

Block

5

MANAGEMENT OF LEARNER SUPPORT

UNIT 1

Learners' Expectations in Distance Education	7
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UNIT 2

Management of Support Services	22
---------------------------------------	-----------

UNIT 3

Monitoring Learners' Progress	54
--------------------------------------	-----------

UNIT 4

Library and Information Services for Distance Learners	72
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MDE-413: Learner Support Systems and Services

(New Course in place of ES-313: Learner Support Services)

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MDE-413 : LEARNER SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

BLOCK 1 : LEARNER SUPPORT: AN INTRODUCTION

- Unit 1 : Learner Support: A System's Approach
 - Unit 2 : Learner Support: Some Basic Issues
 - Unit 3 : Support Services: Institutional Arrangements and Models
 - Unit 4 : Developing a Self Directed Learner
-

BLOCK 2 : LEARNER SUPPORT: DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS

- Unit 1 : Cognitive Skills
 - Unit 2 : Study Skills: How to Study Better
 - Unit 3 : Reading and Writing Skills
 - Unit 4 : Problem Solving Skills
-

BLOCK 3 : COUNSELLING AND TUTORING SERVICES

- Unit 1 : Counselling
 - Unit 2 : Tutoring
 - Unit 3 : Media and Technology in Counselling and Tutoring
 - Unit 4 : Organizing Counselling and Tutoring Services
-

BLOCK 4 : ASSESSMENT OF LEARNER PERFORMANCE

- Unit 1 : Learners' Assessment in Distance Education
 - Unit 2 : Tutor Comments
 - Unit 3 : Tutoring Through Correspondence
 - Unit 4 : Supplemental Interaction
-

BLOCK 5 : MANAGEMENT OF LEARNER SUPPORT

- Unit 1 : Learners' Expectations in Distance Education
 - Unit 2 : Management of Support Services
 - Unit 3 : Monitoring Learners' Progress
 - Unit 4 : Library and Information Services to Distance Learners
-

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Learner support services are indispensable components of the ODL system (ODLS). It is important not because of its relation to the Distance Education theories, but it is a key for learners' successes and their persistence in the ODL system. It is a fact that in Distance Education, there is the geographical separation of teacher and learner. In addition to it, socio-psychological factors affect the learners in their learning and completing the courses. The socio-psychological factors include language, culture, motivation, inadequate skills or preparation, anxiety, time and work or family constraints. Distance learners, therefore, need various support services that would help them to be successful learners. Learner Support Services (LSS) are treated as learner centered facilitating functions of ODLS which take into account problems of distance learners at pre entry stage, during the course of studies and at the course completion stage. In this regard, it is noted that learner support not only bridges socio-psychological distances, but also fosters learners for their personal development and the accomplishment of learning goals. In the light of the separation of the learner from the teacher, the techniques and mechanisms to provide support assume a significant dimension in the teaching-learning transactions through the distance mode. This course MDE-413 discusses about the concept of various Learner Support Systems and Services and their interrelationship with other elements of ODL, theoretical background of LSS and factors affecting the nature of support services. Some important mechanisms of learner support namely contact programmes, counselling, and distance teaching through tutor comments on assignment responses have been discussed thoroughly. It also describes the institutional mechanisms for providing learning support. After working through this course, you should be able to:

- describe the basic principles and methods of learner support,
- explain the importance of support services in the ODL system,
- discuss learner support services as a sub-system of any ODL institution,
- organize academic counselling and other support services,
- assess and report the performance and progress of distance learners,

This course consists of five blocks. These are:

Block 1: Learner Support: An Introduction – This block discusses the concept of support services as a major component of ODL and various institutional models and arrangements in providing Learners Support Services (LSS).

Block 2: Learner Support: Development of Skills – Various learning skills such as Study skills, Cognitive skills, Problem solving skills, Reading and Writing skills have been discussed to develop a self directed learner.

Block 3: Counselling and Tutoring Services – All the issues related to Counselling and Tutoring services like skills, qualities, media and technology in counselling and organizing counselling and tutoring services have been analyzed.

Block 4: Assessment of Learner Performance – Various components of Assessment in Distance Education like Tutor Comments, Tutoring

through Correspondence and Supplemental Interaction have been emphasized.

Block 5: Management of Learner Support – Some important aspects of LSS such as Learners' Expectations in DE, Management of Support Services, and Monitoring Learners' Progress have been analyzed.

Each block of this course consists of four units. We begin each unit with the section 'Introduction' followed by 'Learning Outcomes'. It articulates briefly

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

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

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

What you are expected to do is to go through the units and jot down important points in the space provided in the margin. This will help you to make notes and prepare for the examination. At the same time, you will be able to save time during your revision. Therefore, we advise you to use these margins.

We hope that we have given enough space for you to work on the self-check exercises.

The purpose of giving self-check exercises will be served satisfactorily if you compare your answers with the possible ones given at the end of each unit under 'Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions'. You may be tempted to have a furtive glance at possible answer(s), as soon as you come across an exercise. But we do hope that you will overcome the temptation and turn to these possible answers (which are not the best answers necessarily) only after you write your own. These exercises are not meant to be submitted to us for correction or evaluation. Instead, the exercises are to function as study tools to help you keep on the right track as you read the units.

Besides this, counselling is also provided at your study centres for this course. Attending a counselling session will help you to clarify your queries and doubts. Counselling sessions are also the time when you can meet other learners, and see the diverse nature of the learner profile. If your learning style is discussion and interaction based, it is always suggested to attend the counselling sessions. Along with the counselling sessions, there are other media materials, and services available in this course, and you may like to take advantages of these by attending the teleconference sessions/virtual classes as and when conducted. You will receive information about special arrangements regarding this from time to time.

In this course, you have to submit one assignment consisting of both essay type and short answer type questions which carries 25% weightage. We suggest the following norms to be strictly practiced while you are working through the assignments:

- Write your roll number legibly as indicated in the Programme Guide.

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

Beside the assignment, you have to appear for term-end examination for this course which carries 75% weightage.

About this block:

This is fifth or the last block of the course “Learner Support Systems and Services”. After discussing the issues related to Assessment of Learner Performance in distance education such as Tutor Comments, Tutoring through Correspondence and Supplemental Interaction, now we will make an attempt to focus on some important aspects of Learner Support Services such as Learners’ Expectations in Distance Education, Management of Support Services, and Monitoring Learners’ Progress. Since a learner has a very crucial role in the teaching-learning process in general and in distance education in particular, we have discussed various issues related to Management of Learner Support in distance education elaborately in all the units throughout this block.

In the first unit of this block, we have discussed learners’ expectations from various aspects in detail. We have focused on the meaning and concept of expectations, the characteristics of a distance learner, various domains of expectations and learners’ satisfaction.

In order to cater to the needs, aspirations and individual differences of the target groups, the management of learner support assumes a crucial significance. In view of these it is important to understand the components of learner support, i.e. academic and non-academic, and their effective planning, organization and management by the ODL institution. Therefore, in the second unit we have discussed various issues related to management of learner support, data management and quality assurance in learner support.

In the third unit, we have tried to find out why some learners successfully study through distance mode while others do not. We have also examined the causes of student attrition, categorized the types, and focused on some well known models of attrition. We have also discussed the factors that contribute to learner success and the measures that can be adopted for student persistence. The discussion in this unit is based on the inferences drawn from the empirical research studies conducted at some of the Open Universities across the globe. We hope that this unit would be of particular interest to you as it will give you an insight into the issue of learners’ progress and will probably help you in managing student dropout.

In the last unit, we have discussed about one of the important components of learners’ support i.e. how to use library services effectively. You should know about different types of library resources and services available in a library in the context of supporting distance learners. Therefore, in this unit we have discussed the information needs of distance learners and the guidelines for providing library services to them. This will enable you to think, plan and support distance learners in a more systematic manner.

UNIT 1 LEARNERS' EXPECTATIONS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Learning Outcomes
- 1.2 Who is a Distance Learner?
- 1.3 Learners' Expectations
 - 1.3.1 Distance Education in General
 - 1.3.2 Study Materials
 - 1.3.3 Academic Counselling
 - 1.3.4 Assignments and Grades
 - 1.3.5 Technology Use
 - 1.3.6 Peer Group
 - 1.3.7 Institutions' Services
- 1.4 Learners' Satisfaction
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 References and Further Readings
- 1.7 Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions

1.0 INTRODUCTION

You have gone through Block-04 of this course ES-313 on Learner Support Systems and Services. In this block we are presenting Management of Learner Support. Since a learner has a very crucial role in the teaching-learning process in general and in distance education in particular, in this unit of the block, we shall discuss learners' expectations from various aspects in detail. The knowledge of learners' expectations, as we shall see, has a definite benefit not only for the policy makers in distance education but also for those involved in various stages of programme development and delivery.

Although it may seem that the concept of learners' expectations is associated with some psychological phenomenon only, it also serves both scientific and practical purposes. Because, at the most critical end of the teaching-learning process is the individual who intends to learn something from the teacher or course material. He/She has an active mind which correlates the things with his/her past experiences, thinks logically, and reaches at certain conclusions. He/She is there with certain pre-defined goals and expectations. About expectations, s/he may or may not be aware but these influence, shape and determine his/her path of learning to a great extent.

We all are unique individuals who are different from each other not only in physical appearance and features, but also in our psychological traits and characteristics. We belong to different backgrounds and social set up. Besides heredity, the environment also makes us unique as we have distinct thinking and behavioural patterns even in a given similar situation. However, for the most part, we have certain common broad expectations from those at the other end. These have different effects and implications in various walks of life like learning. Hence, it becomes inevitable for us to have a clear understanding of the expectations our students have from us as practitioners of distance

education system. In this unit, we shall discuss the meaning and concept of expectations, the characteristics of a distance learner, various domains of expectations and learners' satisfaction.

1.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

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

- Identify the characteristics of a distance learner;
- Describe the concept of learner expectations;
- Explain major domains of learner expectations;
- Describe the concept of learner satisfaction; and
- Discuss the importance of learner expectations and satisfaction in the field of learning.

1.2 WHO IS A DISTANCE LEARNER?

As is now well known world-wide that the traditional education system cannot effectively meet the educational needs of all categories of aspirations due to its inherent limitations. Rigid entry conditions, impracticality of attending the classes in conventional institutions, and many other similar factors also lead one to find an alternative opportunity of studying further where there are no such hardships in maintaining job-study balances. And it is perhaps for this reason that the distance education system has emerged as an effective and alternative method of course delivery to cater to the educational needs of the masses. If we focus upon the characteristics of people who become distance learners, we shall find that most of them are the people who, for whatsoever reasons, could not get higher education in the conventional system after their schooling. The possible reasons may include various socio-economic conditions, geographical factors, physical constraints, job and family responsibilities etc. But, one thing which surely plays a significant role is that despite all such problems or difficult life circumstances, they had a desire and motivation to continue their studies and learning.

Throughout the world, an increase in enrolment in distance education institutions and programmes is being witnessed. Because of their specific job and/or family circumstances, more and more people are turning towards distance education not only to raise their educational attainment levels but also to upgrade their skills and improve their knowledge. But, do they possess the same characteristics as students of conventional system? In order to better serve this growing student community, it is very important to study their particular characteristics.

As far as distance higher education is concerned, the learners/students are generally above 18 years of age because most students who are enrolled in any bachelor's level degree programme are supposed to have 12 years of schooling. Hence, they can be regarded as adult learners of distance education system and one must be acquainted with the principles of adult learning before proceeding further towards studying their expectations.

To be effective, it is important for distance higher education to follow the way the adults learn, because they have special needs and learning styles. The credit for pioneering the field of adult learning goes to Malcom Knowles (1970) who highlighted the following major characteristics of adult learners. A minute reading of these might lead one to close understanding of the expectations these learners have.

- As the adult learners are mature, autonomous and self-directed, they tend to learn in a different manner than children do. They identify their learning needs, set their learning pace and like to take the responsibility of the same. They like to direct themselves for learning rather than get directed by others and act like more independent learners.
- Adult learners possess a reservoir of life experiences and knowledge. They need and like the opportunities to get full benefit of the same and to correlate their previous life experiences and knowledge with their current learning.
- Being mature learners, the adult learners set their own goals and are goal-oriented. They know how to achieve their targets and strive for the same depending upon their various life responsibilities like job, family etc.
- Adult learners are prone to find the reason and relevancy in learning something. Since they have enrolled in any programme on their own will and wish and to achieve any specific target, they wish to gain that is really helpful for them in their job and/or other related activities/responsibilities.
- Instead of aspiring for merely or largely theoretical knowledge, the adult learners are more interested in practical-oriented tasks/skills which might be further useful for them in their life and/or job settings. This aspect determines most of the choices they make regarding their programme/courses.
- Adult learners are to be treated respectfully just like all other learners. At appropriate point of teaching-learning, their past experiences and previous knowledge are to be duly recognized and utilised in various learning settings.

Apart from the above psychological characteristics of the distance learners, few demographic characteristics also need mention here. The characteristics of distance education students enrolled in universities for seven countries viz., New Zealand, Israel, Canada, Netherlands, Britain, Germany, and Spain have been reported in an international study (Sheets 1992, in Tucker 2003). Figures represent enrolment of students in respective open universities "in percentages":

Characteristics of Students in Open Universities

	Massey U. N. Zealand	Evrymn U. Israel	Athabasca Canada	OU of Nthlds	British British	FeU FeU	UNED Spain
Age 24	85	69	67	92	95	73	76
Male	37	47	39	67	56	75	70
Female	63	53	61	33	44	25	30
Employed	83	NA	86	73	81	67	88

Explanations and Sources:

Massey University, New Zealand (Tremaine & Owen, 1984)

Everyman's University, Israel (Guri, 1986)

Athabasca University, Canada (Peruniak, 1983)

Open University of the Netherlands (Boon & van Enckevort, 1987)

British Open University (Rumble, 1983)

Fernuniversitat: Gesamthochschule, Federal Republic of Germany (Rumble, 1983)

Universidad Nacional de Educacio'n a Distancia, Spain (Rumble, 1983)

NA: Not Available

Various studies reveal that in comparison to the students in traditional education system, the distance learners have an average age of 25 years, females outnumber males, and most distance learners are employed and have family and higher income levels. Being in full-time employment is one of the biggest factors which do not allow them to get enrolled in face to face, regular education system. It has also been found world-wide that most of the distance learners are married and mature. Despite all odds, they have enrolled themselves further in higher education, which shows that they are internally motivated. The profile and demographic characteristics of the learners of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, India, the largest Open University with 03 million (IGNOU Profile 2011) student strength at present, also reveal that distance learners, being a heterogeneous group, come from diversified backgrounds.

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

Why is it important to know the characteristics of a distance learner?

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1.3 LEARNERS' EXPECTATIONS

While going through the characteristics of distance learners in the previous section, you might have got a fair idea that they have a different set of expectations as per their level of maturity, life experiences and previous knowledge etc. Well, we all do have some expectations in our lives. But what actually do we mean by expectations?

Expectation means an act or state of expecting, anticipating or looking forward to anything/event which is about to or should happen as per our knowledge, experience and/or certain calculations/statistics. In the case of uncertainty it takes place with confidence/fear of fulfilment.

There are few things about expectations which need a detailed discussion before proceeding further.

- Do expectations take place *when there is uncertainty* or when we have no factual information or when final result is not in our hands? Say, a player has expectations that s/he may win the game. Why does s/he expect so? Because at the time of the start of the game, it is totally uncertain who shall win, because s/he has no factual information about winning the game, and because the final result of the game is not in her/his hands at the start of the game. So, it seems to hold true that expectations take place when there is uncertainty or when we have no factual information or when final result is not in our hands.

- Do expectations take birth in the case of uncertainty *with confidence/fear of fulfilment*? It shows that expectations are both positive and negative. The player in the example above has positive expectation with confidence of its fulfilment. But, the opponent, who is weaker and less prepared, may have negative expectation with fear of its fulfilment i.e., losing the game.
- Do we expect certain things on the basis of our knowledge, experiences and/or calculations/statistics? It also seems to hold true because if we have knowledge of the past performance of the opponent and we find him/her weaker or less prepared, we may expect victory. Similarly, experiences, whether our own or of others, say that the chances of his/her winning against us are remote, we may expect victory. As far as calculations/statistics are concerned, this variable might act strongly where quantifiable attributes are associated as is done in case of stock markets and weather predictions.
- Expectation means an act or state of expecting, anticipation or looking forward to anything which is about to or should happen. It means that expectations belong to, for the most part, the events of very near future.
- Expectations are expectations only. These are not future or final results. These may be fulfilled. These may not be fulfilled.
- Expectations are associated with emotions of happiness, disappointment and surprise. When positive expectations are fulfilled (we won as expected) and negative ones are not fulfilled (we didn't lose as expected), we feel happy. Similarly, when positive expectations are not fulfilled (unexpectedly, we didn't win) and negative ones were fulfilled (we lost as expected), the disappointment is faced. And, if some positive outcome happens which was not at all expected, it turns out to be a surprise (unexpectedly, we won).

It is general human nature that we all do cherish certain expectations depending upon the particular circumstances and life situations. So do the distance learners. When a person turns to be a distance learner by enrolling in any distance learning programme, he/she might have expectations from the following spheres of his/her academic endeavour.

1.3.1 Distance Education in General

Coming back to basics, here the distance learner, who has opted the open and distance learning to achieve his/her goals, has definite expectations from the distance education system. As is clear by now that we know about the distinctive features of open and distance learning, the same features might have attracted a person to be a distance learner. Hence, he/she has expectations like:

- For entering a programme of his/her interest or needs, he/she should meet relaxed entry qualifications.
- He/She would be able to select the courses as per his/her desire and professional requirements.
- He/She would be allowed to learn at his/her own pace and place.

- There would be certain mechanism for two-way communication and s/he would not be left totally in isolation.
- He/she would get the specially designed self-learning print materials as well as he/she would be able to use non-print media also like radio, television, audio-visual lessons etc. for learning.
- And, that he/she would get the most efficient support services from his/her Regional Centre, Study Centre, Academic Counsellors, library services etc.

1.3.2 Study Materials

In the traditional education system, the students get instruction from their teacher in a face to face situation when they attend their class and use the text materials for learning. Whereas, in the distance education system, the learners get little opportunity of interaction with their teachers, counsellors and fellow learners. For learning, they depend heavily on specially designed and developed (or transformed) self-instructional and self-learning materials. Because the distance learner might not be able to be in continuous or regular contact with the teacher, the study material should perform the functions of a teacher. Keeping the above points in view, the distance learners may have the following expectations from their study materials which are in essence the various characteristics of self-instructional and self-learning materials:

- It should guide and motivate them, ask them questions and answer their questions, and lead them to learn in a desired way, just like their teacher would do.
- The study materials being *self-explanatory*, they should be able to learn from these materials independently and without much external support.
- The study materials should be *self-contained* so that the distance learner should not be required to explore supplementary learning materials.
- Fostering *self-directed* learning, the study material itself should provide all the necessary guidance and instruction to the learners.
- The study materials, being *self-motivating*, should act as a teacher to constantly motivate and encourage the learners for learning.
- The feedback has also very important role in learning. Hence, the study materials should also serve the purpose as *self-evaluating* by providing self-check exercises etc.

Access devices (title of the unit, structure, objectives, presentation of the text/content, diagrams and illustrations, glossary etc.) play a definite and guided role in the study materials by taking the course writer closer to his/her learners and taking the learners closer to the content which is there to perform the role of a distant teacher. Thus, the course writers in distance education have to be extra-cautious while developing self-learning, self-instructional materials which have to cater to the principles of adult learning as well as fulfil the above criteria so as to facilitate the learning of a distance learner. If the study materials do not come true to the expectations of the learners, it may de-motivate them from further study. So, a course writer has to always keep in

mind his/her target group, their particular characteristics and interests besides fulfilling the demands of the course.

1.3.3 Academic Counselling

The most important role in distance education and learning setting is played by the academic counsellors. They have to keep their students, who are studying at a distance, on the right track throughout their studies and to maintain them there until the course/programme is completed. By a general definition, an academic counsellor is a person who, using his/her interpersonal skills and knowledge, helps a learner resolve their various types of educational difficulties. This role, in distance education setting, becomes even more challenging because both the counsellor and the learner may even not be in direct contact at times.

