UNIT 1 SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have tried to answer with the help of a case study the question as to whether or not there is any socio-political justification for us to promote distance education as a *reformative* educational strategy. We have taken an actual case well rooted in our socio-educational structure and tried to arrive at an answer in the context of the Indian situation. We believe that this situation is very close to corresponding ones in most developing countries. So the discussion, though specific to India, is relevant to all such countries. Section 1.4 will give the necessary evidence to further strengthen this claim.

Our assumption is that after you have gone through this unit, you will be able to

- analyse the constraints and limitations of face-to-face educational provision.
- arrive at the conclusion that distance education is capable of resolving some of the outstanding socio-political issues which education is currently faced with, and
- apply the approach we follow in this unit to the study of educational situation which you may be familiar with or interested in.

(We believe that you will come to the same conclusions as we have. However, our belief should not be counted as the last word on this issue!)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

'Distance Education' and 'Open Learning' are terms which are widely discussed in the academic circles all over the world today. As of January

1998 there were 1117 distance and open learning institutions of different types and sizes located in 103 countries. Student enrolment in all these institutions put together is estimated to be 30 million covering 8 regions of the globe. In all 34,000 courses are offered to distance students. And yet, questions are being asked about the viability, feasibility, credibility and quality of distance (previously correspondence) education programmes being offered in different disciplines and in different situations. These questions have already been answered, but the need to ask the same questions repeatedly does exist, depending on the situations in which distance education is practised and how it is practised.

Distance education is an educational phenomenon that is under constant scrutiny. Besides political issues like allocation of funds to establish new educational institutions so as to meet the growing demand for education, the development of socially relevant courses to fulfil social needs, etc., cultural and academic biases demand socio-political justification for our accepting and promoting distance education as an effective reformative system. To give this socio-political justification and substantiate the idea that distance education is a reformative educational strategy, we have referred to a particular case study.*

The specific 'case' we intend to study in the first two units is that of English Language Teaching (ELT) in India, with our focus on teacher training. In this context it should be noted that we do not intend to argue for the need for trained teachers, which has since been recognised, nor do we need to re-establish the fact that a majority of the English language teachers in India at various levels are untrained, in spite of the efforts put in during the past few decades. Instead, we shall endeavour to identify those socio-cultural constraints of which the institutions of teacher training (in the area of ELT) are victims. We shall limit our discussion to two major problems which the institutions are faced with :

i) the problem of ever growing 'numbers' that need to be trained, and
ii) the 'relevance' of the training programmes.

The fact that emerges from this discussion is that these problems have remained, and will continue to remain intractable mainly because of the "unconscious culturally induced bias(es)" (UCIB), which teacher-trainers and decision-makers cannot undo easily. Can distance education answer such problems? We shall look into these issues through a study of the teacher training programme of the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages** (CIEFL), Hyderabad, India.

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* The case study is referred to, as it has topical relevance to us. The discussion on the case study should not be taken in any pejorative sense whatsoever but should be treated as an illustration.

** Central Institute of English and Foreign Langjages was established in 1958 in India with a view to training teachers of English and promoting research in the area of English Language Teaching.

1.2 THE PROBLEM OF 'NUMBERS'

Before we launch into the issue of the astronomical number of teachers to be trained, we shall briefly touch upon the history of the specialist teacher training institutes in India.

The first English Language Teaching Institute (ELTI) was established in Allahabad in 1954, and the last major one, called the State Institute of Language Studies in Rajasthan, in 1966. In between, 8 more institutes were set up in various parts of the country. A year-wise break up is given in the following table:

Table 1: Specialist Institutes : year-wise break up

Year	No. of Institutes established
1956	1
1958	1
1962	1
1963	3
1964	1
1965	2
1966	1

It may be noted (Table1) that all the 10 institutes were set up within a period of ten years between 1956 and 1966, that there has been only one addition since 1966 and today in 1998 there are only 11 such institutions functioning in the country. This position is not likely to change in the near future. The specialised institutes were set up primarily with a view to improving and up-dating the available human resources. We shall see now whether or not this objective has been accomplished. We begin this discussion with a quotation from the *Supplementary Note on the Priorities and Strategies of CIEFL* (1978). (The situation is not very different in 1998.)

"i) Approximate number of teachers of English in secondary and middle schools in the country (on the basis of the number of high schools and middle schools given in the *Times of India Directory and Year Book, 1978)* 400,000
ii) Teachers trained by ELTIs/RIEs* on their regular courses 10,610
iii) Teachers trained by ELTIs through their campaign centres/short courses 102,926
iv) Teachers trained at CIEFL on the regular courses whose services can be utilised as resource persons 925
v) Teachers trained by CIEFL on short-term courses 1,044

These data may be summarised as follows:

i) The total number of teachers to be trained 400,000
ii) The number of teachers trained on regular courses at ELTIs, RIEs and CIEFL — (ii+iv) above 11,535 (10,610+925)
iii) The number of teachers trained through campaign centers, extension services and short courses - (iii+v) above 1,03,970 (102,926+1,044)
iv) Total number of teachers trained till 1978 115,505 (11535+103,970)

* RIEs : Regional Institutes of English.

Assuming that training given at ELTIs, RIEs and the CIEFL is relevant to the needs of the country, and therefore effective, we notice that till 1978 the country trained near about 26% of the target population of 4 00,000 teachers. That is to say the national effort spread over a period of 15 years (1963-78), assuming that all the Institutes started functioning in 1963, completed only 26% of the total task. If we kept the number of teachers constant and worked at the same rate as during the fifteen years from 1963 to 1978, it should not be difficult to reach the level of saturation — train all the untrained teachers — by about 2023 AD, i.e., in about 45 years, from 1978 AD to 2023. However, if we follow the line of argument presented in the *Supplementary Note*, we shall arrive at a more accurate figure.

The Supplementary Note says that "these.... are approximate figures arrived at on the basis of 4 teachers of English for every high school and 2 teachers for every middle school. The number of schools is based on the figures given in *Education in India* published by the Union Ministry of Education in 1978. As these figures relate to 1971-72 we have assumed an increase of 20% in the number of schools since then".

If the number of schools increases at the rate of 20% every seven years, the number of the teachers of English 45 years hence (counting from 1978, the period required to train all the teachers, at the present rate of training, if their number did not change) should be 4,00,000 $[1+20/100]^{45/7}$ i.e., 13,13,839. To extend the argument, 13,13,839 teachers, when trained at the rate of 1,15,505 teachers in every fifteen years (see above) will take (15 x 1313839)/1,15,505 i.e. 171 years to train one and all. Such a state of affairs is not desirable for obvious reasons — in 171 years, the number of teachers will come to be an astronomical figure.

Solutions

There appear to be three possible solutions to this problem :

i) increasing the number of ELTIs in the country;
ii) producing resource persons at the existing ELTIs, and using their services for a/the 'multiplier effect'; and
iii) using distance education techniques for training teachers all over the country.

We shall discuss the first two of these alternative solutions separately in the above order. The discussion should help us in arriving at a conclusion regarding the third alternative.

1.2.1 Increasing the number of specialist institutions

It must be noted right in the beginning that increasing the **capacity** of the existing ELTIs is not different from increasing the **number** of ELTIs. The basic premise for both is that for teacher training programmes to be effective, the growth in the capacity for training teachers must be proportionate to the growth in the number of teachers who need to be

trained. But then, what kind of funding is required to open new institutes or expand older ones? Let us work out a rough estimate of the likely increase in the budgetary provision to meet the needs outlined above.

Let us assume that we should train all the teachers of English by the end of this century. On the basis of

i) 21 years reckoned from 1978 to 1999, and
ii) 400,000 being the number of teachers involved in ELT in 1978.

The number of teachers in 1999 A.D. at the rate of 20% increase every seven years will be 400,000 $[1+20/100]^{21/7}$ i.e., 692,000.

Of these, 115,505 teachers have already been trained (see above). The number to be trained therefore, is 6,962,000—115,505 = 576,495/21 = 27,452 teachers in a year. Moreover, the average number of teachers trained in one year during a period of 15 years (i.e., from 1963 to 1978) is 115,505/ 15 = 7,700 (see above). Briefly, in order to train 27,452 teachers every year till 1999, the budgetary provision will have to be increased nearly four-fold (27,452/7,700 = 3.6).

Keeping in view the extent of "social cover investment in higher education" in India, a four-fold increase in the budgetary provision for only a part of the overall educational programme cannot be justified on economic grounds. The conclusion is that any attempt to expand the existing training centres, or to increase the number of such centres, and impart teacher training with the help of traditional modes of training is economically prohibitive, and therefore, not possible. The fact that only one new ELTI has been established since 1966 supports this conclusion substantially.

Having found the first solution non-viable, let us now look at the second alternative.

1.2.2 Operating the 'multiplier effect'

Multiplier effect simply means that a small number of teachers or any personnel properly trained will train greater numbers of their colleagues by stages and thus eventually the entire group concerned gets trained without involving additional budgetary provisions and infrastructure having to be provided for by the training institutions.

The solution of producing **multiplier effect** has been tried by most ELTIs, including the CIEFL, for quite some time now. It was thought that teacher training on a large scale would certainly require new ways of training and that this could be done on a 'pyramid' system. That is, a thorough training of at least one academic year in how to train teacher-trainers be given to a relatively small number of people whose services are later used for training teachers. who, in turn, can continue the process till all the untrained teachers are trained. This notion of the 'multiplier effect' of training given at specialist institutes is based on the following three assumptions:

i) That the teachers working in actual classroom situations can perform better if training, of whatever kind, is made available to them. They must get the label 'trained', and that is enough to make them proficient in their vocation.

ii) That a 'thorough' training of a year's duration at a specialist ELTI, for example the CIEFL, necessarily transforms a trainee into a teacher-trainer, whatever the trainee's personal attributes, or the content of the courses.

iii) That there is a ready-made academic infrastructure which will accommodate all the available teacher-trainers in order to effect the 'multiplier effect'.

How strong are these assumptions? We shall discuss them below with the help of relevant references to the *Supplementary Note on the Priorities and Strategies of CIEFL* (1978). But, first let us work on the following exercise.

Cheek Your Progress 1

Define 'multiplier effect' in not more than 12 lines with an illustration from your own experience/knowledge.

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.
b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

We shall now discuss the validity of the assumptions made above [see items (i) (ii) and (iii)]. We have grouped together the first two items (i and ii) as they essentially deal with 'training programmes'. Briefly, we shall be looking at the validity of these assumptions under two headings — training programmes and academic infrastructure.

(Short) Training Programmes — a misnomer

The Supplementary Note admits the fact that the quality of training (short course/training at campaign centres) has not been uniformly satisfactory, but it has not been made explicitly clear as to why this was so. It might be that it was not well organised, or maybe the very content of the training was irrelevant.

Organisational flaws can be mended once they are identified, but if the content of training is irrelevant it may not be easy to pinpoint it, because most often short courses given by specialist institutes (ELTIs, etc.) are miniature replicas of regular full-length courses. (We shall talk about this problem of relevance in greater detail in section 1.3). Short courses, sometimes, may do more harm than good. Consider the following:

> What *must not happen* is for the student (the student-teacher) to think that the lecturer (the trainer-teacher) is demonstrating how she/he expects 40 minutes to be filled. This point is particularly important for demonstrations given on *short vacation* courses by visiting lecturers, especially if these visitors come from other countries and have only a limited knowledge of the conditions in which the teachers they are lecturing have to operate... (Forrester, 1974: Emphasis added).

Forrester (Ibid) further adds

> On any course, there are teachers from a variety of backgrounds who will teach in very different schools, *and the demonstrations should be* varied to help all kinds of teachers. But those who most need help are those from the 'deprived areas'. They are the ones who get most discouraged... (Emphasis added).

Obviously, it is not possible to present varied demonstrations in short training programmes, and the victims are "those who most need help". To overcome this difficulty it might be suggested that we should increase the number of demonstrations and TP (teaching practice) sessions at the cost of theory classes. But then, how do we reconcile this solution with the view that the best kind of 'teaching practice' is the one which is corroborated by a coherent theory and that this kind of 'teaching practice' is a central part of both pre-service and in-service training? Can we then do away with teaching practice in short-term courses? It is a ticklish issue. The disproportionate amalgam results in disintegrating the very purpose of such training courses.

Is not, therefore, a short teacher-training programme of doubtful utility? It undoubtedly is when seen from the idealistic point of view. Lee (1974) says,

> I see no reason why the prospective graduate teacher of English as a foreign language should not commit himself at the beginning of the under-graduate stage (as doctors, dentists or engineers are committed to their profession) from the time they enter the university, and their courses are both practical and theoretical throughout, the centre of interest being practice. It is recognised that, although doubtless it would be better to have hastily trained doctors than no doctors at all, adequate training takes time and should not be rushed.

Supplementary or refresher courses may be short, but then they do not constitute training, they only follow 'subsequently'. One of the facts that

emerge from this discussion is that short courses cannot assume the role of 'full' training courses. At best, they can serve as supplementary aids, and it is unwise to mistake a refresher course for actual 'training'. A refresher course is valid only if the trainee has already had his/her 'full' training. To label a teacher who attends a two-day training programme, or for that matter a two-month programme, as 'trained' is to make a mockery of 'training'. It is true that the duration of a training course is only one of the many factors that influence 'training', but it has direct implications for other factors like the content of training, the quality of training, or the strategy used for training. If the 'duration' is not adequate, the rest cannot be so either. However, we do not deny mini-training programmes their legitimate roles, but those roles should not be mistaken for the roles of full training courses.

With these arguments in view, the data presented earlier assumes an altogether different complexion. Excluding those who were trained at short training programmes during the fifteen years, from 1963 to 1978, we are left with just 11,535 (10,610 + 925) teachers of English who may claim to have received adequate training, i.e., only 3% of the teachers (as in 1978) were actually trained by 1978. In other words, only a paltry 11,535 were really trained out of a total of 400,000 teachers.

Of the above mentioned 11,535 fully trained teachers 925 are said to be resource persons/teacher-trainers (see item (iv), sec. 1.2). These are the teachers trained at the CIEFL. It is difficult to see why of all the trained teachers, these 925 should be labelled 'resource persons', unless we accept the view that they are so by virtue of the kind of institution they have been trained at and logically, therefore, of the kind of training they have gone through. We may accept this view, but it is proved wrong the moment we turn to the system of grading which the institute under consideration follows for purposes of awarding its diplomas and certificates. Every year, about 5% of the trainees score an overall 'A' grade (the highest in the system) and there are quite a few who score 'D' grade (the lowest). Of the rest, some score 'B' grade and the remaining 'C' grade.

A 'resource person' should be what the expression implies, i.e., a 'resource person' and not a very *sound* 'resource person' or a *weak* 'resource person', for what good is a *weak* 'resource person'!

If it were just the kind of institute that one attends, and the kind or length of training that one undergoes, which determined the production of a 'resource person', there would be no 'A' grades as against 'D' grades. Obviously, there is *something* in the 'person', i.e., the trainee as well, which *something* may either be identified or both identified and sharpened by a particular kind of institute or training. This *something* could be the personal attributes of a trainee. That is, a person's age, maturity, personality and temperament, intelligence, experiential education, motivation for becoming a teacher, etc., contribute to his/her success or failure. These 'attributes' will also determine, at least in part, how successful the training will be and what sort of a 'resource person' the trainee will become.

It might be that the possession of this *something* is what lets one score an 'A'. Others who lack it fail to do so. (It should not, however, be construed that we dogmatically hold the idea that an 'A' grade trainee is necessarily a *sound* 'resource person', but that, no doubt, is what the institute's results suggest). Following this line of argument, it should not be difficult to see that so far the institute has produced not 925 'resource persons' but at the most 50 genuine 'resources persons'. That is about 5% of the total number of people who have been trained at the institute so far. The fallacy that every trainee who passes out of an institute like this is a 'resource person' not only builds resistance against reform but also makes a myth of the much talked about 'multiplier effect' of such training.

Is an 'A' grade trainee necessarily a *sound* 'resource person'?

Every trainee who scores an 'A' grade at the CIEFL need not necessarily be a *sound* 'resource person'. This view emerges from an analysis of the content and examination pattern of the major training course given at the CIEFL (PG Diploma in the Teaching of English). The course is mainly theoretical. It has been so for years now. It is not therefore, difficult to see that a high grade can be scored by someone who is well prepared with the theoretical portions of the course. However, not only the stronger claim that the institute produces 'resource persons' but also the weaker claim that it produces trained teachers is not entirely unquestionable, for

> If the training is to be practical in its outcome, it must be centred on language-teaching tasks and should be directed by those who have had plentiful first-hand experience of them. Unless both these conditions are fulfilled, the relevance of the theory is likely to remain in doubt and much of it will be above the trainees' heads. Both on the practical and on the theoretical side plenty of time is needed for the absorption of knowledge and the development of teaching skills. (Lee, 1974).

We may then conclude that the teacher training course under consideration, is, at best, in the nature of 'the information component', while 'the skills component' remains ignored.

Keeping the above discussion in view, we may now say that by 1978 the country managed to have 10,610 'informed' teachers, and 925 somewhat 'better informed' teachers of English — only 'better informed' not 'thoroughly trained'.

