

Block**3****LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES IN ODE**

UNIT 9**Distance Learners and Self-Directed Learning** **5**

UNIT 10**Counselling and Tutoring in Teaching at a Distance** **40**

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BLOCK 3 LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES IN ODE

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BLOCK 3 LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES IN ODE

Introduction to the Block

In Block 2, we discussed different aspects of teaching at a distance such as the process, principles, methods, design and development of SLMs/SLPMs as well as the media and technologies, tools, and human and other resources required for design and development of ODE resources.

Block 3 deals with distance learners and self-directed learning, counselling and tutoring in teaching at a distance, assessment of learner-performance, and learner support system and services. Block 3 has four units (Units 9-12).

Unit-9, Distance Learners and Self-Directed Learning, focuses on the characteristics and problems of distance learners, stages and types of self-directed learning, skills required for self-learning, role of communication technology in self-learning and the factors influencing self-learning.

Unit 10, Counselling and Tutoring in Teaching at a Distance, explains the concepts of counselling and tutoring in ODE, describes the qualities and skills of academic counsellor/tutor, discusses significance of different types of tutor comments in distance teaching and learning, and presents different media that are useful in academic counselling and tutoring.

Unit 11, Assessment of Learner Performance, attempts to highlight the significance of assessment and evaluation, describe different types of assessment, and explain the role and place of different assignments in learner assessment and teaching-learning including continuous and comprehensive evaluation with grading system followed in ODE. It presents the existing system of continuous assessment and also throws light on alternate and new ways of continuous assessment that have relevance for consideration and adaption in ODE.

Unit 12, Learner Support System and Services, emphasises on the concept, need and types of learner support services, the different sub-systems of learner support, and the institutional basis, among others, for organisation of learner support system and services in ODE.

After working through this Block, you will be able to:

- understand the nature, characteristics and problems of distance learners;
- discuss different aspects of self-directed learning;
- explain the role of counselling, assignments and tutoring in ODE.
- appreciate the processes of assessment of learner performance in ODE; and
- analyse different sub-systems and services of learner support system in ODE.

The design and presentation of the Units in this Block resemble that of those in other Blocks of the course. For schematic representation of the design of the Units and other details, please refer to “Introduction to Block 1”.

UNIT 9 DISTANCE LEARNERS AND SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Structure

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9.0 INTRODUCTION

Blocks 1 and 2 have given you clear understanding of the fact that individualised teaching and learning at a distance is the essence of distance education. You may accept the fact that distance teaching through SIMs / SLMs / SLPs is aimed at enabling the learners to learn without or with the help of teachers. The nature, characteristics, and learning styles, among others of distance learners play crucial role in their learning at a distance. In addition, their study skills and various factors influence the learning process of distance learners. In such a situation they may require support to make their learning more effective.

Therefore, in this unit, we will discuss important aspects related to the learners, self-learning or self-directed learning, the skills required for effective self-learning, and the ways of supporting self-directed learning.

9.1 OBJECTIVES

After having gone through this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the characteristics of (adult) distance learners;
- analyse the problems and expectations of the distance learners;

- define the concept of self-directed learning;
- discuss the factors influencing self-directed learning;
- explain the study skills and communicational skills required for effective self-learning; and
- understand the role of communication technology, among other things, in facilitating self-learning.

9.2 DISTANCE LEARNERS

The well known common characteristic of distance learners pursuing higher education is that they are mature adults learning in isolation. There are many other common characteristics, which may vary from learner to learner. Let us look at these characteristics below.

9.2.1 Characteristics

Important common characteristics of Indian distance learners include the following.

i) Age

Though the distance learners are all adults, adulthood of these learners ranges from 18 years to 80 years or more. The distinct strength of distance education is thus to be seen in its flexibility to take care of the educational needs of learners of all ages. But, this flexibility needs to be understood and applied in concrete practical ways.