The distance education system provides ample opportunities to the distance learners to meet and interact with their academic counsellor(s) at a given time, at a given place to discuss their various difficulties which they may have faced during the course of their studies. The students are attached at a given study centre and are informed of the counselling schedule well in advance. However, the prospective and present learners come there for wide variety of purposes which may include:

- **Information:** In many circumstances, the students visit their study centre and meet their counsellors to know about particular courses, fee details and about various last dates etc.
- **Advice:** Sometimes, in addition to information, the learners also seek or are to be given advice, which include the information about all the available options and suggesting the student about the best option for him/her.
- **Counselling:** Counselling, being learner dependent, requires helping the students make suitable and appropriate decisions for themselves by knowing and understanding their particular needs and motivations. Here, they themselves decide for the course/career best for them.

Counselling, by nature, can be both academic as well as non-academic and can take place at various stages like pre-entry, entry, during the course of study, examinations and post-study stage. What particular help (information, advice or counselling) a student needs depends on him/her. However, when a student approaches a counsellor, s/he may have the following broad expectations from him/her:

The counsellor shall:

- Listen to him/her attentively and personally.
- Help him/her learn the things effectively.
- Provide feedback on his/her learning.
- Identify his/her strengths and weaknesses and help him/her overcome his/her weaknesses.
- Monitor the progress of his/her learning and suggest the ways for effective learning accordingly.

- Guide him/her write assignments effectively and evaluate the same to monitor his/her learning.
- Help him/her prepare for examinations.
- Counsel him/her for further studies after passing a particular programme.

Most importantly, the learners expect warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy from their counsellors. They also expect their counsellors to be available to them as and when required for seeking their expert counselling and support. The media of counselling distance learners may vary as per the facilities available to the individual learners and to the institution/counsellors. The interaction between a learner and counsellor may take place face to face or thorough ICT tools such as mobile, websites, email, multimedia CDs, by mail, radio, television, and teleconferencing.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

What qualities do the learners expect in a good academic counsellor?

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1.3.4 Assignment and Grades

Assignments have a very important role to play in the teaching-learning process in distance education. There may be long spatial distance between a learner and distance education institution which is bridged by sending assignments to the learners and requiring them to reply the questions there in. The learners answer the assignment questions and send back which are then evaluated by the evaluators/academic counsellors/distance teachers. The assignment responses reflect what the learners have understood and learnt. The assignments are then returned to the learners with the comments/remarks of the evaluator so that the assignment answers may serve the purpose of providing feedback to the learners and inform them their strengths and weaknesses. These comments carry the meaningful and constructive suggestions of the evaluator which further form the bases of successful learning. Thus, the assignments serve the purpose of two-way communication between the learner and evaluator/academic counsellors/distance teacher despite physical distances between the two.

TMA and CMA

Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) and Computer Marked Assignments (CMAs) are the two types of assignments that are generally used in distance education system. The assignments that are marked/evaluated by the distance teacher/tutor are known as TMAs and carry the comments of the tutor. While assignments that are marked/evaluated by the computer (generally objective type questions) are called CMAs. It is

another way to be in touch with the distance learner and monitor his/her learning. It is a two way communication to provide the learner feedback about the quality of his/her learning and to further guide him for effective learning.

From assignments' component, the learner has certain different types of expectations. Somewhere he/she knows that it is evaluation of his/her own past performance – the assignment responses he/she had submitted at his/her Study Centre. So, it is directly associated with it. It has the same value for him/her as any other term end examination. He/she expects good comments and good grades from the tutor. But, the tutor has to work objectively in order to lead the learner on the genuine path of learning. That's why, the role of tutor here becomes very crucial as he/she has to give feedback in a very positive and motivating manner. Furthermore, it is the tutor's comments which help the learner improve his/her study habits through his/her (tutor's) suggestions and counselling provided to him/her on assignment responses.

As we saw distance learners are adult and mature persons; hence we need to be careful in recording our comments on their assignment responses. It is highly important to write pedagogically purposeful comments on the assignments. These are positive and constructive comments providing a definite guidance to the learners and suggest them the ways to improve their weaknesses and performance. It is very important for the tutor to avoid the misleading, hollow and harmful comments. Since the learners expect a lot from the tutor, the tutors may use this unique opportunity to break the isolation the learners face and feel in distance education settings. They may write their comments in light of the performance by other learners. This may definitely boost up the motivation of the learners.

Just like most examinations, the assignments are evaluated and interpreted in terms of grades which, in a more reliable way, give us an overall estimate of the ability of the learner and tell us something about the quality of the performance of the learner. The learners here expect that the tutor, while evaluating their responses/assignment, will give due consideration to various characteristics of their responses like the content, form and presentation.

1.3.5 Technology Use

Media and technology have played a very significant role in the growth, development and spread of distance education and learning. The world has witnessed a very rapid progress made by the course design, development and delivery from the print media to web-based learning. And, the credit goes to the advances of technology. In simple terms, media here means the forms of communication which facilitate interaction and learning. Similarly, technology here means the hardware part and the mechanisms that help to convey the media message. As we can see, both are essential for the learning to take place. The audio-visual lessons on any given topic here refer to the media and the CD or DVD carrying these lessons refers to the technology.

With the advancement of technology, the learning opportunities have seen tremendous jump. Starting from the print technologies, we have now computers and satellites. As once the audio cassettes and learning from radio were very popular in various parts of the world, the rapid

urbanization and reducing costs of newer technologies are changing the way the world learns now. Dissemination of information through websites, affordability of mobile handsets and connections, and communication through email have had a deep, fast and ever lasting impact on almost everybody who once has come in contact with these latest technologies. And, most educational institutions are utilizing these technologies to deliver their content to their recipients.

The learners of the present age are more aware and alert than ever before. They know how and where to find out the desired content for learning and growth. It has posed a challenge to the educational institutions and teachers as well. They have to offer the best available - be it media or technology use - to their learners. As per the expectations of the learners, the institutions are utilizing more and more - the audio-visual CDs, radio and television, teleconferencing, interactive radio counselling, and educational satellite (EduSat) etc. to reach and deliver their media and content to their learners spread in every nook and corner under their jurisdiction.

1.3.6 Peer Group

By nature, in distance education set up, the distance learner is physically away from his/her distance teacher/institution and from his/her co-learners/peer group. The interaction among them takes place only in contact programmes held usually on week ends at the designated study centres and between the teachers and learners through assignment responses.

An individual distance learner, who otherwise lives in isolation, has certain expectation from his/her peer group ranging from information sharing to academic cooperation and discussions. First and foremost is to remove this isolation by developing a rapport with few co-learners. Only then he/she can expect vital information from them about important announcements, counselling schedules, examination pattern and preparations, others' progress, and post-examination activities etc. He/she has certain things which he/she wants to share as a student and expects other learners to listen to him/her seriously. If someone has some additional information or supplementary study material, he/she expects them to share it with him/her also. He/she also wants others to share with him/her the comments given by the tutor on their assignment responses so that he/she may also improve upon.

Taking it as a unique and rare opportunity, he/she has a strong desire to get the most out of these interactions in or out of the counselling sessions for learning purposes and expects others to cooperate from academic point of view because they all are there for a common goal and bear the similar isolation.

This peer group acts as a positive force to minimize the effects of feelings of isolation, help them survive the risk of dropping out and to sustain the motivation of a learner in studies. Thus the peer group plays a vital role in distance education. A group leader is not essentially required in such discussions but everyone can be encouraged to share their opinion in group discussions. Utilizing the latest technologies, the net-savvy learners may develop their own communities or societies by blogging or group-mails. Otherwise, sharing and discussing vital information with other learners on mobile phones can also serve the purpose effectively.

1.3.7 Institutions' Services

In distance education system, generally the student support services are provided at three levels: the Headquarters, regional centres and study centres. The Headquarters, for the most part, makes various policies and decides various modalities of implementing support services including admissions to examinations. Study centres are the actual points where the learners get the maximum academic support. Regional centres play the role of intermediary link between the Headquarters and the study centres.

The enrolled learners are attached to a Study Centre for various support services. These study centres are generally established in institutions of higher learning like colleges and universities. However, depending upon the nature of academic or professional programme, the study centres are also established in the institutions which have required infrastructure and facilities for holding practical sessions to provide practical training. For example, the computer programmes are run where computer labs are there with systems of latest configuration and internet connection, and health sciences programmes are run where training and surgical instruments etc. are available.

Although we know that the distance learner is independent and he/she can study on his/her own and at his/her own pace and place, yet he/she needs to clear few doubts from the counsellors about studies and assignments etc., and to get various other support services. To fulfil this purpose, the study centres are established. But, the effective and successful functioning of the Study Centre depends largely upon its support services staff which comprises of both the teachers and non-teaching staff. The Study Centre is headed by a Coordinator who is a senior teacher in the host institution. He/she may be assisted by a few Assistant Coordinators who again are teachers. For some clerical nature tasks to be performed at the study centres, there are few assistants who are from non-teaching staff of the host institution. Teachers from the host institution or outside are engaged for course-wise academic counselling of the learners.

The learners have a lot of expectations from their study centres which mainly include the following. The Study Centre would:

- provide them their study material and assignment question papers in time (if it is to be provided by the Study Centre as per the policy of the Headquarters).
- inform them about their counselling schedules (theory and practical).
- organise face to face counselling sessions for them.
- extend the available facilities for using audio-video programmes, teleconferencing and library facilities.
- receive their assignment responses, get these evaluated and return the evaluated assignments with tutor comments.
- attend to and respond to their queries.
- attend to their grievances effectively.
- provide pre-entry, admission-related, during studies, examination-related and post-entry counselling.

Thus, the Study Centre plays a very important role in the academic journey of a learner. If it provides effective support services, the learners will be motivated to complete their programme. And, if it does not, it would be wasting its valuable resources. The learners may also lose their interest in their studies and may drop-out.

1.4 LEARNERS' SATISFACTION

Can we say that once the system is in place and we provide the best services, will our target group be satisfied? Although satisfaction is a psychological phenomenon and may differ from individual to individual but can we make some broad, general rules for our target group's satisfaction? Well, satisfaction is a complex product of interrelated activities in an educational setting. Having a system in its right place, knowledge of learners' expectations, effective execution of policies, dissemination of information, and providing best support services can help a lot.

In an educational scenario, a wide variety of activities are to be performed by persons engaged at various levels or in different branches which have direct bearing on the learner. Be it admission, study material, assignment question papers, evaluation or any other related activity, every aspect has impact on the admitted student. Universities can make a full-proof system, no doubt, but as we just saw in Sub-section 1.3.7 that when it comes to providing support services, it depends upon the human beings who act as service provider. The major areas which need the most attention and are directly associated with learner satisfaction can be categorized as below:

- **Counselling Services:** Mostly a prospective learner first approaches its Study Centre in his/her vicinity for pre-entry counselling and after admission too, he/she contacts his/her Study Centre again and again for support services and academic counselling. Being an adult, he/she expects respectful treatment, better support and immediate redressal of his/her grievances. He/She observes minutely whether the Study Centre communicated the counseling schedule on time and the counseling sessions are well organized. Whether the academic counselors clear the doubts and provide effective counseling. He/She also wants the counseling sessions to be interactive feedback on his/her assignment responses to help him/her clarify the concepts. Project proposals, wherever applicable, are also to be clearly marked and discussed. Besides the academic counselors, the functioning of the study centre staff has also direct bearing on his/her satisfaction levels. Learner expects the staff at the study centres to be helpful.
- **Study Materials:** Since in distance education, the learner is in least contact with his/her tutor/counsellor and peer groups, he/she has also definite expectations from his/her study materials. He/She is influenced when he/she finds that s/he has received his/her study materials well in time and the concepts are clearly explained in the study material. The availability of supplementary study materials (like video/audio) also have a very positive impact on his/her confidence level.

- **Examination:** Just like admissions and studies, examination procedures also carry an important place in a learner's life. He/She needs to be well informed by the University about examination dates and patterns. Also, learner needs his/her results and grade card on time.

Besides better support services, the most important thing is that whether the purpose with which the learner got enrolled in a programme was fulfilled. For example, while studying in a particular programme or course did the learner get the desired/required knowledge of the subject or skills which could help him/her in his/her professional career and life.

Check Your Progress 3

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

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

How would you measure the satisfaction level of your learners?

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

Just as the popularity of any television programme is judged by the numbers of its viewers, the success of any business product is judged by the number of its customers or users, similarly the number of students tells a lot about an academic institution/University. It is a reflection on both the system and functioning of that institution. The students enter an institution with some pre-defined mental set and expectations. It is very important for an institution to study those expectations and the level of satisfaction of its learners in order to improve upon wherever required and to strengthen its system.

The learners' expectations are shaped as per their personal characteristics and goals, and are associated with various academic activities. They have certain perceptions about and expectations from the institution they are entering, from their course materials, Study Centre and its staff, and from teachers and academic counsellors as well. Being adult learners, they expect recognition for their knowledge and experience and respectful treatment. Understanding a distance learner, studying his/her particular academic needs and providing him/her effective counselling are the most challenging areas of distance education.

In this present unit, we have discussed in details some characteristics of distance learners, their various expectations from distance education system, study materials, academic counsellors, assignment evaluation and feedback, use of various technologies, from other learners and from institutions providing support services. We also discussed the

major areas of learners' satisfaction in this unit as it is the satisfaction level of the learners which not only helps them to complete their studies and their programme but also helps the institution to expand and grow.

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1.7 FEEDBACK TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

Check Your Progress 1

It is very important to know the characteristics of a distance learner for the (a) policy makers to help them make effective policies for their proposed target group; (b) course writers to help them design and develop the study materials as per the expected past knowledge, background and experiences of their proposed learners; (c) support service providers to help them provide the support services in a better and effective way. Thus, to help each person in the educational set up perform as per his/her expected role and responsibility, it becomes crucial to have a clear idea about the characteristics of a distance learner.

Check Your Progress 2

The distance learners, being adult learners, when meet the academic counsellors for counselling expect warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy from the counsellors. If the counsellors welcome their learners with warmth, accept them as they (learners) are, are friendly and genuine, and empathize with their learners are going to win the confidence of their learners.

Check Your Progress 3

Learners' Expectations in Distance Education

The most preferred method of measuring the satisfaction level of the learners is to develop a five-point satisfaction scale. First of all, you may list the various components/areas you wish to measure. There may be 15-20 questions in your scale covering these components/areas. The questions should be properly worded and should be clear and precise. Then the target group may be asked to rate their level of satisfaction on the five point scale: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied. After collecting the data/responses, the data may be statistically analyzed to reach the conclusion.



UNIT 2 MANAGEMENT OF SUPPORT SERVICES

Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Learning Outcomes
- 2.2 Support Services: Management Issues
 - 2.2.1 Management of Operations/Activities
 - 2.2.2 Management of Finance
 - 2.2.3 Management of Human Resources
- 2.3 Data Management
 - 2.3.1 Student Records
 - 2.3.2 Managing Data Pertaining to Academic Counselors/Tutors
 - 2.3.3 Data Management of Assessment Systems
- 2.4 Quality Assurance in Learner Support
 - 2.4.1 Quality Indicators
 - 2.4.2 Quality Assurance Criteria: Case Studies
 - 2.4.3 Learner Charters
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 References and Further Readings
- 2.7 Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Learner support constitutes an important aspect of the distance education system. Beginning with a simple transfer of study materials to learners by post, the concept of learner support has evolved to a range of human and non human systems which facilitate, guide and support distance learners. The ranges of activities that can be categorized under learner support are varied. The various terms used classify particular areas of activity, which also depend largely on the type of open and distance learning system. According to Alan Tait (1995): “The term student support means the range of activities which complement the mass produced materials which make up the most well known elements in Open and Distance Learning (ODL)”. He further explains that the print and non-print instructional components enhance access to the learner. However, activities like ‘counselling’, (face-to-face or telephonic or through electronic medium) and their organization at learner support centres, constitute learner support. The ODL institutions have to organize these learner support activities or manage these systems.

It is important for distance educators to think about the expectations of learners in ODL systems. In order to cater to the needs, aspirations and individual differences of the target groups, the management of learner support assumes a crucial significance. In view of these it is important to understand the components of learner support, i.e. academic and non-academic, and their effective planning, organization and management by the ODL institution.

2.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Explain the concept of learner support in ODL;
- Categorize learner support into different types and describe its components;
- Discuss the need for developing a cost effective learner support system;
- Identify the different types of records and data that need to be managed for effective learner support;
- Describe suitable and appropriate e-learner management systems;
- Explain the need for a quality assurance system;
- Develop a framework for quality assurance in an ODL system;
- Prepare a list of quality indicators for effective and efficient learner support; and
- Develop learner charters based on expectations of learners in the ODL system.

2.2 SUPPORT SERVICES: MANAGEMENT ISSUES

In this section you will learn about the meaning of support services and the types of support services required for learner in the ODL and management issues which are crucial for learner success.

Simpson (2003) categorizes learner support into two broad areas, as “academic (tutorial) support and non-academic or counseling support”. He has explained the sub divisions within each type of learner support category, as shown in Figure 2.1.

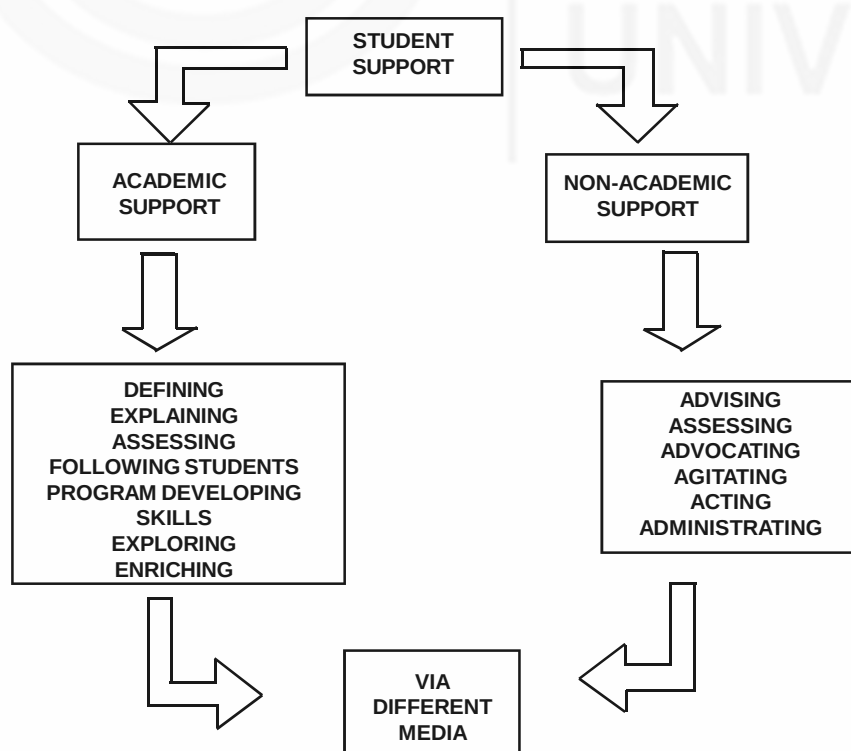


Fig. 2.1: Types of Learner Support in Open and Distance Learning Systems

Source: Supporting Students in Online, Open and Distance Learning, Simpson, O. [2002], pg 7

Academic support is provided by defining, as depicted in Figure 2.1, the course territory, explaining concepts, exploring the course, formal and informal assessment thereby organizing feedback, numeracy and literacy skills, following up students' progress through the course and further enrichment of learning by extending course boundaries. The academic support activities envision a shift in the tutor's role from the 'traditional explicative' to a facilitator using different modes for learning transactions.

Non-academic support as described by Simpson (2002) comprises of:

- Advising, i.e. giving information, listening to problems, suggesting possible course of action/directions, enabling learners to take decisions.
- Assessing the non-academic aptitudes and skills and giving feedback to the individual in this regard.
- Action in the form of practical help to facilitate study.
- Advocacy as in making provisions for funding, recommendations, references.
- Agitation so as to manage changes within the institution for the students' benefit and
- Administration for organizing the student support.

2.2.1 Management of Operations/Activities

The function of student support services is to cater to different learner needs and provide academic and administrative support accordingly. Irrespective of the core medium of instruction, i.e. print or non-print, efficient and effective learner support requires a division of labour between the core elements and other services. Tait (1995) has provided a framework for the development of a student support for an ODL system.

