infrastructure for postal services, radio and television broadcasts, telephone and telecommunication. However, India being a developing country, there are per 1000 people only 81 radios, 61 televisions, 13 main telephone lines, 1 cellular phone subscribers and 1.2 personal computers (1995) (UNDP, 1998).

1.2.1 Rationale for the open university system in India

In a country of India's magnitude and diversity, the conventional education system alone cannot meet the needs and demands of higher education. The policy-makers have therefore realised that the imperative need of distance education is to provide access to higher education to all those deprived sections of society who could not avail of it earlier. The alternative suggested by the Kothari Commission, namely the correspondence education system, resulted in the introduction of correspondence courses in several universities since 1962. Many distance learners enrolled themselves in these courses and have taken advantage of the facilities provided during the last 38 years.

While some of the university correspondence course institutes could succeed in providing distance education of reasonable quality, many others could not do so due to several problems and constraints which inhibited their effective functioning.

Another important concern was the improvement of the quality of higher education. The policy makers realised that unless education is made open to the deprived, unless structural rigidities are removed from the educational system and unless it is integrated with the developments in communication technology, the country may not be able to make any headway in realising the uphill task of educating the large section of the population with diverse educational and social needs. India is one of the first countries to apply its mind to the concept of open universities after the UK established the world's first open university in 1969.

The debate at the national level on an open university also stimulated thinking on the subject in various states. In Andhra Pradesh, a proposal to start an open university was made in 1978, but no progress was made. The Osmania University made proposals for starting an open education college to strengthen distance education. The college was to have full autonomy but the degrees were to be awarded by the Osmania University (Reddy, 1984).

While these efforts were on, the Government of Andhra Pradesh in 1982 decided to establish an open university to provide "access to higher education to the adult population of the State, for upgrading their functional capacities and improving the quality of their life in the context of broader social and political objectives of equalisation of educational opportunities and the emergence of a new concept of life long education" (Government of AP, 1982). To give shape to this policy, the Government appointed a committee and based on the committee's report, established the Andhra Pradesh Open University on August 26, 1982 (now renamed as the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University—BRAOU).

This has been hailed as the opening of a new chapter in the history of education in the country. With the establishment of BRAOU, interest in the subject at the national level increased rapidly. With the publication of the document *Challenge of Education* by the Ministry of Education in 1985, the public debate on education in India was focused in a critical and dynamic way. One of the major conclusions arrived at in the *Challenge of Education*, was that the formal system itself could never meet all the educational needs and demands of the country. Another was that all attempts should be made to use the most advanced technology available in full support of the educational objectives to be attained. These two considerations led to an increasing conviction of the need to establish a national distance learning institution of quality which should cater to the needs of higher education in India as a whole.

On January 5, 1985, the then Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, announced that a National Open University was to be established and on September 20, 1985, the Indira Gandhi National Open University came into being by an Act of Parliament (IGNOU, 1985).

The Indira Gandhi National Open University was officially inaugurated in November 1985. The Act of Parliament establishing the University is explicit about its aims:

"The University shall endeavour through education, research, training and extension to play a positive role in the development of the country, and, based on the rich heritage of the country, to promote and advance the culture of the people of India and its human resources" (IGNOU 1985).

The Act goes on to specify that the University will, among other things,

"strengthen and diversify the degree, certificate and diploma courses related to the needs of employment and necessary for building the economy of the country and provide access to higher education for large segments of the population and in particular the disadvantaged groups such as those living in remote and rural areas including working

people, housewives and other adults who wish to upgrade or acquire knowledge through studies in various fields" (IGNOU 1985).

The Government of Maharashtra appointed a Committee with Dr. K.G. Deshmukh, Vice-Chancellor, Amravati University, as the Chairman to examine the feasibility of establishing an open university in the State. The Committee which submitted its report in early 1985, had not only strongly recommended the establishment of an open university in the State but had also given a detailed blueprint. The Yashwant Rao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) thus came into existence on 1 July 1989 through Act XX (1989) of the Maharashtra State Legislature. YCMOU is the fourth State-level open university in India, situated at Nashik near Mumbai (YCMOU, 1994).

Before YCMOU came into existence, two more provincial governments viz., those of Rajasthan and of Bihar, had established, respectively, Kota Open University (1986) and Nalanda Open University (1988). The Madhya Pradesh State Government announced its open university namely, the Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University, in 1993, the Gujarat Government, announced the setting up of the Ambedkar Open University in 1994, and Karnataka State the Karnataka Open University in 1994 (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996). Of late, the State Governments of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh have also added Netaji Subhash Open University and U.P. Rajshree Tandon Open University respectively. A few more State Governments are also contemplating the establishment of their own State Open Universities.

Objectives of open universities

The foregoing account clearly shows that providing education to the distant learners is becoming an accepted policy of many governments. The avowed objective is to make higher education available to those who are denied and deprived. This policy is being operationalised by establishing open universities.

The objectives of an open university as laid down in the *National Policy on Education, 1986*, are to:

- to reverse the tide of admission in formal institutions;
- to offer education to people in their own homes and at their own jobs;
- to enable the learners to earn while they learn;
- to provide counselling and guidance to people; and
- to take education to the remotest village, through radio, television and correspondence courses (GOI, 1987).

1.3 INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY (IGNOU)

IGNOU which was established as a National Open University in September 1985 is currently blazing a new trail in higher education. The launching of this university is the outcome of the concern and desire to democratise higher education and make it available to a larger segment of the population, especially the disadvantaged groups and individuals, to bring higher education to the doorsteps of all those who look for it and to promote and

maintain national standards in education by offering a wide variety of academic programmes (such as professional, non-professional, and science and technology) with uniform syllabi.

The university was also assigned the role of an apex body charged with the determination and promotion of distance education standards in the country, a function similar to that performed by the University Grants Commission (UGC). As an apex body, IGNOU acts as a co-ordinating, monitoring and funding agency (partially) for the distance education system in the country. For this purpose the university has constituted the Distance Education Council (DEC) which started functioning in April 1992.

From its very inception IGNOU embarked upon an ambitious programme of academic endeavour on the basis of the following principles:

1. Diversity in course content and mobility across disciplines.
2. Innovative ventures which conventional universities do not undertake.
3. Utilisation of modern communication technology for furthering the process of learning.
4. Flexibility in admission requirements and pace of course completion.
5. Emphasis on professional and job oriented programmes of study.

In order to carry out its mandate the university has established four Service Divisions to attend to various functions of administration; nine Schools of Studies for planning, producing and monitoring the academic programmes and courses; the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) to provide training to personnel in distance education institutions in India and abroad and, the Distance Education Council (DEC) to oversee the State Open Universities and Correspondence Course Institutes in India, and provide funds and expertise for inter-institutional material exchange.

1.3.1 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

The academic programmes of the university can be broadly classified into Degree, Diploma and Certificate programmes. The programmes and courses are intended not only for self-enrichment but also for professional upgrading. In keeping with the open nature of the university, the requisite flexibility has been provided to enable learners to space out their studies. For example the Bachelor's Degree Programme (viz. B.A./B.Com/B.Sc.) is of three years duration, but a learner can take up to eight years to complete it. Diploma programmes of one year duration can be completed over a period of four years. The maximum period allowed for a 6 month certificate course is two years. Within a short span of two years, from the date of its inception, the university had introduced two professional programmes (in 1987) with a modest enrolment of 4521. In the year 2000 IGNOU has reached a stage where it offers 50 (including regional language programmes) Degree, Diploma and Certificate programmes containing 604 courses. The annual learner enrolment is more than 196 thousand in 2000 and the total number of learners enrolled are more than 561 thousand in 2000. Thus, IGNOU has emerged as one of the biggest mega open universities in the world.

Table 1.1: Academic Programmes and Learners enrolled at IGNOU

Year	Programmes (Cumulative)	Courses (Cumulative)	Learners enrolled	Learners on roll
1987	3	13	4521	4521
1988	5	43	16800	20810
1989	13	89	42300	61724
1980	19	128	49281	103873
1991	34	205	52376	112192
1992	39	256	62375	145000
1993	47	296	75666	182366
1994	57	368	84200	222815
1995	58 (36)	372	91400	242000
1996	NA	NA	130354	310000
1997	64 (39)	412	162540	394388
1998	64 (39)	486	163390	430830
1999	72(47)	553	172548	516580

Note: (1) Cumulative including National and Regional language programmes too.

(2) Figures in brackets are academic programmes on offer in English.

Sources: 1) IGNOU profile, 1996 and IGNOU Convocation reports, 1996 to 1999, IGNOU.

2) Manjulika and Reddy, (1998). *Unexplored Dimensions of Open Universities*, Vikas Publishing House (P) Ltd., New Delhi.

Womens' enrolment at IGNOU has been increasing over the years. In 1994-95 it stood at 22.5%. The female enrolment went up from 5.2% in 1986-87 to 27.8% in 1987-88. The major reason for this upsurge was the introduction of the bachelor degree programmes and of the certificate programme in food and nutrition (CFN) for the first time. The number of learners from the scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) had been rising between the period 1986-87 and 1988-89. In 1994-95 it had come down to 7% (IGNOU, Annual Reports, 1991-92 and 1992-93; IGNOU 1994, 1995).

As much as 62% of IGNOU learners were employed and 23% were from rural areas (1994-95); 67.7% of the learners were below 31 years of age and barely 3.1% were over 45 years of age. The remaining 29.2% were between 31 and 45 years (Manjulika and Reddy, 1999).

Table 1.2: Profile of IGNOU Learners

Enrolment	1990-91	1992-93	1994-95
Gender			
Male	86.5	77.5	77.5
Female	13.5	22.5	22.5
Social Status			
O.C.	N.A.	91.7	93.0
S.C. & S.T.	N.A.	08.3	07.0
Occupation			
Employed	N.A.	42.8	62.0
Unemployed	N.A.	57.2	38.0
Location-wise			
Rural	18.5	21.9	23.0
Urban	81.5	79.1	77.0

Source: IGNOU, Annual Reports, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

IGNOU, 5th & 6th Convocation Reports, April 1994 to May, 1995.

NB-Data not available after 1995.

The course-wise break-up of learners revealed that a majority of the undergraduate degree learners were below 25 years of age. It is interesting to note that most learners above 40 years of age were enrolled only in the management programmes.

Further, the pattern of enrolment in academic programmes revealed that there was a gradual shift from traditional programmes and diplomas to professional and vocational degrees, diplomas and certificates (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996). For example, a majority of IGNOU learners were enrolled for BDP (B.A., B.Com.) whose share in the total enrolment was around 75% in 1989-90, had come down to around 43% in 1993-94 and 22% in 1995-96. Management and Computer programmes accounted for 36% and 27% respectively in 1997. Thus, the two programmes, management and computer programmes have accounted for 63% of the total enrolment in 1996-97 (IGNOU, 1998).

This is an indication of the gradual shift from the regular undergraduate course to the vocational/professional courses such as Management and Computer Programmes due to compulsion of the job market. This shift is certainly a remarkable one and in tune with the national demand for more technocrats, managers and professionals.

1.3.2 Instructional system

The instructional system at IGNOU is different from that of conventional universities. IGNOU has adopted a multimedia approach to instruction, utilising media such as self-instructional print materials (SIMs), distance tuition through assignments, occasional personal contact programmes, video and audio programmes, teleconference sessions, limited face-to-face counselling sessions, television and radio programmes (via national network of *Doordarshan* and a few regional radio stations), video programmes through cable network, and library facilities. For courses in Sciences, Computer, Nursing, and Engineering arrangements have been made to enable learners to undertake practicals at selected study/work centres. Some courses have project and field work as part of the learning requirements.

An analysis of the multi-media instructional system at IGNOU reveals interesting developments in the use of instructional media for imparting distance education to learners. As other open universities in the world, IGNOU also uses SIMs, it had also adopted audio and video cassettes, assignments and limited face-to-face counselling sessions in the first phase (1987-1989). In the second phase (1990-1992) a few more courses, especially science and basic computer programmes, had been added to the university fold. During this period it had introduced practicals to meet the needs of computer and science based programmes. In addition it had also added broadcasting (television) into its multi-media package to take distance education to all parts of the country taking advantage of the extensive television network (Today in India television has low power transmitters in most district headquarters and high power transmitters in almost all state capitals except in the north-eastern region). In the third phase (1993 onwards) the university added a number of science, computer, health and technological and professional programmes. Extensive use of labs (for practicals) and specialised institutions (for field works) were introduced, taking into account the diverse needs of courses (Manjulika and Reddy, 1999).

The Computer Division is in the process of connecting Regional Centres with the Headquarters through Wide Area Network (WAN). VSAT has already been installed in two of IGNOU's regional centres and a few more are under consideration. This facility would enable two-way audio and video teleconference from a few regional/study centres in the coming years. From these VSATs, educational programmes can reach every house and work place which has access to local cable TV, or computer.

The university has already begun the process of keeping the courseware of educational programmes and academic services on the network. This work started with two special projects supported by IGNOU for ITV and network, for computer and management programmes. Every School/Division is being encouraged to offer their programmes and services on the network.

E-mail and Internet facility is already available at the Divisions to receive data. NICNET nodes are also being implemented in various Schools, Divisions and Regional Centres.

IGNOU has done considerable experimentation (since 1993) with the use of one-way video and two-way audio teleconferencing for distance education. As a result, the Training and Development Communication Channel (TDCC) of IGNOU is fully operational within 17 Regional Centres, 146 Study Centres of IGNOU, 3 State Open Universities (SOUs) and a few Study Centres of SOUs. In addition a few institutes of management and conventional universities are also downloading IGNOU's teleconference and telecounselling sessions (Manjulika and Reddy, 1999). The channel jointly managed by ISRO and IGNOU is being used for special counselling to learner groups, for providing training to counsellors and also for administrative interaction with Regional Centre functionaries assembled at various nodal points. The IGNOU has been conducting teleconferencing/telecounselling sessions regularly and this facility is also available for use by other educational and development organisations. Realising the need for expansion so as to reach out the university is further expanding its receiving end stations.

The audio programmes were broadcast by selected stations of AIR Shillong, Hyderabad and Mumbai, though Shillong has now discontinued the programmes. Bhopal has joined since 1998 for selective courses. A few other radio stations located in rural areas are also under consideration. The video programmes are telecast on the national network of *Doordarshan* five days a week, i.e., Monday to Friday, from 6.30 a.m. to 7.00 a.m. Since 1999, phone-in interactive radio counselling has been added.

1.3.3 Support services network

The Regional Services Division implements the IGNOU objective of providing a national network of academic support services for the learner. This is organized through over 550 Study Centres and Programme Study Centres and 34 Regional Centres established throughout the country with the help of more than 1000 Co-ordinators and Asstt. Co-ordinators and 20,000 Academic Counsellors.

Study Centres are generally located in the existing educational institutions and normally function on weekends and during holidays, while some function on working days in the evening hours. These centres have been

provided with audio-visual and teleconferencing equipment (at more than 140 of them), other necessary electronic equipment, and with a library as well as tutorial facilities. At the Study Centres the learners get exposed to video and audio programmes and teleconferencings to obtain academic help from counsellors and use the library facilities. For this purpose the University employs part-time counsellors drawn from academic institutions where the study centre is housed or other organisations and industry. The Regional Centres co-ordinate and oversee the functioning of the Study Centres.

In addition to regular Study Centres, the University has also established Study Centres in Tihar Jail (New Delhi) and a sub centre each in the Sabarmati Jail (Ahmedabad) and the Central Jail (Bangalore). The demand for Study Centres is growing, not only for meeting the regional requirements but also for catering to the specific programmes like for instance computers, engineering and technology, nursing and library sciences. For these specialised professional and technical courses, specific programme study centres and work centres have been established. Work centres conduct practical/laboratory activities, and programme study centres take care of all the activities of a programme (i.e. including tutoring, examination, etc.).

In addition to co-ordinating the activities of the Regional and Study Centres the RSD also plans and monitors the activities of Study Centres and Regional Centres, develops necessary delivery mechanisms and norms for the launching and co-ordination of academic programmes by the University. It takes care of functionaries, budgeting, finance and accounting of expenditure and also deals with the appointment and orientation of academic counsellors and handles learner grievances through the Students Affairs Cell (SAC). The support services offered by the Regional Services Division at the Headquarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres to learners are presented in Table 1.3:

Table 1.3: Support Services Offered at IGNOU for its Distance Learners

Study Centres/Programme Study Centres	Regional Centres	Headquarters
General information	General information	Distribution of material (MPDD)
Sale of application	Guidance for students	Students admission
Organising academic counselling	Student's admissions	Computerisation of Admissions
Organisation of audio visual programmes	Collection of Fees	Guidelines for evaluation
Providing library facilities	Attending to student's queries	Evaluation of CMAs
Arranging teaching facilities for tele-conferencing	Distribution of materials	Term end exams
Providing computer terminals	Maintenance of student's records	Overall grading
Handling of assignments	Training programmes	Declaration of results
Continuous evaluation of TMAs	Seminars/conferences	Awarding degrees
Conduct of term end examination	Teleconferencing	Training programme
Attending students queries	Teaching facilities	Seminar/conference
Distribution of materials	Admn. & finance	
Training programmes	Advertisement and publicity of admissions	

To disseminate information to the learners periodically about courses, registration, examination dates, T.V. broadcast schedules, teleconferencing schedule, and so on the university brings out a Newsletter thrice a year. At present the university provides a small library with selected books, equipment for audio-video use, accommodation for counselling sessions and conduct of annual examinations, maintenance of learner records on enrolment and assignments at each of the Study Centres which are manned by part-time staff. In order to streamline field level operations the university is planning to further decentralise its operations. The Study Centres are the ears and eyes of the university and hence enormous attention is being paid to make them more learner-friendly. IGNOU selects its counsellors on the basis of suitability and academic qualifications. The counsellors at the local level are required to advise learners on their choice of course, pacing their studies, to evaluate assignments, to provide guidance in project work and so on. Periodically, the counsellors are oriented to the distance education methodology. With the installation of up link facilities by ISRO on IGNOU campus it is now possible to organise teleconferencing on a regular basis connecting most of its Regional Centres and Study Centres. The Government of India recently established an exclusive T.V. channel (Gyandarshan) on the national network for educational programmes. This would enable IGNOU to reach its clientele on a larger scale with greater frequency and duration. Phone-in radio counselling has been introduced through more than 190 radio stations throughout the country.

However, the IGNOU learners spread all over the country, are mainly served through Regional Centres and Study Centres covering the whole country. Most of the Study Centres are established in major cities/towns or district headquarters. For example, metro cities and state capitals account for approximately one third of the total study centres in 1996, thus leaving two thirds for other places. Very few cities with less than 0.1 million population have got Study Centres.

This clearly indicates that the district headquarters and other small towns in the country have not received due representation corresponding to their population. For example, the enrolment pattern in 1996 shows that many Study Centres had less than 10 learners in different programmes. Similarly 30% (79) of total Study Centres had less than 100 learners. The reasons for this kind of imbalance are many. One which is worth mentioning here is the non-availability of infrastructure and academic expertise. Similarly, all the study centres established are not activated for all academic programmes introduced by the university, thus leaving out small towns and block, headquarters for professional and science and technology courses. Contrary to this 60-70% of the population are living in small towns and rural, remote and tribal areas. (Manjulika and Reddy 1999).

The concept of Study Centres had been thoroughly reviewed during 1995-96 and a diversified approach had been adopted. Besides the regular Study Centres and recognised Study Centres, the university has new types of Study Centres such as Programme Study Centres, Distance Learning Facilitators (DLFs) and Partner Institutions (PIs) etc. The diversified approach essentially aims at reaching all sections of people including those living in rural and remote areas.

As already mentioned the enrolment has increased, programmes and courses have multiplied and the facilities of a specialised nature required began to get diversified, hence, new issues have arisen such as:

- The growth in enrolment has not been uniform across all programmes and study centres; attachment of a small number of learners to Study Centres has made some of these Study Centres non-viable.
- The present Study Centre network is urban biased, leaving small towns and rural areas out of reach.
- Distance from Study Centres and their rigid timings have in many cases made access difficult or impossible for learners (IGNOU, 1997).

Thus the Study Centre approach alone cannot take education to the doorsteps of the learners. It is, therefore, necessary to rationalise and diversify the existing centres and add new channels of delivery to reach out to all sections and parts of the country.

The purpose of diversification of delivery methods is not necessarily to establish more of these, but to establish different ways of delivery for specific programmes. On the other hand, the purpose is to ensure how IGNOU can reach its learners who are registered on any programme irrespective of their location and the facilities to which they have access. It would follow therefore that there is no delivery mechanism that is uniquely suitable to any particular programme; all programmes will attempt a combination of approaches starting with course development efforts and going on to the delivery of programmes and services. In short, the emphasis in the approach and strategies towards diversification is to develop a flexible policy framework that permits a combination of different approaches accepted by the university to reach learners and provide better services to them and to establish the principle that the location of a learner is not a disability in accessing higher education facilities through the distance mode and improving the quality of services through a variety of means.

For a large number of programmes offered by IGNOU, easy access to materials and services by learners remains a major problem. Admittedly, it will not be possible to bridge this gap between the university and each of its learners but the attempt to do so for as many learners as possible, cannot be abandoned. It follows, therefore, that a large number of access points have to be set up across the country so that a large number of learners can avail of the services provided by the university. Such access points will have to be essentially on a scale much lower than that visualised in the Study Centre concept. It is in this context, that the mechanism of the Distance Learning Facilitator (DLF) becomes significant. The Distance Learning Facilitator corresponds to a single person study centre as against the present concept of an institution as the study centre (Takwale, 1997 and IGNOU, 1997). Delivery of IGNOU programmes through the diversified delivery mechanism (paradigm shift in the delivery system at IGNOU) is given in Figures 1.1a and 1.1b. In 1998-99, IGNOU has introduced single window operations under IGNOU Army and IGNOU Airforce collaborations to reach out to personnel of the armed forces. To reach out to disadvantaged groups and other special categories, it has introduced the concept of special study centres (IGNOU, 2000).

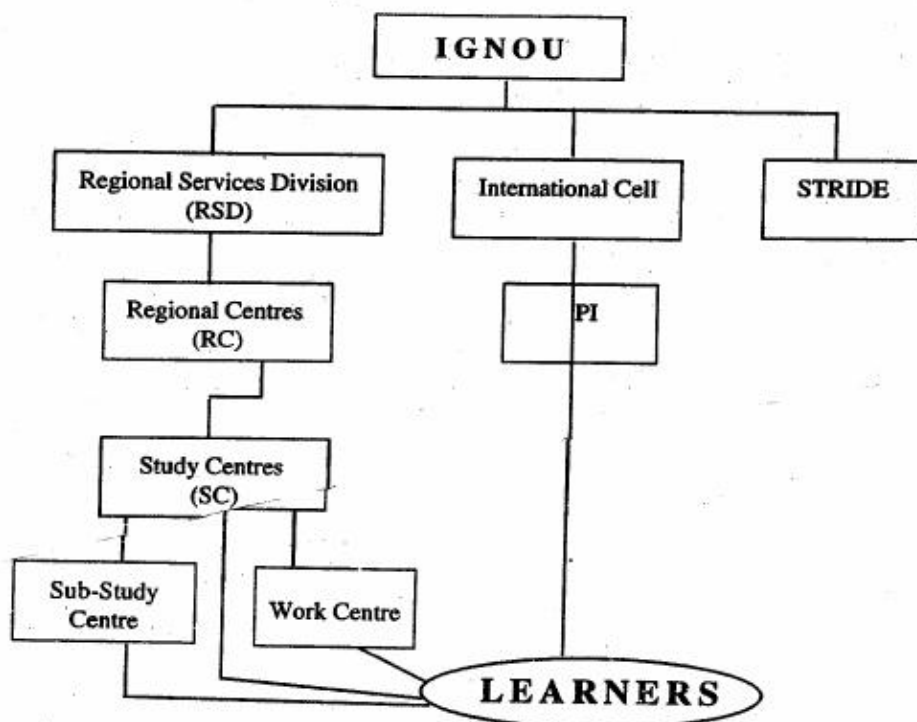


Figure 1(a): Support Service Network before 1996

Source: Manjulika and Reddy, (1998), *Unexplored Dimensions of Open Universities*, Vikas Publishing House (P) Ltd., New Delhi.

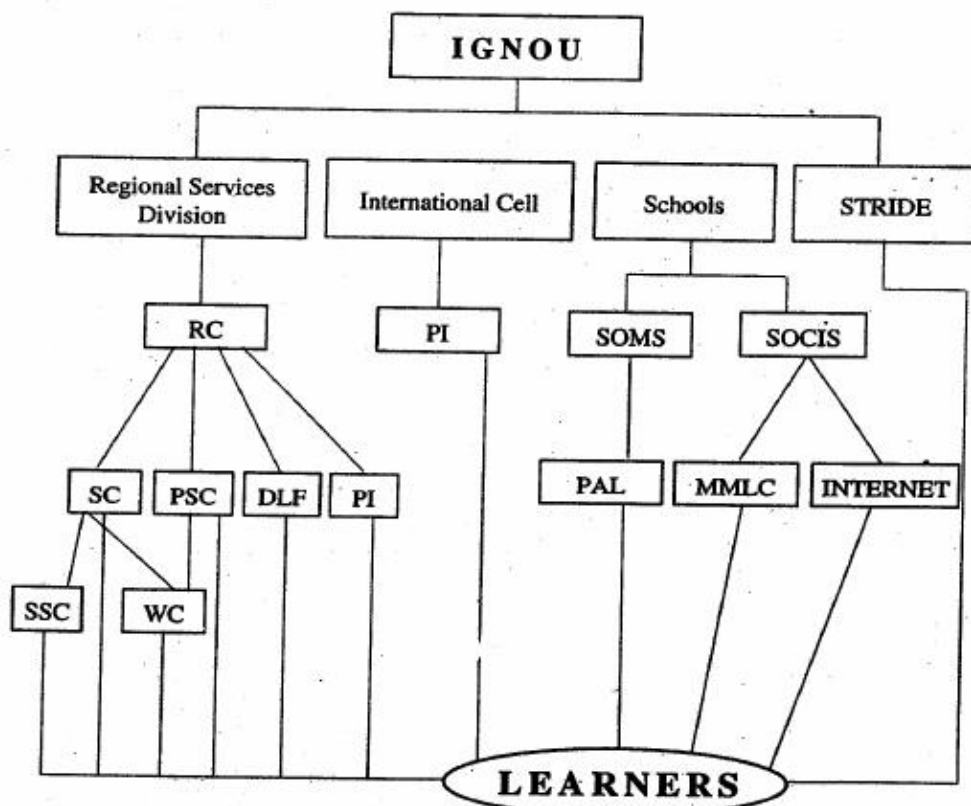


Figure 1(b): Support Service Network after 1996

Source: Manjulika and Reddy, (1998), *Unexplored Dimensions Open Universities*, Vikas Publishing House (P) Ltd., New Delhi.

In August 1997 the IGNOU Act was amended to make a provision which enabled the university to set up "Study Centres" outside India. Pending the establishment of such centres, arrangements have been made to launch some programmes in the Gulf Region. Appropriate Partner Institutions have been identified for providing certain services to learners as per the provisions of the agreement signed with them.

Currently IGNOU's academic programmes are on offer in U.A.E., Bahrain, Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman in the Gulf Region; Mauritius, Maldives, Seychelles in the Indian Ocean region and Ethiopia in Africa (IGNOU, 2000).

1.4 DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR OPEN UNIVERSITY (BRAOU): INDIA

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) (formerly known as Andhra Pradesh Open University), the first open university in India was established in August, 1982 in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. The university has completed 18 years of serving the educational needs of the State of Andhra Pradesh. The university has the mandate to democratise higher education by providing educational opportunities to hitherto neglected sections of population and also to those who missed out on the conventional stream of studies in the State. The university is also expected to undertake programmes in the field of continuing education to help the working population to upgrade their skills and knowledge by evolving a flexible system of education [AOU Act 1982; AOU Act (Amended) 1992].

1.4.1 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

The university is offering undergraduate programmes (through English and Telugu media), vocational/awareness programmes; post-graduate diploma and degree programmes (MA, MSc and MBA) and research programmes (M.Phil and Ph.D). It has 21 academic programmes (Prasad, 2000).

The university started its first academic programmes, i.e., undergraduate programmes in the year 1983. Around six thousand learners were initially admitted in the first year undergraduate programme. There has been a steady increase in the enrolment of learners over the years as shown in Table 1.4.

An analysis of the social and educational profile of the learners indicates that the University introduced the open concept of admitting learners with no prior formal qualifications for B.A and B.Com. programmes. Nearly 75% of the learners admitted to these programmes belong to this category. The university also caters to the demands of learners with formal qualifications who are willing to pursue their education through the distance mode. Normally 20-30% of learners belong to this category. The University is offering programmes through Telugu i.e., regional medium, as well as English and Urdu media. Nearly 80% of the learners are studying through Telugu medium (Venkaiah, 1996).

Table 1.4: Student Enrolment

Academic year	Undergraduate programmes	Other Programmes	Total
1983-84	6,231		6,231
1984-85	11,244	7,284	18,528
1985-86	15,702	1,302	17,004
1986-87	19,271	387	19,658
1987-88	16,505	2,981	19,486
1988-89	16,787	—	16,787
1989-90	16,402	3,270	19,672
1990-91	27,446	2,083	29,529
1991-92	32,027	1,560	33,587
1992-93	57,216	1,150	58,366
1993-94	53,930	5,866	59,796
1994-95	46,046	9,085	55,131
1995-96	70,646	9,085	79,731
1998-99	84,907	9,719	94,626

Source: Prasad, V.S. (2000) Dr. B.R Ambedkar Open University, in V.V. Reddy and Manjulika S. (2000), *The World of Open and Distance Learning*, New Delhi, Viva Books Pvt. Ltd.

The educational opportunities provided by the BRAOU are mostly utilised by people living in urban areas who account for two-thirds of the total number of learners. A major portion of these are from the provincial capital city (Hyderabad) and other district headquarters. The percentage drawn from weaker sections (1995-96) especially Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was not very high. About 30% were from backward classes and around 15% were from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the remaining 60% were from other communities. Around 30% of the learners were women, of whom a large number of them were homemakers (housewives). Though a substantial number of women are joining the Indian Open Universities, yet the number is not proportionate to their population. Age-wise details revealed that most of the learners were young or middle aged. The average age worked out to be 28 in 1995-96 (Venkaiah, 1996).

Most of the learners do not have independent study room facilities and personal audio record players and video playback equipment at their residences. The learners come from a wide variety of backgrounds, both educational and occupational and are, on the whole, highly motivated and mature.

1.4.2 Instructional system

The university has adopted multi-media means in the learning process: correspondence texts, radio lessons, audio cassettes, video cassettes and face-to-face contact sessions, summer schools and science practical sessions. It also provides individual counselling services through correspondence and library facilities in addition to print materials, audio lessons (each audio lesson is of 30 minutes duration). The university is making efforts to strengthen the written materials with the help of face-to-face counselling, audio-video and radio support. Summer schools provide for the intensive revision of Foundation Courses. In Science subjects, arrangements are mad

1.4.3 Support services network

The salient features of learner support services (Fig. 1.2) in BRAOU are (Venkaiah, 1996): study centre-based, subject-based tutorials and system-based counselling; these are integrated and are mainly provided by the part-time staff designated as academic counsellors. The learner support services are more structured and less flexible and designed more to meet the group needs of learners than their individual needs.

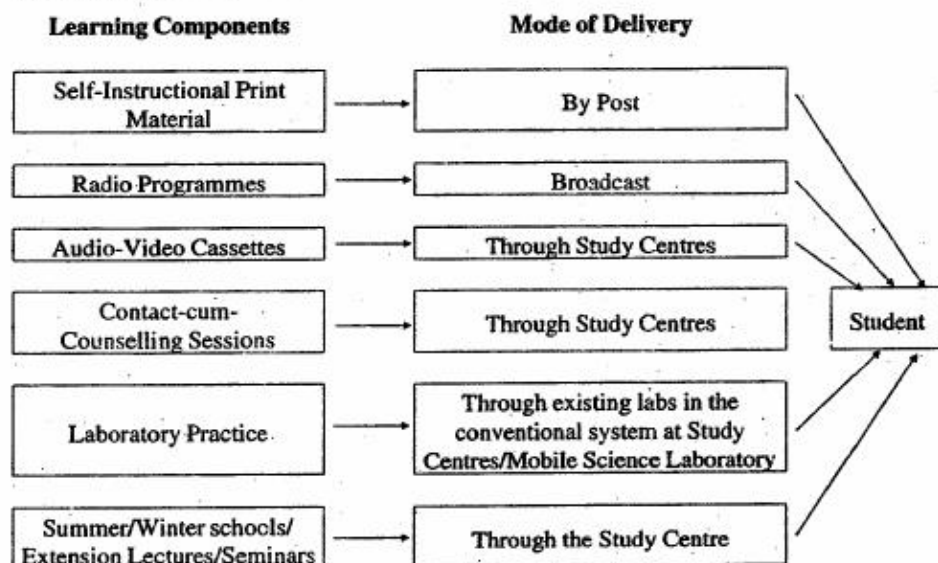


Fig. 1.2: The multi-media learning system at BRAOU

Tutorial-cum-counselling system

The tutorial-cum-counselling system comprises two components. The first and major component is subject related tutorial services, and the second important component is non-academic counselling i.e., pre-entry counselling, during the course counselling and after completion of the course counselling. In BRAOU, tutorial-cum-counselling is extended to the students by the staff of the university headquarters and Study Centres. The tutorial-cum-counselling system broadly covers the various aspects of academic pursuits, choice of optional subjects, course units, assignments, audio and video lessons, examinations, career planning, etc. The university reviews the counselling system from time to time and changes the methodologies of the system whenever necessary, while the method adopted for such changes is based on feedback from the learners.

Tutorial-cum-counselling and summer school for different programmes

Tutorial-cum-counselling sessions are held on 21 Sundays in an academic year. Forty two hours of counselling is provided per course for the first year undergraduate programmes. For the second and third year undergraduate programmes, the tutorial-cum-counselling sessions are held on 24 Sundays in a year (24 hours per course). The learners of second and third year B.Sc. are provided with 96 hours of lab-based practicals for each course of which

72 hours are allotted for hands-on experiments and the rest for demonstration and video based experiments. A total of 576 hours are allocated for lab-based experiments in each year, i.e., for six courses.

The university provides 12 to 16 tutorial-cum-counselling sessions (24 hours of counselling) for each course in the Master's programmes. Tutorial-cum-counselling sessions are provided for Public Relations, Library and Information Science, and Certificate Programme in Food and Nutrition programmes on second Saturdays and the following Sundays ranging from 4 to 8 months in a year depending on the minimum duration of the Programme. A total of twenty-four hours of counselling is provided for each course in Public Relations and Library Science.

In addition to the regular tutorial-cum-counselling, the first year U.G. learners and P.G. learners are provided with summer/winter school of 4 to 6 days i.e., 6 to 8 hours 'intensive teaching' per course. During the summer/winter school, special lectures are delivered by the experts in different subject areas. These summer schools are organised at all the Study Centres where the courses are offered.

Reference library facilities

The university has also set up a small reference library at all its Study Centres. There are a limited number of books which are made available to learners for reference purpose. As there are only a few books and single copies of each book, there is no facility for loaning books to the learners. A few copies of course material developed by the university are also kept in the library of the study centres. All the P.G. Study Centre libraries are provided with some important journals related to the P.G. Courses.

Network

The BRAOU follows a two-tier system to provide support services to its learners viz., Student Services Branch (SSB) at its Headquarters and study centres across the province. SSB recruits learners, plans and monitors face-to-face counselling sessions for different courses and extends other forms of academic support to its learners. The SSB serves as an "Information Bureau", as an office for the admission of learners to various courses of study and as a channel of communication between the university and its learners. The university has established a network of 125 Study Centres located in different districts and the provincial capital twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Postgraduate courses are offered at 12 Study Centres (Prasad, 2000). Two Study Centres are located in the Central Prisons, one at Hyderabad and the other at Rajahmundry in which prisoners are enrolled as learners of undergraduate programmes. Six Study Centres are functioning exclusively for women learners. Of these 125 Study Centres, 77% are located in urban areas, 13% in semi-urban areas and 17 in rural areas (census classification). Face-to-face counselling is provided to over 90,000 active learners (actually more than two lakhs including backlog learners) of different programmes through these Study Centres.

While 17 Study Centres are headed by Deputy Directors and Asst. Directors, who are full-time employees of the university, the remaining 90 study centres are headed by part-time co-ordinators, who are appointed from among the senior teachers of the host college. The Study Centre avails itself

of the services of the members of the staff of host colleges on a part-time basis in addition to the full time staff of the University. 70% of the study centres are functioning only with part time staff.

The Study Centres are mainly structured to provide opportunities for interaction between learners and teachers/part-time counsellors/other staff members. The Study Centres not only facilitate face-to-face counselling for academic purposes but also provide general advisory functions. All other administrative and learning support services such as admissions, fee remittance, maintenance of records, information provision, preparation of rolls of learners for despatch of course material, examinations, etc. are centralised at the university headquarters (Venkaiah, 1996).

Individual communication regarding the details of tutorial-cum-counselling sessions and summer/winter schools is sent to all the Study Centres and learners by the Student Services Branch of the University. The Co-ordinators of the Study Centres also give wide publicity through the local newspapers. Attendance is not compulsory for tutorial-cum-counselling sessions and summer/winter schools. However, attendance is compulsory for science practicals (75%). In the case of Bachelors in Library Science (BLISC), attendance at the summer schools and submission of assignments are compulsory. The learners of Masters in Business Administration (MBA) and Bachelors in Public Relations (BPR) are required to submit a project report as a partial fulfilment for the award of the degree.

The University utilised the services of 3664 academic counsellors for different courses during the academic year 1995-96. Of these counsellors, 3200 were engaged in tutoring undergraduate programmes, 328 counsellors for P.G. degree courses and 136 were engaged for the other programmes (Venkaiah, 1996). In 1999-2000 number of counsellors has gone up to 4010 (DEC, 2000).

1.5 YASHWANTRAO CHAVAN MAHARASHTRA OPEN UNIVERSITY (YCMOU): INDIA

YCMOU was established in July 1989 to serve a province viz. Maharashtra state in the Union of India. Its major objective is to introduce and promote the open university and distance education system in the state in order to achieve decentralisation and reorganisation of university education in the province. To provide education not only in the field of arts, commerce and science, but also in professional and technical fields. The attempt is to qualify a person for further continuous education, so that he/she may get better employment, higher wages and or set up employment generating units (YCMOU, 1998).

1.5.1 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

The YCMOU Act clearly specifies the direction the university is expected to take. While implementing its programmes, the YCMOU is expected to give attention to the following (Deshpande, 1992).

- The university is expected to make its courses available both in English and in Marathi, the local language.

- The university's major thrust is expected to be on applied, technical and vocational courses.
- The university is expected to operate in a cost-efficient manner and make efforts to become self-sufficient in its operational costs.

A good deal of emphasis has been laid by the university on vocational/technical courses, keeping in view its mandate. Most of the courses are offered in the regional language. English is used at higher levels and for courses in science and technology (Kulandaiswamy, 1995). The university has offered preparatory programmes, certificates, diplomas, first degree, post-graduate degree and research programmes (M.Phil and Ph.D.). The details of number of academic programmes and student enrolment is given in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5: Academic Programmes and Student Enrolment

Year	1990-91	1994-95	1997-98
Programmes	4	20	42
Courses	29	171	250
Students	13,052	43,485	62,572

Source: YCMOU, (1995), Handbook of YCMOU, Nashik, YCMOU.
YCMOU (1998) Handbook of YCMOU, Nashik, YCMOU.

The university had introduced in addition to traditional first degree and post-graduate degree courses, a number of diploma programmes in Agriculture, Management, Computers, Electronics, Teachers Training and English language. The university had introduced eleven agriculture programmes in 1995 for farmers (certificate level courses) to enable them to be scientific farmers and to help them raise their production. The duration of these courses coincides with the life-cycle of the crop (YCMOU, 1995). YCMOU has also introduced several vocational courses in the form of non-formal programmes and certificate programmes. These programmes are targetted at less educated persons to acquire skills (YCMOU, 1998).

Profile of learners reveal that female enrolment was gradually increasing in Diploma and Certificate programmes between 1991-92, however, female enrolment in U.G. and professional degree courses had come down during the same period. In 1996, 29.5% of the learners were women.

Most of the SC/ST learners of YCMOU were enrolled for the undergraduate degree course (22.5% in 1991-92 and 17.2% in 1993-94) and in the professional degree course, namely B.Ed. (16.1% in 1991-92 and 19.8% in 1993-94). The enrolment of SC/ST was slightly over 20 percent of the aggregate enrolment. The enrolment of rural learners was high considering the number of courses that YCMOU has targeted at the rural population and mostly in the regional language i.e. Marathi. In 1995-96 there were 47.5% rural learners. In absolute numbers, most of the rural learners were enrolled for undergraduate degree courses. Age-wise analysis shows that more than 45% of the learners were in the 20-25 years age group in 1991-92 and also in 1993-94. Nearly 70% of the learners of YCMOU were below 31 years of age in 1991-92 and 60.8% in 1993-94. The number of learners above 45 years of age had increased substantially from 211 in 1991-92 to 2,137 in 1993-94. 1936 learners above 45 years were enrolled for the teachers' training course of YCMOU (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996).

In 1998, of the 62642 students enrolled in YCMOU, 17% are enrolled in computer programmes, 8.7% in Education, 6.6% in Agriculture, less than 5% in the professional programmes and 62% in the traditional programme (YCMOU, 1998).

1.5.2 Instructional system

The University has adopted a multi-media approach for instruction. Print is the major medium supported by audio and video programmes. Science and computer programmes also provide practicals through laboratories. At the study centres, subject specific and general counselling is being provided, basic library facilities are also extended at the study centres. Study centres also provide audio-video facilities. YCMOU also utilises broadcast medium (TV) but in a limited manner.

1.5.3 Support services network

The Student Services Division (SSD) of YCMOU is entrusted with the responsibility of establishing the support services network of the university throughout the state of Maharashtra. With a view to ensuring the effective delivery of its programmes, the SSD has set up 8 Regional Centres. The Regional Centres serve as a vital link between the headquarters and the study centres. There are 503 study centres to reach every block in every district of Maharashtra. Similarly, for computer and technical courses, 324 work centres have been recognised where practical training is imparted (YCMOU, 1998). Besides, the university has implemented the unique *Prayog Pariwar* System for skill transformation in agricultural programmes. A group of like minded farmers with a common goal came together and experimented to test the technology in their farms and to make appropriate alterations, the idea being, to synchronise the contact sessions of the agricultural courses with the crop growth stages. Such a system not only helps to create a scientific temper among the learners but also promotes self learning among them (Gunjal *et.al.*, 1992).

YCMOU is presently utilising the services of more than 4200 part-time academic counsellors for counselling its distance learners (DEC, 2000).

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we sought to describe the learner support services provided to distance learners by three Indian open universities. A brief contextual information has been provided about the country, its higher education scenario and the mandate of the open universities. The academic programmes they offer, the instructional system they have adopted and the details of enrolment have been described in order to enable you to understand the nature of support being provided to distance learners, in the right perspective.

Activity

You could reflect upon the diversified delivery approach of IGNOU, being a national university as compared to the State Open Universities, namely BRAOU and YCMOU, whose jurisdiction is limited to their

respective states. Identify the variations in support services being provided by the 3 institutions we have talked about.

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UNIT 2 CASE STUDIES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: BANGLADESH, IRAN AND SRI LANKA

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Bangladesh Open University (BOU): Bangladesh
 - 2.2.1 Country profile
 - 2.2.2 Rationale for the open university
 - 2.2.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 2.2.4 Instructional system
 - 2.2.5 Support services network
- 2.3 Payame Noor University (PNU): Iran
 - 2.3.1 Country profile
 - 2.3.2 Rationale for the open university
 - 2.3.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 2.3.4 Instructional system
 - 2.3.5 Support services network
- 2.4 Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL): Sri Lanka
 - 2.4.1 Country profile
 - 2.4.2 Rationale for the open university
 - 2.4.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 2.4.4 Instructional system
 - 2.4.5 Support services network
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have attempted to describe the support services provided by three open universities operating in three developing countries, namely Bangladesh, Iran and Sri Lanka. By the end of this unit, you will have gained some useful insight regarding the profiles of these countries and the backdrop against which these open universities have been set up. Besides you should be able to:

- list the types of academic programmes these universities are offering;
- familiarise yourself with learner enrolment;
- describe their instructional systems; and
- describe their provision of learner support.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The three countries covered in this unit are Asian countries. You may be aware of the fact that Asian countries are characterized by varying stages of socio-economic development: some are developed, some are being industrialized, and some are still developing.