The different age groups of distance learners would pose serious pedagogic questions to instructional designers who need to consider the learning styles of different individuals as well as the different age groups. The age factor will also have implications for the choice of subject content, its level of difficulty, examination duration and schedule, etc. For example, learners in their thirties and forties would have better conceptual grasp and emotional stability in coping with the requirements of demanding subjects or the demanding areas in any subject than teenagers and other age-groups, though all are technically considered 'adults'. On the other hand, even very knowledgeable and mature learners in their forties and above may have problems in writing their examinations within a set time limit (say 3 hours), unless they regularly practice the mechanical and psychomotor skill of writing. Here the adults in their early twenties with their nimble fingers may write faster than their more mature elders writing the examination can. Age is thus an important consideration while deciding the work load, teaching-learning strategies, examination patterns and schedules, among other things. Further, age difference would matter in organising student support services too. We shall talk about the related issues of student support later.

ii) Gender

Gender is another important factor in understanding and providing necessary support to distance learners. By implication, we mean the difficulties faced by women as a disadvantaged gender group as a whole in general, and the socially, economically and educationally backward women in particular. Often, the gender inequalities are either kept aside or the issues concerning the 'creamy layer' of the female gender are projected as the gender issues. The fact that women and girls in rural areas, urban slums and tribal areas constitute the major chunk of the illiterate populace of a country like India shows that the gender issue has not been adequately addressed by the policy makers and institutional leaders so far. Though the prejudices against women affect negatively

the women belonging to all classes of society, the urban middle class and upper class women are incomparably more advanced than the women working in rural areas, urban slums and in the unorganized sectors. The latter suffer from multiple disadvantages and discriminations which should receive utmost attention from distance education institutions with mandate to reach them educationally. Gender discourse at the philosophical level must address far more serious issues than the gender bias of language use in the form of 'he' and 'she'. The social placement of women, the place given to them while deciding the curricular issues, the psychological and emotional barriers which restrict the participation of women during the teaching-learning process, the non-encouraging or intimidating domestic and work environments, the cultural or religious biases which restrict the participation of women, and women's own negative perceptions about themselves as well as their choices of courses and programmes are some of the issues which need to be carefully considered right from the very beginning of developing distance learning programmes through their implementation.

iii) Social Status

The heterogeneity of distance learners in a country like India includes social disparities in terms of both caste and class. Caste hierarchy is unique to India. Though it has a lot of historical and sociological significance, caste system in India has been playing a negative role in democratising education and developing a democratic, scientific, secular and egalitarian world view among the people. Distance learning, in order to attain its goal of breaking the educational barriers of people, has to first break the social barriers to education. Traditional thinking about certain professions and their related skills should not stand in the way of people choosing other professions and educational programmes. For example, tannery workers and construction workers may do distance learning programmes to improve their skills, but they should never get the feeling that they cannot change their professions or choose other learning programmes of their choice. Social prejudices often act against the educational interests and learning competencies of disadvantaged sections of society such as women, members of backward castes, scheduled castes and tribes, religious minorities and people with disabilities. These and other social factors must be dealt with when we talk about the social status of distance learners.

iv) Economic Status

Usually, social status, economic status and educational status go together, because they are mostly interlinked. Though this is generally true, in India, there are certain peculiarities. There are instances of people with better social status and high educational potential but cannot realise their educational potential because of poor economic status. Differential fee structures and policies of subsidy of institutions should take into account the economic status of the learners as well. In general, the rural poor and the socially backward people do not have enough money to pay for their education. This aspect is crucial to their access to courses which have high professional and employment potential. For example, courses of management, computer sciences and other professional courses have a good market, but they also demand high fees. Poor students and unemployed persons can hardly afford these courses. Naturally such courses offered by distance teaching institutions cater to the educational needs of those who are already economically well off. This kind of subtle elitism needs to be balanced with appropriate policy changes, in terms of scholarships, subsidies, fee exemptions, etc., to enable those who are economically poor but want to pursue courses with job opportunities.

v) **Educational Status**

By educational status we mean the educational environment that prevails in a family or community. In India, it is not uncommon even today to see families and communities/ castes which are economically poor but educationally well endowed. Members of these families and communities can easily do well in their studies if the necessary economic support is given to them. On the other hand, the neo-rich in certain regions and the communities which had traditionally been kept out of the mainstream of education cannot be expected to perform well in their study by merely giving them some monetary aid in the form of scholarships or fee concessions or total fee exemptions. Most of the first generation learners lack the necessary self-confidence and sophistication to do well in their studies, particularly when they learn through distance mode. In this case, even economically high status will not help the learners much. Therefore, the educational profile of families, communities and regions become an important curricular issue for distance educators.

vi) **Geographical Location**

The urban-rural divide is a major issue that determines the educational opportunities and through this the learning outcomes of the learners. Urban learners always enjoy the advantage of having easy access to the necessary information. They also get a relatively better exposure to educational institutions and their chances of forming peer groups for better academic interaction are also more. In the rural areas, it is difficult for the learners to get even information on the distance education institutions and the programmes/ courses. They also face other difficulties like travel, time, etc., whenever they want to make use of the study centre-based support services. Additionally, they have to temporarily shift themselves to urban environments, which by itself becomes a major distraction. Most Indian villages are poorly connected by roads and postal services, though radio, television and even telephones have made some inroads in the rural areas.