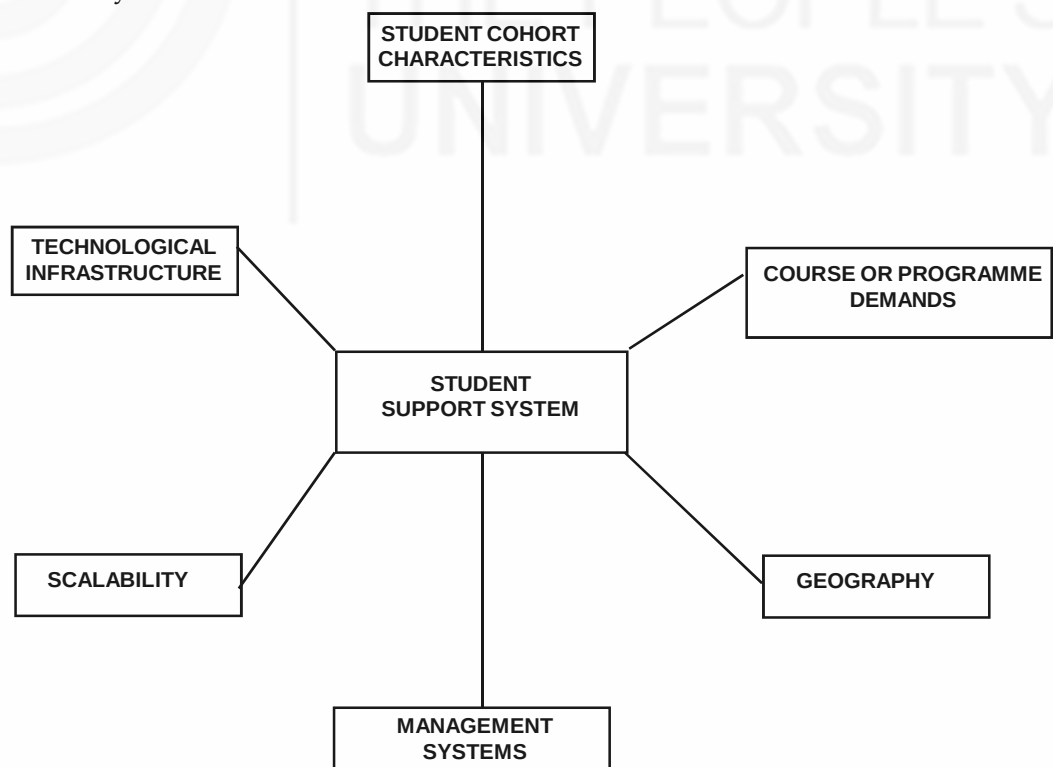


Fig. 2.2: Framework for the development of a student support system

Source: 'Planning and Student Support in Open and Distance Learning in the UK', Alan Tait, 1995.

Let us examine briefly each of these six components.

- **Student Characteristics**

Consideration of student characteristics is central to the development of learner support services. Here the learner's status is taken to be that of a customer or client availing the services of an organization. The latter has to assess the needs, capacities and aspirations of the student while planning the development and its delivery of services.

The student characteristics/qualities that need to be considered are:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Domestic conditions
4. Status of employment
5. Source(s) of income
6. Geographical situation
7. Language
8. Ethno-cultural background (Tait, A.)

- **Technological Infrastructure**

Tait (1995), considers two essential elements when deciding about the type of technologies. One category is of those technologies to which students have access and other is that the institutions or organizations which adopt new information and communication technologies for their programme delivery and learner support. The institutions will have to make provisions for using alternative technologies depending on the need and suitability of the learners. For example different kinds of communication technologies will be required for reaching out to learners in tribal, rural or urban locations or delivering student support services in geographically difficult terrains. If the programme is designed involving the use of computers, then their availability to the target group must be ensured. Alternatively a programme can be designed based on a specific occupational grouping and support provided accordingly. Social availability of a particular technology is an important factor as also the domestic and work place availability. Careful planning and serious thought should go into the development of student support, particularly in the context of a country like India, characterized by geographical, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Even if a particular technology is socially available, e.g. use of railways for material dispatch, it may require another technology or system to reach a learner in a hilly terrain, say by trucks or lorries. Assuming domestic availability of a particular technology e.g. computers or television, may unknowingly exclude some learners, e.g. those in rural or semi-urban areas may not have access even to such technologies.

- **Course or programme demands**

The crucial component around which the success of student support hinges is the demands or requirements of the programme. These are the core issues which have to be carefully considered when the programme is conceived. Some of the issues in this regard which need to be focused upon are:

- Type of assessment – continuous or terminal or a combination of the two. In case of continuous assessment, there is a need to decide about who will undertake the assessment? It could be done by the core faculty or academics in the organization or by part-time faculty, tutors and counselors.
- Weightage – It has to be decided whether continuous assessment involves the teaching component as well as making or grading or only the latter. The weightage to be assigned to the continuous assessment component in the scheme of overall assessment also needs to be ascertained.
- Face-to-face component can be a part of the distance education programme depending on its nature and need. In some skill or competency enhancement programme, interaction with the tutors becomes necessary. The purpose of the face-to-face support could vary from just the need of social experiential learning or for mutual support through peer interaction. Geographical factors and location of learners for a particular programme have to be considered for organizing face-to-face interactions.

- **Scalability**

Scalability determines the way a distance education system should be organized depending on its volume of activity. One major determinant e.g. could be the number of students which the programme intends to enroll. The management of student support will be structured differently for a programme enrolling 100 students than one that targets to register 100,000 students, the dimension of scale will directly impact all activities of academic and administrative support, e.g. the nature and number of teachers/faculty, organization of admission, student queries, regional and local support services through study centres or work centres.

- **Geography**

The geographical factor considers not just the physical terrain but also has a social dimension. It includes the aspects such as:

- Density of population in a given area (rural or urban).
- Transport facilities and their costs.
- Extent of freedom exercised by the females in movement outside their homes or for all students in dangerous areas.
- All these issues will have a bearing on the extent of student-tutor interactions and their meetings at a particular place.

- **Management Systems**

Let us examine some specific issues related to management of student support services. These will be dealt with in detail in the sections that follow. The management issues deserving specific focus are:

- Centre periphery organization – This implies that the services are delivered at a location away from the central institution. Such a setup often leads to a hierarchical structure and proves negative. A 'partnership' or 'distributed' model can be more useful for effective student support i.e. partnership for production and presentation.

- Management of Information - to ensure smooth flow of information to and from the centre and peripheral elements.
- Quality assurance – In ODL systems, since most of the services are delivered outside of the central organization, quality of these services has to be assured. For instance, tutoring or counselling is done by part-time faculty or tutor-counsellor or mediated through computers or postal learning materials etc.

- **Budgeting**

A significant consideration is the decision regarding the investment to be made in the student support provisions. Decisions about the outcomes of these investments in terms of student retention, assessment and evaluation procedures, quality of learning experiences, have to be considered. The institution has to adopt the appropriate financial model, depending on the direction in which funds flow in the organization.

Main Operations Involved

In the context of the framework described above, the challenge is to provide good quality learning experiences to the distance learners. For achieving a minimum level of efficiency and effectiveness the institution should be clear about the different elements or activities involved in providing such a learner support system. Let us now take a look at the main elements or services of the support framework that the institution will need to focus on.

- *Pre study and Admission enquiry/advice/information*

A student will expect right information and guidance which institutions do provide through prospectuses. However some organizations provide platforms for individual and interactive enquiry systems. This may be through face to face contacts, letters, e-mail, telephone outreach events etc. The important considerations are timeliness, transparency and competence.

- *Teaching-Learning Strategy/Tutoring/Counselling*

This is a very crucial component of the support services being provided to the learners. It includes all support, human and physical in addition to the course materials provided to the learners. The management issues involved are:

- Tutors/academic counselors constitute the core staff or are part-time local resource persons
- Nature of teaching-learning format – correspondence, mail, individualized, teleconference or CMC etc.
- Role of the counselors/tutors in continuous assessment and the latter's weightage in the overall assessment scheme.
- Role of tutors/counselors in the terminal assessment.

All the above issues are context specific. The type of security mechanisms that a particular country can put in place will be crucial in deciding the extent of responsibility to be assigned to a part time faculty. This is essential to maintain the sanctity and confidentiality of the examination and assessment systems. These decisions will also

have a bearing on development of suitable quality assurance mechanisms.

- ***Learner Support Centres/Local Study Centres***

Some institutions adopt a system where there is a need for face to face support for the learners. This support is organized at a local resource centre, termed as a study centre/programme study centre/special study centre etc. Tait (1995) has described four models for organizing study centers. These are:

- 1) The Rented Model: Rooms and laboratories (if needed) are hired from another institution for the specified meetings/contact programmes/practicals. e.g. most study centers in IGNOU follow this pattern.
- 2) The Partnership Model: Another institution provides the location and services. e.g., the Recognized Study Centers in IGNOU.
- 3) The Dedicated Model: The building (whether rented or purchased) is solely dedicated for the ODL institutional activities.
- 4) The Civic Model: In this scheme the local community through a provincial body or council takes responsibility for providing the resources for educational activities of the institution.

In systems which cater to large numbers, as in IGNOU, there can be a regional coordinating body, Regional Centers. The Regional Centers are the middle tier in the three tier system of student support followed in IGNOU and coordinate between the Headquarters and the local support centers.

- ***Assessment Systems***

The effective management of assessment systems in an ODL system (as in a conventional system also) is very crucial for the success of the organization. In an ODL set up the assessment system is a core component of the overall framework. However it needs to be supported through the academic counselors/tutors as the component of continuous assessment is involved and has considerable weightage in overall achievement of learners. There is need for an efficient management system considering the large scale of operations dealing with examinations, assignments, project work, practical work etc. Institutions need to focus on issues of safe and timely conduct of examinations, record maintenance, attendance sheets, award lists, transfer of records etc.

Image of the institution and the respect people have for it depends greatly on the sanctity of its assessment procedures.

(Acknowledgement: This section is abstracted from an article entitled, 'Planning Student Support in Open and Distance Learning in The UK', by Alan Tait).

Before we proceed to the other important components of learner support that require careful planning and management, you may attempt to answer this question.

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

List the non-academic support provided to the learners as described by Simpson.

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2.2.2 Management of Finance

One of the major attractions in setting up of ODL institutions is the fact that it is much more cost-effective than face-to-face teaching in traditional systems. This is true only if the number of students involved are relatively high. To develop a cost effective system the student numbers must be optimized (Melton, F.R., 2002). Hence the distinguishing feature in open systems is the need for management of investment.

Open systems, especially those which produce materials have higher fixed costs and longer financial planning periods. This necessitates use of more sophisticated methods than usual annual budgets (Freeman, R. 1997). If student numbers have to be taken to levels to achieve cost effectiveness, a careful planning and consideration is to be given to student support systems. Efficient support services can be provided to large number of learners only by decentralizing the support activities.

Melton (2002) compares the costs of ODL and FFT (face-to-face teaching) and gives some indication of the extent to which the former can be more cost effective. The fixed costs of ODL, like the cost of course development, institutional costs, regional institutional costs are much higher as compared to FFT. The variable costs in ODL e.g. student support which depends on student numbers are much lower per student when the number of students is relatively high.

Rumble (1987) in a study noted that the minimum numbers required on UKOU courses to achieve cost effectiveness varied from course to course. For example he found that in a particular course (foundation course) break-even point was reached at a student enrolment of 2,658 while the break even point in a post foundation course was reached at 800 student enrolment. This is also primarily because of the belief at UKOU that students at foundation course need more support than at a higher level, hence more investment is made at the former level. Rumble confirmed through this study that comparisons should be made between courses of similar quality and that the cost of an ODL course depends largely on what is invested in them.

Wagner's (1997) study on drop out rates indicated that the annual recurrent costs of supporting a full time undergraduate in the UKOU were one third the cost of supporting the counterpart in the FFT University. Rumble (1986) noted that evidence for distance teaching having the potential to be cheaper per capita (i.e. more cost effective) than conventional education.

The question that is often raised when cost comparisons are made between ODL and FFT institutions is about the quality of teaching and the graduates produced. Whether the cost effectiveness of ODL programme can also sustain the quality of output as compared to conventional FFT systems, is debated. Many researchers have questioned the equivalence of academic quality of distance and conventional education systems. Carnoy and Levin (1975) argued that the cost savings of an OU (Open University) system 'may be obliterated by a smaller educational product'. This according to them is primarily because the average university student has greater access to tutorial services, instructional materials and instruction, libraries, computers, campus classes than the OU counterpart (Rumble, 1986). However most come to the conclusion that ODL can be highly cost effective if delivered on a large enough scale to offset the high investment costs.

Another consideration for financial management of learner support is to develop a system of decentralized learner support. A system is required in which student numbers can be easily expanded without overstretching the resources. For this a system of regional or local support needs to be created. The example of IGNOU is a case in point. The student support is provided through a network of regional centres which operate through a set of learner support centres in each region. These learner support/study centres provide academic counseling, guidance and material distribution and assessment support to learners attached with them.

The academics at the Headquarters are there to develop courses. Hence learner support is provided through part-time staff and central academics are thus not affected by expansion in number of students. This is applicable even in situations where all teaching and student support is provided online (Melton, 2002).

2.2.3 Management of Human Resource

In most distance education systems support to learners is provided at a distance from them. The support is generally in the form of study materials, consulting and tutorial services through face to face contact, telephone or postal correspondence. Since ODL deals with students at a distance, the question of the effectiveness of the communication systems always arises. Another issue involved is the ability of the institution to monitor the quality of services being offered to the students. In many cases since the institution deals with large numbers spread over a large area, the tutors are recruited locally. The institution needs to keep a check on these 'distant tutors' as to whether they are serving the needs of the students.

Generally DE (distance education) courses are developed for a large clientele and those academics that develop the course cannot do the tutoring for each enrolled student. However some institutions do encourage the course developers to do some tutoring for e.g. - Universidad Nacional Abierta, the full time staff travel to local centres for tutoring. Also in the British Open University some study courses are developed by academics who tutor the course. But by and large the ODL institutions induct and orient part-time faculty to do the tutoring.

To maintain quality, it is important that their counselling/tutoring is monitored and supervised by the full time faculty or 'senior tutors'

(Rumble, 1986). Whatever is the form of academic support, formal e.g. a tutorial or informal, e.g., an encouraging remark, its provision has to be ensured through a proper management system. Freeman, R. (1997) describes three management tasks for learner support:

- Creating a support system
- Enabling students to use the system
- Mechanism for monitoring the provisions of support systems to the learners.

The sources of learner support range from tutors (personal and/or subject), line managers and mentors to fellow learners. This support can also be technology mediated. Let us look into some issues of management of these human sources of learner support.

Management of Support from Tutors/Counsellors

Freeman (1997) considers the tutor as the key supporter in systems which offer longer accredited courses. Support from tutors is very important since learners cannot complete courses if left untutored and unsupported. The main functions of the tutor are:

- As a subject expert
- As a gateway to other resources
- As a facilitator by giving feedback on progress
- As a counselor by encouraging/assisting with personal problems
- As an evaluator by assessing the learners.

The management functions here are:

- To ascribe a role to the tutor
- Monitor and support the role
- Evaluating the role.

Freeman (1997) has provided a framework for managing the tutor support function. There is not much distinction in the function of the tutor as a subject expert and a feedback provider, because both are concerned with the performance of the learner in the subject. However since the content in ODL system are self instructional, the subject expertise may not be overly emphasized in appointing tutors/ counselors. There is however need for more experienced tutors or mentors for newly appointed tutors. This is an important management function. Freeman's matrix examines the three managerial functions against all the five aspects. It is also highly difficult and complex as far as monitoring and evaluating tutor performance is considered. This is mainly because it is difficult to observe all tutors in action in the field as they operate occasionally on visits to the study centres. Their visible 'output' is only in the form of feedback on assignments. Some learners may also give feedback on tutor performance. Efforts have to be focused on extracting maximum information from these sources.

Table 2.1: Managing the Tutor support function

Examples of setup tasks	Examples of monitor/ support tasks	Examples of evaluation tasks
Tutor as subject expert - Set standard for tutor qualifications and experience in the subject - Recruit tutors to those standards - Brief tutors on the course content - Train tutors in relevant teaching techniques e.g. phone tutoring	- Arrange mentor support for new tutors from an expert in that subject - Monitor (via subject expert) the tutor's marketing of assignments - Monitor learner feedback on their subject support, e.g. on tutorials - Monitor student progress lack of progress could indicate poor support	- Compare marks statistically against those of all other tutors - Review learner feedback - Review tutor feedback on the course and the organization
Tutor as a gateway to other sources - Brief tutor on other resources available through the organization	- Provide subject expert support (i.e. some well versed in access to resources) to the tutor	- Review learner comments on the resource access they had - Review tutor feedback on there resource access role
Tutor as provider of feedback - Define feedback standards - Train tutors in how to give effective feedback in an open system	- Monitor learner comments on their support and feedback - Provide mentor support to the tutor	- Evaluate learner comments on the feedback they received
Tutor as helper with personal problems - Brief tutors on the types of problems learner have	- Provide mentor support to new tutors - Monitor student progress as lack of progress could indicate unresolved problems	- Review learner feedback - Review learner progress - Review tutor feedback on the problems they received and how they dealt with them.
Tutor as assessor - Brief tutors on the assessment system - Train tutors on any assessment skills	- Provide an experienced assessor to support the new tutor	- Compare tutor's assessment against other indicators of learner potential less prior qualifications - Collect learner views of the assessment process and specific assessments

(Source: Managing Open Systems, Richard Freeman (1997), Pg.50-51)

Other types of human resource support that needs to be managed are managing peer and group support and support from mentors.

Managing group support – Organizations can play a major role in organizing group support. The learners can be encouraged to set up study groups or self help groups. For this the learners need to be able to communicate with each other. They need access to personal details of their peers. This of course should be done with the consent of the learners. Admission days and induction meetings can be the appropriate times when they will have easy access to such information. Alternatively the organization and the local centres can prepare and circulate the list with personal details to interested learners.

Organizations can facilitate functioning of such peer groups in the following ways:

- Tutors can identify the activity which will be usefully performed through group work
- Meeting place can be arranged for such groups
- Guidelines to set up and maintain self-help groups can be published
- If computer facilities are available, arrangements can be made for them for meeting online.

Managing Support from Mentors

'Mentor' is a term used for a workplace-based supporter, who is assigned to a learner and has some responsibility towards the learner.

It is defined as, "A person who accepts the role of facilitating an individual's learning. In its purest form, the concept involves the mentor being chosen by the learner and carries out activities as requested by the learner" (Jeffries et.al., 1990). Freeman (1997) has described three activities for effective functioning of mentors. These are:

- i) Apprise learners about the concept of mentors, and how to choose them because for most learners it may be a new phenomenon. This may be done during induction meetings.
- ii) The organization can provide mentors with some summary about the programme/course in which they will be allocated to learners. This could be about the aims of the course, outline of content, role of mentors, functioning support systems and assessment systems.
- iii) Evaluation of mentor roles for improvement in their future performances.

This facility is difficult to put into practice since support systems cater to large numbers of programmes, learners and dispersed local support centres.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

How can a Distance Education Institute facilitate the functioning of peer groups?

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2.3 DATA MANAGEMENT

Learners in the ODL systems require a variety of academic and administrative support during their study career. The range of support activities required include:

- developing instructions material
- dissemination of routine information
- answering queries
- processing admission data
- record maintenance
- dispatch of study materials
- monitoring assignment evaluation
- management and coordination of administrative support structures
- conducting examinations and
- certification – issuing certificates.

An open and distance learning system is heavily reliant on its administrative support structure since learners are studying at a distance. Fundamental to the success of such a system is an effective record management system or data management.

2.3.1 Student Records

You need to first understand the significance of records in an ODL system. An effective data management system will ensure that:

- every learner gets the correct study material on time.
- learner achievement records are kept securely.
- financial and other matters are documented in a systematic manner.

There are three crucial aspects of data management that the planners should keep in mind. These are:

- a) Need for record keeping
- b) Type of records to be managed and
- c) Method/mechanism for data management.