The Asian continent is very vast, consisting of a number of big and small countries. It can be geographically divided into three major sub-regions, West Asia, South Asia and East Asia including South East Asia. The countries that we have selected for this unit are located in South Asia (Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) and West Asia (Iran).

Though several of these countries are geographically knit together, they differ from each other in terms of geographical size, population size, degree of industrialisation, degree of urbanization, and other basic indicators such as GDP and GNP etc. We have therefore given a brief profile of the country concerned at the beginning of each case study. This should help you to understand the particular open university, its programmes of study; its instructional system and its provision of learner support in the right context/perspective.

2.2 BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY (BOU): BANGLADESH

Bangladesh Open University came into existence in 1992 following a series of studies undertaken by international agencies.

2.2.1 Country profile

Bangladesh is a small coastal country in South Asia covering an area of 55598 square miles (143998 sq. kilometres). It is one of the poorest among the developing countries of the world, with its GDP index as low as .21 (UNDP, Human Development Report, 1998); agriculture accounts for half of the GDP and about two thirds of the employment. Bangladesh is the ninth most populous country of the globe with a population of over 120 million and an annual population growth rate of 2.3% (1970-95). The adult literacy rate is 38.1% (1995), the expenditure on education accounts for 2.3% of GNP and 8.7% of total government expenditure (1993-95) (UNDP, Human Development Report, 1998).

The communication facilities are still quite inadequate, as there are 47 radios, 7 televisions, and 2 telephone lines per 1000 people (1995) (UNDP, 1998). Telephone services are now being extended through cellular phones being provided through easy bank loans.

2.2.2 Rationale for the open university

The Asian Development Bank's Project Appraisal document (1992) spelt out the rationale for the BOU project. It cited the high absolute levels of poverty, the low per capita GNP, the high population growth, the low adult literacy rate and the inability of the conventional education system to meet the country's requirements, including inadequate access to rural areas, inadequate higher and professional education and training opportunities, the poor quality of educational resources and programmes, and the lack of informal and non-formal educational opportunities.

The establishment of a distance teaching university will, it was believed, help support the government of Bangladesh's efforts to strengthen human resource development by increasing access to education and training in rural areas (including basic and secondary education and vocational training), provide higher education and professional training in selected areas,

strengthen informal and non-formal educational programmes aimed at the general population, and enhance the general quality and relevance of educational programmes (ADB, 1992).

The Bangladesh Open University was formally established by an Act of Parliament in October 1992 (Bangladesh Gazette 1992). The BOU which was initially set up as a project was jointly financed by the ADB and the Bangladesh Government till 1996.

2.2.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

Although the 1996 Project Appraisal document had listed the programmes which the BOU would be expected to develop during its development phase, one of the conditions of the mid-1992 Loan Agreement between the government of Bangladesh and the Asian Development Bank was that a needs assessment survey would be undertaken before any work began on the development of BOU's academic programmes.

The needs assessment survey was undertaken during 1993 and the results published and discussed in early 1994. The purpose of these surveys was to validate the demand for the courses and awards which the BOU had already identified during 1992 as possible programmes, as well as to identify other possible programmes, and to assess the likely demand for each of these.

The survey indicated a demand for a number of specific certificate level courses in the fields of agricultural and rural development, which the University then set about planning to meet; and for a broadening of the range of management education qualifications, to embrace certificate, diploma, first degree, and master's degree levels. Overall, the survey confirmed many of the intuitive views of its early planners about the relative priorities that needed to be addressed, while leading at the same time to the abandonment of some ideas in the face of evidence that demand would be low. (Ali *et al*, 1997).

BOU has so far introduced 19 formal academic programmes (BOU, 1999) such as: Bachelor of Agriculture Education (B.Ag.Ed.), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Bachelor of English Language Teaching (BELT), Graduate Diploma in Management (GDM), Certificate in Management (CIM), Certificate in English Language Proficiency (CELP), Certificate in Arabic Language Proficiency (CALP), Secondary School Certificate (SSC) etc. and a number of non-formal programmes through nationwide radio and television (Islam and Rahman, 1997) (See Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Enrolment at Bangladesh Open University

Programme	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Bachelor of Education (ex BIDE)	5125	4542	15662	21236	n.a
Certificate in Management				1256	n.a
Diploma in Management					n.a
Cert. in English Language Proficiency			4997	5586	n.a
Secondary School Certificate				14247	n.a
Total actual	5125	4542	20659	42325	n.a
Planned	4000	13000	24500	42500	54500

Source: Ali *et al* (1997), 'The BOU missions and promise', *Open Learning*, June 1997.

The number of learners entering the Open School's Secondary School Certificate is very encouraging, as this programme has learners throughout Bangladesh, in both urban and rural communities. The high female participation rate is also very encouraging.

The expectation was that BOU would enrol some 140,000 people during the five year implementation period of the project (ADB 1992). Although it was able to offer the B.Ed. degree immediately (having taken this over when BIDE was incorporated into the university), the fact that time had to elapse to enable the needs assessment survey to be undertaken and course materials to be designed, effectively reduced the number of years available to the University to achieve its objective of reaching the disadvantaged in the rural areas.

According to Ali *et al.*, (1997):

- "Majority of learners taking tertiary level qualifications are male: roughly three in four (77 percent) of the B.Ed students are male students. However, samples suggest that the proportion of female students is much higher (50 percent or over) in the SSC.
- Between 75 and 78 percent of each intake into the B.Ed. have been teachers. All are graduates, with some 32 percent having a master's degree (Huq, 1995).
- Two out of three (67 percent) CELP learners have a degree as their highest educational qualification; 3 percent have technical qualifications, 26 percent have a Higher School Certificate, and 9 percent a Secondary School Certificate.
- One in two (51 percent) of CELP learners are job seekers; one in three (34 percent) are in office employment; 7 percent are housewives; 5 percent are in business; and 3 percent are students. Majority of Diploma in Management learners are working. Nearly three in four (74 percent) live in the Dhaka region.
- Majority of the learners taking the B.Ed are aged 30 or over. The majority of CELP learners are under 30."

2.2.4 Instructional system

BOU uses text in the form of print, audio media in the form of radio and audio-cassettes, television in the form of broadcasting, and direct human contact through lectures that incorporate a degree of interactive questioning of and by the teacher. The norm is to provide 75 minutes of broadcast television and 120 minutes of radio broadcasting to every 45 hours worth (estimated study time) of printed course materials (Ali *et al.*, 1997).

Thus print is the core medium. Bangladesh Television (BTV) has provided BOU 40 minutes transmission slots from 5.15 pm. to 5.55 pm. five days a week that reach 85% of the total population. The university is negotiating for a few more slots.

So far as radio is concerned, Bangladesh's medium wave transmission reaches most areas of the country with the notable exception of the Chittagong area, where there is a local radio station which BOU does not currently have access to. The same national survey as for television shows

the proportion of households owning a working radio (Mitra, 1995). What is surprising about this survey is that ownership of a working radio in the urban areas is only on par with television ownership, while in rural areas, it is much higher than television ownership. Both the general population and BOU learner's reach is higher for radio than for television in rural areas, but higher for television than for radio in urban areas. BOU broadcasts its radio programmes between 8.30 am and 9.00 am daily.

Audio-cassettes are used for appropriate courses, notably the Certificate in English Language Proficiency where they play an important role in language learning.

The final 'medium' is that of face-to-face contact. Tutorials are held on Fridays (the national day of rest) in BOU's tutorial centres. Attendance is generally high. The number of locations where tutorials are held varies from programme to programme.

2.2.5 Support services network

The BOU has adopted a three tier network constituted of Student Support Services Division at the university's headquarters, Regional Resource Centres (RRCs) and local tutorial centres.

The SSSD maintains liaison with learners of different formal and non-formal programmes through its 12 Regional Resource Centres (RRCs), 80 local study centres and around 600 tutorial centres at least one in each headquarters (district) (Tarafdar, 1998). Tutorials are arranged twice a month for the distance learners.

The RRCs carry out all activities connected with the admission of students, the distribution of books and study materials, the arrangement of examinations, announcements of examination results and promotional activities. RRCs also provide library facilities to distance learners.

Distance learners can come and listen to, or view audio-video programmes and refer to books at RRCs.

Besides these, BOU is going to establish computer networks with fax, e-mail facility to RRCs and there is a possibility to extend this facility to local study centres in future (Tarafdar, 1998). BOU is also developing audio-teleconferencing to extend interaction to tutorial learners in remote areas. The media centre in BOU is under construction and will be equipped with the latest technology including a networking internet system connecting all its RRCs with the main campus (the headquarters).

2.3 PAYAME NOOR UNIVERSITY (PNU): IRAN

The Payame Noor University which was established in 1987, is one of the few such institutions operating in the Middle East.

2.3.1 Country profile

Iran is an Islamic Republic located in Western Asia. It has an area of 636300 square miles (1648195 square kilometres). It has a population of

68.4 million (1995) with an annual population growth rate of 3.6% (1970-1995). The expenditure on education is 4% of the GNP (1995) and 17.8% of the total government expenditure (1993-95) (UNDP, 1998). The adult literacy rate is quite high 69.0% (1995) (UNDP, 1998).

Iran has an efficient communication media and postal service, but telephone has not yet been generalized in the rural areas.

There are per 1000 people 228 radios, 134 televisions, 76 telephone lines, 0.8 public pay phones, 0.4 cellular phone subscribers (1995) (UNDP, 1998).

2.3.2 Rationale for the open university

The limited capacity of conventional higher education institutions to absorb the number of secondary school graduates was the major force behind the establishment of an open university. Previously, only 25% of the total applicants who sat for the National Entrance Examination got admission in all the state and private universities.

Thus in 1987 Payame Noor University was established. The aims and objectives of PNU are to:

- provide cultural and scientific qualification of the society;
- offer a chance to people who live in remote areas and have no way of improving and continuing education;
- create opportunity for people with family and work commitments who are unable to further their studies at conventional universities; and
- accelerate the economic and social development by means of cultural revolution (NIME, 1994).

2.3.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

PNU offers three levels of degree programmes viz., formal degree programmes, general degree programmes, and equivalent degree programmes. Formal degree programmes can lead either to an Associate degree or to a Bachelors degree. Academic programmes are offered in environmental health, accountancy, life sciences, physical sciences, business administration, computer engineering (software), education, humanities and languages, local sciences, physical education and statistics and mathematics in the form of formal degree and General degree programmes. However, equivalent degree programmes are exclusively offered to employees in the public and private sector.

The enrolment has increased from the initial intake of 8118 in 1988-89 to 34175 in 1993-94 and 117000 in 1996 (NIME, 1994; ICDL, 1996) (see Table 2.2).

2.3.4 Instructional system

PNU courses are mainly based on self study texts supported by limited face-to-face contact during each semester. Courses of 1-4 credit units may have 3 to 8 face-to-face sessions. Some self study texts are supplemented with audio and video programmes, laboratory activities, practicals and field trips. A limited number of television programmes are broadcast for these courses.

2.3.5 Support services network

Learner services at PNU comprise the administration of enrolment, orientation of fresh learners, delivery of study materials, tutorials, provision of advice, counselling by the staff and through booklets and pamphlets, and administration of midterm and final supervised exams. Learners receive study materials including self-instructional texts, study guides, audio-visual tapes, and experimental kits in some instances. The Printing and Publishing Centre of the university which is based in Tehran is in charge of the entire production and distribution (direct distribution) of print study materials to the centres before the beginning of each semester. Study materials are then delivered to learners at the local study centres. Similarly, the Media Centre at the Main Campus produces audio-video tapes which are delivered to Study Centres to be used by distance learners.

All admissions are decentralised to the local centres. Learners do not have to travel long distances to come to the headquarters for admission. Similarly, orientation programmes for fresh learners are held at local centres.

The organisational link of PNU, between the headquarters and the local centres, is a hierarchical link from top to bottom. The link of each level of organisation to its senior level is provided by a co-ordinating deputy. The creation of the co-ordinating deputy for establishing links with constitutional universities at the regional centres and a communication deputy for absorbing the facilities for the local centre are necessary. Therefore, the main organizational bodies of the university can be classified as the headquarters, the regional centres, the local centres, the Board of Founders (cf. Fig. 2.1). The local centres are set up after the formation of the Board of Founders.

The Board of Founders consists of all the important figures of the city such as the governor, mayor, director general of education including the trustees. The interaction of these Boards with PNU resulted in the establishment of local study centres (Parvin, 1995). The main responsibility of the headquarters is general policy making.

Curriculum design, development of study materials, recruitment of manpower, budgeting, test and assessment and planning is done at the PNU headquarters.

Regional Centres were set up to reduce the direct interaction between study centres and the headquarters, and also to maintain a balance, and improve the co-ordination among study centres in their region. This also provides the headquarters with more time to spend on fundamental issues.

PNU began its operations with a network of 27 local study centres in 1987. Later it introduced 10 Regional Centres bringing local study centres into the fold of Regional Centres. The local study centres grew to 43 in 1990 and 88 in 1993 and 125 in 1996 (ICDL, 1996; NIME, 1994).

Functions of the regional centre

- To supervise the implementation of education, research, administration, finance, and regulations in local centers.

- To hold regional council meetings, to set forth proposals in the relevant committee in order to resolve the problems that have something to do with education, research, culture, constructive works, administration and finance.
- To examine the articles, booklets and texts submitted by the centers under the regional centers, in the specialized committees and to dispatch the selected works to the faculties based at the headquarters.
- To collect the tests designed by the academics at the centers, and to submit them to the faculties at the headquarters after approval.
- To study and advise the sabbatical leave and scholarships awarded to the academics of the local centers, and to submit the measures taken to the office of Vice Chancellor (Research).
- To absorb the academic staff of the centers under the regional centers coverage according to the current rules and regulations of the university.
- To encourage researchers, scholars and learners of the relevant center in order to fulfil the research goals and to co-ordinate with the office of the vice chancellor, research in the fields concerned.
- To distribute the study aids, study materials and laboratory equipment which have been dispatched from the headquarters.
- To control the construction works, development and maintenance of the buildings of the study centers with co-ordination from the headquarters. (Askarian Abyaneh and Yazdanifard, 1995).

Functions of the local study centers

- To implement the plan relevant to education, research, learner, culture, development, administration and finance at the center.
- To encourage researchers, scholars and learners of the center to achieve the research goals with co-ordination of the office of the vice chancellor, research.
- To execute the general rules and regulations as well as the educationally approved regulations under the supervision of the chancellor and vice chancellors of the university.
- To establish co-ordination between the educational and non-educational programmes.
- To organize the council of the center in order to deal with the problems of education, research, learner, culture, development, administration and finance at the center.
- To have a continuous collaboration with the relevant regional center, and to participate at the meetings held at the council of the region and the relevant committees.
- To have a continuous external interaction with community and different organizations in order to seek their assistance and co-operation.
- To enrol the learners, to administer the examinations and to keep records of the learners.
- To consider the admission capacity of the center with co-operation of the regional center (Askarian Abyaneh and Yazdanifard, 1995).

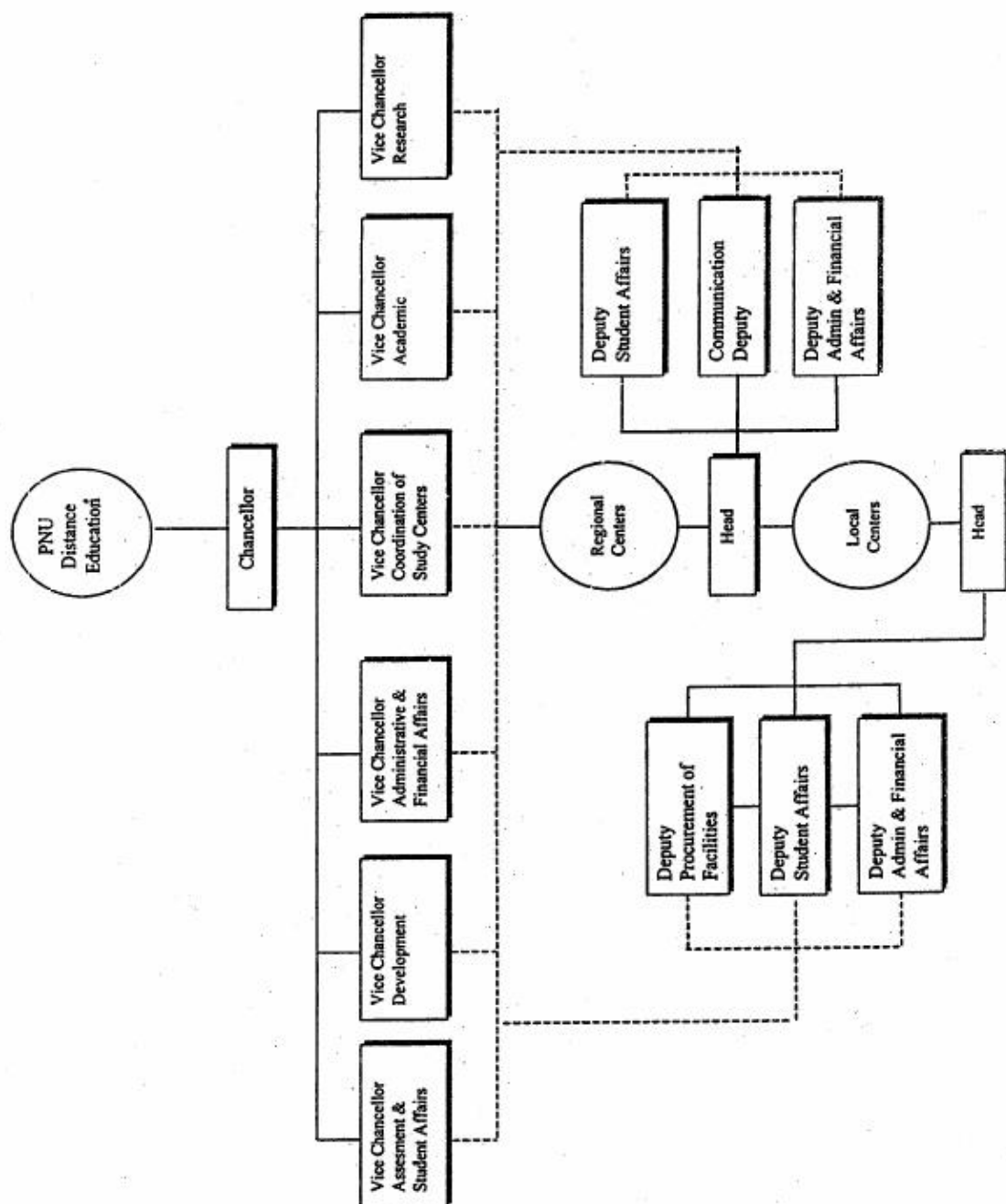


Figure 2.1: The chart of the management of study centres and their relations with other management-organization of PNU

Source: Parvin, H. (1995) Management of Study Centres, The PNU case, VIII AAOU Conference Papers Vol. 2, p. 94.

**Table 2.2: Details of Regional Centres and Study Centres and
Student Population at PNU (1993)**

No. of the Regions	No. of Provinces	No. of Study Centers	Student population	
1	3	8	7769	
2	2	11	8816	
3	3	14	17031	
4	4	8	4647	
5	4	9	7019	
6	3	6	5245	
7	3	8	6855	
8	1	11	9671	
9	2	8	9840	
10	2	5	5127	
—	27	88	82020	Total

Source: Askarian Abuanch, H. and Yazdanifard, A(1995) The Role of Regional Organization PNU, VIII AAOU Conference Paper Vol. 1, p. 85.

The permanent staff at each local center is by no means sufficient for holding regular tutorials, hence, academics of conventional universities situated in each region are being recruited. The group tutorials are held on weekends and during holidays. Laboratory activities and other practicals are organised at the local centers. The conventional universities are committed to assist the local centers of PNU in the organisation of practical, hence PNU uses the facilities of these traditional institutions. The number of tutorial sessions varies from subject to subject. In general, learner's attendance at tutorials is compulsory.

Audio-visual facilities are available in some local centres. The trend of PNU is towards the reduction of group tutorials and of costs and the creation of a traditional distance teaching system without any face-to-face sessions. The learners of PNU are supported by 499 full-time, 3165 part-time academic staff and 1670 other full-time staff at local study centres (ICDL, 1996).

2.4 OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA (OUSL): SRI LANKA

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) which was established in 1980 is the second oldest open university of the South Asian Region. It is the only university in Sri Lanka offering distance education programmes.

2.4.1 Country profile

The Republic of Sri Lanka is an Island in the Indian Ocean lying off the Southeast coast of the Indian peninsula. The Island is pear shaped with a maximum length of 272 miles and a maximum width of about 140 miles forming an area of 25332 square miles or 65610 square kilometres. Its economy is mainly dependent on the exports of the country's plantation products. Sri Lanka has a population of 17.9 millions and annual growth rate of 1.5% (1970-95). Sri Lanka is a fairly developed country with a key

high adult literacy of 90.2% in 1995 (UNDP, 1998). The Sri Lankan government spends 3.1% of its GNP (1995) and 8.1% of its total expenditure, during 1993-95, on education.

The communication network is also well developed. There are per 1000 people 206 radios, 66 televisions, 11 telephones, 2.9 cellular phones and 1.1 personal computers (1995) (UNDP, 1998).

2.4.2 Rationale for the open university

The government of Sri Lanka felt the need to establish an open university for the benefit of those who are unable to continue their university studies for reasons beyond their control. Among the recommendations made at a national workshop organised by the University Grants Commission in collaboration with UNESCO, it was stated that courses should be structured in the open university so as to meet wherever practicable, both unmet social demands and management needs, taking into account programmes already conducted at traditional universities, the maintenance of standards and the availability of staff resources.

Thus the OUSL was set up for the purpose of broadening the scope for the provision of higher educational opportunities to all, including those with basic qualifications and those over 18 years. Established under the University Act No. 16 of 1978 and OUSL ordinance No. 1 of 1989, and incorporating into its system the External Services Agency (ESA) and the Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education (SLIDE). The Open University commenced its operation in 1980.

2.4.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

OUSL has three faculties viz. social sciences, natural sciences and engineering and technology. They offer programmes, ranging from computer literacy programmes to postgraduate programmes. The university also offers associate learner programmes and public education programmes that do not offer formal education. The OUSL was offering 16 programmes in 1991 which has increased to 38 in 1999 (OUSL, 1999). Any person who is 18 years of age can enrol in the OUSL. No specific entry qualifications are required, but the candidate has to pass in 6 subjects at the GCE (O/L) examination. Examinations are held for those who possess approved relevant qualifications.

Learner enrolment has increased from 2360 (1982) to 17261 (1999) (OUSL, 1999). OUSL caters to more than one-third of the total university population of Sri Lanka. Nearly 85% of the student population is employed and 45% are women (OUSL, 1999).

2.4.4 Instructional system

The OUSL has adopted a multimedia integrated approach suitable for local conditions. Print materials form the major component of the study package. The learner is expected to devote 55% to 70% of the study time available on the print materials. The second important component is face-to-face contact, either at day schools or demonstrations and practical work, depending upon the needs of the particular course. Approximately 15% of the time is

expected to be devoted to these. Audio and video programmes are an integral part of the study package. A selected number of these audio-video programmes are broadcast by the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation and Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation.

Individual guidance and tutorial assistance is available to the learner at the Study Centre through the full-time tutor attached to the centre. Assignments play a major role in continuous assessment components. Support service at the centres include library facilities and individual guidance.

2.4.5 Support services network

A network of four Regional Centres and sixteen Study Centres are located (1998) across Sri Lanka to provide counselling, registration, distribution of course materials, face-to-face contact sessions, examinations, and finally, a place for learners to meet. The Regional Centres and Study Centres have full-time staff and they work continuously to meet the needs of learners. The major objectives of learner support services are:

- The Regional and Study Centres provide facilities for both academic and non-academic activities. Laboratory and workshop facilities are available at selected Study Centres where learners who are taking courses in science and technology, have the opportunity to observe demonstrations and to engage in practical work.
- Although the home study materials are designed to help learners learn independently, personal tuition and counselling are available at the Regional Centres. The open university conducts day schools and discussion groups in order to facilitate distance learning. Any study problems the learners encounter during their home study can be discussed at contact sessions when academic staff are available to solve learning difficulties. University teachers are available at the central campus each week during working hours and learners are able to meet the staff at the central campus when required. Similarly, the central core academic staff also visit Study Centres and Regional Centres to meet learners periodically, thus, academic staff (HQs) and regional officers also act as counsellors.
- Apart from the main library at the central campus in Colombo, mini-libraries or reading rooms are available at all the regional and study centres. The main library at the central campus is open every day from 8.30 a.m. to 7.30 p.m., including weekends. Because resources are limited, the libraries are for reference purposes only. Limited lending facilities are provided for undergraduate learners at the main library on the central campus. In addition, 25 public libraries, situated in main towns, cooperate with the open university in providing library facilities for distance learners (Jayasuriya, 1993).
- Other learner support services include a monthly learner information system. A newsletter is printed and mailed to all registered learners in the first week of every month. The newsletter gives the learners information about non-academic and academic activities, including examination and day school timetables. An estimated 70% of learners use this newsletter to get information about activities at the open university. It helps to eliminate the communication gap between the learners and the university.

Non-academic facilities at the Regional and Study Centres include short-term hostel accommodation in Colombo and other Regional Centres for those learners who come from a distance to attend the activities at these centres. The Regional Centres also provide canteens. Finally, photocopying services are provided at a subsidised rate. Limited medical facilities are available to learners through the services of a qualified medical practitioner who is available for two or three days a week at the main campus. A limited number of bursaries are available to learners in the Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Laws, and Diploma in Technology programmes. The selection of learners is based on their performance and financial need. The value of the bursary awarded to any learner is equivalent to 60% of the tuition fees for an academic year. The scholarship funds are received from the interest income on bursary deposits. Also, 1% of the total income from learner tuition fees is allocated to the bursary fund (Jayasuriya, 1993).

The OUSL has engaged 164 full-time and 516 part-time academic staff at Headquarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres (ICDL, 1996).

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have sought to describe the provision of learner support at three open universities operating in different Asian countries, in separate socio-economic settings. A brief contextual information has been provided about each country, its higher education scenario and the mandate of the open universities. The academic programmes they offer, the instructional system they have adopted and the details of enrolment have been described in order to enable you to understand the nature of support being provided to distance learners, in the right perspective.

Activity

After having gone through this unit, you would have realised that it is not only the size of the country but also its economic status which determines the learner support structure developed by an open university. Did you notice any differences in the objectives (rationale) of these 3 open universities located in 3 different developing countries of Asia? Illustrate your answer with reasons.

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UNIT 3 CASE STUDIES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: CHINA, HONG KONG (CHINA) AND THAILAND

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Central Radio and Television University (CRTVU): China
 - 3.2.1 Country profile
 - 3.2.2 Rationale for the open university
 - 3.2.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 3.2.4 Instructional system
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- 3.3 Open University of Hongkong (OUHK)
 - 3.3.1 Country profile
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 - 3.3.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
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 - 3.4.1 Country profile
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 - 3.4.4 Instructional system
 - 3.4.5 Support services network
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have attempted to describe the support services provided by three open universities operating in three developing countries namely China, Hong Kong (part of China) and Thailand. By the end of this unit you will have gained useful insight into the profiles of these countries, and the backdrop against which these open universities were established. Besides, you should be able to:

- list the types of academic programmes these universities are offering;
- familiarise yourself with the learner enrolment;
- describe their instructional systems; and
- describe their provision of learner support.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we cover the study of open universities in three developing countries from the East Asian region. Many of the countries in the East-Asian region are well developed and fall into the high human development category, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Republic of Korea, Brunei Darussalam, Thailand and Malaysia (UNDP, 1998). Most of the East-Asian countries have entered the stage of technological maturity but of

course they cannot be paired with Japan, which is one of the most technologically developed countries in the world. As compared to South Asia and West-Asia, East Asia has a larger proportion of literate population. Japan has no illiterates; barely 2% illiteracy in Republic of Korea, 6.7% in Thailand, 7.8% in Hong Kong, to quote a few examples.

Let us now look at the case studies of three important open universities of the East Asian region.

3.2 CENTRAL RADIO AND TELEVISION UNIVERSITY (CRTVU): CHINA

China's Central Radio and Television University (CRTVU) is a national single mode university, which along with the Provincial Radio and Television Universities forms the largest Open University System in the world.

3.2.1 Country profile

China is the world's largest developing country with the world's largest population. It is also the third largest country in the world in terms of area, covering 3706560 square miles or 9600,000 square kilometres. Its population has crossed 1.2 billion (1995) with an annual growth rate of 1.6% (1970-95) (UNDP, 1998). It has an adult literacy rate of 81.5% (1995). The expenditure on education accounts for 2.3% of the GNP and 12.2% of the total government expenditure (1993-95) (UNDP, 1998). The People's Republic of China has a full communication infrastructure for the nationwide coverage of postal service, radio and television broadcast via satellite, telephone and telecommunication.

There are per 1000 people 185 radios, 247 televisions, 34 telephone lines, 3 cellular phones, and 2.1 personal computers (1995) (UNDP, 1998).

3.2.2 Rationale for the open university

A recognition of the need to develop a mass higher education system in China first arose in the national agenda at the end of the 1970s after the end of the Cultural Revolution, when there was a demand for higher education. The television universities were set up in 1979 to meet the growing demand for qualified manpower and for adult education which the conventional system could not fulfil. Also the policy shift to economic construction and educational development and the sudden population explosion during the 10 years of the Cultural Revolution, when there were practical measures for birth control, are some of the factors that led to the establishment of the CRTVU. From the late 1970s and the early 1980s the national mass market for higher education arose partly from the need for a second chance at higher education for the lost generation of the Cultural Revolution.

Thus, from 1979 to 1988 CRTVU developed rapidly. By 1985 there was a nation-wide network with one central RTVU and 35 provincial level PRTVUs, about 600 prefectural level Branch Schools, around 1100 country level work stations and over 30,000 TV classes throughout China (Ding,

1995). By 1999, there were 44 PRTVUs, 841 Branch schools, 1768 Work stations and 17076 TV classes (Manjulika and Reddy, 2000).

The objectives of the radio and television universities are to provide higher education for those who have failed to gain access to the conventional colleges and universities; to provide vocational and technical education for the prospective employees in factories, companies and enterprises; to offer professional and job-related training to those in-service workers and staff members who have not had the opportunities to gain the knowledge required for their jobs; and to convey life-long education to the whole nation for the improvement, upgrading, and updating of human resources.

3.2.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

China's Television Universities offer a great range of educational programmes in various study fields, disciplines, and specialities.

China's television universities provide courses in a wide range of subjects at both degree and non-degree levels. These courses can be divided into three categories: 1) core courses, 2) continuing education courses, and 3) courses based on local needs. The first two categories of courses are offered by the CRTVU. The total number of courses offered by TVUs both at the central and provincial levels amount to more than 350 unified courses in over 59 specialities of 22 subject areas (Manjulika and Reddy, 2000). Core courses are subjects for which there is a sustained demand. These are mainly foundation courses and technical foundation courses, produced by CRTVU and delivered by China Central Television (CCTV) and/or China Education TV (CETV), and used selectively by local TVUs at various levels.

Continuing Education Courses are designed for those adults who have already received higher education but who wish to broaden or update their knowledge in special subjects. Since 1986, more than forty series of lectures and courses have been broadcast through CETV.

Courses based on local needs are provided by PRTVUs that have been designed and produced independently or in cooperation. These courses are specially prepared to meet local economic and educational needs; a few PRTVUs produce their own degree courses when the Central Radio and TV University courses do meet local needs.

According to the statistics of China's State Education Commission, the annual entrants at China's TVUs had grown from 97800 in 1979 to 273100 in 1985. However, this number declined to 86200 in 1991 (Ding, 1995). In 1998 the enrolment has crossed 300000 students (Manjulika and Reddy, 2000).

However, the TVU system has played an important role in increasing the proportion of enrolled learners over the age of 25 in China's higher education institutions. The number of TVU graduates majoring in humanities and economics and management has helped to improve the curricular arrangement in China's education. For example, the number of graduates majoring in economics and management amounted to more than 248,800 in 1986, which is 7.6 percent times the number of graduates on campus institutions in the same year; 28 percent of the TVU learners were

female, while 2.5 percent belonged to minority groups. 59.4 percent learners were workers, 5.1 percent were teachers, 12.5 percent cadres, 12.0 percent workers doing cadres job (Jinping *et al.*, 1993). During 1980-90, 660,000 graduated from correspondence education programmes and 1.25 million from TVUs (Jinping *et al.*, 1993).

Since its inception 2.6 million have graduated, in addition 35 million non-degree graduates and 2 million teachers and 1 million principals of primary and secondary schools have completed their programmes successfully (Manjulika and Reddy, 2000).

3.2.4 Instructional system

China's TVUs are using a multi media teaching package by combining printed materials. Most print materials are similar to the standard textbooks used in regular universities and colleges, and quite different from correspondence learning materials, audio-visual programmes and face-to-face tutoring. Radio and TV programmes are broadcast nationally by central and local radio and TV stations and also transmitted by satellite. Because of the limitations of the fixed broadcast hours, TVU produces and distributes audio and video cassettes to study centres for some courses. All TVU learners are organised into TV classes in centres where the quality of transmission is of a higher standard than at home. The science learners are expected to carry out the required number of practical experiments at the worksite before they can graduate. Social science learners have to conduct a field study and submit a write up on their findings. Learner progress is mainly assessed through examinations.

Since 1986 a satellite TV based multimedia distance education system is being offered in China. The INTELSAT TV and CHINASAT satellite cover all of China and some countries in Southeast Asia such as Thailand and Burma.

By the end of 1990, the delivery system had broadcast 36000 hours of educational programmes through two TV channels. About 29 million people view educational programmes or take courses either at home or in 30,000 learning centres (Gao, 1991).

Another feature of media teaching is that different courses use different media and in various ways, for example, scientific and engineering courses use a lot of TV instruction programmes and video cassettes and humanities courses mainly use radio broadcasting and audio materials etc. Different media have a variety of cost structures.

At present, China Education Television (CETV) is using two channels to transmit the courses offered by CRTVU for 12 hours per day, accounting for 4368 hours per year. The China Central Television (CCTV) transmits the courses offered by CRTVU for 22 hours per week, accounting for 886 hours per year. So in all, the courses of CRTVU are transmitted for 5248 hours every year.

In addition to this, the CETV transmits 310 hours of programmes of rural education and training courses for CRTVU. Besides, regional radio and TV

networks transmit some audio-visual teaching programmes of standard courses and some courses offered by provincial and local RTVUs.

3.2.5 Support services network

The system for the organization of Radio and TV Universities parallels China's system of central and regional governments and is a five-tier structure. The Central Radio and Television University (CRTVU), at the highest level, is under the direct leadership of the State Education Commission. The Provincial Radio and Television Universities (PRTVUs), at the second level, are under the auspices of provincial autonomous regional, or municipal governments. Their branch schools, at the third level, come under prefectural or civic governments. TVU work stations, at the fourth level, are run either by urban district or rural county education bureaus or by a particular industry. The lowest tier of this structure is the TVU classes which the learners attend (Wei, 1991). Refer Figure 3.1 given below.

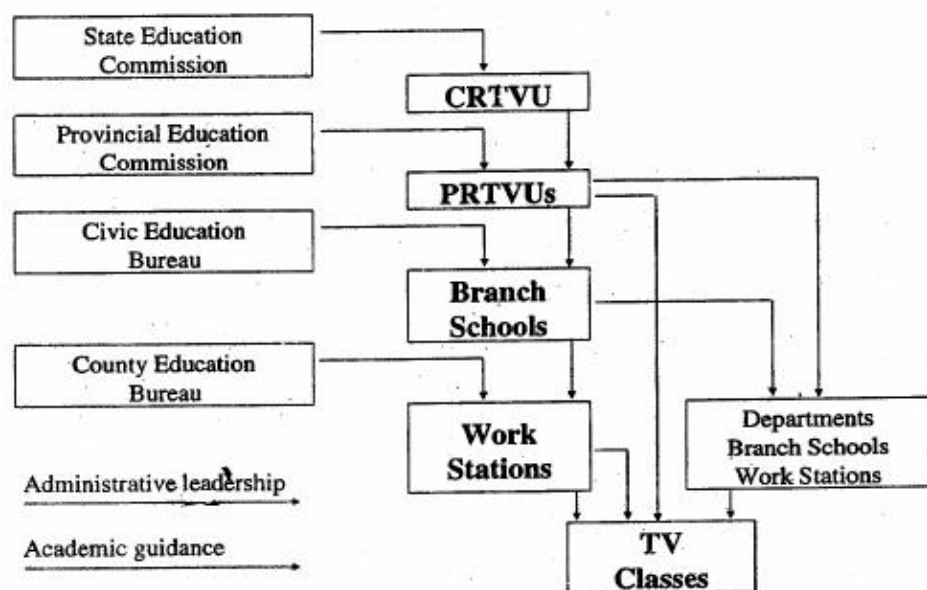


Figure 3.1: Administrative and organizational structure of China's RTVU system

Source: Xingfu Ding (1989) *An Introduction to Distance Higher Education in the World*, CRTVU Publishing House, Beijing, China.

There is no political, administrative, financial, or personal relationship between each of the five tiers of the television universities; relationships between each tier are limited to academic aspects. Only the provincial-tiered TV universities have the right to award degrees, diplomas, and certificates (Wei, 1991).

By 1999, the CRTVU had one huge national system with one CRTVU, 44 PRTVUs, 841 Branch Schools at the city level, over 1700 work stations and over 17,000 TV classes (Manjulika and Reddy, 2000). The CRTVU at the centre prepares general majors and curricula of national interest. It produces and distributes course outlines, course-books, and radio and TV programmes for these core courses. CRTVU develops and schedules national examinations and sets marking standards. The PRTVUs are responsible for detailed educational programmes, majors, and specializations, as well as

curricula for local TVUs. They control and supervise local programmes and produce course outlines, course materials and radio and TV programs for local courses. The PRTVUs develop and schedule examinations for provincial courses and supervise the examination and marking procedures. They also enrol learners, keep learner records, and issue degrees, diplomas, and certificates. They train teachers and direct teaching and administrative work done in branch schools and work stations. Finally, they provide counselling and help the learners with personal, moral, and ideological problems (Wei, 1991).

TVU Branch Schools oversee all aspects of teaching/learning activities, such as viewing TV programmes, tutorials, laboratory work, tests and exams, field study, etc. They carry out the stipulated procedures in teaching, administration, examination, and learner record areas, and they establish and direct TVU work stations and TVU classes. The TVU Branch Schools also provide counselling and help learners with personal, moral, and ideological problems. They issue course certificates for secondary, technical, and vocational courses and conduct the detailed teaching and administrative work for these training courses.

TVU Work Stations recruit part-time tutors. They organize classes, tutorials, laboratory work, and field studies. Further, they register learners, collect tuition fees, and distribute course materials to learners. They too provide counselling and help learners with personal moral, and ideological problems.

TVU Classes prepare class timetables each semester. They organize the viewing of course programmes and oversee tutorials, laboratory work, and field studies. They supervise learners' self study out of class and maintain contact with the work units to which their learners are attached. Finally, they arrange the learners' administrative, physical, and recreational activities (Wei, 1991).

3.3 THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG (OUHK): HONG KONG, CHINA

(Extracts taken from OUHK Website: <http://www.ouhk.edu.hk/about.html>, 1998).

The major development in distance and open learning in Hong Kong has been the establishment and steady growth of the Open Learning Institute which has more recently come to be known as the Open University of Hong Kong. Interestingly it is the only university in Hong Kong that is self-funding as it does not receive any funds from the UGC.

3.3.1 Country profile

A former British colony which was under the British regime till June 1997, and is now under the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong is located off the coast of the Chinese mainland. It has an area of 410 square miles or 1060 square kilometres.

Hong Kong has a market economy based on light industry and thriving international trade. It is one of the most developed parts of East-Asia and is

one of the “Four Little Tigers”, the other three being the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. It has a population of 6.1 million (1995) and an annual growth rate of 1.8% (1970-95) (UNDP, 1998). It has a high adult literacy rate of 92.2% (1995), 2.8% of its GNP is spent on education, amounting to 17% of the total government expenditure (1993-95).

The telephone services in Hong Kong are considered among the best in the world. In Hong Kong there are per 1000 people 668 radios, 359 televisions, 533 telephone lines, 129.7 cellular phones, 48.5 internet users and 130 personal computers (1995) (UNDP, 1998).

3.3.2 Rationale for the open university

Hong Kong has a large proportion of population whose educational standards do not match either their expectations, their potential or their social and financial position. Moreover, the increasing prosperity of the territory, along with the consequent demand for more opportunities to obtain personal fulfilment through additional education and the strong emphasis traditionally placed on educational attainment by the local society, were some of the factors responsible for the establishment of the Open Learning Institute (OLI) in 1989. In 1991 the OLI got the status of a self accrediting institute and in 1997 it was renamed as the Open University of Hong Kong (<http://www.ouhk.edu.hk/about.html>, 1998).

3.3.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

The OUHK has four schools — School of Arts and Social Sciences, School of Business and Administration, School of Education, and School of Science and Technology — offering a wide range of degree courses. In addition, it also offers Continuing and Community Education Courses. In 1998 the university was offering 78 programmes and 30 courses. OUHK admitted 5,192 learners in April 1998 and currently it has more than 25,000 learners on roll. The majority (63.5%) of them are aged between 22 to 35. The average age of a distance learner is around 32 years (Todd and Wong, 2000).

A demographic comparison of learners reveals that an equal number of male and female learners are enrolled in various courses, the male-female ratio was 1:1 in April 1988 (male 11,825 and female 11,808); 9% of the learners who were admitted were those who completed bachelor's degrees; 30% had a sub-degree or diploma; and 36% HK-A level GCE qualification. Geographical distribution revealed that 22% are from Hong Kong Island, 32% Kowloon and 45% New Territories (<http://www.ouhk.edu.hk/about.html>, 1998).

3.3.4 Instructional system

Most courses offered by OUHK are print based, with the content being wrapped around text books and selected published journals, articles or chapters from edited books. A set of course materials normally includes:

- a course guide which briefly describes a course and gives information about face-to-face sessions and assessment;

- study units which include specific objectives, directions for working through the course materials, interactive activities, and comments on summaries of the key issues and ideas in the textbooks and readings;
- some course materials are accompanied by television broadcasts, or video tapes or audio cassettes;
- for special courses in computing, they also include computer software, a medium which is going to be integrated into many other courses in the future (Fung, 1997).

3.3.5 Support services network

The OUHK campus provides good basic facilities such as library, computer laboratory and science laboratories, an audio-visual centre, a language laboratory, a lecture theatre, tutorial rooms and a disabled learners resource centre. In November 1997, an Electronic Library was launched for learners to access thousands of reading materials by remote means. The university broadcasts television programmes more than 400 (in 1997/98) in a year for all courses. On an average, more than 640 hours of tutorials have been provided per week and more than 16,700 hours per semester during 1997/98 (<http://www.ouhk.edu.hk/about.html>, 1998). The university has six self-study centres (1997-98).

The Student Affairs Office at the headquarters handles enquiries by phone and in person during the year. Information about the institute is also available through the 24 hour 'InfoExpress', the interactive voice response system, which has become an increasingly important link between the Institute and its students and the public.

Regularly counselling seminars are organized for prospective students about the programmes and various aspects of study

"The Student Affairs Office also handles the Student Financial Assistance Scheme, which provides bursaries or loans for students who encounter financial difficulties in paying for their tuition. Student loans, available at a very low interest of only three percent per annum, are financed by a government grant. Depending on the applicant's financial situation, either a bursary, a 'Pay on Graduation' loan, or a 'Pay As You Learn' loan is offered. On the other hand, scholarships are awarded to learners with outstanding academic performance.

In October 1994 the Institute had 64 learners with various disabilities. A range of services including counselling advice, special course materials, suitable tutorial venues, special examination arrangements and the loan of learning equipment is provided to facilitate their learning at the Institute. A Disabled Learners Centre (through donations with a variety of learning aids) has been set up. Visually impaired learners can use equipment such as powerbraille and a closed-circuit television with enlargement capability in the Centre. Hearing impaired learners can borrow notebook computers, external modems and fax machines from the Institute for use at home. New equipment, including a chair lift to help transport wheel chair-bound learners between the two floors of the Library, was set up during the year. Closed-circuit television with enlargement capability is one of the

specialty-designed pieces of equipment available for loan by disabled learners.