Non-existence of the academic infrastructure to effect the 'multiplier effect'

Only one ELTI, namely the Regional Institute of English (RIE), Bangalore has well organised campaign centres, which use the services of the people trained at the institute. The remaining ones, including the CIEFL, Hyderabad, leave their products i.e. the trained trainees/teachers, to their own destiny. These 'teacher-trainers' hardly ever find any channels to train teachers. Most often they go back to their respective institutions and continue teaching English the way they had done before they were trained, because the constraints set by the attitudes of other colleagues and students, the teaching materials and examination patterns collectively do not allow them to work differently.

We have tried to show that the courses given are called *training* courses only because there is a long tradition of treating them so. These courses are essentially generalistic in nature. They are supposed to suit all kinds of trainees, and all teaching/learning situations, but they do not show any positive results, as those who take these courses are not able to put their 'training' to any productive use. Consequently, there is no 'multiplier effect' whatsoever, for the infrastructure that could help in producing that effect does not exist. And what is being attempted by the RIE, Bangalore, by means of the kind of infrastructure they have built for the purpose is not effective either, for their campaign centres can but give short training courses, the weakness of which has already been commented on. This explains why the second solution, namely the strategy of producing resource persons at key institutes to produce the 'multiplier effect' subsequently, has not succeeded so far, and may not succeed in the future either.

Cheek Your Progress 2

Identify a programme/course being given in your country/state/ neighbourhood which highlights the issue of *numbers* as discussed in section 1.2

What are the various measures which your country/state has adopted to meet the rising demand, in terms of rising student numbers, for education?

Notes: a) Use the space given below to record your response.
b) We have not provided any response for this question.

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The foregoing discussion, thus, brings to light the following:

i) the number of teachers to be trained is large and the period of time we

may need to train them all, will be unbelievably long,

ii) increasing the number of ELTIs would mean a phenomenal increase in budgetary provision which by implication is uneconomical, and

iii) the kind of training available at the ELTIs is unsatisfactory and irrelevant to the needs of teachers and students.

These being the problems, what we may need immediately is a 'relevant' teacher training programme which can cater to the diverse needs of teachers. Obviously, the only possibility is to opt for the third alternative/solution that we mentioned earlier.

Before we discuss this alternative at length, we shall first take up the issue of 'relevance'. But first let us attempt the following exercise:

Cheek Your Progress 3

Give at least two reasons why the ELTIs do not succeed in effecting the 'multiplier effect'.

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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1.3 THE PROBLEM OF 'RELEVANCE'

The problem of 'relevance' is primarily concerned with the 'concept' of teacher-training as it is currently understood in India.

The concept of teacher-training espoused by specialists at present is a part of the British educational legacy which India has not ventured to give up. The

usual practice is still the same as that followed by the British Universities, i.e., a usual first degree course the content of which is not closely associated with language teaching followed by a 'teacher-training year'. It should be noted that the British graduate gets trained to teach his/her own mother tongue, but Indian graduates are handicapped as for them English is a foreign language. Coming to specialist institutions like ELTIs etc., the story is no different. The staff in these institutions are either directly or indirectly accultured by 'resource-countries' (England, for example) which have nothing to offer on the specific problems of teaching English in India or any other developing country.

The influence of British practices, with regard to *teaching practice*, is manifest in the low priority given to it at the ELTIs. And this affirms the fact that the teacher-training programmes currently available are unsatisfactory. It is also clear then that the 'concept' of teacher-training — as far as the significance of TP (Teaching Practice) is concerned, upheld by our specialist bodies is the result of a culturally induced bias. Over the years, this bias has also been transferred to the trainees. Most trainees, like the specialist bodies, think that it is just one generalistic type of teacher-training that can serve them all, whatever their specific needs. Needless to say, the self-same training course which aims at catering to the needs of one and all often fails to serve any at all.

We shall substantiate this observation in the following sub-sections, which show that in spite of the efforts put in by the specialist institutes the courses offered do not serve their purposes satisfactorily.

1.3.1 Generalistic type training courses

Every second teacher in a group of 246 in-service teachers who joined the Post-graduate Certificate Course in the Teaching of English (PGCTE) given by the CIEFL through correspondence in 1976, and every fourth in a group of 527 who joined the said course in 1979 were contacted through a questionnaire. The two samples thus acquired consisted of 123 and 131 teachers respectively. [Of these 254 (123 +131) teachers, only 205 sent back their responses, and not all of them responded to all the questions set in the questionnaire]

As the eligibility restrictions regulate the intake, all these 205 teachers have a Master's degree in English literature. It is interesting that the *qualified* teachers working at different levels of instruction and responsible to differing types of students should look up to one and the same type of generalistic training. There appear to be two possible reasons for such a 'rush' for the generalistic type of training.

i) The teachers are not fully aware of the nature of their respective needs, (for example, the needs of a teacher trainee, working in a B.Ed. college cannot be the same as those of his/her counterpart working in a professional college like a medical or an engineering college on the one hand, and a primary school or a post-graduate department of English on the other).

ii) They might know exactly what kind of training they need, but are helpless because none but the generalistic type is available. In this case, it is the fault of the key training centres that they have not realised what the needs of their clientele are, or if they have, they are not willing to or have no means, to fulfil them.

In either case the training given and taken cannot be relevant to one and all.

1.3.2 Need for a relevant training course

The teachers who join the generalistic type of course may have differing motivations. For instance, those working at post-graduate departments may have joined the course out of sheer curiosity, or it may be that their departments introduced a course involving some linguistics or phonetics which they would like to be exposed to through these training courses. Those working at the primary level may be looking for better jobs. Those in the professional colleges look for an improvement in quality. Consider what one of the respondents to the questionnaire has to say of the Quality Improvement Programme.

> ..... I would point out that in polytechnics the programmes are set to improve the quality of technical teachers, but the non-technical teachers and particularly the lecturers in English are not considered for Quality Improvement Programmes. However, I do not know the exact reasons behind it. I feel, I may perhaps (be) the only teacher from a polytechnic who has on his own accord got admission to the course in language teaching.

"Quality improvement' is equated with 'training in language teaching', which ostensibly it is , but 'what kind of training and for what purpose'?

It might be argued that more than 93% of these teachers, i.e., 192 out of the 205 who responded, teach at the school and the college levels, and, therefore, if these two levels are catered to, the generality of the course under consideration is more than justified. But is that true? Can there be a teacher training course general enough to cater to the needs of teachers working at the school, the intermediate and the degree levels all at once?

What follows (Table 2) is the abstract of the information we collected through the questionnaire from these 192 teachers with a view to emphasising the fact that teachers working at the three different levels under consideration need differing training courses. Besides, we would like to show that **a single generalised course for teachers working at different levels can prove harmful**.

Table 2: Differing ELT/L situations at different levels of instruction

(Please do not worry much about Mathematics. Move on to the text, if this table intimidates you)

	Date from teachers working at								
	Degree level		Intermediate level		Sec. School level				
	1979	1976	1979	1976	1979	1976			
	30 2	**26**	**32**	**38**	**18**	**19**	**No. of teachers who contributed the data:**		Column :A
	87.4	87.0	75.0	76.0	39.0	39.1	Strength of class-average	Composition: any one class/teacher	
	16%	21%	22%	24%	10%	14%	Students from the Eng. medium schools		
	84%	79%	78%	76%	90%	86%	From regional med, schools		
	51%	55%	37%	42%	24%	39%	From lower middle class families		
	49%	45%	63%	58%	76%	61%	From poor families: income <Rs. 500.00 per month		
	17	19	27	31	15	15	No. of teachers who responded:	Nature of teaching materials used:	Column : B
	0%	0%	30%	35%	87%	87%	YES Selected		
	100%	100%	7-%	65%	13%	13%	NO Vocabulary		
*SC=Socio-cultural *BG=back ground	0%	0%	30%	35%	87%	87%	YES Graded		
	100%	100%	70%	65%	13%	13%	NO Vocabulary		
	0%	0%	30%	35%	80%	54%	Without graded structures & themes appropriate to the SC* BG* of the learner — YES		
	12%	20%	37%	18%	0%	12%			
	88%	80%	63%	82%	100%	88%	NO		
	100%	100%	70%	65%	20%	46%	Without graded structures & themes appropriate to the SC* BG* of the learner — YES		
	0%	0%	21%	20%	0%	14%			
	100%	100%	19%	80%	100%	86%	NO		
Average %	25	20	32	37	19	18	No. of teachers who responded:	Bases for the responses	Column : C
27%	24%	20%	28%	41%	26%	22%	YES Knowledge of the curricular aims		
73%	76%	80%	72%	59%	74%	78%	NO		
63%	4%	10%	6%	8%	5%	5%	YES Classroom fully equipped		
93.7%	96%	90%	94%	92%	95%	95%	NO		
1.5%	4% No.lib		3%				Personal affair — for no		
2.2%	4%		6%	3%			Bad materials & methods		
2.5%		5%		5%		5%	Students unwilling		
14.5%	12%	25%	15%	24%	11%		large classes		
72%	76%	60%	62%	60%	84%	89%	Aids not available		
5%	4%	10%	6%	3%L	5%	5%	T=Teacher; AVA=AV Aids — for yes		
1.5% AVA av.	AVA	BB,B &R	BB,B	5%	AVA	T	L=Lecture; BB=Black Board		
	available	&R	BB,&B	available			B=Books;R=Room		
67.3%	72%	60%	56%	65%	84%	76%	L=Learner — **The more important factor in ELT/L**		
19.3%	12%	30%	25%	16%	5%	28%	T=Teacher		
13.3%	16%	10%	19%	19%	11%	5%	B=Both		
90.5%	75%	78%	97%	94%	100%	99%	Translation the most common teaching strategy		
	15	18	26	28	14	13	No. of teachers who responded:		
	35%	39%	46%	39%	78%	85%	The training is useful Reasons — Usefulness of training in ELT. [CIEFL a special case]		Column : D
	Mainly self improvement + (Teaching of Gr*								
*Gr = Grammar	100%	94%	96%	93%	71%	73%	The training is not useful Reasons		
	Exam types. student type, course content & requirement		Exams; class compositin; Course requirement		Exams; Student aims Student type				

An analysis of Table 2 shows that the training programme we have been talking about needs to be improved. Let us elaborate.

Column A

The average strength of a general English class at the intermediate level (i.e., A level) is almost two times what it is at the school level, and at the degree level the average strength is much more than that at the intermediate level. The majority of learners at all the three levels come from classes in which a regional language is used as the medium of instruction. A greater percentage of learners at the high school level comes from poorer sections of the society and at the graduate level this percentage tilts in favour of the middle income group.

Column B

Most of the teaching materials used at the high school level are based on selected and graded vocabulary and graded structures. This is not always the case at the intermediate level, at which only a small percentage of teaching materials is based on some kind of 'selection' and 'gradation'. At the degree level, however, these criteria do not find any place in cours development. As we examine the themes presented in the language tests, we notice that they are, in a majority of cases, inappropriate to the socio-cultural background of the learners.

Column C

Most teachers at all the three levels of instruction are not aware of the 'aims' of the curriculum at their respective levels, and a majority of them think that their classrooms are not properly equipped for the purposes of ELT. And the basis of this view, in most cases, is that audio-visual aids are not available. Again, most teachers think that it is the learner who is the more important factor as far as the activity of ELT is concerned, and they use 'translation' as the major ELL (English Language Learning) strategy in their classrooms.

Column D

A vast majority of the trained teachers who work at the intermediate and the degree levels think that their training at the CIEFL is not relevant to their needs.

Comments

It appears legitimate to train high school teachers to teach classes of about 50 students each and college teachers to handle about 90 students in a class. However, since in the Indian situation the number of students in a class is not predictable at either level, the trainees should be trained to handle a variety of class-sizes. At present they are made aware of this variety in class-sizes but actual training to cater to this 'variety' is not available. Secondly, the

kind of students available for 'practice teaching' sessions in large towns, (that is where all the ten specialist training centres are situated) do not constitute samples of the types the trainees have to face in the actual situation — the 'disadvantaged' sections of the society. Thirdly, the type of teaching materials used at the school and the college levels are distinctly different from each other. If teacher training includes training in using teaching materials, there is need for providing differing teaching skills to teachers working at differing levels of instruction. Besides, if the teacher himself/herself is convinced that the themes presented in the texts do not conform to the socio-cultural background of the learners, it is difficult to visualise how the learners' interest or imagination might be aroused or captured by such texts. A generalistic type of training cannot, at one and the same time, train all the teachers who use different types of texts.

It appears (see column C — Table 2) that the training courses currently available give rise to a new type of folk-lore emphasising that teaching of English, whatever the 'aims' of a course, is not possible without the use of audio-visual aids, or that since the learner is the more important factor involved in any ELT/L situation, the entire onus of making the activity successful falls on him/her and not on the teacher. The weakness of such training courses is obvious: on the one hand they fail to influence the collective thinking of teachers with regard to teaching techniques, on the other, they build a folk-lore which makes it convenient for the teacher to be indifferent to his/her duties. In this sense, these training courses do prove harmful (see column D — Table 2).

The point that emerges from the above discussion is that a teacher training programme which does not

- equip the teacher for his/her survival-struggle and vocation,
- convert him/her to the pedagogic ideology it preaches,
- differentiate between the differing needs of the teachers working at various levels,
- give specific training for specific purposes, and
- exploit those tendencies of the teachers, which if exploited could prove useful,

may do more harm than good to an unwary trainee, and more so if it succeeds in building a folk-lore which blocks 'application' on the part of teachers.

Obviously, we should be looking for an alternative. What consideration should the alternative be based on?

Before you proceed further, please attempt the following exercise.

Cheek Your Progress 4

Give at least two reasons to show that a 'generalistic type' teacher training programme is not satisfactory. Mention at least two examples from your local context.

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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1.3.3 A relevant training programme -- basic considerations

This being the state of affairs (refer to our discussion 1.3.2) what we need is 'grass-roots training'. It consists of committing the prospective foreign language teacher to his/her profession from the very beginning of his/her university career, as is the case with doctors or engineers who pursue courses which are both theoretical and practical throughout — 'practice' being the focal point of the entire activity.

Although it is highly desirable to have adequately trained teachers, on practical grounds it may not be realistic to look up to a concept of teacher-training that idealizes the quality of training over the investment, in terms of money and time. But a much stronger argument against this concept is the pressure of the geometric increase in the number of our students. Besides, considering the insignificant number of specialist institutions in the country, the prospect of 'grass-roots training' appears to be gloomy.

But, in spite of these handicaps, the obvious advantages and the evident utility of such training recommend it for the Indian situation, in which it will have to be based on a consideration of the following factors:

i) The country as a whole *should* be capable of training more than 27,000 teachers of English in a year.

ii) These 27,000 teachers are of vastly differing linguistic abilities (as far as their proficiency in English is concerned). They include teachers who hold secondary school certificates and B.A. degrees with and without specialisation in English (i.e., English as an elective subject at the B.A. level)

iii) These teachers can be withdrawn from their active duty for, at the most, 8-10 weeks in an academic year.

iv) Almost all these teachers have to depend on a blackboard, textbook, a notebook, pencils and pieces of chalk as their only teaching tools.

v) These teachers are overloaded with work and cannot genuinely be expected to spend enough time preparing their lessons.

vi) There are only eleven specialist training institutes in the country. Most of them are not fully equipped.

vii) The trained teachers *should* be able to bring their students to the level of language proficiency which is expected of them (the learners) at the particular level of learning they work at, be it the school level, the higher secondary level or the degree level. The learner after having undergone a course in English should be able to use this language as a tool in such real life situations as are commensurate with that course.

It may be noted that of the seven factors listed above only two, i.e., the first and the seventh are speculative — see the implication of the word *should* in them — and the rest are facts that obtain in our present socio-political set up. Items (i), (iii), and (vi) point to 'distance education' as the only viable mode of training these teachers. Items (ii), (v) and (vii) point to another relevant consideration, namely that the training has not to be 'generalistic' in nature, it must cater to the specific needs of a variety of teachers. Item (iv) points to the fact that there is no time/scope for indulging in pedagogic luxuries which affluent countries can afford without any difficulties.

From our discussion we can deduce that the 'distance mode' of training may answer the problem of 'time' and 'numbers', but that does not bring us anywhere near the solution of another basic problem - that of making training courses relevant to the needs of teachers and of society. To support this argument we discussed the notion of relevance in some detail and pointed to the considerations which are basic to a socially relevant training course. With these considerations in view, we argue that the 'distance' mode of training may serve our purpose. (Units 2, 3 and 4 of this block discuss these points in greater details).

Cheek Your Progress 5

In this unit we have presented a case study which is old. The purpose of this study is to show what educational issues have compelled educators to look for stronger/better modes of education recently. That it pertains to English Language Teaching is not significant, as we could as well have chosen some other area to make the points; what is significant is that it brings in to sharp focus the issues of *rising student numbers, relevance of courses available and need for alternative methodologies of teaching/training.*

To assess whether you have grasped the essence of this unit we would like you to look around and identify an educational transaction (like the ELT case discussed in this unit) of your country/institution which brings to focus the issues pointed to above.

