
UNIT 1 LEARNER SUPPORT — WHAT, WHY AND HOW?

Structure

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

1.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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

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

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

1.2 LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

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

1.2.1 What are support services?

A range of services are provided through activities such as

- advice/counselling
- tutoring individually and in groups
- the learning of study skills, including examination skills
- peer group support
- feedback concerning assessment and progress
- language support
- career guidance
- administrative problem solving. (Tait, 1995)

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

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

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

The elements of the system are:

- personal contact between learners and support agents, individuals or groups, face-to face or via other means;
- peer contact;
- the activity of giving feedback to individuals on their learning;
- additional materials such as handbook, advice notes or guides;
- study groups and centres, actual or virtual (electronic);
- access to libraries, laboratories, equipment, and communication networks.

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

The power of the new information technology lends a new dimension to the concept of learner support. The regard for face to face interaction, even though being limited in distance education, as patently superior to all other forms of interaction, will be overcome with the widespread use of the new information and communication technologies. Just as electronic media has transformed the instructional methods it can also transform the method of providing support to distance learners. Figure 1 given below, gives the different types of electronic learning support.

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

Figure 1: Types of Electronic (E) Support.

Check Your Progress 1

What are learner support services?

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

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1.2.2 Types of support services

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

Pre-entry stage

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

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

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

During the course stage

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

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

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

Post course stage

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

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

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

Pre entry stage	During the course	Post-course stage

1.3 NEED FOR SUPPORT SERVICES

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

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

1.3.1 Characteristics of distance learners

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

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

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

Conventional System	Distance Education System
● Learning is a full time and major activity. ● The learner remains in one role, and continues the membership of a learning institution. ● The learner 'belongs' to an institution. ● The learner is usually young. ● The learner is in easy contact with fellow learners. ● The learner has easy access to the institutional resources.	● Learning is a part-time secondary activity. ● The learner returns to a role he/she had some time ago. ● The learner is a member of many institutions (e.g. work, family), most of which take precedence over the institution which gives the courses. ● The learner is an adult. ● Contact with fellow learners may not be easy. ● The learner's contact with the institution is infrequent and often takes place across a distance.

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

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

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

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

1.3.2 Characteristics of learning material

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

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

Whatever be the merits of the self-learning materials — be it that they try to build the teacher in the text, or that they try to simulate a classroom situation — they remain finite in their character. They cannot go beyond a point. On the other hand, learner needs are ‘infinite’ in their variety, since all human beings are thus. So distance education has to cater to these infinite variations, which the self-instructional materials, however good, may not completely succeed in doing. To satisfy these variations, it thus becomes necessary to offer some additional support. This is precisely where the role of the counsellor becomes important in distance education. This is dealt with in Block 2, Unit 1 of this course.

Check Your Progress 3

What are the differences between distance learners and conventional learners?

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

Conventional Learner	Distance Learner

1.3.3 Academic socialization

A very important issue is that of academic socialization. In view of the fact that open and distance learning is different from correspondence study and teach yourself programmes, systematic efforts need to be made to orient the new entrants into the system. Also distance learners are mostly adult learners and the effectiveness of adult learning varies with learning ability, but is also affected by the approach the adult takes to the learning activity. Undoubtedly an adult's approach to a learning activity reflects previous experience, including extent and type of formal education, recent use by learning procedures and current circumstances that give rise to the need for increased competence.

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

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

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

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

1.4 HOW TO PROVIDE SUPPORT

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

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

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

Furthermore, there are large-scale and small-scale approaches to distance education.

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

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

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

1.4.1 Factors affecting the provision of support services

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

1.4.2 Different models of learner support

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 4

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

Notes: a) Read this section carefully, and write your answer in the space given below.

b) Please don't proceed till you answer the question.