Special assistance is also available for the elderly and for learners on overseas trips. Learners aged 65 or above can apply for a reduction of 30% in the tuition fee. More than 100 examinations were held for the disabled and learners in prisons or outside Hong Kong.

The library's collection of books, serials, audio-visual materials and CD-ROMs continues to grow. The library's CD-ROM networking project has been completed. It enables users to access about 30 CD-ROM research databases, from within and outside the campus. Learners can check the university's library catalogue and their borrowing status through the Internet.

Borrowing services for learners began in October 1996. Project-based and postgraduate learners can also use the inter-library loan service to get materials from the libraries of local universities.

A modern Language Laboratory has been set up within the Library. A fully-equipped audio-visual centre with VCRs, TVs, CD players and cassette tape recorders has also been opened for use by learners and staff.

Science Laboratories, donated from the Lee Hysan Foundation were added in 1996. With a capacity for serving up to 150 learners at a time, the wet and dry laboratories facilitate the conduct of experiments in earth sciences, environmental sciences, computers, electronics and engineering sciences. Similarly an Environmental Laboratory (donated) was also opened in October 1996.

The OUHK currently has about 400 full-time staff and 1,100 part-time/temporary staff. A majority of the part-time staff are part-time tutors."

Thus, the learner support system includes a variety of face-to-face sessions and other secondary support, which include:

- tutorials involving face-to-face tutor learner and learner-learner interaction which are usually for discussing key issues raised in the course materials and solving the problems that the learners have encountered in their self study;
- "surgeries" in which tutors provide individual consultation to learners;
- workshops which involve the development of specific skills or project work;
- day schools which normally include lectures or talks;
- laboratory sessions for science and computing courses.

All face-to-face sessions are optional, except for laboratory sessions for science courses and day schools for certain courses.

Besides face-to-face support, learning is also facilitated by assignments—particularly tutor-marked assignments in which the tutor's comments form an important teaching element which we had discussed in Block 3 of this course.

Other support for learners includes:

- pre-admission counselling;
- tutorial visits by course co-ordinators;
- special facilities for disabled learners;
- learner financial awards such as learner loans, bursaries and scholarships.

Lastly there are a number of on campus facilities such as a library, computer laboratories and a self study centre. Computer facilities and self study centres are also provided by OUHK at other locations too.

Quality assurance

"The Quality Improvement Team, established in 1994 to build a quality culture within the university, reviewed various areas of learner services, including assignment handling procedures, tutor-learner relations and the grade award system, and completed the project on rationalizing quality assurance procedures. During the year the team also began to administer the Institute's end-of-semester learner surveys which provide feedback on the quality of course presentations.

Learner and graduate round tables have been held regularly. They provide an informal opportunity for the Institute's learners to share with each other their experiences about study, career and aspirations, as well as to exchange views with staff on how best the Institute can perfect its services (<http://www.ouhk.edu.hk/>)."

3.4 SUKHOTHAI THAMMATHIRAT OPEN UNIVERSITY (STOU): THAILAND

(Extract taken from STOU Website: <http://www.stou.ac.th/>, 98).

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) is one of the oldest open universities of Asia founded in 1978 (<http://www.stou.th/>, 98)

3.4.1 Country profile

Thailand is a country located in the centre of the mainland of South-East Asia. It has an area of 198456 square miles or 514000 square kilometres and is an industrialized country. By 1995, industrial production increased to 81% while agricultural production dropped to 11%. Thailand has a population of 58.2 millions (1995) and an annual growth rate of 2% (1970-95) (UNDP, 1998). It has an extremely high adult literacy rate of 93.8% (1995). Its expenditure on education is 4.2% of the GNP and 20% of the total government expenditure (1993-95).

The communication network is also fairly advanced and developed. There are 189 radios, 227 televisions, 59 telephone lines, 18.3 cellular phones, 0.7 internet users 13.6 personal computers per 1000 people (1995) (UNDP, 1998).

3.4.2 Rationale for the open university

STOU was formally founded by a Royal Charter in November 1978, to respond to the ever-increasing demand for higher education. STOU's main objective is to provide equal opportunities for university education to people from all walks of life, and to contribute to the expansion of educational opportunities at the university level. This is an extension of the Thai Government's policy of democratizing education, making the best use of the country's existing infrastructure to develop human resources. STOU is the first open university in South-East Asia to design and employ a complete and comprehensive distance education system (<http://www.stou.ac.th/>, 98)

3.4.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

Initially STOU offered programmes of study in three academic schools. The university has expanded to 11 academic schools representing all major study areas, namely Liberal Arts, Education, Management, Law, Health Science, Economics, Home Economics, Political Science, Agricultural Extension and Co-operatives, Communication, Arts and Science and Technology; offering 2 postgraduate level programmes, 65 degree level programmes and certificate level programmes and also continuing education programmes.

STOU enrolled 82000 learners in its first intake, 150,000 in 1987 and in 1993 more than 300,000 learners were enrolled. Among these 99000 were class attending learners, 128000 belong to the mixed type (both attending classes and learning at a distance), and 76000 are distance learning or home based learners. About 210000 learners actively register each semester and 120000 register for re-examinations (ICDL, 1998).

Since 1982 more than 111000 graduates were produced by STOU (Brahmawong, 1993).

The average age of a STOU graduate is 33, and the learners are mostly working class and living in provinces outside Bangkok (Wongsothorn, 1995).

3.4.4 Instructional system

STOU provides opportunities for learners to study and to pursue education according to their own interests, and at their own pace and convenience, through various forms of self instructional media. The main media include textbooks and work-books which contain instructions, details of the teaching units, self-evaluation before and after studying, doing exercise and reports, together with test forms for each unit accompanied by supporting media such as educational radio and television programs, audio cassette tapes, videos, computer-assisted instruction, tutorials, skill training and professional experience workshops.

The university arranges educational radio programmes which accompany academic courses and are broadcast from the radio network of 40 stations to equip learners with better knowledge and understanding of the course content. Each semester, the university also arranges and sends to the learners a broadcast schedule of radio programs that accompany academic courses.

For each academic course there are three 30 minute educational television programmes produced in different formats such as dramas, discussions, interviews, and documentaries (Rojanasang, 1996). Learners may also contact the University's automated telephone information service to obtain the dates and times of particular programmes on radio and television.

In some study areas, learners are required to receive practical skill training by attending simulated training and various academic activities such as group research and activities with fellow learners. Before learners can successfully complete their studies, they must also attend Professional Experience Training to enrich their professional experience, knowledge and expertise, and to develop proper personal skills, attitudes, and moral and ethical professional behavior (<http://www.stou.ac.th/>, 98).

3.4.5 Support services network

The university's Centre for Regional Affairs assists learners who have problems in understanding the course material and helps increase their knowledge and understanding. This learner support service consists of tutorials, learner activities, academic guidance, and media services such as videotapes as a substitute for tutorials, professional and practical training programmes, and field and laboratory work. All these activities are conducted at the study centres located in the provinces with the cooperation of various educational institutions and agencies.

There are three types of study centres: study centres; provincial or local study centres, and special-purpose centres. The latter include STOU Corners that are located in libraries and other specialised and practical study centres (Khilbtong, 1993). The university has established seven Regional Study Centers to provide to university learners various services which include orientation for new learners, tutorials, examinations and university news and information services. It has established eighty Provincial Study Centers in educational institutions throughout the country for the same purpose. In addition the university has also established Special Study Centers in co-operation with government agencies that are directly related to and specialize in selected study areas offered by the University to enrich the knowledge, understanding and experience of learners through training, laboratory practice, and field studies (for example, Special Study Centers of the School of Health Science in various hospitals throughout the country are designated by the University as training sites for nursing learners and there are also special Study Centers of the School of Agricultural Extension and Co-operatives).

STOU corners

"The university has established Special Study Centers called "STOU Corners" in eighty provincial public libraries to provide library and educational media services to university learners and the general public. The educational media at the STOU Corners include various course instructional textbooks, workbooks and other printed instructional materials, reference books, supplementary reading, audio-visual media including cassette tapes that accompany courses, and cassette tapes for tutorials and academic counselling."

Academic and Development Service Centers

The university established Academic and Development Service Centers in each region of the country to expand academic services and to enhance the effectiveness of the distance education system. The Centers use mobile units to cover their service areas, which have a radius of at least 200 kilometers and which include many provinces. Ten Academic and Development Service Centers have been established so far. (<http://www.stou.ac.th/>, 98).

Graduate Educational Resource Centers

The Graduate Educational Resource Centers provide STOU library services and educational media catered towards graduate studies. The general public can also utilize certain services provided by the Graduate Educational Resources Centers. The various services facilitated by the Graduate Educational Resource Centers are, with the exception of information retrieval services, the same as those provided by STOU Corners, to assist in graduate research and studies. In 1993, the year in which STOU began a Master's degree Program, the university provided Graduate Educational Resource Centers services at seven sites in co-operation with the National Library Division under the Fine Arts Department, the Department of Non-Formal Education, the Tinsulanonda Library in Mahawachirawut School in Songkhla province (<http://www.stou.ac.th/>, 98).

Counselling

The counselling section of the Office of Educational Services plays a very important role in helping learners to quickly grasp the system of education that the university uses. The counselling section also gives advice on the selection of study areas, study in the different courses, vocational guidance and personal problems. In addition, the counselling section provides orientation to newly enrolled learners through various media such as radio and television broadcasts, the STOU Newsletter, and orientation pamphlets. It also provides telephone and mail guidance services, which are responsible for the supervision of STOU learner clubs throughout the country and conducts territorial defence courses for STOU learners (Khilbtong, 1995).

Tutoring

"Tutorials constitute one of the academic services that the university arranges for the benefit of its learners. Through tutorials, academic staff provide knowledge, enrichment of knowledge, a wider and deeper understanding of the content of course blocks which learners study on their own. Tutorials also help to clarify the problems, learners may have with the teaching materials they are studying. Tutorials are conducted on weekends in local study centres throughout the country, and they are generally held twice. Where it is considered necessary, three meetings are arranged, each lasting three hours. Academic staff from the university are sent, on a rotation basis to all study centres. There they give counselling and guidance to learners for 15 to 60 minutes before tutorials begin.

The university arranges news and information services that enable learners throughout the country to receive knowledge, news and information about the University, especially about current events and activities. The various forms of University media are:

STOU Newsletter is a public relations newsletter that links learners to the University by reporting current activities and their progress, various developments of the university, in addition to articles, news and knowledge that is of benefit to STOU learners. Learners receive monthly issues of STOU News by mail.

Radio and Television Programmes

The university arranges educational radio and television programmes that accompany academic courses in order to help learners gain better knowledge and understanding of the course content that they are studying. In addition, the university also arranges educational radio and television programs to serve the general public and to help university's public relations systems.

InfoVoice

InfoVOICE Services is the university's voice information service via the public telephone system. The service provides learners with useful information such as grade reports, graduation ceremony's programmes, etc. For obtaining access to the service, the learner has to use a touch-tone telephone to dial up to 18 lines: (02) 982-9633. The service is available 24 hours.

Inquiry Services

The university has established a unit to provide services to learners including information on STOU and general inquiries. The unit, which is under the jurisdiction of the Office of the President, has various duties including providing university news, and running an information service for learners and anyone who might be interested. The inquiry services assist STOU learners in overcoming difficulties problems in the pursuit of their education.

To access the services, one can call (02) 982-9700. Office hours are 8:30-16:30 (Monday, Friday and Saturday), and 8:30-19:30."

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have sought to describe the provision of learner support at Open Universities in some of developing countries of East-Asia including those of South East-Asia. We have tried to give you brief contextual information about each country, its higher education scenario and the mandate of the open university. We have also provided you the details of its academic programmes, learner enrolment and instructional package in order to enable you to understand the nature of support being provided to its distance learners in the right perspective.

Activity

This was an interesting unit with all 3 developing countries which belong to the same region (Far East). You could reflect on the learner support

system evolved by CCRTVU, which is the world's largest open university in terms of jurisdiction as well as learner enrolment. Most of the activities have been decentralised to the middle levels and the lower levels. In contrast on a small island like Hong Kong, the OUHK is catering to its learners very effectively, using the new information technologies as compared to any other open university in Asia, not even STOU of Thailand. List out the types of support services being offered by these OUs and also the reasons why different models have emerged.

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UNIT 4 CASE STUDIES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: ZIMBABWE, UGANDA AND SOUTH AFRICA

Structure

- 4.0 Objective
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU): Zimbabwe
 - 4.2.1 Country profile
 - 4.2.2 Rationale for the open university
 - 4.2.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 4.2.4 Instructional system
 - 4.2.5 Support services network
- 4.3 Makerere University: Uganda
 - 4.3.1 Country profile
 - 4.3.2 Rationale for distance education
 - 4.3.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 4.3.4 Instructional system
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- 4.4 The University of South Africa (UNISA): South Africa
 - 4.4.1 Country profile
 - 4.4.2 Rationale for the distance teaching university
 - 4.4.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 4.4.4 Instructional system
 - 4.4.5 Support services network
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have attempted to describe the support services provided by a dual mode university offering programmes through distance education and two open universities operating in three developing countries namely Zimbabwe, Uganda and South Africa. By the end of this unit, you will have gained useful insight into the profiles of these countries, and the backdrop against which these institutions were established. Besides you should be able to:

- list the types of academic programmes these universities are offering;
- familiarise yourself with the learner enrolment;
- describe their instructional systems; and
- describe their provision of learner support

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we cover the study of two single mode distance teaching universities and one dual mode university from the African continent. Probably no continent has a greater need for distance education than Africa. Apart from the University of South Africa (UNISA) which has expanded since it began as the world's first single mode distance teaching university in

1947, provision of distance education in Africa has lacked resources and continuity though several countries have introduced distance education for over 20 years. As the former colonies became independent, the new ministries of education saw the potential of correspondence study as a means of both expanding educational opportunity and training manpower.

Most of the countries in Africa are under-developed and fall into the medium and low human development categories. Only a few countries, such as Seychelles, Mauritius and Libya are listed in the high human development category (UNDP, 1998). Hence literacy levels are comparatively higher in Seychelles (88%), Mauritius (83%) and Libya (76%). Interestingly literacy levels are also extremely high in Zimbabwe (85%), and South Africa (82%) even though they come under the medium category (UNDP, 1998).

Let us now look at the case studies of three institutions selected from the African continent, one from the medium human development category and two from the lower development category.

4.2 ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY (ZOU): ZIMBABWE

(Extracts taken from the Commonwealth of Open Learning: Case Study A-G, Brunei Darussalam, 1-5 March, 1999, by Mugad Zaweta and Benza. Permission obtained from the COL.)

Zimbabwe Open University started to operate as a Centre for Distance Education of the University of Zimbabwe in August 1993. In 1996, it was upgraded to the status of a University College. Presently it has graduated to the level of an autonomous open university.

4.2.1 Country profile

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country located in South-Central Africa with an area of 390272 sq. km. Its estimated population in 1995 is 11.2 millions with an annual growth rate of 3.1% (1970-95) (UNDP, 1998).

According to the World Bank reports Zimbabwe had the lowest gross educational enrolment rates compared to any region in the world in 1960s. However, by 1995, Zimbabwe had more than doubled its gross enrolment rates making the country one of the top two (along with Tanzania) countries which were above the median rates for education enrolment in the whole region (World Bank, 1998).

After attaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe introduced the most successful educational innovations. Hence, today its literacy rate stands above 85% which is on the higher side for a developing country. The expenditure on education accounts for 8.5% of the GNP (1995). Though its communications network is not all that developed: 89 radios, 27 televisions, 14 main telephone lines, 0.2 public pay phones, 0.1 internet users and 3 personal computers per 1000 people (UNDP, 1998).

4.2.2 Rationale for the open university

Zimbabwe inherited very similar British colonial systems at independence which were characterised by the disparity between the educational provisions for whites and those for blacks, with the former group enjoying privileged and better educational opportunities than the latter group. At independence Zimbabwe adopted in its national development, policies which included the achievement of socialism in order to fulfil the aspirations of the masses, the majority of whom were denied the right to education during the colonial era. Zimbabwe adopted policies of free universal education for primary and secondary school pupils. The quantitative achievements that were made in expanding the whole education system were indeed spectacular by third world standards. This massive expansion is often referred to as Zimbabwe's "Education Miracle" because through this process Zimbabwe moved closer to the achievement of universal primary education. However, the provision of tertiary education was not addressed at this stage.

At independence in 1980 only one university, the University of Zimbabwe in Harare existed. It was not until 1990 that other universities came into being. This resulted in larger number of candidates in seeking places at the university level whereas the seats available were limited. In addition, the demand for university education came from two other major sources: mature adults who after working for several years felt the need to improve themselves through university education and also hordes of college graduates who graduate every year from the more than 155 registered private colleges (Wakatama, 1983).

Thus, many were forced to register with the University of South Africa even though the majority of the Zimbabweans were opposed to the policies of apartheid of South Africa, but had no choice due to lack of opportunity in their own country.

This led to the opening of several privately owned distance education colleges. The government of Zimbabwe also took the initiative by initiating the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course through distance mode to alleviate teacher shortage caused by rapid expansion of the education system. In 1986, the Adult and Non-Formal Education Division of the Ministry of Education and Culture established the Zimbabwe Institute of Distance Education to complement private distance education colleges.

Several studies including commissions were set up to determine the feasibility of introducing distance education at the University of Zimbabwe.

Thus in 1993, the University of Zimbabwe established a Distance Education Centre which started offering the same courses available face-to-face on campus, through distance mode. The advantage of this dual mode model was the recognizable credit transfer between the off-campus and on-campus modes. As a result, of this Zimbabwe saved an estimated \$ 163 million in foreign currency which was the amount paid to foreign correspondence colleges including UNISA by Zimbabwean learners registered with foreign institutions (Zindi and Aucoin, 1995).

In 1996 the Centre for Distance Education of the University of Zimbabwe was upgraded to the University College of Distance Education (UCDE) and now it has upgraded to the new Zimbabwe Open University (Benza *et al.*, 1999).

4.2.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

The UCDE later known as the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) offers the Bachelor's degree in Education Programme, Bachelor's degree in English and Communication Studies, Bachelor's degree in Agriculture Management, Diploma in Classroom Text and Discourse, Diploma in Applied Accountancy. The other programmes that are to be offered shortly include the following:

- Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Statistics.
- Bachelor of Science in Geography and Environmental Science.
- Bachelor of Commerce.
- Bachelor of Education in Special Education.
- Bachelor of Nursing Science.
- Bachelor's Degree in the Hospitality Industry.
- Diploma in Guidance and Counselling.
- Bachelor of Health and Physical Education.
- Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies.
- Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages (French and Portuguese).
- Master of Education in Educational Administration.
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education.
- Master of Business Administration.
- Ph.D. (EAPPS).
- Master of Science in Manufacturing Technology.

The trend is more towards vocational and professional programmes of study.

In 1998 the total enrolment was 8236 and during 1999 it is 10,000 (Mugadzwe *et al.*, 1999). For programme wise enrolment details you may see Table 4.1.

Over 129 000 post secondary school learners ('O' level) are left without the opportunity for further education every year. This excludes those who are accommodated for the High School Certificate - A Level (10 000) and those who are admitted into technical, vocational and professional colleges (10 000). Only a fraction of the high school graduates are accommodated into the five conventional universities. It is estimated that over 300 000 learners drop-out from the education system in Zimbabwe each year. The net result is that the educational market is left with over 300 000 learners without opportunities for university education every year (Zimbabwe Government, 1998).

In addition to this figure, the majority of those who enrolled into the technical and vocational/professional colleges remain potential learners to enroll for university education. The aggregate of all these are the natural

market of Zimbabwe Open University. This number is expected to significantly increase when the Zimbabwe Open University adopts more 'open' entry requirements for its courses.

Table 4.1: Programs on Offer at the UCDE and Learner Enrolments

Programme	Intake	Number
BEd. (EAPPS)	1	485
BEd. (EAPPS)	2	1 456
BEd. (EAPPS)	3	299
BEd. (EAPPS)	4	846
BEd. (EAPPS)	5	1 181
BEd. (EAPPS)	6	1 186
BEd. (EAPPS)	7	476
BEd. (EAPPS)	8	679
BA (English and Communication Studies)	1	700
B.Sc. (Agriculture Management)	1	569
Diploma in Classroom Text and Discourse	2	119
Diploma in Applied Accountancy	Part 1 & 2	240
Total		8 236

Source: UCDE Registry, 1998. In Mugadzaweta, J.G. and Benza T. (1999) 'Distance Education in Zimbabwe', Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning Case Studies H-M, Brunei Darussalam, COL, 1-5 March.

Learner characteristics

The following characteristics apply to most learners that are currently studying at the University College of Distance Education in Zimbabwe (Mugadzaweta & Benza, 1999):

- More than 75% of the learners in each program are males.
- Their average age is between 35 and 45 year.
- The majority are married.
- Their highest academic qualification is 'O' Level.
- The majority have a professional qualification and are working.
- Most have their studies along with their work and family responsibilities.
- Most work under extreme isolation with no contacts or access to support services such as a library.

4.2.4 Instructional system

The main mode of instruction at the ZOU is print based on open learning materials. Face-to-face tutorials, radio broadcasts and audio-cassettes support the print materials. ZOU and Ministry of Higher Education have been studying the use of satellites for use at the ZOU as another medium of instruction.

4.2.5 Support services network

The Zimbabwe Open University has a fairly decentralised structure that is commensurate with its mission to bring "university education to every

doorstep''. ZOU delivers its services through the National Centre at Harare, 10 Regional Centres and 55 District Study Centres in all the Provinces of Zimbabwe.

The role of the National Centre is that of coordinating and facilitating to:

- develop or adapt, in close liaison with academic faculties, degree and non-degree distance education programs for which there is a demand;
- administer, organise, direct and coordinate distance education programs and support systems through out the country;
- develop or adopt a wide range of instructional media, which include printed materials, audio and videocassettes, radio programs, computer assisted learning materials etc.;
- teach course through the distance education mode and examine learners who have studied at a distance;
- establish and manage Regional and District study centres throughout the country for the delivery of distance education programs and for the provision of tutorial services;
- process examination results and awarding of qualifications;
- conduct research and training to support the distance education learning mode;
- assist the University of Zimbabwe Faculties, which desire to apply distance education technologies in their programmes or offer some of their programs at a distance.

Regional Centres are headed by Regional Coordinators. The functions of the Regional Centres are to:

- receive, process and forward application to the National Centre;
- register learners with the assistance of the Academic Registry;
- arrange for examinations venues and the conduct of the examinations with the assistance of Academic Registry;
- provide tutorial services including guidance and counseling;
- collect fees and other income and bank it in the Centre's account;
- maintain proper learner and financial records.

At the ZOU, learners have access to the main University of Zimbabwe library and laboratories for practical work. In addition administrative services have been established in the provinces for the registration of learners, payment of fees, distribution of study materials, handling of assignments and conducting examinations as well as maintaining accurate records of course work marks. Thus most of the learner support services have been decentralised and their major goals are to promote the development of learner's ability to plan their lives, careers and education, so that they are able to set realistic goals and study effectively (Mugadzaweta and Benza, 1999).

Recently, a study was conducted by Regional Coordinators and Tutors of ZOU regarding the learner satisfaction with the overall support services (Benza *et al.*, 1999). The results of the study are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Level of Student Satisfaction with Tutoring Support Services (4 parts)

Service	% Satisfactory	% Unsatisfactory
General disposition of tutors:		
Tutor preparedness for tutorials	82	18
Tutor's mastery of subject	88	12
Preparedness to assist in problems	83	17
Comments on written assignments	76	24
Assignment turnaround time	69	31
Face to face arrangements:		
Weekend school	85	15
Residential courses	55	45
Orientation	70	30
District study centre visits	13	87
Student tutor discussions	48	52
Group discussions by students	75	25

Student level of Satisfaction with Reference and Course Material Support Services

Service	% Satisfactory	% Unsatisfactory
Language clarity	99	1
Adequacy of reference books	33	67
Access to library	31	69
Relevancy of references	84	16
Course content	93	7
Handouts	56	44

Level of Satisfaction with Administration Support Services

Service	% Satisfactory	% Unsatisfactory
Admission procedures	86	14
Registration procedures	74	26
Information dissemination	62	38
Distribution of learning materials	70	30
Submission of assignments	82	18
Weekend school venue	84	16
Starting times for tutorials	89	11
Distribution of marked assignments	57	43

Level of Satisfaction with Guidance and Counselling

Service	% Satisfactory	% Unsatisfactory
Pre-admission counselling	5	95
Orientation	69	31
Course overview	82	18
Study skills	77	23
Examination counselling	67	33
Contact in sudden difficulties	38	62

(Reproduced with permission of COL from an article published in the Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning Case Studies: A-G, Brunei Darussalam, COL. 1-5 March by Mugadzaweta and Benza).

4.3 MAKERERE UNIVERSITY: UGANDA

(Extracts taken from the Commonwealth Forum of Open Learning: Case Study A-4, Brunei, Darussalam 1-5 March 1999, by Jessica Aguti. Permission obtained from the COL).

The Makerere University is the oldest University in Uganda which was established in 1922 as a Technical School, and became a University College linked to the University of London in 1949, and in 1963 became a constituent College of the University of East Africa. In 1970, it gained the status of a full university and till today is the only university in the country. The Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) of Makerere University offers distance education programmes.

4.3.1 Country profile

Uganda is an equatorial state in East Africa. Formerly a British Protectorate, Uganda became independent in 1961 and a republic in 1963. It covers an area of 241139 sq. kilometres with a population of nearly 20 million. Like most developing countries only 61.7% of the population is literate (UNDP, 1998). Also its communications network is not all that developed with, per 1000 people, 117 radios, 26 televisions, 2 main telephone lines, 0.1 fax machines, 0.1 cellular mobile telephone subscribers and 0.5 personal computers (1995) (UNDP, 1998).

4.3.2 Rationale for distance education

The first distance education programmes were introduced in the mid-60s when a number of Ugandans registered for correspondence courses (programmes) run from England. In 1965, Makerere College began to run its own correspondence courses. Also the Ministry of Education ran a number of radio broadcasts for schools and teacher training colleges. However, by 1987 the number of correspondence learners registered on the Makerere distance education programmes had dwindled to only eight (Chick, 1990). The political and economic chaos of that period affected the growth and development of these programmes.

The late 1980s reopened the debate and interest in distance education. The major reasons being: the escalating numbers of secondary school learners and very few seats available in Makerere University (the only university in Uganda) for higher education. The NGOs as well as individuals and also the Ministries of Health and Education, have initiated a number of distance education programmes in order to cater for the education of working adults or those who could not attend formal learning institutions, mainly with the aim of providing continuing education (Aguti, 1991).

Since 1991, Makerere University is offering External Degree Programmes (EDP) and is therefore functioning as a Dual-mode University.

The Department of Distance Education (DDE) set up within the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education is the only unit which has the mandate to offer programmes through distance mode.

The goal of the DDE is to offer a wide variety of relevant educational programmes for adults, using a flexible multimedia approach so as to open access to lifelong education, particularly at higher levels (IACE, 1993). The

distance education programmes are being run on a collaborative basis involving the collaborating faculties, the DDE and the Central University administration.

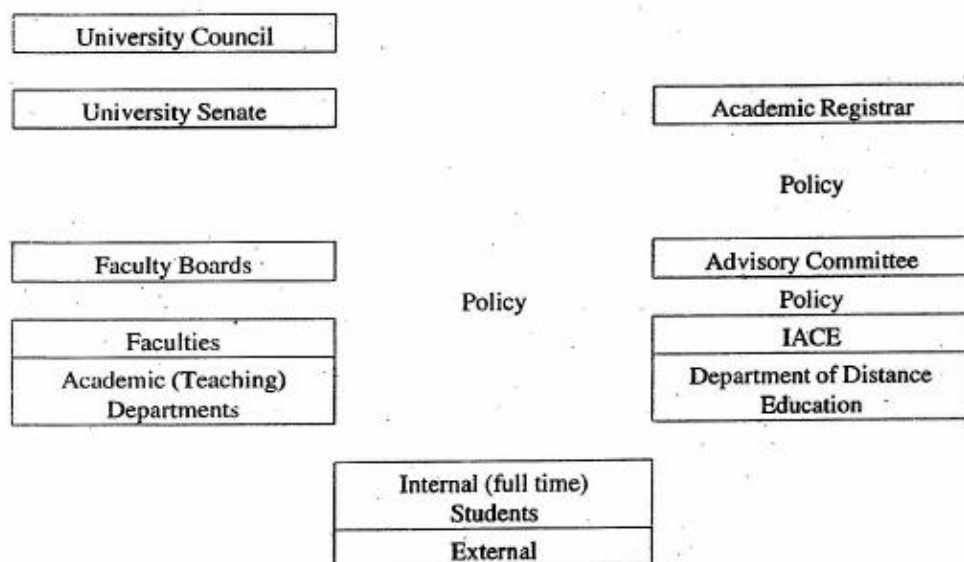


Figure 4.1: Relationship of Department of Distance Education to Other University Departments and to the External Students

Aguti, J.N. (1999). The First graduates of the Makerere University External Degree Programme in Uganda, The Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, Case Studies A-G, Brunei Darussalam, COL, 1-5 March.

4.3.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

The DDE introduced two EDPs in 1991, namely Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.). These programmes were targeted at working adult and school leavers who were unable to enroll due to lack of places.

Table 4.3: FDP Student Enrolments 1991/92 — 1998/99

Year	Course	No. Admitted	No. Registered		Did not ter	%	Continuing/ Completed	% of Registered	% Drop out
1991/92	B.Ed.	198	148	75	50	25	72	47	53
	B.Com.	112	98	88	14	12	49	50	50
1993/94	B.Ed.	178	132	74	46	26	96	66	34
	B.Com.	194	135	70	59	30	89	66	34
1994/95	B.Ed.	120	89	74	31	26	64	72	28
	B.Com.	212	207	98	05	02	140	68	32
1995/96	B.Ed.	233	132	57	101	43	125	95	05
	B.Com.	270	160	82	34	18	160	100	00
1996/97	B.Ed.	600	450	75	150	25	410	91	09
	B.Com.	1,000	620	62	380	38	580	94	06
1997/98	B.Ed.	360	300	83	60	17	300	100	00
	B.Com.	750	650	87	100	13	550	85	15
1998/99	B.Ed.	980	698	71	282	29	698	100	00
	B.Com.	750	520	69	230	31	520	100	00
Totals		5,957	4,339		1,542	Av. 24	3,853	Av. = 81	Av. = 19

Both these programmes are similar to the University programmes being offered to on campus learners. The internal B.Com is a 3-year programme while the B.Com External can be completed between 4 to 7 years. The internal B.Ed is a 2-year programme while the B.Ed External is a 3 to 4 years programme.

The DDE is also considering developing programmes such as Bachelor of Law, Bachelor of Arts in Education and Bachelor of Science in Education. There are plans to develop short programmes in the areas of Marketing, Accounting, Income Generating Projects, Writing and Publishing and Research Skills for Assistant Researcher (Aguti, 1999).

Enrolment in these programmes were initially low but have since grown. See Table 4.3 for enrolment figures.

4.3.4 Instruction system

The EDPs are being run on a multimedia approach which comprises: printed study materials, face to face sessions, learner study groups, audio programmes and radio. To launch the EDPs, printed materials were acquired from the Nairobi University and The Open College, U.K. This was financed by the Commonwealth of Learning. However this was to serve as a stop gap measure till such time the concerned faculty of Makerere University developed their own materials.

However, the university was not able to continue purchasing study materials due to lack of funding. Also the required units have not been developed again due to lack of training and funds to pay writers, editors and reviewers and also print and publish them.

In the face of shortage of learning materials, handouts have been written and along with the acquired materials are placed in the library for reference only.

Along with the study materials, audio programmes were also purchased from Nairobi University and The Open College, U.K. in order to supplement the printed materials. Radio is used as an important medium for dissemination of information to learners scattered all over the country.

Face-to-face sessions also form an important component of the teaching-learning process although these sessions are expensive to both department and learner. Learner study groups are also encouraged to provide learners an opportunity to offer each other direct and personal support. In addition the learners are provided other services which will be discussed in the next subsection on support services.

4.3.5 Support services network

“Support services which are vital in any distance education programme are not well developed in Makerere University. Although the IACE has nine centres scattered all over the country, these centres are not being utilised to offer services to distance learners as they need to be strengthened and better equipped.

The support services that are being offered are centralised. For example, library and counselling services are available only centrally. In addition,

counselling is also offered through circulars, by post and over the **telephone**. Radio is also used to disseminate information about upcoming events, requirements and schedules.

The DDE is gradually moving towards decentralized support services. Learners are now encouraged to form study groups in their localities. The DDE is also establishing study centres in already existing **institutions** of learning to provide local support. Through these centres have access to relevant literature, hold **discussions** with or without the help of a tutor. So far nine study groups have been started. (Aguti, 1999) There is thus a lot of room for growth and development at Makerere University with regard to its delivery of distance education programmes.”

4.4 THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA (UNISA)

(Extracts taken from Labuschagne, J.J. (2000) ‘The University of South Africa’, an article to be published in Manjulika S. and Venugopal Reddy, ‘The World of Open and Distance Learning’, New Delhi, Viva Books Pvt. Ltd.)

The University of South Africa (UNISA) was the first single mode distance teaching university in the world. In the beginning it was only an examining body but since 1947 it has been functioning as a distance teaching university. During the early 1990’s, the university was criticised for its limited teaching practices when compared to international norms of open distance learning practice. Since then UNISA has embarked on radical pedagogical transformation.

4.4.1 Country profile

The Republic of South Africa is 12,28,376 square kilometres in extent. It is divided into nine provinces, the Western Cape, Northern Cape, **Eastern** Cape, KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Transvaal, Northern Transvaal, **North West** Free State and Gauteng. It lies at the southern tip of the continent of Africa. South Africa includes the former white colonies of the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State. It is formerly known as the Union of South Africa (formed in 1910) and it became a republic after leaving the Commonwealth in May 1961. The country adopted a policy of Apartheid, the separate development of racial groups. The year 1990 witnessed softening of the whites’ attitude towards the 26 million agitating blacks. The government lifted the ban on The African National Congress, the primary black group fighting to end white minority rule. However, the situation did not improve very much till 1994 when the first general elections were held and Nelson Mandela was sworn as the first Black President. Once again South Africa was admitted to the Commonwealth.

South Africa is the richest African country. About 47% of the world’s total production of gold is from South Africa. It is also the biggest gold and diamond producing country in the world and one of the biggest producers of uranium.

South Africa's population consists of Blacks (76%), Whites (13%), coloureds (8.5%) and Indians (2.5%). It has a population of 40 million and a high adult literacy rate of 82%.

4.4.3 Rationale for the distance teaching university

There are three dedicated higher distance education institutions in South Africa: the University of South Africa, Vista University and Technikon Southern Africa. These three institutions have formed the Confederation of Open Learning Institutions in South Africa (COLISA) in order to collaborate closely with each other.

The University of South Africa's history dates back to the establishment of the University of the Cape of Good Hope in 1873. At first this university was only an examining body and did no teaching. In 1916 the name of this institution was changed to the University of South Africa. As a federal body with a number of constituent colleges, the University of South Africa played an important role in guiding many university colleges to eventual autonomy. This developmental role spanned several decades and under the guardianship of UNISA, several universities came into being, including the Universities of Pretoria, Free State, Rhodes, Natal, Potchefstroom and Zululand.

In 1945, the University Council resolved that the university should establish a Department of External Studies, which would not only control exercise over the curricula and teaching methods of constituent colleges, but would specialise in external studies with distinctive tuition methods under the supervision of the University and its academic organisation. In 1947, UNISA started offering distance education programmes (Labuschagne, 2000).

In the new University of South Africa Act, the institution commits itself to maintain the University of South Africa as an institution of higher learning and protector of true scholarship whose primary commitment is to respond to the needs of communities in South Africa as well as the rest of Africa, to strengthen the University of South Africa as an institution of open and flexible distance education, which, on its own and together with other institutions, will constantly strive to bring higher learning and scholarship in a cost-effective, affordable and accessible manner to whomsoever has the desire and abilities to acquire such learning and scholarship.

It has enjoyed to continue to build the University of South Africa as an institution which harbours excellence, respects racial, linguistic and cultural diversity, but does not discriminate on the grounds of race, sexual orientation, gender, language, culture, creed, class or disability, upholds and respect freedom of religion, belief and opinion, promotes academic research and tuition, and excels in service to the South African community.

4.4.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

The University of South Africa has grouped its academic programmes in six faculties, namely the Faculties of Arts, Economic and Management Services, Law, Science, Education and Theology and Religious Studies.

The Faculty of Arts consists of 26 academic departments and three institutes namely that of Behavioural Sciences, Gender Studies and Criminology.

Although students can take courses separately for non-degree purposes, most students begin by studying for a bachelor's degree. This first-level degree

grants students entrance to postgraduate studies: honours, followed by masters, and finally a doctors degree, which is the highest academic qualification. Besides degree courses, the faculty also offers a variety of certificate courses, programmes and directed workshops. The faculty presents seven bachelor's degrees. One of these, the BA degree, is the most versatile. It offers students a choice of about 50 subjects which may be combined in various ways to suit students' individual interests and needs. There are some professional degrees as well, such as, B.A. Social Work, B.A. Police and Security Services, B.A. Nursing Management, B.A. Music etc. (Labuschagne, 2000).

The Faculty of Economic and Management Services has 19 career oriented under-graduate degrees which are in line with South African companies which need well trained personnel. The Faculty consists of 10 departments. It also offers post-graduate studies.

In addition to formal degrees, the Faculty of Law also offers certificate programmes in Law, Labour Law, Estate Administration Practice, and Women and the Law. The lectures actively promote and conduct research through the Centre for Business Law, Centre for Indigenous Law, VerLoren van Themaat Centre for Public Law Studies, Unit for Legal Historical Research and the Unit for Basic Legal Education.

Distance education plays an important role in producing science graduates. Science learners at UNISA can major in: Applied Maths, Astronomy, Biochemistry, Botany, Chemistry, Computer Science and Information Systems, Geography, Mathematics, Microbiology, Operations Research, Physics, Physiology, Psychology, Statistics and Zoology.

The faculty of Education at UNISA offers degrees whereby learners qualify as preprimary, primary or secondary school teachers, or can be fully trained as trainer of people in the workplace or as an adult basic education trainer. Learners who are already qualified teachers can improve their qualifications with one of the further training programmes. The faculty has four departments (the Department of Primary School Teacher Education, Secondary School Teacher Education, Further Teacher Education and Education Studies), an institute (the Institute for Educational Research—IER), and the two units (the Unit for Training and Development, and the Unit for Community Development). Since UNISA's Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies is inter-denominational with regard to both students and lecturers, students of any denomination or faith may enrol. Several churches recognised this training as partially qualifying candidates for the ministry enrolled for postgraduate qualifications, are based outside South Africa (Labuschagne, 2000).

"The faculty offers two degrees and a diploma. In 1997, UNISA's student body, numbering 124 212, accounted for approximately one-third of all learners enrolled at South African universities. These learners come from all walks of life: the largest groups are teachers (27%), clerical staff (15%) full-time learners (15%). There are more women (56%) than men learners. The population ratio shows a majority of African, Asian and Coloured students at 62% and the preferred language of correspondence is English, at 84%. The mean age is 30 years and ranges from 17 to 85 years. Of the total learners enrolled at UNISA, 1,17,337 reside in South Africa, 4,617 in other parts of Africa and 2,258 elsewhere in the world."

In 1998 the learner enrolment has gone upto 1,17,046. The faculty-wise distribution of learners is given below in Table 4.4. and gender distribution in Table 4.5.

Table 4.4: Faculty-Wise Learner Enrolment (1997)

Economic and Management Sciences	44,815
Arts	42,249
Law	9,314
Education	5,745
Science	6,051
Theological and Religious Studies	1,084
Non-degree registration	10,965
TOTAL	1,20,223

Source: Labuschagne (2000).

Table 4.5: Gender Composition (1997 and 1998)

Year	Male	%	Female	%	TOTAL
1997	54,999	44	69,231	56	1,24,212
1998	51,810	44	65,236	56	1,17,046

Source: Labuschagne (2000).

4.4.4 Instructional system

UNISA strives to take the “distance” out of distance education by promoting what has been called as “mediated guided didactic dialogue”. The dominant medium is print: study guides and tutorial letters are the main components of a typical study package. Other media are increasingly being integrated into this package: audio cassettes, teleconferencing, videos, computer-assisted learning and multimedia packages. UNISA uses modern communication technologies such as an ISDN video conferencing facility for group discussions, and learners can use the Internet to communicate with faculty members, staff and fellow learners.

Instructional media adopted by UNISA:

Major	Minor	Duration
Print	Video Cassettes	Duration varies
Audio	Face to face	
Practicals (where necessary)	Teleconferences	

In the course of the year, learners work independently, and submit assignments regularly. The faculty members mark and return the assignments, with comments, to the learners.

UNISA's Internet presence is in the form of a Web page with a Students Online (SOL) facility, providing access to the library, academic and administrative information as well as an e-mail link to the university. It envisages rapid expansion in the use of modern information technology for teaching and learning and is actively working towards creating an on-line virtual university and making access to the Internet easier and more affordable for the learners.

4.4.5 Support services network

"The University is concerned about the needs and problems of its learners. There is a system-wide focus where every member of the university works proactively towards the ultimate goal of learner success.

There are several specialist departments which work specifically to create an environment which fosters learner's learning and achievement. The Bureau for Student Counselling helps learners to solve problems that may hamper their academic progress. The Bureau's staff does this personally through interviews, telephone calls, letters, teleconferencing, radio broadcasts and articles in the Unisa News. Workshops are held with groups of learners, topics such as academic skills, and at certain times of the year learners are sent various information and motivational brochures. Future developments will focus on developing more material for the Internet so that learner can access the material and work on their own. Innovative work is also done with the training of peer counsellors who assist newcomers to the university to adapt quickly and smoothly.

The Bureau of University Teaching works with academics to improve tuition methods and materials, and also does research and keeps abreast of developments in distance education throughout the world.

Since 1994, UNISA has expanded its commitment to learner's academic advancement by setting up learning centres through the Department of Student Support. These centres aim at creating a supportive environment conducive to learning, by providing first-year and second-year undergraduate students with a platform for interactive learning. This platform includes weekly face-to-face tutorials, counselling services, workshops on skills development, library facilities and areas for study and discussion. In response to the emerging tendency of taking education and support to the students in their community, the Unisa Learning Centres actively promote the development of community-based study centres. These study centres also generate certain support services in partnership with the communities, and operate as satellite centres of the Unisa Learning Centres.

The Student Financial Aid Bureau was established to provide financial assistance to disadvantaged students who are academically deserving but financially needy. The Bureau's mission and objective are to provide access to tertiary level education for South Africans who have been historically disadvantaged and would otherwise not have such access. The Bureau is currently part of national network aimed at providing financial aid to disadvantaged South Africans. The network involves the Tertiary Educational Fund of South Africa (TEFSA), the United Nations Educational Training Programme for Southern Africa (UNETPSA) and various other donors countrywide.

Thus, distance tuition at UNISA is augmented by an integral learner support system that uses tutorial support, counselling services, video and teleconferencing. These support services are delivered by from the main campus, five main learning centres and eleven satellite learning centres. UNISA runs more than 450 examination centres where learners from six faculties, comprising 60 academic departments, write exams.

Relatively few learners can attend the discussion classes held in Pretoria and at the provincial centres for some courses, but the issues touched on in these classes are reported in tutorial letters reaching everyone registered for a particular course.

The UNISA Library is one of the largest academic libraries in Africa and also one of the best endowed with information resources, information technology and expert staff. The past 50 years have seen rapid growth in the book collection which totals almost 1.5 million volumes. In addition, the library stocks over 3,00,000 other items as well as 7,000 current periodical titles. Learners, academic staff and other clients of the library borrow more than 7,30,000 books annually. These books may be borrowed personally or by post from the main and branch libraries.

A team of subject librarians meet the information research requirements of academic staff and postgraduate learners on an individual basis."

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we described the provision of learner support at the two single mode distance teaching universities of Africa and one dual mode university.

A brief contextual information was provided about each country, its higher education scenario and mandate of the open universities. The academic programmes they offer, the instructional system adopted by them and the details of enrolment were described in order to enable you to understand the nature of support provided to distance learners in the right perspective.

Activity

The 'dark' continent namely, Africa is no longer dark after having gone through case studies of: a newly opened open university (ZOU); a dual mode university (MU); and Africa's oldest Distance Teaching University (UNISA). Differentiate between the instructional systems adopted by the single mode universities and the dual mode university. What are the implications for the SSS of each?