Note: In the space given below, please name the case/transaction you identify.

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1.4 NUMBERS AND RELEVANCE IN OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

It is not just a country like India which has a population of about 1 billion that has to grapple with the problem of numbers of people in need of affordable education. Small nations of the developing world too have to tackle this problem, especially when they are in need of quick educational solutions but do not have huge budgets for the same. Irrespective of their size in terms of population and geographical spread, the developing nations have resorted to open distance learning strategies to fulfil their educational and developmental needs.

Mauritius, for example, is a small country as compared to India and other developing countries. Though Mauritius has a strong economy it is yet to make significant progress in educating its population. Having experienced

three successive colonial regimes under the Dutch, the French and the British, Mauritius has to free its educational system from its past legacy and also from the present educated elite who received their higher education either from France, Britain or from both. The majority of the people are yet to be covered by higher education of acceptable quality, though efforts have been on to educate them ever since Mauritius became independent in 1968.

The Roman Catholic Missionaries from Europe could set up schools and colleges in a limited way during the French colonial rule. During the British period, education, for the first time became a state subject. Besides being restrictive, the educational policies and practices of these periods aimed at perpetuating the interests and the cultures of the colonisers. Naturally, mass democratic education with secular content was not the priority.

After independence the need for expanding general education and specialist training was felt by the government. In the late sixties the University of Mauritius became operational, but it focused on a limited number of educational fields which supported the service sector. The need to increase the access of people to higher education and diversify programmes which the conventional university system could not accommodate was still pressing, as only a small number of students could enroll with the University of South Africa, the London University for external degrees, UK based correspondence colleges, etc. In 1992 the government of Mauritius came up with the Education Master Plan which may distance education a priority. Though the Mauritius college of the Air, established in the mid seventies, has been broadcasting primary, secondary and of late, adult education programmes for the urban and the rural population, the coverage is limited. To overcome this problem, the Mauritius Institute of Education has adopted distance mode for training primary and secondary school teachers on a large scale. The same strategy has been adopted to offer B.Ed. Programmes too. Subsequently, Mauritius set up a Distance Education Division within the Tertiary Education Commission to further expand higher education through distance mode to tackle the problem of numbers and remove the traditional educational disparity between the privileged few and the under privileged many.

In Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Botswana, Swaziland and other African countries, the educational institutions face great difficulties in solving the problems of numbers in the areas of teacher education, training of health workers, agricultural extension workers, management trainees etc. and other non-conventional educational programmes to be mounted on a mass scale. The relevance of the programmes and the efficacy to offer them through distance mode have been proved in the recent experiments.

In the Caribbean region the West Indies, Costa Rica, Cuba and Nicaragua took to different types of distance education precisely to tackle the problems of mass education necessary for modernisation and development of their respective nations. Training of teachers through distance mode was/has been

an important component of the educational campaigns in these countries. The University of the West Indies Distance Teaching Experiment (UWIDITE) programmes have been on since the late 70s and have made significant contribution to Antigua, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and other island nations in the region. Teacher training and vocational education in Antigua, for example, have to be imparted on a large scale and the government has opted for distance education to do that. The University of the West Indies (UWI) has recently set up its Distance Education Centre to develop programmes for the 16 Anglophone Caribbean island nations. The regional population is over 5 million and UWI has about 12000 students on its rolls. Though the population is comparatively small the challenges are big. In Jamaica, for example, at the graduate level the number of trained labour force is below 2 percent. In St. Vincent too, access to secondary education is still limited. Shortage of trained teachers at primary level and a high rate of illiteracy are reported to be matters of concern.

Cuba has made remarkable progress in expanding mass education programmes at all levels. Distance education is used as a tool to develop human resources in all fields, and it is considered "an ideal complement" to the Cuban education system "which has as a principle (been aiming at) equal opportunity for all Cuban citizens" who want to go for higher education. (A.M. Justiniani and M.Y. Seuret, 1992).

In Latin America, distance education has been in practice in different forms over the past three decades, if not more. However, because the literature pertaining to Latin American experiences is available mostly in Spanish or Portuguese, the outside world has not yet known much about the scenario in this region. Nevertheless, distance education practices in Argentina, Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica and Venezuela are notable for their unique features. Later, in Block 3 you will read a review of the Latin American experience at some length. Here we may mention just one point which is relevant to all developing countries, after a series of experiments, the Latin American distance educators have come to a firm conclusion that distance education must take indigenous shape in order to become sustainable. Based on this principle, many institutions of this region have made remarkable contributions during the past decade. (Also see unit 3, Block 3 of this course).

In the South Asian countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh the experiences in tackling the educational issues at different levels have been no different from those in India. Pakistan's Allama Iqubal Open University (1974), Sri Lanka's Open University (1980) and the Bangladesh Open University (1990) have been offering courses similar to those of the Open Universities in India. Development of human resources necessary for nation building, greater access to the existing academic programmes and launching of unconventional programmes to meet social needs are the priorities of these universities.

From the foregoing discussion, it must be clear that distance education as a system has been emerging in the developing world as a legitimate response to its socio-academic needs and demands.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have presented a case study which is relatively old. The purpose of this study is to outline the educational issues of the developing countries. That it pertains to English Language Teaching is not significant, as we could have chosen some other area to make the same points; what is significant is that it brings to sharp focus the issues of *rising student numbers, relevance of courses available and need for alternative methodologies of teaching/training.*

Here we took up for discussion a specific educational transaction, namely the training of teachers of English in India. The discussion brought into focus a few issues — the unmanageable number of teachers to be properly trained, the inordinate period of time we may require to train all the teachers and the imperative need for a more relevant teacher-training programme. To resolve these issues, we suggested three alternative solutions. They are:

i) increasing the number of specialised institutes,
ii) effecting the multiplier effect, and
iii) adopting distance education to train the teachers.

In the course of our discussion, we established that solutions (i) and (ii) above are ineffective and therefore cannot resolve our problems of 'numbers', 'time' and 'relevance'. We then affirmed that a distance mode of training is the only means which might have the potential to satisfy our needs. By implication, we indicated that the distance mode is more relevant than the age old mode(s) of education.

Towards the end of this unit we have also given a brief survey of the conditions which demand educational solutions through distance mode in a number of developing countries of different sizes, cultures, and varying degrees of economic and technological development. We hope that the foregoing cases are sufficient to establish the need for distance education in your own country.

Cheek Your Progress : Possible Answers

1. Multiplier effect is a mode of teacher-training in which a relatively small group of people are given training for about a year in how to train teachers. The services of these resource persons are used at a later stage to train another set of teachers. This process is, thus, continued till all the teachers are given training. The number of people who receive training thus gets multiplied over and over again.

3. The ELTIs could not succeed in effecting 'multiplier effect' because of

various reasons such as:

i) Lack of the necessary academic infrastructure in user Institutes;
ii) The generalistic nature of training courses (which are supposed to suit all the teaching/learning situations and all the needs of the trainees); and
iii) The inability of the people who receive training at these institutes to use it purposefully. (The attitudes of their colleagues and students, the quality of the teaching materials and the examination system contribute to this consequence).

4. The generalistic type of teacher-training programmes are unsatisfactory because they:

i) fail to give differing teaching skills to teachers working at differing levels of instruction (i.e., for example, the needs of a school teacher are obviously different from those of his/her counterpart at a college and further the types of teaching materials used at the school and the college levels are markedly different from each other);
ii) find it difficult to arrange for appropriate practice teaching sessions, i.e. the 'subjects' (i.e., students/learners) for these sessions are normally from urban areas and therefore do not constitute samples of the types of student trainees may have to face in actual classroom situations.

UNIT 2 ACADEMIC CREDIBILITY

Unit Structure

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Conventional Use of Distance Teaching

2.3 Cultural Bias of the 'Key Agencies'

2.4 Relative Effectiveness of the Two Modes of Education
2.4.1 Controlling interfering variables
2.4.2 Effectiveness of the distance mode vindicated

2.5 Let Us Sum Up

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall try to show you that in general, academics in India as in many other countries with conservative academic traditions, do not think highly of distance education as a reformative educational strategy, and that such an attitude is a consequence of their 'culturally induced bias', and has no empirical evidence to support it, as well as the fact that empirical evidence establishes the academic credibility of distance education as a successful educational strategy.

After you work through the unit, we would like you to assess *your* own attitude pertaining to the issue under consideration. This might be a difficult exercise to undergo, but our views may help you shape yours. We believe that a distance educator's success depends significantly on his/her attitude towards this new mode of education. At this stage, you need to be certain about whether or not you strongly affirm that distance education can be and should be used as a reformative educational strategy to achieve the educational goals of your country.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In unit 1 of this block we raised some important issues pertaining to the training of the teachers of English — the time needed to train all the teachers, the *money* needed to train them, the *large number* of teachers to be trained, and the *relevance* of the kind of training currently being given. We thought of

three alternative solutions to these issues and then discussed two of them in great detail. In conclusion, we suggested that the solutions discussed did not appear to solve the problem, and therefore the third alternative, i.e. the use of 'distance education' techniques was justifiable from the socio-political point of view.

Thus having answered the first of the four questions raised in the 'Introduction to the Block' in the affirmative, we now turn to the second question, i.e., that of the academic credibility of distance education.

We propose to look into this issue with the help of another case study, and, once again, we turn to the teacher training course discussed in unit 1. You can think of any other discipline in place of English but the basic issues discussed here would have the same relevance.

2.2 CONVENTIONAL USE OF DISTANCE TEACHNIG

Of the eleven ELTIs (see unit 1) in the country only one, namely the CIEFL, Hyderabad, is using the techniques of distance education for purposes of training the teachers of English on a large scale, and the first group of teachers trained at the Institute through 'correspondence', passed out in 1974. One of the salutary effects of the initiative taken by the CIEFL is that distance education techniques are being advocated, but the courses (to be given by ELTIs other than the CIEFL, Hyderabad) under preparation for teacher-trainees working at various other ELTIs are conventional, and therefore, 'imitative' and not 'innovative' in nature.

This weakness notwithstanding, we admit that the distance mode of education appears to be the only solution to the problem of 'numbers'. (The issue of 'numbers' has been discussed in unit 1). This is the 'mode' which also appears to have the potential to train more than 27,000 teachers (see unit 1) in a year. However, we admit that this 'mode' may not show qualitatively better or comparable results than those of the existing face-to-face training programmes.

We shall substantiate our claim — that 'imitative' use of distance teaching may not show qualitatively better results — with the help of a Study. * The study was conducted with the objective of comparing the academic achievement of the on-campus graduate students with that of correspondence graduate students — the B.A. (Pass) students of Utkal University and the B.A. students of the Directorate of Correspondence Courses of the same university during the academic sessions 1976-77, 1977-78, and 1978-79. In total, the achievement score of 600 on-campus and 600 correspondence students were collected.

* The study "Achievement of Regular and Correspondence Students: A Comparative Study" was conducted in 1980 by Laxmi Shankar and Santosh K. Panda of the P.G. Department of Education, Kurukshetra University, Haryana. The academic achievement of graduate students of Utkal University, Orissa was compared with that of the graduate students enrolled in the Directorate of Correspondence Courses, Utkal University. The results pointed out the areas for the improvement of the correspondence courses.

The analysis of the data showed that generally the on-campus students had achieved better results than the correspondence students. The primary reasons for this, as identified by the researchers, are as follows:

i) the course-components/syllabi of the correspondence courses are, by and large, similar to those of the regular courses;
ii) the academic input is mostly confined to print materials; and
iii) the Directorate Correspondence Course offers only a limited number of course combinations which are identical with those of the regular face-to-face courses.

The conclusion is that, the 'imitative' use of distance teaching, thus, does not help promoting qualitatively better results.

The study does not, however, overlook other variables that might have contributed to bringing down the academic achievement of correspondence students. The variables may be:

i) ineffective personal contact programmes,
ii) inadequate library facilities,
iii) ineffective delivery system,
iv) lack of an effective feedback system.

In the present context, (i.e., in the context of ELT) to use a distance education system 'innovatively' would, then mean to exploit it to its full potential, use it for presenting effectively a more relevant content of training, as against its current use for purposes of transmitting a content similar to that of the residential courses, i.e. its 'imitative' use.

The claim is further evidenced by a comparison of the course-content prescribed for the CIEFL residential Diploma with that prescribed for the Diploma through distance. What emerges from this comparison is the fact that even this 'imitation' is not satisfactory, i.e. the choice of subjects which is available in the residential courses is considerably wider than that available through distance courses.

Distance education techniques are intended to be used imitatively in the future too. Let us substantiate this claim with the following excerpt from the Proceedings of the XII Annual Conference of ELTIs in India (1977). The citation which pertains to teacher training relevant to the higher secondary level goes as follows:

> Coming to the mode of training, (it was) said that the correspondence mode of education integrated with face-to-face training was the only possible way of training thousands of untrained teachers.. (Accordingly)... a correspondence training programme suitably modified, on the lines of the one being given by the CIEFL to college and university teacher (was suggested). Four subjects namely, (1) Spoken English ad Phonetics, (2) Methods of Teaching English, (3) Modern

> English Grammar and Usage and (4) Materials for the Teaching of English could be presented to the trainees in 40 lessons spread over five months followed by a face-to-face training programme of three weeks. The specific role of the CIEFL would be to train key personnel, who, in turn, could work at various ELTIs was obvious from the training point of view too.... Lastly, (it was suggested) that such a training programme could be implemented without involving huge sums of money. Besides, the Central Agencies like the Ministry of Education, the National Council of Educational Research and Training, and the State Governments would be willing to support this programme provided they were convinced of its usefulness.

Three points emerge from this citation :

i) It appears reasonable to suggest distance education techniques to train teachers at the higher secondary level. However, a modified shorter course on the lines of the one given by the CIEFL to college and university teachers appears to be of doubtful validity.

Is the difference between the needs of the teachers working at the higher secondary level only a matter of "more or less" of a certain time honoured course-content?

ii) It is clear that the respective roles of the CIEFL and other ELTIs have been expressed explicitly. We have already discussed the weakness in the CIEFL's role in preparing 'resource persons'. Further, the assumption here is that the CIEFL has ready machinery for training *'resource persons' who can train teachers through correspondence*. This does not seem to be a tenable assumption against the background of our discussion pertaining to the training of 'resource persons' for face-to-face training situation, and the overall fate of the 'multiplier effect' produced in such situations (see unit 1). Juxtaposing 'distance education' techniques with a strategy that has not worked well so far, may not be advisable, but the 'imitative' use of these techniques cannot go beyond that juxtaposition.

iii) It is said that the correspondence mode of instruction does not involve huge sums of money, and both the Central and the State agencies would support this programme, once they are convinced of its usefulness. By implication, the Central as well as the State agencies are yet to be convinced of its usefulness. How and when is this 'usefulness' going to be proved?

Most of the key people in the specialised institutions like the CIEFL are no doubt products of the face-to-face mode of education and, therefore, most of them will find it difficult to appreciate the overall potential of the correspondence mode of instruction. The best they can do under the pressure of circumstances is to use the distance mode 'imitatively', for it is only when one is convinced of the usefulness of a certain mode of activity that it can be put to 'innovative' uses.

Check Your Progress 1

Define the innovative use of distance mode of training in not more than 10 lines.

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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The three reasons that we discussed earlier not only substantiate the claim that 'distance education' techniques are being used 'imitatively' and are intended to be used in the same way in the future as well, but also point to three distinct causes thereof. The first cause is rooted in the content of the courses, the second in the strategy, i.e., the way of implementing the courses, and the third in the 'cultural bias' of the key personnel and the key institution.

The first two of these causes are related to the problem of the 'relevance' of the present teacher-training courses. We have already discussed this problem in section 1.3. Here we shall discuss the third of these causes.

2.3 CULTURAL BIAS OF THE 'KEY AGENCIES'

Consequent upon their 'unconscious culturally induced biases', academics in general do not think highly of distance education as a reformative educational strategy. It will take some time for this situation to change appreciably. To support this observation, we shall present here a study which was carried out between 1976-1979. In the study, the opinions of the faculty members — particularly the ELT experts of the CIEFL — about the distance courses given by the institute were collected and analysed.

For this purpose the faculty members were approached one by one, on one or another pretext and engaged in an informal talk with special reference to the following questions:

i) **Overall relative usefulness:** Which are more useful, courses given through correspondence or ones given to regular participants?
ii) **Partial relative usefulness:** Is it true that correspondence courses might be more useful in certain subjects and the regular residential courses more useful in certain other subjects?
iii) **Possibility of equation:** Is it possible at all (whatever the means) to make correspondence courses as useful as the regular residential courses?
iv) **Mere utility:** Can correspondence courses (modified adequately) serve the purpose effectively?

The meetings were repeated twice with the same group (with some variations) at regular intervals of about 15/16 months with the same aim as mentioned above. This was followed by a round of meetings with the newly appointed staff.

We have depicted the overall opinions of the staff members in the following table.