In geographically remote and hilly areas, learners are dispersed and they need special communication channels. Many hill tribes and those who have been posted in the geographically hostile areas with extreme weather conditions (e.g., armed forces, and professionals with special assignments) need special assistance and arrangements to pursue their studies as a part of their continuing education or their professional capacity building programmes. Geographical locations of distance learners should have a bearing on the policies and practices of distance teaching institutions.

vii) **Other Characteristic Issues**

Besides the above discussed factors, there are certain other important issues which would inform us about the characteristics of distance learners and their needs. The following need special mention.

- a) **Language Skills:** In bi-lingual and multi-lingual situations, acquisition of linguistic skills is extremely important for the learners to successfully learn through their courses. In India, most of the courses at the higher education level are offered through the medium of English which is not the mother tongue of most Indians. Distance learners, therefore, must have the minimum necessary competence in using English, if they have to successfully complete their courses. On the other hand, the course writers must also have the necessary competence and writing skills when they develop courses in English as a medium of instruction. If the institutions concerned decide to offer courses through the mother tongues of learners (i.e., in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Bengali, Marathi and other Indian languages),

they must ensure that there is enough knowledge base in the languages concerned so as to equip the learners with adequate knowledge and information so that they compare and compete well with those who learn through the medium of English. The main issue here is to create courses at the appropriate level with acceptable standard and provide additional reading materials in the languages concerned. This is a major challenge which is yet faced by distance education and educationists in general in India.

- b) **Academic Traditions:** In societies with strong oral traditions and high respect for teachers, students expect ‘teaching’ by teachers rather than ‘learning’ by themselves from the study material. India is known for its ‘Guru-Shishya Parampara’ (Teacher-Disciple Tradition) and the tradition still continues in some forms in the campus-based educational institutions and holds away in fine arts like classical music, dance, painting and sculpture. Distance learners suddenly face a different teaching-learning situation which puts the onus on the learners. When this transition from ‘teaching’ to ‘learning’ occurs suddenly, the distance learners are in for a cultural shock. This shock becomes more intense when the technology-based or digital-based distance education is given to them with little or no preparedness or poor support services. Some of these issues have already caught the attention of distance educators. In 1998, the Association of Asian Open Universities chose ‘The Asian Distance Learner’ as the theme for its Annual conference in Hong Kong. Otto Peters (1998) has reflected upon the Asian Distance Learner by raising a number of theoretical and pedagogic issues related to distance learning in Asia. The theme, was taken up seriously with specific focus on issues of access, materials and technological support and institutional collaboration in meeting the needs of the Asian open and distance learner and to provide solutions to many learning related problems faced by the distance learners.
- c) **Learners with Disabilities:** Learners with different types of disabilities receive special attention from the well-known distance teaching institutions such as the Open University, UK, the Fern Universitat, Germany, Hong Kong Open University, China, the Hadley School for the Blind, USA and others. The Open University, UK, Fern Universitat, Germany, the distance teaching institutions of Hong Kong, China, Japan, USA, Canada and other developed countries have large number of students with disabilities of different kinds and have made special arrangements to help the students with disabilities to successfully study through their courses. In India, particularly at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) efforts are made to meet the special requirements of disabled learners through various means such as fee concessions, special study centres, enabling technologies, course material in the appropriate media and special need-based courses and programmes. However, the needs of the disabled students are yet to be addressed by the DE institutions in India in a significant way. Physical disabilities such as lack of mobility, visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental retardation, and different types of learning disabilities like autism, dyslexia, etc., must be given serious attention, when we develop distance education programmes and implement them.
- d) **Learning Styles:** A comprehensive definition for learning styles that has been adopted by leading theorists in the field is given by Keefe (1989; quoted by Griggs, 1991): “Composite of characteristic cognitive, affective and psychological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with and responds to the learning environment.” Depending upon their socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and other background different learners get used to

different learning styles. Their learning styles are determined by their composite cognitive, affective and psychological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how they learn, perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment. Accordingly, their learning styles are bound to be different. Kit Logan and Pete Thomas (<http://www.ppig.org/papers/14th-logan.pdf>) studied the preferred learning styles of distance education students such as having an experience (*Activist style*), reviewing an experience (*Reflector style*), concluding from an experience (*Theorist style*), planning the next steps (*Pragmatist style*). Grasha & Reichmann’s Student Learning Styles Scales (Grasha, 1996) present six styles: Independent, Avoidant, Collaborative, Dependent, Competitive and Participant. Thus, learning style of some learners may be competitive, that of others may be collaborative, avoidant, participant, dependent, independent and so on. Therefore, the learning experiences need to be diversified by the distance teacher so as to cater to the different learning styles of different categories of learners.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

1) Describe in brief the salient features of Indian distance learners (you can draw on your experience too, in addition to what you read in the Unit).