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

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we:

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

SA

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

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

2

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

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

3

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

4

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

UNIT 2 READING SKILLS

Structure

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

A

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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

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

2.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

2.2 BASICS OF READING

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

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

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

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

2.2.1 Defining reading

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

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

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

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

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

Record your response in the space provided below:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

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

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2.2.2 Reading: an integrative process

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

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

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

The cognitive domain

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

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

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

The perceptual domain

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

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

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

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

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

The affective domain

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

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

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2.3 TAXONOMY OF READING

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

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

2.3.1 Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension

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

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

This taxonomy consists of four categories. These are:

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

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

Literal comprehension

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

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

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

Some samples of literal comprehension tasks are:

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

Inferential comprehension

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

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

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

Examples of inferential tasks related to reading are:

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

Evaluation

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

Examples of evaluation tasks related to reading are given below:

- judgements about reality or fantasy, facts or opinions;

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

Appreciation

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

Examples of tasks that involve appreciation are:

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

A word of caution

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

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

Check Your Progress 3

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

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

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

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

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2.3.2 Stages in reading

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

The stages we have identified are:

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

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

Recognition of words

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

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

Association of meaning with symbols

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

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

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

Literal comprehension

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

Interpretation

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

Critical reading

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

Creative reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4 READING: SQ3R TECHNIQUE

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

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

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

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

Survey

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

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

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

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

Question

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

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

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

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

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

Read

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

Two important suggestions should be listed here:

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

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

Recall

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

How often to recall?

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

Review

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

Check Your Progress 4

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

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

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2.5 TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

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

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

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

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

Now let us talk about the essential reading comprehension skills.

Finding the main/central idea

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 5

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

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

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

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

Topic:

What is special about the topic?

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

Main idea:

Reading between the lines

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

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

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

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

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

Categorising

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

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

Example

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

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

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

For example,

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

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

Distinguishing between fact and opinion

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

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

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

Creative reading

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 6

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

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

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

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2.6 READING AND DISTANCE LEARNING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we learnt that

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

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

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1

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

2

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

3

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

4

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

5

Topic: Writer's pattern of life.

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

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

6

Good readers are able to:

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

UNIT 3 STUDY SKILLS

Structure

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

3.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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

3.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

3.2 DEFINING 'STUDY SKILLS': AN ATTEMPT

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why is it difficult to define or list study skills?

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

Let us elaborate on this.

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

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

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

Consider the following statements:

The term 'study' refers to

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

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

We shall elaborate on this.

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

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

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

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

3.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHING STUDY SKILLS

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

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

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

“I don’t know how to study.”

“I always listen to music when I study.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.3.1 Building good study habits

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

Can a person relax and study at the same time?

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

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

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

When to study?

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

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

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

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

Where to study?

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

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

How much time to spend on study?

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

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

3.3.2 Knowing the text

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

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

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

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

Interpretation of non-verbal items

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

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

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

Maps

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

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

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Graphs and charts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Using reference sources

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

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

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

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

Dictionary

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.3.3 Concept mapping

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

Here is a technique learners could use:

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

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

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

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

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

Outlining

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

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

Note taking

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

Summarising

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

Check Your Progress 2

Summarise the following paragraph:

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

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

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

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

3.3.4 Test taking

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.4 STUDY SKILLS AND DISTANCE TEACHING/LEARNING

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

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

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

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

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

Appropriate questions

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

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

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

- i) to derive ways to solve a problem; and

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

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

Non-verbal aids

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

Conjunctive features and glossaries

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

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

Advance organisers

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

Sum-ups

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

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

Narrative style

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we:

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

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

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers**1**

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

2

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

UNIT 4 INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR LEARNER SUPPORT

Structure

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

4.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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

4.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

4.2 STUDY CENTRES

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

4.2.1 What is a study centre?

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

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

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

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

4.2.2 Equipment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.3 Staff

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.4 Summary of the characteristics of study centres

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 1

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

Either:

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

Or:

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

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

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

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

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4.3 THE FUNCTIONS OF A STUDY CENTRE

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

4.3.1 Teaching groups

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.3.2 Teaching using media

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

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

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

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

4.3.3 Individual teaching

In most distance education systems, the main individual contact between the tutor and the learner takes place by correspondence, when assignments are marked. The feedback from the correspondence tutor is vitally important to the learner. Considerable attention is therefore paid by distance-teaching institutions to ensure that correspondence teaching is of high quality.