Table 3: Responses of the staff members - a sum up

Questions ↓	RESPONSES			
	I Meeting Jan-Feb. 1976	**II Meeting June-July 1977**	**III Meeting Nov.-Dec. 1978**	**IV Meeting Apr.-June 1979**
No. of subject →	28	25	26	9
Q.I. Which is more useful -- RC's or CC's?	RC's-28 CC's-X	RC's-25 CC's-X	RC's-26 CC's-X	RC's-9 CC's-X
Q.II Which mode is better for which subjects?	RC's for all subjects -28 CC's for nil-28	RC's for all subjects-25 CC's for nil-25	RC's for all subjects-26 CC's for nil-26	RC's for all subjects-9 CC's for nil-9
Q.III Can CC's be made as effective as RC's?	Yes-X No-28 TSE-5	Yes-X No-25 TSE-X	Yes-X No-24 (1) (23) TSE-2 (2)	Yes-X No- 8 TSE-1
Q.IV Can CC's be effective if modified?	Yes-X No-23 TSE-5	Yes-X No-20 (20) TSE-5 (1) (4)	Yes-X No-21 (1) (20) TSE-5 (5)	Yes-X No- 8 TSE-1

Notes: 1. RC's Residential Courses, CC's: Correspondence Courses, TSE: To Some Extent.
2. Numbers following the arrows show the distribution as it shaped in the followng meeting.

The table shows that the collective opinion of the teaching faculty is fairly consistent — they believe that correspondence courses are no match for the regular residential courses. And the opinion of the junior staff is in full agreement with that of senior members. This shows how strong the 'cultural trap' may be. A body of academics that has been brought up on a certain mode of education can hardly think that a different mode can be as useful as or at times more effective than the one they are familiar with. It is evident that the culturally induced bias in favour of face-to-face instruction makes it difficult for people to see the advantages which the correspondence mode of instruction can offer.

An academic body that does not appear to have any faith in the correspondence mode of instruction, can hardly put it to 'innovative use' and lead other institutions in a similar task. This lead if given and accepted will be a mere extension of the 'imitative' or conventional use of correspondence courses. The obvious explanation, it appears, is that the biases in favour of the conventions make it difficult for them to appreciate the full potential of distance education techniques; consequently they use these techniques 'imitatively'.

What has been understood about the correspondence mode of instruction is that it is economical, and that its reach is extensive both in terms of 'numbers' and 'distance', but as far as its social and educational utility is concerned, nothing beyond its 'imitative' use has been realised yet. To make this point clear, we shall refer to the way the Open University, UK, uses the mode. The Open University introduced over three decades ago some major innovations to make these courses academically effective and socially relevant (Bates, 1974).

These innovations are: open entry, course team, award of a degree by cumulative credits, low-cost per student, interdisciplinary courses, a systems and educational technology approach to learning and course design, joint production of courses, post-experience courses, etc. A cursory look at this list of educational innovations points to the strengths of this unorthodox approach to education.

Going back to the question ('Introduction to the Block') which we attempted to answer at some length, we would like to assert that although distance education as a reformative educational strategy has yet to reach the desired level in the developing countries, there is no reason to question its academic credibility. Once we, as academics, get over our culturally induced biases, we shall rate it very high on the scale of such credibility, both at the theoretical and practical levels. The enormous amount of literature now available on this theme should prove helpful in modifying attitudes.

Moreover, there is no justification for being biased in favour of one or the other mode of instruction, unless the results of the two have been compared. The CIEFL has not evolved any mechanism to assess the post-training performance of its trainees. And therefore, for the purpose of developing a reliable and valid viewpoint about the relative effectiveness of the modes of

instruction, we shall use the respective scores at the term-end examinations as the criterion for comparing the effectiveness of the two modes.

In section 2.4 we have attempted to show how the comparison was carried out.

2.4 RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TWO MODES OF EDUCATION

The two modes under consideration are:

i) face-to-face education — the mode currently favoured by most academics, and
ii) correspondence/distance education — the mode that seeks social and academic recognition.

Before we proceed any further, we would like to say that the intake of the Department of Distance Education (the CIEFL) for a year is more than ten times that of the institute for regular residential courses. This, however, does not suggest that the institute's correspondence courses are more popular or effective than its face-to-face training programme, nor that the Certificate course or/and the Diploma course given through correspondence is/are pedagogically more useful than the regular residential Certificate or/and Diploma Course(s). The larger number of correspondence students is attributed to the fact that many in-service teachers of English who for one or the other reason cannot join the residential courses have to accept the 'second choice' — the correspondence courses. And those who can afford to undergo the formalities of a regular course would rather go for the 'first choice' — the regular courses.

The implication of such a view is that correspondence studies are taken up not for their intrinsic pedagogic value, but to counter certain social hurdles which deprive in-service teachers of joining the regular courses. There are reasons to think that the better mode of imparting education is a face-to-face teaching programme. Personal contact with teachers, availability of books, journals, tutorials, undisturbed studies in intense academic atmosphere and the possibility of getting immediate solutions to academic problems are some of the factors that contribute towards the strengthening of this notion. Further, academics in general and correspondence students in particular look upon the regular students as superior beings.

This lack of status for correspondence education stems perhaps from the following factors :-

- lack of library facilities,
- long gaps in time between the questions raised and the answers received,
- no immediate personal contact with teachers,
- heavy social commitments,
- disturbed study hours and no interaction within a cross-section of student population.

Notwithstanding the obvious odds against the correspondence mode of education, it must have an appreciable degree of pedagogic reliability, for otherwise it would not have withstood the test of time in the West, Australia or the former USSR.

Having said this, we shall now look at the relative effectiveness of the two modes of education under discussion.

We used the overall performance of the trainees for purposes of comparison. The data collected from the examination records of the two samples — correspondence students and the regular students of a particular year, 1975 in this case — were compared to assess the relative effectiveness of the two modes.

Check Your Progress 2

List any four factors (which are generally pointed to) that put the distance mode of education at a lower rung in terms of academic prestige.

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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2.4.1 Controlling the interfering variables

The overall performance of the trainees (correspondence and regular) collected from the examination records is presented in table 4.

Before we decide on how to interpret the data (see table 4), we shall attempt to explain how various interfering variables were controlled.

i) Look at the table. The two samples of 18 students each appeared at different examinations comprising questions of differing difficulty levels and types, though based on almost identical syllabi. Such a difference may be a hurdle in the way of a genuine comparison. The apprehension is that a comparison of performance at two different examinations is bound to bring in errors in the final interpretation. To overcome this difficulty, question papers of three successive years, i.e. 1973 (regular courses only), 1974 (two sets of question

S. No.	Roll No.		SUBJECT-X					SUBJECT-Y						SUBJECT-Z	
	Correspondence Courses = CC's	Residential Courses = RC's	I Pair		II Pair(Qs)			I Pair			II Pair(Qs)			The only Pair (Qs)	
			CC's E_1	RC's E_1	CC's E_1	RC's E_2	RC's E_1	CC's E_3	RC's E_4	RC's E_3	CC's E_3	RC's E_4	RC's E_3	CC's E_5	RC's E_5
1	532	107	10.0	10.0	6.9	8.0	9.2	5.3	7.0	5.5	5.5	9.0	8.0	6.7	5.0
2	541	108	10.0	5.0	7.5	6.5	1.5	4.0	6.0	4.5	7.0	8.0	7.0	8.0	5.0
3	545	112	10.0	00.0	5.0	6.0	2.5	5.3	6.0	6.0	5.5	10.0	10.0	5.8	3.3
4	548	113	10.0	9.0	5.6	7.5	2.5	7.3	6.5	3.0	7.0	8.0	8.0	7.7	6.5
5	551	116	5.0	9.0	2.5	7.5	8.0	5.3	6.5	6.5	5.5	10.0	10.0	6.7	5.8
6	554	117	6.3	10.0	6.9	7.0	7.5	6.3	6.5	5.0	6.5	6.0	5.0	4.3	5.0
7	564	120	10.0	2.0	6.2	7.0	5.0	2.7	7.5	5.0	6.0	10.0	10.0	5.5	5.6
8	566	121	10.0	10.0	7.5	6.5	1.5	4.0	7.5	4.5	6.0	6.0	6.0	7.5	5.0
9	578	123	10.0	10.0	8.1	5.0	1.5	4.7	9.5	6.5	4.5	9.0	9.0	7.0	0.0
10	581	124	10.0	2.5	7.5	8.5	2.5	4.0	8.0	5.0	5.5	9.0	7.0	6.3	5.0
11	588	125	10.0	2.5	6.3	7.0	7.5	2.3	9.0	6.0	7.0	9.0	7.0	6.2	4.2
12	592	127	10.0	00.0	6.3	7.0	6.0	1.3	2.5	2.0	7.0	10.0	10.0	6.3	5.8
13	611	133	10.0	2.5	5.6	7.0	2.5	6.7	8.0	5.0	7.0	10.0	9.0	6.5	6.7
14	615	134	10.0	9.5	5.6	8.0	9.0	6.7	8.0	6.5	5.0	10.0	10.0	5.3	7.5
15	620	136	00.0	5.0	8.1	7.5	7.0	4.0	9.0	6.0	5.5	10.0	10.0	6.5	5.0
16	622	137	10.0	2.5	5.6	7.0	6.0	4.7	3.0	4.0	7.0	3.0	2.0	7.0	4.2
17	630	138	10.0	5.0	6.3	8.0	3.5	4.7	3.0	3.0	6.5	7.0	8.0	6.0	5.8
18	643	139	5.0	00.0	5.9	7.5	8.5	1.3	3.5	4.0	7.5	9.0	9.0	6.3	3.3
Total ⟶			156.3	94.5	113.4	128.5	91.5	80.7	119.0	88.0	111.5	153.0	145.0	115.7	88.3
Average Score per question			8.7	5.3	6.3	7.1	5.1	4.5	6.6	4.9	6.2	8.5	8.0	6.4	4.9

Overall averages : The same examiner - CC's 6.42/Qs; RC's : 5.64/Qs.
Different examiners - CC's: 6.42/Qs; RC's : 6.48/Qs

E_1, E_2, E_3, ... Stand for Examiner$_1$, Examiner$_2$ etc.

Score / no. of students	Frequency				
	$0.0/_1$ $0.0/_3$ $5.0/_2$ $2.0/_1$ $6.5/_1$ $2.5/_4$	$2.5/_1$ $5.0/_1$ $1.5/_3$ $5.0/_1$ $6.0/_1$ $2.5/_4$ $5.5/_4$ $6.5/2$ $3.5/_1$	$1.3/_2$ $2.5/_1$ $2.0/_1$ $2.5/_2$ $3.0/_2$ $3.0/_2$ $4.0/_4$ $3.5/_1$ $4.0/_2$	$4.5/_1$ $3.0/_1$ $2.0/_1$ $5.0/_1$ $6.0/_2$ $5.0/_1$ $5.5/_5$ $7.0/_1$ $6.0/_1$	$4.5/_1$ $0.0/_1$ $5.5/_2$ $3.5/_2$ $6.0/_3$ $4.0/_2$
	$10.0/_{14}$ $5.0/_3$ $9.0/_2$ $9.6/_1$ $10.0/_4$	$6.0/_1$ $7.0/_6$ $5.0/_1$ $6.5/_4$ $6.5/_4$ $6.0/_2$ $7.0/^2$ $8.0/_3$ $7.0/_1$ $7.5/_3$ $8.5/_1$ $7.5/_2$ $8.0/_2$ $8.0/_1$ $8.5/_1$ $9.0/_2$	$4.5/_3$ $6.0/_2$ $4.5/_2$ $5.5/_3$ $6.5/_2$ $5.0/_4$ $6.5/_3$ $7.0/_1$ $5.5/_1$ $7.5/_1$ $7.5/2$ $6.0/_3$ $8.0/_3$ $6.5/_3$ $8.5/_1$ $9.0/_2$ $8.5/_1$	$6.0/_2$ $8.0/_2$ $7.0/_3$ $6.5/_2$ $9.0/_5$ $8.0/_3$ $7.0/_6$ $10.0/_7$ $9.0/_3$ $7.5/_1$ $10.0/_6$	$6.5/_7$ $5.0/_7$ $7.0/_2$ $6.0/_3$ $7.5/_2$ $6.5/_2$ $8.0/_1$ $7.5/_1$

MARKS SCORED OUT OF A MAXIMUM OF 10

Table 4: Comparison of performances at examination: Training through correspondence & residential courses

papers in the case of correspondence courses) and 1975, of the training programmes under consideration were analysed to discover the broad differences and similarities in question types, and also in their difficulty levels. On the basis of this analysis only five pairs of questions from three different subjects (in table 4, we have denoted these subjects by letter X,Y and Z) were chosen for the study. Each pair comprised two similar questions — similar in the sense of question type and the difficulty level of the question — one each from the respective courses. A brief description of the questions chosen is given below:

Subject X: I pair — Similar essay type questions
II pair — similar problems based on the same theory
Subject Y: I pair — similar analytical questions
II pair — similar problems based on the same theory
Subject Z: A pair of similar practical questions based on the same theory.

The interfering variables inherent in the comparison of performances at two different examinations were thus taken care of considerably, as the performance of the two samples based on their answers to questions of the same type and comparable difficulty level only were taken into consideration.

ii) Another source of error, when two separate groups are being compared, is the inequality in their basic abilities. To minimise the effect of this factor and make the groups 'matched' to the greatest extent possible, only such students as had scored an overall 'B' grade in the final computation were considered in this study.

We should mention here that the patterns of the results of both modes show distributions which can be represented by a normal curve.

A detailed description is given in the following table.

Table 5: Distribution of successful candidates

Mode of Education	Top Grade A	Middle Grades B & C	Low Grade D
Face-to-face mode	4%	43% + 42% = 85%	11%
Correspondence mode	2%	36% + 46% = 82%	16%

iii) Of the five pairs, questions in three pairs, i.e., II pair in subject X, I and II pairs in Subject Y were not evaluated by the same examiners. As such subjectivity in evaluation, consequent upon the examiner was one variable that was to be eliminated, and it was arranged to get the answer scripts of the regular students evaluated by the examiners who had checked those of the correspondence students earlier. This 'unofficial' evaluation was conducted with a view to eliminating the effects of subjectivity in evaluation.

It was recognised that the attitudes of examiners toward the two samples of participants might affect the evaluation trends. However, no counter steps were taken to undo the effects of this variable.

2.4.2 Effectiveness of the distance mode vindicated

Let us now interpret the data presented in Table 4. It shows in figures the scores of each student in each question, computed at a uniform maximum possible score of 10 marks per question; the average score in each question out of a maximum of 10 marks, and the score-student frequency distribution of the three subjects. Two of them viz. X and Z indicate that correspondence students perform better than the regular students, while Y shows a better performance by the regular students (see table 4).

We shall elaborate on this.

An analysis of the answers with regard to the first pair of questions (Subject X) indicates that correspondence students do better in problem-solving.This is perhaps because their lessons force them to pay exclusive attention to a limited number of topics which deal with such problems. Such topics may be overlooked by the regular students who have a whole library to tempt them to read relevant, irrelevant and even trivial material. A correspondence student, on the other hand, concentrates completely on his/her comparatively smaller bits of information and achieves a good level of mastery over them.

In this particular case both the correspondence and the regular students had received comparable instruction in terms of such variables as 'the teacher' and the 'teaching materials'. Obviously, therefore, the correspondence mode of education is better than face-to-face education, or a second possible interpretation is that an effective correspondence tutor may not necessarily be equally effective in a classroom situation (because the bit of the course we are concerned with here was taught by the same teacher to both the groups).

The two pairs of questions (Subject Y), however, contradict these conclusions. This contradiction is reinforced by the fact that the Subjects X and Y cover like areas of study and a student who finds X interesting, usually also finds comparable interest in Y. Why then do the data show contradictory results? The only factors that seem to explain the contradiction are:

i) the attitude of the examiner, and
ii) the quality of tuition.

Examiners attitudes

If examiner no. 3 (see table 4) is favourably inclined to regular learners, examiner no. 1 has his sympathies with the correspondence students. This certainly could be a valid interpretation, but it has no intrinsic significance that could be used to substantiate the notion of the 'second-ratedness' of the correspondence mode of education. The fact, though unjustifiable, is that examiner's sympathies are as divided as those of the learners and that society warrants an analysis of teacher attitudes and we must find ways to modify them in case they are found to be harmful.

Quality of tuition

As in the case of a face-to-face teaching situation, two classes following the same course and using the same teaching materials may show appreciable differences in average student-performance because of the varying quality of tuition given to them, so might it happen in correspondence education on the one hand and in a cross comparison of correspondence and face-to-face education on the other. In our study, the correspondence students probably did not get good tuition in Subject Y. And on similar grounds, perhaps the teacher of subject X (especially in the case of the area covered by the first pair of questions) did not do his best with the regular students. The conclusion is that not the mode of education but the teacher/tutor efforts might be a vital factor in students performance; and if it is to be controlled to yield maximum benefits, correspondence education should have an edge over face-to-face education, because it is easier to control and utilise teacher-efforts in the former system.

The frequency distribution (score/student-numbers) in the case of the I pair (Subject X) is as follows:

Regular students: About 39% of the students group into grade A; 44% into grade D; and only 17% into grades B and C put together.

Correspondence students: About 78% of the students group into grade A; just 5% into group D; and 17% into grade B and C put together.