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9.2.2 Problems

From the foregoing discussion, you can easily understand how challenging it is to meet educational needs of the varied and complex clientele of distance learners. Because of their very composition, distance learners groups will have study-related problems which would defy easy or uniform solutions. Distance educators must think of flexible, practical and appropriate strategies to meet the academic needs of the learners while attempting to solve their problems. Let us first see what kinds of problems are typically faced by distance learners.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) manual on Distance Open Learning (1997) mentions the following as the problems faced by distance learners:

- isolation
- organising studies and study space
- finding sufficient time to study
- balancing work, study and family

- lack of motivation
- lack of resources and equipment
- lack of study techniques (or study skills)

It also mentions the ‘information’, ‘contact’ (i.e. contact with the institution/teacher/tutors/ counsellors), ‘institutional identity’ and ‘advice on how to study’ as the special needs of distance learners. To solve the problems faced by the learners and to take care of their special needs (not in terms of special education), counselling, tutoring and administrative support are recommended at different stages of students learning: pre-enrolment stage, the starting stage of study, during the study and after the completion stage. How exactly the strategies to do these should be formulated will depend on the specific situations or contexts in which they need to be adopted.

While answering the question “Why Students Don’t Learn?”, Gibbs, et. al. (1982), they question the following commonly given explanations:

- Students lack the necessary study skills;
- Students are of different types and some students have limited approaches to studying;
- Students choose their approaches to studying and some students choose inflective or inappropriate approaches;
- Students develop in their sophistication as learners and some are less developed than others; and
- Some aspects of course design constrain students in their learning.

Analysing and examining the veracity of the above explanations, Gibbs, et. al. (*op cit*) conclude: “It may not be helpful to view poor students as lacking certain skills It may not be helpful to view students as having fixed style of learning To some extent students actively and consciously choose their approaches to study... .. To some extent (they) seem to develop as learners in that they develop increasingly sophisticated conceptions of the learning process and of the nature of knowledge. Even a skilled sophisticated student can go about learning in limited, surface-processing ways (because of external constraints such as the over-sized curricula, demanding assessment system, lack of background knowledge of interest)”.

The above research findings already indicate the limitations of simple generalizations about the characteristics, problems and difficulties faced by distance learners who have very different orientations, in terms of age, educational background, interest, study skills, learning skills, etc. However, positive interventions by distance teachers, tutor counsellors and the teaching institutions would certainly help the distance learners overcome many of their study related problems. There are other problems faced by distance learners for which solutions may come from their own living and working environments. For example, finding time to study regularly and organising the daily routine of distance learners cannot be directly regulated or supervised by distance teaching institutions, though some guidelines and suggestions to organise the study habits of students can be made by the Academic Counsellors. But, by and large, the onus rests with the students to arrange and organise their own studies at the timings and the places most suitable for them.

For working/employed adult learners, morning time and home-based study may not be easy always. Evenings and holidays would be ideal for them to study in the homes.

On working days, they can read their lessons in print while travelling or during the leisure time at the places of work. However, these arrangements will have to be adjusted according to their professional and domestic commitments. So, for you too, finding time to study is directly related to your motivation and adjustment of your schedule. You must have read many biographies of great personalities who had very busy schedules, and yet had time to read a lot. You can get inspiration from your peers, friends and acquaintances with those who do well in their studies, in spite of their busy schedules and many commitments.

Having said this, we must admit that serious study requires proper arrangements. You must find a place to keep your books and notes in an orderly fashion so that you will have a positive and pleasant feeling whenever you look at your study table. Your study place must have sufficient light and ventilation. Do not heap your books, notes and papers clumsily on your study table. Keep only those books and papers on it that you require at the time of your study. If your study table is cluttered, you will have difficulty in concentrating on your studies.