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UNIT 5 CASE STUDIES OF INDUSTRIAL COUNTRIES: AUSTRALIA, ISRAEL AND JAPAN

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 University of Southern Queensland (USQ): Australia
 - 5.2.1 Country profile
 - 5.2.2 Rationale for the dual mode university
 - 5.2.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 5.2.4 Instructional system
 - 5.2.5 Support services network
- 5.3 The Open University of Israel (OUI): Israel
 - 5.3.1 Country profile
 - 5.3.2 Rationale for the open university
 - 5.3.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 5.3.4 Instructional system
 - 5.3.5 Support services network
- 5.4 University of the Air (UA): Japan
 - 5.4.1 Country profile
 - 5.4.2 Rationale for the open university
 - 5.4.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 5.4.4 Instructional system
 - 5.4.5 Support services network
- 5.5 Let us Sum up

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have attempted to describe the support services provided by two open universities and one dual mode university, operating in industrial countries, namely Israel, Japan and Australia respectively. By the end of this unit, you will have gained useful insights into the profiles of these countries and the backdrop against which these universities have come into existence. Besides, you should be able to:

- list the types of academic programmes these universities are offering;
- familiarise yourself with the learner enrolment in them;
- describe their instructional system; and
- describe their provision of learner support.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The three countries covered in this unit are industrial countries located in different parts of the world. Australia is located in the Southern Hemisphere and is an island continent. Israel is in far West Asia while Japan is in far East Asia. They are all industrial countries with high standards of living which are measured with the help of economic indicators like per capita, gross national product, social indicators like expectancy, health status etc. In

contrast to the developing countries discussed in Units 1, 2, 3 and 4 of this block, these countries have fairly well advanced educational systems as well as telecommunications systems. It would be worthwhile to study the rationale behind the setting up of open universities in these countries where illiteracy is almost absent, and also to look at the types of learner support being provided to distance learners in such situations.

5.2 THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND (USQ): AUSTRALIA

(Extracts from USQ website: <http://www.usq.edu.au/decl>, 1998).

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) has been functioning as a dual mode institution since 1977.

5.2.1 Country profile

Australia is located in the Southern Hemisphere between the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific. An island continent, Australia has a land area of 300000 square miles (800000 square kilometres) with striking characteristics that make it isolated in many ways. The Commonwealth of Australia is an independent federation of six States (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania) and two internal territories (the self-governing Northern Territory; and the Australian Capital Territory).

It is a multicultural, advanced industrial nation. The population is 17.9 millions (1995), (UNDP, 1998) most of whom (70%) live in State capitals or major cities on the south and east coast. Most of the population is not indigenous. Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, the indigenous people of Australia, make up about 1% of Australia's population and are mainly living in the rural areas, especially in Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory and in cities like Sydney and Brisbane (NIME, 1994).

The adult literacy is 99% (1995). The expenditure on education is 5.6% of the GNP which accounts for 13.6% of the total government expenditure (1993-95). Australia has a complete infrastructure for broadcasting, 510 telephone lines, 128 cellular phones, 55.4 internet users and 276 personal computers per 1000 people (UNDP, 1998).

5.2.2 Rationale for the dual mode university

The aim of providing access to education for groups which have for many reasons been disadvantaged in the education system, that have been denied access to higher education such as people living in rural and geographically isolated areas and for educationally and socio-economically disadvantaged adults, are the major factors responsible for the introduction of distance education in Australia. There is no open university in Australia but there are more than 20 conventional universities offering programmes through distance education. In this section we will be studying one such dual mode conventional university namely the University of Southern Queensland.

The University of Southern Queensland was established in 1967 to offer on campus higher education to the people of the Darling Downs Regions of Southern Queensland. Later on it was converted to a dual mode institute in 1977 (institute was granted university status in 1989 as University of Southern Queensland) providing education to the off-campus learners in over 40 countries in addition to Australian learners (<http://www.usq.edu.au/dec/>, 1998).

The Institute expanded rapidly between 1990 and 1998 to become one of the largest higher education institutions and one of the country's eight designated Distance Education Centres.

5.2.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

There are six faculties at the USQ which includes Arts, Business, Commerce, Education, Engineering and Surveying and Science. These faculties provide graduate and certificate courses upto the Masters Degree, to both on-campus and off-campus (distance education) learners (ICDL, 1998).

The University had around 7000 learners in 1996, with an annual intake of approximately 1700. The enrolment has gone up to 13,387 in 1997. Region-wise (within Australia) and country-wise learner enrolment classification is given in Tables 5.1 and 5.2.

Table 5.1: Region-wise Student Enrolment in Australia in 1997

Region	Number of students
Queensland	8343
New South Wales and ACT	1462
Victoria	315
Western Australia	126
South Australia	121
Northern Territory	108
Tasmania	70
Australians living overseas	338
TOTAL	10883

Source: ICDL, 1998.

Table 5.2: Country-wise Student Enrolment in 1997

Country	Number of Students
Malaysia	1164
Singapore	527
Hongkong	389
South Africa	82
Pacific Islands	81
United Arab Emirates	54
Other Countries (USA, Canada, Asia and African nations)	207
TOTAL	2054

Source: ICDL, 1998.

The learner profile indicates that a majority of the population belongs to the 20 to 40 year age group. A gender-wise analysis shows that the number of female (49%) and male (51%) off-campus learners was found to be almost equal.

5.2.4 Instructional system

A variety of media are used for offering instruction, some of these are print, audio tapes, telephone, video tapes, teleconferencing (audio, audiographic video), computer managed learning/computer-based exercise, CD-ROM multimedia presentation, computer mediated conferencing, Internet-based WWW material. To effectively manage the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of Distance Education methodologies and technologies, a Flexible Delivery Committee (FDC) was established, chaired by the Vice Chancellor.

5.2.5 Support services network

"The USQ has a regional network of 26 Regional Liaison Officers (RLO) in 21 Regions throughout Eastern Australia. The RLOs work from their homes on a part time basis. The learners send their inquiries through the RLO network, telephone, fax or e-mail etc. The learner's inquiries, received in outreach services, are entered into a database. The inquiries which are administrative in nature are immediately answered by the outreach services staff, whereas academic inquiries are sent to the lecturer concerned. The outreach section also manages the residential schools which are voluntary. The distance learners can visit the campus for face-to-face lectures or tutorials, interacting with other learners and faculty or to avail of the other services available.

USQ Australian centres hold resource materials, including audio cassettes and books for recommended reading. Centres also have loudspeaking telephone facilities with loudspeakers, for tutorial purposes, and facilities for learners to undertake computer-assisted learning activities. These services supplement the USQ teaching package, which comprises study books and books of readings supplemented by audio cassettes, slides, computer managed learning booklets, administrative packages, and study charts as appropriate to unit objectives. USQ has also established numerous study centres in other countries."

5.3 THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF ISRAEL (OUI): ISRAEL

The Open University of Israel is one of the first open universities to be set up in the Asian Continent in 1974.

5.3.1 Country profile

Israel is situated in South West Asia, along the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea and has an area of 8019 square miles or 20770 square kilometres. The population of Israel is 5.5 millions (1995) with an annual growth rate of 2.5% (170-95) (UNDP, 1998). Since 1973, the Israeli population growth has slowed down, partly as a result of a stabilization in the natural growth rate and partly because of a fall in the number of

immigrants and an increase in the number of emigrants. The adult literacy rate is 95% (1995). 6.6% of the GNP is spent on education which accounts for 12.3% of the total government expenditure (1993-95) (UNDP, 1998). Israel is a free market economy with a dominant private sector.

Israel has one of the densest transportation networks in the Middle-East. Israel is also fully integrated into the international communications system. There are 489 radios, 303 televisions, 418 telephone lines, 53 cellular phones, 53.5 internet users and 100 personal computers per 1000 people (1995) (UNDP, 1998).

5.3.2 Rationale for the open university

The Open University of Israel is a single mode distance teaching university designed to offer academic programmes. The university was established in 1974 by the Ministry of Education (ICDL, 1998).

5.3.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

Authorized by the Israeli Council for Higher Education to confer a Bachelor's Degree, the OUI offers 400 courses in Life Sciences, Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Computer Science, Social Sciences, Management, Jewish Studies, Education, Humanities, Music and Art. The OUI also offers a Master's degree in Computer Science (Kurtz, 1998).

The university's learner enrolment has been steadily increasing. From 15717 in 1991 to 20,000 in 1994, 27461 in 1997 and 29000 in 1998.

The learners at OUI are older than their counterparts at other universities, on an average 30 years old, and 95% of the open university learners are working.

Learners from Russia and other countries (around 1000) are enrolled in OUI for Judaic studies. They are taught in Russia and a course co-ordinator in Israel is responsible for supervising the work of the tutors (ICDL, 1998; Enoch and Arav, 1998). Learners come from virtually every walk of life including teachers and school principals, administrative workers, technicians, policemen, bankers, managers, senior citizens, and many others. Some have college degrees and doctorates and are seeking to broaden their education or to update their knowledge; and some do not even have a complete high school education.

5.3.4 Instructional system

Each course at the Open University is designed to meet the particular needs of the learner coping with individual studies at home, and is composed of some or all of the following elements:

- text books (published by the open university);
- audio-visual aids;
- television and radio broadcasts;
- cable TV and computers;
- studies via satellite;
- technology, media and supplements;
- laboratory kits;
- tutorial guidance;

- tutoring by telephone;
- field trips and symposia;
- group study sessions;
- study centres;
- study sessions via satellite.

Study texts

The Open University of Israel publishes 450.000 volumes a year, about half of which are purchased outside the framework of the University's courses. The University's textbooks are used in all the other universities in the country and are very much in demand by Israeli learners.

Assignments

The learner must complete a large number of assignments reviewing the material to be covered, some in the form of computer-marked assignments and some graded by the tutor. Final exams are held under supervision in exam centers throughout the country on designated days. Some courses have specific additional requirements, such as field trips, workshops, laboratory work or seminar papers.

Technology and media supplements

Television broadcasts accompany many of the courses. Some of these broadcasts are produced by the open university especially for its courses and others are quality films acquired by the University for its educational purposes. The open university broadcasts on cable television, with segments dispersed throughout the day. The broadcasts made on, every day of the week, offer enrichment in the broad spectrum of topics taught at the open university. Telecourses, in which the video material is an integral part of the course and not only enrichment of it, are also offered. Studies are broadcast via satellite to 15 sites throughout Israel, offering interactive lectures, professional training programs and symposia. Computer-mediated studies are held in several courses with learners communicating with teachers, as well as with each other, and submitting their coursework via the modem.

Special kits are provided to science learners so that experiments may be performed at home. The electronics kit, for example, includes an oscilloscope, a signal generator, power supply and other electrical components which in different combinations allow for a broad range of experiments. Geology learners receive kits of stones and minerals, and learners of life sciences receive seeds, flowers, and flies. Advanced science courses require lab work in sophisticated laboratories throughout the country.

Music and language courses are accompanied by audio cassettes, maps, calculators, tape recorders, slides with compact viewers, and personal computers are other aids made available to learners.

Symposia offering special screenings, guest lectures and other education elements to amplify and complement the course material are also held.

Study sessions via satellite

One of the latest methods adopted for instruction through satellite communication is called OFEK, and has been operating since February

1995. The OFEK is a joint venture of the OUI and Gilat Communications Ltd., and is a private educational network, that transmit lessons as high quality digital broadcast from one of the studios located at the OUI Campus at Tel-Aviv to the Israeli Satellite - "AMOS". From there it reaches more than 40 remote classes spread all over Israel and abroad. The learners at the remote classes see the teacher on a large television screen and actively participate in the study session. They can interact with the teacher using telephones or computers connected to the satellite system. (Kurtz, 1998)

5.3.5 Support services network

The University has 110 study centres across the country. These centres are set up in such a way that no learner is required to travel more than 30 minutes from his/her home or place of work to a study centre. Around 700 tutors throughout the country offer guidance and a personal link between the learner and the University. They hold tutorial sessions at these study centers throughout Israel to clarify and review the material, and are also available by telephone or mail. Tutorial sessions range in levels of frequency from once a week to once every three weeks, depending on the study format chosen by the learner. Study centers, library and laboratory facilities are located in educational institutions all over Israel. Attendance at tutorial sessions is usually optional, unless field trips, lab experiments or other activities require compulsory attendance. Study centers are equipped with all the material relevant to the courses, and related video films and tapes and other aids may be obtained there.

Of late the University has also experimented with online computer teaching where one tutor situated in a studio in Tel-Aviv communicates simultaneously with learners in ten or more centres across the country. (Enoch and Arav, 1998).

The Open University of Israel, in co-operation with the Histadrut - General Labor Federation, runs a program which combines preparatory teaching and a group study framework with intensive tutorial guidance. Banks, the Police Force, Military Industries, El-A1 Airlines, the Defence Ministry, the Israel Defence Forces, and a variety of other organizations, industries and business concerns take part in programs of group study towards a Bachelor's Degree run by the Open University. These are usually run on the basis of weekly group study sessions. Some programs focus upon economics and management, others on humanities and social sciences. Young learners, taking an intensive study program to finish the Bachelor's degree more rapidly, also prefer the group format and the campus atmosphere (ICDL, 1998).

5.4 UNIVERSITY OF THE AIR (UA): JAPAN

(Extracts from the University of the Air Brochure, 1999.)

The University of the Air is the first single mode university to be set up in Japan in 1981 using distance mode.

5.4.1 Country profile

The Japanese archipelago forms a convex crescent off the eastern coast of the Asian mainland. The total area of Japan is 377,483 square Km or 145,747 square miles. Japan is thickly populated with a population of 125 million (1995) and an annual growth rate of 0.7% (1970-95) (UNDP, 1998). The second problematic aspect of the population is its age structure, since as death rates declined steadily, life expectancy climbed to among the highest in the world.

Japan is one of the richest countries of the world. This is no mean achievement for a densely populated nation living in a relatively small national territory with little or no natural resources. Japan is, for all practical purposes, a free market economy but the influence of the government is all pervasive.

The Japanese are the most literate people in Asia with 97% adult literacy. The expenditure on education is 3.8% of the GNP (1995) which accounts for 10.86% of the total government expenditure (1993-95) (UNDP, 1998). There are 916 radios, 619 televisions, 488 telephone lines, 81 cellular phones, 7.2 internet users and 153 personal computers per 1000 people (1995) (UNDP, 1998). Japan has the most advanced communication infrastructure in Asia.

5.4.2 Rationale for the open university

The University of the Air was established primarily in response to the general needs for lifelong education. By adopting distance education methods, the UA can make use of the latest knowledge and newest educational technology to offer a system of higher education to a broader spectrum of the population and also meet contemporary needs. The UA is the first independent single mode institution to be set up in Japan in 1981. (University of the Air, 1995).

5.4.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment

The UA offers a Bachelors degree in Liberal Arts in 3 areas (Science in Everyday Life, Industrial and Social Studies, and Humanities and Natural Sciences) with 6 majors (Living and Welfare, Human Development and Education, Social and Economic Studies, Industry and Technology, Humanities and Natural Science). The UA also offers 313 broadcast courses including courses offered for individual research (University of the Air, 1999).

The UA first enrolled learners in 1985. In 1999 the student enrolment was 73446. The student profile and details of foreign students is given in Tables 5.3 and 5.4 respectively.

“Three types of learners are enrolled at the university viz. regular learners, one year non-degree learners and one semester non-degree learners.

Regular Learner: This is a degree-oriented learner who intends to graduate from the University of the Air. A learner intending to obtain a university degree enrolls as a regular learner. The university requires a high school diploma or a certificate for entering university for enrolment. A regular learner majors in one of the six major fields of study and must enroll at the University of Air for at least four years. For more details you may see Figure 5.1.

**Table 5.3: Student Profile (Including Special Audit Students) of UA Students
(1995 batch)**

Source: Department of Distance Education Records in Aguti, J.N. (1999). The First Graduates of the Makerere University External Degree Programme. The Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning: Case Studies A-G, Brunei Darussalam, COL, 1-5 March. Reproduced with permission of the COL.

Occupation

Unit: person

Classification	Total	Office workers including store clerks and bank tellers	Unemployed including housewives	Public officials	Self-employed	Free-lance professionals	Farmers	Teachers	Others
total	57,979	17,640	13,523	8,239	1,375	1,408	208	1,699	13,887
Regular Student	25,763	8,290	5,749	3,139	536	642	55	589	6,763
One-Year Non-Degree Student	20,163	6,283	5,200	2,998	614	551	107	738	3,672
One-Semester Non-Degree Student	10,120	3,061	2,555	2,095	225	215	46	370	1,553
Research Student	37	6	19	7	0	0	0	2	3

Table 5.4: Foreign Students at UA (1995)

Classification	Total	Korea	US	China	Taiwan	Canada	North Korea	Other Countries
Total	262	128	5	47	20	2	25	35
Regular Student	120	51	1	22	12	1	13	20
One-Year Non-Degree Student	105	61	3	18	8	1	6	8
One-Semester Non-Degree Student	34	16	1	5	0	0	5	7
Research Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Special Audit Student	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0

Source: The University of the Air, (1995), The University of the Air, Chiba, Japan, p. 27 and 28.

College graduates or those with over two years of education at other universities, Junior colleges or Technology Colleges can be transferred into the junior year of the University of the Air. Regular learners are allowed to extend their enrolment up to 10 years, or to leave and re-enter the University of Air system. This enables them to pursue their studies in accordance with the needs and requirements for regular learners which are: broadcast lectures — Seven 45-minute programs; Printed study materials — 45-60 pages; Face-to-face instruction — one session (2 hours 15 minutes).

The standard weekly study load does not include the time necessary for preparation or review. Broadcast lectures requires learners to submit answers/reports to assignments given in the middle of the semester.

One year non-degree learner and one-semester (6 months) non-degree learner: These two types of learners study particular subjects without necessarily wishing to graduate from the University of the Air. They may be enrolled on either a one-year or one-semester basis. Enrolment is open to any one over 18 years of age. For more details you may see Figure 5.1.

For universities and junior colleges, the partial availability of a part of courses and programs offered by other institutions of higher education helps enrich their own curriculum. It is upon this understanding that a Mutual Credit Transfer Agreement was exchanged between the University of the Air and the other universities. At the University of the Air, the learners studying under the benefit of this system are called "Special Audit Learners". One of the professed aims of the University of the Air is "to promote credit transfer with existing universities." In order to reach this aim, the university of the air is currently making great efforts for exchanging similar agreements with a larger number of universities. As of August, 1995, The university of the Air has entered into Mutual Credit Transfer agreement with 85 universities."

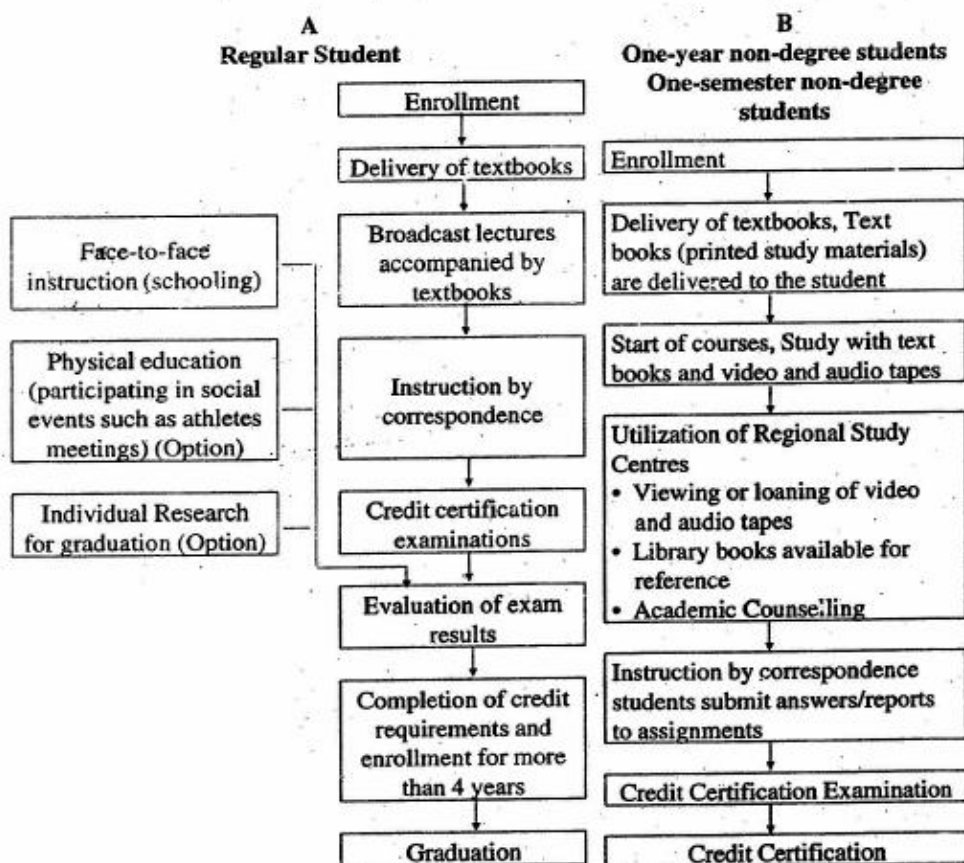


Figure 5.1: Instructional System at the University of the Air

Source: University of Air, (1999) The University of the Air — Information Brochure, Chiba, Japan.

5.4.4 Instructional system

Television and radio broadcasts are used as core-media, supplemented by face-to-face sessions, printed textbooks and audio visual materials.

Broadcast programmes are prepared by instructors and programme directors at the National Institute of Multi-Media Education (NIME) and academic staff of the University of the Air. Printed materials are prepared by instructors.

Broadcast lectures

“In each semester spanning 15 weeks, 2 credit courses have 15 broadcast lectures (a 45 min. lecture is aired once a week), while 4 credit courses have 30 broadcast lectures (45 min. lectures aired twice a week). In principle, all courses are transmitted either by TV or by radio. The learner who has missed broadcast lectures can make up for the lost hours by studying with the audio or video tapes provided at the study center. 18 hours of broadcast daily between 6 A.M. to 12 mid-night is being provided.

Printed study materials (textbooks)

Printed study materials, mainly textbooks, are provided for all the courses offered through the broadcast method. Two-credit courses usually have 100-120 page textbooks, which are sent to each learner after the tuition is paid in, but before the start of the broadcast. These textbooks are written by the lecturers who teach the course, and published by the society for the promotion of the University of the Air. Textbooks are also sold at most of the major bookstores.

Instruction by correspondences

Each broadcast lecture is followed by a test for the learners at the end of the 8th week of study. The learner must submit his/her answer, which will be graded and evaluated. The learner must pass the test in order to qualify himself/herself for the credit certification examination.

Face-to-face instruction

Face-to-face instruction is carried out at the study centers. In order to graduate, regular learners must earn at least 20 credits through face-to-face instruction. This offers each learner an opportunity to learn directly from the teaching staff and also a chance of contact and of the exchange of views between learners.

In principle, the same courses are offered at all study centers. About 100 courses are taught this way during each semester. Five classes (each class: 2 hrs. 15 min.) are given per course according to 3 different schedules: (1) every-other-week class; every other week (at the same time, on the same week day), (2) Sunday class; 2-3 consecutive Sundays, or (3) intensive class: 2-3 consecutive days in August and February. A learner completing these 5 face-to-face classes receives 1 credit.

Physical education

Keeping in mind the fact that the learners enrolling in physical education come from all walks of life, the classes are quite flexible. For example, participation in physical activities given by organisations other than the University of the Air, under appropriate coaching, leads to the earning of a credit.”

5.4.5 Support services network

The University has established two types of centres across the country viz. Study Centres and Regional Study Centres. The University of the Air offers not only lectures over radio and television but also face-to-face sessions to be conducted at the Study Centers. In principle, learners can select the Study

Center which is most convenient to them. Study Centres organise classroom instruction, provide academic counselling, books and journals available for study and research and taped lectures available for re-viewing; and they also provide a place for final examinations and for learners to meet.

Regional Study Centers have been established to expand the broadcast lectures beyond the Kanto Area, as part of a plan to extend their coverage to all across the nation. The Regional Study Center provides video and audio-tapes of the broadcast lectures for use by the general public. In this way, these facilities are expected to contribute to enlarging the opportunity for continuing education. Regional Study Centers only accept non-degree learners. They can study with video and audio-tapes, receive supervision and take credit certification examinations.

In 1999, there were 49 study centres (UA, 1999). Special learner commute discount certificates are issued to regular learners when they commute from home to the study centres or the UA's headquarters.

Since January, 1998, the UA began to broadcast programmes nationwide by Sky Perfec TV in addition to broadcasts by the university's land based TV and radio stations. These broadcasts are course specific programmes; special lectures; programmes for bulletins and announcements; for answering student queries; and also for precounselling purposes (UA, 1999).

5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, described the provision of learner support at open universities in two industrial countries of Asia, namely Japan and Israel and in one dual mode university of Australia. A brief contextual information about each country, the mandate of each university, its academic programmes, pattern of enrolment and instructional package have been provided. This will enable you to understand the nature of support provided to distance learners in the right perspective.

Activity

In this unit you have studied about the open and distance learning practices of 3 important industrial countries, 2 of which are located in Asia. A cross comparison of these institutions operating in different settings but belonging to the same category, would be interesting. What are the promises made by these institutions and how far they have been fulfilled?

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UNIT 6 CASE STUDIES OF INDUSTRIAL COUNTRIES: CANADA, UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 The Open Learning Agency (OLA): Canada
 - 6.2.1 Country profile
 - 6.2.2 Rationale for the Open Learning Agency
 - 6.2.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 6.2.4 Instructional system
 - 6.2.5 Support services network
- 6.3 The Open University, UK, (UKOU): United Kingdom.
 - 6.3.1 Country profile
 - 6.3.2 Rationale for the Open University
 - 6.3.3 Academic programmes and learner enrolment
 - 6.3.4 Instructional system
 - 6.3.5 Support services network
- 6.4 Western Governors University (WGU): United States
 - 6.4.1 Country profile
 - 6.4.2 Rationale for the Western Governors Virtual University
 - 6.4.3 Academic programmes and academic awards
 - 6.4.4 Instructional media and support services
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have attempted to describe the support services provided by Open Universities in among the most advanced industrial nations namely Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. By the end of this unit you will gain useful insights into the profiles of these countries and the backdrop against which these universities have come into existence. Besides you should be able to:

- list the types of academic programmes these universities are offering;
- familiarise yourself with the learner enrolment and profile of learners;
- describe their instructional system; and
- explain their provision of learner support.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we discussed three universities in three industrial countries. In this unit we will be looking closely at three more open universities operating in the most industrialised countries of the world viz., Canada, U.K. and the USA, particularly the U.S., are the world leaders in technology and telecommunications. It would be interesting to study what

they have acquired on the job. For example, WGU awards its competency-based degrees and certificates based on what a learner knows, rather than on the number of hours a learner has spent in class or the number of credits earned. Thus, the requirements for a degree and certificate are not based on the number of college credits accumulated or the core courses completed, but on competencies. Degree programs are built to allow learners to apply what they know regardless of whether they have ever taken a class. Instead of completing a certain set of courses for a given number of credit hours, the learners must demonstrate that they have acquired the required skill and knowledge (the set of competencies, as WGU calls them) through their own life or work experiences. If not, there are distance courses available for them to gain those skills and knowledge.

Learners can demonstrate their competencies by completing an assessment, which may be either a traditional test (paper-and-pencil or computer-based) or a practical demonstration of the skill concerned. A WGU assessment can take many different forms: it may be a math test; it may be a design assignment using desktop publishing tools; it may be an oral presentation of a comprehensive marketing plan for a new product; or it may be a research paper on the function of liver enzymes. In each case, the knowledge or skill of learners in a given area is assessed or measured through an appropriate means, allowing them to prove their competence.

WGU's first three degree and certificate programs were opened to learners in 1998, and 15 additional programs are expected to be ready by 1999. The University awards a degree or a certificate in a variety of disciplines of study, from any one of the dozens of institutions and corporations that are affiliated to it (<http://www.wgu.edu/wgu/about/index.html>, 1998).

6.4.4 Instructional media and support services

"WGU is a virtual university — a "cyber" university that is not bound by its location, because it doesn't have a campus in the physical sense. By using the latest technology WGU is able to reach the learner regardless of where they are. The delivery methods WGU uses are: e-mail, the World Wide Web, closed-circuit cable television, video and audio tapes, videoconferencing, satellite broadcasts, voice mail and other traditional methods such as mail service, etc.

Some distance delivered courses arrange for learners to meet at regularly scheduled intervals (every Thursday at 7 p.m. via videoconference, for example) while others have no set meeting times (the instructor may ask the learner to download course material from the Internet and discuss that material with other learners via e-mail). The university also provides services like an online library, online bookstore, online telephone advising services and financial aid. Various types of skills assessment either electronically or through a net work is also being provided at local centres. The university has offices that span geographically. WGU's academic offices are located in Denver and Colorado at present. The university's administrative offices are located in Salt Lake City and Utah."

6.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we described the provision of learner support in three very advanced, industrial countries of the world. The last case study was of a virtual university — the educational pedagogy of the 21st century. In this unit we provided a brief contextual information about the country, its higher educational scenario and mandate of the universities. We also described the academic programmes, instructional package and learner enrolment in order to enable you to understand the nature of support being provided in the right perspective.

Activity

In the last unit of this block you have studied about the UKOU (mother of all OUs), OLA of Canada, and WGU one of the first virtual universities of the U.S. and also of the world. How WGU is different from UKOU and OLA? Describe the various uses of different technologies by these institutions for providing learner support to their distance learners.

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Dear Student,

While studying the units of this block, you may have found certain portions of the text difficult to comprehend. We wish to know your difficulties and suggestions, in order to improve the course. Therefore, we request you to fill out and send us the following questionnaire, which pertains to this block. If you find the space provided insufficient, kindly use a separate sheet.

Questionnaire

Enrolment No.

1. How many hours did you need for studying the units?

Unit no.	1	2	3	4
No. of hours				

2. Please give your reactions to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Items	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Poor	Give specific examples, if poor
Presentation Quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Language and Style	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Illustrations Used (diagrams, tables, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conceptual Clarity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Check Your Progress Questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Feedback to CYP Questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

3. Any other comments:

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New Delhi - 110068, India.



Block

5

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BLOCK 5 LEARNER SUPPORT: A REVIEW OF ARTICLES

Introduction to the Block

Many people today, whether practitioners or students, wish to know something of distance education. The field grows rapidly, with new and significant developments year by year. There are now also a respectable number of publications on the subject. But this growing literature is often not easily accessible to those who wish to read it. A student of distance education needs to have a reasonable degree of familiarity with the theory, the general principles of materials production, delivery, management and support systems. This selection aims to help you gain such familiarity in the area of 'support services'. It looks at the process of learning at a distance and considers how to encourage it.

The articles in this block have been chosen because of their significance. Some are quite old, but have been included because they are classics—either they have stood the test of time, or they deserve reading because of the stimulating views they propound.

The selections have been annotated as follows:

1. Each article is introduced through an 'editors' notes', which summarises the main points of the article.
2. The 'editors' notes' also attempt to relate the article to themes and issues which are dealt with in training programmes in distance education.
3. The block begins with a general introduction (Unit 1) which, while briefly touching upon the themes of each case in the block, attempts to explain the rationale of the selection, comments on the relationship between the items and on the various issues and themes that emerge.
4. The general introduction (Unit 1) also quotes briefly from a number of other important articles, to give you a broader view.

It is impossible to make a brief selection of this nature comprehensive. We hope, however, that it is instructive, useful and enjoyable. In the main, you may notice that this block reinforces what has been presented in the first four blocks of this course. Secondly, it gives you a first-hand feel of original and serious work in distance education. Annotations have been provided systematically to help you go through the selections.

UNIT 1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Janet Jenkins, B.N. Koul and Manjulika Srivastava

In course ES-311, we discussed how various socio-political, technological and educational developments over the past years of this century led to the growth of distance education as a worldwide phenomenon. We also touched briefly upon the various principles which have come to be the philosophical foundations of this phenomenon. Besides, we dealt with the variety of its forms, their scope and application in differing socio-educational contexts. In general, it shows a strong and decisive alternative to conventional face-to-face education.

Non-contiguity of the teacher and the learner being the primary point of departure from conventional education, we addressed ourselves to the issues pertaining to self-instructional materials in course ES-312. We touched upon various theoretical and practical issues related to course design, media mix and strategies of presentation. Superficially, it would appear that self-instructional materials which incorporate functions normally performed by a face-to-face teacher, completely resolve the problem of non-contiguity referred to above. But the fact is that even the best self-instructional materials fall short of achieving what they are intended to achieve. High drop-out rates, for example, are a common phenomenon in distance education. Obviously, there are factors outside self-instructional materials which play a significant role in this overall process of teaching and learning in distance education. Self-instructional materials can, at best, represent various degrees and types of teaching, while learning is primarily a learner centred function. The shortfall in achieving the objectives of a distance education programme may to a great extent depend on factors related to the learners. Obviously a consideration of such factors, the issues that arise from them, and the solutions thereof, are matters of concern for distance educators.

It is these concerns to which we devote this fifth block. In all we present seven articles. In the first (Unit 2), Graham Gibbs and his colleagues try to identify characteristics of students which pose difficulties in their learning; in the second (Unit 3) David Sewart puts forth the view that distance learners should be recognised as a learning community very different from the conventional community of face-to-face learners; in the third (Unit 4) James Taylor looks at the issue of flexible delivery through the new communication technologies; in the fourth (Unit 5) Sam Ayer and Catherine Smith study the consumer preferences for flexible education; in the fifth (Unit 6) Janet Macdonald and Robin Mason look at information handling skills and resource based learning and the issue of their utilisation by distance learners, and lastly in the sixth one (Unit 7) Charlotte Gunawardene examines the unique features of the on-line medium and their impact on social cohesiveness, group dynamics, interaction and participation and also the design of collaborative learning through computer conferencing. We shall introduce these articles in the same order before we go to the actual texts. An important point to note about these texts is that many of them pertain to the UK Open University, so the expression 'Open University' invariably refers to that institution.

Distance educators not only stress the importance of study skills for distance learning, but also aim to provide detailed instructions in such skills, as poor study skills are certainly a handicap for a distance learner. However, to blame poor study skills for all that goes wrong in learning may not be reasonable. Various learner factors, such as different approaches to learning, differing levels of sophistication of the learners and differing reactions to instructional materials, all contribute to the quality and degree of learning. Based on these insights, it has been suggested that apart from some reasonable training in study skills, distance learners need to be made aware of the process of learning, the nature and purpose of various learning tasks, flexible and suitable study strategies, and also their own motivations and abilities, in relation to learning materials. Such awareness is bound to help the process of learning.

Besides the above insights, there is yet another interesting view presented by Peter Jarvis, who makes a distinction between pedagogy and andragogy. The former pertains to imparting and absorbing of knowledge in general and the latter, to the business of teaching *adults*. This is significant as most distance learners are adults. Jarvis suggests that course design should be based on both the principles of pedagogy and those of andragogy, and he explains the four basic assumptions of andragogy as follows:

- **Self concept:** Much of the present Open University course approach leads students to become dependent upon the academic system for both the knowledge to be learned and the method by which it has to be learned. However, students should be encouraged to be more independent learners so that some of the knowledge they need for the course should be left for them to discover and time might be set aside and programmed for the students to embark upon their discovery learning. This means that the learning outcomes may not necessarily be those envisaged by the course team. Part-time tutors may be encouraged to act as resources and support persons for the students during this aspect of their learning.
- **Experience:** Adults bring a rich store of experience to the process of the course, so that new cognitive information should be selected, organized and presented in such a way that students can relate it to that experience. Naturally this presents difficulties for the course team since every student brings a different store of knowledge to the course, but this diversity itself might be employed in peer teaching in tutorials. Additionally, projects might be used as a learning technique, so that students may be encouraged to learn through their own experience as well as through reading, viewing, listening and memorising.
- **Readiness to learn:** The curriculum should relate to the students' needs. Hence the relevance of that which is being learned should always be self-evident to students. Options might be built into individual courses so that students might select aspects of the course that are more relevant to them. Such an approach may be more costly in terms of manpower, time and money but it is one that could be employed with courses that have a high drop out rate.
- **Learning orientation:** Adults tend to have a problem-centred approach to learning rather than a subject-centred one. Therefore, the course needs to incorporate the demands of themes and topics as well as the demands of the academic subject. Learners may be much more motivated to study

the logical structure of knowledge once they have recognized its relevance by having first followed its application in a thematic manner.

Naturally, the above suggestions are only initial ones and the andragogic approach may be applied much more exhaustively than these few points indicate. However, an andragogic perspective would enrich many of the courses produced by the Open University and change the format of some of the units.¹

The implications of the above details are twofold. One, that a relatively greater proportion of the time of academic counsellors and tutors could fruitfully be spent in making distance learners aware of these factors (suggested by Gibbs *et al.*) which may improve their learning, and the second, that course materials should incorporate the principles of andragogy as well, in order to be more effective for adult learners. These, obviously, are new directions for both study centres and course designers.

Having discussed the implication of learner factors for learning, we come to the issue of the role of face-to-face teaching/learning in distance education. There are at least three conflicting views on this issue:

- Once the self-instructional materials through various media are handed over to distance learners there is no need for face-to-face contact or teaching, as self-instructional materials have teachers built into them. Courses given by Fernuniversität, West Germany are a good example of this view.
- In spite of self-instructional materials given through diverse media, face-to-face interaction between the learner and the teacher is inevitable for reasons no different from those for which tutorials are so essential in the conventional system of education. Face-to-face sessions conducted by many distance education institutions in India and those of the UKOU are good examples.
- The third view, which has still not fully emerged, much less been recognised, is that face-to-face contacts in the system of distance education may essentially have altogether different functions from those envisaged in the conventional system of education. Neat examples of this system are not available except in a limited sense at the UKOU and some other western open universities.

The first two of these views are well known; however, the third one offers scope for discussion. The view presented by Sewart is that self-instructional materials incorporate the subject matter (i.e., content) and also advice/support for the distance learner. This advice/support is inevitably based on the 'standpoint of the institution teaching at a distance', and not on the 'standpoint of the student learning at a distance'. Self-instructional materials, in practice, cannot incorporate all the advice/support needed by each and every individual learner. At best they can incorporate such advice/support as is seen to be of common utility. But the advice/support needed by distance learners shows infinite variety. So, standard teaching packages 'cannot provide an individualised learning system'. And if we are aiming at developing a 'learning society', and in order to develop a truly learner centred system of education, we need to provide 'an individualised learning system'. This may be achieved through correspondence tuition and continuous general and academic support provided by academic counsellors

at study centres. What then needs to be realised is that in essence, study centres are institutions (within institutions) which are effecting a socio-educational change—they are directing learners from the traditional methods of face-to-face classroom teaching/learning to individualised and independent learning, they help learners learn how to learn—in other words effecting the more from teacher/institution-centred education to learner-centred education. It appears that the strongest justification for having study centres and upholding their activities lies in this third viewpoint elaborated above. Whether or not such is the case all over the world is not the point at issue. But it needs to be considered, debated and recognised—and for this Sewart's article makes good insightful reading.

With this third view in mind, let us take a quick look at what Pauline Kirk thinks are the common characteristics of 'successful' study centres:

1. students feel sufficiently attracted to attend as regularly as possible for tuition and counselling;
2. a significant number of them are willing to take part in self-help groups there and to come in on their own to make use of the facilities provided;
3. out of this, a sense of identity develops so that local students regard the centre as 'theirs'; it becomes a social as well as an academic meeting place with students arriving early to talk to each other before tutorials and lingering afterwards. Extra-curricular activities are suggested by the most active, and are sufficiently well attended to encourage similar ventures. These may take the form of an occasional party or end of year 'do' organised by the study centre committee, or the Open University Students' Association, or there may be crèche facilities, book sales, coach trips or outside speakers of general or course-based interest. Such activities may be stimulated by, or in conjunction with, the local part-time staff;
4. in general there is a feeling of busyness and well-used facilities most evenings. Though the numbers attending may understandably decline during the examinations and include a larger proportion of foundation students than those doing higher-level courses (who tend to be scattered over a wider area), the place never feels inhospitable and neglected.²

To this we add what she suggests for making study centres successful.

The difficulties in establishing such an atmosphere

Since the study centre is basically only a number of rooms in a building perhaps being used for many other purposes and belonging to someone else, the actual physical conditions may vary enormously and make the establishment of a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere very difficult. The rooms may be hot, smelling of chalk and dirt, and separated from each other by several flights of stairs, which are a nightmare for the handicapped and elderly. There may be constant distraction from other classes still meeting or from external noises, and material used by day-time teachers may be lying about or covering the whole blackboard. The location of the building itself may be significant, for, if the centre serves a locality in which there is a large number of Open University students and is centrally placed within that area, it will have a greater potential attendance than one in a sparsely populated rural region. In

many instances it seems the availability of suitable premises with a sympathetic local authority and governing body that has governed the choice of situation rather than student numbers or ease of access. In some cases a fixed centre seems inappropriate altogether and a mobile one (perhaps on the lines of the travelling library) would better serve local needs. The availability and pattern of public transport can also be important. If the centre is blessed by frequent services to its major catchment areas, it ought to stand a better chance of success ... There may also be misunderstandings with the local authorities in charge of the building in which the University is a guest, particularly when day-time students are in recess. Most part-timers have hoary stories of such misfortunes; mine concern the night I wandered around a locked college for half an hour before finding that an alternative venue had been arranged, or the later occasion when I threw open the door of my normal teaching room and found a hundred students and a lecturer staring at me. Such situations are nobody's fault; they are inevitable when several different bodies are using one building, but they make it difficult to develop any sense of Open University identity ... Even the furniture at the various centres I have been to has proved malevolent. Free and friendly discussion is hard to promote when you are shouting across a lecture room to each other ...

Some practical suggestions

Given such problems, how can an unprepossessing set of rooms and a noticeboard be turned into a thriving study centre? It seems to me a great deal depends on the initiative and determination of the local academic-counsellor. He or she is in the centre one night a week for at least twenty weeks a year, and is on the spot to organize activities and resolve any problems as they arise. In a sense the academic-counsellor is the host for the evening and possesses a freedom and autonomy which would be envied by most other teachers. There is usually no one more senior present and any decisions that need making immediately must be made by him ... The local student will judge the value of his centre and the whole University staff by the one or two part-timers he meets each week. To put it crudely, it is the part-timer's responsibility to ensure that students in his locality get as fair a deal as those in the rest of the country, and if his sessions are helpful and stimulating and his manner welcoming, his foundation students will express their appreciation by attending as regularly as they can. In my experience there is a direct correlation between frequent attendance at this level and a willingness to come to continuing students' evenings later, and a conscientious academic-counsellor *can* build up a strong local 'following', whatever the problems of distance, work commitments or inhospitable premises he may encounter (providing of course no cynical continuing student gets to his group first and tells them no one ever comes to the centre!)

Apart from such general professional responsibilities as we have discussed, I have found there are some very basic steps an academic-counsellor can take to make his centre more attractive. An introductory letter inviting (expecting?) learners to come to the centre and outlining the facilities available seems to increase the initial attendance, and subsequent mailings giving details of special functions and tutorial dates and topics help to prevent students turning up on nights when there

is no academic-counsellor present—understandably exasperating on a summer evening. If nothing else, such duplicated letters provide an opportunity to keep in regular contact with students and with space for a personal note, can enable the academic-counsellor to check on the outcome of past problems or to query the non-submission of work. Encouraging foundation students to watch the television programmes together if the timing is convenient, or to make use of tapes of programmes they have missed can build up future habits, and television groups often turn into self-help groups as the year goes by ...

There are other even more mundane measures one can take. For instance, we have found it pays to be determined with the furniture. Pulling tables and chairs about at the first tutorial to create a cosier grouping within the scholastic barn sets up an expectation of informality, and students have usually laid the room out themselves afterwards without my requesting them to do so. It is advisable however to see that they put everything back in place before the caretaker comes; after all, it is caretakers who run further education, not academics. For the same reason it is a good idea not to run overtime too frequently as the caretaker's cooperation can be invaluable when looking for lost items or trying to get the television to work. Scrupulous care in the booking of rooms can prevent potentially disruptive misunderstandings too, while the care, and replacement of, any equipment belonging to the host institution is surely a matter of courtesy.

Finally, higher-level students seem to need special attention over and above that normally expected by the University if they are to remain connected with the study centre during the later years of their degrees. Such a connection seems to me valuable for them as a way of avoiding the sense of isolation which greater distance from their course tutor and colleagues inevitably produces, and important to the centre itself. Logically, continuing students should be the driving force on study centre committees and readily available for new students to consult, yet in practice they are often completely missing from local activities... Whatever the problems of organizing such functions those we have been involved in have been increasingly well attended as students realized they were worth the time involved, and have enabled me to keep in closer contact with my higher-level students. Frequently we have had a potentially serious problem brought to me during such an evening which might not have been raised by phone or letter. We have also found the experience of such students personally helpful; they have been able to advise me whether courses are overloaded or particularly interesting, while inviting graduates to speak to their less experienced colleagues recently produced a very interesting evening.