The frequency distribution in either case does not conform to a 'normal curve'. The question seems to be of the type which allows only those who know the answer, and eliminates the 'attempters'. If this observation is valid the correspondence students fare better, perhaps, because they are able to concentrate on specific areas of the courses more effectively than the regular students can. This confirms our interpretation of the data regarding Subject X, I pair (see table 4).

The II pair (Subject X) being essay type questions, demands extensive reading, appropriate organisation of the material in the answer and an approximation to what the examiner thinks is a good answer to the question.

How significant the last of these demands could be is very clearly indicated by the marks awarded by the two examiners: (see table 4-Subject X, pair II, E I, and E2).

Out of a maximum of 10 marks, the awards of the same answer can be as varying as 1.5: 6.5, 2.5: 7.0, 5.1: 7.0,3.5: 8.0 and the like. A cursory look at such data might mislead one to conclude that any study like the present one is an uncalled for exercise in futility. But the other side of the picture reveals a number of crucially valid facts which deserve consideration at all academic levels.

What are these valid facts?

i) The notion that correspondence education is necessarily second rate as

compared with face-to-face education may not be a pedagogic absolute, because the essay type questions under consideration, as usual, are not reliable and therefore certainly not valid. And if they are so for regular students, they cannot be different for correspondence students. As such, if the very tools of comparative assessment are not reliable, we have no right to brand correspondence education with any kind of stigma.

ii) The notion that regular students have library facilities and read extensively and, therefore, are better equipped than their counter parts taking correspondence courses may be yet another fallacy. If library facilities and extensive studies were all that significant for the type of examinations we have, the average score of correspondence students should have been considerably lower than that of regular students with both the official and unofficial examiners, which it is not the case. The finding (see table 4) shows that the utility of libraries for examination oriented courses is not as high as we think it is. This, however, does not reduce the importance of libraries, but the implication is that a correspondence student may not suffer as much as he/she is supposed to, on account of his/her limited reading or questionable accessibility to libraries. Besides, a correspondence student has many more chances of inculcating the habit of organised expression than the regular student, as the former keeps on bettering his/her style and expression as he/she writes regularly to prepare answer-scripts and reads course-units which are much better organised than a lecture or tutorial can be.

The frequency distribution (score/student numbers) in the case of the II pair, (subject X) is as follows:

Regular students: Over 45% of the students group into grade A, none into grade D, and 55% into grades B and C put together.

Correspondence students: About 28% of the students group into grade A, 6% into grade D and 66% into grades B and C put together.

The distribution in the case of correspondence students does conform, though not ideally, to a 'normal curve', but that of the regular students does not, and the latter changes its complexion considerably with a different examiner, who pushes 45% into grade D, and retains only 33% in grade A, leaving a small group of 22% into grades B and C put together. This distribution too does not conform to a 'normal curve', and our conclusion pertaining to essay type questions and the utility of libraries finds further support in this data.

The frequency distribution in the case of Subject Y (both the pairs of questions) also confirms our interpretation of the data, as the frequency pattern in case of both these pairs of questions does not conform to a 'normal curve'. Consider the following table:

Table 6: Frequency Distribution - Subject Y

Grades scored	I pair of questions				II pair of questions			
	Different Examiners		The same Examiner		Different Examiners		The same Examiner	
	RC	CC	RC	CC	RC	CC	RC	CC
Grade A	50%	5%	0%	5%	78%	5%	67%	5%
Grades B & C put together	28%	34%	72%	34%	17%	95%	28%	95%
Grade D	22%	61%	28%	61%	5%	0%	5%	0%

RC — Regular Course
CC — Correspondence Course

The frequency distribution in the case of subject Z (the last pair of questions) presents a typical contrast to the four pairs discussed so far. It is the only case in which the frequency distribution conforms, though not completely, to a 'normal curve'.

Regular students: 5% of the students group into Grade A, 28% into grade D, and 67% into grades B and C put together.

Correspondence students: 17% of the students group into grade A, none into grade D, and 83% into grades B and C put together.

The frequency pattern of the last pair of questions (subject Z) is very much in favour of the correspondence mode. This might be so, to repeat earlier arguments, because of one or all of the following factors:

i) better correspondence tuition,
ii) favourable examiner attitudes, or
iii) learners' regular exercise in writing responses.

Let us quickly recall what we have said in section 2.4

i) As far as the content of courses are concerned, face-to-face education does not show any significantly intrinsic advantage over correspondence education. Therefore, the notion that the latter is second-rate education may be false. The CIEFL correspondence courses, by and large, may be said to be as good or as bad as the CIEFL courses given to regular resident students.
ii) The performance of the students (at examinations) may not depend so much on the mode of instruction as on the nature of the tuition available under it.
iii) A good classroom teacher is not necessarily a good correspondence teacher and vice versa.
iv) Libraries do not seem to contribute significantly to the performance of

learners whose sole purpose is to get through an examination.

v) Most of the tests given at the CIEFL may not be either reliable or valid; and their results, in most cases, will probably not conform to a 'normal curve'.

One general conclusion is that the success or failure of a mode of instruction seems to depend on the people and the materials behind it. The quality and performance of both of these, we assume, can be controlled to improve the effectiveness of either mode. Besides, items (i) to (v) affirm that the distance mode of teacher training is academically viable and the academic credibility of such a mode is not in question.

A word of caution:

Having concluded thus, we should also say that on account of the nature of the 'subject samples', the interfering variable and also the statistics, (which has not been taken beyond the stage of simple averages), the conclusions derived from this study cannot be considered conclusive or statistically significant . We accept the criticism on the grounds that the method followed, and the statistics presented here are not sophisticated, but the limited objective (suggested in the general conclusion drawn above) of establishing a certain probability has been achieved fairly convincingly.

To close we quote Rumble (1986) who says that

> many such comparative studies have been carried out. The general conclusions from them are that it is factors such as the pedagogical quality and clarity of presentation, the relevance of the content, and the motivation and interest of the learners, which are the significant variables, rather than the particular medium of instruction.

Today in the 21st century, the distance mode of education/training is not questioned for its effectiveness, but that does not mean that the sceptics have vanished. Distance educators have to face them time and again even today.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we established:

i) the fact that the distance teacher-training programme currently available at the specialist institutes are 'imitative' in nature; and that we need to use the distance mode of education innovatively;
ii) that academics look at the distance mode of teaching/learning with disdain because of culturally induced biases;
iii) the academic credibility of distance education; and
iv) that compelling social needs are not the only props which sustain the growth of distance education, for if it were so, societies that have accepted this mode of education as a near alternative to face-to-face education would have experienced irrevocable educational disasters, which they haven't. The conclusion is that *distance education* has reasonable pedagogic validity.

Cheek Your Progress : Possible Answers

1. The content used in the 'distance' teacher-training courses currently available at specialist institutes is similar to that of their residential courses. In other words, except the mode of transmission of instruction, these teacher-training courses more often than not, are mere replicas of the conventional courses. As a contrast, to use distance education innovatively would then mean to present more relevant content materials (print and electronic media) to have effective academic communication and purposeful student support services.

2. i) lack of library facilities
   ii) absence of an intense academic atmosphere
   iii) lack of immediate feedback
   iv) poor group interaction

UNIT 3 SOCIAL CREDIBILITY AND OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Unit Structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Functions of an Educational System

3.3 Distance Education Systems: A Socio-academic Perspective
- 3.3.1 Socio-academic needs and conventional educational assumptions: a mismatch
- 3.3.2 Meeting the socio-economic needs

3.4 Distance Education: An Effective and Purposeful Educational Strategy
- 3.4.1 Imparting 'skills'
- 3.4.2 Building a cultivated society
- 3.4.3 Advancing knowledge
- 3.4.4 Instilling the secular view

3.5 Micro Issues
- 3.5.1 Students' assignment-responses
- 3.5.2 Course materials (print and electronic media)
- 3.5.3 Student support services

3.6 Macro Issues
- 3.6.1 Distance teaching institutes: The present state
- 3.6.2 Financial support to distance teaching directorates

3.7 Let Us Sum Up

3.0 OBJECTIVES

Our endeavour in this unit is to ascertain the social credibility of the distance mode of teaching/learning and to assess whether or not distance education could be considered an academic discipline. We also look at some of the operational issues at the micro and macro levels.

A careful reading of this unit will enable you to:

- describe the essential 'functions' of an educational system,
- discuss the socio-academic relevance of distance education,
- argue for distance education as an effective and purposeful educational strategy

- justify the need for 're-thinking' with regard to the 'academic inputs', which have been and are in practice in distance teaching institutions, as an imperative, and
- analyse the academic biases coupled with social prejudices which deny distance education the pedagogic prestige it deserves.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we turn to the remaining questions raised in the introduction to this block. Before we take up these questions, let us generalize what we presented with the help of specific cases in units 1 and 2 : the changing political scenario all over the world, the increasing responsiveness of governments towards the educational needs and aspirations of the masses and the growing realization that education is one of the major means of ensuring socio-economic well being of an individual and also of a society, have brought in challenges which were not experienced by the educational system so far. These challenges consist of:

i) the emergence of very large numbers of students who seek education of diverse kinds at every level of instruction,
ii) the realization that education and training should serve socio-economic purposes, and that they should be socially relevant,
iii) the realization that the relative sluggishness of the existing educational endeavour has created a *time lag* of immense proportions, and that a great deal has to be achieved in much less time to remove this lag, and,
iv) the realization that we need innovative systems of education as the conventional approaches to and methods of education are handicapped when it comes to meeting the new demands.

In line with this approach, we now discuss (in this unit) the criteria which have traditionally been used to define educational systems and assess whether the system of distance education fulfils those criteria. In the process we have identified the criteria that contribute to the credibility of an educational system. We have also shown how each one of these criteria has been adequately fulfilled by distance education. Seen from the perspective presented in this unit, it should not be difficult for you to argue for distance education as an academic discipline.

Nevertheless, the impediments that come in the way of distance education system in the developing world are not insignificant and so they cannot conveniently be ignored or overlooked.

The impediments which we intend to talk about pertain to actual, daily routine activities which constitute the distance education operations. Again, for this purpose, we shall draw on our Indian experience. Distance education was introduced in India at the university level in 1962. The mechanism adopted for this purpose was a 'unit' established at a conventional university. Subsequently many more universities established such units called directorates/departments/schools/institutes of correspondence or distance

education. Today there are around 60 such directorates functioning in India. As in India, historically these directorates (different countries have given them different names) are the precursors of open universities everywhere in the world and they continue to be so in most cases even today. An analysis of the activities of these directorates should help us understand their operational weaknesses which needed to be overcome to use distance education effectively. The efforts made in this direction ultimately led to the establishing of open universities in India in the eighties and nineties.

We have presented the 'issues' as they are, i.e., as seen from the point of view of the existing distance teaching directorates. (Some of these directorates have been in existence for more than three decades). Since we look at these issues from their viewpoint, they are of topical relevance here. It should be pointed out here that we have not resolved the issues. Neither did we intend to do so. In the course of time, however, it is not impossible to find fitting answers to each of them. The possible solutions suggested by the existing distance teaching directorates in order to rectify the 'macro' and 'micro' issues, have been discussed in some detail.

3.2 FUNCTIONS OF AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The relevance of any educational system ought to be adjudged in terms of the criteria that give the system a significant social function. Thus, it is not presumptuous to say that the basic issue of credibility can be seen as one of either success or failure to meet such criteria. To serve our immediate purpose, we have listed the following four required aims that characterize the functioning of an educational system.

i) To give instruction in skills,
ii) To build a cultivated society,
iii) To advance learning, and
iv) To transmit the secular view of human beings/people.

What do we mean by each one of these criteria?

We shall talk about each of the criteria briefly in the same order as given above.

i) The primary function of an educational system is to give instruction in skills that are related to and promote a general division of labour and at the same time respond to changes in such division of labour. (It should be mentioned here that students come to institutions of higher learning, mainly because their studies and training are related to future prospects),
ii) Besides imparting skills that are purely practical, education aims at teaching whatever it does in a manner calculated to develop the powers of the mind. It thus attempts to produce a cultivated society, and it is this particular function of the educational system that places it in a highly eminent light.

iii) An educational system, furthermore, makes a contribution to the growth of knowledge which in turn, leads to the advancement of truth or the unveiling of ignorance. This growth of knowledge becomes a specialised function of the educational system, especially at the higher level, which explains the reason why research is generally coupled with teaching at this level of learning.

iv) The educational system is unique in so far as it is the only system that seeks to transmit a common human culture and common standards of citizenship. It indicates the spread of rationality or of a certain view of people and so a vision of human potential that distinguishes it from other social institutions. To emphasise, educational institutions, thus, play a crucial role in the evolution of human culture.

These being the criteria which determine the social credibility of an educational system, we now raise a question - does distance education fulfil these requirements and conditions?

In order to take stock of the capabilities of distance education, it is necessary to evolve a valid perspective from which its legitimacy may be considered.

3.3 DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEMS : A SOCIO-ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

The idealism of the conventional university is well-known, yet some of its special features need to be discussed in detail. Universities of the conventional type function almost like ivory towers and show little care for the needs of students or of society.

The charges commonly levelled against the conventional educational system, to name a few, are

i) educational programmes/courses offered are not relevant to the existing social needs,

ii) the highest paid teachers are reaching an increasingly smaller number of selected students,

iii) the age-old classroom teaching method is becoming more and more stale and ineffective as is indicated by the present levels of absenteeism,

iv) the rigidity regarding the duration of courses, classroom attendance, etc., remains unchallenged, and

v) the benefits of higher and better education continue to be enjoyed by a privileged few.

3.3.1 Socio-academic needs and conventional educational assumptions: a mismatch

The above mentioned items (i to v) point to a mismatch between the present socio-academic needs and the conventional education system. We should

mention here that much of the insular nature of conventional education systems — particularly those of higher education — has arisen from the fact that research and teaching have been regarded as twin functions that must be yoked together. A university teacher normally earns his/her right to teach on account of the research he/she was, and often still is engaged in. The result has been the development of courses that are more geared to the needs of research scholars than to those of the society at large, for example. Gradually, university education has been deprived of its 'application' value and has grown to be an autonomous and often a non-relevant system. This is certainly true of the Indian situation and we believe that it is so in most developing countries.

As a reaction to the above view, there came into being polytechnics and various institutions of management and technology. These institutions prepare students for degrees just as universities do. At the same time, they cater to other levels of training through various diplomas that are more tuned to the needs of society. Unlike conventional universities, these institutions are not intended to be entirely research-oriented and they are more concerned with being genuinely useful to the requirements of students and of the society they live in.

New demands, are thus being made on the educational system, which arise from the nature of industrial society. There is a tacit struggle between the traditional university framework with its emphasis on scholarship, concern with preserving human culture, and advancing knowledge and the new demand for vocation-oriented courses which will help provide training for the general growth of society. In the age of the professional, there is a growing demand for relevant knowledge and skills and for a continual updating of such information and skills. There is also a demand for post-experience education to which an adult can keep returning to draw fresh sustenance.

One way of meeting these new demands is to separate long-term education from short-term courses which are mainly of the post-experience type. A logical way of looking at this would be to assume a first stage of education which is formal and of long duration and which covers basic 'fundamentals' in various disciplines. This is followed by experience which creates definite needs. A variety of needs exists at different levels.

These may be listed as follows:

i) need for part-time education with a more flexible arrangement in order to meet the requirements of young persons who learn and earn simultaneously,
ii) need for specialised courses for those who are in-service,
iii) need for intercultural stimulation on the part of the adult, and
iv) need for certification without undergoing the formalities of the conventional university system.

All these point to the fact that along with the growth of industrial society there has emerged a different kind of motivation towards education. That is to say, the traditional idea of a son generally following the footsteps of his father has become obsolete. Today young men and women generally have definite ideas about what they wish to do or do not wish to do. Often they want to change goals or subjects midway, depending upon their perception of changing needs. This assumes both a strong motivation and a flexibility of approach. Hence a system of education that can cater to such high motivation and offer a package that is flexible enough seems to be among the greatest needs of human society today, as it experiences changes at a much faster rate than it ever has before. (see unit 1, block 3, ES-311, where we say that the changes in educational systems can be attributed to societal changes).

3.3 2. Meeting the socio-economic needs

The argument we presented above highlights the growing realization that dissemination of knowledge cannot be confined to schools and colleges alone. It has to be extended beyond the campus. The adult must be able to return to education as and when he/she feels the need to do so. Education, therefore, is changing from being an institution-centred activity to a student-centred one. In the context of modern societies a once-for-all education, is thus no longer viable. Economic, technological and social changes and the changes in the system of values entail a system of continuing education whereby the individual can upgrade himself/herself from time to time. The manifold needs of society, therefore, should reconcile with the educational process in a manner that will increase academic freedom without proving self-destructive.

We shall now look at the weak assumption with which traditional universities function.