Let us examine each aspect briefly:

a) *Need for data management:*

Some of the reasons that make an effective record management system imperative for ODL systems are:

- keep track of learner's progress as a whole and also that of individual learner
- maintain continuity irrespective of change of personnel
- assist academic counselors/tutors in organization of tutoring
- compare courses, tutors, learners, sexes and years
- analyse data of particular age cohorts of learners, so as to identify emerging trends

- facilitate ongoing planning process
- have a historical proof of tasks undertaken
- facilitate research
- give feedback to all stakeholders – learners, tutors, planners, administrators, faculty etc.
- monitor and evaluate the system.

b) ***Type of data/records***

The different kinds of data that should be properly recorded and managed are:

- assignments submitted
- marks/grades awarded
- term end examination awards
- difficulties faced by learners
- obstacles faced during programme implementation
- correspondence with all – learner functionaries, community
- feedback from all sources
- attendance registers – at headquarter and learner support centers
- personal records of learners – personal data progress report, assignment data.
- maintenance of a log or journal for incidents, visits, materials, equipment
- details regarding the issue of instructional materials to all
- records of finance and accounts
- Notes of meetings, counseling (theory and practical) sessions, follow up actions required/taken.

c) ***Method of keeping records/data***

Records can be kept either on paper or on a computer based system. Those ODL institutions which deal with large number of students, computer based systems are preferable to manual systems. Whatever the system adopted for record management, some important features, that it must have are:

- simple
- logical
- easily comprehensible by users
- secure and
- sustainable

a) **A check list for reviewing and evaluating the student record system**

The following questions may be asked to assess whether the data is fulfilling learners' needs:

- I) Does the student database contain the following information?
- Personal details – name, address, age, family circumstances and employment status, academic and professional qualifications.
 - Special requirements such as specially adapted material for disabled learners.
 - Counselling/tutorial records, receipts of assignments, grades, monitoring of tutor comments.
 - Details of materials dispatched with dates and status of undelivered materials.
 - Attendance records at counseling sessions especially in skill and practical oriented programmes.
 - Status of fee payment and details of fees paid.
- II) Does the database ensure that records are updated, detailed and accurate?

In order to ensure these, the following activities are to be taken care of:

- Regular monitoring of records system to ensure their efficient functioning.
- Dissemination of right kind of information to the right people at the right time.
- Information kept in a secure manner, so that access is enabled only to authorized personnel.

- III) Are the support functionaries regularly trained and updated on record management system?

Essentially all the support service functionaries i.e. personnel involved in instructional, counseling or administrative, activities, need to be trained and updated on the record management system and the method of using it (COL, 1999).

The task of designing a student record system that produces meaningful decision, making information, is a challenge for ODL practitioners. There is need to take a holistic view of the mission and vision of the institution with a focus on the objectives and the processes for achieving them.

A practical example is from the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Analysis of student registration data, revealed 99% students using mobile phones. Hence the SMS facility was used to send regular messages to their students. Regular information was sent to students pertaining to:

- Alerting students about dates of material dispatch. So that they could pursue this at their post offices.
- Providing information regarding extension of assignment submission dates, using an encouraging language.
- Notifying deadlines.
- Sending reminders to register for term end exams.

At this stage it is also pertinent to examine the common type of records that need to be kept by distance education institutions. This is shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Checklist for starting or reviewing a student record system

Records	Possible Questions	Possible Details
Personal student profile	• What kind of students enrolled? • Where are they from? • How many have access to mobile phones? • How many have access to computers, email and the internet?	• Full contact details, including mobile phone numbers. • Means of identification • Demographic factors, i.e. age, gender, geographic location. • Resource factors e.g. place of learning, available learning times, electricity access, media and technology access. • Prior learning and experience, qualifications, distance learning experience, language ability. • Special educational needs • Occupation and work history, learning motivation
Retention and dropout	• How many students are completing the programme (completion rate)? • How many students complete the programme and graduate (throughput rate)? • Do demographic trends show differences between enrolment and successful programme completion?	• Number of enrolled students. • Number and names of students who drop out.
Fee payment	What is the student fee recovery rate?	• Names of students with fees owing. • Amount outstanding • Due date
Material dispatch	• What is the rate of successful material delivery? • What are the most common material delivery problems?	• Names and addresses of students. • Date materials were sent. • Delivery mode (include postal reference number if necessary). • Number of non-delivery complaints.
Student participation and progress	• How many students are inactive (not participating in contact sessions, not handing in assignments)? • How many students are at risk (participating but failing formative assignment)? • What is the assignment turn-around time? • What are the most common delays for receiving student assignments?	Contact session attendance: • Number of attending students (per session, across all sessions) • Attendance by individual students (per session, across all sections) • Assignment submission (formative assessment): – Date assignment received – Date assignment marked – Date on which marked assignments are returned to students – Reasons for delay in receiving assignments from students • Assignment results (formative assessment): – Individual assignment results – Group assignment results
Student complaints	• What are the most common complaints? • What is the complaint response rate?	• Nature of the complaint. • Name of the person recording the complaint. • Date of complaint. • Action taken. • Date when the action was taken.

(Source: Managing Students Records in Distance Education; A Topical Start-Up Guide to Distance Education Practice and Delivery, Commonwealth of Learning, Knowledge Series, 2005).

Check Your Progress 3

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

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

Provide reasons as to why effective record management system is imperative for ODL systems?

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2.3.2 Managing Data Pertaining to Academic Counsellors/ Tutors

In most ODL institutions, data collection systems are not always centralized. They have different databases for different activities, which later need to be integrated. For example at NAMCOL (Namibian College of Open Learning) the student record system is integrated with the management information system. This facilitates easy collation and access to data by both staff and researchers.

Freeman (1997) describes six categories of student records, which are:

- i) Course information – static (i.e. known information – when the course starts) and dynamic (i.e. any changes as the course is delivered).
- ii) System information – allocation of work and organizing it.
- iii) Learner information – static (i.e. learner details at the time of enrolment) and dynamic (i.e. changes to the learner during the course)
- iv) Learner progress information – details of learner performance
- v) Tutor performance information – communication on the tutor's comment and marking (grading)
- vi) Summative information – overall results of the course, results for the tutors' groups evaluative feedback from the learners.

Table 2.3 describes the type of information the academic counsellors/tutors require in ODL systems.

Table 2.3: Phases of Tutor Involvement and their corresponding information needs

S. No.	Stage	Examples of Information Needs
1.	Recruitment	• Course contents • Tutor role • Commitment required, e.g. when tutors have to be available to learners • Tutor development and support system
2.	Induction	• Course materials – the chance to become familiar with them • Qualification details • Mentor system – how it works • Learner system, e.g. how learner get materials. what work they do; how they submit work • The tutor system e.g. how to contact learners; how process learners' work
3.	Tutor development	These skills are imparted as required for an ODL system • The tutors would be experts in their subjects and competent face to face tutors.
4.	Supporting learners	• Details of learners : demographic, workplace, special needs • Changes to course to qualification assessment systems • Learner progress details • Changes in learner status, e.g. change of address, withdrawn from a course
5.	Course review	• A record of the final performance of each learner • A summative record of the tutor's performance e.g. range of marks awarded, average mark awarded • Summary of the learner feedback on (a) course (b) tutor

(Source: Freeman, R (1997) Managing Open Systems,. Pg. 63-64).

When tutors are scattered over many places as e.g. in the case of IGNOU, management of provision of information becomes very challenging. Freeman (1997) describes a successful data management system as a balance of various factors for providing the information. These factors are:

- Balance between static and dynamic information in the system e.g. print is more suitable for static and computers for dynamic information.
- Depending urgency of the information needed – post will take longer than fax message or e-mail.
- The extent of labour provided by the organization, managing paper based systems of information are more labour intensive.
- Storage space available in the organization.
- Types of computer systems available with the organization.
- Access to computers and fax of tutors/counsellors

An innovative method of data management is being practiced at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The two major initiatives were undertaken by the Regional Services Division (RSD) at IGNOU and focused on:

- i) Web-based monitoring of academic counseling and assignment evaluation.
- ii) Maintenance of online database of academic counselors.

The learner support centres perform two major activities i.e. academic counseling and assignment evaluation. An information base of these two activities is crucial for effective management of support services. Also, since 60% of the budget for regional centres is spent on counseling and assignment work; it is important to know their status, for monitoring and feedback. The data pertaining to academic counseling, assignment received and evaluated per week at the study centre is directly uploaded at the server in the IGNOU Headquarters. It can be accessed at the URL: <http://www.ignou.ac.in/divisions/rsd/counseling/search.asp>

IGNOU also maintains a web-based online database of academic counselors, engaged at all the learner support centres, spread throughout the country. Owing to the large scale expansion of the university and diversification of its support services network, an urgent need was felt to develop online software to keep track of the academic counselors. Details of these counselors can be accessed at the following URL, which is on the IGNOU server: <http://www.ignou.ac.in/divisions/rsd/rcdata/login.asp>

The results of maintaining such online databases, has been successful. Data is now available about the number of counseling sessions held course wise and number of students who attend these sessions from the allotted number. The faculty at the Headquarters also benefits from such data as they can plan training of counselors in their programmes and plan other academic activities (NCIDE Report, IGNOU, 2009).

2.3.3 Data Management of Assessment Systems

Most open and distance learning systems are assessing their learners. Management of assessment process and relevant information is a stupendous exercise. Freeman (1997) lists four aspects of an assessment which directly influences, how its can be effectively managed. These are:

i) Format of assessment

The types/designs of assessment can be of the following types:

- a) Tutor marked assignments
- b) Computer marked assignments
- c) Closed book examinations
- d) Open book examinations
- e) Portfolio based assessments

ii) Time of the test

- a) At a time fixed by the organization
- b) On demand

iii) **Frequency of assessments**

- a) Only once in a cycle
- b) Limited number of times
- c) As many times as the learner wishes to

iv) **Quantum of assessment to be taken**

- a) All assessment on one occasion
- b) Take it in parts, at their own pace
- c) Resist/Reappears in the unsuccessful parts

Let us examine management of information of some assessment activities:

Management of Assignments Data

The issues that need to be considered are:

- Provision of clear-cut guidelines to tutors for assessment of assignments
- Marking/Grading guidelines should be provided
- Provision of suitable feedback forms for – counselors learners and learner centre coordinators
- Timetable clearly stating the schedule/time of submission, evaluation and data compilation timeframes.
- Clear rules and guidelines to deal with request from learners regarding extension of deadlines and appeals on awards, i.e. grades on marks.
- Information to learner about their marks scored and updating of their records.
- Guidelines to be provided for assessment of practical/skill based assignments.

Management of Projects

Many programmes require the learner to undertake project work which is a research activity. The performance of the learner in the project activity is assessed from the report submitted in fulfillment of that course often along with a viva-voce. Many programmes at IGNOU involve a project component, e.g. the computer programme – BCA, MCA, Management – MBA, Education – PGDHE, etc. the project reports in some programmes are required to be submitted at the Regional Centres and in some at the central evaluation units at the Headquarters. Due to high enrolments in such programmes, compilation of information, its management, effective utilization in organization of support activities is a major challenge. An innovation in this area has been undertaken by S. Mishra and G. Mythili of STRIDE, IGNOU. They have developed an online system “Web based environment of evaluation of project reports”. It is a software tool for evaluation of ES-320, a course in one of the IGNOU programmes. Some innovative features of this tool are:

- Automatic allotment of project report to evaluators
- Automatic updating of student record and feedback
- Online evaluator authentication

The software is placed at the following URL on the IGNOU server:
<http://learnerprojects.ignou.ac.in/>

This system can be used for project report submission in other IGNOU programmes also. Since the reports are digitally available, a lot of physical space is saved as also logistical and administrative efforts are spared. It can also facilitate development of online library of project reports which can check plagiarism, mass copying and duplicacy of efforts.

Information on Assessment

Assessment systems in ODL differ markedly from those in a face-to-face setup. The differences are:

- i) The academic counselor/tutor do not design the assessment items/questions. They need to be informal as much as learners do.
- ii) The learners and tutors are dispersed which increases the risk of misunderstandings, and hence necessitates a carefully designed information system.

Table 2.4: Tutor and Learner information needs on assessment

	Type of Information	Examples of Information Content
1)	Information on the assessment process	• How many items have to be done • When the items can be started • When are they to be submitted • To whom these items have to be submitted • How they should be submitted, e.g. would be processed • Other documents required e.g. an assessment form
2)	Information on the assessment tasks	For each assessment • Purpose of task • Task details • Format (including length) of the answer • Marking criteria • Answers (for tutors only)
3)	Information on the results of a given assessment	For each assessment • Marks/Grades awarded • Explanation for how to interpret the mark/Grades – a conversion chart • Explanations of reappearing and appeal systems
4)	Information on the overall assessment results	• Print out of results to date • List if items still due for submission • Advice/Implications of results so far

[Source: Freeman R, (1997): Managing Open System, pg-106]

The first aspect deals with information on the overall assessment process, including the number and types of assessment process and procedures for submitting them. The second row deals with aspects of information on each assessment item. The third and fourth aspects give information on the learners' progress and keep learners updated about their correct records being reflected in the databases. Freeman (1997) observes that such assessment information is best provided through computer printouts from the headquarters, where all data is integrated. The result is officially recorded and learners can also challenge it if they consider it to be wrong. In large systems, such information is generated through computer managed systems [Freeman, 1997].

2.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN LEARNER SUPPORT

You will agree that the quality of any education system is dependent on many factors, both internal and external. Similarly the quality of an ODL system also varies since it is also the resultant of a variety of factors. For example – the resources (physical and human) available, the level of skills and expertise of its workers, the type of leadership, the communication system developed and its management and also the efficiency of the administrative systems. These systems are geared to achieve highest standards of quality within their realms of operation, so as to achieve a level of quality equivalent to the convention (Robinson, 1995). The ODL institutions though undergoing rapid expansion, that too beyond national boundaries, have yet to convince all stakeholders about the equivalence, if not supremacy of the ODL system to its conventional counterpart. Hence a lot of effort is being put in by the ODL institutions to promote quality assurance as an important tool for building public confidence. Many frameworks have been developed nationally and internationally to regulate and guide quality assurance programmes and some toolkits have also been developed for the purpose. However these are more prescriptive in nature as they are based on inferences drawn by the regulatory bodies and ODL providers. The need is to develop frameworks for quality assurance that evolve with respect to the learner behaviours and experiences. One quality assurance strategy cannot be uniformly applicable to all types of ODL institutions. The concept and philosophy of ODL requires that the process of developing quality assurance frameworks should be flexible and evolutionary, rather than prescriptive (Mannan, A., 2005).

Let us first examine the concept of quality in the context of education in general and in ODL system in particular. Quality as a concept concerns itself with issues of effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. Green and Harvey (1993) consider the following criteria for quality in education:

- Exceptionally high standards
- Perfection and consistency (zero defects)
- Fitness for purpose (meeting stated objectives)
- Transformation capabilities
- Value for money

However since ODL operates on the principles of division of labor and operating in a more systematic and self-conscious manner, the above criteria are applicable, albeit more vigorously to all elements, i.e., to:

- curriculum design, content and organization
- teaching, learning and assessment
- student progression and assessment
- student support and guidance

A high level of quality can be assured by following a three-pronged approach: a mechanism of internal quality assurance; evaluation by peers and accreditation by an independent and competent organization. The concept of quality is thus complex, value laden. It is a constantly evolving dynamic entity, subject to continual re-examination and re-interpretation (Robinson, 1995).

2.4.1 Quality Indicators

Generally the quality in ODL is judged by the quality of its learning materials – print and non-print. But you will agree that the enterprise of learning through ODL involves all learning experiences in totality that is provided to the learners. The course provider needs to ensure that proper learning conditions are provided. For this all the systems and sub-systems like course product, delivery and student support systems are well integrated. A framework for management of quality in an ODL system is provided by Robinson (1995). All these aspects have to be considered for ensuring quality. Whether it is the products, (e.g. course materials) or processes, (e.g. delivery of these materials to learners). The framework takes into account:

- **Products** – The instructional materials, i.e. print and non-print (media materials), output in terms of enrolled learners, pass percentage, skills and competencies acquired.
- **Services** – Registration of learners, guiding and advising learners, tutoring, counseling through feedback on assignment, providing support during the course, career advice and efficient management of the learner support centres.
- **Operational processes** which support the above i.e. delivery mechanisms, record keeping, scheduling, warehousing and stock control and quality assurance procedures.
- **Philosophy of the institution** reflected through its policy and mission statements, culture and ethos of the organization, mottos such as 'Education at your doorstep', 'reaching the unreached' as in IGNOU. Work culture and staff attitudes and their commitment levels affect the quality of services provided.

Quality Assurance Approach for Managing Quality in an ODL Institution

According to Robinson (1995), most of the approaches adopted for managing quality in an ODL system are developed from business and industry. For example quality control, quality assurance and total quality management. All approaches are focused on achieving desired standards of performance for all activities.

Let us examine quality assurance as an approach for ensuring quality in the educational context. Quality assurance “is the set of activities or procedures that an organization undertakes to ensure that standards are specified and specified and reached consistently for a product or service” (Robinson, 1995). This implies that reliable systems need to be created so that errors in the conductor operation are minimized. Quality control, on the other hand, looks at the products and progresses in retrospect. In this approach the non-performing or defective products are discarded. However both approaches cannot be taken in isolation, but in a more holistic manner along with assessment of the quality systems for total quality management.

Freeman, R. (1997) explains quality assurance as an approach for quality management. According to this approach the organization should identify the main processes and determine the devices for doing these, i.e. use of flowcharts and defined standards. The organization must have mechanisms in place to check whether the determined methods and procedures are being adhered to, i.e. monitoring systems and checks, i.e. audit systems should be established. The flow of activity in such a quality assurance approach is depicted in Figure 2.3.

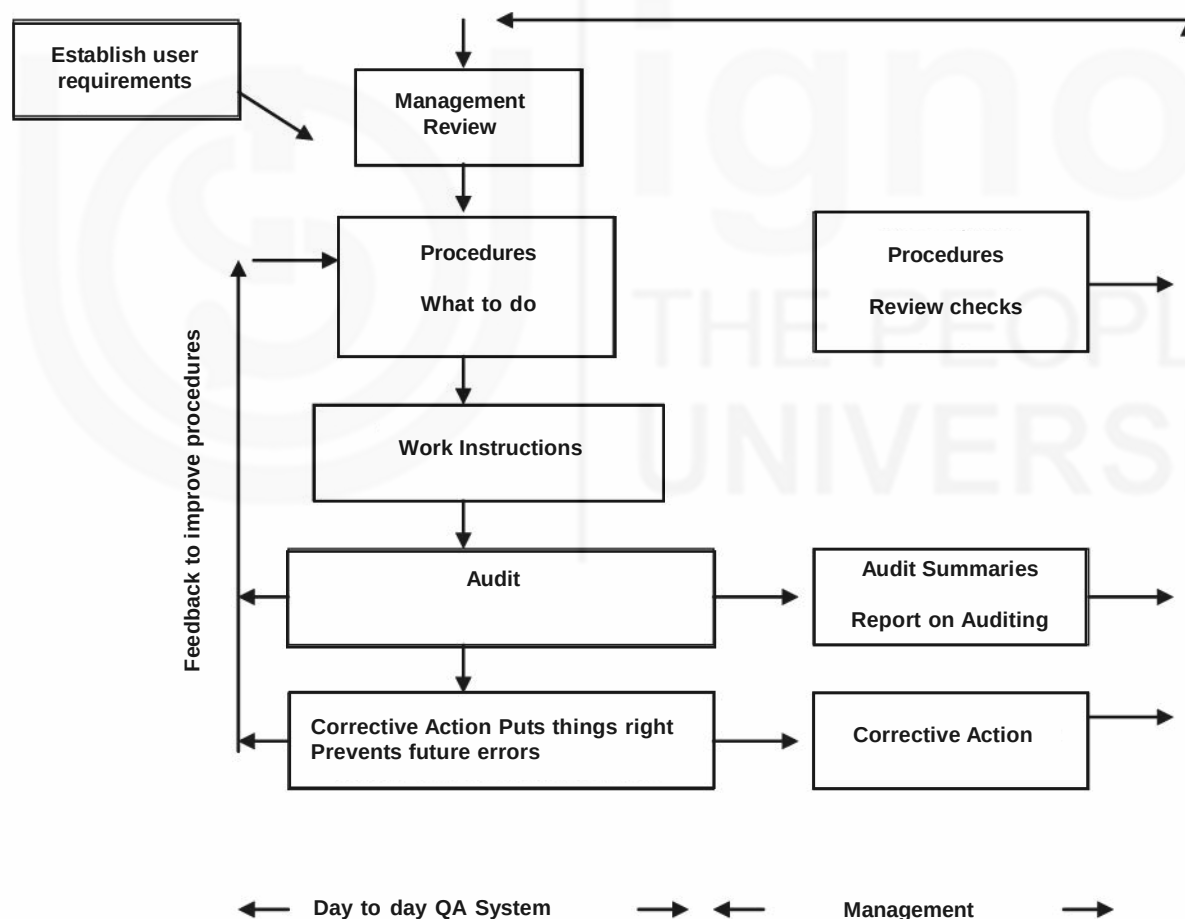


Fig. 2.3: Outline of a Quality Assurance System

[Source: Freeman, R. (1997): Managing Open Systems, p132]

The figure spells out those aspects of management when implementing such a system. These are:

- Clearly established user requirements e.g. the expectations of learners and employers.