Striking a balance between your study and work is the challenge. We know how difficult it is to complete one's study successfully through distance mode. But proper planning and perseverance will ensure your success. You should get your priorities right. Suppose you have to submit your assignment responses on a particular date, but you find some other work very fascinating, say reading a lesson which is not connected with your present assignment. At such moments you must resist the temptation of postponing the submission of your assignment response. Sometimes, delay may lead to a year's delay in completing your studies.

A feeling of isolation and boredom is common in the distance learning process. At times difficulties in understanding the content or answering the assignments may discourage you. Or, some of the members of your family comment adversely on your studies. Your children would demand your time when you are under tremendous pressure to complete an assignment and also your office work. Friends and relatives may drop in unannounced, and they may not take your hint that you are awfully busy. The cultural setting you are in may not be very conducive to pursue your studies. For example, your kith and kin may tell you that you need not 'waste' your time studying further but you would 'do well' if you look after your 'business'. They may ask you to measure something you may find it embarrassing and impossible to do. In all such situations it is better to ignore the discouraging comments and absurd questions. But in real life situations we do react, often sharply, to any suggestion that discourages us from studying. With experience we learn to cope with such situations without neglecting our studies.

Distance teaching institutions, particularly distance educators and Academic Counsellors can help their learners in solving many of their study related problems. A lot depends on the ability of the institutions concerned to appreciate the unique features of distance learning, anticipate the problems faced by the distance learners and plan the academic programmes as well as support services suitably. Success and failure of distance learners depend, to a considerable extent, on the degree of understanding, responsiveness and readiness of the institutions to help and facilitate the learners in their studies. Quality concerns of the institutions should persuade them to take care of the interests and the concerns of the learners, in all the activities related to curriculum, syllabus, course development, course delivery, evaluation and the different kinds of student support services.

In the next section, we shall discuss some of the ways of motivating distance learners as well as sustaining their interest in learning at a distance.

9.2.3 Expectations

You must have seen in the previous sections what efforts distance learners have to make and what difficulties they have to face in order to complete their studies successfully. To enable the learners to cope with their studies, institutional support of different kinds is absolutely necessary. In fact, the crucial difference between ‘private study’ and ‘distance open learning’ is to be seen in the latter’s deliberate efforts to provide support and a learning environment to the isolated distance learners. We shall touch upon a few important types of support that distance learners in developing countries usually expect from their distance teachers and institutions.

- i) **Motivation:** We can fairly be certain about the motivation of learners to register for programmes / courses. Unless they have motivation, they wouldn’t decide to study them, especially when they have to pay hard earned money towards course fee. But this kind of motivation alone is not enough for them to be successful in their studies. They need a different kind of motivation, i.e. the motivation to engage themselves in answering the assignments and meeting the necessary requirements of the courses. It is this motivation that will give the learners the necessary confidence to overcome their difficulties, sustain their interests and resist the temptation of dropping out. The distance learner “is at (the) greatest risk of becoming a drop-out during the first term, semester or year of study” (Roberts 1984). Motivation from distance teachers, tutors and counsellors at various stages would help the learners to drop the idea of dropping out whenever they feel difficulties of whatever kind — study related or personal. Initial motivation can be effectively provided, if the institutions know how to establish a support for the learners and create in them a sense of belonging. The learner should feel: “Here is an institution which cares for me. I can seek its support whenever I am in a genuine difficulty”. Such a sense of belonging should be created right from the beginning of the institutional contact with the learners — from the time of advertising the courses, at the time of sending admission letters, sending the first batch of study materials and up to the time of awarding degrees or even later. Constant interaction between the institution and the learners would develop a sense of belonging, mutual trust and a positive environment for learning.
- ii) **Operational support:** The most important aspect of developing and sustaining the interest and motivation of distance learners is the efficiency with which an institution handles its operations and logistics. The image about the institutions plays a crucial role in motivating the learners to study. Accurate and timely information about courses and programmes at the pre-enrolment stage in the form of advertisements and pre-enrolment counselling would help learners in deciding about their strategies of learning. Timely admissions, clear schedules of dispatch of materials, assignments submission, counselling and tutoring, and effective implementation of the schedules instill confidence in the learners and inspire them to study through the courses, even if the courses are tough. A weak administration would create a chaos which in turn would de-motivate the learners, though the courses may be very good and academically useful. For example, if the materials do not reach the students in time, the students will have serious problems in meeting the schedules of assignments submission; they won’t be able to prepare themselves for the counselling session; and because of these and other related difficulties their performance in the final examinations will be affected.