Traditional universities function with the assumption that young men and women are motivated mainly by their academic interests, and thus tend to ignore or diminish the role of career prospects. Hence the urgency about the problem. Yet another dimension to this problem of the mismatch between educational assumptions and career prospects arises from the prohibitive costs involved in setting up and running a university. Considering the exorbitant costs involved, it is simply not possible to be able to set up as many universities as are needed to provide education to all. Conversely, this also works to the detriment of the existing university system. For instance, funds may not be available in the required quantity. Furthermore, teaching posts and 'chairs' generally remain unfilled for years together and research projects may be held up for want of funds.

Gradually the quality of the teaching staff suffers. Further, classes may not be held regularly, meaningful contact between the teacher and students may not be possible and strong intellectual stimulation may not be effected. The

result will be not only a fall in academic standards but also a deterioration in staff/student ratios. As a result, the first rate researchers are attracted to affluent countries where facilities for advanced research are available relatively easily, or they choose professions other than teaching.

It is with considerations such as these in mind that the distance learning system should be evaluated in the present context. Apart from its comparatively low costs, it is a system that can fulfil a plurality of interests and needs. It is time, then, that the high fertility rate of distance education — something that is reflected in its more flexible arrangements — and its ability to cater to a variety of demands were taken note of.

The open distance learning system can, thus, operate on two levels:

i) It can provide traditional courses in a more capsular form and allow for individual variations in programming.
ii) It can provide a variety of post-experience and in-service courses that are better geared to the requirements of the adults and of society in general.

Cheek Your Progress 1

List the four major criteria which characterize the functions and social relevance of an educational system. Does the present social situation suggest additional criteria?

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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3.4 DISTANCE EDUCATION: AN EFFECTIVE AND PURPOSEFUL EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY

Now we shall look at how efficient this compatible system of education is in fulfilling the criteria that define the functions of an educational system. In keeping with what has been stated in section 3.2 certain key questions arise which should be answered in order to legitimise distance education as an

effective and purposeful educational strategy. The questions to be answered are

i) Does distance education impart skills?
ii) Can it, by severely minimising the method of oral instruction, a primary instructional medium, turn out a really cultivated society?
iii) Can it help advance knowledge?
iv) Can it promote a rational, secular view of human beings and of human culture without the kind of interaction provided for in the conventional formal system?

Obviously, these questions clearly call for close attention and considerable discussion if distance education is to be accepted as a permanent innovation in the educational system of the contemporary world. We shall take up each one of the questions for a detailed discussion.

3.4.1 Imparting 'skills'

Society is naturally concerned with the question of imparting 'skills', if it is to give its approval to the system of distance education. This question is significant also because the distance learning system does not rely upon oral instruction, and hence does not depend on the kind of socio-academic interaction which is the mainstay of the formal system.

Though distance education depends mostly on the written word, the role of the spoken word is not wholly discarded. Being a multi-media system of education, the distance mode of teaching/learning imparts instruction through electronic media as well.

A basic learning of skills is thus inherent in distance education.

For our purpose, we shall divide skills broadly into three categories:

i) Communication skills (listening, reading, writing, and oral skills),
ii) Intellectual skills (reasoning abilities), and
iii) Specialised skills (scientific and technological abilities as well as management skills).

Communication skills

In fact, the distance education system makes ample provision for the distance learners to communicate, though mainly through the written word, with the distance tutors or institutions. Having read through the course materials, the students are expected to respond to the assignment questions sent to them. (Usually, the submission of assignments is made compulsory in this system). These days electronic media are being used more and more successfully and conveniently for two way communication .

Intellectual skills

These skills are presupposed in the course design. Sufficient demands are made upon the students who may at the same time be permitted to pace their learning. However, a point of some importance may be made here. Distance

education programmes are bound to function in a somewhat different existential situation where the student is more immediately concerned about his/her ability to support himself/herself and is thus likely to make an informed choice of courses. It is this *feasibility* that gives him/her stronger motivation to study. It can be argued that intercultural stimulation would produce a more promising response in him/her than it would in a student who is part of a traditional university.

Specialised skills

Such skills pose problems of a logistic nature. They concern the teaching of science and technology and those areas where an insistence on project work is considered desirable. Certain solutions do suggest themselves such as the use of, practical kits in the case of basic science. There are other solutions too, such as week-end practicals or summer schools where laboratory based practicals may be possible. We can also think in terms of apprenticeship programmes with the active participation of industries. These problems are by no means intractable. So they call for a good deal of innovation and considerable coordination.

At this juncture, let us distinguish between 'higher' and 'lower' levels of education.

The 'lower level' of education will consist of traditional courses with suitable modification in so far as their administration/monitoring is concerned and will provide education in the fundamentals. There is no harm in retaining the traditional arts, commerce and science streams or in integrating these into a common stream with adequate modification to effect distance teaching/ learning, allowing multiple choices, monitoring student progress and awarding degrees on the basis of credits earned. Thus a student might be allowed to opt at a time for two disciplines at an elementary level, and over a minimum period of three years complete at least six disciplines, along with a selected few at somewhat more advanced and specialised levels, to be able to earn his/her first degree.

At the 'higher level', a variety of courses will have to be offered. These may consist of in-service and post-experience courses that will assume a basic knowledge of the discipline/area, seek to further update knowledge/skill levels, and provide the adult learners with an opportunity for continuing their education. These courses may include instructional packages giving the latest information on relevant disciplines such as astronomy, chemistry, sociology, anthropology, economics, etc. Such courses include discussion at a fairly sophisticated level and lead -- once again through a credit earning system -- to a post-graduate degree.

We should not, however, overlook the problems which arise from the general conservative attitude of society. The social problem which deserves our attention is whether a distance student will be employable in the teaching profession or for that matter any other profession, at par with a student from the formal system. Of, course, we have argued that a distance student is in

no way inferior to his/her counterpart at a conventional institution. Our discussions in units 1 and 2 give us adequate support on this issue. But has society in general accepted it?

Cheek Your Progress 2

In about 15 lines describe how distance education fulfils the criteria of imparting skills. Are you yourself convinced of if?

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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3.4.2 Building a cultivated society

Apart from furthering a more professional understanding of social and economic roles, distance education can help significantly in the evolution of a learning society. The possibility of taking a course and of updating one's information level at any time in one's life is more than likely to promote a professional attitude towards one's social role. Consider the case of a general medical practitioner who, without having to go on leave, can take a course in order to learn about the latest diagnostic practices and the principles behind the newer formulations in drugs. Such a course would foster in him/her a more professional attitude, besides adding to his/her efficiency. And such a task would be accomplished within a limited time, with limited resources and limited commitments. In other words, in spite of several constraints, distance education strategies would certainly help us move one step nearer to a more self-conscious, professional and learning society.

Hence, it is hardly necessary to justify the idea that distance education leads to a general improvement and transformation of learners and through them, of society as a whole. By initiating them into subjects and areas which are

valuable in themselves, the system will turn out more cultivated persons whose powers of reasoning are likely to be more sophisticated than they were before. And, since distance education can act without the restraining condition of numbers, the system can reach out to very large groups and bring about desired changes in a very short period of time.

Cheek Your Progress 3

Write in about 10 lines how distance education can transform an ordinary society into a cultivated one.

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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3.4.3 Advancing knowledge

Can distance education lead to research and add to the growth of knowledge through research? Yes, it can. The kind of research that may entail distance education programmes concerns the designing and selection/innovation of courses. This research can be very fruitful as it will have to concern itself with continually modifying and updating courses and thus provide a basic dynamism to the distance education system.

Consider the following :

You would have noticed, by this time, that by itself distance education is a socio-academic activity — an activity that

i) has to develop not only new insights into but also new ways of explaining and achieving the educational aims of different courses required by distance learners; these aims mostly pertain to cognitive, psychomotor and /or affective domains. However, it does underscore the fact that the variety of courses offered by an open university or a distance education institution -- academic courses, refresher and updating courses, training courses, general awareness courses, etc. — will demand an unusual mixing of these aims, and therefore each course will have to be designed and presented differently.
ii) must be based on investigations and insights into the study habits of individual learners, the processes of learning, teaching and effective academic communication.
iii) assesses and then exploits the differing strengths and weaknesses of different education media — print, audio and video materials, oral communication, communication by correspondence, telephone. computers, etc. — for purposes of both the cost and the pedagogic effectiveness of the type of courses offered.
iv) plans two-way feedback extensively for purposes of reducing misunderstanding by students, failure of courses, the difficulties caused by the variations in students' abilities and other difficulties that may be caused by the failure of postal services, the private problems of a distance learner, the unsympathetic attitude of a tutor, etc.
v) makes use of investigations and insights into the systems and strategies of information processing for purposes of promoting more effective teaching materials and thereby discarding the less effective ones.

The items (i-v) presented above give us a broad outline of the research activities that are basic to distance teaching as a system.

3.4.4 Instilling the secular view

More specifically, distance education — and this encompasses its fuller development including the use of audio-visual supplementation and, gradually, the channelling of radio/TV and computer networks -- will promote in the individual those basic abilities that form a necessary part of the adult in a modern, changing society.

What are these basic abilities?

i) ability to support himself or herself,
ii) ability to make informed choices about life, including career, religion, politics, life-style and general attitudes, and
iii) ability to decide what is and is not morally acceptable.

Corresponding to each of these, one's education must provide one with

i) sufficient skills to obtain work,
ii) general education giving a reasonable understanding of the nature of human beings and of the world, and
iii) education in morality.

It may be possible, at this point, to say that a distance education system, when properly and fully developed, leads to a furthering of those interests that are peculiar to an open society. By providing education to all, the educational process ceases to be a preserve of the elite. And by catering to the needs of school/college dropouts, distance education can almost eliminate the academic isolation of those who have been deprived of education for whatever reason.

Thus, distance education is placed in a position which enables it to take on the responsibility of offering diverse courses throughout an individual's life.

It also ensures the spread of rationality and a common human culture based on values that arise out of learning and professionalism. Distance education is thus a highly potent tool in a developing society that is anxious to bring about egalitarianism through the educational process.

In contrast with this system of education, the educational structure now prevalent tends to be autocratic and coercive. The manner in which the formal university is structured, and functions in some of the developing societies leaves much to be desired. In these societies, universities were set up quite early in the colonial era and often by the ruling Western societies. These universities tend to ape the Western universities of the past and often turn out products that are more suited to Western societies. What is, however, the most abominable part of these universities is that they are wary of giving to the student any real measure of academic freedom. For instance, there is generally a great deal of restriction on the choice of subjects/ disciplines and these are such formidable barriers that students often take up courses of study only through the pressure the system exerts and not through any degree of voluntary choice. In fact, the students do not even know about the choices possible in the western world. Thus, a student who may wish to change a course midstream finds it an impossibility and is compelled to continue with a programme in a halfhearted manner.

It should be mentioned here that those universities which resisted the influence of colonialism were able to define their objectives more clearly and hence avoided this rather lop-sided development.

It is here that distance education as a system is in a position to offer flexibility in course curricula. It can cut through the heavily ritualised manner of functioning of the formal system. Education can become a more vital experience, giving to the learner a chance to alter his/her existential situation and hence perception of society. In effect, distance education can reduce significantly the constraints on development that originate and arise out of the formal educational system. That this alters the historical experience of a society makes distance education a basis for revolution as well as for evolution.

By altering the existing social stratification through educational restructuring, it is possible to alter significantly the developmental experience

of a society. This is particularly relevant in a developing society. In other words, it is only when one perceives education as a future-oriented programme that one is able to link it up with the process of development.

Some inferences:

The following major inferences emerge from this argument:

i) Education is very heavily conditioned by the constraints and compromises of the past and thus does not easily respond to new demands and to change in society. An educational system can achieve a high degree of autonomy and social insulation under certain conditions and can grow indifferent to the world around it.

ii) The responsiveness of education to social, economic and political demands depends largely upon the type of society and the kind of development it permits. (From this point of view, one can see the educational system in India reflecting the general conservatism of Indian society. This may not permit any radical change unless the values of leading socio-political groups overcome the constraints of the past and conceive of new options for the future. Thus, a degree obtained though distance education may carry a stigma in Indian society for quite sometime until the overall social framework is amended through political pressure. However, the way it gains currency indicates that distance education has come in a big way in India). This may be the experience of other developing societies too.

iii) There is a special responsibility of the academicians in so far as they have to spell out the vision of a better future of an evolving society in which education is going to be widely available and will be linked to the development and participation of all individuals in the general social growth.

It is in this light that distance education can also be seen as an important declaration of policy. Policy in education does not reflect only a concern with resources and priorities. It is more deeply related to questions of social demands. These demands cannot be separated from the interests of dominant groups with vested interests and their political power and form the network of international relations. Thus, a programme for education cannot be discussed except within the social needs it reflects.

Besides reflecting social needs, educational planning, to be realistic, should take into account not only the choices available but also those constraints which cannot be easily overcome, and the means through which ends have to be realised. Distance education provides just such an alternative. It accepts the challenge of existing constraints on resources, buildings for schools and colleges, funds, availability of workforce etc., and seeks to mobilise available resources to provide the much needed instructional package. It is in that sense that distance education is an answer to a genuine need and is a significant policy change in education .

Cheek Your Progress 4

Write, in not more than 10 lines, how distance education succeeds in instilling a common secular view among human beings.

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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The foregoing discussion shows that distance education has the relevant credentials for being considered a discipline by itself and reinforces the fact that it is a system which is self-reliant and autonomous. However, it has to operate through appropriate mechanisms and the operational issues involved in the practice of distance education are as important as the theoretical propositions justifying it. We shall discuss the micro and the macro issues of distance education operations in sections 3.5 and 3.6 respectively.

3.5 MICRO ISSUES

By 'micro-issues' we mean the issues related to the 'academic inputs' which are generally being used in the distance teaching institutes to disseminate instruction. The following items constitute such 'academic inputs'. They are:

i) Students' Assignment-responses,
ii) Course Materials (print, and electronic), and
iii) Personal Contact Programmes

It should not be, construed however, that these inputs have been uniformly used in all distance teaching institutes. Nevertheless, it should be noted that most of these institutes invariably use print materials. 'Print', thus, plays a pivotal role in the distance mode of teaching and learning in India as elsewhere, notwithstanding the technological advances which are making educational transactions more and more intimate.

Now, we shall take up each one of the inputs in the same order as given above. This discussion of the 'academic inputs' brings to light the issues pertaining to them.

3.5.1. Students' assignment-responses

Assignment-responses are one of the major inputs through which distance teaching institutes normally communicate with the students. That is, tutor comments on the assignments give the students the necessary feedback. Academic communication is thus effected. Usually the submission of assignments is made compulsory in most distance teaching institutes. Some directorates which have experimented with compulsory submission of assignments have been forced to give up this practice, for the following reasons:

i) students' resistance born of laziness, inexperience or lack of aptitude,
ii) inadequacy of the staff to correct the assignment-responses and send them back to the students.
iii) delay in submission of assignment - responses from the students, and
iv) the failure of the directorates to send reading materials in time so that the students could not submit responses well in time.

It has also been noted that in case the responses sent by the students are not returned within a reasonable period of time, the students lose interest and consequently they stop submitting them thereafter. Secondly, if the teachers correcting the responses do not give concrete suggestions for improvement, the students feel that it is a futile exercise. Therefore, it is necessary that the submission of assignment - responses, which are very useful as means of providing feedback should be streamlined. This implies, among other things, that an adequate quantum of staff be provided for the purpose, and the submission and return of the responses to the students be made more regular. The situation as it prevails in many of the institutes in the developing world today is not encouraging and leaves much to be desired.

3.5.2 Course materials (print and electronic media)

A major chunk of the course materials of any distance education programme is normally covered by print materials notwithstanding the rapid developments in the telecommunications, computer technology and audio-visual media. Obviously, the distance teaching directorates involve themselves in the production of a large quantity of print materials for various courses. However identical the course content/syllabus may be, each one of these directorate/institutes prepares its own materials in order to maintain its identity and standards.

It should not however, be understood from this that the academic and distance teaching directorates are the sole agencies engaged in preparing course materials. By implication , these directorates more often than not, might as well depend on outside sources — course writers from outside the

directorate structure — for materials. It should be mentioned here that **inadequate academic infrastructure** is the chief factor which forces the directorates to depend on course materials prepared outside the directorate system.

Those directorates which have to find course writers outside the system normally pay small and varying amounts depending on the status of the person engaged for preparing the cource materials. Eminent persons, who have sound footing in their own field of study, are generally reluctant to udertake this task, either because of the fact that they hardly have any time to spare for such work, or because of the disincentive in the form of trivial remuneration. (Added to this, perhaps, is the fact that a majority of the senior academics feel diffident about *writing* course materials). Consequent upon these facts some distance teaching directorates are forced to depend on mediocre course writers. The courses thus prepared very often fail to bring to light the effectiveness of the print medium.

It would not be difficult to pay decent remuneration to the course writers, if the distance teaching directorates were given **adequate financial support,** or in some cases, allowed to use the income generated by the directorates for the development of courses and other support services.

Besides print materials, the distance teaching directorates make use of media support — radio, television, video cassettes, etc. In fact, radio talks have been widely used. With the co-operation of local radio stations, the directorates broadcast the lectures of eminent personalities. As far as possible the directorates choose a convenient time for the students to listen to these lectures and benefit from them. But there are limitations.

What are the major drawbacks of radio lectures?