Ideally, the correspondence tutor is also the tutor at a local study centre, and the learner has a chance for personal contact. But often the correspondence tutor and the face-to-face tutor are different. This means that when learners ask tutors about individual work-related problems, the reply is seldom based on a detailed knowledge of the individual learners performance. While local tutors will always try to help individual learners with their problems, in most cases numbers of learners are large and time is short, so that individual contact of this kind must remain occasional and informal.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

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

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4.3.4 Access to resources

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.3.5 Contact with other learners

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

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

4.3.6 Administrative activities

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

Check Your Progress 3

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

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4.3.7 Counselling in study centres

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

4.4 REGIONAL CENTRES

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

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

4.4.1 What is a Regional Centre?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.4.2 Facilities

Regional centers, the sub-offices of the university for all practical purposes, are also intended to act as resource centers of the university in respective regions. Regional centers are centers for training of coordinators/counsellors/other functionaries and provide a venue for the learners and the academic-counsellors to express their problems. Responsibility for random checking of student assignment, if needed, would also lie with regional centers. Therefore, the following facilities are usually provided by Regional centers :

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

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

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

4.4.3 Staffing

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

Regional Director

Appointment and Status

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

Duties and Responsibilities of the Regional Director

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.4.2 Functions

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

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

Academic Activities

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

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

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

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

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

Organization of seminars/workshops

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

Research and new academic programmes

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

Programme Evaluation

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

Need-assessment research

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

Systems Research

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

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

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

Orientation and Induction

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

Setting up a Support Services Network

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

Student Admission

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

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

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

Monitoring

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

Administrative Activities

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

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

Promotional Activities

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

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

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

19

Check Your Progress 4

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

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

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

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

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4.5 INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR CHANGE IN THE NATURE OF SUPPORT SERVICES

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

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

4.5.1 Change in learners' needs

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

4.5.2 Access and achievement

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

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

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

4.5.3 Curricular changes

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

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

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

4.5.4 Repositioning the learner

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

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

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

4.5.5 Advent of multimedia systems

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

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

Check Your Progress 5

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

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

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4.6 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEMS

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 6

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

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4.6.1 What is quality assurance?

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.6.2 Quality assurance through performance indicators

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Performance indicators proposed in the Jarrat Report.

Internal performance indicators include

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

External performance indicators include

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

Operational performance indicators include

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 7

Define performance indicators?

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4.6.3 Performance indicators for learner support

The key activities of open universities are as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 8

List out the major activities of learner support and give examples of 3 performance indicators for each activity.

[illegible]

[Extracts from (1) Commonwealth of Learning (1994) *Quality Assurance in Higher Educations*, Vancouver, COL. and (2) Manjulika and Reddy (1999) *Unexplored Dimensions of Open Universities*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. Reproduced with the permission of the authors.]

4.7 LET US SUM UP

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

Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1

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

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

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

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

2

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

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

Methods used to help learners to acquire these skills include:

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

3

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

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

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

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

4

The central institution:

teaches by providing all teaching material and examinations
by appointing and monitoring correspondence tutors
by organising residential courses or summer schools

supports by providing printed study advice and information
by responding to individual requests for advice
by handling special cases

Regional centre:

teaches by supporting local study centres
by running occasional seminars at the regional level/
teleconferencing sessions

supports by supporting advisers at local study centres
by handling special cases

Local study centre:

teaches by providing regular learner-tutor contact, in groups or
one-to-one.

supports by providing an opportunity for regular counselling/
tutoring for most needs
by providing a friendly first point of reference for problems
which cannot be handled at the local level.

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

5

You would have considered all the factors namely:

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

6

You would have considered all the important factors namely:

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

7

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

8

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

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

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