Similarly, the assignment responses submitted by the learners must be assessed, commented upon and returned in time. The purpose of assignments is to teach the learners by giving them timely feedback. But very often, assignment responses are either submitted late by the students, or they are not assessed by the tutor-counsellors and returned to the students in time. This kind of non-serious approach would be detrimental to students' learning and the purpose of giving assignments to students will also be defeated.

Another important operation that plays vital role in distance learning is the organization of tutorial and counselling sessions. Whatever be the strength of learning materials, the isolated distance learners will always have the need to have face-to-face meetings with the teachers and their peers. Tutorials and counselling sessions enable such meetings to take place. These meetings are the only channels which help learners to interact freely with the tutor-counsellors and peers, not only on issues related to course materials, but also on issues related to their study arrangements which often clash with their domestic and professional commitments. Therefore counselling and tutorial sessions must be planned systematically with a view to helping the learners academically and emotionally. The quality of counsellors and their approach to learners very often determine the persistence and the drop-out rates in distance education. A positive experience would encourage the learner to continue his/her studies and a negative experience would result in his/her dropping out.

Finally, the preparation for the term-end examination is the last major challenge that distance learners have to face, the outcome of which will decide the success or failure of studying at a distance. Timely conduct of examination, assessment and evaluation of the answer-scripts, announcement of results and correct certification would give the utmost satisfaction to the serious and active learners. Operational and administrative efficiency will help the learners take timely decisions regarding their further studies and career.

- iii) **Timely addressing of problems/difficulties:** Certainly the young learners coming fresh from High Schools and Higher Secondary Schools miss a lot of their socialization and youthful joy of studying together on campus when they choose to be distance learners for whatever reasons. In general, these young distance learners do not feel very confident and comfortable with studying at a distance. Women, young housewives, unemployed youth, first generation learners from under privileged families, students with disabilities and retired persons are vulnerable to many difficulties and emotional trauma, and at the slightest inconvenience they are likely to drop-out. If we analyze the reasons for non-performance or lack of interest of students in a distance learning situation, we would discover that most of the factors that discourage students are institution-related. And they can easily be tackled, given the institutional will.

One of the commonest problems faced by distance learners in India is non-responsiveness to their queries. Suppose there is a delay on the part of the institution in dispatching the study materials to the students. Or wrong packs of materials have been sent to some students. When students contact the institution(s) concerned to help them in this regard, quite often they may not receive satisfactory or clear response. Such a lack of response from institutions may be the result of badly organized despatch procedures but this would cost the students dearly, and any initial negative experience will create negative impression in the students about the institution as well as the students' own study plans. These negative impressions

can easily be prevented, if the institutions take enough care while dispatching study materials to students.

Even if there are no problems with the dispatch of materials, students may face problems in answering their assignments, especially the first assignment. Students need some guidance at this point. They can get the necessary guidance and help from their tutors, counsellors or mentors, provided they are in a position to contact each other. It is possible to enable the students to meet their tutor-counsellors and their peers during the contact-cum-counselling sessions held at the study centers. But the location of study centers, the distance to be covered by travel, time, money and other constraints may not allow some of the students to attend the contact sessions. Even if they attend the sessions lack of arrangements at the study centers and the limited time available to both the tutor-counsellor and the study centre functionaries may not help the students in sorting out their study problems. In these situations, the possible solutions could be to attach a specific number of students with a particular tutor or counsellor and enable them to interact through correspondence, telephones or personal visits.

The other possible problems faced by distance learners may be at the time of writing their projects or preparing for their term-end/final examinations. They may also face problems, if they do not get in time their assignment responses back with helpful comments and appropriate grades and marks. In these matters, the institutions of distance teaching have to adopt professional approaches and give individual attention to the learners with problems. Formal, bureaucratic and rigid policies and practices would de-motivate the learners. Worst of all, non-responsiveness and 'holier than thou' attitudes of institutions would bring discredit to the institutions concerned and seriously undermine the credibility of distance learning as a system. The extreme possibilities are that the learners may publicly criticise the erring institutions or approach courts of law for legal remedy. Such situations will not be pleasant ones.

Quality assurance is the key to answering all the above mentioned problems possibly faced by our learners. But quality assurance is not simply possible, unless we set up institutional mechanisms to take care of quality of all the activities related to distance teaching practices. There are no such things in distance education which can be termed as more important and less important. Every activity or operation will have its impact on the rest of the activities within an institution.