To serve our immediate purpose, we have identified three major drawbacks. They are:

i) The specified time for radio talks may not be convenient to a heterogeneous population.
ii) However mature/adult a person, 'animation' has a stronger impact on him/her. Radio talks being restricted to an auditory channel may not capture and sustain the attention of the students.
iii) Being a heterogeneous group the degree of concentration reached by the students may not be identical — a student who has a lower level of concentration cannot play back the talk and thus does not assimilate it at his/her own pace.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we can safely say that, wherever available, distance students benefit from radio broadcasts. What we need, perhaps, is a means to present these broadcasts effectively. We discuss the related issues in detail in ES 318, the course on "Communication Technology in Distance Education".

3.5.3 Student support services

In this sub-section, we shall touch upon some prominent support services like contact programmes, study centre and laboratory facilities. (We elaborate on these in the course ES 313 "Support Services" in a larger context).

Contact Programmes

Contact programmes are generally considered to make significant academic inputs in distance teaching all over the world. They are arranged with a view to providing opportunities to the students to have interaction with their tutors and peers. Besides offering academic benefits, the contact progammes establish a useful rapport between the distance teaching directorate and the distance students. Obviously, this helps the students escape from or deal with their feeling of loneliness which may otherwise prove harmful to their studies.

Normally, in contact programmes major issues are taken up and discussed. This assumes, in fact, that the students would have thoroughly gone through the materials sent to them and come to attend the contact programme with specific doubts to be clarified. The duration for such programmes being limited, it is impossible and also impractical to have a sentence by sentence discussion. They have to be more like tutorials than lectures, but it is not unusual for students not to come prepared for such tutorials.

Is the attendance at contact programmes made compulsory?

Except for a few professional programmes like Diploma in Library Science, Bachelor/Master of Education etc., attendance at contact programmes is optional. Some distance teaching directorates do not even conduct these programmes, due to various administrative reasons. The academic effectiveness of such programmes is viewed differently by different directorates — some directorates make them an integral part of their academic endeavour while some others tend to ignore them.

The major reason for this kind of indifference to contact programmes is the simple fact that the directorates suffer either from poor financial support or from an inadequate academic infrastructure. By implication, 'under-nourished' directorates should be paid proper attention.

Now let us look at the difficulties which are faced by the directorates in conducting, and by the students in attending the contact programmes.

i) *Inadequate financial support:* Usually personal contact programmes are organised at places where the distance teaching institutions have reasonable student-concentration. Consequently, these programmes become restricted to a limited number of places. Thus, many students

may not be able to profit from such programmes. Given enough financial support, the contact programmes can be arranged at a reasonable number of places.

ii) *Difficulty in getting leave*: Working students find it difficult to get leave (or day release) from their employers for attending the contact programmes which go on for long periods of time.

iii) *Problems of accommodation, board and transport*: Often, the distance teaching directorates may not be able to provide these facilities to the students. The transport authorities do not grant travel concessions to the students who come for such programmes.

We should say here that there are many more difficulties we could write about, but these are the major problems which need special mention.

The items we listed above — especially item (i) — reveal that the duration of the personal contact programme is also a matter which needs closer scrutiny.

Duration of personal contact programmes

Distance students generally appreciate the importance of personal contact programmes as a very useful input for improving their understanding of the subject. Consequently, some of them insist on longer durations for these programmes but some prefer a shorter duration. Directorates of distance education prescribe varied durations of personal contact programmes ranging from 2-3 days to 20-30 days in a year. Some believe that a 2-3 day programme is too short to serve any meaningful purpose, but it may be contended that a 2-3 day contact programme can be made effective. It mainly depends on the course content. Depending on what the subject needs, 14 working days extendable up to 20 days in the case of undergraduate programmes and 30 days in the case of a post-graduate programme may be useful for the students. Of course, this presupposes that working students are being granted leave for the purpose. Providing the students with per diem and travel grants will solve the problems of accommodation, boarding and transport. [See items (ii) and (iii) above]. But is that possible for each and every institution?

Laboratory facilities and library-cum-study centres

Distance teaching directorates which offer courses in science and technology confront the problem of providing laboratory facilities to the students.

For this purpose the directorates either set up their own laboratories or seek help from other institutions which have laboratory facilities. The students may avail themselves of these laboratory facilities on holidays and week-ends. The strategy of using experimental kits is quite useful, but can't be adopted by all alike. Keeping in mind the significant role the practical experiments play in science and technology, it is necessary for the distance teaching directorates to have laboratory facilities, either of their own or hired from other institutions.

Distance teaching directorates also require the setting up of library-cum-study centres, which should make library facilities and teacher guidance accessible to the students. Some directorates do set up library-cum-study centres. The main problems faced in this case are:

i) The directorates do not have the resources to appoint teachers who can be made available for the guidance of the students.

ii) Adequate grants for the library-cum-study centres are not available to the directorates, and therefore, reading room facilities and adequate reading material cannot be provided to a large number of students.

Cheek Your Progress 5

Mention the two main factors, which lessen the academic effectiveness of distance education in your country.See how similar or dissimilar they are to those described above.

Notes: Space is given below for your answer.

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The discussion of these micro-issues leads us to the conclusion that the directorates should have enough financial support and a sound academic infrastructure in order that the issues may be adequately resolved. We discuss these issues further in ES 313, the course on "Support Services". Now we shall look into the 'macro-issues'.

3.6 MACRO ISSUES

The educational system in India is passing through a period of transition. On the one hand, the establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University has fulfilled the long-felt need to have an apex institution to act as a pace-setter with respect to distance education. On the other, educational biases coupled with social prejudices look down upon distance education. This does not, however, lessen the need for an effective educational system like distance education. So some nine State Governments have already established and some others are thinking of establishing open universities to

cater to the needs of a vast clientele. This being the state of affairs, the main contention has been that these newly set up distance teaching institutions ignore the experience of the existing ones. And efforts are being made at the Central level to bring the existing institutions or directorates within the fold of the Open University structure. This stems from the fact that the existing directorates attached to the conventional universities are deprived of the freedom of developing their own syllabi, methods of instruction, etc. In other words, a 'dual structure' (i.e., independent Open Universities to impart distance education and distance teaching directorates attached to the existing universities) has come into being. In the long run, such a 'dual structure' may not promote the cause of distance education. The Distance Education Council (DEC) of IGNOU and the University Grants Commission (UGC) are making efforts to resolve this issue. The course ES 314 gives you a comprehensive account of these issues.

We shall discuss here two major identifiable impediments in the development of distance teaching directorates which are attached to the conventional universities.

3.6.1 Distance teaching institutes : The present state

Bogged down by their problems, very little time is devoted by conventional universities to promote the distance mode of education. It is not uncommon that academics at conventional universities in India continue discussing whether a particular course can be given through the distance mode of teaching, though experience has shown that every kind of knowledge can be transmitted through the distance mode of education. Obviously, it takes us quite some time before we clearly see the potential of distance education! Consequent upon this, the distance teaching units attached to the conventional universities are considered 'inferior' in the academic hierarchy.

They can neither frame their syllabi nor innovate their system of examination. They have no option but to follow the syllabi of the parent universities and adhere to their examination pattern. Added to this is the popular fallacy that certificates, diplomas or degrees obtained after taking distance education courses can have academic and social credibility only if the students concerned have gone through the same course content and followed the same examination pattern which prevail in conventional educational institutions. Although this is a naïve view, there is hardly any effort made to dispel it. Rather, with the present university structure, it is not possible to dispense with it. By implication, the distance teaching directorates do not have an identity of their own. They are treated as mere appendages of the parent universities.

Moreover, the operators of the distance education system have hardly any role to play in the process of decision-making. In other words, the teachers and the non-academic staff of the directorates are hardly associated with the process of decisions-making. The formal bodies of parent universities play a dominant role in taking decisions regarding the problems faced by the distance teaching directorates for devising innovations. This absence of

autonomy in decision-making is bound to hinder the development of distance education in every respect. As we said earlier this situation may change for the better when the efforts of the Distance Education Council (DEC) bear fruit.

Check Your Progress 6

We have said that the existing distance teaching directorates are treated as mere appendages to the parent conventional universities. Is this true of your state/country? Give an example to substantiate your stand.

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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3.6.2. Financial support to distance teaching directorates

Although as part of the National Education Policy of India, distance education techniques have been accepted as viable and economical alternative techniques for reaching the deprived sections of society, adequate support in the form of human and physical infrastructure has not been provided to them so far.

In general, it has been found that the ratio of cost per student between the on campus students and the distance students is 3:1. Besides, the average cost per student for on-campus students is about ten times the average fee

paid by them. The subsidy per student is quite high obviously. As against this, in distance education the cost per student works out to be less than one third of what it is for the on-campus student and nearly 45% of the cost is being paid by the distance student. The quantum of state support is too meagre for the development of a meaningful distance education system. On top of this, it is not unusual for governments to ask distance education directorates to be self-sufficient or even revenue generating mechanisms, while on-campus education continues to be subsidised. What is the situation in your country/state?

It is necessary that certain norms of expenditure are developed and revised periodically so that this alternative technique of education may develop a proper infrastructure and an effective delivery system.

Distance teaching directorates do not enjoy financial autonomy to run their programmes or bring in innovations necessary for imparting instructions through the distance mode of teaching/learning. This is not to say that there should be no limit on the financial autonomy of distance teaching directorates but that certain norms of making provision for financial assistance should be developed.

The emphasis should shift from a competitive approach to one of collaboration, and optimisation of resources. This requires coordinated planning of distance education at the national level. A detailed discussion on this is presented in ES 314, the course on "Planning and Management of Distance Education".

3.7 LET US SUM UP

We discussed the academic and social relevance of an educational system and the normal criteria within which it operates. We also identified four major aims that characterize the functions of an educational system. The aims we identified are: to impart skills, to develop the powers of the mind, advance knowledge, and promote a secular view among the people.

We then evolved a more valid perspective of distance education and considered its legitimacy with reference to that perspective. Having given the perspective, we discussed comprehensively whether or not distance education fulfills each of the educational criteria mentioned above. We eventually drew the conclusion that distance education does fulfil the criteria satisfactorily.

Finally, we discussed the major operational issues related to the type of distance education offered by the units/directorates located in the conventional universities, the problems faced by them and the possible solutions.

Cheek Your Progress : Possible Answers

1 An educational system should be able to:

i) give instruction in skills,
ii) develop the powers of the mind and bring about a cultivated society,
iii) advance knowledge, and
iv) transmit a common human culture and thereby instil a secular view among individuals.

The present social situation suggests many more criteria, for example, social and economic relevance of education, education to bring about equity, etc.

2. Distance education encompasses three domains (i.e. cognitive, psychomotor and affective) which subsume skills of learning.

i) **Cognitive domain:** Access devices, i.e.., glossaries, exercises, etc., which predominate in distance teaching materials help to develop independent reading and the comprehension skills of the students.
ii) **Psycho-motor domain:** Distance education takes care of this domain by providing the students access to laboratory facilities — especially for science subjects.
iii) **Affective domain:** The demands of this domain are met through personal contact programmes, counselling, tutor-comment, audio/ video programmes, computer aided learning and by adopting a personalised approach in the design of course materials.

3. Distance education provides an opportunity for updating information and life-long education. It, thus, promotes one's professional attitude towards one's social roles and leads to improved awareness in the learner. This awareness, in turn, leads to a shared improvement and the transformation of the society as a whole.

4. By providing educational opportunities to a majority of the population, distance education brings about **de-elitisation** of the educational process. Thus, its wide 'coverage' ensures the spread of rationality and a common human culture based on values that arise out of learning — this is a positive move towards the creation of a *learning society*.

6. The existing distance teaching directorates in India are parts of their parent conventional universities. As a result 'academic autonomy' is denied to them. That is, these directorates are forced to follow the syllabi and examination pattern of conventional universities. Thus, the immense potential of distance education as a system remains unexploited.

UNIT 4 THE NEW LEARNER

Unit Structure

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Education in the past: Europe
- 4.2.1 Greeks
- 4.2.2 Romans
- 4.2.3 Medieval Europe

4.3 Education in the East: The Case of India
- 4.3.1 Brahminic education
- 4.3.2 Buddhist education
- 4.3.3 Islamic education
- 4.3.4 Education in British India
- 4.3.5 Education in Independent India

4.4 Changing Attitudes Towards Learning
- 4.4.1 Emphasis on the learner
- 4.4.2 Equality - education for all
- 4.4.3 Relevance of education in terms of learner-needs

4.5 Distance Education - A Reformative Movement
- 4.5.1 A minimum programme of reform
- 4.5.2 A tool for social transformation

4.6 Let Us Sum Up

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at showing you how the NEW LEARNER is markedly different from the one who is a product of a rigid system of education.

By the end of this unit, you should be able to explain

- how 'learner autonomy' was denied in the educational systems of the past
- how it is effected in distance education to motivate the learners, to make the learning process simpler and more interesting, and
- how to democratise eduation

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In general, educational systems over the centuries have been indifferent to 'learner autonomy', notwithstanding the fact that seemingly all teaching/

learning processes primarily focus on the learners. Recent developments in science, technology and educational thinking fortunately attempt to resuscitate these withering educational systems by shifting the focus of emphasis from teaching to learning. By implication, more attention is now to be paid to learners and their needs than ever before.

And it is possible to see distance education in terms of this gradual evolution of the educational process as a whole. Seen thus, distance education or learning marks a transition from the more traditional concept of education that distinguished human society untill about the onset of the Industrial Revolution. The new ideas implicit in science and technology, the new demands made by a somewhat more self-aware generation bred upon these ideas and the hitherto unknown possibilities opened up by the development of technology exerted a different kind of pressure upon the traditional system of education and gradually produced newer systems such as distance learning. Concomitantly, the role of a learner in distance education differs from that of his/her counterpart in the conventional educational system.

4.2 EDUCATION IN THE PAST: EUROPE

The content and the methodology of education in Europe have all along been the monopoly of the dominant social groups which tried to perpetuate their lines of thought and ways of life among the younger generations. In effect, the learners were brought up in a biased environment and learnt to live with prejudiced thoughts.

4.2.1 Greeks

That education must inform, guide and particularly, stimulate creativity was an unknown idea in ancient Greece. For the Greeks, the teacher gave the 'eternal verities' by means of discursive symbols to 'empty vessels'. The teacher transplanted wisdom in the minds of students who were regarded largely passive and in need of such wisdom. Thus, the Greek trivium (grammar, rhetoric and dialectic) and quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music) were mainly a matter of studying certain patterns of words and systems.

4.2.2 Romans

The Greek system of 'formal school' was continued by the Romans who only expanded the number of citizens obtaining schooling. Knowledge became increasingly a matter of memorising and what was given to the student was a finished product which the student was required to take as final. Knowledge was not a mediation between the student and the world but the world itself as finally known and interpreted. This is typical of the traditional concept of education which prevailed in the western world untill almost the 19th century.

This concept of knowledge built into an educational practice that regards knowledge as only an item for transference has been ridiculed as the

nutritionist concept of knowledge, according to which those who read and study do so to become 'fat' **intellectuals**. The validity of this concept was based on the fatuous assumption that knowledge is static and human consciousness empty, that the teacher could quench what was regarded as an appetite for understanding or hunger and thirst for knowledge.

4.2.3 Medieval Europe

This nutritionist concept of knowledge seemed to eminently suit medieval Europe from the sixth century onwards. Schools were run by churches and religious bodies. Schools were, by and large, monastic in order to train monks, priests and lay people. The curricular programme centred around the teaching of Christianity, although, after some initial resistance, the classics were included as part of the curriculum.

It would be more true to say that the history of education in the medieval age is the history of the educational role of the Church. The Church is an institution involved in history and it is distinguished by a definite ideology. The Church was primarily concerned about the propagation of Christianity and it therefore sought to produce an educational system and a view of morality that would make such propagation possible. The Church also supported a class structure which believed in a type of morality that was further reinforced by the traditional puritanical education imparted by the Church. To illustrate this point, let us consider the following two cases:

i) **Morals**

An emphasis on moral virtues as absolute and sacred and on the transcendental, as distinct from the mundane, resulted in an educational system that relegated to relative insignificance matters pertaining to more practical knowledge, to everyday living, to sex and to human relations. What was taught was only that which could be regarded as eternal and 'elevating' -- rhetoric, mathematics, grammar, Latin, the classics and the Bible.

ii) **Women**

Women have traditionally been an oppressed class. This oppression is rooted in the paternal will to perpetuate the family system, which makes the woman as much a property, as possessions that can be inherited. Since inheritance is through the male line, greater value is attached to the male than to the female who is seen more as a necessity for procreation and for carnal pleasure.

Thus, the medieval system of education denied educational opportunity to women, although a more enlightened Church gradually emerged and recognised the right to education in the case of women. But a tradition that tied women to the home and kept them absolutely dependent on father and husband remained firm throughout the Middle Ages. Her existence being largely parasitic, the education of the female was not regarded a matter of any importance. Women were generally considered incapable of

understanding the subtleties of the arts and sciences.