- Listing out the main processes adopted by the organization, i.e., answering queries – pre-course and post-course enquiries, material production processes and academic counselling and tutoring. Based on these developing procedural codes and norms so that the best way of doing these may be practiced. This results in documents where procedures along with work instructions are detailed and compiled as documents.
- Data retrieval mechanism should be in place for effective management of learner support. ODL systems have to manage vast amount of information ranging from academic to non-academic aspects of learner support. The data pertain to students, i.e., their admissions, instructional components and their delivery, assessment and certification. Since the ODL systems cater to large number of students, data has to be stored and organized in an appropriate manner. This will ensure retrieval of correct information from the vast database whenever there is a query by the users. Data can be managed in a static and/or dynamic manner. Static data involves management which requires more physical labor and storage space, for example, keeping award lists in all courses of study for all learners, or student records/admission forms with relevant documents. Use of latest technologies, like web based management; on-line methods constitutes dynamic management of data/information using latest computer software packages. A sound data storage and retrieval system is instrumental in achieving optimum levels of quality assurance in organizing support services for distance learners.
- A monitoring or check mechanism, called 'audit' is put in place to investigate that the established procedures are being adhered to.
- A mechanism for corrective action is in place so that the institution learns from failures by rectifying the areas and following right procedures.
- Evaluating the system through a process of management review for changing the existing processes if required and adopting new ones to enable the growth and evolution of the institution.
- Many organizations have considered such an approach, but in ODL it has not been very successful. This is primarily due to the intangible nature of the teaching learning process, which cannot be defined through fixed procedures (Freeman, R, 1997). Quality assurance systems, particularly in the context of managing learner support, need to focus on operational processes in a way that is based on a review of existing practices. For example –
- Standards are set for a product or service, for instance setting the turn-around time for students' assignment works, providing the correct information to students about choice of courses etc.
- The development of a product or service is organized so that the desired standards are met.
- As a consequence reliable and consistent procedures for essential action have to be developed.

However, quality assurance procedures are generally difficult to implement in the ODL systems, because even simple problems can pose difficulty in resolving it. It also requires a shift in organization

culture. This should not deter institutions from adopting quality assurance procedures, for they will be poorer by not adopting them. Let us examine some common (though avoidable) failures encountered in the ODL system.

- Students write to the local centre to which they are attached for non-receipt of study materials. After not receiving any response, the student travels several hundred miles to enquire personally about the status of material dispatch. Often the student may collect the materials from the local centre during the visit or may be even return without the material. Reasons for the latter may be non-receipt of the relevant material by the local centre from the production unit, or could be some bottleneck in the processing of admission records, data entry errors etc.

A key concept in quality assurance here is to adopt a client-centred approach. This implies placing the learner first and not last while designing procedures and services. It is important that the internal processes of a system are well regulated and managed so that the blame game does not become a practice.

In the case illustrated above, even though the course materials are well designed, but failure in timely delivery to the learner will directly impact learner achievement and indirectly the attainment of the institutional goals and objectives.

It will be worthwhile at this point to examine the considerations for quality assurance in student support provided by the COL (2005). These are:

- Performance standards should be established and practices adopted for redress of student problems and these to be documented.
- The nature and content of student and staff record should be documented and easily tracked for which responsibilities need to be assigned.
- Procedures must be put in place to monitor various activities, e.g., student registration, material dispatch, academic counseling etc. Standards of performance need to be specified owing to differences in the type of services to a heterogeneous target group.
- Policy, procedures and timelines for assignment submission and return. Tracking, monitoring and reporting processes are to be established.
- Standards to be set up to communicate, monitor and track student access to their tutors.
- The standards for the support services, i.e., location, scope, standards of service and accessibility to be specified.
- Standards for examinations include procedures of scheduling, notification, administration and general conditions of examinations. All norms and procedures to be clearly provided, i.e., will all ODL students require to appear for the exam, who will invigilate, will external invigilators be taken?
- Periodic monitoring and review to be scheduled against specified performance indicators.

Check Your Progress 2

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

What are the quality indicators in the ODL system?

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2.4.2 Quality Assurance Criteria: Case Studies

Let us discuss a few selected examples of institutions which have established criteria for QA in student support services.

- **Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)**

India is one of the few countries of the world to have a separate agency for coordinating and monitoring standards of ODL in the country. It has established the Distance Education Council (DEC) as a separate QA body for the purpose. The DEC has drawn up comprehensive guidelines for QA in ODL. The criteria suggested for student support are:

- Timely dispatch of course materials
- Training of tutors and counselors in methods of student support
- Timely delivery of multimedia packages to learner centres
- Quality of regular tutorial and counselling sessions
- Timely feedback on assignments
- Timely response to student queries
- Feedback to students on their performance and progress
- Facilitation of peer group interaction

- **Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK)**

Student support activities at OUHK include tutorial support through part time tutors provided by, optional face to face tutorials, available telephone support, and online instructional support through e-mail, discussion boards and asynchronous chat. QA criteria include:

- The Course Coordinators visits to monitor the tutorial sessions.
- Review of a sample of evaluated assignments.
- Feedback received from students
(Jung, 2005)

- **Open University of Malaysia (OUM)**

OUM is the first open university of Malaysia and a private one. It faces the challenge of providing educational products, experiences and results meeting standards of established quality at par with the public conventional universities. OUM has thus adopted a customer centric

strategy to provide quality services and products. The QA criteria focus on:

- Since it is heavily dependent on tutors' performance, it operates through a 'Lead Tutor' system where a senior tutor supports and guides the new tutors in face-to-face and online pedagogy.
- Online services such as online interactions, MS ISO 9000:2001 certified digital library and email based supports are provided.
- Extensive training is provided to the tutors.
- Assessment of tutor performance by learners and Learning Centre administrators.
- Best practice standards are identified in ODL management through benchmarking visits to renowned international open universities.
- Well-developed procedures for courseware development. e.g. market survey before developing an academic programme to ensure its viability (www.oum.edu.my)

2.4.3 Learner Charters

This is also what Simpson (2002) describes as 'quality breakdown'. He attributes this failure to 'organizational weaknesses' and 'staff problems'. There is need for the institution to be empathic with the student and staff. If the system examines the failures from the students' perspective it is important to explore the expectations of the students, i.e. what is it that they will expect. Developing, 'student charters' or 'learner charters' is one way of doing it. The charter will provide some guidelines for what students can and should expect. For example, examine the extracts from the draft charter of UKOU (excerpted from Simpson, 2002):

"For you as an OU student we will endeavor to provide:

- 1) Face-to-face, phone and correspondence tuition appropriate to your needs in both method and content;
- 2) Correspondence tuition including return of assignments within four weeks of the due date and appropriate comment which explains the grade and offers adequate feedback to enable you to improve your future assignments....."

Students will have clarity in their minds about what services they can expect from the institution. It also encourages them, to become assertive, lodge complaints and question the institution in case of poor services provided.

A Framework for quality assurance is provided by Simpson (2002) which is not an all time structure for all institutions. The structure is suggestive and not prescriptive and is applicable in some measure to all ODL institutions. In this Framework Simpson has raised 21 questions pertaining to different aspects of learner support. The questions under each aspect are summarized below:

Support Activities

- 1) System for dealing with student queries using all communication media.

- 2) Provision for accurate and speeding response without delay.
- 3) A practice mechanism for reaching out to disadvantaged learners.
- 4) Availability of reasonable choice of media for all learners to ensure their participation.
- 5) Policy of equal opportunities for all learners regardless of physical and mental needs.
- 6) Provision of timely support, especially at the beginning and end of course.

Support Staffing

- 7) Appropriate and clear staff selection procedures.
- 8) Staff development programme in practice for all staff involved in student support.
- 9) Provision of an interactive platform for student support staff to reflect and give feedback.
- 10) Good ongoing support for staff, which implies good communication and feedback to and from the institution, commitment to support staff as they support students.
- 11) Supportive rather than punitive mechanisms to deal with staff problems.
- 12) Regular facilitation of staff to be empathetic and be aware of students' problems.

Materials

- 13) Materials to cover students' problems and issues by and large.
- 14) Characteristic features of empathy for students being incorporated in them and a readability check done.

Supporting students in practice (What the institution looks like to students)

- 15) Is it friendly and approachable or inaccessible?
- 16) Enrolment procedures, easy or difficult to follow?
- 17) After enrolments how much time do you take to feel part of the institution?
- 18) Is the sense of isolation overcome once the course starts?
- 19) Is there support provided if the student wavers or feels diffident after course commencement.
- 20) Appropriate mechanism to support a failed or dropout student.
- 21) Provision of monitoring systems at the macro level (progress through entire programme) and micro level (progress through each module or one course).
- 22) Did students get all the support they needed at the desired time within the resources available? If not where did the system fail them? How will the system reinforce and rectify the failures?

These are the indicators/benchmarks of quality assurance which can help to improve the quality of functioning of an ODL provider. Approaches however need to be context specific, though institutional goals may be common especially in the context of learner support i.e. timely delivery of materials, timely evaluation of assignments and return to the learners for timely feedback, providing access to support and advice for students. It is also important to remember the limitations of quality assurance. Limitations should also focus on making their vision clear to the staff about the factors that constitute good quality learning, the conditions that forfeit learning and the assessment of this learning.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you read about the following concepts pertaining to the management of support services in an ODL system:

- Different types of learner support required in an ODL system.
- A framework to identify the components of learner support that need proper management.
- Various activities and operations to be performed by these components and their management for effective student support.
- Procedures involved for decision making so as to evolve a cost effective mechanism of learner support which is the main attraction in an ODL set up.
- Management and organization of human resource, i.e., issues in organization of tutoring/counseling/mentors/group work.
- Methods of providing academic and non academic support by the institutions through a well developed communications system and a strong monitoring mechanism.
- Data Management.
- Quality assurance as an approach for managing quality in an ODL system for which an outline was developed.
- Focusing on learners' needs and expectations for learner support as there is need to draw up a learner charter.
- Some quality indicators or benchmarks were described to attain a minimum level of achievement.

2.6 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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2.7 FEEDBACK TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

Check Your Progress 1

Non-academic support as described by Simpson comprises of:

- 1) Advising, i.e. giving information, listening to problems, suggesting possible course of action/directions, enabling learners to take decisions.
- 2) Assessing the non-academic aptitudes and skills and giving feedback to the individual in this regard.
- 3) Action in the form of practical help to facilitate study.
- 4) Advocacy as in making provisions for funding, recommendations, references.
- 5) Agitation so as to manage changes within the institution for the students' benefit and
- 6) Administration for organizing the student support.

Check Your Progress 2

Organizations can facilitate functioning of peer groups in the following ways:

- Tutors can identify the activity which will be usefully performed through group work
- Meeting place can be arranged for such groups
- Guidelines to set up and maintain self help groups can be published
- If computer facilities are available, arrangements can be made for meeting online.

Check Your Progress 3

Some of the reasons that make an effective record management system imperative for ODL systems are:

- Keep track of learner's progress as a whole and also that of

individual learners.

- Maintain continuity irrespective of change of personnel
- Assist academic counsellors/tutors in organization of tutoring
- Compare courses, tutors, learners, sexes and years
- Analyse data of particular age cohorts of learners, so as to identify emerging trends
- Facilitate ongoing planning process
- Have a historical proof of tasks undertaken
- Facilitate research
- Give feedback to all stakeholders – learners, tutors, planners, administrators, faculty etc.
- Monitor and evaluate the system.

Check Your Progress 4

Generally the quality in ODL is judged by the quality of its learning materials – print and non-print. Hence, the systems and sub-systems like course product, delivery and student support systems are integrated for management of quality in an ODL system. The framework which indicates quality takes into account:

- **Products** – The instructional materials, i.e. print and non-print (media materials), output in terms of enrolled learners, pass percentage, skills and competencies acquired.
- **Services** – Registration of learners, guiding and advising learners, tutoring, counseling through feedback on assignment, providing support during the course, career advice and efficient management of the learner support centres.
- **Operational processes** which support the above i.e. delivery mechanisms, record keeping, scheduling, warehousing and stock control and quality assurance procedures.
- **Philosophy of the institution** reflected through its policy and mission statements, culture and ethos of the organization, mottos such as 'Education at your doorstep', 'reaching the unreached' as in IGNOU. Work culture and staff attitudes and their commitment levels affect the quality of services provided.

UNIT 3 MONITORING LEARNERS' PROGRESS

Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Learning Outcomes
- 3.2 Attrition: Conceptual Analysis
 - 3.2.1 Attrition Models
 - 3.2.2 Causes of Attrition
 - 3.2.3 Types of Attrition
- 3.3 Factors Contributing to Distance Learner's Achievement (Success)
 - 3.3.1 Background of Learners
 - 3.3.2 Motivation Levels
 - 3.3.3 Study Pattern
 - 3.3.4 Institutional Commitment
- 3.4 Measures to Reduce Attrition
 - 3.4.1 Pre-admission Counseling
 - 3.4.2 Student Induction
 - 3.4.3 Faculty and Staff Development
 - 3.4.4 Student Tracking
 - 3.4.5 Identifying at Risk Learners
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 References and Further Readings
- 3.7 Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is not simply acquiring knowledge. Education is holistic in nature which not only provides knowledge but also brings about personality change in learners. A good curriculum, therefore, not only covers the content, but also the means by which the content can be transacted and assimilated in a most congenial and interactive environment. You are aware that the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system uses pre-packaged study materials to provide instruction to learners who have limited opportunities to interact with their teachers and peer learners as compared to their counterparts studying in conventional face to face classroom mode. Studying at a distance, therefore, is very demanding as distance learners have to study on their own without much opportunity for interaction and immediate feedback.

In this unit we will try to find out why some learners successfully study through distance mode while others do not. We will also examine the causes of student attrition, categorize the types, and throw light on some well known models of attrition. We shall also discuss the factors that contribute to learner success and the measures that can be adopted for student persistence. The discussion in this unit is based on the inferences drawn from the empirical research studies conducted at some of the Open Universities across the globe.

We hope that this unit would be of particular interest to you as it will give you an insight into the issue of learners' progress and will probably help you in managing student dropout.

3.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this unit you will be able to:

- Identify the factors that contribute to student withdrawal and lead to attrition;
- List the factors that influence achievement and course completion;
- Explain some well known attrition models;
- Describe the types of attrition; and
- Discuss the methods for reducing attrition.

3.2 ATTRITION: CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

First of all, let us try to understand what is learner retention (success) and learner attrition (dropout)? Learner retention refers to a learner's successful completion of a programme without dropping out in between or at all from the programme. On the other hand, the learner attrition means those learners who could not complete their programmes successfully because of low grades or those who dropped out in between for certain reasons that we will be discussing in this unit. Learner retention and learner attrition are often said to be two sides of the same coin or can be viewed as two sides of the same research question. Studies report that dropout rates are higher and course completion rates are lower for distance education courses compared to face to face learning. Why is this so? High completion rates primarily depend upon the motivation level of the learners. The higher the motivation level the greater is the success. Of course, there are other factors that contribute to course completion too, such as 'good' learning materials and delivery system, and strictly observed deadlines. Several studies have been conducted to find out the reasons for learner success. In fact some researchers have even developed models of learner attrition.

Distance education has been able to attract not only a large number of learners but also a very heterogeneous group of learners, including those who have been deprived of educational opportunities and those who are first generation learners. In fact ODL institutions, particularly open universities have made specific efforts to reach out to the deprived sections of society. With regard to open universities it may also be necessary to review the admission policy. Open admissions policy gives everyone the freedom to join a course/programme at the university level, even though they may not have the basic necessary educational background, even though such numbers may be small. Since such learners have not been through the structured and vertically moving learning, it is therefore expected that many such learners may not complete their programmes/courses successfully. Open universities also give the freedom to all its learners to take more than one programme at a time and follow a modular approach towards programme completion. It is difficult to find out whether a learner has dropped out from a course, a programme or the institution because

learners have the freedom to finish one course or module and can leave with interim qualifications such as certificates, diplomas or just course credits and be “successful” in their own terms. Many a times they can move to another institution to complete their learning or can take as many years/semesters off as they like and yet complete their programme of study as a learner has the freedom to complete his/her programme in the maximum period allotted. Even if a learner has not completed a programme in the maximum period allotted, he/she has the option to re-admit and carry forward his/her previous credits earned. The maximum period varies from 2-6-8-10 years depending upon the nature and level of the programme. Thus, several factors are critical for successful completion or non-completion of a distance education programme.

Having done the conceptual analysis of the factors leading to attrition, let us now look at some well known models of attrition.

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

What is meant by learner attrition?

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3.2.1 Attrition Models

You may be aware that the issue of retention came to the fore only in the second half of the twentieth century when non-completion of a programme came to be viewed as failure on part of the learners. Most of the research studies done are of conventional campus student progress, particularly in the United States. Attrition has been looked upon as a reflection of individual learner’s lack of attributes, skills and motivation. In the 1970s researchers brought a new dimension to this issue by focusing on the environment and in particular the role of institution that had an impact on learner’s success. One of the earliest propounders of this new line of thinking was Tinto (1975).

Student Integration Model of Tinto (1975)

The most commonly referred model of learner retention/attrition is Tinto’s Student Integration Model. According to Tinto’s model, a learner persists (continues learning till completion of a programme) or drops out (in-between without completion of a programme) by their degree of academic integration and social integration. Tinto’s theory basically asserts the matching between the learner’s motivation and academic ability and the institution’s academic and social characteristics that shape the underlying commitments i.e. commitment to an educational goal and commitment to remain with the institution. It is a longitudinal model that asserts primary factors related to learner withdrawal, which are the personal characteristics of the learner and the nature of the learner’s interaction with the institution over different periods and the most critical period is the first year of college.

Tinto's model is influenced by Spady's (1971) research, who found an analogy between committing suicide and dropping out of school as in both instances a person leaves a social system. The French philosopher Durkheim (1961) had found that some people committed suicide because they lacked the values of the social system in which they participated and because they were not supported by a group of friends. Tinto borrowed Spady's use of Durkheim's two postulates to identify the concepts of academic and social integration.

A major gap in Tinto's theory has been the role of internal factors in shaping perceptions and commitments. There are variables that prevent attrition other than institutional ones such as parental support, the ability to pay which are variables external to the institution. This was a rather narrow treatment of learner's personal characteristics. Hence in 1993, Tinto revised his model, which has been discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

Student Attrition Model of Bean (1980)

The model propounded by John Bean was quite similar to Tinto's original model but Bean included environmental variables (external factors outside the college) that might affect retention and learner's intentions, an important factor of student retention. Bean asserts that learner's background variables, particularly high school educational experiences, educational goals and family support influence the learner's behaviour and attitude towards his/her interaction with the college or university. The learner's interaction with the college/institution influences the learner to develop a set of attitudes towards himself or herself as a learner towards the institution. Further his/her academic capability indicated by grades obtained and the loyalties to the institution are the pull factors that determine a student's persistence.

Conceptual Model of Non-Traditional Attrition of Bean and Metzner (1985)

In 1985 Bean and Metzner developed a model of learner retention for non-traditional learners based on Tinto's model, which reduced the emphasis on social integration factors since non-traditional learners (working persons, older age group persons, adults, etc.) have less interaction with others on campus as compared to traditional as well as residential learners.