Such measures as we have suggested are of course common sense, but common sense has a way of deserting one amongst the intricacies of the Open University system, and an academic-counsellor based on his own at an outlying centre can feel very isolated.³

After discussing the crucial role of a part-time counsellor in the distance education system, we turn to the need for training counsellors. Counsellors/Tutors are accustomed to more conventional teaching modes. They have to acquire new skills and attitudes. As you are aware, distance education is a learner-centred system with teaching activity focussed on

facilitating learning. The faculty engaged in distance education must be adept at facilitating the student's learning through particular attention to both content and process, unlike classroom based teachers, whose traditional role is largely confined to selecting and sharing context. The counsellor in distance education must also recognise how technological applications can create greater access to education, and the partnership roles they can play when allied with technology. In fact as Taylor⁴ pointed out, distance educators have tried to provide teaching-learning resources of high quality that could be used at a time and in a place convenient to each student. In effect, these "flexible access" technologies allow the distance learner to turn the "teacher" on, or off, at will as lifestyle permits.

While geography (distance) was the primary factor in promoting distance education, it is becoming irrelevant today. The new information technology allows the rapid transmission of knowledge from one corner of the world to another instantaneously. Thus the challenge is to understand the available technology and apply it to create new and more effective learning situations. Thus the need for continuing vocational education and training has never been greater in the teaching profession.

The University of Queensland's AT&T project provides an appropriate prototype for the flexible delivery of continuing professional education and training on a global scale. The approach has the flexibility to meet the needs of busy professionals in full-time employment, irrespective of their geographical location.

Linked to flexible delivery is the question of consumer preference for flexible education which we come to know in the next section.

We are living in the information age. This century has witnessed the explosion of information to survive in professions as well as in daily lives, we have to enrich our knowledge and skills continuously. A life-long education is essential in this information age. Luckily the digital revolution in computers, audio-visual devices and communications have been integrated into a powerful new technology⁵ that can fulfill the dream of life-long education.

Most traditional distance instructions are using one-way communication media. Ironically these media are not sensitive to the differences between individual learners even though they are used to carrying the concept of individualised instruction. On the other hand, if life-long education has to be successful and effective, as the learners are greatly varied in ability, interests, background, location, available learning time, and determination, distance education media should also address the embodiment of interaction and individualisation.

Based on the types of instructional usage, Yang⁶ has classified these technologies into three categories: resource tools, teaching tools and learning tools. These developments enable instruction to go beyond physical campus, beyond printed materials into worldwide multimedia databases. E-books, on-line databases, CD-ROMs, and worldwide web home pages are examples of technologies used in instruction as resource tools. Video conferencing, call-in and on-line discussion, e-mail, all expand or create new types of teaching activity. Multimedia, hypermedia, course on demand provide a

flexible and dynamic environment to encourage student centred a synchronous learning.

The above mentioned developments signal very clearly the need for distance educators to re-appraise their methods of instruction and delivery and introduce more flexible learning strategies.

Sam Ayer and Catherine Smith have explored the specific aspects of flexibility in education which are relevant to students of flexible education (Unit 5).

There is a trend towards resource-based learning which is different from transmissive models of education. It is a more student centred approach. Resource-based learning, allow distance learners access to information in the form of text, audio or video clips, graphics etc.; the freedom to browse through the information at his/her place (home or work place) at any time, giving him/her control over learning. It can help to empower learners to take charge of their own learning through greater control and ownership of the learning process. In Unit-6 a case study has been presented bringing out the experiences and attitudes of the students registered at UKOU towards resource-based learning.

Having touched upon resource-based learning, we turn to another significant factor related to interaction between spatially separated learners electronically through computer conferencing. The range of educational uses of computer conferencing are vast. Interactivity is the major advantage and this is enhanced by the ability to interact after time for reflection rather than on the spot. The textual nature of the interaction has a number of educational advantages: it develops written communication skills, it enhances in-depth processing and recall of course material, and it prepares students for examinations which demand a certain standard of written expression for the responses. Collaborative discussions and peer activities are also a positive feature this medium facilitates for distance education.

Brainstorming, seminar discussions, small group work and peer learning are examples of this. The encouragement this medium provides to develop the independence and self-directed approach of the learner is another of its most often cited advantages.⁷

This medium has its disadvantages too. For example the much vaunted time for reflection produces no pressure to respond and the silence in many conferences is deafening as Robin Mason has rightly mentioned. He further adds, the equal opportunity for all to express their opinions can lead to chaos and an overwhelming number of messages. While the textual nature of the medium has educational advantages, writing takes longer to produce and to read than speech. All in all, most people find conferencing a time consuming activity.

Despite its disadvantages computer conferencing is here to stay. The future of computer conferencing is undoubtedly one of mergers — with synchronous media, with multimedia and with the whole panoply of desktop facilities.⁷

Charlotte Gunawardena has in her paper (Unit 7) explored the issues related to the design of collaborative learning environments mediated by computer

conferencing. She also discusses the new paradigms to evaluate collaborative networked learning.

While introducing the six articles which constitute the main text of this section, we have presented additional notes pertaining to each of them. The attempt has been to present a broader understanding of what student support services are all about and what they would be in the future. In doing so we have tried to give you a feel of distance education as a growing and dynamic field of activity with immense possibilities of developing and achieving new strands and goals. If this awareness is achieved the purpose of this section will have been fulfilled completely.

NOTES

1. Peter Jarvis (1981) The Open University Unit: andragogy or pedagogy?, *Teaching at a Distance*, 20, 27-28.
2. Pauline Kirk (1982) Study centres: some impressions, *Teaching at a Distance*, 16, 38.
3. *ibid.* pp. 38-41.
4. J.C. Taylor (1992) Distance education and technology in Australia: A conceptual framework, *International Council for Distance Education Bulletin*, 28, 22-30.
5. N. Negroponte (1992) *Being Digital*, N.Y.: Vintage Books.
6. C. Yang (1999) Perspectives of distance instruction in the content of the National Information Infrastructure (I), *Instructional Technology and Media*, 27, 50-57.
7. Robin Mason (1994) *Using Communications Media in Open and Flexible Learning*, London: Kogan Page, 50-62.

UNIT 2 WHY STUDENTS DON'T LEARN

Graham Gibbs, Alistair Morgan and Elizabeth Taylor

Editor's Notes: There are very few distance and open education programmes which do not suffer from high drop-out rates. Apart from the economic and social implications of this phenomenon, it poses significant questions to distance educators. Why does an enthusiastic aspirant give up after he/she joins a course? Is it that learning from self-instructional materials is not possible? Or is there anything wrong with the learners themselves?

This last question, though of great relevance for conventional education too, is very crucial for distance educators, as distance education is a learner centred system. It is not surprising, therefore, that with the rise of distance education, considerable attention is being given to learning motivation, learning habits and learning techniques or study skills. As a result, a lot of literature has been produced in the area of study skills.

One of the assumptions which all this work is based on, is that usually distance learners are wanting in study skills, and therefore if they are informed about, better still trained in, study skills, they will complete their courses successfully. And by implication the drop-out rates will be considerably reduced.

This article interests us primarily as it tries to go below the surface to identify certain factors which appear to be crucial in the process of self-learning. Besides the need for study skills in general, the article indicates that:

- *Learners are of different types of whom some have very limited approaches to learning/studying*
- *Learners choose their approaches to studying, and some choose inappropriate and/or ineffective ones*
- *Learners keep on developing as such, and different learners are at different levels of sophistication as learners*
- *Learning is affected by some of the features of course design and course implementation.*

The article supports these insights with illustrations and data from various researches, and presents guidelines suggesting the considerations that should form the basis of any attempt to help learners adopt effective and appropriate approaches to learning. These are:

- *to facilitate learners' own awareness and thus develop their conceptions of the process of learning*
- *to make learners aware of the nature and purposes of various study tasks, and then develop this awareness gradually*

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- to wean learners away from their limiting approaches and help them to adopt flexibly approaches suitable for particular study needs, and
- to set the three guidelines above into a pragmatic context — that of learners' motivations, life-styles and abilities on the one hand, and the nature of materials and learning activities on the other. These suggestions have implications for both course design and student support services.

INTRODUCTION

Theories of learning on which many aspects of Open University course design are based are often somewhat tenuously related to the reality of learning as students experience it. At the same time the pragmatic attempts course teams, tutors and students themselves make to improve study methods are often not grounded in any strong conceptual framework for understanding why students sometimes don't learn, or how they develop and change as learners. This paper attempts to provide a conceptual framework which is firmly based in the reality of student learning. It presents a critique of five common explanations for why students sometimes don't learn effectively. These explanations are:

- students lack the necessary study skills;
- students are of different types and some students have limited approaches to studying;
- students choose their approaches to studying and some students choose ineffective or inappropriate approaches;
- students develop in their sophistication as learners and some students are less developed than others;
- some aspects of course design constrain students in their learning.

To help make the critiques of these explanations more immediate they will be loosely based around the case of a single science student. This case is set in the context of conventional higher education, where most of the research which is discussed here has been undertaken. Whenever possible, however, examples and research from distance teaching contexts will be used. Here the science student describes how he tackled some set work, and how this approach to studying fits in with his perception of the demands of his course:

Oh, I didn't think about this problem. I just bashed the numbers out. I went straight through it without looking back at anything. I wasn't really interested but, well, you've got to do this stuff. In this sort of problem you've just got to get through to the answer. I find it pretty dull doing it this way so I don't spend long on it.

I've got these notes, from the lectures. These ones aren't too bad, but you often miss things, and can't make head or tail of them afterwards. You don't need to read the books—provided you get it all down you can't go wrong. It's getting it all down that's the problem. But here it was O.K. You just have to more or less get the right formula and bung the figures in.

Provided you get it right you're O.K., you'll get enough marks. It's the safest way really, to pass the course. For the exam I'm banking on

recognizing the same sort of problems—then you can just trot it out. If it's something you've never done before you don't stand a chance. Bit hit-and-miss. Scary, really.

I only need a pass 'cos I've got this job lined up, or at least I hope I have. I never thought I'd come to see things like that, you know, I sort of expected it to be different to school, more interesting, even exciting, but you soon have to get down to it. If you work hard enough you'll get by. Some of the others seem to read the books and discuss it and things, but it's not really on, discussing it over coffee, is it? I bet they'll fail.

Why is this student behaving in such a disappointing, uninspired way?

Students lack the necessary study skills

The most common explanation for poor study behaviour is that students lack the necessary study skills. Our science student may not have the necessary skills to tackle the problem in any other way than 'bashing the numbers out'. He may not have the note-taking skills to do anything other than 'getting it all down'. The obvious solution, and one that has been widely adopted, is simply to advise or train students in the necessary skills. However, this apparently simple and attractive diagnosis and cure is bedevilled by problems and pitfalls.

Firstly, it is extremely difficult to identify what the 'necessary' study skills are. If a room full of successful academics were asked to take notes from a lecture, it is pretty certain that they would all take rather different sorts of notes, and some would not have taken any written notes at all. This isn't merely a conjecture- we've tried it several times! And yet all these different note-taking strategies apparently have worked for the individuals who adopted them. Thus it appears that successful learners do a variety of different things whilst learning.

This is not to say that there are no differences between successful and unsuccessful learners, but unfortunately these differences are often disappointingly obvious or trivial. This has not stopped study skills programmes from being based on such differences. For example, some programmes advise students to sit at the front of the class, because there is evidence that those who sit at the front of the class do better. It is assumed that such behaviour will cause success. But of course this is unlikely. Students who are keen may do well, and keen students may sit at the front, but a bored student is unlikely to improve merely through sitting at the front. Indeed Edfeldt (1976) has claimed that there is no evidence of causal relationships between study skills and performance. Even the most extensive correlation studies typically find that variance in scores on study skill inventories 'explains' only about one per cent of variance in performance (Entwistle, 1977). So if you were to choose to train your students in the use of a particular technique, you would almost certainly not be training them to do anything which is necessary and your hopes that students would become more successful as a result would almost certainly not be supported by evidence.

Secondly, it is often very unclear what students are actually doing when they are studying—what study 'skills' might actually consist of. It may be possible to record some aspects of the observable behaviour of studying but

this is unlikely to tell you very much about the underlying cognitive processes—the purposes, plans, and thoughts which direct and make use of this behaviour. For example, various reading recorders have been built to produce a record of some aspects of reading behaviour, such as patterns of eye movement in scanning a text, but we are not very much wiser about how people approach, comprehend and process what they read. Similarly note-taking can be observed through examining what students write down, the layout, use of abbreviations, etc., but it is difficult to reveal the processes of selection of subject matter, and its transformation and organization, which determine why particular items are written down. Two sets of notes of outwardly similar form can have been produced by entirely different processes, for entirely different reasons, and with completely different learning outcomes.

Some aspects of studying are not even open to observation of overt behaviour. Problem solving, for example, can often be an entirely covert activity, entirely in the head of the student. This has not prevented the development of theories of problem solving, but they have tended to differ markedly in important respects, and lead to rather different advice and training in how to solve problems. The contrasting approaches of Polya (1957), De Bono (1976), and Wicklegren (1974) are good examples of this. It is not even unanimously recognized that it is **possible** to teach **general** problem solving skills.

This is not to say that there is nothing available to help us understand studying. However, it cannot be expected that existing research into study techniques will necessarily reveal what **underlies** them so that we can avoid concentrating on insignificant surface features.

Thirdly, and partly as a consequence of the above difficulties, many analyses of study skills, upon which a great deal of study skills training and advice has been based, are fundamentally unsound. Much advice claims a valid scientific basis which it simply does not have. Sometimes, as in the case of advice on memory, the basis is in out-of-date laboratory psychology of extremely dubious relevance. Much advice on over-learning and rehearsal falls into this category. Sometimes the basis is little more than impressive sounding claims and pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo. Much advice on speed-reading falls into this category, and Carver (1972) has provided an impressive demolition of some claims made by speed reading pundits.

Despite these severe problems, you might nevertheless have the feeling that you know exactly what it is that a particular student ought to be doing if she is to study more effectively. However, even if you have diagnosed a need for a necessary study skill, and you have a **valid** analysis of what that skill consists in order to be able to train your student, you are still likely to have a great deal of difficulty getting the student to adopt the skill. Both giving advice and training through exercises involve many problems.

Some advice, though based on a sound understanding of what the end product of studying looks like, is impossible to take because it lacks an understanding of the process by which this product is achieved. Advice on how to concentrate, for example, may include a reasonable description of the state of mind when one is concentrating, but be completely unhelpful as to

how to achieve it. People simply cannot concentrate 'at will'. It is a state reached as a by-product of being engaged in, or absorbed by, a task.

Some advice is impossible to take because what is described is impossible. The advice, on writing sentences, that one should first think through to the end of the sentence before you start writing it is simply impossible to follow even for experienced, proficient writers (Britton, 1975). On the other hand some advice is impossible, or disruptive, to follow for particular people. This may be partly due to the variation between learners, and partly due to the weakness of the understanding of studying on which the advice is based. A good example is advice on planning written work before undertaking it. It is almost universal to advise students to produce a plan for an essay before they write it. James Britton (1975) has studied the development of writing abilities in secondary school children and found that their ways of planning, and their attitudes towards planning, varied very widely. The real planning many people do is often so informal and messy as to pass unrecognized. Clearly the lack of any planning at all can be disastrous, but very formal planning can also be disruptive and unhelpful. When advice over-formalizes what is normally an informal process it can become impossible to follow.

There are several ways in which advice doesn't lead to any change, even when it has been accepted. The advice tends to emphasize some aspect of the difference between knowing how to do something and actually being able to do it. Students often have rationalizations for their study habits which bear little relationship to what they actually do. A student might tell you that the reason she is taking notes from a book is to revise from them afterwards. She knows that such revision is a 'good thing'. But she won't actually revise from them because she finds it such a dull and profitless activity.

While attempting to teach students how to study through a National Extension College course (Freeman, 1972) our students were required to send us their notes from a chapter of the course text which covered note-taking. A good proportion of these students had copied out, word for word, the advice in the text to take notes in one's own words! Also, some had copied advice to structure notes in one's own way and use one's own headings, and had embedded this advice in notes laid out, structured, and headed, **exactly** as in the chapter. Clearly these students had learnt the advice, at some level, without it influencing their studying in any way.

Sometimes this gap between knowing and doing is evident in the lack of **transfer** of approaches to studying from one domain to another. This is sometimes wrongly taken to indicate that the student lacks some ability altogether. For example, that a schoolchild cannot ever remember his French vocabulary is taken to indicate that he has a poor memory, though he may easily remember who scored the goals in the Cup Final. A study skills course may try to teach students how to be evaluative when writing essays, though they are perfectly capable of being evaluative in other aspects of their lives: in choosing a boyfriend or deciding whether the manager of the England football team is any good. This lack of transfer is sometimes evident in a very stark way even within one piece of work. One of our National Extension College students had submitted an assignment to us in which she was asked to exercise her powers of critical thinking on some *Daily Telegraph* articles. She had carried out a superb job of demolition on

the arguments, pointing out mis-use of evidence, appeals to authority, emotive language, and so on. Having completed this impressive task she could not resist offering her own opinion on the topic of the articles and proceeded to commit every logical fault she had, correctly, accused the articles of committing! This phenomenon will be discussed further within the second explanation for our science student's studying, offered below.

Finally, students sometimes do not follow advice, even though they value it, because it involves a threatening attack on their existing ways of doing things. Even the most confident of us would hesitate at the thought of making a complete hourly timetable of our work for the next week. We know that it would help us see how much we are getting done and help us to plan our tasks, but the thought of being confronted with all the unreconcilable demands and statements saying: 'watched TV' is just too horrible, so we don't do it. We have had students who know that the way they take notes is ridiculous and useless, but who lack the confidence to abandon their note-taking technique for another which they know will be more useful. In our experience, the less happy and secure a student is in his existing habits, the less likely he is to change them in the hope that some new technique will improve things. Simply knowing the advice is not enough.

We believe that quite often students do not follow advice simply because what is suggested sounds so unappealing. The model of the super-efficient, hard working, well-organized, conscientious student embodied in much advice is a pretty off-putting one to those of us who like to feel that learning has more to do with imagination and creativeness and who recognize that learning plays only one limited part amongst the many other aspects of our lives. There are limits to what we are willing to do in order to become more efficient. We may be perpetually missing deadlines but we are not willing to timetable ourselves any more rigidly. Working late at night may be less efficient than early in the morning, but we can't face working early in the morning. We often seem to ask students things we are not willing to do, or even try, ourselves. It isn't very surprising when they don't do what we ask.

To return to our science student, if we intend to give him advice about how to go about solving his science problems more effectively then we are faced with the possibilities that:

- we may not have any clear idea what skills are really involved in problem solving; and
- even if we can be clear what skills are involved our advice may not be useful:
 - a. it may be impossible to follow or disruptive to the student's existing problem solving;
 - b. it may not lead to any changes for a variety of reasons such as its being unpalatable or threatening to the student;
 - c. it may be followed, but only in a very limited context, or for a short while.

Some of the above problems with giving advice can be partly overcome by following up the advice with training—some more extensive **practice** with the recommended skills. Also when students first adopt a new technique

they may initially get worse at that aspect of studying. The unfamiliarity of the technique, and sometimes the interference of being consciously aware of what they are trying to do, can be quite disruptive. They may therefore need time to try it out and improve in a safe context before trying it out in everyday studying. However there are problems, too, with skills training. The main problems are those discussed by Carver (1972) and Gibbs and Northedge (1979) who are concerned with whether there is any valid basis for the training skills, and whether skills training does what it claims to do.

Training is much more powerful than simply giving advice, and if you train students to do something, there is a distinct possibility that they will continue to do it in their everyday studying. This may not always be a good thing unless the training also involves some help as to how to use the skill **appropriately** and with **purpose**. Most study techniques embody assumptions about the purposes of the technique, or the purposes of studying in general. The student may well not be aware of these assumptions, may misunderstand them, or may not share them and not realize any incompatibility. This may have unfortunate consequences. Students attending study skill training programmes often seem to trustingly abandon all responsibility toward the purpose of the tasks in which they employ the technique. For example, William Perry (1959) describes what happened when 800 Harvard students with superb fast reading skills tackled a chapter of a book, and were stopped after twenty minutes:

We can report that their work-rate in this particular approach was astonishing, and their capacity to answer multiple choice questions on detail was impressive. Some of them had read as many as twenty pages of very detailed material and were able to answer accurately every sensible question we could ask them about the detail ... We asked anyone who could do so to write a short statement about what the chapter was about. The number who were able to tell us ... was just one in a hundred and fifteen...

In other words 99 per cent of these skilled readers were going about reading this chapter in a way which did not involve an attempt to find out what it was about. Perry described their efforts as 'obedient purposelessness' and went on to conclude:

Until such students revise their sense of the purpose of reading, an increase in effort is likely to produce only worse results ... the mechanics of reading skill are inseparable at this level from the individual's purpose as he reads. If you train someone in mechanics alone, he drops right back into his old habits the minute he picks up an assigned text.

Training in fast reading is particularly prone to misorientation. Worst still, Perry found that a third of the students who were misoriented in their reading also appeared to be oriented towards the wrong goals in their writing.

Emphasis on mnemonics and memory training is another area where assumptions about the nature of learning in higher education are inextricably bound up with the recommended study techniques. Some of our own students appear to have gained a very distorted impression of what sort of a task studying is, as a result of taking a 'how to do it' course. On the course there appeared to be a heavy emphasis on memory, and students were

encouraged to practise the use of rhyme, repetition, overlearning, and so on, without an adequate discussion of the appropriateness of such practices for most learning.

Students are of different types, and some students have limited approaches to studying

Two points raised in the first section are central to the next stage in this discussion. They are that students seem to **differ** in the ways they study, and that students do not always seem very flexible in changing the way they study. There is a powerful, and popular, perspective on student learning which embodies the notion that differences between students are due to underlying pervasive cognitive styles, or characteristic ways of thinking which are rather like personality characteristics. As a person with a particular personality behaves predictably in different social settings, so a student with a particular cognitive style will study in predictable ways in different study tasks. The student whose statement opened this discussion would therefore be seen not as lacking certain study skills, but as exhibiting characteristics of a particular 'type' of learner. This explanation, and its implications for teachers, needs to be examined rather closely.

There are several sources of this argument and these sources are of sufficiently different form to greatly confuse the issue. Three different types of students will be briefly described, to give the flavour of this argument. There are, of course, many other types.

Hudson (1968) was concerned to describe and explain why some students seemed to limit themselves strictly to the set study task and not go beyond it, whilst others felt able to set themselves tasks and tackle problems in a freer, more open-ended way. In concrete terms, for example, some students tend to read all the set books whilst others read parts of a few set books and parts of a number of other books more loosely related to the course. Hudson related these tendencies to hypothesise underlying intellectual and emotional characteristics, and developed a personality inventory to measure the extent to which students were 'syllabus-bound', or 'syllabus-free'.

Pask and Scott (1972) have started from highly controlled learning tasks and plotted exactly how students move through them. Their definitions of different types of students are operational definitions in that they describe the actual operations students characteristically undertake in working through study tasks. They distinguished 'serialist' and 'holist' learning strategies. In practical terms, serialists go through a topic step by step from the beginning, whilst holists try to get an overview. Serialists employ 'operation learning' strategies (e.g. using definitions, using procedural rules) whilst holists use 'comprehension learning' strategies (e.g. comparing theory and practice, interpreting theory in terms of the real world).

Marton and his associates at Goteborg (Marton and Saljo, 1976) have started from qualitative descriptions both of how students describe their learning, and of the outcomes of this learning. (For a review of this work, see Gibbs, Morgan and Taylor, 1982.) They have concluded that the crucial determinant of the quality of learning outcome is the students' approach to learning. This they describe as either a 'surface level' or a 'deep level' approach. A surface level approach is characterized by rote learning, memorising, going straight

through a task without thinking, and a general focus on the subject matter itself (the sign) rather than what it is about (what is signified). A deep level approach is characterized by 'making connections', 'drawing conclusions', 'getting a clear impression' and 'getting the point'. While Marton has simply described the relationship between level of process and level of outcome in particular contexts, others have gone one step further and described students as either 'surface processors' or 'deep processors'.

A questionnaire which identifies whether students characteristically adopt a surface or deep approach to their studying has been developed by Lancaster University. Its use in the Open University has clearly shown that the distinction is applicable to Open University students, and that students who adopt a surface approach are not as rare as one might hope (Morgan, Gibbs and Taylor, 1980).

In terms of these analyses of learning style, then, our science student would probably be considered:

1. Syllabus-bound: 'You don't need to read the books—provided you get (the lecture notes) down, you can't go wrong'. 'Some of the others read the books and discuss things, but it's not really on, discussing it over coffee, is it?'
2. A serialist, adopting 'operation learning' strategies: 'I just bashed the numbers out.' 'You just have to more or less get the right formula and bung the figures in.'
3. Adopting the surface-level approach: 'Oh, I didn't think about this problem.' 'I went straight through it without looking back.'

To differing extents, theorists assume that such learning styles are fixed, and that a learner of one style, put in a learning environment demanding a different style, will do poorly. For example, Pask and Scott (1972) have shown that serialists do poorly when confronted with holist learning programmes, and vice versa. As with personality, it is understood that learning style cannot be easily changed, if at all. The implications of this argument for teaching are clearly that teaching must be adjusted to fit the learning styles of different students. There would be little scope for example, for trying to change the way a student tackles problem solving except within the constraints of the student's learning style.

As with the 'study skills' argument there seem to be several reasons for rejecting, at least partially, this view of student learning, and for taking a less pessimistic view of what we as teachers can do about it.

Even if the above position were accepted as a valid basis for action, the practical consequences might be rather odd. Statistically significant differences in learning performance tend to have been found where learners of one extreme type have been put in learning environments of the other extreme type. But, of course in a normal population of students most students will be rather close to the average on any measure of learning type and very few will be examples of extreme types; and also the range of practical alternative teaching environments is unlikely to be wide. Matching students to environments (given the crudity of existing measures of learning style and learning environment) would be a pretty hit and miss business.

In addition, even in the case of supposedly stable personality characteristics, people do not behave identically in different situations. In the late 60s and early 70s social psychologists were grappling with the problem of how much of people's behaviour was determined by their personality, and how much by the social situations they found themselves in. It seems that personality, on its own, accounts for rather little, and that it is the **interaction** of the person with the social situation which is responsible for most of the variation in behaviour (Bowers, 1973). This might suggest that consistency in the way students learn in different learning environments could be due to the similarity between the learning environments rather than solely to the consistency of learning style of the students.

In fact few theorists still claim to be able reliably to distinguish between students irrespective of the learning context. For example, Pask (Pask *et al.*, 1975) has said that different learning tasks require different proportions of operation and comprehension learning strategies, and that successful students are those most flexible in adopting learning strategies which suit the task. Furthermore Laurillard (1979) has demonstrated that even within one particular science course individual students adopted primarily operation, or comprehension, learning strategies, and surface or deep level approaches, according to the specific problem they were working on. It seems that our science student will not necessarily study other problems in the same way as he studied this one. He nevertheless may have adopted a strategy for tackling this particular problem which is not very appropriate. Does this mean that he lacked the **ability** to adopt an appropriate strategy? Probably not. In several areas where psychologists have tested what people are able to do, it has been realized that what has been taken to be evidence for a lack of ability is really only the consequences of people's lack of understanding of the demands of the test. Examples of this are available in both cross-cultural studies of cognition and in the study of child development.

It therefore seems quite possible that when our science student adopts a serialist approach to problem solving, he does so not because he lacks the ability to adopt a holist approach, but because he does not realize that a holist approach would be appropriate. Criticising the argument that behaviour can be understood in terms of people's fixed characteristics, Mischel (1968) has suggested that 'A more adequate conceptualization must take account of man's extraordinary adaptiveness and capacities for discrimination, awareness, and self-regulation'. If our science student could **discriminate** between the demands of different problems, be aware of the problem-solving strategies he was adopting, and **self-regulating** about choosing appropriate strategies, then he would show little consistency of learning style.

But is there really evidence that students actively choose the ways they go about their studies?

Students choose their own approaches to studying, and some students choose ineffective or inappropriate approaches

There is a good deal of evidence that students can give reasons for the way they study. In studies by Becker, Greer and Hughes (1968) and Snyder (1971) in American universities there are vivid examples of students talking about their studying, and why they believe they work in the way they do.

Similar studies in the context of British universities (Parlett, 1976) also describe students as definers of their own study tasks. It might be argued that such student explanations are merely post-hoc rationalizations for behaviour which is actually determined by students' limited skills or fixed learning styles. However recent longitudinal studies in British universities would seem to overcome this objection, as they trace **changes** in students' explanations over the course of their studies.

Beatty (1978), in order to understand students' study habits and use of the library, interviewed students over the full three years of their course, about why they were studying. She developed the notion of the 'Study Contract' which students implicitly make as a sort of statement of aims and ways of achieving those aims while at university:

Students come to university with ideas of what it will be like and with aims at various stages of development. Through interaction with others and experience of the university and course they develop a study strategy, tentative at first, which is consistent with their aims and self-identity. This organization of attitudes and study patterns soon affects educational outcomes in the form of essay marks, but also in knowledge gained, etc. This provides students with objective and subjective feedback on the effectiveness of their strategy and allows them to reinterpret and perhaps re-design the Study Contract by changing strategy or perhaps aims in order to be consistent once more.

Beatty showed second year students the transcripts of their first year interviews and they recognized the sentiments they had expressed a year before and were able to explain how things had changed and how they now saw things differently. This active re-assessment and changing of study strategy over time is also illustrated in a study by Mathias (1980). He identified two general 'types' of approaches to learning: 'course-focus' and 'interest-focus'. Course-focused students stuck to the syllabus (rather in the manner of Hudson's 'syllabus-bound' behaviour) e.g. 'If you do things which are not on the syllabus they're not going to come up in the exam. The only thing you really come to university for is to get a degree.' In contrast, an 'interest-focused' student said 'If I were really interested I would try to read more about it and possibly go and see the tutor again depending on how deeply interested I was.' Mathias points out that there can be no simple explanation for these differences as 'these behaviours did not represent static mental characteristics of students fixed in time, but rather could vary over time as the student moved through his degree course. It seemed more likely that a combination of factors were at work whose interaction and behavioural product was mediated through some process of interpretation on the part of the student.' For example, some students in Mathias' study started off with a weak course-focus but over the three years of their course changed their orientation to a strong course-focus.

Two studies in the Open University have demonstrated similar variations in students' overall orientations to study (Goodyear, 1975; Taylor, Gibbs and Morgan, 1980). The main difference between Open University and conventional students appears to be in the frequency of occurrence of the various orientations. In the Open University there is a marked emphasis on personal orientations: towards personally relevant goals rather than towards academic or vocational goals. It seems likely that many Open University

students are simply seeking different goals than course team authors are oriented towards (Taylor, Gibbs and Morgan, 1980).

Let us go back and look at what our science student said:

'I wasn't really interested but, well, you've got to do this stuff.'

'Provided you get it right you're O.K., you'll get enough marks. It's the safest way really, to pass the course.'

'I only need a pass 'cos I've got this job lined up, or at least I hope I have.'

'I never thought I'd come to see things like that, you know, I sort of expected it to be different to school, more interesting, even exciting, but you soon have to get down to it.'

He seems to have a clear picture of what is involved in studying, for him, and of what he wants to get out of it. His 'study contract' is to do enough to pass the course in order to get his job, even though the way he's decided to do this is dull. He seems very course-focused, though there is some indication that he had some interest-focus during transition from school to university which he has since abandoned. Instead of seeing the way he tackled a problem as an indication of an underlying fixed learning style, it is possible to see it as one consequence of his overall approach to his studying which fits in with his aspirations and his experience of the course. He may have been strongly interest-focused previously, or go on to become more interest-focused, but at this moment in time he sees his course, and this particular problem in a course-focused way. Any attempt to influence the way this student goes about his studying must clearly take into account his overall orientation, his aspirations, and his perceptions of his course.

Students develop in their sophistication as learners and some are less developed than others

It hardly seems credible that all students consciously decide how to go about their studies. Indeed, some students give every impression of having no awareness at all of the way they study. Miller and Parlett (1974) found that almost half the students in their study were 'cue-deaf'—that is, they were oblivious to cues about exactly what is to be learned. In the studies of both Beaty (1978) and Mathias (1980) there are numerous suggestions that students become more aware, more able to consciously choose personally relevant learning strategies, as they become more experienced learners. Our science student may not have a sufficiently developed awareness of the task facing him to choose a more productive learning strategy.

This argument does not focus on the development of **skills or techniques**, but on the development of an awareness both of the demands of study tasks, and of the alternative learning strategies relevant to those study tasks. The clearest proponent of this argument is Saljo (1979a). He has argued that: 'the fact that people learn in different ways could be understood as a reflection of the fact that they have different beliefs or conceptions of learning'. He interviewed a wide variety of students about their conceptions of learning. He found that students, at one extreme, took learning for granted: the task of the learner is to 'get all the facts into your head' in a reproductive, rote memorising way, without regard for what is important.

As students became more experienced they started to reflect on the process of learning, and began to make various distinctions.

Students were found to differ in the extent to which they were aware of influences on their learning, and in the extent to which they made various distinctions. Their conceptions of learning could be seen to develop. A student might not be expected to follow advice to tackle a study task in a way which leads to understanding rather than rote learning unless he could recognize the difference between these two kinds of learning. Saljo suggests that at early stages of development students are unaware of this distinction.

He found that people varied. At the one extreme were those who saw learning as simply a quantitative increase in knowledge e.g.:

You kind of start with a small bag (of knowledge) and there's not much in it, but then the longer you live, the more you will fill it up.

At the other extreme were those who see learning as an interpretive process aimed at the understanding of reality e.g.

In some way I think I've found out that you learn things twice somehow. The first time could have been at school really, the second time is the connection, I mean it becomes conscious in some way ... I mean it should be related to some kind of practice. That's when you have learnt it. I think, terribly much. Then you live ... I mean you sort of be your knowledge in some way. Then, then the really important thing has happened ... (Saljo, 1979b).

Saljo identified five qualitatively different conceptions of learning. We have identified all five of these, including the naive qualitative conception above, in students new to the Open University and have identified **changes** in students' conceptions of what learning consists of over the duration of a foundation course (Morgan, Gibbs and Taylor, 1981).

A comprehensive developmental scheme is offered by Perry (1970) based on many years' experience of counselling students on their studying at Harvard University. His scheme of intellectual and ethical development helps explain why we as teachers can be so differently perceived and understood by various students. To illustrate:

Let us suppose that a lecturer announces that today he will consider three theories explanatory of ... (whatever his topic may be). Student A has always taken it for granted that knowledge consists of correct answers, that there is one right answer per problem, and that teachers explain these answers for students to learn. He therefore listens for the lecturer to state which theory he is to learn.

Student B makes the same general assumptions but with an elaboration to the effect that teachers sometimes present problems and procedures, rather than answers 'so that we can learn to find the right answer on our own'. He therefore perceives the lecture as a kind of guessing game in which he is to 'figure out' which theory is correct...

Student C assumes that an answer can be called 'right' only in the light of its context, and that contexts or 'frames of reference' differ. He assumes

that several interpretations of a poem, explanations of a historical development, or even theories of a class of events in physics, may be legitimate 'depending on how you look at it'. He supposes that the 'lecturer may be about to present three legitimate theories which can be examined for their internal coherence, their scope, their fit with various data, their predictive power, etc.

Whatever the lecturer then proceeds to do ... these three students will make meaning of the experience in different ways.

In this way students' perceptions of the tasks facing them may be limited by the intellectual stage of development they are at. Perry outlines nine stages of development, from an extreme absolutist position, through relativism to a flexible personal commitment to ideas.

We have found Perry's scheme very easy to apply to make sense of the studying of Open University students. For example, while interviewing some social science students we found a clear example of the 'B-type' student described above. This student had taken technology courses to fill his undergraduate profile, and was studying the foundation social science course as his last course before graduating. His technology course had evidently not disturbed his fundamental absolutism. He recognized that the social science course was examining alternative explanations of social phenomena: of **crime** for example. But he complained that in the end the course did not **tell** him what the cause of crime was. An absolutist stance such as this is disastrous for a social science student, and completely over-rides any significance of his study techniques.

Let us have another look at how our science student describes his learning:

'In this sort of problem you've just got to get through to the answer.'

'Provided you get it all down you can't go far wrong. It's getting it all down that's the problem.'

'Provided you get it right you're O.K.'

'If you work hard enough you'll get by.'

Here our science student may be revealing a stage of development as a learner which is reflected in a lack of awareness of some possible distinctions about learning, and in an absolutist approach to knowledge. If this was the case, the task of helping students to learn more effectively becomes one of increasing students' awareness of alternative conceptions of learning, and of fostering intellectual development. This latter task seems to be, at least partly, the function of the students' entire education, and it is to demean its importance to relegate it to the status of a separate programme to improve studying.

It is important to note that the sort of development process described here is natural, and everyone goes through it. Our science student isn't simply a fool, he's at a particular stage in his development as a learner. It is also interesting to realize that he may be at a different stage in another subject. He may be thinking relativistically (like student 'C' in the extract from Perry above) about his Introduction to Social Science course, and be interested in

social science for what it can say about his life. Yet it would not be possible simply to make this student transfer his approach towards social science to his science studies and to expect him immediately to approach his study of science like student 'C'. Nevertheless students' development as learners can be fostered.

Some aspects of course design constrain students in their learning

It may not be sufficient to simply be at an advanced stage of development as a learner to tackle study tasks in a fruitful way. Even when students are sophisticated in their awareness of the learning process and in their conceptions of the task facing them, they may study in a way which leads to very unsatisfactory low-level outcomes. This seems to be due to some powerful external constraints on learning which are beyond the students' control. 'Improving' students may have no material effect on their studying unless these external constraints are removed.

The most powerful and pervasive influence on student learning is the curriculum and its assessment. As Rowntree (1977) puts it: 'The spirit and style of student assessment defines the *de facto* curriculum.' Dahlgren (1978) has argued that the sheer size of curricula constrains the approaches to learning students take:

In order to cope with overwhelming curricula, the students probably have to abandon their ambitions to understand what they read about and instead direct their efforts towards passing the examinations. Higher education, not to say all education, would contribute a lot more to the development of thinking if understanding were made the main criterion of progress. In order to permit that, many curricula would have to be reduced by something like 50 to 75 per cent.

It seems very likely that some attempts to increase the amount students can read may be fundamentally misguided, and that perhaps instead we should be attempting to get them to read less (though at a deeper level of understanding, of course!).

Dahlgren was able to demonstrate that students with very poor understanding of the central concepts of a course were able to pass their exams because the exams only tested 'surface level' outcomes of learning: the memorising of algorithmic procedures for solving problems. Our science student seems to be adopting just such a strategy:

You just have to more or less get the right formula and bung the figures in.

For the exam I'm banking on recognizing the same sort of problem, then you can just trot it out. Easy.

Here a successful student describes how academic success can be achieved without learning anything significant:

There's an awful lot of work being done up here for the wrong reason. I don't know exactly how to put it, but people are going through here and not learning anything at all ... There's a terrific pressure on everybody here to get good grades. It's very important ... And yet there are a lot of

courses where you can learn what's necessary to get the grade, and when you come out of the class you don't know anything at all. You haven't learned a damn thing really. (Becker *et al.*, 1968).

This very limited goal of assessment and its effects on student learning has been comprehensively described by Snyder (1971) in his study of the 'hidden curriculum'. By the 'hidden curriculum' is meant the curriculum which, while very different from the formal, public curriculum, is one which students must address themselves to if they are to succeed.

Miller and Parlett's (1974) study of the 'examination game' highlights the central role assessment has in the forming of student learning strategies. They described students as 'cue-seekers' who actively sought out cues as to what the special interests and concerns of the teacher who would be assessing them were. These students gained better degrees than those who did not 'play the system' but even the successful cue-seekers realized what they were losing:

You know you want to get a certain class or degree within the system, but as far as assimilating knowledge properly is concerned, it just doesn't work, because if you play the game properly you're choosing all the time, and not getting an overview because you know there will be a certain question you have to answer.

There appears to be a risk involved, then, in choosing to follow up interests, in choosing to understand the subject rather than 'play the system'. Some students do take this risk.

It seems likely that our science student had *not* taken this risk, though he recognized that other students had done so.

Fransson (1977) has demonstrated experimentally that students who were made highly anxious by a test and tried to adapt to the demands of the test, produced 'surface-level' processing, ineffective, reproductive attempts at answers to the test questions. He concluded:

If deep level processing is valued, every effort must be made to avoid threatening conditions which rely mainly on extrinsic motivation. This is especially important when the initial interest of the students in the learning task is low.

This is obviously not a startling new discovery. The role of threat in inhibiting meaningful learning is central to the psychologies of George Kelly (1955) and Carl Rogers (1969). Three of Rogers' ten 'principles of learning' concern threat, including:

When threat to the self is low, experience can be perceived in differentiated fashion, and learning can proceed. (p. 161)

Similarly, analyses of the motivations of students suggest that limited, inflexible, and surface-processing learning is common amongst students motivated by a fear of failure (Entwistle and Wilson, 1977; Biggs, 1976). It may be that our science student does not lack study skills, does not have a limiting cognitive style, and is not even at an early stage of intellectual

development, but simply bowed down to the threatening requirements of the assessment system and is afraid of failure. He said:

It's the safest way, really, to pass the course.

If it's something you've never done before you don't stand a chance. Bit hit-and-miss. Scary really.

Under threat we sometimes regress to cruder ways of seeing things which we have employed at an earlier stage in our understanding. Perry (1977) has observed that:

A student, as he loses confidence in himself, tends paradoxically to fall back on less and less productive methods of learning (p. 123).

Similarly, Perry (1970) has described how students revert to earlier stages in their intellectual development when their ideas are most under threat. It has always seemed to us that it is exactly those students who are most in need of a more flexible approach to the learning and who feel least secure in the efficiency of their approaches, who are most deeply entrenched and least likely to change. There is a suggestion from the work of student counsellors at the University of Aston (Nelson-Jones and Toner, 1978) that it is not the particular study methods a student adopts which are important so much as the student's sense of competence as a learner.

There are two other potential limitations on the way in which students tackle their studying. These have been highlighted by Ramsden's (1979) study of the way students learn in different departments at Lancaster University:

The variables which appear to exert most influence on a student's level of processing in both arts and science are the student's background knowledge of the field and the student's level of interest in the task. The former appears to be more important in scientific subjects ... In the following extracts a natural science student describes how his previous knowledge of a type of problem enables him to take a deep level approach, while his weakness in a basic mathematical concept makes his approach to another part of the same question anxious, passive, and superficial: 'It was Like one of the questions from a previous course, which I could relate. It was a Shroedinger equation for a particle in a box, which we'd solved generally before in chemistry, so I could relate it, I could see a picture of what I wanted, I knew basically what sort of answer I should get, and from that I could work my way through it ... The other bit was different; I couldn't do it. Basically I gave up with it, because it was a function, which I've never really understood (Ramsden, 1979) (pp. 12-13).

It may not be very novel to mention these two factors, but if a student lacks background understanding of the subject matter, and lacks interest in it, then there probably isn't much hope of changing the way he approaches learning that subject matter merely by working on his study methods. Our science student said:

'I wasn't really interested but, well, you've got to do this stuff.'

'I find it pretty dull doing it this way, so I don't spend long on it.'

To some extent however, this lack of interest, unwillingness to put much time in and generally finding studying dull, can be a consequence of the study strategy one adopts.

In Open University courses which contain an element of project-based learning, where students take some control and responsibility for their learning, (Morgan, 1976) it has been found that students are obliged to take an active approach to studying and put in far more time than on more passive parts of the course and find this experience rewarding (Henry, 1977).

Similarly a study by Svensson (1977) suggests that students who focus on parts of the text in sequence, memorize details and so on, spend fewer hours studying than those who attempt to understand the overall meaning of the text and search for the author's intention. It seems reasonable to assume that some ways of going about studying are inherently boring and unlikely to lead to prolonged periods of study. This is important because some study skills advice recommends study activities which are paralytically dull.