A consequence of this was that education remained by and large the prerogative of men. This not only meant a denial of educational opportunities to women but also the fact that studies of women and their problems remained of peripheral interest. The educational system created male scholars who, having been brought up on the notion that the female is inferior, were not particularly interested in studying female psychology. The studies that did develop concerning women were largely oriented towards the male point of view and there was general agreement that women could not be regarded equal to men.

In the eighteenth century, for instance, some writers tried to prove that women had no immortal soul. And where women did succeed in making an impact, they only aroused further hostility. This is apparent in the emergence of women as actresses -- all actresses were generally the wives of actors -- and, although a few women gained prestige and rank, there was also a rise in the clamping down upon them of middle class morality with its rigid notion of chastity.

However, a few intellectuals championed the cause of women and pleaded for a more just system of education. It was argued that the lack of education among women was responsible for their supposed inferiority. The democratic and somewhat individualistic ideals that gradually developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did favour women in some ways.

Having briefly discussed the educational systems in ancient Greece, Rome and Medieval Europe, we now turn to what education meant to the East with a particular reference to ancient India.

4.3 EDUCATION IN THE EAST: THE CASE OF INDIA

The educational scene in ancient India was not different from the European scene in essentials, i.e. in being dominated by different social groups. Throughout the course of Indian history, the process of education was a means for perpetuating group-biases. We shall discuss them here.

4.3.1 Brahminic education

Caste and religion played vital roles in the educational system of India. The *Guru* who taught in the *Vidya Ashrams* was always venerated and he generally belonged to the *Brahmin* caste which was considered the caste of God Almighty. Education in ancient India was geared to the caste system and was designed to perpetuate it. The *Sudras,* i.e. ordinary people, were denied access to education. This arose from the view that they were inferior and existed only for doing menial tasks.

Based on this belief, the *Brahmins* received training in the scriptures and learned to perform important religious rituals. They became teachers and contributed substantially to the strengthening of the caste system. A distinct ideological bias thus formed the core of the educational system in ancient India.

The system remained formal in which disciplines were clearly defined--the choice of which depended upon the accident of birth. Thus, the *Kshatriyas* (i.e. warriors), for example, received instruction in military techniques and polity as these were intrinsic to the specific duties of that class. The common methodology of learning not only included memorising, but also reflection after careful listening. There was also an insistence upon rhetoric, phonetics, grammar and the scriptures. All this tended to reinforce an exclusive reliance on and acceptance of scriptural authority.

4.3.2 Buddhist education

Buddhist education remained distinct from *Brahminic* education in so far as it provided educational opportunities to all castes, although it was centred mainly around monasteries. It was largely religious education, concerned with overcoming the demands of the flesh through meditation. Knowledge was conceived as a means of salvation. It thus provided a holistic ideal which demanded acceptance from each individual unlike the *Brahminic* system which insisted on acceptance of differing ideals on the basis of caste. In this sense, it is possible to view the Buddhist system as being more democratic.

4.3.3 Islamic education

Muslim domination over India produced Islamic educational institutions that were mainly divided into three categories: *Maktab* or primary education, higher *Maktab* and *Madrassa* or higher education. *Maktabs* were mostly atached to mosques and their main function was to preach religious piety and ritual.

4.3.4 Education in British India

The British established in India an educational system which can still be seen in operation. It is a system that was expected to produce an army of clerks and petty officials to carry on the colonial bureaucracy. Most students came from a select class of people who understood the English language and were sympathetic to the culture of the rulers. Education became divorced from life more than ever. Courses of study were narrow and mainly geared to prepare pupils for the civil service. There was very little technical or vocational education and the Indian languages fell into gross neglect.

Around 1860, the British attempted to establish universal education as part of their recognition of the Indians as equal partners. The model was the British system in which the university is the dominant institution. In order to give university education a greater intensity, the British divided the

curriculum between secondary and university education. The admission test for university education gradually became the intermediate (also called the higher secondary) examination for which a separate Board was constituted.

4.3.5 Education in Independent India

Learning continues to be looked upon as a process distinct from working or earning a livelihood, although the two are now being seen as interlinked. A person spends a certain part of his/her life in learning and then proceeds to earn a livelihood. This formal concept of learning restricts education to a certain age limit and to a definite and recognisable student system governed by a set of rules and regulations that are biased towards providing education to a pre-conceived receiver and towards controlling the receiver with a formally understood system -- the traditional university.

And what is going to give a significant fillip to the growth and evolution of distance education is the emergence of a new concept of learning. Thus, distance education is obviously a radical departure from the past. It is a whole new way of learning and living.

4.4 CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNING

The picture presented above points to gradual changes in the content and process of education as there have been individuals of outstanding abilities who jumped the limitations of their times and presented new ideas from time to time, and new practices found place by the side of old ones in the general development of educational thought and practice. Today we notice a NEW LEARNER emerging from the masses. This NEW LEARNER does not want to get into pre-conceived and pre-prepared educational strait-jackets. She/he is conscious of his/her wants, what suits him/her, what s/he needs, and will not simply accept what someone may offer him/her. This NEW LEARNER is the offspring of the changing, contemporary times, and is closely related to the new concept of learning.

The concept of learning that has evolved out of several contemporary developments -- including the growth of science, computer and information technology, psychology, etc. -- is infinitely wider. It is an extension of one's awareness and, since such an extension is possible throughout one's life, learning is limitless and cannot, in its amorphous richness and total range, be restricted to a formal system. In other words, learning is basically not formal. It is a non-formal activity and cannot, therefore, be brought under any normative restrictions.

However, learning has quite clearly a strong and undeniable subjective element. It plays the role of a change-agent which alters one's notions and perspective: the reordering of one's system of knowledge or an examination of one's set of presumptions. At the same time, it is also the raising of one's

competence. It may impart skills -- linguistic, artistic, or practical. These, however, are secondary, though highly significant results of learning. From this point of view, it might be possible for us to say that in so far as the learner is concerned, the immediate meaning of learning is a modification of his/her consciousness, a growth in his/her awareness and a sense of achievement within his/her own subjectivity. But, because learning can and does result in the acquisition of new skills, it has become a valuable tool which can bring about significant changes in human behaviour.

4.4.1 Emphasis on the learner

Such a wide concept of learning places an emphasis on the learner rather than upon the teacher. It is the learner who is undergoing a primarily subjective transformation and hence the learning process is bound to be determined more by what the learner can take and how s/he can take it rather than by what the teacher has to offer him/her. The role of the teacher has to be seen as collaborative and as belonging to an existential situation in which he/she is an object to the learner's subjectivity and can influence the process of learning only to the extent he/she can reach out to this subjectivity. Teaching may be thought of as a process of clearing the way, a kind of illumination. What is not quite visible is made visible through the process of teaching. It is like enabling the learner to see a reality that he/she had missed seeing earlier.

It is this that makes teaching such a tricky venture. It is perhaps the most vulnerable kind of human venture, precisely because it is subjected to the special needs and capabilities of the learner. Since all teaching and education has to reach out to the learner, the goals of teaching and education lie enmeshed in the psychology of the learner -- the motivation of the learner, and the kind of struggle he/she is capable of in determining the outcome of this mental battle. And what determines the motivation and the struggle of the learner is the challenges s/he faces in life and the kinds of experiences s/he encounters, and how much these may have shaken him/her out of his/her complacency. In other words, until the learner is prepared to learn, no learning can take place. It is the learner who, in actual terms, rules the roost and sets the conditions. S/he is the autonomous entity within the educational process.

The above concept is in keeping with the broad and universally accepted view that human beings are not empty vessels that can be merely filled in with knowledge. They have basic interests and work within tacit frameworks within which they structure experience. Above all, they have the ability to react in certain ways and to modify their awareness. It is these abilities that have to be reinforced by providing stimuli in the form of debates, discussions and other aids.

4.4.2 Equality: education for all

The above concept of learning is related to various developments in modern times. One way of looking at them is to take into account the *idea of*

equality that has begun to dominate discussions on education today. It has been part of a larger social movement towards greater democratisation which has resulted in an effort to provide education, especially higher education, to all. **It is a move against the elitist concept of education which sought to limit** its benefits to a select minority of people.

However, the idea of universal higher education for all is unrealisable in principle. The reason for this is that providing access to higher education to all, becomes in practice an empty provision, which is just not feasible. An equal right to education does not guarantee that each individual will receive the kind of education, or the duration of education that he or she needs. A whole spectrum of issues can be seen in the idea of equality in education. The full realisation of such an idea depends upon several factors. Some of which are :

i) to what extent does the kind of education being provided allow the learner to really benefit from it,
ii) the relevance of the educational content, and
iii) the flexibility of the system in terms of the constraints of time, place, etc., under which the learner functions and the ability of the 'teacher' or the learning programme to reach out to him/her.

In other words, equal access to education becomes meaningful when the system can be set up on the learners' terms, when educational programmes can be evolved to function **for** the learner and with a **flexibility** that permits the learner to **pace** his/her learning programme according to his/her convenience and needs.

Many persons have argued that an educational system that is truly flexible has to be conceived in rather large and social terms. It must implicitly assume a social set-up within which an effective learning programme is to be devised. In that sense, it has to move out and away from the classroom, which makes education a largely formal affair. It will have to form a genuine educational content, but, also be able to use the student's needs and experience to generate new insights and to create new skills and competence. In other words, an educational system will have to begin by accepting that the experience or knowledge acquired by the learner has a definite intrinsic value and that it must become a necessary component of a learning venture.

4.4.3 Relevance of education in terms of learner-needs

From the point of view of what we have discussed so far, it should be clear that educationists must consider seriously the actual utility of the educational programme they are offering to a certain kind of learner or to a particular class of learners. And here one faces the enormous possibilities inherent in highly flexible programmes of learning. While learning must be relevant to the actual situation of the learner, this relevance is not something that can be absolutely defined. One might even be able to say that a course on toy-

making, for example, might serve a distinct purpose where it is designed to relieve boredom for urban populations whose lives have become tedious and full of routine. Similarly, an education that offers men and women an insight into their personal and emotional problems can be highly relevant. And yet an education that takes into account important social and economic needs and is the answer to a person's basic quest for livelihood must soar, above all, in terms of relevance.

Check your progress 1

List the three factors that characterise the dictum 'education for all'.

Notes: a) Write your answer in the space given below.
b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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4.5 DISTANCE EDUCATION - A REFORMATIVE MOVEMENT

What we have presented in section 4.4 forms an important argument for moving away from a total dependence on the formal educational system towards distance education. This must be regarded as a minimum programme of reform. It is this reform that must be seen in more comprehensive terms.

4.5.1 A minimum programme of reform

What distinguishes the formal system most, at the higher educational level for example, is the annual feature of students moving from one class to the next, in an attempt to secure degrees within the stipulated period of three years or so. This movement is mechanical and is hardly related to their actual

learning experience. The annual test is formal and takes into account what the student has been able to memorise and retain verbally. In some cases, such promotions from year to year have become automatic.

Shift of emphasis from teaching to learning

The rejection of the academic year of education or learning is the hallmark of distance education. In this system, the learner may learn a programme in more than one year, if he/she wants to, or he/she may pack more than one programme into one year of learning, if able to do so. This rejects the whole idea of a curriculum wedded to a fixed and inflexible time-dimension. The learner is free to take up a programme or even part of a programme and pace it according to his/her convenience. The emphasis obviously is neither on the course content, nor on the teachers, but on the design of the course and on its flexibility, i.e., the emphasis is more truly on the learner.

We must elaborate on the last sentence above. Any instructional strategy that is worthwhile must be based on an assessment of basic inputs needed to promote an educational programme. In the formal system, these consist of classrooms, blackboards and teachers. If these are to be rejected, what then will form significant inputs in distance education? These can be classed under three heads: textual materials; two-way interaction; and non-print aids.

The institution supplies the instructional materials to the learners who approach them with their abilities and experiences. Periodical evaluation through assignments or through interaction with a peer group or with fellow-students helps each student to self-learn by posing his/her problems and watching how others resolve theirs. And non-print aids such as audio-visual cassettes form the bulwark of teaching strategies, thanks to the development of modern communication technology.

Thus a system that de-emphasises teaching, but emphasises learning and makes the learner truly autonomous is both possible and desirable.

4.5.2 A tool for social transformation

Distance education is obviously a radical departure from the past. It is a whole new way of living and learning. The traditional concept of learning keeps learning tied down to the teacher, rather than to the learner. Knowledge or wisdom is transmitted from the teacher to the pupil. This view of learning permits minimal interaction between the learner and the teacher and cannot permit the process of learning that distance education visualises. Distance education strategies move inevitably towards a more secular view of education. In that sense, they are closer in spirit to modern science.

Just as science insists upon the criteria of validation which are based upon observations and experiments, so also the modern concept of learning calls for a validation of learning in terms of how it benefits the learner. It is the learner who becomes the final unit or entity that determines the entire system. The system is so contrived and so distributed as to satisfy the consumer who, in this case is the learner. Distance education can be viewed

as a significant device that attempts to raise the actual educational attainment of adult (and not so adult) populations of a civilised society without insisting upon any formal requirements. It does this by enunciating a more valid meaning of learning and incorporating it within a carefully constructed set of strategies that are distinguished by their flexibility, and by the fact that they accord to the learners the freedom to set their own pace and thus recognise their autonomy. It facilitates the free communication of knowledge.

Such a free communication of knowledge will obviously involve two things. One is a constant revision of what constitutes knowledge, and the other is the basic appeal to rationality that such communication implies. Knowledge that is truly effective must be relevant. This indicates that there is nothing final or sacrosanct about any piece of knowledge, and so about any course that might be devised. **Courses will have to be constantly screened, and additions and alterations made**. Such monitoring will also enable a gradual elevation of courses and result in more and more advancements. There will have to be an incessant endeavour to cross the intellectual or cognitive threshold, assuming that there is one.

Furthermore, while the learners are being treated as autonomous, they are being, at the same time, viewed as persons whose reason is sufficiently developed. The very fact that learners make a conscious choice with regard to their courses of study shows them to be capable of making a rational choice and being able to evaluate the relevance of what they are studying. They are in that sense responsible persons who possess certain definite moral and personal qualities.

Check your progress 2

Give two examples to show how learner autonomy is practised in distance education.

Notes: a) Write your answer in the space given below.
b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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From the foregoing discussion it should be clear that the autonomy of the learner must have a special meaning in distance education. What distance education in effect does is to let the learners think for themselves and so take full possession of all they are capable of. Such capability is specially important because it seems to (more authentically) result in the learners' realising their own merit. Needless to say, the value of reason finds particular emphasis in any distance education programme.

Distance education can be seen therefore as a powerful and potent means of social change which could bring about a more reasonable society of human beings. By according autonomy to the learner, it becomes a part of an integral movement towards the general advancement of reason.

Of course, what has been said so far may be circumscribed by a more precise rule. Not every learner can exercise autonomy, however desirable that may be. Some learners might need more guidance than others.

The 'autonomy' dimension of distance education cannot be measured with any real accuracy. Obviously, this calls for evolving a system that will provide direction where it is needed. This can be done by more precisely enunciating the objectives of distance education. It is only when the learner is able to formulate his/her learning objectives that he/she will be able to exercise more autonomy and learn easily and well.

Thus, some kind of preparatory activity or session may be necessary. Different ways and means can be identified. For example, a questionnaire may be used to elicit information on the basis of which such preparatory activity could be conducted. Alternatively, the student could be asked to go through a certain book or watch a film in order to be better prepared to benefit from distance education. These are the actual modalities that will have to be considered in order to introduce a truly effective distance education programme. They are important and will ultimately pave the way not only for autonomy in learning but also perhaps for autonomy in evaluation.

What has been suggested is that though the NEW LEARNER is becoming more and more conspicuous and articulate day by day, s/he needs help to identify himself/herself and his/her needs clearly and that the educational system has to evolve ways and means for meeting this requirement.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

The following are the main points we dealt with in this unit:

i) Educational systems in the past were basically sectarian in nature.
ii) Education was restricted to certain dominant social groups.
iii) The learners were treated as passive agents who had no active role to play in the overall teaching and learning process.
iv) New developments in socio-political thought, educational thinking and

technology have shifted the foucs of attention from the teacher to the learner.

v) We experience the emergence of the 'autonomous learner' - the NEW LEARNER - and our assertion is that his/her needs can best be met through the agency of DISTANCE EDUCATION.

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1 The three factors that characterise 'education for all' are

a) the relevance of educational content to objectives.
b) the flexibility of the educational system.
c) the benefit that learners get from the kind of education being provided to them.

2 a) There are no time-constraints. In other words, the learner is allowed to learn, cover a programme in more than one year, if s/he wants to and may complete more than one programme within one year of learning if s/he is able to do so. Thus, the learner is allowed to proceed at his/her own pace.

b) Distance education allows a learner to make a rational choice with regard to his/her course of study. By implication, it shows that this mode of teaching and learning does not treat the learner as a 'passive' agent. On the contrary it considers him/her a person whose **reason** is sufficiently developed to become an **active** partner in the process of learning and teaching.

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Note: The discussions on Mauritius and West Indies are partly based on the information supplied by our M.A. graduates in Distance Education, Roshun Dhurrbarylal and Elaine M. Olliverre respectively.

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