For example, quality assurance in the programme development would mean: appropriate curriculum, high quality and learner-friendly study materials and timely delivery of the materials. Assuming the curriculum is appropriate, because of involvement of academics of reputation, the question of developing high quality, learner-friendly study materials can be answered satisfactorily, only if you have high quality academic staff to do the job. Formal positions of academics such as 'Lecturer', 'Reader' and 'Professor' will not guarantee the development of quality materials. Whether you involve internal faculty or the external course writers is not that important as identifying and involving the right kind of academics to develop distance learning materials which require higher level abilities and good writing skills. 'Democracy' and 'equality' among colleagues will not work here. Quality assurance in academic matters such as course development is possible only when you have at least a few people who can distinguish between the good and the bad materials and do what is necessary to correct the weaknesses of a given course or programme. For example, if you get a badly written unit in terms of content,

presentation and language from any course writers you must be able to remove all the weaknesses and make it acceptable. This is one aspect of quality control and quality assistance. Similar exercises must be done in every activity of distance teaching, if we have to minimise the difficulties of distance learners.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

2) Identify at least five operational problems which, in your view, may seriously obstruct the learning process in the distance education situation. How would you solve them, if you are asked to?

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9.3 SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

You know that learning encompasses learner’s capacity to acquire, represent, recall, respond to and use information. It refers to how we perceive, act, think and remember objects / things / information. Therefore, self-learning too refers to all these, and require greater ability to reflect upon, understand and control one’s learning (Dart, 1997). Self-learning or self-directed learning is an essential condition of distance learning. Let us understand the concept of self-directed learning.

9.3.1 Concept

In self-learning, also called self-directed learning, the emphasis is laid on the learner capability to learn according to his/her needs, interest, ability and pace. According to Knowles (1975, p.18), ‘self-directed learning’ is a process by which individuals take the initiative, with or without the assistance of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. Knowles (1975 and 1984) differentiated adult learning (andragogy) from child learning (pedagogy). His thinking is based on the premise that in the case of adult learners there is a steady increase in their need and capacity to:

- be self-directing in their study;
- make use of their life experience in learning;
- identify their own readiness to learn; and
- organise their own learning around real experiences.

In this andragogical model of learning, the teacher is a facilitator who helps diagnose learning needs of learners, creates a climate conducive to learning and designs a series of learning experiences with appropriate techniques and resources (Knowles, 1984). The learners are expected to be goal-oriented, activity-oriented and learning-oriented. Knowles delineates self-learning with the following justification:

- Self-directed learners are better learners. They learn more things easily.
- They are fully capable of taking charge of their own learning. (Therefore, self-directed learning is more in tune with natural process of their psychological development).
- They look for opportunities for development of appropriate skills.
- They are in favour of change in education and learning in the era of rapidly changing world of knowledge.

We may call self-learning as *self-managed* learning or *self-directed* learning also. It is, therefore, usually argued that self-learning requires learners to have high level of commitment, self-initiative and self-discipline. They are not only highly motivated but also able to sustain their motivation throughout their study.

Self-learning is characterised by certain learner-centred features of learning. It facilitates the learners to learn: *when they want* (according to their own time, frequency and duration convenient to them); *how they want* (according to modes of learning suitable to them); and *what they want* (learning objectives and content).

The learner who is accustomed to learn together with other learners under the direct supervision of the teacher might initially feel it difficult to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes through self-learning. In order to achieve it (self-learning skill) he has to train himself in the process of leaning without or with little external support. He has to become autonomous in planning and controlling his learning activities and fix the time, duration and places of his learning. For the most part of his learning the learning becomes individualised and autonomous. Thus, self-learning is principally initiated and managed by the learner himself/herself.

Individualised, learner-centred learning lies at the heart of successful educational systems. It is more so with distance education system. Various media such as radio, telephone, fax, computer and satellite technologies have proved their worth in helping learners to stay in touch with the teacher and the institution. Distance learning promotes self-learning which takes place in the individual context demanding independent learning, to a greater extent.

Though distance education is often thought of as independent learning due to the physical separation of the learner from the institution, pedagogically it need not be so (Seaton, 1993). Self-learning encompasses both the aspects of physical separation and greater pedagogical control by the learner. The essence of this type of learning is to be seen in the degree of learner control over what, when and how learning takes place. The greater the degree of learner control, the greater is the learner's autonomy and hence self-learning.