They determined that non-traditional learners are distinguished from their traditional counterparts by their intense academic and vocational orientation to college. Therefore, according to this research, the traditional social environment of the campus is as important as the academic offerings. Interaction with faculty and peers are not of the same duration and intensity and therefore differ in their influence on attrition. Consequently, outside encouragement, from family and community, appear to replace on-campus support as a key to retention.

Social Integration Model of Tinto (1993)

Tinto developed a sociological model that emphasizes on "the actions of the various actors in the collegiate environment, such as students, faculty and staff" (Tinto, 1993, p122) and analyzed how their interactions form social and academic communities in higher education institutions. This revised theory of Tinto was influenced by Van

Genep's (1960) social anthropological study of the rites of passage in tribal societies. This social integration model of successful integration into collegiate communities corresponds to Van Genep's concept of incorporation, which is the ability for individuals to take on new patterns of interaction with members of the new group and to establish themselves in that group. Successful integration in the dominant (internal college) community and multiple (external) communities (such as family, neighborhood, office, etc.), increases learner persistence. If the external community is not conducive to the learner's commitment to attend college, he/she can be easily pulled away from the institution. Further membership in sub-groups of the college community also contributes to persistence.

Open Learning Model of Kember (1995)

Kember drew from Tinto's model and modified it to develop a model of drop-outs studying through distance mode. Kember's model rationally addressed a different target group and quite a different study situation in which learners have to study in isolation and have to integrate the demands of their courses with the demands of their families, employers and friends. Kember evolved his own *Open Learning Model* (1995) which like Tinto's model is an interpretation of two dimensions: academic and social entry characteristics, social interpretation and academic interpretation. Kember's model identified four key constructs: social integration, academic integration, external attribution, and academic incompatibility. Kember built these constructs, together with background characteristics, into a causal model of learner progress and then tested it using path analysis (Woodley, et al, 2001). However Kember's model of learner progress focused on adult learners studying at a distance who study part-time and are faced with social demands that they have to cope with alongside the academic demands. They are likely to be working, and to have family, and social commitments. According to Kember's model learners enter a course of study with a number of predetermined personal traits (e.g., gender, prior education and salary) which "guide" the learner down one or two tracks in the model i.e. the positive path or the negative path. Those learners with positive attributes will proceed down the positive path and will be better able to integrate socially and academically. In order to achieve social integration a learner would receive broad ranging support and encouragement from those who have an impact on their day-to-day lives. Academic integration in the model reflects the degree of affiliation between the learner and the course encompassing and all elements of contact between an institution and the learners whether these are of an academic, administrative or social nature. The learners who move through the study process on the negative path, will have difficulty in achieving social and academic integration and will be less likely to perform satisfactorily in their final grade point average score (GPA) (Woodley, 2003).

Kember's model also recognises that part-time learners usually take twice as long to complete a course of study compared to their full-time counterparts. Throughout this protracted study period the circumstances in a learner's life are likely to change. To accommodate the changing aspects of life, the model includes a re-cycling loop and a cost/benefit variable. The cost/benefit variable and re-cycling loop are of particular importance as the model is linear and learners pass through the model constantly. Some learners will ask themselves

whether all the study is worth the effort, and as long as the benefits outweigh the costs, the learner will continue to study.

Theoretical Model of Non-Traditional Student Attrition of Wylie (2004)

This conceptual model by Wylie has two critical processes which are sequential and causal namely; Pre-Enrolment Evaluation and Re-Evaluation and Disengagement factors. In his model Wylie considers the background variables identified in the Bean (1980) and Tinto (1975) namely that of age, gender, enrolment status, high school performance etc. In addition to background he has also considered other variables namely: Academic, Environmental, Course Utility and Self-worth which he hypothesized as the process of evaluation that the learner undertakes prior to course enrolment and participation. The depth of these evaluations will be different for every learner and the combination of influences of the many variables comprised in each of the five pre-course factors will also vary between individuals. These factors may also play a role in a learner's determination to withdraw, it is suggested that this occurs during a separate set of processes of re-evaluation, separation and disengagement. It is postulated that this action begins following their enrolment. Research suggests that it is at this time of transition into the study programme that the learner is most vulnerable to withdrawal as pointed out by Tinto (1993). The learner weighs the implications of withdrawal or persistence regarding the extent of negative outcomes on extrinsic aspects such as employment prospects and intrinsic factors such as self-esteem and self-efficacy.

After disengagement sets in the learner increases the distance/separation from his/her study commitment. During this period the learner creates a host of socially acceptable explanations for having dropped out of the programme of study, mostly citing factors external to their control (e.g. work demands, insufficient time for study, illness, financial difficulties, family demands) in order to salvage some self-esteem. Those who succeed prefer to point to internal causes in order to enhance their self-esteem (Kember, 1999, p.114, as quoted in Wylie, 2004). According to Wylie, studying the self-concept may be more valuable in identifying the vulnerable learner; and an appropriately designed intervention may reduce the significant number of dropouts. With the application of an appropriate intervention, the impact of the theorised cyclic pattern of disengagement from the study commitment may be averted.

A Review of the Models

The theories of retention of the 1990s were inadequate to deal with either specific populations or individual decisions. The economic and the cultural factors typical of sub-group of learners that may affect retention decisions were discussed in several articles, which were analyzed and published by John Braxton (2000) in *"Rethinking the Departure Puzzle; New Theory and Research on College Student Retention"*. Braxton has highlighted economic, social, psychological, organizational and interactional factors to explain the concept of retention. The economic influence on retention pertains to the ability to pay, family resources, student aid, etc. and how this investment will pay off in the future. Societal factors that influence retention focus on what kind and how many friends, a learner makes/has. Lack of campus activities, large class sizes and inadequate staff are some of the organizational

issues that affect retention. The level of maturity and psychological characteristics of the learners play an equally important role as do the interactions between the learner and the institution.

However, all the above mentioned models have been criticized in their tendency to generalize learners' needs and experiences without analyzing the combined or interactive effect of learner, institutional and other factors on persistence. This point can be explained with the help of an example. According to Astin (1993) peer group interaction promoting learner's involvement in the institution is one of the most potent influences on growth and development during undergraduate years. This could be true for a traditional age full time learner but would not be applicable to a non-traditional mature adult learner. This has however been dealt with in a relatively new model developed by Wylie (2004) in which he takes into account disparate attributes of non-traditional mature learners.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

List the well known models of Learner Attrition discussed in this unit and briefly describe their major postulates.

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3.2.2 Causes of Attrition

Keegan (1986) in his book "the Foundations of Distance Education" refers to certain "push" and "pull" factors responsible for off campus discontinuation. A "pull" factor is one which draws the distance learner away from the course, for example a change of employment or family commitments etc. A "push" factor relates to factors for which the institution is responsible such as poor quality materials, or delay in dispatch of materials which are within the parameters of the institution.

Several studies have been conducted on this very crucial aspect. The vast literature available in the form of books, articles in journals, edited books and conference proceedings dedicated to this theme have covered many aspects pertaining to discontinuance or non-completion of courses/programmes offered through distance mode.

Thus many of the studies on dropouts in distance education pertain to open universities. Given below are a few examples. If you are interested you can access these studies from the sources mentioned under references.

- The Open University, UK, Kennedy and Powell (1976)
- Athabasca University and Netherlands Open University – Powell (1991)
- The Fern Universitat – Peters (1992)

- Korea National Open University – Shin & Kim (1999)
- Open University of Hong Kong – Kember, et al (1991); Li. et al (2000); Jegede, et al (1999)
- Open Learning Agency – Sweet (1986)
- Athabasca University – Powell, et al (1990); May (1994)
- Indira Gandhi National Open University – Taplin (2000); Sivaswaroop (1999); Kumar (1999); Biswas (2001); Fozdar, et al, 2006; Srivastava (2007)
- Allama Iqbal Open University – Batool & Bakker (1997).

There are several reasons why students dropout, some of which have been discussed below based on the findings of the research studies quoted above.

i) *Workload*

Studying at a distance requires discipline and independent study. Distance learners are bound to exhibit differences in behaviour as the nature of studying at a distance varies according to their individual workloads interfaced with commitments. Lack of time management due to workload is a major cause of dropouts.

ii) *Family commitments*

Closely linked with workload is the issue of family commitments which add to the workload and create problems of insufficient time, which has been pointed by many researchers.

iii) *Health related/unexpected circumstances*

Another major negative factor specially is that of health or unexpected circumstances which may include death of a close one such as spouse/child, divorce, loss of job, change of job, etc. These unexpected circumstances could disrupt studies and lead to dropouts.

iv) *Negative Personality Traits*

It is equally true that discontinuance often results from personality traits of individual learners, which are outside the control of the institution. Researchers have quoted under confidence as one of the major reasons for dropping out. Lack of self discipline and fear of exams are also identified as prime factors for student attrition.

v) *Lack of Study Skills*

Distance learners are isolated as they lack immediate support of a teacher and are dispersed and separated physically from the institution as well as their peer group. Therefore they cannot get immediate clarification for the doubts that come up during the course of their study. Both traditional and non-traditional age group of learners who enroll in distance education may lack the basic reading, writing and mathematical skills required to pursue their studies at the college level either because they lacked these skills even in their high school days or because they had forgotten them due to passage of time. Mostly being adults with different roles to perform at their homes, offices, in their families, they have to coordinate different areas of their lives, which influence their studies.

vi) *Institutional Negligence*

In distance education settings technology is used through which both information and communication flow. Access to technology, being used for the delivery of instruction as well as support would also vary depending upon the background of the learners. Also, familiarity with its usage is yet another important factor which could either inhibit or foster communication between the teacher and the taught. There are several factors that can hamper or help in the process of learning. It is the responsibility of the institution to make the distance learners feel less isolated and more familiar with the system and adept with the usage of technology. The institution also has to ensure various access points and avenues for interaction and feedback for the learners with the institution and among themselves. In fact a committed facilitator (tutor-counsellor) can significantly reduce dropout by serving as a facilitator. Lack of feedback and proper support by a tutor counsellor led to dropouts. Also dissatisfaction with the course quality can have an adverse effect. Non-receipt of course materials on time can also demotivate distance learners.

vii) *Changed Goals*

Distance learners are a heterogeneous group, coming from diverse backgrounds and experiences, which affect their ability and willingness to participate in any educational endeavour. Distance learners generally have different motivational levels and goals too. Some of them are interested in obtaining a degree to qualify for better jobs or change their lives. Yet some may take courses to broaden their education and are not really interested in completing a degree. A change in motivation level or goal can easily make them discontinue the programme.

The above discussion reveals that learning at a distance is demanding and can lead to student attrition. Student attrition can be of different types that we shall examine in the next sub-section.

Check Your Progress 3

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

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

What are the three important reasons for attrition?

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3.2.3 Types of Attrition

You are aware that attrition is the opposite of retention. Learners who successfully complete each semester and progress through the entire duration of the programmes of study will be termed as successful learners or retained learners. On the other hand, learners who do not complete the programme of study would come under the category of attrition. There are so many circumstances that lead to such a situation which we have listed below:

- A learner who has not submitted any assignment or not sent in any work.
- A learner who does not fulfil some course requirements such as attending a residential programme/practical sessions that are compulsory.
- A learner who does not sit for the examination conducted by the institution.
- A learner who fails the assessment and does not succeed in completing the programme.
- A learner who has got himself/herself transferred from an institution where he/she had enrolled to another institution will become a dropout.
- A learner who leaves the institution for a while and returns within the valid period of his/her registration.
- A learner who leaves the institution abruptly and does not return to that institution and or to any other educational institution is a dropout.
- A learner who may slow down and who is on the rolls but is not pursuing his/her studies for whatever reasons.
- A learner who enrolls for a programme but chooses to complete only a few courses and not the entire programme. As per the institutional records he/she will be considered as a dropout.
- A learner, who quits the institution due to a particular reason but returns back to the institution and re-registers as his/her registration period is over, will also be a dropout.

Thus, a variety of situations would put the learner under the category of attrition, and term him/her as a dropout. Woodley (2003) has broadly classified them as “voluntary”, “involuntary”, “avoidable” and “unavoidable” dropouts.

Voluntary dropouts would be the learners who choose to leave as opposed to being dismissed by the institution. These would be learners who have changed their minds concerning the costs and benefits of further study. These would also include those learners who enrol in a programme with no intention of completing the assessment. They are studying out of interest and do not want/need to face the rigours of assignments and examinations.

Involuntary dropouts would be learners who are told by the institution that they cannot continue on a programme because their academic performance is not satisfactory or because they have infringed some regulation.

Unavoidable dropouts would be learners who due to some crisis might not be able to continue with their studies, such as a life-threatening illness, or financial crisis or they might have to deal with some major domestic or occupational crisis.

Avoidable dropouts are learners who have psychologically dropped out and have cut down on their studies because of which they are failing in the examinations and are not able to successfully complete the

course/programme and the dropout could have been avoided had the institution made special efforts to motivate the learners to continue their studies.

3.3 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DISTANCE LEARNER'S ACHIEVEMENT (SUCCESS)

Knowles (1980) in explaining the advantages of knowing the learner believes that learner's behaviour is influenced by a combination of learner's needs, plus the learner's situation and personal characteristics. There are several studies that have examined various aspects of studying at a distance that have contributed to learner success, which have been discussed below.

3.3.1 Background of Learners

Distance education places new demand on the learners as the competencies required for success in distance education are not quite the same as those needed for success in conventional campus-based education. The environments are different. The learning activities are different. Relationships are different. Thus many distance learners express a feeling of being cut off from their teachers and peer groups. They may also experience stress and frustration related to the using of unfamiliar technologies for interacting with the content as well as their peers and facilitators and the institution itself. All this greatly depends upon the background of the learners. The ability to study at a distance requires emotionally independent, self-directed learners. The learner's background characteristics, such as that of age, gender, level of formal education, are related to persistence, which has been established by the findings of various studies. In fact, the previous participation in a distance education programme proves to be more beneficial to a distance learner in coping with studying at a distance.

3.3.2 Motivation Level

Motivation is of utmost importance for achieving any kind of success. Determination and the will to succeed enables distance learners to complete their programmes of study. Motivation can be driven by various factors such as; vocational or academic or even social for that matter. Many distance learners pursue their studies with the objective of improving their academic qualification for career prospects or professional development or their looking for new employment opportunities or changing their career or profession. Another strong motivational factor is to improve personal life or social position.

3.3.3 Study Pattern

Distance learners develop their own study patterns, which may include: learning styles, study habits, study strategy i.e. planned study/ learning or regulated study, physical posture and study timings. As we know that learning styles vary, which can be classified under two broad categories; surface or deep approaches to study. Deep learners begin with an intention to understand the content and maintain a rigorous interaction with it, whereas surface learners' main intention is to complete the task requirements which are necessary for completion of a course, such as answering assignments and studying the content from the examination point of view. Learning may be surface or deep

and more or less successful depending upon learners' cognitive competencies and biases but above all motivation. It has also been found that distance learners succeed by working in groups.

It has also been found that studying in a separate room helped. Even physical posture plays an important role, specially, sitting upright. Regulated study or planned study proved to be crucial to success. Researchers have found a close link between learner success and study hours put in and also study timings.

3.3.4 Institutional Commitment

Institutions have responded to the needs of distance learners in three major areas, namely, instructional design, course delivery system and learner support services. High completion rates also depend on "good" learning materials and delivery system and strictly observed deadlines. Materials developed on the principles of instructional design not only build learning activeness in the materials and promote learning but also enable the learners to interact with the content. Materials that are readily available, on time and easy to use do have a positive impact on the learners and their learning outcomes.

Good outcomes can be attributed to the improved administrative services of the university (or DE institution) and close monitoring and guidance of the staff. In fact a few studies have stressed on the important role played in counseling and tutoring support in student success. It is the institutional responsibility to maintain interaction with the distance learners, which is definitely vital for student motivation and ultimately success. Also information about databases and library services is important to distance learner's self direction. Equally important are induction/orientation programmes for newly enrolled distance learners.

Check Your Progress 4

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

What are the factors that contribute to learner success?

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3.4 MEASURES TO REDUCE ATTRITION

From the discussion in the foregoing sections it is quite clear that the role of the institution in learner retention is vital. Ensuring the involvement or engagement of the learners particularly in the first year is the most crucial and critical. How to make this happen is the biggest challenge before educational institutions. Let us look at the measures that institutions should adopt to enhance student persistence. The institutional actions have to be multi-layered in order to be effective.

3.4.1 Pre-admission Counselling

It is important for institutions to provide pre-admission counselling at the time of admission to prospective learners to facilitate them in making the right choice of the programme of study. Learners should be able to identify their needs and set realistic goals at the time of registration. Pre-entry assessment is the first step to prevent dropout.

3.4.2 Student Induction

The next step is to arrange an induction into the system: to familiarize the newly entrants regarding their roles and responsibilities as distance learners. Also the institutional commitment should also be spelt out at such programmes. This would help learners make the social and academic transition to the new and possibly more challenging period of distance learning that they have chosen. A starter's kit or a Programme Guide developed for the newly enrolled learners will also serve the purpose.

3.4.3 Faculty and Staff Development

It is increasingly clear that faculty and staff actions are critical to institutional efforts in improving retention. The institutions need to invest in faculty and staff development programmes to enhance the introduction of varying curricular, pedagogical, evaluation and assessment practices that impact student learning (Tinto, 2005, Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

3.4.4 Collaborative Learning

We know that academic and social interaction creates involvement of the learners and this fosters persistence. It is therefore the responsibility of the educational institution to get learners actively involved by providing avenues for interaction and feedback, shared and collaborative learning. By asking learners to construct knowledge together, this would involve learners both socially and intellectually and in the jargon of the theories of retention and attrition promote academic and social integration.

3.4.5 Student Tracking

Besides creating learning communities through promotion of collaborative and shared learning, it is equally important to regularly review the progress of the learners. The institution should use definite measures to this end which in today's parlance is known as student tracking.

The check list for student tracking should include:

- i) Scheduling contact between the institution and the learners. Further ensuring that the schedules prepared are realistic and also providing alternatives to the learners to reschedule if necessary.
- ii) Formative assessment through assignments, seminars, workshops, logbooks, workbooks, etc. should be carried out. The assessment should be throughout the learning process and the feedback on assessment should be time bound and periodic through written comments.

- iii) Help desk services should be provided preferably round the clock 24x7. Replies provided should be accurate and definite and the approach should be problem solving.
- iv) Proactive measures could be adopted by alerting the learners about the forthcoming activities and events, the dates of submission for internal assessment attending counseling sessions etc. In fact the new ICT provides many such services and solutions for distance learners. For example: adopting an Learning Management System (LMS) platform can make learning resources and services accessible to all learners. Also the LMS will be able to follow the progress to the learners. The LMS learning manager memorizes the learner's actions and thus gives an extremely rich education data (time spent on each learning unit, number of attempts, data of last attempt, progress level, learner's answers etc.) for effectively monitoring learners' progress.

3.4.6 Identifying at Risk Learners

The educational institution should also have a mechanism for identifying at risk learners. This can be done only through regular monitoring of the learners' progress. The institution should be able to provide special academic assistance to learners who are not coping well with their studies which is reflected through their low grades/marks obtained in their formative assessment. Also the institution should establish special contact with the learners who are not on track which will be evident from their non-participation in various activities including submission of assignments, attending examinations etc. Low income group learners should be encouraged by the institution by providing them financial support in order to ensure their persistence. Likewise differently-abled learners should be identified by the institution at the time of their entry and provide them the necessary support that is required by such learners.

Check Your Progress 5

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

What are the methods that can be adopted by an institution for student tracking?

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you would have realized that we have reviewed the available literature on learner success as well as learner attrition in distance education. The findings of these studies have been pieced together to present a holistic picture of the factors that contribute to learner success and attrition.

We have also examined some well known attrition models postulated by Tinto, Bean, Kember, Bean and Metzner, and Wylie. The different types of attrition in higher education with particular reference to ODL were described. A variety of situations that put the learner under the category of attrition, and term him/her as a dropout were discussed. These were broadly classified as 'voluntary', 'involuntary', 'avoidable' and 'unavoidable' dropouts.

The causes for student attrition were also highlighted on the basis of empirical data analysed in various research studies. If you can recall, generally the causes for student attrition are: workload, family commitments, lack of study skills, health related/unexpected circumstances, negative personality traits, changed goals and institutional negligence.

In this unit we have also looked at the flip side of the issue of attrition by identifying the factors that play an important role and have contributed to learner success, which is again based on empirical research namely: background of the learners, motivation level, study pattern and institutional commitment.