CONCLUSION

To summarize the points made above:

1. It may not be helpful to view poor students as lacking certain skills. It is very difficult getting students to use new 'skills' appropriately and it is not clear that any study skills automatically produce better learning outcomes.
2. It may not be helpful to view students as having a fixed style of learning which limits their approaches to studying. Poor studying may be better understood as revealing a lack of understanding of the demands of study tasks. This may be especially true when the nature of the study task has changed between school and higher education.
3. To some extent students actively and consciously choose their approaches to study. Their choice is influenced by their overall approach to being a student and is not separate from all other aspects of their lives. Any attempt to influence the way students study will need to take this into account and not tackle studying as if it were made up of neutral techniques.
4. To some extent students seem to develop as learners in that they develop increasingly sophisticated conceptions of the learning process and of the nature of knowledge. A goal of the whole of education should be to encourage such development, and this should clearly be the central goal of any direct attempt to improve student learning.
5. Even a skilled sophisticated student can go about learning in limited, surface-processing ways if there are certain external constraints. The sheer size of curricula, the demands and threats of the assessment system, lack of background knowledge of the student and lack of interest in the study task are the primary constraints.

We have not set ourselves the task here of discussing how to tackle these constraints, but while they exist attempts to help students learn more effectively may be frustrated to some extent. Some attempts to train students in study skills seem no more than educationally repressive devices to fit

students within such constraints. Consequently, we would argue that practical attempts to help students adopt more purposeful and effective approaches to their learning should have the following goals:

- the development of students' conceptions of the learning process. By this we do not mean heavy theoretical teaching on learning, but a student-centred facilitation of students' own awareness;
- the development of students' awareness of the nature, and purposes of study tasks. By this we do not mean training in the use of specific techniques;
- the development of autonomous flexibility in adopting learning approaches appropriate to particular study tasks and learning intentions, and the emancipation of students from habitual and limiting approaches.

Such practical attempts must be set within the context of the realities of inadequate curricula, disparate student intentions in studying, and in the knowledge that students fit studying into existing life-styles and values. This implies:

1. getting away from notions of the average, or ideal, student, or way of studying;
2. getting away from notions of study methods being appropriate independently of course content and curriculum design;
3. getting away from notions of curriculum goals being synonymous with student goals;
4. getting away from notions of study activities being of a purely technical, or cognitive, nature.

We believe that notions 1, 3 and 4 are very commonly held by those writing distance learning materials and as a result students are caused a lot of difficulties.

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UNIT 3 DISTANCE TEACHING: A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

David Sewart

*Editor's Notes: Following the lead given by the UKOU, many open universities provide student support services through study centres, where distance learners come into face-to-face contact with teachers such as counsellors, tutors, tutor counsellors or academic counsellors. The genesis of such support of the centres which provide this contact, lies in the belief that **tutorial** work is an essential component in the system of distance education. Accordingly, the Planning Committee of the UKOU conceived of study centres as places where 'viewing' and 'tutorials' could take place. Indeed, most other open universities have favoured such centres precisely for similar reasons. Such a line of thought and action is obviously a consequence of how the founders of the UKOU, and then others who followed them, viewed distance education. They viewed it in the framework of conventional education, which is essentially institution and/or teacher centred. The obvious implications of this view are as follows:*

- *Distance education systems use face-to-face contact between students and teachers for objectives similar to those for which the conventional education uses them. Why then should distance education be seen as something different from conventional education? Or to put it differently, the purists among distance educators would oppose the idea of using study centres, as for them distance education, by definition, should have nothing to do with face-to-face teaching or tutoring—a contradiction in terms.*
- *For the same reasons, a conventional student is no different from a distance student, whose learning is hardly individualised, and who, like the former is not an independent learner, but only an element in the transaction of **teaching** controlled by the institution.*

*We are interested in this article mainly because it provides us with insights that help overhaul these misleading implications. In the first place we realise that it is too early to assume that we have defined distance education finally or once and for all. Secondly, unless we view distance education independently, without imposing on it preconceptions derived from conventional education, we shall continue to misunderstand and consequently fail to improve it. Thirdly, unless we perceive and accept that the essential transaction in distance education is **learning, not teaching**, most of the activities that constitute student support services, or even the work on self-instructional materials, will remain indifferent in character and therefore ineffective.*

*This article presents these insights by showing why, in spite of high costs, student support services should be provided for purposes altogether different from those for which they were initially conceived; that is, to fulfil those needs which are unique to distance learners, and to promote the culture of learning against that of **teaching**. It argues that distance education is a*

transaction of learning unlike conventional education, which is a transaction of teaching, and therefore, whatever is provided through support services needs to be provided to promote learning. The theoretical issue of what is and what is not allowed to be part of distance education, is seen as only a minor issue which may be resolved by broadening the connotation of the word 'distance'.

It is sometimes said that there is nothing new about the concept of distance education, since it is possible to point to examples of the use of written material for educational purposes almost back to the beginning of written records and a clearly didactic objective is inherent in, for example, the Epistles of St Paul. However, it is only in the twentieth century, and perhaps particularly in the last decade, that teaching at a distance has achieved international recognition and even acclaim. Consequently some have seen teaching at a distance as an industrialized form of teaching arising out of the new techniques which have been perfected in the twentieth century;¹ others, while not denying the importance of new technologies, have seen in the recent rapid growth of this form of teaching a reflection of the increased and increasing costs of conventional teaching which is very labour intensive and to which distance teaching offers, therefore, a seductive alternative.

What makes distance teaching popular?

In both developing and developed countries the possibility of supplementing or even perhaps replacing conventional teaching methods by teaching at a distance has had wide appeal. For the developing countries, where the supply of trained and competent teachers is often severely restricted, teaching at a distance materials can be produced by a small skilled group of teachers which set a standard of excellence capable of wide dissemination, bypassing the need for training, in the first instance, a generation of teachers and thus significantly reducing the time scale for mass education.² An example of this can be seen in India where the central government, with technical assistance from UNESCO, has been involved in planning an open school project at the secondary level based on the Central Board of Secondary Education and following a similar syllabus to the Central Board's conventional secondary schools. Such a system would not only cater for 'drop-outs' from the conventional system—a large and increasing number forced for economic reasons to abandon full-time education and seek employment—but also 'left-outs', since the conventional secondary education system is not equipped to cater for the increasing size of the school population. In the developed countries the motives for experiments in teaching at a distance are more complex and here, perhaps, the cost of employing teachers is a more significant factor, but it is worth noting that one of the three primary objectives of the state government of Nordrhein-Westfalen in setting up the Fernuniversitat in Hagen (Germany) was to deal with the fact that the conventional universities could not cope with qualified potential students. However, even in developed countries the lateral expansion of knowledge—the arrival of new subjects and new disciplines—can and often has outstripped the supply of teachers and we can see, for example, in the United Kingdom that the government is now beginning to use the expertise of the Open University in the area of continuing education and for updating in subjects such as computer science and the use of computing in management where the advances have been so rapid as to deny the opportunity for training a large cohort of teachers.

Teaching at a distance liberates the student/teacher interface from the straitjacket of the lecture hall or tutorial room. The student may learn when he wants, whatever the hour of the day or night; he may learn wherever he wants; he may learn at his own pace. Because of this 'freedom' allowed to the student learning at a distance, we might consider that teaching at a distance is inherently a more individualized system than the conventional face-to-face method as far as the student is concerned. In the conventional system, teaching is directed to a group and the group must learn together within the restrictions placed upon it by the abilities of those who form its membership. Its learning will therefore approximate to the mean between the extremes of the abilities of its members, and the needs and potential of the individual in learning will tend to be subservient to this mean. However, the student learning at a distance normally does so as an individual. He learns, therefore, in the way and at the pace which is most suitable to him since he controls his own learning situation. On the debit side however, it is clear that the student learning alone and at a distance lacks the supportive atmosphere of the tutorial class. He has no-one against whom he can measure himself in the development of his learning. He does not know if he is doing well in relation to his learning. Indeed he has no framework against which to judge 'doing well'. He can of course expect to receive comments on and perhaps grading for, his work from his tutor, but this interaction is strictly between teacher and student, and the student is therefore always at a disadvantage. No comparison with the peer group is possible and the student learning at a distance lacks the usual bench marks for his self-assessment.

A variety of educational packages

Any system of teaching at a distance must concern itself with what it is teaching and how it is teaching. The variety of systems of teaching at a distance and the levels of study which they embrace are now almost legion. Most of the systems contain a package of attractively presented self-instructional materials. Printed material invariably forms the basis of this package, but it is often supplemented by audio-visual material, normally on cassettes but sometimes offered through open circuit broadcasting. In all cases a great deal of thought is customarily put into the assembly of this package and it is made as attractive as possible for the student learning at a distance. The production of such packages is usually seen as the basis on which economic calculations are made and, since the production demands complex resources, both material and human, and requires long-term planning, it often dominates the system of teaching at a distance to the exclusion of all other activities. Indeed there is a beguiling temptation to assume that the problems of teaching at a distance can all be solved by the production of an as yet merely hypothetical perfect package of material.³

This excessive concentration on the package is the institution-based approach to teaching at a distance and indeed it is characterized in the very use of the word 'teaching'. The student-based approach involves a more rigorous examination of learning at a distance. It is, of course, inherently more difficult since, whereas the teaching approach can start from a fixed standard package—a unified, concrete and controllable phenomenon—and tacitly assume the subordination of the needs of the individual to that

package, the student approach requires a consideration of the needs of the individual in relation to the package and must involve an examination of an almost infinitely variable base which cannot be controlled or completely stabilized within a specifically de-limited area.

A student-based versus institution-based approach

Yet why is it necessary to consider the student-based approach? Can we not seek to arrive more closely at the theoretically perfect teaching package of material? Before we can begin to arrive at any answer to this question, we must define rather more clearly the relationship of the institution to the student and the flow of contacts or interchange between both parties, the one attempting to teach and the other to learn at a distance. In a simple civilization there can be a personal relationship between the individual and those who stand for the religious or secular authority. In a complex civilization, such as our own, this personal relationship, of necessity, disappears. There is a gulf between the system (for example, society, the social and medical services, the consensus, education) and the individual (for example, the citizen, patient, pupil, case study). Within this gulf in the complex civilization there has grown up a group of intermediaries—social workers, broadcasters, teachers, counsellors, etc.—who seek to adapt a system to the individual needs of people. The primary concern of the intermediaries is not for the system itself, but rather for the individuals and, although they are normally employees of the system, they seek to represent individual needs to such an extent that they force the system to take cognisance of these needs. In education this function of intermediary is embraced within a variety of roles which we refer to as teacher, tutor, advisor, counsellor, etc. The intermediary is concerned with the general welfare and support of students, but the various applications of this concern, both in breadth and depth, are almost infinite. On the one hand he may provide information on basic administrative functions; on the other hand he may offer psychological and medical advice. The reason for the variety of roles and duties lies in the variety of education itself. For each system of education we may posit a distinct supportive role.⁴

Why are intermediaries necessary?

In examining a system of teaching at a distance we must analyse the requirements of an intermediary function. To pose the question in more concrete terms we must ask ourselves whether these requirements can be met by a package of materials, that is whether the package can take the place of every essential facet of the teacher in the conventional teaching situation.

Even a cursory examination of the learning process will lead to the conclusion that the needs of the student are not wholly related to the subject that is being studied. That is not to say that such needs are solely of a psychological nature and are completely unconnected with the content of his study. His needs are of an educational kind, even of an academic kind, but they are not strictly related to a subject. This phenomenon is observable in education at all levels. The word 'teaching' is a simple definition of a complex interactive process and we might begin by dividing teaching from the point of view of the institution into the subject matter and advice/support. The subject matter would embrace the strictly academic content of the course and advice/support would embrace general study

problems arising from the individual circumstances of the student or the system of teaching peculiar to the institution.⁵ We might look at this in another way by saying that the subject matter is information or knowledge and the advice/support covers the way in which the student as an individual fits this new knowledge into his own peculiar pre-existing framework and into his everyday life style.

Limitations of the package

What part does the teaching package in a system of teaching at a distance play in the intermediary role? Does it or could it provide both subject matter and advice/support for individuals? While not wishing to exclude the theoretical possibility that the teaching package could perform all these functions, there are a number of reasons for suggesting that in practice it will always fall a good way short of this ideal, if only for reasons of complexity and cost. While it is possible to define and de-limit the subject matter through an institutionally centred analysis in a way which might receive general assent within the institution, advice/support, being student-centred, is by comparison almost infinitely variable. It follows therefore that any package of materials which seeks to embrace advice/support must admit of almost infinite variation. Moreover, if we were to posit the existence of such a hypothetical package of materials, the cost of production and delivery would render it completely impractical. Clearly however, a package of material need not be limited to the subject matter. It may cover some aspects of advice/support which are judged to be universal or at least common. While economic considerations will of course be of importance in that area of the package which deals with the subject matter, it is likely in practice that general agreement can be obtained on the various limits of the subject matter and therefore on its cost. The same is unlikely to be true in the case of advice/support and here the cost-benefit approach will begin to operate. All students need the subject matter, therefore this element is 'cost-effective'. Not all students can easily be seen to need some/all of what can be offered in terms of advice/support; consequently it is by comparison far less cost-effective.

I have suggested above that institutions engaged in teaching at a distance have concentrated extensively on the production of a package of materials. For obvious academic reasons these packages embrace the subject matter. For equally obvious economic and practical reasons, few of these packages embrace the function of advice/support. It does not seem unfair to suggest that there is an overwhelming tendency within the field of teaching at a distance to offer systems from the standpoint of the institution teaching at a distance, rather than from the standpoint of the student learning at a distance. The response to the individual needs of the student learning alone and at a distance has often become lost in the overriding requirement to produce a grandiose package of materials.⁶

Contexts of distance and conventional students

Perhaps this failure to recognize and concentrate on individual needs arises out of a failure adequately to appreciate the difference between the conventional student and the student learning at a distance. Conventional students, in digesting the academic pabulum (mental nourishment) of their chosen study, exist within a highly artificial and wholly supportive

framework. For most of them their study is merely a further stage in an unbroken linear development which began when they were infants. The infant school class and the university lecture are generically similar in offering a group learning situation with a face-to-face teacher/student contact and the subsequent possibility for instant feedback of an oral and visual nature. The group learning situation is itself supportive of the learning process, not only because of the potential interaction between students in relation to the academic content of the course—learning through discussion with one's peers—but also because the group learning offers a bench mark to the individual members of the group. The students might naturally expect to fall short of the comprehension of a particular subject which is demonstrated by their teacher. The bench mark of how short or 'how much' of this are we expected to understand? is provided by the group, and through the group a common denominator of success or achievement is established for all its members.

The situation of students learning at a distance is wholly different. Often they are returning to study after a number of years. For such people the concept and practice of their previous learning is somewhat clouded. They have an experience of life and work and hence a framework into which their new learning has to be set. Often the students learning at a distance are part-timers. Their work and families are of prime importance. It is not open to them as it is open to the conventional students to devote themselves entirely and with singular purpose to learning. Moreover, the process of learning at a distance is generically different from the conventional mode. The swift feedback available from the face-to-face learning model is almost entirely absent. The supportive environment of the peer group is lacking and the bench mark of achievement and, deriving from this, the maintenance of the individual's confidence, is difficult to establish.

A division of roles

It is elements of this sort, fundamental to the student learning at a distance, which the package of materials either cannot influence at all or can only influence in a marginal way. The teaching package is the raw academic pabulum of the institution for teaching at a distance; for the student learning at a distance there is need of another element, an advisory/supportive role. In conventional education the teacher can and often does perform the advisory/supportive role while acting as the source of academic knowledge. In a system of teaching at a distance we normally find the separation of the source of academic knowledge and the advisory/support role, the former being contained in the teaching package. The separation of these activities does not, in itself, create problems. Problems will however arise if the two elements are not balanced; if the teaching package predominates to the virtual or complete exclusion of the intermediary role; if the existence of these two activities is not constantly in the minds of those involved in teaching at a distance.

Drop-out as a measure of effectiveness

No-one who has given even a cursory glance to the literature of distance teaching will have failed to note a preoccupation, almost at times approaching hysteria, with the phenomenon variously described as drop-out, wastage, withdrawal, attrition, etc. This phenomenon exists in all forms of

teaching, but in distance teaching it is a major characteristic since its incidence is often many times as great as in any form of conventional teaching, and its very existence threatens the 'cost-effectiveness' which is so often listed as an advantage. The hypothesis that the face-to-face teacher and the student's peer group could not be adequately replaced in distance teaching received, until recently, almost universal credence and this belief was 'substantiated' by reference to drop-out statistics. In the last decade and particularly in the last two or three years the hypothesis has received a practical challenge from the success of the Open University in the United Kingdom. Here, instead of the ninety per cent drop-out confidently predicted in the educational press when the University first began to offer courses, we find that up to sixty per cent of finally registered students are graduating, and, moreover, that a very significant proportion of the forty per cent of 'drop-outs' is in any case unavoidable, ranging from the obvious cases of death, through movement outside the United Kingdom, significant changes in domestic circumstances and satisfaction with the completion of a part rather than the whole of a particular programme. The success of the Open University has brought it an international reputation and many attempts have been made to transplant this success to other countries and other continents. So far it would appear that none have managed to improve upon the drop-out rate and thus, in popular terms, the 'success'. Indeed the opposite seems to be the truth. None have come anywhere near reaching a success rate approaching sixty per cent. There are a number of reasons for this but, I would suggest, only one of major significance. The popular conception of the Open University, even by those who have made a careful study of it, is of a system dominated by a highly structured package of correspondence texts and broadcasts.

The method of preparation of this package by a course team has been seen as a unique development and a major contributory factor to the quality of the package. The package—particularly the course units—and its method of production, are extensively and variously copied. Yet, I would contend that this analysis of the Open University system is too superficial. The success of the Open University does not rest wholly or entirely on the highly structured teaching package. It rests rather on the inter-relationship of that package with the student as an individual through the agency of the counselling and tuition functions peculiar to the Open University. It is the combination of these elements on which the comparative success of the Open University is based. Neither is sufficient in itself.

Contrasting the Open University with Fernuniversität

The truth of this hypothesis might be supported in quasi-mathematical terms through the use of a paradigm of the Open University. The Fernuniversität in Hagen falls within the same broad ambit of Western European culture and tradition as the Open University in the United Kingdom. While the countries are not identical in geographical, cultural and economic terms they are, nevertheless, very similar. The students of the Fernuniversität are highly motivated, being self-selecting as in the Open University. In general, however, they are far better qualified than Open University students, since they must normally have achieved the Abitur (i.e. qualified for university entrance), whereas forty per cent of Open University students in the last three years have less than the minimal requirements for normal entry to a degree course at universities and polytechnics in the United Kingdom.⁷

The teaching package of the Fernuniversität does not contain open circuit broadcasting, although audio and video material is often available in cassette form. In the quality of its correspondence material (course units), the Fernuniversität could fairly be seen as the equal of the Open University. The Fernuniversität does not, however, possess an integrated support system and is becoming increasingly concerned about the high drop-out rate of its students which raises the concomitant questions of economic viability.

Bases of Open University support services

If we accept that, for all practical purposes, the advice/support function cannot be supplied through the teaching package, but see it as a vital element in the system, we can go on to consider the ways **in which** this might be supplied.

In practice, Open University support services are offered through tutor-counsellors in some two hundred and sixty local study centres throughout the United Kingdom. In addition, students are attached to specialist tutors to deal with the specific academic content of the course and to mark their assignments. The function of the tutors is exclusively related to the teaching package. What then is the rationale behind the use of study centres and tutor-counsellors? The use of study centres in a system of teaching at a distance might not unreasonably be seen as a contradiction in terms. Study at a distance is normally depicted as independent of time and **place and these** are normally claimed as characteristics and advantages for the system. But study centres impose a restriction in place; they also impose a restriction in time to a greater or lesser extent as they are not open all day for every day of the year. Are study centres *per se* an essential part of teaching at a distance, if it is to be successful, or are they not essential at all? If the latter is true, why do many systems of teaching at a distance use them and in particular the Open University? Since they almost invariably offer a facility for face-to-face interaction, do they therefore deny on this account the practical viability of teaching at a distance?

Radio, television and telephone supplementing print

In our earlier analysis we defined the teaching process as the transmission of subject matter and advice/support. Until the sixteenth century, the transmission of subject matter—or at any rate its wide dissemination—was through a verbal medium. Cost and time factors inherent in copying by hand placed out of court the provision of a text for students. The professors and the lecturers communicated verbally with their students as the very root of these words implies. The introduction of printing brought a dramatic change. The professors and lecturers continued to lecture to their students, but no longer was the student limited exclusively to the time and space of a lecture room. He could have as a supplement—or even as a substitute—a text book written by someone to whom he would, perhaps, not otherwise have access. Moreover, he could study this in his own time and at his own pace, re-reading whenever and wherever he thought fit. However, the text book had none of the interaction of face-to-face teaching. Teaching at a distance relies now, and for the foreseeable future will continue to rely, upon the technology of printing. Other more recent technologies have supplemented this, but none have replaced it. The telephone has offered a direct substitute for student/tutor interaction. The student can receive an

immediate response to his question through the telephone as in the lecture room. He lacks the non-verbal signs of normal communication, but this is not usually seen as a vital loss. However, the telephone is limited in time, since tutors and students must have their interchange at the same time and it is limited in space both by the requirement of an installation and by the cost of the link. Furthermore, telephone lectures or tutorials between one tutor and a number of students, while far less costly in tutor time, begin to pose some of the disadvantages of radio in that tutors, deprived of non-verbal signals, teach at their own pace, and their students, unwilling to contribute to a technological anarchy, refrain from interrupting. There are certain similar disadvantages attached to the use of radio. While open circuit broadcasting is restrictive in time and space, the use of audio and video cassettes can ameliorate, to some extent, these problems by offering the student an opportunity to view and listen at his own pace and in his own time, the availability of a re-play facility being the only restriction. However, the possibility of interaction between tutor and student is virtually non-existent within this medium. Printed material, radio and television can be used for the simple transmission of subject matter. Assuming re-play facilities, all can be used by the student in his own time and, with the wide dissemination of equipment in recent years, all are, or could be, independent of space. They are however the tools of **teaching** at a distance not necessarily of **learning** at a distance, since they are not susceptible of an interactive mode: only the telephone offers this facility.

Education is about learning more than teaching

The view that education is primarily a learning process on the part of the student rather than an instructional process on the part of the teacher has achieved almost universal acceptance in recent years. The fact that the Ministry of Education in Italy is still called the Department of Public Instruction and that *enseignement* is still used in France can be seen as anachronisms. In Germany the use of *Fernunterricht* for 'distance teaching' has been superseded at all levels by the term *Fernstudium* (distance learning) which had originally only been used for degree level study. While recognizing this trend in educational thinking, distance teaching systems have found difficulty in its practical application. One solution has been to develop, for the printed medium, highly structured self-instructional materials in which the student is required to respond at regular intervals to the text and there follows a discussion of a variety of potential responses. Because of the wide range of possible responses, the discussion cannot be all embracing, so that this development must always fall some way short of perfection. However, the creation of this internal dialogue for the student within the material has been a significant element in changing the student from a passive to an active learner.⁸

Adding correspondence tuition and counselling

The standard teaching package, however well structured, cannot provide an individualized learning system for students. It is only the introduction of a human element which can adapt to the almost infinite variety of student needs. Hence, in distance teaching, and in particular in the Open University, we have witnessed in recent years the refinement of teaching by correspondence alongside the development of the carefully designed teaching package. The technique and the approach of the correspondence

tutor are not always immediately grasped by those who have been engaged in the traditional forms of teaching. The correspondence tutor is not there to transmit information—all this is done in the package of materials. The role of the correspondence tutor is that of a facilitator. This requires two things: the ability on the part of the correspondence tutor to convey through his comments advice for further study and the ability to perceive his student's present state of knowledge and conceptual framework so that the advice may be as relevant as possible to the individual student. The tutor must offer comments which are considered human, constructive and supportive. The formal nature of written comment which is not susceptible of the inflection, tone and pause of speech, renders it liable to misinterpretation. Clarity is essential. While much has been done to refine the art of correspondence teaching, it is, as yet, in its infancy. It is clearly not the case that the skills of the traditional teacher can be adapted for correspondence teaching, rather there is a need for the development of new skills.⁹

The Open University has combined its teaching package with an individual support system offered through correspondence tuition and a general and continuous academic support provided by a tutor-counsellor, who is responsible for the progress of the individual student from entry into the University until graduation. This general service is supplemented by specialist tuition beyond the foundation level. The interrelationship of the package of materials with the student has been achieved through the agency of tutor-counsellors and course tutors. Individual contact can be, and often is made by telephone and by post.

A rationale for study centres?

But we have still not supplied a rationale for the study centre, and indeed we seem increasingly to be isolating it as superfluous and as an anachronism in a system which, as we have seen, can probably comprehend the subject matter and advice/support. The study centre has been used for a number of functions in various distance teaching systems. In some it has been seen as a viewing centre where replay devices may be used. In others it has been seen as a library resource centre. In some it has been seen as a locus for student interaction and self-help groups, a substitute for the conventional campus. In yet others it has offered a site for practical experiments or the use of equipment, such as computing facilities, which are essential to study, but which cannot be offered to the student at home without great difficulty. Finally, there are cases where the origin of the study centre system is shrouded in complex educational politics, and study centres are seen as a tangible link between the otherwise amorphous distance teaching institution and the local community.¹⁰

Can we then say that the study centre is the dustbin of teaching at a distance? Is it the repository into which are emptied those functions or parts of functions which seem to be too difficult or too expensive to carry out? Is it there because we cannot feel completely confident as yet in our combination of teaching materials and correspondence tuition, because it is particularly useful in the provision of the advice/support function in which the necessity for individualisation is paramount? Is the presence of study centres a denial of the practical possibility, as yet, of teaching at a distance? Might we so 'improve' teaching at a distance as to be able to dispense with study centres entirely?

We might construct cogent arguments against the use of study centres. Clearly they are a costly element. As far as can be ascertained in all systems of teaching at a distance, the use of, and need for, study centres on the part of the students fall a long way short of the use and need projected by the institution. It is clear that a large number of students either are not able, or choose not to, attend a study centre. Clearly, many students choose to study by distance teaching methods because they prefer or require, for domestic or work purposes, to be freed from the time and space constraints of conventional teaching methods.

Continuingly changing functions

I would suggest that we are being over-simplistic, if we take the view that the study centre in the Open University is merely a dustbin wherein we can deposit all the difficult functions of teaching at a distance, which we intend ultimately to carry out by other means. Indeed, I would suggest that it is entirely wrong to see study centres in the Open University solely against the background of traditional education, as places in which conventional face-to-face contact between teachers and students takes place. Within the Open University, our concept of a study centre is blinkered by our adherence to the objectives of study centres seen in the original report of the Planning Committee of the Open University.¹¹ The Planning Committee had initially seen two purposes for study centres. They were to be used as viewing centres and as places in which tutorials would take place. Such tutorials were envisaged as an essential element in this system of teaching at a distance. The reality, almost from the beginning, proved to be different. Over two hundred and sixty study centres were created, but within the first three years it became apparent that they were not being and could not be used as originally intended. The open circuit broadcasting of radio and television did not always match the evening opening times for study centres. Furthermore, the store of audio and video tapes, particularly the latter, became too expensive to maintain, and the replay facility provided through technicolour machines and audio-cassette devices lapsed. The increase in the number of courses after foundation level was not and could not be matched by increases in student numbers. The average post-foundation course population rapidly fell below two students per study centre. The idea of local tutorials, other than for the high population foundation level centres and locations for essential tuition was not even the case, in practice, in the University's first year of operation. It is even less the case today. Yet the Open University has failed to re-define the role of study centres in its formal publications, although a significant element of their role is implicit in the functions of the tutor-counsellors.

A focus for the tutor-counsellor

Tutor-counsellors are seen in the Open University as the local and continuing support for students. The description of this support as local is given a physical presence in the study centre which is seen as the base for a tutor-counsellor's activities. The local study centre is a place in which the foundation level tutor-counsellor is able to offer face-to-face support of a strictly academic and of an advisory/supportive nature to his first year students, all of whom live in the vicinity.¹² The tutor-counsellor is seen as weaning students from the traditional methods of face-to-face group teaching to the Open University's methods of individual and independent study. The

study centre is, in reality, a transitional phase for the students in this process. For the student it has much of the appearance of the traditional classroom in that it is a physical location in which an authoritative figure, the tutor-counsellor, is present. If the similarity between the traditional and non-traditional teaching methods holds good for the physical situation, it certainly does not hold good for the educational rationale. The tutor-counsellor does not lecture or profess a subject in the traditional way. Instead he takes the academic content as given in the shape of the course units and broadcasts and sets out instead to help the student to learn from the material, either by himself or in groups. As such, therefore, we might describe the study centre as an important element for most new students in the painful early steps of adapting to learning at a distance. It is a stepping stone from group learning of the traditional sort to individual and/or group learning of the non-traditional sort. While it is possible that some students do not need such a stepping stone, it seems clear from the attendance of students themselves that most students still require this element. Moreover, the needs of the individual can be met by the service of the tutor-counsellor in the study centre. The student may take advantage of what is offered whenever and as often as he pleases. He may feel no need to attend for some time but later develop a need. Such a need is met by the regular presence of the tutor-counsellor in the study centre.

A local resource centre

It might be alleged that this argument does not hold equally true for post-foundation level tuition and this is almost certainly true. For post-foundation level students the tuition is unlikely to be as 'local', but the study centre with its face-to-face tutorials—and by this I mean tutorials in the Open University sense—does satisfy a need. The face-to-face contact provides for a large number of students a stimulus, both social and educational, to the continuing process of study. The initial strong 'local' support of the tutor-counsellor is not totally withdrawn after the first year. It exists in more rarefied form thereafter but can be tapped into by the student as and when he thinks fit.

The study centre is a place in which tutorials, day schools and self-help groups take place. Students do not use these facilities as often as the institution makes them available, but they are nevertheless essential. We know that students do not read every word of the course units or even all the course units. They sometimes—perhaps often—do not read the set books. Some students omit the radio and television broadcasts entirely, most are extremely selective. Some students do not complete all their home experiment kit activities and, indeed, a few do not even open up the boxes. It is clearly naive and certainly over-simplistic to try to use student usage as the sole determinant of the value of an element in the system, unless of course the use is that of a very insignificant minority and even here we should be careful. It is the richness and variety, the multiplicity of provision, which attracts and sustains our students. Study centres and what is offered in them are part of this richness of provision.

Are study centres an anomaly?

Are we to say that study centres are a contradiction of the feasibility of teaching at a distance? The answer for the Open University is certainly No.

The confusion rests with the definition of teaching at a distance. If we consider the variety of teaching and learning processes we might see at one extreme the continuous face-to-face dialogue between one teacher and one student, a totally supportive learning situation. Further along the spectrum we find the conventional primary school in which the authoritative figure of the teacher provides a continuous contact throughout the day with a group of students. Much further along the spectrum we find a traditional university teaching system in which the authoritative figure of the teacher appears only occasionally and the subjects are more independent in their learning situation. At the other end of the spectrum we find a pure system of teaching at a distance in which the student is learning at a distance from those who have prepared the material and learns at his own pace, wherever he wishes to study and whenever he wishes to study. The Open University, like the conventional universities, falls somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum, although it is clearly further towards the end of pure distance teaching. Its position in the system has been determined by a number of elements. These include the varying entry qualifications of its students, their domestic and work circumstances as adults learning part-time, their previous experience of learning and their perceptions of what they are capable of and the support that they require. The study centres and what is provided in them are part of the total package of the Open University teaching system to which we ascribe overall the generic term of teaching at a distance. There is no contradiction between the notion of study centres and teaching at a distance. For some students who do not attend the study centres, the Open University might come close to 'pure' (sic) teaching at a distance. For others it will come less close. More important, however, from the student's point of view, the Open University offers a richness of variety in opportunities for learning, such that its appeal is catholic. It is from this that its success follows, and if the University ever seeks to alter the balance of its provision or removes specific elements from the rich variety of this provision, it must do so only with extreme care and mindful of the fact that in so doing it will almost certainly be detracting somewhat from its present universal appeal.

NOTES

1. Perhaps the major contribution to this debate has been provided by Otto Peters (1973), *Die didaktische Struktur des Fernunterrichts, Untersuchungen zu einer industrialisierten Form des Lehrens und Lernens*, Tübingen.
2. This has been apparent in numerous countries where the educational problems seem overwhelming as was noted by K Whitlock (1980) 'Perspectives on adult education in Latin America', *Teaching at a Distance*, No. 18, pages 28-33.
3. Anyone so beguiled would do well to read Abercrombie, M L J (1976) 'Paths to learning', *Teaching at a Distance*, 5, 5-12.
4. For further discussion of this point see D Sewart, *Continuity of concern for students in a system of learning at a distance*, Zentrales Institut für Fernstudienforschung, Papiere 22, Hagen, 1978.
5. I use the phrase 'advice/support' as a shorthand description. It should be taken as embracing not only general study problems connected with

the course but also problems which are less course specific or perhaps not at all course specific, such as career planning and advice to the individual in the context of studying at a distance.

6. This is not to say that all distance teaching packages are totally concerned with teaching rather than the students' learning. Mary Thorpe, 'When is a course not a course?' *Teaching at a Distance*, 16, 13-18, has recently pointed to and argued for the increasing recognition of the role of the tutor and student in the development of courses.
7. Open University experience tends to show that qualified students in general do better than non-qualified students. At the same time, this experience also shows that it is dangerous to extrapolate from such a general hypothesis to a particular individual.
8. In offering this general statement I am very conscious of the fact that our knowledge of 'dialogue' is extremely limited. Brian Lewis, 'Conversational Man', *Teaching at a Distance*, 2, 68-7, suggested an intensive scrutiny of the whole topic of dialogue/conversation. To date no-one appears to have accepted the challenge.
9. For further analysis of the role of correspondence tutor see Clennell, S, Peters, J, Sewart, D (1977), *Teaching for the Open University*.
10. Some aspects of study centres in the Open University are covered by Bradford, M 'Study Centres: The background to the current policy review'; and Kirk, P 'Study Centres: some impressions', *Teaching at a Distance*, 16, 33-41. A more comprehensive and international viewpoint is available in Gough, J E (1980) *Study Centres in Distance Education*, University of Deakin.
11. The Open University (1969) *Report of the Planning Committee to the Secretary of State for Education and Science*, HMSO.
12. The 'local' nature of the study centre will clearly vary and there are some students whose homes are beyond reasonable travelling distance of a study centre. However, given the large number of study centres and the density of population in the United Kingdom, this is clearly the exception rather than the rule.

UNIT 4 FLEXIBLE DELIVERY: THE GLOBALISATION OF LIFELONG LEARNING

James C Taylor

Editor's Notes: Historically, distance education has placed great emphasis on individual and independent study. The educational process, consisted largely of students interacting with print materials. Mediation and recognition of learning was minimal. However the quality of educational transaction is dependent upon two way communication. The issue of feedback is of concern in mediated communication. Thus mediated forms of communication are of particular interest to distance educators.

The developments in communication technology have led to a subtle paradigm shift. The concern for the individual, personal media for instruction in the home, at work and in the classroom have begun to emerge. A broader definition of the place where learning occurs has begun to develop. Corollary to this, the communication technologies have gone one step further by abolishing boundaries: racial, cultural or national, distance education is the fastest growing area of education today.

Further, the advent of the information age makes continuous education a necessity. Traditional distance, instructional media are not effective, just as face-to-face classroom instruction is not feasible in a life-long learning environment.

In the future, flexible delivery is likely to play a more significant role at all levels of education and training as globalisation becomes the norm. Given the rapidly growing influence of flexible delivery, stimulated by the exponential growth in access to the Internet, the need for continuing vocational education and training has never been greater in the teaching profession. In response to this need, the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) initiated a global faculty development program for teaching at a distance. The project entails the development of a Graduate Certificate in Open and Distance Learning (<http://www.usq.edu.au/material/course/us59/>).

The USQ project appears to provide an appropriate prototype for the flexible delivery of continuing professional education and training on a global scale. Although focused primarily on the teaching profession, and those employed in industrial training roles, it could well act as a prototype for continuous professional education in many other professions. The approach has the flexibility to meet the needs of busy professionals in full-time employment, irrespective of their geographical location. Further, it has the interactivity to engender efficacious learning outcomes in a time efficient manner. The immediate access to current materials and associated professional discussion with colleagues from around the world creates a socio-cognitive learning environment from which all who participate in it will surely benefit.

Flexible delivery, based primarily on the application of distance education technologies and methodologies, is the key to the future of education and training. It could well be the only viable option to meet the escalating worldwide need for lifelong learning, for as Patry (1995) has pointed out, "Traditional education systems throughout the world have been stretched to the limit by the population explosion, scarcity of resources and expansion of knowledge." In the future, flexible delivery is likely to play a more significant role at all levels of education and training as globalisation becomes the norm. Because of its tradition and expertise in distance education, Australia is well placed to become a leader in flexible delivery.

Although distance education has been a reasonably significant element of Australia's history, geography and culture since early this century, it was not until Blainey (1964) coined the phrase "the tyranny of distance" (which he used as the title of his book), that this phrase became part of the common vocabulary of Australians. In a sense, Australian distance educators responded to the notion of the tyranny of distance, and were motivated to embrace a wide range of new technologies. Since many distance educators were in the vanguard of such initiatives, a review of the developments in the application of new technologies in the distance education context could be a useful starting point for evaluating alternative modes of delivery and the emergence of the virtual campus.

Apart from the more traditional technologies such as print, broadcast television and radio, the following new technologies provide opportunities for enhancing the quality of teaching: audiotapes, videotapes, computer-based learning packages, interactive video, interactive multimedia (IMM), audio-teleconferencing audiographic communication systems, videoconferencing, and video on demand (VOD). In recent times these technologies have been supplemented by the advent of the opportunities for interactivity and access to instructional resources provided by the computer communications networks popularly referred to as the "Internet", the "World Wide Web" (WWW) or the "Information Super Highway." As Swannell (1997) highlighted recently, flexible learning systems are based on a "philosophy of giving people what they want, where they want it, when they want it (WWW happens to be almost incidental)...." (p. 17). A potentially useful framework (Table 1) for organising such a knowledge base is provided by the emergence of different generations of distance education (Taylor, 1995).

The Correspondence Model is widely regarded as the first generation of distance education. It has since been subsumed by the second generation Multimedia Model, which entails the use of highly-developed and refined teaching-learning resources, including printed study guides, selected readings, videotapes, audiotapes, and computer-based courseware, including computer managed learning (CML), computer assisted learning (CAL), and interactive video. While many institutions have evolved from using the Correspondence Model to the Multimedia Model, another significant trend is the move towards the third generation Telelearning Model (Nipper, 1989; Pelton, 1991; Taylor, 1992). This third generation of distance education is based on the use of information technologies, including audio teleconferencing, audiographic communication systems, video conferencing and broadcast television/radio with attendant audio-teleconferencing.

Table 1: Models of distance education and associated delivery technologies

First Generation —The Correspondence Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Print
Second Generation —The Multi-media Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Print ● Audiotape ● Videotape ● Computer-based learning (e.g. CML/CAL) ● Interactive video (disk and tape)
Third Generation —The telelearning Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Audioteleconferencing ● Videoconferencing ● Audiographic Communication ● Broadcast TV/Radio and Audioteleconferencing
Fourth Generation —The Flexible Learning Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interactive multimedia (IMM) ● Internet-based access to WWW resources ● Computer mediated communication.

The emerging fourth generation of distance education, the Flexible Learning Model, promises to combine the benefits of high quality interactive multimedia(IMM), with access to an increasingly extensive range of teaching-learning resources and enhanced interactivity through computer mediated communication (CMC) offered by connection to the Internet.

Distance education technologies and pedagogical perspectives

As Bates (1991) has highlighted, there are two very different types of interactivity in learning: social and individual. Social interaction between learners and teachers needs to be balanced with the individual student's interaction with teaching-learning resources, including textbooks, study guides, audiotapes, videotapes and computer assisted learning programs. He argues that the view that students in conventional institutions are engaged for the greater part of their time in meaningful, face to face interaction is a myth, and that: "for both conventional and distance education students, by far the largest part of their studying is done alone, interacting with textbooks and other learning media" (Bates, 1991,p.6). One of the strengths of the Multimedia Model of distance education is that with learning materials, such as specially designed printed materials, audiotapes, videotapes and computer-based learning packages, aimed at teaching concepts and cognitive skills associated with clearly defined objectives in the context of a coherent curriculum.

Distance educators have also recognised the need to provide opportunities for social interaction to support effective learning. They have therefore tried to simulate face to face communication through the development of instructional systems based on technologies such as audio-teleconferencing, audiographic communication systems, videoconferencing and computer mediated communication (CMC). These technologies can support contiguous two-way communication between students and teachers. Alternatively, residential schools or local tutors have been used to provide the social interaction that can facilitate effective learning. It is worth noting

that the necessary balance between social and individual interactivity will vary from course to course and will be a function of such variables as the subject matter, the specific objectives of the course, the structure and quality of the learning materials, and very importantly, the student target audience.

In many contexts, including continuing professional education, the clientele for distance education consists mainly of part-time students in full-time employment. Distance educators have, therefore, had to provide teaching-learning resources (printed study guides, audiotapes, videotapes, computer-based courseware, etc.) of high quality that could be used at a time and in a place convenient to each student. In effect, these, "flexible access" technologies (Taylor, 1992) allow the student to turn "the teacher" on, or off, at will as lifestyle permits. Similarly, access to the Internet facilitates interactivity, without sacrificing the benefits of flexible access, since it can be used to support students to progress at their own pace. Thus varying rates of individual progression can be accommodated, unlike in typical conventional educational practices where the whole class tends to progress at the same pace in synchronisation with the delivery of information through mass lectures and tutorials. Some of the characteristics of the various models of distance education that are relevant to the quality of teaching and learning are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Models of distance education: a conceptual framework

Models of Distance Education and Associated Delivery Technologies	Characteristics of Delivery Technologies				
	Time	Flexibility		Highly Refined Material	Advanced Interactive Delivery
		Place	Pace		
First Generation — The Correspondence Model					
● Print	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Second Generation — The Multi-media Model					
● Print	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
● Audiotape	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
● Videotape	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
● Computer-based learning (e.g. CML/CAL)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
● Interactive video (disk and tape)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Third Generation — The Telelearning Model					
● Audioteleconferencing	No	No	No	No	Yes
● Videoconferencing	No	No	No	No	Yes
● Audiographic Communication	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
● Broadcast TV/Radio and Audioteleconferencing	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Fourth Generation — The Flexible Learning Model					
● Interactive multimedia (IMM)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
● Internet-based access to WWW resources	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
● Computer mediated communication	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

While the models of distance education could reasonably be regarded as the distance educators' response to the tyranny of distance, this evolution has been subject to the vagaries of at least three other tyrannies: the tyranny of proximity, the tyranny of futility and the tyranny of eternity.

In the first instance, on campus educators have largely ignored the new technologies, with the process of face-to-face conventional teaching regarded as being patently superior to all other forms of teaching. While distance educators have striven to overcome the perceived constraints associated with limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction, on-campus educators appear to be basically satisfied with traditional approaches. They have, therefore, tended to ignore the new technologies and have concentrated their energies on research and other forms of scholarly activity. "Such a state of affairs wherein teaching as a process is more-or-less taken for granted is overlooked because they are so much an accepted part of day to day activities that they remain unchallenged and unquestioned" (Taylor, 1994, p.180). This tyranny of proximity has also generated another significant influence, "the tyranny of futility", which has also had a detrimental impact on the cost-effective development of distance education.

The widely held view that face-to-face teaching is inherently superior to other forms of teaching has spawned a major industry worldwide. It is difficult to believe that videoconferencing would have become such a major influence, especially in North America, without the intellectual complacency associated with the tyranny of proximity. The investment in videoconferencing has been quite staggering despite the widely held view that the lecture is a process whereby the notes of the lecturer are transmitted to the notes of the student, without passing through the minds of either. As Bligh (1972) pointed out, the lecture is extremely ineffective and primarily a waste of time, as the majority of our own experience as students would testify.

The apparently unwavering enthusiasm for the proliferation of videoconferencing systems for the purpose of enhancing teaching and learning represents "the tyranny of futility". If most lectures are relatively futile from a pedagogical perspective, why spend vast sums of money promoting expensive futile exercises? A reasonable explanation is related to the rate of change, or lack thereof, in the educational context—a phenomenon known as "the tyranny of eternity." Educational paradigms tend to change direction with much the same agility as an ocean-going oil tanker. Yet another widely held view (so revered, it approaches the status of a universal truth) is that "education never changes". One major reason that the lecture has been around for hundreds of years is that "it works." It is also cheap. The fact that it is ineffectual is irrelevant. It has become institutionalised. As the late Professor Ram Reddy, a former Vice-Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, once said when describing the advice given to him by an experienced teacher when embarking on his career, "It doesn't matter what you say, as long as it lasts for 45 minutes!" The total curriculum throughout the world of institutional education is a simple variation on this theme. Schools don't change; colleges don't change; and universities don't change. Changing a university is like moving a graveyard. It is extremely difficult, and you don't get much internal assistance.

It is in this context of an apparent lack of significant change over years, that the senior managers and leaders of educational institutions have been lulled into a false sense of security, "the tyranny of eternity." Why make a decision today, when you can put it off until tomorrow, next week, next year.....? Such an attitude is no longer tenable. The rate of change of technology with the potential to enhance teaching and learning is exponential. The world is shrinking. In effect, geography is history!

While geography was the primary factor in promoting distance education, it is increasingly, irrelevant. As Lowe (1992) highlighted recently, "The power of information technology lends a new dimension of the pace of change, as it allows the rapid transmission of new knowledge from one corner of the world to another" (p. 10). The relative geographical remoteness and isolation of Australia is now largely irrelevant, since it takes an e-mail from Queensland to Queenstown only marginally less time than one from Queensland to London. The changing scale and scope of technological change now means that the tyranny of eternity as a *modus operandi* for management is no longer sustainable.

The opportunity for institutional leaders to become proactive, and to ensure that flexible delivery technologies (the fourth generation/the virtual campus) become a structurally integrated part of the teaching-learning process has never been greater. However, while the trend towards "technology-mediated" flexible delivery is perhaps inexorable in a wide variety of education and training contexts, it is crucial to realise that the use of a range of instructional media does not automatically enhance the quality of teaching and learning. As has been pointed out, this does not come simply from invoking the tyranny of futility and replicating conventional face-to-face teaching, the challenge is to understand the technology and apply it "to create new and more effective learning situations" (Paulsen and Rekkedal, 1988, p. 363). It is crucial to realise, however, that no technology will automatically improve learning to a significant extent.

Instructional design technology

A detailed discussion of instructional design and technology is beyond the scope of the present paper. However, it is important to note that delivery technologies (printed materials, audiotapes, videotapes, computer-based instructional systems etc.) simply package information and instruction to give students access to educational experiences. What really matters is the quality of the instructional message, rather than any inherent characteristics of the instructional medium. The need in education to differentiate clearly between the medium and the message was highlighted by Clark (1983), who made the point that educational technologies are mere vehicles that deliver instruction but do not influence student achievement any more than the truck that delivers our groceries causes changes in our nutrition" (p.445). It is entirely feasible to surround a teacher with a team of audio-visual technicians, graphic artists and computing specialists, to vary the style of the delivery of the educational message, without producing a significant increase in pedagogical efficacy.

The key process for improving the quality of teaching and learning is instructional design (Braden, 1996), which has received a significant boost from recent advances in instructional science (Anderson, 1982, 1985; Glaser,

1984, 1991; Kidd, 1987; Landa, 1976; Reigeluth, 1983; Winn, 1990). In the first instance, the process of instructional design entails a systematic fine-grained analysis of the knowledge base and associated cognitive skills that provide the foundation of professional expertise in a particular discipline. This approach entails the application of such techniques as cognitive task analysis (Ryder & Redding, 1993), Novex analysis (Taylor, 1994) and concept mapping (Novak, 1990) in order to design a sequence of well-structured learning experiences, thereby significantly enhancing the efficacy of the teaching-learning process.

The rapid growth in the field of instructional design and technology has promoted a shift from a system wherein a single teacher is more or less solely responsible for the design, development, delivery and evaluation of education and training programs, to a multi-disciplinary team approach, wherein a wide range of specialist expertise is applied to the generation of training programs. The necessary range of expertise for the development of technologically sophisticated teaching and learning systems, tends to be beyond the capacity of individual teachers and appears to demand the deployment of an expert teaching team, with a wide range of specialist skills. The following example of a global flexible delivery initiative entailing the use of fourth generation distance education technologies would not have been feasible without pooling the expertise of a wide range of experts. These include specialists in instructional design, systems design, electronic information systems, database design, graphic design, student administration, electronic publishing and project management. And the discipline content experts!

This team approach has been institutionalised at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) where it was first introduced in 1977 (Taylor, 1994). The organisational ethos generated by this multidisciplinary approach to teaching in a dual mode institution where distance education enrolments now constitute 73% of total enrolments has enabled USQ to move rapidly to introduce fourth generation distance education technology. USQ's leadership in this field was recognised recently by its selection to participate in a "Showcase of Best Practice", organised to run concurrently with the Commonwealth Minister of Education Conference held in Botswana in July, 1997. The course selected for the Showcase, the Graduate Certificate in Open and Distance Learning, is available only via the Internet, and appears to offer an appropriate prototype for lifelong professional education on a global scale.

A global prototype for lifelong professional education

In a recent paper, Plater (1995) argued that faculty in all fields must know how to use the technology and be able to teach effectively through distant interactions with students and peers. One of the acknowledged difficulties, however, is the need to provide appropriate staff development opportunities for teachers to become familiar with new technologies and the associated pedagogical potential for the enhancement of teaching and learning. Thach (1995), for example, made the point that, "Faculty and instructors need instructional design information to assist them in adapting to the new teaching environment" (p.93). Given the rapidly growing influence of flexible delivery, stimulated by the exponential growth in access to the

Internet, the need for continuing vocational education and training has never been greater in the teaching profession.

In response to this, the USQ initiated a global faculty development program for teaching at a distance. The development for the courseware was initially supported by the Australian Government through its Committee for Staff Development, with a AUS \$ 100,000 grant. The AT&T Foundation provided a further US \$ 50,000 (AU \$ 67,000) to develop the international network. The project entails the development of an international network of institutions to support the offering of a Graduate Certificate in Open and Distance Learning (<http://WWW.usq.edu.au/material/course/us59/>).

The following institutions worked with the USQ to launch this initiative in 1996.

- Fundação Brasileira de Educação, Brazil
- Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei
- Open Learning Institute, Hong Kong (now OUHK)
- Universiti Malaysia, Sarawak, Malaysia
- Institut Teknologi Mara, Malaysia
- Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico
- Rhodes University, South Africa
- Georgia Southern University, USA
- Solomon Islands College of Higher Education
- University of Manitoba, Canada.

The Graduate Certificate (ODL) is offered solely via electronic means. Participating students need to have access to appropriate hardware and software to communicate via electronic mail and to download materials through the Internet. The courseware that has been developed makes extensive use of existing electronic resources already available on the World Wide Web. A recent search of electronic materials revealed 31 electronic journals and magazines and 43 newsletters relevant to educational technology, as well as 12 electronic journals related to distance education, 29 electronic journals related to instructional technology, 28 associated electronic discussion groups and numerous database all specifically related to the content of the course. Students gain access to these materials through the use of an Internet Browser such as Netscape.

Additionally, systems developed to support the AT&T project allow students to: (i) find out about the course by accessing an electronic brochure, (ii) enrol electronically, and (iii) submit assignments electronically. These initiatives underwent a formative evaluation phase during Semester 2, 1996, with the first formal offer of the course initiated in Semester 1, 1997. During the formative evaluation phase, enrolments were restricted to a maximum of 25 with two or three faculty members from each of the participating institutions embarking on the course during the second semester of 1996. These faculty members may subsequently act as local tutors in their own regional contexts.

The design of the electronic teaching and learning environment, although developed independently by the USQ team, has much in common with the

technological environment created by the Laboratoire d'Informatique Cognitive et Environments de Formation (LICEF) at the Télé-université in Montreal. Ricciardi-Rigault, Henri and Damphousse (1996) articulated the design and operation of a "pedagogical virtual space" to support a learning process that is on-line, collaborative and interactive. The USQ approach embodies these principles.

Students are provided with an interactive study chart. This sets the broad parameters of the subject matter content to be investigated, and lists a number of exemplary references. References are both to traditional print-based materials that might be found in a local library and to electronic references which are hot linked via specific URLs. The lecturers were assisted in the task of locating relevant materials on the WWW by a research assistant, who surfed the Net for potentially useful materials according to lists of key works provided by the teaching staff. These materials were then bookmarked and made available for evaluation. As members of the teaching team assessed these materials, each electronic reference was annotated with a comment on the relevance of the content for particular modules of the course. Because of the transient nature of many web sites, any material which was evaluated as being essential, was cleared for copyright and stored on the local USQ server. This electronic database of courseware is referred to locally as the "AT&T Treasure Trove." As Owston (1997) highlighted, "What the Web can offer, that traditional media cannot, is information that is instantly available, often very up-to-date, worldwide in scope, and presented in a more motivating format for students to explore" (p. 31).

In due course, students will also contribute to this database, which will be highly amenable to efficient searching because of its inherent structure and selective nature. Naturally, the students are free to surf the Net for teaching-learning resources that meet their specific needs. They are also able to download assignments, with those of sufficient quality being added to the database for reference by future students. The interaction with courseware materials is, however, only one element of the interactivity into the USQ pedagogical approach.

Interaction with other students, teaching staff and other experts, who act as mentors, is achieved through the use of computer mediated communication (CMC), using the Web-based conferencing system, "About", or "Netscapes Newsgroups." Students are encouraged to communicate through various electronic conferences, established for specific content areas as well as for informal social interaction through the "Coffee Chat" Conference. It is worth noting that there is a qualitative difference between traditional tutorial (real-time verbal) and computer conferencing (asynchronous written communication), with the reflective and precise nature of the latter being very different from the spontaneous and less structured nature of oral discourse in either a face-to-face, video or audio teleconference context. "The reflective and explicit nature of the written word is a disciplined and rigorous form of thinking and communicating it allows time for reflection and, thereby, facilitates learners making connections amongst ideas and constructing coherent knowledge structures" (Garrison, 1997, p. 5). Computer conferencing is not just another technology, its capacity to rehumanise distance education represents a qualitative shift which has the potential not only to reshape learning at a distance, but also to pervade conventional education systems.

Time zones and local infrastructure permitting, the socio-cognitive dimension of learning in the Grad Cert (ODL) is also being enhanced through the periodic use of audiographic communication, videoconferencing and the use of Internet Relay Chat (IRC) systems. Since the current cohort of students comes from 12 countries covering seven time zones, this use of synchronous communication is limited and supplementary, with the primary mode of communication being asynchronous, thus maintaining flexible access for students.

At a more specific level, some members of the teaching team are exploring different styles of interaction, including the use of reflections as a basis for collaborative learning (Naidu & McAleese, 1996), which tends to demand a controlled sequence of learning activities. Others are emphasising independent learning which permits greater choice of learning sequence and style for individual students. Further, another member of the team (Ross, 1997) is basing his pedagogical approach on the simulation of a company involved in the design, development and marketing of multimedia products. This subject unit, "Creating Interactive Multimedia", entails a number of innovative features, including the design and development multimedia products using software available via the WWW, collaboration between students through the running of production team meetings via Internet Relay Chat, supplemented by real audio.

These approaches are supplemented by a mentoring system in which each student has access to a mentor through e-mail in an effort to provide individual support and advice. Each of these pedagogical variations is being systematically evaluated through the use of an on-line evaluation system, which will lay the foundation for continuous improvement. It is planned that the results of such action research will lay the foundation for a series of experimental research studies in the future. Initial indications are, however, that the quality of student learning outcomes is extremely high and in some respects quite exceptional. For instance, the student project generated through collaboration among 18 students in 11 countries, who were learning to use multimedia, was superior to that of the same unit taught on campus- (<http://www.connect.usq.edu.au/students/d9710775/con1.html>).

CONCLUSION

The USQ AT&T project appears to provide an appropriate prototype for the flexible delivery of continuing professional education and training on a global scale. Although focussed primarily on the teaching profession, and those employed in industrial training roles, it could well act as a prototype for continuous professional education in many professions. The approach has the flexibility to meet the needs of busy professionals in full-time employment, irrespective of their geographical location. Further, it has the interactivity to engender efficacious learning outcomes in a time efficient manner. The immediate access to current materials and associated professional discussion with colleagues from around the world creates a socio-cognitive learning environment from which all who participate will surely benefit. Indeed, the professional networking which is likely to emanate from such approaches to flexible delivery seems likely to engender genuine lifelong learning.

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UNIT 5 CONSUMER PREFERENCE FOR FLEXIBLE EDUCATION

Sam Ayer and Catherine Smith

Editor's Notes: It was during the 1980s and early 1990s that a degree of awareness about flexible approaches to education was beginning to percolate through higher education. This may in part be attributed to the mushrooming of open universities all over the world. The term open learning has connotations of being about learning packages, most commonly print based, which an individual learner could study at his or her own pace, place and time. There was a misplaced and unfounded expectation that this would turn out to be tutor free, increasingly technology based and endlessly available and relatively cheaper than conventional education. It is hardly surprising that the initial reaction was that of hostility in the teaching profession and scepticism among college managements and corporate and individual clients. Many teachers were fearful for their job and hence were particularly suspicious of the motives behind open learning.

Elisabeth Clark (1995) has rightly pointed out that open learning was being introduced to many higher education teachers in entirely the wrong way — as no more than a means of responding to government targets and of solving some of the associated practical problems currently facing higher education. As educationists first and foremost, teachers in higher education are understandably and rightly suspicious of any approach which appears to spring from more expediency rather than from a sound and principled educational foundation. The six key concepts that are embedded in the philosophy of open learning are:

- *a student centred approach*
- *students encouraged to take responsibilities for their learning*
- *learner choice*
- *opening up learning opportunities by overcoming some of the barriers to course attendance*
- *flexible education provision to meet individual requirements*
- *use of specially prepared or adapted learning materials.*

The open learning approach brings together sound educational principles and an organizational framework which is practical and suited to the needs of our times. New communication technologies are being adopted by open universities not only for course production but also for course delivery and instruction which allows greater flexibility and control over learning to distance learners than is usually possible in conventionally taught courses offered by conventional universities. Since open universities are using technology for promoting flexible learning, perhaps the term flexible learning shakes off the limited perception of what open learning is and implies a wider view of the learning process.

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In this article the authors present the findings of a market research project to identify consumer preferences for flexible education. The research concentrated on two major aspects of flexible education: access to learning and choices within courses. It explores what specific aspects of flexibility within education and training provision are most relevant to prospective students of flexible education and thus highlights potential market opportunities.

What do distance/open learning students consider to be the most relevant aspects of flexible education? What mode of delivery is preferable? What do they regard as the strengths and benefits of flexible education? What are the weaknesses of flexible education?

It is to these and similar questions relating to flexible education in further and higher education that this study is attempting to answer.

A search through the literature on flexible education reveals that there is no one accepted definition of its meaning. Often the terms open and distance learning are used interchangeably to describe the same education philosophy. There are differences.

Open Learning is most frequently used to describe a type of education provision that Lewis (1986) characterised as being learner centred. By being learner centred individuals take responsibility for their own learning so they can study what and how they want at a time, place and pace suited to themselves. It is designed to remove the barriers associated with conventional education such as qualification requirements, location and time of courses, fixed start and finish times, cost of travel and fees (Lewis 1986). Lewis (1995) groups the freedoms made possible by the type of education provision under two headings: choices in access (time, place and pace) and choices within the curriculum or course itself (content, mode of study, and method of assessment). Open learning, therefore, is a method of education that gives flexible access, choice and control to the individual.

Arfield (1994) states that as well as being an educational philosophy open learning denotes a set of techniques for delivering knowledge and skills. These include the use of supported open learning packages and other resource-based materials, learning workshops, flexi-study, study circles and computer-based training (Lewis 1986; National Extension College 1989). Distance Learning, where the student learns using packages at a distance from the teacher, falls into this category and can thus be thought of as a branch of open learning (Holland 1990).

Open learning therefore, is both an approach and a system for delivering education (McManus and Lyne 1992). Kelly and Keely, however, state that 'too much emphasis is often placed on open learning as a mode of delivery at the expense of the philosophical principles' (1992:4). Regarding open learning merely as the production and the development of learning materials fails to take account of other dimensions of flexibility such as access, cost, recognition of prior learning, selection of modules, accumulation and transfer of credits and choice of assessment and content.

For this reason, many others prefer to use the term flexible learning as an umbrella term covering both open and distance learning. This implies a system that is more than just the use of learning packages (see, for example,

Further Education Unit 1983); Fulmer et al 1992; Sutcliffe and Powell 1994; Clark and Robinson 1994; and Wade and Sutton 1994).

Although the degree to which flexibility is achieved depends very much on the institution, course, tutor and the individual, a flexible learning system is one which offers a range of freedoms designed to meet the needs of the individual. These are set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Key features of flexible learning system

<i>Access to Learning</i>	<i>Choices within the Course</i>
Choice of location, learner chooses where to study	Choice of modules, course offers many possible destinations
Choice of time of day and day of week	Choice of mode of study, learner can use several media
Entry to course at any time of year	Negotiate course content, learner negotiates course content
Prior learning in place of entry qualifications, anyone can study	Choice of method of assessment, learner is involved in assessing progress
Ability to work at own pace, learner sets the pace	Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CATS)
Ability to roll-on roll-off course, learner can set own completion date	Access to tutor support when required
Payment by instalment	Learner negotiates program of study
Resource centre open outside hours	Learner selects from support options

The impetus behind the introduction of flexible education. There are many radical changes affecting training and education within the health and social care field. These include, for example, political and economic pressures and the increased demand for continuing education within the health and social care professions.

Developments in higher education. According to Slee (1990) and also McManus and Lyne (1992) the major influences are the increase in the number and diversity of student populations, increasing demand from employers for skilled-based training, and a fall in the number of teachers in higher education.

Political and economic pressures. The main change within the structure and environment of the National Health Service (NHS) which affected education was the implementation of market principles into service provision. This has resulted in education being viewed as a commodity (McManus and Lyne 1992) which educational institutions supply and NHS Trusts and other employers within the health and social service purchase. There is an emphasis, therefore, on value for money. Employers are increasingly looking for cost-effective flexible training to educate their workforce quickly and efficiently.

Demand for continuing education within health and social care professions. Within all health and social care professions there is on-going demand for continuing professional education. To maintain competence, practitioners need to keep abreast of new knowledge and apply that knowledge to clinical work. Changes within the nursing profession, such as the UKCC's Post-Registration Education and Practice (PREP) and the English National Board's Framework for Continuing Education and Higher Awards, have

particularly accelerated the demand for training and education. This demand cannot be satisfied by traditional methods alone, reinforcing the need for institutions to adopt a more flexible approach to education (Kelly and Keely 1992).

The development of the internal market within nurse education has led colleges to review their portfolio of course provision for consumers of health education. As a result, education is questioning whether traditional modes of programme delivery are sufficiently versatile to meet the needs of purchases within the changing nature of health care delivery (Murphy 1995). One way for colleges to meet the demand for a wider range of learning opportunities for adults is to provide more flexibility within the further and higher education system. The concept of flexible education involves the modification of delivery systems, specific providing agencies, target populations, specific determinants such as geographic location and institutional determinants. Because the flexible learning approach is learner-centred it requires a greater emphasis on negotiation, counselling and guidance to help learners to identify and to progress through the most appropriate learning programme to meet their individual needs (FEU 1983; Stevenson et al 1996).

The myriad of changes and developments outlined above signal very clearly the need for educational institutions to re-appraise their methods of delivery and introduce more flexible learning strategies. There is every indication that this is now the case with open learning, distance learning and flexible approaches to learning ever increasing in popularity (Le Var 1992; Thomas 1995). Flexible approaches to education and training are being actively encouraged and supported by professional bodies such as the English National Board and the Institute of Health Services Management, who recognise the advantages such an approach offers. Both the English National Board and Nursing Times have developed open-learning programmes and nurses now form one of the largest professional groups studying with the Open University (Bailey 1992). From this evidence it is clear that flexible learning has and will continue to have a major role to play in the education and training of health and social care professionals.

Method

The dearth of material in this field of study prompted the researchers to adopt a triangulatory approach as a means of developing an appropriate questionnaire content. To develop the survey questionnaire the following approaches were adopted. A thorough search through the relevant literature for issues and themes relevant to the provision of flexible education was undertaken. An in-depth discussion with experts in the field of flexible education was undertaken. Focus groups were used to identify themes and issues from stakeholders.

The use of focus groups. Focus groups are a research strategy which involves intensive discussion and interviewing of small groups of people on a given 'focus' or issue, usually on a number of occasions over a period of time. (see for example Morgan and Spanish 1984; Krueger 1995). In the present study, the questionnaire content emerged from and was developed through the use of focus-group discussions. Issues generated by the focus groups served as catalyst for the researchers who used the information to

develop and generate new ideas. Focus-group data were used to provide appropriate language and to improve the research questions. In a study of this kind in which respondents have different orientations, characteristic and backgrounds it was crucial to use the correct vocabulary, jargon and phraseology in order to ensure that prospective respondents fully understood the questions asked. For the present study focus groups were used: to explore issues and generate ideas to be used in the design of the survey questionnaire; to provide information on the needs and wants of stakeholders regarding flexible education and to provide primary data on the view and perspectives of students of flexible education.

Three focus group events took place. Focus group one (11 managers) were recruited from the health and social care field. Focus group two (10 course tutors) were recruited from tutors who deliver flexible-education courses. Focus group three (8 students) were made up of current students or individuals who had attended flexible-education courses.

A questionnaire was designed and piloted using a sample of open learning, distant-learning and traditional students.

Two hundred questionnaires were distributed in August 1995; 113 were returned completed, three questionnaires were returned incomplete because the respondents no longer lived at the address. The three uncompleted questionnaires were removed from the original sample leaving an overall sample of 197. This gives a response rate of 57 per cent.

Presentation of Results. Relevance of flexible approaches to education provision. Respondents were asked to indicate how relevant each aspect of flexibility would be if they were choosing a course of study. Table 2 shows the degree of relevance respondents placed on each aspect of flexibility relating to *access to learning*. The responses are ranked in order of most relevant (e.g. access to the Learning Resource Centre) to least relevant (e.g. choice of day of week).

Access to the Learning Resources Centre. Table 2 shows that the most important feature of flexibility relating to access to education and training was that the learning resource centre be open outside of normal office hours (i.e. 0900 hours - 1700 hours). Seventy-seven respondents (68 per cent) stated this was very relevant which was the highest percentage of responses in this category. Twenty-nine (26 per cent) felt it was relevant. Work and/or home commitments preventing health and social care workers visiting the learning resource centre during office hours, was the most common reason why flexible opening times were considered important. This was mentioned by sixty-one respondents. The following comments sum up what was said:

'As I tend to work office hours I need time outside 9-5 to work on coursework'

'Because I work nights, very early opening would be convenient to me'

Opening times outside office hours is relevant because I works shifts'

Table 2. Degree of relevance respondents placed on aspects of flexibility relating to access to learning (n = 113)

Aspect of Flexibility	Very Relevant	Relevant	Not Relevant	Missing Data
Opening times of Resource Centre	77	29	6	1
Pay by instalments	73	28	10	2
Location	41	62	10	0
APEL to gain entry to a course	37	52	22	2
Own pace of learning	32	56	22	3
Choice of time of day	28	62	23	0
Choice of time of year	31	37	43	2
Roll-on roll-off course	12	57	35	9
Choice of day of week	14	47	52	0

Twelve respondents felt flexible opening times would increase overall access to education, allowing learners to call upon library and computer services at times of convenience. Eleven stated they would like to see the centre open in the early evening and weekends.

A small number of respondents (5%) did not feel extending opening times of the learning resources centre was a relevant feature of flexible learning. These respondents indicated they did not have problems arranging visits so it made no difference to them when the centre was open.

Payment by instalments. The ability to pay for a course by instalments was of significance relevance to the majority of respondents. Seventy-three (64%) found this very relevant, whilst twenty-eight (25%) indicated it was relevant. Financial constraints was the main reason why this was of importance to respondents. Sixty-seven respondents, for example, stated they had difficulty paying in one lump sum so paying by instalments would help ease the cost and allow them to budget for the course.

The location of a course. When deciding whether to take a course of study, the place it would actually be delivered was of relevance to the majority of learners (36% very relevant, 55% relevant). This was because of problems associated with travelling to the location.

The most common problem associated with travelling to the location was the time and cost involved. Twenty respondents mentioned other problems associated with travelling long distances to a venue. For example; transport difficulties; the high cost incurred if it was necessary to stay in overnight accommodation; and a dislike of travelling long distances.

Work and/or home commitments also prevented many respondents from travelling long distances to a venue. On cross tabulation there were no correlations between place of work and the relevance of the location of a course. This suggests that all health and social care workers experience problems with travelling long distances to a venue.

Credit for prior learning to gain entry to a course. A large majority of respondents (79%) felt that previous experiential learning (APEL) should be used where appropriate to allow those staff without qualifications to gain entry to a course. Fifteen respondents felt that prior learning/experience was

of relevance as it would benefit themselves and/or others on the course. One respondent stated:

'I have realised the importance of this over the last two years doing my conversion course. Prior learning/experience I'm sure are what helped me complete my conversion course'.

Learning at own pace. Thirty-two respondent (29%) felt it was very relevant that they could negotiate the pace of their learning, whilst fifty-six (49%) felt it was relevant. The main reason for this was the need to fit study in with home and/or work commitments (mentioned by twenty-six respondents). Eighteen respondents felt learning at their own pace was relevant because unforeseen circumstances might mean extra time would be needed to complete a course.

The fact that people learn at different speeds was cited as a reason by seven respondents. Comments included:

'Each person learns at a different pace so having fixed times hinders learners and puts undue pressure on them'

Twenty-two respondents felt negotiating the pace of learning was not relevant. The main reason for this was that they preferred a fixed deadline. Many stated this was the only way they could become motivated to complete the work.

Choice of time of day. Twenty-eight respondents (25%) felt choice of time of day was very relevant, whilst sixty-two (55%) thought it was relevant. Work and/or home commitments were the main reasons given by the majority of respondents (64 respondents). Typical comments were"

'Time is relevant because of school leaving times'

'Time of day is very relevant as I work shifts and therefore cannot attend the same regular hours each week'.

Six respondents mentioned problems with travelling, particularly if a course was a distance away. For thirteen respondents, time of day was not relevant because they could organise their life around a course.

Choice of time of year. Time of year was of relevance to sixty-eight (60%) respondents. This was mainly due to family commitments during school holidays or peak staff holiday times at work (mentioned 31 times). Nine respondents felt access to a course at any time of year was important because it would allow them greater flexibility to plan ahead, organise time off work and fit in family commitments. Six respondents felt that there was more opportunity to get on a course if entry was at any time of year. In one respondents' opinion it:

'Makes a course more attainable and improves access'.

Forty-three (38%) respondents felt time of year made no real difference to their choice of course.

Roll-on roll-off courses. Sixty-nine respondents (61%) felt the ability to roll-on roll-off a course was of relevance. The reasons given were very similar to those given for negotiated pace of learning. For example, fitting in with home and/or work commitments was the most common reason, followed by a need for flexibility due to any unforeseen changes in circumstances. Thirty-five (31%) respondents felt that the ability to roll-on roll-off courses was not relevant because they preferred to complete a course once they had started it.

Choice of day of week. Sixty-one respondents (54%) felt choice of day of week was of relevance. The majority of these mentioned work and/or home commitments as the main reasons (mentioned by 51 respondents). Fifty-two (46%) respondents however, did not feel day of the week was of relevance. Of those that gave a reason, seventeen respondents stated it was because they were flexible enough to manage any day.

Choices within the course. Table 3 shows the degree of relevance respondents placed on each aspect of flexibility relating to choices within the course. The responses are ranked in order of most relevant (e.g. access to tutor support) to least relevant (e.g. choice of mode of study) according to the number of responses received in each category of 'very relevant', 'relevant' and 'not relevant'.

Table 3. Degree of relevance respondents placed on aspects of flexibility relating to choices within the course (n = 113)

Aspect of Flexibility	Very Relevant	Relevant	Not Relevant	Missing Data
Tutor support	55	51	5	2
Exemptions for prior learning	45	45	14	9
Choice of modules	40	49	14	10
Negotiating content	39	60	12	2
CATS scheme	45	47	20	1
Choice of mode of study	26	59	27	1
Choice of assessment	35	47	29	2

Tutor support. Nearly all respondents (94) stated that flexible access to tutor support was important. Tutor support was felt to be essential to gain both encouragement, answer queries, give advice and provide an opportunity to discuss individual needs. Nine respondents felt negotiating tutor support would enable them to fit around work and/or home commitments, particularly if there was a distance to travel to meet the tutor. Seven respondents felt flexible access to tutor support was important because tutorial input would be required at different times throughout the course.

Exemptions for prior learning. Ninety respondents (80) would welcome the opportunity to negotiate exemptions from parts of courses through the use of prior experiential learning. The main reason for this (mentioned by 40 respondents) was that such a scheme prevents duplication of learning and thus saves time and money. Seventeen respondents felt it was important to recognise and give credit to past learning, whether academic or experiential. Fourteen (12) respondents did not feel exemptions from parts of a course for prior learning was relevant. Many of these indicated they would prefer to repeat learning, whilst others said it made no difference to them.

Choice of modules. Eighty-nine (78) respondents would like the opportunity to pick and mix from a menu of modules. The most common reason for this

was that a course could then be tailored to specific needs (mentioned by 32 respondents). Typical comments were:

'Every learner has different needs and if 'pick and mix' modules were available courses can be adapted to individual requirements'

'Picking modules helps one structure a course around ones own needs.'

Negotiating content. Eighty-nine (87%) respondents felt the ability to negotiate course content was important. Tailoring a course to specific needs, for example, applicability to the work place, was the most common reason for this (mentioned by 42 respondents).

Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme. Ninety-two respondents (81%) felt it was important that a course carried Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CATS) points. A wide range of reasons were given for this, but by far the most common was that it allowed learners to build up credit towards future study. Sixteen respondents (all nurses) stated that CATS points were essential to help fulfil the UKCC's Post-Registration Education and Practice (PREP) requirements. Twenty respondents (18%) did not think the accumulation of credit point was of relevance. Reasons were: it made no difference to them; they were not looking to study further; experience is more important than academia; and if the course was important enough then CATS points are not so relevant.

Choice of mode of study. Eighty-five respondents (75%) felt choice of mode of study was important. Sixty felt such flexibility enables learners to study through a medium that was best suited to their learning style.

Choice of assessment. The ability to choose a method of assessment was of relevance to eighty-two respondents (72%). The main reason for this was that it would suit their own style of learning and preference for assessment. This was mentioned by forty-eight respondents. Twenty-nine (26%) respondents did not feel a choice of method of assessment was important. These respondents would accept the assessment strategy designed for the course.

Préferences for the delivery of flexible learning. Respondents were asked to select from a number of listed alternatives the ways in which they would like to see flexible learning courses (non-traditional courses) delivered. Table 4 shows their responses .

Table 4. Preferences for delivery of flexible education

<i>Mode of Delivery</i>	<i>% Response</i>
Modular flexible programmes	79
Open learning with tutor support	77
Learning workshops	68
Multi-media library	47
Individual tutoring	45
Drop-in centre	39
Open learning packages	36
Distance learning schemes	35
Computer networks	21

Modular-flexible programmes and open learning with tutor support were the most popular methods of delivering flexible-learning programmes. This reflects the individual learners' desire to tailor a course to their own requirements through the mixing of modules. It also reflects the importance placed on tutor support. 77 per cent of respondents preferred to use open learning packages alone. Computer networks were least popular although this may be due more to lack of skills in computer than the method itself.

The swot analysis. This section examines what respondents thought were the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of flexible learning. Table 5 lists the comments received and identifies the number of times each was mentioned by respondents.

Table 5. Swot analysis

<i>Swot</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Number of Times Mentioned</i>
Strengths (n = 113)	Can fit with work and home commitments	30
	Allows one to work at own pace	25
	Tailor to meet individual needs	16
	Accessible to more people	12
	Increase choice and flexibility	8
	Develops self motivation	4
Weaknesses (n = 113)	Lack of motivation	35
	Lack of support/isolation	30
	Lack of time	3
	Cost	3
Opportunities (n = 113)	Educational access for more people	28
	Professional/personal development	19
	Better for those with little time or irregular hours	15
	Suits individual needs	6
	Increases choice and flexibility	5
	Can learn at own pace	4
	Traditional methods may disappear	7
Threats (n = 113)	Cut in educational posts for staff	7
	Reduction in quality	4
	Cost	2

Discussion of Results. The results show that the two major aspects of flexible education: *access to learning* and *choices within courses* have varying degrees of relevance to the respondents. See Table 6.

The results also reveal a multiplicity of reasons why flexibility is considered important to increase *access to learning* and to provide freedom and *choice within courses*.

The most important elements of flexibility relating to *access to learning* was that the learning resource centre be open outside of normal office hours. This would allow those health and social care professionals constrained by family or work commitments to call upon library and computer services at a time of their convenience. Many who work shifts, for example, had encountered problems accessing learning resources due to restricted opening times. Airfield (1994) suggests that as a central resource supporting

teaching and learning, libraries must adapt the services it provides to ensure they meet the needs of its users. This, he says, is particularly important for those students who are returning to learning and who may have full-time jobs and family responsibilities.

Table 6. Degree of relevance respondents placed on aspects of flexibility relating to access to learning and choices within courses

<i>Aspects of Flexibility</i>	<i>Degree of Relevance (%)</i>
Tutor support	94
Opening times of resource course	94
Location of course	91
Pay by instalments	89
Negotiating content	87
CATS scheme	81
Choice of time of day	80
Exemptions from prior learning	80
Choice of modules	79
APEL to gain entry to a course	79
Own pace of learning	78
Choice of mode of study	75
Choice of assessment	72
Roll-on roll-off course	61
Choice of time of year	60
Choice of day of week	54

Family and work commitments emerge as the biggest barriers preventing individual learners from gaining access to traditional education and training. As such it was cited as a reason for providing flexibility and choice in the time of day, year, place and pace of learning of a course. Flexible access and exit to courses was important for the same reasons. Robinson (1990) identifies work and family responsibilities as one of the main reasons why the use of open learning is becoming increasingly popular amongst health care workers.

Another barrier for individual learners is the issue of cost. The cost of a course was the main reason why many preferred to pay for a course by instalments, particularly learners who have financial difficulties or are not eligible for sponsorship by their employers. This reinforces the findings of a study by Hones and Rushforth (1996) who found that personal financial constraints ranked as the most common barrier to accessing study. The cost of travelling is also a reason why many individual learners felt the location of a course is significant. If located at some distance away, for example, the cost of travelling increases as does travelling time. To reduce travelling time and cost, individual learners would prefer courses delivered locally.

The ongoing demand for continuing professional education and, for nurses, the advent of the UKCC's Post-Registration Education and Practice (PREP), means that health and social care professional require constant up-dating of their skills. Many however, are prevented from accessing a course because they do not hold the required educational qualifications. For this reason most respondents felt that previous experiential learning (APEL and APL) should be used where possible to allow those staff without the relevant credentials to gain entry to a course. The use of previous experiential

learning was also seen as an important way of gaining exemptions from parts of a course, thereby preventing duplication of learning and saving both time and money. Many respondents indicated that credit for prior learning schemes such as APEL/APL and CATS, were an important part of flexible education and training as they allowed learners to gain recognition for past learning. Such schemes were seen as providing a means of building up to future study and of transferring between institutions and/or courses.

The ability to tailor a course to an individual's specific requirements was the most common reason why flexibility within the course itself was welcome. Choosing from a menu of modules and negotiating course content were seen as ways of providing this flexibility, allowing learners to plan a personalised route through a course and to study topics of relevance to their own professional development and to the workplace. Choosing the mode of study and method of assessment were also seen as providing flexibility within a course, enabling learners to study through media best suited to their individual learning style.

Nearly all respondents felt flexible access to tutor support was of major relevance. The most common reason for this was to provide advice, answer queries, give encouragement and maintain motivation. Negotiating access to tutors would also enable learners to fit tutorials around work and home commitments. The importance of access to and level of tutor support for flexible and open learning students is a subject discussed by a number of authors (see for example, Bailey 1990; Robinson 1989; Cowan 1994; Stevenson et al 1996; Morgan and Morris 1994).

Many of the strengths and weaknesses of flexible learning listed above mirror the reasons why flexibility is of relevance to learners. For example, the major strengths are seen as being able to fit in learning with home and work commitments, working at one's own pace and tailoring a course to meet individual requirements. Similarly, weaknesses were seen as lack of motivation and isolation, reinforcing the importance of both tutor and peer support.

CONCLUSION

The popularity of flexible learning signals new perspectives for enriching education provision as we move into the 21st Century. This study has used the notions of *access to learning* and *choices within courses* to explore practical and logistical issues in the provision of non-traditional education. Philosophically, flexible education is consistent with the andragogical paradigm expounded through the works of educationalists such as Knowles (1970). In this regard the rationale underpinning flexible education is shared by strategies such as shared-learning, student-centred learning and problem-based learning. All these are increasingly being utilised to maximum effect in multiprofessional education.

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UNIT 6 INFORMATION HANDLING SKILLS AND RESOURCE-BASED LEARNING IN AN OPEN UNIVERSITY COURSE

Janet Macdonald and Robin Mason

Editor's Notes : The computer is no longer one option, or one choice of medium among others in a media mix as it was considered to be a few years back, when computers were primarily used for word processing, e-mail, and computer conferencing.

It has now become the vehicle for multimedia. It is able to handle both signs, visuals and sounds, are no longer a 'machine' like radio and television but a 'medium' using digital communications system. World-Wide Web (WWW) and CD-ROM are being used for production of learning materials for the computer. Both of them also serve as a medium for storage of huge amounts of data (information).

They are specially important for the transference of knowledge-learning. The hyperstructure of these media supports the interaction between the learner and the learning material, while at the same time, the learner remains in a position where he/she controls the learning process.

We would like students of distance education to get more insights on resource-based learning. To achieve this objective, we selected this article which is a case study of U.K. Open University Students registered for the course 'Information Technology and Society' which was presented for the first time in 1995. The students' experiences and their attitudes towards resource-based learning provided through the computer have been studied through a survey of students' from two tutorial groups on completion of the above mentioned course.

The move towards resource-based learning reflects a trend away from transmissive models of education, towards a more student-centred approach, where the individual has the responsibility for finding and synthesising relevant information from a variety of sources.

There is a growing body of literature and research in resource-based learning. For example, a survey of resource-based learning in Higher Education by Gibbs, Pollard and Farrell (1994) focuses on institutional issues associated with the introduction of resource-based learning. They discuss a spectrum of types of resource-based learning in various organisations and include measures for training students in independent study techniques. Related to this is growing interest among academic librarians in improving students' information handling skills. On the Internet, the electronic magazine DeLiberations which is part of the Electronic Libraries programme, provides a resource and forum for discussion on issues related to educational development including resource-based and flexible learning (<http://www.lgu.ac.uk/deliberations>).

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In the context of open and distance learning, recent advances in information technology have increased opportunities for all students to make use of resource-based learning. Multimedia workstations allow students access to information in the form of text, graphics, audio or video clips. They can search for relevant information, using a variety of techniques, and cut and paste relevant sections into assignments or other work. In addition, modern access to the Internet means that students working from home can make use of a store of documents, news and other sources, in addition to communicating using electronic mail and conferencing with their tutor and other students. These innovations are realised in the OU course THD204 'Information Technology and Society', which was presented for the first time in 1995.

Perspectives on resource-based learning

There are many ways of interpreting the concept of resource-based learning. Laurillard (1993), whilst arguing against a transmission model for education, suggests that because of costs, resource-based learning in its purest form is properly restricted to postgraduate education, where it can be adequately supported and assessed. She feels that a less 'open ended' approach is more appropriate for undergraduates. In contrast, there is a popular conception equating OU courses generally with resource-based learning (see for example Gibbs, Pollard and Farrell 1994). It is probably true that most OU courses already have a resource-based element in them, because the student always has the choice of when, how, and how much to read, and to decide when they know enough.

The course THD204 differs from more conventional OU courses in a number of respects. In explaining resource-based learning to students, various course writers highlighted several interesting facets. Some emphasised the acquisition of study skills, in association with resource-based learning. Aspects such as learning to scan articles, or being exposed to a variety of viewpoints, and learning how to assess them were mentioned. Although these skills are often discussed in association with OU study generally (see for example various chapters in the *Good Study Guide*, Northedge 1990), students probably have a greater opportunity to practise them when studying using a resource-based learning approach:

Learning how to pick out the essential elements of what an author has to say and making connections between ideas from a range of sources, and finally, exposing yourself to different perspectives on the same issue, are all important elements of resource-based learning.

Information Technology and Society Block 3 p40

Another obvious theme was that students were afforded a greater measure of independence, and given more choice in what they read, and greater control over their learning:

you will have the choice[...] to spend more time on areas which interest you most

Information Technology and Society Block 3 p56

Some authors emphasised resource-based learning, as a way of introducing a research-based approach to the student. One mentioned:

to give you a feel for the way in which an evolving, multidisciplinary field is investigated

Information Technology and Society Block 3 p31

This contrast with more traditional OU courses, which frequently contain extensive reviews on a topic, together with a lengthy bibliography.

Perhaps the most obvious sign of the resource-based learning approach is the range and size of the resource-base available to the student: the term 'open access' was mentioned to describe the student faced with articles, video clips or programs from a range of sources.

The role of electronic media in resource-based learning was thought to be significant in three areas: the size and diversity of resources which can be accommodated; the organisation of the resources, which can be flexible; and the access, which can be through a variety of routes. One author felt that their success could lie in the potentially interactive nature of the media:

The information resource by itself is a hostile environment for most learners.

A computer-based workstation as an information resource would be an equally hostile environment if it were not interactive.

Information Technology and Society Blocks 3 p12

Advice and activities related to resource-based learning in the course

The resource-based structure of the course provided students with a core article, in both the Reader and on CD-ROM, accompanied by related papers, video clips, animations and CBT, on CD-ROM. In practice, resource-based learning is introduced gradually through the course, some parts being more intensively resource-based than others, but the final project involves extensive use of the resources provided.

For each article on CD-ROM, a member of the course team supplied the following:

- a bibliographic reference and abstract;
- a reference to particular paragraphs in the article which discussed any of the main course themes and block themes;
- glossary words and a glossary entry;
- hypertext links to parts of related documents.

Advice on navigation and operation of the CD-ROM was covered by computer-based tutorials and access to the resource was through hot links from a list of articles, or from a concept map giving a visual representation of the subject area. Additionally, entry was possible with free text searching (known as Search in this particular application), or through an index of course and block themes.

Several strategies were employed to help the student use the resources. Some authors encouraged students to use the resources for a form of research, and some gave detailed advice on the techniques of analysing the subject for research and skimming through articles. Others encouraged students to choose their readings, by offering a choice of study routes according to interest. Guidance came as abstracts of articles in the hard-copy texts, or by electronic links to relevant parts of articles.

Survey of students

An interview survey of 21 students from two tutorial groups was carried out in September and October 1996, on completion of the course. The interviews were designed to establish attitudes to resource-based learning and the levels of information-handling skills acquired by students. The students had various backgrounds, abilities and motivations. Some worked in an urban environment (Dundee and Glasgow), others were remote from other students, in northern Scotland.

In addition to the interview, students were asked to demonstrate how they would research a given question, using the CD-ROM resource. In face-to-face interviews, this was done during the interviews. For telephone interviews, seven interviewees were asked to undertake the exercise whilst speaking to an audio tape.

Studying using the CD-ROM

The intensive use of electronic resources requires students to spend longer with a PC than they would in traditional courses, not only to write assignments, but also to search and read articles on CD-ROM, to communicate using CMC and to explore the Internet. This has implications for part-time students, who have to fit their study time around the requirements of job and family.

Students were asked to describe how they studied, for instance whether they made notes, or highlighted sections of text. They were also asked whether they read articles on screen, when and why they printed out material, and to what extent they use the electronic bookmarks and cut and paste facilities.

When asked whether they read articles on screen, most students said that they both read on screen and printed out. There were several reasons for this. Half (9) the students did not like reading from a screen for prolonged periods. This was attributed to fatigue, an unfamiliar habit, and the fact that many of them were used to highlighting and annotating scripts, or glancing up and down the page, and they found it easier to do this with hard copy.

Other reasons for printing out material related to the lifestyles and study patterns of students. Students mentioned the need to study away from their machines, because of shift work; studying on public transport; in the car, waiting for children; a predilection for reading in bed or in the bath; going on holiday; or the need to find a quiet space at home away from the family. Some had a study at home and they could work in peace. Others, less fortunate, had a PC in the living room, or hall, where shared space with other members of the family limited the times when it could be used:

'Reading from the CD-ROM means you have to be at your machine; I can't carry my CD-ROM through to the kitchen when I'm competing with children's TV.'