Finally we have discussed the measures to reduce attrition. Surely you will agree that learner/student (both terms have been used interchangeably in this unit) persistence can be enhanced through some definite proactive steps by any educational institution. In this section the need and importance of pre-admission counselling and student induction have been spelt out. Also the need for designing programmes for the development of faculty and staff is essential. Further a sound system of student tracking and identification of at risk learners helps in reducing attrition, besides creating avenues for frequent interaction and feedback to ensure learners' involvement and thereby persistence.

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3.7 FEEDBACK TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

Check Your Progress 1

Learner attrition means those learners who could not complete their programmes successfully because of low grades or those who dropped out in between for certain reasons.

Check Your Progress 2

The answer to the question can be traced from sub-section 3.2.1.

Check Your Progress 3

The three important reasons for attrition are mentioned below:

i) Workload

Studying at a distance requires discipline and independent study. Distance learners were bound to exhibit differences in behaviour as the nature of studying at a distance varies according to their individual workloads interfaced with commitments. Lack of time management due to workload is a major cause of dropouts.

ii) Family commitments

Closely linked with workload is the issue of family commitments which add to the workload and create problems of insufficient time, which has been pointed by many researchers.

iii) Lack of Study Skills

Distance learners are isolated as they lack immediate support of a teacher and are dispersed and separated physically from the institution as well as their peer group. Therefore they cannot get immediate clarification for the doubts that come up during the course of their study. Both traditional age and non-traditional age group of learners who enroll in distance education may lack the basic reading, writing and mathematical skills required to pursue their studies at the college level either because they lacked these skills even in their high school days or because they had forgotten them due to passage of time.

Check Your Progress 4

The factors contributing to learners' success are:

- 1) Background of the learners
- 2) Motivation level
- 3) Study pattern
- 4) Institutional commitment

Check Your Progress 5

The methods for tracking students may include:

- i) Scheduling contact between the institution and the learners. Further ensuring that the schedules prepared are realistic and also providing alternatives to the learners to reschedule if necessary.

- ii) Formative assessment through assignments, seminars, workshops, logbooks, workbooks, etc. should be carried out. The assessment should be throughout the learning process and the feedback on assessment should be time bound and periodic through written comments.
- iii) Help desk services should be provided preferably round the clock 24x7. Replies provided should be accurate and definite and the approach should be problem solving.
- iv) Proactive measures could be adopted by alerting the learners about the forthcoming activities and events, the dates of submission for internal assessment, attending counseling sessions etc. In fact the new ICT provides many such services and solutions for distance learners.



UNIT 4 LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR DISTANCE LEARNERS

Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Learning Outcomes
- 4.2 Library and Information Needs of Distance Learners
- 4.3 Using Libraries
 - 4.3.1 Using Different Types of Documents in Libraries
 - 4.3.2 Using Library Catalogues/Databases
- 4.4 Using Internet
 - 4.4.1 Surfing the Web
 - 4.4.2 Quality of Information
 - 4.4.3 Educational Web Sources
- 4.5 Acknowledging and Referencing
 - 4.5.1 Avoiding Plagiarism
 - 4.5.2 Referencing
- 4.6 Types of Library and Information Services for Distance Learners
- 4.7 Guidelines for Library Services to Distance Learners
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 References and Further Readings
- 4.10 Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions

4.0 INTRODUCTION

As a distance learner, have you felt the need of using libraries? The answer to this question would be 'yes' for many of you. Though distance learners receive a pack of reading materials, it is natural for them to have further inquisitiveness on specific topics to read and learn more. In higher education, we are expected to demonstrate higher order understanding and critical appreciation of ideas and concepts to be expressed in our own words. Therefore, the need to have additional material is obvious. In open and distance learning system, you are expected not only to use materials other than the texts provided but also to develop the abilities to write assignment responses in your own words without verbatim reproduction of textual material. This requires detailed, critical and systematic reading of a variety of sources. There are many resources that we can use as additional reading materials, and in this unit, we shall discuss how to use these resources effectively. You should know about different types of library resources and services available in a library in the context of supporting distance learners. Therefore, in this unit we will discuss the information needs of distance learners and the guidelines for providing library services to them. This will enable you to think, plan and support distance learners in a more systematic manner.

4.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading the unit, you are expected to be able to:

- Discuss the library and information needs of distance learners;
- Use library resources for learning;
- Search library databases and/or catalogues;
- Use the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW);
- Search useful information on the net;
- Assess the quality of information available through online search;
- Avoid plagiarism;
- Acknowledge sources using proper reference techniques;
- Identify different library services for distance learners; and
- Apply the guidelines for library services for distance learners.

4.2 LIBRARY AND INFORMATION NEEDS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

“The library needs of distant learners are not unique. They are similar to those of on-campus students. Apart from the manner in which they are accessed, requested and delivered, the same resources are required, the same questions are asked, and the same quality of service is expected” (Rodrigues, 1996).

Distance learners receive packets of study materials in the form of specially prepared textual materials, text-books, audio and video materials, multimedia CDs or a combination of these. Most of the times, when a specially prepared material is supplied, it is believed to have the characteristics of ‘self-containedness’, and therefore learners are not expected to search for additional reading materials to complete their studies. This has been a useful blessing for the learners in remote and isolated places, where access to libraries is a problem. However, the use of such materials has been criticized for being pedagogically authoritarian and depriving the learners of developing a critical understanding of the concepts and ideas. “The student runs the risk of being turned into a passive consumer of educational commodities – such as packet of knowledge and educational certificates” (Kaye and Rumble, 1981).

It clearly shows that distance learners need library and information services like their counterparts in the conventional face-to-face institutions. Thus, we can think of the needs of distance learners as similar to that of on-campus students. However, there are impediments to library provisions to all the students. Neither can we supply books to all the students for home reading, nor can the students come to the library regularly. They would like to have appropriate and timely photocopying and document delivery service. To make this effective, the learners need to have access to the information resources of the library online or resources accessible through a reference librarian over phone. In the next section, we will discuss about how to use libraries as a distance learner.

4.3 USING LIBRARIES

A library is the best place to find information on a topic. Most organizations (public/private) these days have their own library. A Library is a collection of documents organized systematically for easy search and retrieval at the time of need. Most of you might have some experience of using a library in your school or college days. However, as a distance learner you may feel constrained to make use of library services provided to you because of various reasons such as lack of time, distance, etc. At the Regional Centre, and at the Headquarters, you can also make photocopies of the documents you require. It is possible that the library of your institution is not near your workplace or home, and therefore, regular access is impossible. But, do you know that there are other libraries that just might have enough resources of your interest and needs? It is also possible that the organization, where you work has an excellent library to support your learning needs!

Libraries are categorized into three types, viz. (a) Public Libraries, (b) Academic Libraries, and (c) Special Libraries. **Public Libraries** are information and resource centres meant for citizens of a state (i.e. everyone), and you can find such a library in most district headquarters in India and even in villages in many states having library legislation. The states having library legislation in India have wide network of public libraries that cater to the needs of public in general, and thus, are highly suitable for subject areas in social sciences and humanities. In order to use a library, you need to become its member. So far, the states having library legislation in India are: Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal, Haryana, Goa, Manipur, Orissa, Mizoram, Gujarat, and Uttaranchal. **Academic Libraries** are those that are attached to educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities. These libraries normally do not allow outside members to use their collections, and are accessible only to bonafide students of that institute. However, on special request, some of them may allow you to use their library collection for a shorter duration. **Special Libraries** are subject/area specific libraries attached to different organizations. For example, library in SAIL, ONGC, and many other organizations fall under this category. Apart from keeping documents of special interests in the scope of their organizations, these libraries also cater to general interests of their clientele. If you happen to work in an organization with a special library, you are privileged to use the facilities there in. All types of libraries provide a special facility called Inter Library Loan (ILL) to their bonafide members. Using the ILL facility, you can even get a book not available in your library but available in some other library. In major cities, there are library cooperation networks to facilitate this. Check with your librarian, whether any such facility is available in your library.

4.3.1 Types of Documents in Libraries

Libraries contain many different formats of documents. Book is just one of them. Books are essentially of three types, viz. textbooks or general books, reference books, and electronic books. Apart from books, libraries also possess journals, databases, indexing and abstracting sources, theses, microforms, CDs, Maps, etc. in their collection. The IGNOU library at the Headquarters has the following in its collection:

- Books
- Reference books
- Journals
- Magazines
- Databases
- Microforms
- Theses
- Newspapers
- Question papers
- E-Resources

Books are arranged in the libraries in stacks using a specialized classification system. The most popular library classification code is Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). However, in India the Colon Classification (CC) is also used in many libraries; and the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) is used in many special libraries. In order to use your library effectively, you need to acquaint yourself with the library classification system used there. Library collections other than books are arranged in separate stack areas.

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

List the possible collections found in an Open University Library.

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Reference Books

The reference books section of a library includes a variety of books that provide 'quick response' to many of your questions. The following are normally marked as reference collection in a library:

- Encyclopedias
- Dictionaries
- Bibliographies
- Directories
- Handbooks
- Manuals, etc.

The documents that are marked as reference are not loaned outside the library and some of them may require specialized skills to use. Therefore, do not hesitate to ask for help from a library staff.

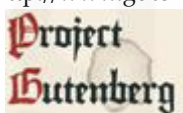
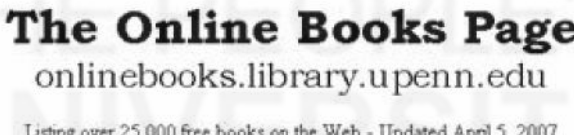
Journals

Scholarly journals, also called periodicals, record latest research findings in specialized areas. Unlike books, that provide information on a topic in an exhaustive manner, and are dated, journals cover research articles in micro-areas and book reviews that are up-to-date. You should be using journals, particularly if you are going to work on a research project or project work in your studies. Journals are also categorized into primary and secondary journals. Primary journals record research articles, whereas secondary journals are indexes and/or abstract of research articles on a given subject. For a researcher, the secondary journals in a subject are a starting point. Every year the journals are bound covering all the issues in a volume and are kept separately.

Electronic Resources

An increasingly large amount of information is available these days in electronic format, and libraries are providing access to these. You can use these electronic resources for your research and learning. Some of the electronic resources available are e-books, e-journals and databases.

e-Books

Many books are available these days in electronic format, either accessible on the net or on a desktop PC or through a handheld reader like Portable Digital Assistants (PDAs). Usually the e-books are available in HTML or pdf format. There are many commercial e-book providers/vendors. Check with your library staff for the availability of e-books. You can get access to many e-books through the websites of Project Gutenberg, Online Book Page, Free Books, and the Digital Library of India.	Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page 
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	Open J-Gate: http://www.openj-gate.com/ 
	HighWire Press Full-text articles on Science: http://highwire.stanford.edu/lists/freetart.dtl 

Databases

Libraries subscribe to full-text database and/or databases on indexes/abstracts either in CD-ROM or online. These provide access to huge amount of information, and make searching and access to quality information easy. Most of the time, the databases come in specialized areas, and therefore, you should check the availability of electronic databases in your subject of interest in your library. These are highly useful for research. We shall discuss searching and using the databases in the next sub-section.

4.3.2 Searching Catalogues or Databases

The library catalogue is a list of books and other documents in a library that provides multiple search access to the users. Normal access points for a document covered in library catalogues include the author, title, subject headings, editors, series information, etc. Sometimes the catalogues are arranged according to three separate groups, viz. author (including editors), title, and subject headings. Whatever may be the type of catalogue; the information is arranged in alphabetical order. So, if you have information on any of the basic access points for a document, you can directly go to the library catalogue and search the same. The library catalogue shall show you the location of the book/document through the call number (classification number + book number) of the book displayed in the card. These days, the library catalogues are available on computers and the card catalogues are disappearing. The use of computer for cataloguing has brought the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) to the users through a desktop computer and/or available on the Internet/Intranet. Here the OPAC is also a database/bibliographic record of documents available in the library. Databases provide us a range of

search options based on 'string search'. The string search is also called keyword search, but while searching databases, we can also use a variety of criteria to limit the search and increase the preciseness of the results. Some of the search criteria used are:

- Author
- Title
- Key Words
- Journal name
- Publisher
- Date
- Publication type (books/journals/CD)
- Type of record (full-text/bibliographic data), etc.

The following are some of the guidelines to search databases:

- i) Use a proper name or distinct phrase. If you know the exact phrase, enclose it in double quotes, e.g. "eco-feminism".
- ii) Use Boolean operators: AND, OR, NOT e.g. Child AND Labour AND India will cover Child labour in India.
"Distance learning" OR "Distance education" OR "Open learning" will cover open and distance learning/education.
"Cars NOT Red" will result in "Cars that are not red".
- iii) Use proximity, truncation and wildcards e.g. Proximity searching with NEAR: "Journals" NEAR "Open Access" to cover Open access journals
Truncation searching: Stud* shall cover students, study, studying, etc.
Wildcards used in variation of spelling cases; Analy*e to cover analyse and analyze.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

What is an e-Journal?

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4.4 USING INTERNET

Ever since the Internet started in 1969, it has been growing by leaps and bounds. The Internet is a network of computers from all over the world and helps us to communicate with different machines and individuals. It is also often called as the one stop destination for all kinds of information. There are all sorts of organizations (business, govt., military, academic) and individuals who are associated with the Internet. The emergence of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1991 on the Internet has further revolutionized collection, organization and

distribution of information. By the click of a computer button, you can now find information quickly by using appropriate websites. The range of information available on the web too is very high. From newspaper to research articles all are available on the web, and you can use them for your learning and understanding.

To get access to the Internet and its WWW, you need to have access to a computer with Internet connection through a telephone line, a network, a cable or wireless link. Using the computer and a browser (e.g., Firefox and Internet Explorer), you can use a website for finding information. However, the number of websites is so high that it is practically difficult to keep track of them and find relevant information. There are some search tips that we can effectively use to find information from the ocean of data available on the net. We shall discuss these in the next sub-section.

4.4.1 Searching the Web

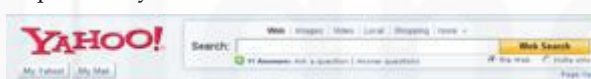
The web can be mainly searched through three ways, viz. (a) Use of organized directories, (b) Use of search engine, (c) Use of meta-search engines.

Use of Directories

A directory is a catalogue of websites collected and organized by human indexers. The websites are organized into subject directories, and therefore, it is often considered as a good starting point. When you don't have your exact need and would like to browse through, the directories are a great source of help. Browsing a directory is like moving the stack room of a library. Many large directories include a keyword search option. You can just type the key word of your search topic and get the results. There are many web directories available on the net, and Yahoo is the largest of them all. Some of the best directories are listed here for your use.

Yahoo:

<http://www.yahoo.com>



Open Directory:

<http://dmoz.org/>



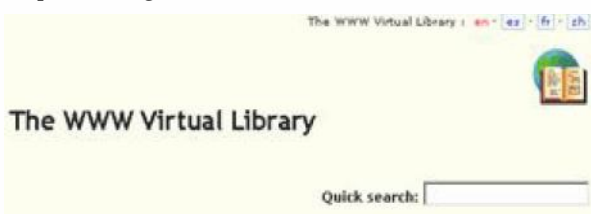
Internet Public Library:

<http://www.ipl.org/>



WWW Virtual Library:

<http://vlib.org/>



Librarians' Internet Index:

<http://lii.org/>



Infomine:

<http://www.infomine.com/>



Use of Search Engines

Search engines on the web are useful tools that make our life easier by using search spiders on the net, and indexing the websites automatically. Google is perhaps the best search engine available that has the largest database of web pages. In order to use the search engines, you need not have to learn a great deal of computer science. You can use most of the database search techniques to search through these engines. However, we advise you to familiarize yourself with the search techniques in their website to effectively use them. To know more about web search engines, visit [http:// www. searchenginewatch.com](http://www.searchenginewatch.com) or [http: //www.searchenginecolossus.com/](http://www.searchenginecolossus.com/).

Google:

<http://www.google.co.in/>



Ask:

<http://www.ask.com>



Use of Meta-search Engines

The meta search engines are search engines about search engines. The meta search engines do not maintain a database of their own, rather they send your query to different search engines and within a few seconds get back with the results from different search engines in one window. Use of meta search engine is a smart way to find more and quick response. Some of the popular meta search engines are: Dogpile, Mamma, Copernic, and Vivisimo.

Copernic:

<http://www.copernic.com/>



Dogpile:

<http://www.dogpile.com/>



Mamma:

<http://www.mamma.com/>



Vivisimo:

<http://vivisimo.com/>



4.4.2 Quality of Information

Having searched the large knowledge base of the WWW, you should be able to differentiate “rice and chaff”. Not all information available on the net is of good quality, and is written by qualified people. So, what you get through a web search needs to pass through the test of quality. There are some basic indicators of quality that you can assess yourself considering the context in which you are going to use the information. These are: accuracy, relevance, objectivity, authority, and timeliness. On the basis of these criteria some of the questions you should ask are as follows:

- 1) Is the information on the web page written by an authority in the area? Can you rely on the data, concepts and other information given there? Websites coming from government sources and academic institutions always provide authoritative information.
- 2) Is it accurate? It would be difficult for you to decide the accuracy if you do not know the subject, but you can try two or more sources/web pages to contrast, and decide.
- 3) Is it relevant to your needs? How suitable is the information on the website for your immediate and future requirements?
- 4) Is the analysis objective, and unbiased? Does the source provide a balanced viewpoint on the issue discussed?
- 5) Is the information up-to-date? Is it outdated and can't be dependable? How frequently is the information on the website updated?

4.4.3 Educational Web Sources

The web has also become a source for a variety of educational materials. Teachers at all levels of education prepare learning materials and put them on the net for use by their students and others. Completely online courses are now available in many institutions that use the power of the Internet and the World Wide Web. As the WWW is based on the hypertext transfer protocol, and is capable of handling multimedia materials (in text, audio, video, animation), a large amount of education resources are also available that are primarily designed to help people learn. Though much of such materials are not available through the search engines, there are open source and open content initiatives that collect and organize such materials. As a learner you can make use of some of these to collect additional materials for your learning. Several institutions and government agencies have taken steps to make such materials available to all. The Govt. of India through the Ministry of Human Resource Development has taken one such step to create an educational web portal, called SHAKSHAT. This web portal has five functional modules: Learning resources, scholarship information, educational testing, tracking of super achievers, and interaction with experts in synchronous and asynchronous mode. The IGNOU has also taken steps to develop a National Digital Repository of Learning Resources, called eGyanKosh. The repository intends to have all learning materials of IGNOU, in print, audio and video, made available through the web. Some of the educational web resources are given here for your use and browsing.

Learning Space: http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/	
Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page	

Open Content Finder: http://opencontent.org/ocwfinder/	
COL Finder: http://www.colfinder.org	
Open Educational Resources: http://www.oercommons.org/	
Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching: http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm	
Open Training Platform, UNESCO: http://opentraining.unesco-ci.org/	
WikiEducator: http://www.wikieducator.org	
Sakshat: http://portal.sakshat.gov.in/wps/portal	
eGyanKosh: http://www.egyankosh.ac.in	

4.5 USING AND ACKNOWLEDGING SOURCES

For preparation of your assignments and project report, you will normally use various kinds of sources of knowledge. But what is important is to acknowledge the source of the document, when you prepare assignments and/or project reports, there are two very important points, you must know in relation to acknowledging sources (i) not to plagiarize, and (ii) provide reference of the source correctly.

4.5.1 Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism occurs when you take the ideas of a source and either do not acknowledge them or present them as your own. Most students become prey to copying the sections of learning materials for their assignments, and this is how they get poor grades. Most learners face these problems, and sometimes unknowingly become prey to

plagiarism. To avoid plagiarism you can put the content/quotation in a quotation mark and give the source after the end of the quotation mark. You can also paraphrase the idea in the quotation and put the reference at the end of the sentence or paragraph. However, quoting at length from various sources without critical viewpoint of your own does not make your writing original. Therefore, it is essential that you present various viewpoints/facts taken from different sources within a critical and constructive story of your own. In order to avoid plagiarism, you should follow the following:

- Note down the exact source of information (with page number, if it is a quote)
- Give reference in-text and also at the end
- Use your own expressions
- Ideas taken from others, even if expressed in your own words need referencing
- Treat plagiarism as an offence.