Asked whether they preferred to read whole or part articles, most (18) said that they did both, although probably to varying degrees. The decision as to how much to read depended on time available, and what students perceived as relevant or worthwhile. However, despite much advice on skim-reading in the course texts, a minority said that they always read complete articles, showing concern about missing vital information.

The cut and paste facility was regularly in use but occasionally open to abuse. One student commented (somewhat alarmingly):

'It's great for essay writing: change the odd word and you have an essay without much effort.'

Finding information on the CD-ROM

In order to establish how students searched the CD-ROM, two strategies were adopted. The first was to observe students working at their machines, and the second was to ask them in what circumstances they would use particular facilities.

Students were given a sample question from the course text and asked to demonstrate how they would answer it. The question was:

How is IT being used to promote flexibility and open access to learning and training resources?

13 respondents completed this exercise. Nine turned straight to the Search (free text) facility on the CD-ROM, and typed in terms lifted straight from the wording of the question. Presumably this approach demanded a fairly straightforward 'surface processing' of the question. Most made a reasonably sensible choice of terms from the title.

Having looked at the number and subject scope of search results, 11 out of 13 students tried to refine their searches, using various terms in a wide variety of combinations. The choice of terms, and Boolean logic, did not seem to be a process requiring lengthy thought. There seemed to be very little appreciation of the need for logic to broaden or narrow a search, and no-one used synonyms in their searching and subsequent refinement.

Most students made four or five searches, before deciding to stop. Eventually, they began to encounter duplicate topics:

'seen these articles before.

'after a while, different routes bring you back to the same article.

lot of this stuff you probably come across by accident: it's a bit hit and miss.'

It is probably true that whilst students lacked searching skills, most were able to get by, because the database was small and they were bound to turn up relevant material eventually.

When asked about other search tools, access to the database by block or course themes seemed to have caused confusion and uncertainty for most (18) students. Some were not sure what block themes were, others had attempted to use the facility but 'couldn't make head or tail of it'. There were perceptions that 'it seemed very slow', or 'a long way round', and a feeling that the themes tended to give a wider search, and there was a general lack of confidence.

The use of concept maps provoked lively comments: 10 students used them regularly, five never used them, and six were occasional users. Of the regular users, five liked to look at the concept map at the start of each section, to get an overall view of the subject, and one liked to pursue a study route using links to articles from the electronic version. Others used it when searching for articles on particular subject. Those who never used concept maps, or only occasionally, commented that they found the maps unattractive and non-intuitive.

Use of CMC as an information source

Students on the course were given access to e-mail and to a wide variety of conferences, allowing discussion on course-related topics, for socialising, and for communication with staff. At the local level, each tutorial group had its own conference, and students were divided into smaller groups of four to six for discussions on the project, which was a collaborative exercise. There were also a number of national conferences, to which students could contribute.

Half (10) of the students interviewed had previous experience of CMC, so had already gained some expertise. When asked what information they acquired from CMC, it became clear that the conferences were being used as a support to other course materials, rather than as a reference source, like material on the CD-ROM. The medium was viewed as complementary to, rather than replacing, fact-to-face tutorial support.

Use of the Internet

Students were given introductory exercises to the various Internet resource tools, and had to complete an assignment on their applicability. The extent to which they used the Internet beyond this was a matter for personal preference, although they were given guidance to potentially useful sites from the course Home Page, and two activities directed students to use the Internet to find particular information.

Most of the students (18) interviewed had no previous experience of the Internet. Of these new users, most (12) of them encountered few problems with the introductory manual on Internet tools.

When asked about using the Internet as an information source, two thirds of the students interviewed (14) felt confident, and one third did not. Nearly half (9) the students had difficulty in finding information on the Internet. There were problems related to the cost of using the system, and indeed nine of the students were paying trunk call rates. Related to this was the time taken to find relevant information, and the quality and lack of controlled quality of the information found:

- 'It's not a very friendly interface. I don't like going from one place, to the next, to the next, then not finding what you want.'
- 'I worry about the validity of what's there.'
- 'It's important to have the right guidance to useful and relevant pages.'

Students also had positive perceptions about the Internet. Several, whilst not using it much during the course, planned to explore further in the winter, when they had more time. Others had found it a valuable resource, both as backup for the course, as well as for other uses, most commonly recreational, but also for reference and e-mail.

Attitudes to resource-based learning

Having considered various specific aspects of the resources for this course, students were asked to describe their overall attitudes to resource-based learning. It was a new way of studying for all the students interviewed.

When asked whether, looking back on the course, they had liked the resource-based approach, where they were given choice as to what to read, and a range of resources to use, there was a variety of responses. Many students made both positive and negative observations, so it was difficult to rationalise overall attitudes to resource-based learning.

Opinion was more or less equally divided between those students who liked resource-based learning (10) and those who did not (11). Students said that they liked it because they enjoyed more independence, the flexibility in study routes and choice of reading. Some simply found it more interesting and stimulating, particularly because of the choice of media. Others found that it made them think more, and improved their study skills. One student was particularly interested in the role which electronic media could play in constructing alternative interpretations:

'Electronic forms of information are very exciting: there is the potential for unique interpretation, and for constructing an individual knowledge base.[...] It allows you to be more flexible in your arguments: if one argument doesn't stand up, you can easily search for materials to support another.'

Negative perceptions about resource-based learning revealed concerns on whether the students had covered everything relevant. Related to this, several mentioned that they would have liked more guidance on what to read:

'Have I learnt what I was supposed to learn?[...] I like learning, but have I got side-tracked?'

These concerns were put into sharper focus by one student who pointed out(perhaps justifiably) that he felt that he could not square the flexibility of resource-based learning with the rigidity imposed by a traditional exam: and the exam had to be passed.

Several people mentioned the quantity of information ('drowning in a sea of information'), the extra work entailed in coping with this, and their lack of time to deal with it. This may reflect a lack of skill in skimming articles and assessing relevance, but it may also be true that resource-based learning

takes more study time than traditional courses. Certainly, some students' perceptions were that the approach required more time:

'It didn't suit me at all [...] I don't have time to cope with ambiguities [...]

Finally, there were indications that the acceptability of resource-based learning depended on the individual motivations of students. For example, students concerned with developing study skills found the structure of the course helpful. One suggested that the course might be a useful introduction to other courses using resource-based learning in conjunction with a variety of technologies. Other students were motivated by a need to 'polish off a degree', and found the process of resources-based learning both tiresome and time-consuming.

CONCLUSIONS

It appears that many aspects of resource-based learning appeal to OU students: choice, breadth of materials and new technology delivery. Additionally, CD-ROM has been shown to be a very user-friendly medium for a database of multimedia resources. The various routes into the data, including hypertext links, free text searching, course themes and concept maps, support a range of learning styles.

As for other resources, all the students had acquired the skills necessary to communicate using CMC. It was an important backup facility particularly for remote students, but was perceived as being complementary to face-to-face tutorial support. Most, but not all, students were confident about using the Internet, although its potential use in this context is difficult to judge. The resource required considerable investment in time to learn how to use effectively, and involved real cost to students.

The evidence from this investigation suggests that students are adapting their study patterns to the demands of resource-based and computer-based study, despite resorting to making printed copies at some points to provide greater flexibility. However, there seems to be a minority of students who continue to find difficulty in selective reading and report confusion as to what they should be studying. Until there is more general practice of resource-based learning throughout the education sector, students will benefit from assistance with the development of information-handling skills.

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UNIT 7 DESIGNING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS MEDIATED BY COMPUTER CONFERENCING: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE ASIAN SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

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Editor's Notes: Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) refers to the use of networks of computers to facilitate interaction between spatially separated learners; these technologies include electronic mail, computer conferencing and on-line databases. The most prominent applications of CMC — computer conferencing and electronic mail — support sophisticated synchronous (real time) or asynchronous (delayed) group communication. Dyads or groups can work together to solve problems, discuss issues, argue about interpretations, negotiate meaning or engage in other educational activities including counselling and tutoring. While conferencing the learner is electronically engaged in discussion and interaction with counsellors, peers and may be experts. As a result of contact with new or different perspectives, these activities may contribute to a higher level of learning through cognitive restructuring or conflict resolution. Sharing knowledge through an electronic medium also aids the overt exchange of natural covert processes and strategies with other on-line learners in order to solve collective or individual problems. (Harasim, 1989, 50-62) As a result of this and its collaborative nature, computer conferencing has attracted widespread attention in education particularly distance education.

Computer conferencing presents a very different approach to the educational transaction. Kaye (1992) correctly recognised that CMC is qualitatively different from other interpersonal and group communication. While computer conferencing may appear to simulate discussion in a conventional classroom, there is a qualitative difference between real-time verbal and asynchronous written communication. Moreover, the reflective and precise nature of written communication is very different from the spontaneous and less structured nature of oral discourse in either a face-to-face, video, or audio teleconferenced context.

In order to enable students of distance education to understand the utilisation of CMC for collaborative learning, we have selected this article. The present article examines the unique features of the online medium and their impact on social cohesiveness, group dynamics, interaction, communication anxiety, and participation. Based on several computer conferences, the paper offers guidelines to practice and focuses on the importance of the role of the moderator/facilitator in a computer conference. The necessity to change traditional roles from teacher-centered to learner-centered learning is emphasized and the challenge to design collaborative learning based on constructivist principles is explored. The

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century will increasingly place emphasis on global connectivity and on international and national collaborative learning efforts and team work. Asynchronous computer conferencing because of its time-independent and place-independent features has the ability to promote such global collaborations as well as interconnect geographically isolated persons within national boundaries. One of the predominant users of computer conferencing now and in the future will be institutions of higher education and national and international distance education systems. As educational institutions begin to utilize computer conferencing for networking and collaborative learning, it is important to consider the effective utilization of this new technology in order to design learning environments that facilitate collaboration and effective cross cultural communication.

Internet development in Asia has only begun to take off since 1995. For the purpose of this paper the Asian socio-cultural context is defined as the cultural context of the Indian sub-continent which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. In many of these countries, the Internet has been introduced by universities as is the case in India and Sri Lanka (Firdhous & Dias, 1996). Ang and Loh (1996) note that the growth of the Internet has been fastest where there is a commercial push, aided by the availability of public access. This means that the major cities get access first. In general, Asian users have a more purposeful attitude toward the Internet than their Western counterparts. Pricing may have played a part in conveying the perception that the Internet is expensive, and therefore more suited for specific purposes such as communication, access to databases, and research. There are many barriers to Internet development in the Indian sub-continent some of which include high telecommunication costs, poor infrastructure, and language, as English is a second language in many of these countries. Ang and Loh (1996) note that despite these barriers, the Internet will grow at a much more rapid rate in Asia than in the West, and that the pace of growth will be influenced by history, culture, language and economics.

With the rapid growth of the Internet in Asia, educational institutions are beginning to utilize the features of computer-mediated communication (CMC): electronic mail (e-mail), computer conferencing, and the World Wide Web (WWW) and on-line databases, for educational purposes. Computer conferencing systems, in addition to e-mail, provide a conferencing feature which supports group or many-to-many communication. In these systems, messages are linked to form chains of communication and these messages are stored on the host computer till an individual logs on to read and reply to messages. Most conferencing systems based on groupware principles offer a range of facilities for enhancing group communication and information retrieval. These include directories of users and conferences, conference management tools, search facilities, polling options, cooperative authoring, the ability to customize the system with special commands for particular groups, and access to databases (Kaye, 1989). Computer conferencing systems are still being developed and some

of the currently used systems include First Class, EIES, COSY, and several WWW based conferencing systems such as Netscape's Collabra. In addition to computer conferencing systems developed on group ware principles, Listservs (L-Soft 1995) enable communication between groups whose members are scattered throughout the world. A listserv is in effect, an automated mailing list program which enables the computer on which it is installed to receive messages from anyone subscribed to the list and retransmit each message to the entire list of subscribers. Messages sent to an "unmoderated" listserv are retransmitted automatically by the computer without being reviewed by a human moderator. Participants may join a list with no membership or other restrictions by using the automatic subscription feature of the Listserv program.

Purpose of the Unit 7

The purpose of this paper is to examine issues related to the design of collaborative learning environments mediated by computer conferencing, and discuss them from the perspective of challenges faced in the cultural context of the Indian sub-continent, referred to hereafter as the Asian cultural context. While it is obvious that the cultural context of the Indian sub-continent is not one concordant whole, as it represents many cultural differences both across and within countries, the term "Asian cultural context" is used in this paper as these countries face similar challenges in adopting and using a new technology such as computer conferencing.

The objectives of this paper are to:

- examine the unique features of the medium of computer conferencing;
- discuss issues related to designing collaborative learning experiences via computer conferencing;
- investigate ways in which the on-line environment impacts social cohesiveness of the group, group dynamics, interaction, communication anxiety, and participation;
- analyze the role of the moderator/facilitator in a computer conference, and examine techniques for online moderation; and
- discuss techniques for the evaluation of CMC mediated collaborative learning.

The discussion is based on conceptual frameworks and research on computer conferencing, the author's experience in implementing and evaluating several online collaborative learning experiences, and the author's recent interviews with educators in India and Sri Lanka who are planning to use computer conferencing to facilitate collaborative learning. The paper is practitioner oriented in that it provides guidelines for practice by discussing issues related to computer conferencing design and organization. Advice given to practitioners is derived mostly from the author's experience in conducting several collaborative learning experiences online. These include two inter-university Globaled projects conducted in 1992 and 1993 which linked graduate students in several universities in the U.S.A. and overseas to participate in the sharing and discussion of research related to their coursework (Gunawardena, 1992; Gunawardena et al., 1994; Murphy et al., 1995; Rezabek et al., 1994). The Globaled projects were premised upon a learner-centered collaborative learning model where the learner would be an

active participant in the learning process involved in constructing knowledge through a process of interaction and discussion with learning peers and instructors. Students at each participating university were responsible for moderating the Globaled discussions. Other collaborative learning projects involved a computer conference that was set up as a small group discussion within the context of a global electronic pre-conference for the international TeleTeaching '93 conference held in Norway, in which graduate students at the University of New Mexico shared and discussed their research with experts in the field of cooperative learning in North America and Europe (Gunawardena & Heeren, 1993), and class computer conferences between graduate students in instructional technology at the University of New Mexico, U.S.A. and the University of Guadalajara, Mexico. In addition to these student-centered collaborative learning projects, the paper draws on a professional development experience; a global online debate, one of the first to be conducted across international time lines in an asynchronous format. The online debate was part of the International Council of Distance Education's pre-conference to its world conference in Birmingham, UK, in June 1995, and provided an opportunity for those who could not attend the conference to discuss issues online that would be addressed during the Birmingham conference. The participants in the online debate were predominantly practising specialists or advanced students in the field of distance education, and the 500 list subscribers represented 35 countries (Gunawardena, Lowe and Anderson, 1996).

Perhaps one of the initial steps to be taken by designers as they approach the design of collaborative learning via a new medium is to understand the unique strengths and weaknesses of the medium so as to be able to maximize on the strengths and compensate for the weaknesses.

Issues and Challenges in Designing Collaborative Learning via Computer Conferencing

Understanding the Medium of Computer Conferencing

Harasim (1990, 1993) emphasizes the necessity to approach computer conferencing as a distinct and unique domain. She notes that the medium has five key attributes which impact the social educational environment: i) many-to-many communication, ii) place independence, iii) time independence, iv) text-based nature, and v) computer mediated interaction. "The group nature of computer conferencing may be the most fundamental or critical component underpinning theory-building and the design and implementation of on-line educational activities" (Harasim, 1989, p. 51). For distance educators CMC offers the capability to facilitate group work at a distance as the medium enables communication between geographically separated students over a sustained period of time. The opportunities to share multiple perspectives in an interactive group process is one of the unique advantages of this medium.

Place-independence affords access to the class from any location as long as instructors and students have easy access to a computer and phone line. Further, access to libraries, databases and archives may be available through the conferencing system.

The asynchronous or time-independent feature of CMC systems offers an advantage in that the CMC class is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to accommodate to the time schedules of distance learners. Although CMC systems may be either synchronous or asynchronous, the focus of this paper is on asynchronous CMC, because this time independence feature is an important dimension in facilitating cooperative group work among distance learners. One of the unique advantages of time-independence is that students have time for reflection before they post their comments on line. While a face-to-face classroom affords little time for reflection, CMC enables learners to refer to resources, experts, texts and reflect before they contribute to a conference. Harasim (1990) observes that the time-independent feature also has several drawbacks. Communication anxiety (the feeling of speaking into a vacuum) results when a participant receives no immediate response to comments posted online. Another difficulty is the "rolling present," knowing whether a topic is still current or taken over by another topic. If group members do not log on frequently long delays can result in arriving at a consensus or decision.

The text-based nature of the medium has unique strengths and weaknesses. Harasim (1990) notes that writing comments is perceived by learners as contributing to more reflective interaction than talking in a face-to-face class or telephone conference. She cites Vygotsky who contends that the process of articulating thoughts into written speech involves deliberate analytical action. The medium of CMC affords the opportunity for students to compose and edit one's response or respond spontaneously. One of the problems of a text-based medium however, is that students who do not perceive themselves to be good writers may be reluctant to post their messages online. This may be compounded in the case of non-native speakers of the language that is being used for the CMC discussion.

Text-based communication also means that non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, voice intonations, and gestures that usually accompany face-to-face communication are absent. This may lead to misunderstandings of the intent of the communication and participants in conferences need to make the effort to communicate clearly and foresee the impact of their messages. This becomes an even greater issue when cross-cultural online groups are involved. On the other hand one advantage of the medium is that text-based communication devoid of non-verbal cues provides no social or physical cues to distract from the content of the message thereby equalizing the conferencing group. In Asian cultures where there are social distinctions based on caste and creed, this medium may be a good means of equalizing the group of participants.

One of the disadvantages of the text-based feature is that it can contribute to information overload as computer conferences depending on the number of participants and frequency of communication can generate heavy amounts of reading. A related problem is inadequate user interfaces for navigating through the discussion threads of a conference. Current conferencing systems have tools for linking comments but no suitable mechanisms for linking and relating ideas. Therefore tools for linking and organizing information is needed for conferencing systems to be more responsive to group information needs. While there are new developments in incorporating graphics and video (Cuseeme) into conferencing, the medium remains largely a text-based one. Novice conference users therefore have to be

trained in the unique characteristics of the medium, information management techniques, and navigation through a conference.

The computer-mediated learning feature of this medium is its most distinct feature that separates it from other media such as books, audio and video conferencing. It is an interactive medium encouraging active involvement from participants. Lectures that involve one person dominating the conference space for a long period of time will not go well with this medium. Discussion, where there is equal participation among members is what this medium fosters best. The computer-mediated feature offers the advantage of the control capabilities of the computer — the ability to read, print, search, revise, copy, paste, upload and download information. A unique advantage of the medium is that it provides an archived transcript of the conference, allowing teachers and evaluators to examine the contributions of participants and the process of learning that has taken place.

Designers need to understand the unique strengths and weaknesses of the medium of CMC as they begin to design collaborative learning experiences for adults.

Designing Collaborative Learning Experiences

In Hofstede's (1980) study of the four dimensions of national culture, India and Pakistan scored moderately high on Power Distance, which is the degree to which a society accepts the idea that power is to be distributed unequally. Goodman (1994) notes that these societies are characterized by teacher-centered education, in which the teacher transfers wisdom to students. Students are not expected to initiate communication or speak up unless called upon to do so. In such societies teachers are respected in and out of class and are not to be publicly contradicted. Age is respected and formal presentations such as lectures are appreciated. This to a certain extent describes the socio-cultural context of the Indian sub-continent. Distance education reflects traditional face-to-face education, and in most large scale distance education systems in these countries, print-based courses are designed with the information usually delivered one-way from the teacher to the student, placing emphasis on independent learning.

Computer conferencing because of its essentially interactive group nature offers a challenge to these educators to move from teacher-centered learning paradigms that view the learner as a passive recipient of knowledge from an expert, to more learner-centered collaborative learning, that treats the learner as an active participant in the learning process. Technologies such as computer conferencing that foster collaborative learning may break traditional forms of teacher oriented education and incorporate interaction into distance education. For isolated distance learners for whom the need for affiliation is critical, and for those who share values of group ethos, computer conferencing will offer an opportunity to develop bonds and working relationships with fellow classmates and their instructor.

Computer conferencing is particularly suited to collaborative learning because the medium facilitates information exchange and provides the shared space essential for group work. Members of a conference can read the same message on a topic, reply to messages which can form chains of communication to be read by all, generate new messages and share files.

Further, conferencing systems enable the linking of students to instructors, peers, experts, databases, online libraries, and multimedia instruction available through the WWW. These features of the medium facilitate the design of instruction where the learner is central to the learning experience.

Collaborative or group learning is premised upon a learner-centered model that treats the learner as an active participant in the learning process involved in constructing knowledge through a process of discussion and interaction with learning peers and experts (Harasim, 1989; Harasim, 1990).

"Knowledge is not something that is 'delivered' to students in this process, but something that emerges from active dialogue among those who seek to understand and apply concepts and techniques" (Hiltz, 1990, 135).

According to Bouton and Garth (cited in Harasim, 1990), learning is an interactive group process whereby the learner actively constructs knowledge by formulating ideas into words and then by building upon them through the reactions of others.

Peer interaction among students has been identified as a critical variable in learning and cognitive development: the conversation (verbalizing), multiple perspectives (cognitive restructuring), and argument (conceptual conflict resolution) that are a part of group learning may be responsible for greater cognitive development in groups than when the same individuals work alone (Harasim, 1990). Hiltz (1990) notes that in her evaluation of the Virtual Classroom, students who experienced high levels of communication with other students and with their professor, and participated in the 'collaborative approach to learning' were most likely to judge the outcomes of the Virtual Classroom courses to be superior to those of traditionally delivered courses.

Literature on peer collaboration indicates that as ideas are presented, there is a need to actively build linkages and associations and to organize the ideas. Interaction among peers seems important to internalizing attitude change. Information is processed, weighed, reorganized, and structured in this process, both by each individual and also by the group (Harasim, 1990, p. 44)

Building CMC environments that promote higher-order thinking through collaborative learning has been a concern for many distance education designers. Constructivism has recently begun to influence the design of technology mediated learning environments. Jonassen (1994) observes that according to constructivists, thinking is grounded in perception of physical and social experiences, which can only be comprehended by the mind. The mind produces mental models that explain what the individual has perceived. These models are then used to explain, predict, or infer phenomena in the real world. Constructivists also believe that much of reality is shared through a process of social negotiation. Jonassen (1994) discusses the implications of constructivism for instructional design and observes that purposeful knowledge construction may be facilitated by learning environments which a) provide multiple representations of reality, b) focus on knowledge construction and not reproduction, c) provide real world case-based learning environments, d) foster reflective practice, e) enable context and content dependent knowledge construction, and f) support collaborative construction of knowledge through social negotiation. Employing constructivist principles, CMC environments can be designed to provide multiple perspectives and real world examples, encourage reflection,

and support collaborative construction of knowledge through social negotiation. It is an excellent medium for supporting collaborative construction of knowledge through social negotiation. However, such learning environments may promote collaborative learning only if participants can relate to one another, share a sense of community and a common goal.

Moving from teacher-centered learning environments to learner-centered collaborative learning will be a challenge to both teachers and students in the Asian cultural context. Patronage systems which foster values of obedience, honor, and respect for authority are evident in many Asian educational systems through students' respect and loyalty toward their teacher or professor. Students generally do not question nor disagree with the statements made by a professor. While it would be a challenge to teachers to move away from the control and authority they maintain in the classroom to designing learning environments where students and teachers are more or less equal, it would also be a challenge to students to change their expectations of the role of the teacher as an authority figure who is responsible for delivering knowledge. In collaborative learning environments, learners will have to give up their dependency on teachers as sources of knowledge. They will be held responsible for their own learning and will need to interact with each other and the teacher to negotiate meaning and construct knowledge. For learners who are not comfortable with interacting with their peers this will be a challenging task. The medium of CMC is an interactive medium that promotes discussion and interaction. Lectures are better placed as read only files in a separate conference space and the medium is used to discuss the content of the lecture.

Therefore, in the Asian cultural context, selecting a suitable format and topic for facilitating collaborative learning via CMC will be key. A teacher-led discussion format will be a good start with control given to student discussion leaders as teachers and students become more comfortable interacting with each other. Inviting a guest expert to discuss a paper is another fairly non-threatening format for an initial conference. Students who are more comfortable with the medium and interaction can be asked to lead a discussion on a research paper or a group project they have completed. Stimulating questions or topics with sufficient controversy should be introduced as participants become more comfortable with interaction. The format should be structured enough to provide a framework for the discussion but not so rigid that its formality discourages participants from interacting. A non-threatening collaborative learning exercise that worked well in the Globaled project was inter-university teams developing annotated bibliographies of research related to a specific topic and sharing these bibliographies with the rest of the conferencing group. As the group becomes more comfortable with the medium and with each other, more challenging formats such as the discussion of case studies and debates can be tried.

In the K-12 context, Riel (1993) discusses the promotion of global education and cross-cultural education through "learning circles;" small electronic communities that form to accomplish specific goals. As in the AT&T Learning Network, teachers and students who share academic interests but represent different geographic or cultural perspectives are grouped together. She notes that "learning circles" in the educational community, like

"quality circles" in the business community, involve participatory management by teachers. A "learning circle" is not controlled by a single teacher, it is a collective construction by participants.

One of the questions that is often asked when designing collaborative learning is, what is the best time frame for a CMC conference activity? The characteristics of the medium create some difficulties for the participants to maintain a clear picture of the discussion over time. Spreading a discussion over a longer period of time introduces difficulties in keeping an overall perspective of the discussion as a whole (Romiszowski & de Haas 1989). Ironically, it is this very feature of being able to spread a discussion over time that is considered to be one of the unique advantages of the online environment. To be able to chew over an idea and come back to the conference with a new and different perspective will be seriously hampered when online discussions are limited by specific time periods. However, if a group goal has to be achieved, it is important to assign time frames for collaborative learning activities and this would largely depend on the nature of the activity, how often the participants can get online, and the social cohesiveness of the group. The Globaled projects indicated that a two-week period was sufficient for discussion of a question or topic when participants could be online frequently, that is log into their computer every day or once in two days.

Planning and Organization

When organizing inter-university or inter-institutional collaborations, advanced planning, collaborative planning and organization are key to the successful operation of the computer conference. In the Globaled projects (Gunawardena, 1992; Gunawardena et al., 1994) planning began a semester before Globaled was due to begin when several instructors teaching distance education and telecommunications who had indicated an interest in such a project were contacted. Previous experience had indicated that unless the CMC activity is integrated as a class assignment, motivation for participation among students would be low. Professors at each institution had different goals for their particular courses but were able to integrate Globaled activities as class assignments in a number of ways.

One of the problems was scheduling when the conference would begin and end, as participating universities were either on a semester or quarter system. Group activities had to be arranged to take into account the spring breaks, and course schedules at each institution. When international course schedules are involved, this becomes even more complicated. The planning among instructors was carried out using a group distribution list on e-mail with each instructor making suggestions for conference activities. The ability to collaborate in the planning process and come to a consensus was very important to the success of this conference.

Technical System and Access

One of the major decisions that need to be made by a designer is the type of technical system that will be used for the conference. A Listserv enables the interconnecting of any individual who has an e-mail address and is therefore versatile as an initial conferencing system. One of the problems however, is that a listserv delivers each conference message to the individual's private

e-mail box thus causing information overload. In addition, there are no mechanisms for linking the messages, or looking at threads in a conference. Therefore, while the listserv is conducive to generating many ideas, it is not suitable for synthesizing them and building knowledge. Excellent moderators who can facilitate group activity, link ideas, synthesize and summarize the discussion, and manage information overload are necessary if listserv technology is selected.

Groupware based conferencing systems on the other hand are more versatile in affording navigational tools and separate conferencing spaces. But they have to be installed in servers or mainframe computer systems and access to them may be limited by the institution that has purchased the conferencing system. Large distance education systems however, can purchase the conferencing software and make it available to its numerous users. The other alternative is to explore web based conferencing systems if all students have access to the WWW.

Access can be defined to include two aspects. Physical access, that is access to a networked computer to participate in the conference, and psychological access, that is comfort with using the medium of CMC. Access perhaps will be the major deterrent for using computer conferencing in Asian countries because of the high cost involved in providing both physical and psychological access. It is important that students who are expected to participate in a conference have easy access to a computer and a modem if they are to be present online frequently.

Psychological access or mastery of the technical system by both teachers and students is the key to enhancing collaborative learning via CMC. In the Globaled inter-university project, each instructor was responsible for training students to use CMC and a listserv at their respective university during the first two weeks of class. Since e-mail systems at each university have a set of commands unique to that system it was difficult for some students to initially subscribe to the conference. It was also difficult to foresee the problems that occurred due to the updating of computer systems at participating universities. Frequent test messages to the system as a result of these problems irritated participants.

In order to overcome technical problems, the instructor or listowner must be trained to maintain a listserv, and have access to a computer expert who can solve technical problems at the subscribing sites. The subscribing instructors and students must be trained to use the system and be able to work with their own consultants to solve initial technical problems. Comfort with the use of the technical system and easy access are key to effective group learning.

Social Cohesion and Group Dynamics

Computer conferences generate complex social environments. The social interactions tend to be unusually complex because of the necessity to mediate group activity in a text-based environment devoid of non-verbal cues. Feenberg (1989) notes that failures tend to occur at the social level far more than they do at the technical level. This problem is magnified when cross-cultural groups are linked. Therefore, one of the design challenges is to create a socially cohesive online group where participants can relate to each other and maintain group goals till the tasks assigned are completed.

Research has indicated that a minimum amount of social cohesiveness is required for the effective performance of a group task (Davies, (1989). Because of the unpredictable time lag between sending and receiving messages and the text-based nature of computer-mediated communication, it is difficult to achieve this cohesiveness unless moderators of computer conferences make a genuine effort to do so. Harasim (1990) observes that "group dynamics can suffer because in many ways this medium does not offer tools to support such processes as forming groups and identifying and coordinating group tasks." (p. 48).

Some of the techniques for building social cohesion and group dynamics that worked well in the Globaled project and that would transfer to the Asian cultural context are discussed as follows. It must be noted that for Asian students who may not be comfortable with interacting and sharing their professional interests and ideas in an open forum, a greater effort will have to be made to achieve social cohesion. The conference should be organized so that the first two weeks would be spent on introductions before the scheduled activities begin. Getting to know each other is very important if the online group is to remain cohesive for a long period of time. In order to create the sense of an online community and promote social cohesiveness, participants should be asked to introduce themselves and talk about their professional interests and experiences. Participants will soon connect with those who have similar professional interests. All introductions should be acknowledged by the moderator at the end of every week in order to avoid the communication anxiety caused by the unpredictable time lag between sending and receiving messages in an electronic environment. In addition to introductions, "ice breakers" that will make participants comfortable communicating with each other will be a good way to start the conference.

The social environment CMC creates necessitates the development of a new set of social and communication skills. It is crucial to make students understand the unique features of the medium and problems inherent in communicating through this medium. Students should be introduced to a set of communication protocols for the conference which provides information on procedures for signing on and using the system, and netiquette (etiquette for the discussion). Because communication via CMC is a novel experience for most students, Netiquette should include guidelines on the length of messages, writing style, the use of the subject line, providing cultural context cues for unfamiliar phrases, the use of wit and humor, etc.

In order to maintain social cohesiveness throughout the conference, a separate conferencing space should be assigned for social chit chat. Often labelled a Coffee House or Electronic Cafe, these spaces afford opportunity for lighthearted banter and sharing of jokes which helps to form a community of online personalities.

Research on social presence and CMC (Gunawardena, 1995) has indicated that despite the low social bandwidth of the medium, users of computer networks are able to project their identities whether "real" or "pseudo," feel the presence of others online, and create communities with commonly agreed on conventions and norms that bind them together to explore issues of common interest. CMC users develop an ability to express missing nonverbal cues in written form. One way of expressing emotion through this text-based medium is the use of "emoticons" or icons that express emotion,

the contrived sideways faces that can be made by combinations of punctuation marks. For example, where :-) indicates a smiling face or "smiley" and :-(indicates an unhappy face or "unsmiley." These marks contextualize the message within the relationship. Parenthetical metalinguistic cues such as "hmmm" or "yuk" in a message adds emotion to a text-based message. Such cues and emoticons add affective information and indicate informality and participants can be encouraged to use them.

Further discussion on social cohesion and group dynamics is found in Gunawardena, 1994. One of the best methods of building social cohesion between a group is to alleviate participants' communication anxiety.

Communication Anxiety

"Communication online involves a minor but real personal risk, and a response—any response—is generally interpreted as a success while silence means failure" (Feenberg 1989, p. 23). In the absence of non-verbal cues to support communication, communication anxiety results when no immediate responses are received for a participant's comments, ideas or questions. Since CMC messages are lodged instantly in the central computer, we feel an intense need for response when we send a message. "This technical improvement, which makes rapid exchanges possible, also makes unusual delay a sign of rejection or indifference." (Feenberg, 1989, p. 24). Therefore, computer communication places a premium on active participation and is often critical of "lurkers" or passive readers. Experience with the Globaled projects have indicated that while it is important to encourage students to participate, they should not be penalized for being lurkers as they often learn from the conference discussions even if they do not post a comment online. So, the argument for letting lurkers be lurkers.

Communication anxiety occurs in computer conferences because of the following reasons: lack of immediate responses, lack of non-verbal cues, lack of communication protocols, lack of good writing skills especially in the case of non-native speakers, uncertainty of cultural context cues in messages and domineering personalities on line. In order to alleviate communication anxiety, moderators or teachers need to be present online frequently and acknowledge messages posted by participants. This is specially true in conferences where there are many novices. As participants gain experience using the medium, these acknowledgements can become less frequent. Creating a socially conducive climate, a cohesive community and developing a set of communication protocols or netiquette will help overcome communication anxiety. Another technique is to encourage students to write private e-mail messages to moderators or instructors voicing their concerns.

In the Asian cultural context, special concern must be given to the language selected for the conference. Since non-native speakers of the language will be involved, their fears related to inadequacies in the use of the language have to be assuaged and clear guidelines provided for writing style. Another technique that has worked well with novice users who are concerned about the inadequacy of language or writing skills, is to have them work in groups to respond to the questions and topics in the conference, and sign the messages posted to the conference as a group. When responsibility for a message is shared, anxiety about its content and appearance can be reduced.

Cross-cultural communication issues need to be considered when designing collaborative learning in both the international and national contexts. Even within national boundaries misunderstandings due to cultural differences can occur. India, for example, represents many diverse cultures and religions as well as diverse socio-cultural contexts in urban, rural and tribal communities. These differences are bound to play a part in online communication and designers of computer conferences need to foresee them and address them in the communication protocols they develop for the conference. Explaining cultural context cues when participants post messages is a good way to overcome some of the misunderstandings that tend to occur.

Equal Participation

Harasim (1993) observes that the text-based nature of online communication enhances interaction among the group by reducing discriminatory communication patterns based on physical and social cues such as gender, race, socio-economic status and physical features. "Text-only communication can free people from the bonds of physical appearance and enable communication at the level of ideas" (p. 26). This statement, however, may be only partially true. Social equality may be evident only in the initial phases of a conference. As the conference progresses, participants may interject social cues to messages leading to differences in status. Phillips and Pease (1987) note that a computer conference that linked high-level professionals in business and academia to discuss top-level management yielded intriguing insights on social interactions on CMC. Participants complained about feeling ostracized for expressing opposing views or opinions. This ostracism was conveyed subtly by ignoring the opposing points of view. Those who complained were not worried about getting into arguments, but were concerned about being left out for even daring to be critical.

Active participation and interaction by group members are claimed to be necessary ingredients for effective collaborative learning. Jarvenpaa et al., (1988) suggest that shifting member participation in the direction of equal participation results in higher quality group decisions. It appears that, in organizational settings, the use of electronic media increases participation by otherwise reticent members. The asynchronous nature of computer conferencing allows for equal participation by all members, even the more reserved group members, unlike in a face-to-face setting where the vocal members might dominate the conversation. The asynchronous feature also allows the participants to reflect on current topics and even to consult outside resources before contributing to the conference. However, even though CMC affords the opportunity for equitable participation, it does not guarantee it. Learners can be excluded by lack of access or through fear of the technology. There may be other reasons such as the dynamics of the group, and gender related communication issues that might exclude participants.

In the socio-cultural context of the Indian sub-continent, societal tradition of male dominance and female subservience may initially restrain female students from participating in computer conferences with their male counterparts, or they may feel unequal participants in the conference. This may particularly be true for female students from tribal or rural areas.

Further, technology is perceived as a masculine domain, and female students may be reluctant to learn to use the technology because they feel they are incapable of mastering it. Another aspect that needs to be considered is the use of language which might exclude female participants. Sharma (1996) stresses that it is essential that gender inclusive language be the norm. She notes that even now in many cases the student is addressed as "he" which gives the impression that the female learner is not important or is not targeted at. Therefore, designers need to understand the influence of the socio-cultural context on communication between genders, self-concept, and self efficacy. Women students may need more support and positive feedback from the moderators/instructors of computer conferences in order to boost their self-concept and self-efficacy. During the conference, it is important that moderators determine reasons for non-participation or inequitable participation and address the problem as this may detract from an effective collaborative effort.

The above discussion on various issues and challenges in designing computer conferences has highlighted the need for effective moderators and moderating techniques.

Moderating Computer Conferences

An active moderator who is capable of skilfully leading a computer conference can overcome some of the deficiencies inherent in online communication. The moderator should attempt to relieve the communication anxiety experienced by participants by issuing warm invitations and sending encouraging private messages. Feedback and acknowledgement of initial messages are crucial to making people feel comfortable in participating in the conference. Since collaborative learning activities such as seminars, working groups, learning partnerships and team debates use cooperative task structures based on active learner participation and peer interaction to achieve a common goal, it is important that the moderator frequently summarizes or clarifies what has been taking place and tries to express the emerging consensus of the group. These "weaving comments" supply a unifying overview and synthesis of the discussion. A conference is doomed for failure without an active moderator. The strong leadership of the moderator must compensate for the missing cues in the medium.

Instructors who are beginning to use CMC as a medium of instruction, should make an attempt to learn the skills of an effective online moderator. Teaching through this medium requires a change of role from "deliverer" of information to an active and equal participant. In the CMC environment, "the instructor is more of a facilitator of group communications, organizer of group learning activities, and resident consulting expert" (Turoff, 1990, p. xii). As was discussed previously this will be a challenge to many Asian instructors. Further, moderating a computer conference requires the instructor to develop a unique set of skills to communicate and maintain group process through a text-based medium, and be technically competent to some degree in order to answer or direct technical questions. Gunawardena (1995) points out that an important skill online moderators and participants need to develop is "social presence," defined as the degree to which a person is perceived as a "real person" in mediated communication (Short et al., 1976). Social presence skills enable moderators to create a sense of online community in order to promote interaction and collaborative learning.

The author's experience with designing, implementing and evaluating several computer conferences has led to the formulation of the following guidelines for moderating computer conferences. The moderator's role in an academic computer conference can be discussed in relation to three types of responsibilities:

- 1) To humanize the online environment and create a sense of community,
- 2) To facilitate learning, and
- 3) Achieve group goals.

The tasks included in each of these responsibilities are listed below:

1) To humanize the online environment and create a sense of community:

A. Be present online frequently.

The moderator should be on-line at least once a day to see if participants need clarification, and focus the discussion if it wanders off the topic.

B. Ask participants to introduce themselves.

At the beginning of a conference encourage participants to introduce themselves by first providing a sample introduction and then encouraging those who haven't already done so, to post their introductions. It is also important to remind participants to sign their name at the end of each message.

C. Encourage participation.

This is particularly important very early in the conference when there are several novice users. Send private e-mail messages.

D. Initiate and sustain meta communication.

That is communication about communication. Whenever communication problems arise, give explanation of unclear messages, request clarification of the tone of messages and suggest changes in the rules of the conference.

E. Send encouraging private messages.

In order to alleviate communication anxiety, acknowledge participant contributions, and pay compliments, send private e-mail messages.

2) To facilitate learning:

A. Encourage participants to generate ideas.

(Example: brainstorming, information sharing, and looking at different perspectives to a problem.)

B. Help participants to link ideas together and see relationships.

C. Help participants to see the structure of ideas, synthesize them, and build knowledge.

D. Summarize the discussion.

Moderator summaries can be of two types:

- a) Summative synthesis (listing ideas which have been presented, showing relationships between the ideas).
- b) Query-posing synthesis (asking questions which will help the students to discover relationships between ideas and opposing viewpoints).

3) *To Achieve group goals moderators need to:*

- A. Choose a communication model or a set of communication protocols. (Netiquette).
- B. Summarize or clarify frequently.
- C. "Weave" thoughts and comments.
- D. Express emerging consensus of the group.
- E. Develop techniques for managing information overload.
- F. Maintain social equality of the group (by making sure that everyone has an equal chance to be heard and that nobody tries to dominate the discussion).

While these guidelines serve as a useful starting point, it is important that CMC moderators develop their own techniques with which they are comfortable and make their own personalities come through.

Evaluating Collaborative Learning via CMC

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to designing collaborative learning experiences via CMC is to develop effective frameworks for evaluating such experiences. New paradigms for evaluating learning are needed if collaborative learning experiences are designed based on constructivist principles. As Jonassen (1994) has noted constructivism emphasizes knowledge construction through social negotiation rather than reproduction, where learners are actively engaged in building knowledge structures. Then, as evaluators we need to assess the intellectual processes of knowledge construction, not reproduction, which suggests new forms of assessment emphasizing process variables rather than outcome variables!

Questions that are uppermost in evaluators' minds as they approach the evaluation of CMC learning experiences are:

- 1) Did people participate in the conference?
- 2) Was useful knowledge created?
- 3) Did participants learn? and
- 4) Were participants satisfied with the learning experience?

Since the adoption of a single technique for analyzing the quality of the learning experience in a computer conference will not yield satisfactory answers, it is important to examine several techniques and select methods that suit a particular learning experience and socio-cultural context. Techniques that have been used to answer these questions are: participation analysis, participant reports of learning and satisfaction in the transcript,

online or mail surveys, and content or interaction analysis of the computer transcript.

For analyzing participation patterns and the structure of interactions in computer conferences, Levin, Kim, and Riel (1990) developed a model that includes participant structures analysis, intermessage reference analysis and message act analysis. Henri (1992) contends that quantitative analysis of participation in computer conferences tends to yield "superficial" results, often expressed in the number of messages or participants. However, participation patterns still has much to tell us about the capacity of a conference to engage members and about comparative patterns of participation among learners from varying backgrounds. It is a useful tool for determining who participated, how actively and for how long. It is even more useful, perhaps, for determining whether patterns exist regarding the comparative frequencies with which differing types of participants participated.

Another type of information that is valuable and fairly reliable is participants' own reports of learning or satisfaction with the conferencing experience. These occur spontaneously in the transcript of the computer conference itself, or can be solicited by online surveys or by assigning a separate conference space for the evaluation of the conference from the participants' perspective.

Perhaps the most challenging type of evaluation and one that would yield the most useful information on the process of collaborative learning and knowledge negotiation, is content analysis or interaction analysis of the conference transcript. One major advantage of computer conferencing as an instructional medium is its self-documenting feature. Evaluating the quality of a computer-mediated conference by content analysis entails studying the transcript to determine whether learning or the co-creation of knowledge occurred. Of the models that have been developed for interaction analysis, Henri's (1992) model holds the most promise. However, since existing models for content analysis were not well-suited for the analysis of a constructivist learning environment, Gunawardena, Lowe and Anderson (1996) developed a constructivist interaction analysis model to examine the social negotiation and knowledge construction that occurred in an online debate. They critically examine interaction analysis techniques, and based on a new definition of interaction they propose for the CMC context, develop a model for the analysis of interactions in a computer mediated constructive learning environment.

Developing an appropriate framework for evaluating collaborative learning via computer conferencing is an important aspect of the design process. It is also an area in which further research is needed.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed issues and challenges in the design of collaborative learning experiences through computer conferencing and pointed out areas of concern from the perspective of the socio-cultural context of the Indian subcontinent. The paper offers suggestions for overcoming these challenges and provides guidelines for practice based on several computer conferences

that have been conducted nationally and internationally. The need to change traditional roles from teacher-centered to learner-centered learning is emphasized with the challenge to design collaborative learning based on constructivist principles. The importance of the role of the moderator/facilitator is emphasized with guidelines provided for moderating computer conferences. The paper concludes by addressing the need to develop new paradigms to evaluate collaborative learning mediated by computer conferencing. The issues addressed in this paper begin to build a body of knowledge about the utilization of CMC for collaborative learning.

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