4.5.2 Referencing

There are various patterns of referencing used in books and journals. There are certain conventions to academic referencing, and we should follow them. For the *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, a research journal published by IGNOU, we provide few guidelines for citations and references, which can be used for any other similar purposes in preparing assignments and project reports. We reproduce below the guidelines.

Citations of other works should be limited to those strictly necessary for arguments. Short quotations should be included in the text within inverted commas (“...”) and quotations of more than 30 words should be placed in a separate paragraph indented from the main body of the text. However, all the quotations should be accompanied by precise reference, in author date style.

References should be indicated in the text by giving the name of the author(s) with the year of publication in parentheses. If more than one paper by the same author(s) from the same year is cited, a, b, c etc. should be put after the year of publication. All references should be alphabetically listed at the end of the paper in the following standard format.

Books: Keegan, D. (1986) *Foundations of Distance Education*, London: Croom Helm

Journal Articles: Jedge, Olugbemiro J. (1995) Anxiety levels and factors which engender them among tertiary distance learners, *Indian Journal of Open Learning* 4(1), 1-6.

Book Chapters: Mishra, S. (2006) ‘Learning from, in and with technology’ in Ramanujam, P.R. (Ed) *Globalisation, Education and Open Distance Learning*, New Delhi: Shipra.

Conference papers: Gooler, Dennis D. (1981) 'Critical Issues in evaluating distance education', *Discussion paper presented at the Regional Symposium on Distance Teaching in Asia, University Sains Malaysia, 4-7 May.*

Dissertations: Singh, S.K. (1994) 'Problems of women pursuing university degree course through distance education in India', *M.Ed Dissertation, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.*

4.6 TYPES OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR DISTANCE LEARNERS

While there seems to be a need for library and information services for distance learners, the actual use of libraries by distance learners are not very encouraging (Appavoo and Hansen, 1988). However, Unwin (1994) reported that distance students wish to see themselves as real students, and that using the library is regarded as an important component of an authentic learning experience. A study by Stephens et al (1997) revealed that students use the public libraries the most, and the need of students to use library was underestimated by the course providers. Continuing reporting of this study, Bolton et al (1998) stated that training in library use is a significant factor in use of library and its services amongst distance learners. Students also preferred cooperative arrangements for use of libraries of other institutions. Providing library and information services to distance learners should be a policy of every distance teaching institution. Having appropriate policy in place help the librarian to plan and develop the collection to provide appropriate and need-based services. Some of these are discussed below:

- **Collection Development:** Any library service to distance learners shall be dependent upon the quality of books and journal collection it has. Libraries supporting distance learners need to understand the needs of their learners, and keep books that are given as references and further readings in the study material supplied to them in multiple copies. *These are the most commonly needed books by students in the Study Centres.*
- **Document Delivery:** As the distance learners can't come to the library, the library must reach the learners. The second law of Library Science pronounced by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan in 1928 says "Every reader his/her books". In other words, it is morally binding on the part of the library professionals and institutions to provide document delivery services to distance learners.
- **Local Study Centre:** Access to libraries and books can be provided to distance learners through local study centres of the distance teaching institutions through partnership/collaboration with public libraries and other educational institutions.
- **Network Access:** With the advancement of information technology, it is possible to provide access to electronic databases, e-books and e-journals subscribed in the library to individual distance learners through individual user id and password.
- **Photocopying Service:** It is also a form of document delivery service that provides photocopies of required article or pages of a book by following appropriate copyright procedure. This is often

an additional need-based service to the learners, and/or the learners have a specific limit of requesting photocopies.

- **Reference Services:** Distance learners need quick information service through phone and email. A qualified reference librarian can help distance learners to access the reference collection of a library and improve their access to knowledge.
- **Book Bags:** Some distance teaching institutions, use a concept called “book bags” through which the students are given a set of 15-20 books in the beginning of the year on returnable basis at the end of the year. This is also called book bank in conventional set-up, where it serves the need of economically poor students who can’t purchase textbooks. The same concept can also be used for distance learners to identify a set of books and supply them to the distance learners.

Now let’s look at some of the library and information services of reputed distance education providers in the world:

Athabasca University

Canada’s Open University – the Athabasca University (AU) was established in 1970 in the Province of Alberta. It provides university education through:

- Flexible distance education teaching and learning strategies
- Competitive tuition fees that includes cost of all course materials and text books
- Course choice within programmes
- Minimal residency requirements
- Coordination of transfer credits
- Challenge for credit options
- Collaborative arrangements

The Library of AU believes in enhancing learners’ academic success by providing library service, including distance library service to students. The following library services are available to students who are enrolled in an AU courses. AU students:

- May borrow materials from the AU Library collection.
- Can search AUCAT, the online catalogue of library materials.
- Have access to library assistance and instruction from the Library Information Desk.
- Can request Inter Library Loan (ILL) for journal articles.
- Have access to AU online full-text Databases.

The AU Library makes reasonable attempts to provide library services. The learners have 24 hour access to Library Information Desk, and can borrow materials from the library in person, or they can request materials by mail, phone, fax, e-mail, or online. Books are normally mailed to the home address of the learner with an appropriate return card included for return of the materials to the AU library. The journals subscribed by the library are also available to the users through its webpage. Other services are: Digital Reference Centre,

Digital Reading Room, Digital Theses and Project Room, and access to E-books collection. Photocopy of library materials are also provided to the learners on request on payment.

Indira Gandhi National Open University

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is the apex body of Open and Distance Education in India, offering large number of programmes at Certificate, Diploma, Graduate, Post Graduate and Research degree level. Established in 1985, it has grown into the largest Open University in the world. It has a three tier structure and operates at the Headquarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres level. At each of these places there is a library for the use of the students. However, these are only reference libraries, and books are not loaned to the students for home use. Over the years, the central library's main focus was to support the staff in development of quality learning resources, and the Regional Centre and Study Centre libraries supported the learning needs of the students. At the end of 2008-2009, the Regional and Study Centre libraries had a cumulative collection of 248800 books. Recently, the IGNOU has initiated a project entitled National Open and Distance Learners' Library and Information Network (NODLINET) to develop an online platform and consortium/network of libraries of the Distance Education Institutes, State Open Universities and National Institute of Open Schooling. The NODLINET envisages providing access to library/learning resources and services to distance learners. It would encourage that the library system of distance learning institution should either (a) own the resources itself or provide appropriate direct service, (b) provide electronic access or (c) have formal agreement in place for provision of materials and services by other organizations.

Open University, United Kingdom

The Open University was established in 1969, and it paved the growth of other open universities around the world. It is the pioneer in promoting the concept of specially designed learning materials for the students, and thereby *unintendedly* relegated the library service to distance learners as secondary. This has been criticized by many as lack of understanding of the library needs of distance learners, and the packaged reading materials as too simple for not promoting critical thinking. We have discussed these issues previously. The Open University Library at Milton Keynes is a highly sophisticated system that aims to broaden and improve the learning experiences of the Open University students and staff. It provides access to OU theses, course materials, books and journals. It has also developed the online resource on Skills for Accessing, Finding and Reviewing Information (SAFARI) (see <http://www.open.ac.uk/safari/index.php>). For most of the online databases students have access through individual user ID and password. The Open University encourages students to make use of libraries near their homes. The SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries) Access facility at the OU library allows students to access a library near their home through a simple registration and borrow books. To know more about the Open University Library and its services, you may visit the website at <http://library.open.ac.uk/>

Open University of Hong Kong

The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) was established in 1989 as Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong, and later on became the Open University of Hong Kong in 1997 through a charter of the Government. Being a city based university, it has some advantage over many other

open universities around the world. While the learners are not dispersed, they are mostly busy people and are working. They have access to Internet and therefore, the OUHK has adopted an e-library system to provide online access to most of its resources to the students. Students can reserve books online and also borrow books by visiting the library. More about the library of OUHK can be read at <http://www.lib.ouhk.edu.hk/index.html>

Check Your Progress 3

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

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

Write a brief description of Hong Kong Open University Library.

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4.7 GUIDELINES FOR LIBRARY SERVICES TO DISTANCE LEARNERS

Library services to distance learners started way back in 1906 at the University of Wisconsin (Goodson, 2001). In 1966 the Board of Directors of the American College and Research Libraries (ACRL) approved the *Guidelines for Library Services to Extension Students*. Later on ACRL released the *Guidelines for Extended Campus Library Services* in 1981. Sheila Latham (1991) while analyzing the literature in this area attributed the interest in library services to distance learners to the emergence of open universities in the 1970s, and off-campus distance education programmes in the 1980s by the traditional post-secondary institutions.

Today, many guidelines for library services are available for the needs of distance learners. The National Council of the Indian Library Association (ILS) approved a set of *Guidelines for Library Services to Distance Learners* (Prepared by the Sectional Committee on Distance Education, Chairperson: Neela Jagannathan, and Convener: Sanjaya Mishra) on 28th July 2001. We reproduce below the guidelines to help you think, plan and provide library services to distance learners in the most possible professional manner.

Indian Library Association

(Sectional Committee on Distance Education)

Guidelines for Library Services to Distance Learners

Introduction

Distance Education has become very popular in the Indian sub-continent. At present there are 14 state open universities, one national Open University, and more than 200 Correspondence Course Institutes/ Distance Education Directorates operating in regular universities of the country. The range of courses/programmes on offer varies from academic to professional and vocational to technical in nature. All disciplines including science, technology, agriculture, medicine, nursing

etc. have distance education programmes. The learners are also heterogeneous as the diversity of the programmes on offer. More and more individuals are joining these programmes, as distance learning provides flexibility in terms of time, place and pace of learning. In other words, it facilitates learning while earning. Mostly the learners receive packets of printed learning materials presumably self sufficient in nature for self study and learn. These learning materials, though many a times designed very carefully by a team of experts in the field/subject, can't be termed sufficient for effective learning equitable to face-to-face teaching and learning. In face-to-face teaching and learning systems, the learners after having attended the classroom teaching undergo a variety of learning tasks including consultation and use of library materials. In distance education, the print materials have just replaced the classroom teacher allowing the learners to be independent self-learners. Therefore, for a complete learning experience, the distance learners need to make use of resources other than printed materials provided by the educational institution. The situation calls for a critical reflection on the place of library in distance education. Various scholars have emphasized that:

- The library has a prominent role to play in facilitating learning.
- Libraries in Open and Distance Learning Institutions have hierarchical systems: Central library at the Headquarters and Regional and/or Study Centre libraries at the grass-root level.
- There are different formats of resources available for the use of the learners.
- Users need material facilities and information services.
- All kinds of libraries, public, academic and special, have to make combined efforts to meet the diverse requirements of the widespread learners.
- The use of modern technology has a special role in providing effective library services.

In order for effective use of library resources and development of information literacy skills to play a significant role in student learning, distance education programme designers must consider and give special place to library services at the course/programme design stage itself. Therefore, the "Guidelines" call for a paradigm shift in provision of course materials as "sufficient" to "basic minimum" for distance learning.

Mission

To ensure the provision of equitable library services to distance learners by assisting in the development and improvement of library services for new and existing distance learning programmes.

Scope

The guidelines are generic in nature and are applicable to Open Universities, Correspondence Course Institutes/Distance Education Directorates, Open Schools, and other Private Distance Education Providers using print, multimedia, teleconference, and web-based or any other course delivery methods. These are applicable to all credit and non-credit based certificate, diploma, degree, post-graduate degree, postgraduate diploma, and research degree programmes.

Target Groups

The guidelines are aimed at administrators of distance learning providers, distance learning programme coordinators/managers, library professionals in charge of managing distance learning services and other support staff responsible for effective implementation of the distance learning programme. As a secondary target group, the guidelines may also benefit various accreditation bodies in the country.

Definitions

Chief Professional Librarian: A professionally qualified librarian, who has been designated by the Distance Education Provider to look after the library system.

Distance Learners: Students enrolled in a distance learning programme.

Distance Learning Programme Coordinator: An academic in charge of conceptualization, organization, preparation and delivery of a distance learning programme.

Distance Learning Provider: The organization usually responsible for offering and funding courses and programmes through distance mode.

Professionally Qualified Librarian: A person holding at least a Bachelor's degree in Library and Information Science from a recognized institution.

1) Philosophy

- 1.1 Access to library resources is essential for quality education regardless of the location of both the learner and programmes.
- 1.2 All registered distance learners and course tutors are entitled to library services equitable to those provided for learners in face-to-face educational institutions.
- 1.3 With distance learners being disadvantaged in terms of library access, special services need to be designed for them. In other words, traditional library service designed for on-campus users will not meet the requirements of distance learners.
- 1.4 Effective library support requires advance planning by the distance learning programme coordinator in consultation with the library professionals of the institutions. In other words, the programme/course design committees should have at least one library professional.
- 1.5 Since resources are scarce, partnerships, networking, and resource sharing are essential ingredients of effective library resources for distance learners. For this the distance education provider may use MOU with local institutions and/or technology based networking systems.
- 1.6 It is for the Library and Information Science professionals to create awareness and demand for library and information services in the distance learning mode.

2) Management

- 2.1 The head of the distance education provider should ensure through a designated Chief Professional Librarian, the adherence of national and international standards in library services, and provide for appropriate fund, staff, and other resources as may be required.
- 2.2 The Chief Professional librarian should demonstrate leadership

in developing relationships and methodologies (including partnerships, networking and access to remote databases) to address the library needs of the institution's distance learning programmes.

- 2.3 The distance learners being geographically dispersed, access structures of the libraries should be in accordance with the institutional support structure (e.g. IGNOU has a three tier structure with Headquarters at New Delhi, Regional Centres, and Study Centres across the country).
- 2.4 The library services should be planned and monitored by a Library Committee in the institution. The Committee should include amongst other members, representative of partner institutions, regional and local libraries, and learners.
- 2.5 The Chief Professional Librarian should prepare all such reports required for decision-making by the Library Committee.

3) Finance

- 3.1 The distance learning provider should make adequate funding available to ensure that its distance learners receive quality library services.
- 3.2 The library budget should take into consideration the following factors:
 - The number of programmes on offer;
 - The size of the distance learning programmes in terms of number of learners and access centres activated for the programme;
 - The type and number of library service planned for the programme.
- 3.3 Funding for library services should generally come from the institute's operating budget. However, specific library services may be offered as fee-based services. In addition, a specific percentage of student fee collected should be given to the library budget. As such there should be three major sources of finance for the libraries as suggested under:
 - i) 6-10% of the institute's operating budget;
 - ii) 2% of the fee collected from the learners; and
 - iii) Fee collected from specific services.

4) Personnel

- 4.1 Personnel involved in providing library services to distance learners should be professionally qualified.
- 4.2 The distance learning provider should designate a Chief Professional Librarian for coordination of the different library access points and for the overall management of the system to work under the advice of the Library Committee.
- 4.3 Each library access point should have professionally qualified personnel as full-time or part-time staff in accordance with the institutional policy of support services to support the Chief

Professional Librarian for achieving the goals and objectives of the institute.

- 4.4 As distance library services require specialized skills, personnel with specialized skills in non-print media, networking and online services (including databases handling) should be recruited and/or specialized training be provided to the employees on a regular basis.

5) Facilities

- 5.1 The distance learning provider should provide adequate space, equipment and communication links to enable the designated staff to operate effectively as service units. Examples of suitable arrangements include but are not limited to:

- Space for reading room(s);
- Space for holding library materials;
- Space for office staff;
- File storage cabinets;
- Dedicated telephone line for learner queries;
- Access to Fax, Internet, Photocopier;
- Access to packaging and mailing services;
- Access to audio, video, and multimedia equipment;
- Access to appropriate computer facilities.

6) Resources

- 6.1 Library resources should include materials in all kinds of formats (physical and electronic). However, they all should meet the requirements of learners, faculty, and other support staff.
- 6.2 Multiple copies of specific library items should be made available.
- 6.3 Master copy of all non-print media should be preserved carefully.

7) Services

- 7.1 In order to meet the information needs of the distance learners, faculty and other support staff, a wide range of services may be necessary. The kinds of services that may include, but are not limited to:
- Reference service either in person, by telephone, or fax, or through e-mail;
 - Bibliographic services (manual and/or computerized) to faculty;
 - Borrowing of copies of library materials;
 - Obtaining specific copies of articles for course work in compliance with copyright regulations;
 - Preparation of "Readings of Articles" in print and/or online on specific topics after copyright clearance;

- Access, from remote locations, to the Website and OPAC of the library and other library networks (eg. DELNET, INFLIBNET);
- Access to online journals, databases located at different servers through student password;
- Access to interlibrary loan services;
- Mobile library services for remote areas;
- Access to Book Bank or recommended “Set of Books”;
- Access to reading rooms; and
- Establishment of Learning Resource Centres at Public and Private Libraries through MOUs.

7.2 Some of the library service may be fee-based as per the institutional policy.

7.3 The services should be available during all working hours for optimum access by the users. Efforts should be made for providing services during holidays.

8) Documentation and Research

8.1 Library policies should be printed and made available to all patrons.

8.2 Library statistics (including use of the services and about collection) should be prepared regularly.

8.3 User guides, membership forms, and other user related documents should be made available easily.

8.4 All the addresses of the key library professionals along with their duties and responsibilities should be printed in the user guide/manual.

8.5 Evaluative research studies should be conducted at regular intervals to measure the effectiveness of existing library services and design new library services. Internal staff may do the evaluation or external agencies specialized for such activities may be asked to do the job on *turn key* basis.

9) Publicity

9.1 Access to library facilities, resources, and services should be clearly advertised and promoted in the programme guide.

9.2 Library timings should be clearly mentioned in the signboards and other documents of the institution.

10) Library Education

10.1 To enable the initiation of an academic professional specialization in distance learning library services, Universities should include in their Master’s curriculum, an optional special paper on Distance Librarianship.

- 10.2 Continuing professional development programmes of short duration on all areas of Distance Librarianship should be conducted at regular intervals by professional associations and library schools.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we focused on the library and information needs of distance learners and emphasized that their needs are similar to that of the students in conventional face-to-face education. However, they need materials to be delivered at their door step, and with the introduction of information and communication technologies, it is possible to provide comparable library services to distance learners. We discussed how to locate information, search, access, and evaluate them for our educational needs. In the process we discussed how you could make use of the library facilities near by your place of work, residence, office, and above all the public libraries. We also discussed the types of information sources available in the libraries and how you can make use of them. Guidelines to search databases were also discussed. With the emergence of the Internet and the WWW, the collection, organization, and dissemination of information on the net have changed considerably. While discussing these, we discussed the search techniques for the web. In course of our discussion of the web search techniques, we identified three major ways of finding information on the net: use of directories, use of search engines, and use of meta-search engines. We have given you a number of examples to give you the starting point to work on. We hope you will have access to the Internet and practice finding information on your own. The list of educational web resources including the Sakshat portal of the Govt. of India and the eGyanKosh of IGNOU shall be two websites that you should bookmark and visit regularly, as these will be providing more and more digital content online for your additional use. We also have strongly advised you to avoid plagiarism and develop the referencing skills. In this unit we have discussed different types of library and information services that you can plan and provide to the learners. Some of these are: document delivery, network access, collection development, photocopy services, local library services, library bags, etc. We also described the library practices of some of the leading open universities as examples. At the end we described the guidelines for providing library and information services to the distance learners as approved by the Indian Library Association. Using this, you may be able to plan better library services for your distance learners.

4.9 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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4.10 FEEDBACK TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) An Open University library possibly has the collections mentioned below. This is so because without these sources, learners who stay at a distance and pursue studies in a distance university/institution will be deprived of getting the required academic services.
 - Books
 - Reference books
 - Journals
 - Magazines
 - Databases
 - Microforms
 - Theses
 - Newspapers
 - Question papers
 - E-Resources

Check Your Progress 2

E-Journal is an abbreviation of electronic journal which is now available on the web across the globe. These can be accessed irrespective of time and location. The e-journals come in different editions, such as electronic version of print journals, or electronic only journals. Most journal publishers today provide online access to their collections either free with print subscription or on payment of some additional amount.

Check Your Progress 3

In the Hong Kong Open University (HKOU), learners are mostly busy and are working people. They have access to HKOU library through Internet and therefore the HKOU has adopted an e-library system to provide online access to most of its resources to the learners. They can reserve books online and also borrow books by visiting the library.