You might have observed that the learning during childhood is more teacher-directed, but, as the learner matures, he/she develops independent thinking and uses it to acquire knowledge. Self-learning then becomes more real and meaningful. Because of their separation from the teacher and institution distance learners are more close to the idea

of self-learning, which is an important feature of distance education. Learning materials, tools and technologies are chosen to meet the needs of the learning by way of facilitating their self-learning. Self-learning depends more on the learners themselves — their motivation to learn, their commitment to learn on their own with the necessary self-discipline. Learning at a distance is a good test of self-reliance and self-determination of the learners. DE makes the learners understand that most knowledge, perceptions and insights come from their own actions and from their own initiatives. Thus, the learners come to realise that the best teacher is really oneself, and that personal efforts made in this process of self-learning are the most productive.

We know that there are no short-cuts to learn. Successful independent study involves a great deal of concentration. Self-learning is a hard and demanding task. It depends on the following main pre-requisites:

- a desire or motivation to learn;
- clear and realistic goals;
- systematic approach to studies; and
- adequate academic support.

In our discussion, in this section, we have tried to highlight the fact that in self-learning the responsibility for learning is shifted from the teacher to the learner. It gives the learner the autonomy to make decisions and accept the responsibility for selection of suitable leaning strategies to achieve the learning goals.

We can thus conclude that the concept of self-learning or self-directed learning, particularly in distance education system, is essentially characterised by:

- A learner-centred approach to teaching and learning;
- Learner’s responsibility for his/her own learning;
- Flexible provision of education to meet individual needs, interests and requirements; and
- Use of specially designed and prepared learning materials (see Unit 7).

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

3) What are the essential characteristics of self-directed learning in distance education?

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9.3.2 Stages

Based on our discussion under Sub-section 9.2.1 above, you might have noticed that the distance learners are not homogenous entity and vary in their learning abilities and styles, among other things. Self-directed learning by such group of learners demands certain responsibilities on the part of distance learners and teachers. Self-directed learning (SDL) is dependent upon the characteristic stage style of self-directed learning and the teaching style suitable for effective learning.

Gerald Grow (1991) identifies four styles of self-directed learning and the four styles of teaching along with possible teacher pitfalls, and presents it as Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) Model.

Table 9.1: The Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) Model

Stage	Learning Style of Student	Teaching Style of Teacher	Examples	Possible Teacher Pitfalls
Stage 1	Dependent	Authority, Coach	Coaching with immediate feedback, drill and informational lecture. Overcoming deficiencies and resistance.	Can be too controlling that stifles learner initiative and enhances dependency.
Stage 2	Interested	Motivator, Guide	Inspiring lecture plus guided discussion. Goal setting and learning strategies.	May end up entertaining well but leaving learners with little learning skills and/or motivation.
Stage 3	Involved	Facilitator	Discussion facilitated by teacher who participates as equal. Seminar, Group projects.	May end up accepting and valuing anything from anybody; students then show little respect.
Stage 4	Self-Directed	Consultant, Delegator	Internship, dissertation, individual work or self-directed study group.	May withdraw too much and thus lose touch and fail to monitor progress.

Source: Grow (1991) at www.essentialgptrainingbook.com/resources/.../Grow%20-%20SSDL%20model.doc — Retrieved on 05-01-2017.

Gerald Grow (*op cit*) emphasised that:

- the ability to be self-directed is situational; one may be self-directed in one subject, a dependent learner in another.
- there is nothing wrong with being a dependent learner -- one who needs to be taught.

Therefore, the purpose of this model is to help you:

- identify* where your current learners are in terms of *self-directedness*,
- match* your educational activities/session to that level, and then
- facilitate their progression* to the next higher level.

These four stages gradually release or reduce responsibility of the teacher as the learner becomes increasingly self-directed. Grow (1991) emphasizes that moving the learner onto the next stages requires time; it doesn't happen overnight. The basic principle of SDL is that *teaching is situational*: the style of teaching needs to be matched to the learner's ability and motivation at the time (termed 'readiness').

Good teaching, Grow believes, does two things: a) it matches the student's stage of self-direction, and b) it empowers the student to progress toward greater self-direction.

How to Determine a Learner's Level of Self Direction?

You can try and get a global picture of the learner when you feel you have got to know them better. The following questions may help you determine your inner feeling on the matter (<http://www.longleaf.net/ggrowsSDL/Disc.html#DefinitionDiscussion>, cited in Grow, 1991 at www.essentialgptrainingbook.com/resources/.../Grow%20-%20SSDL%20model.doc).

- 1) What is the learner's level of motivation?
- 2) How well does the learner perform when asked to take initiative in an assignment?
- 3) Does the learner participate in class discussions?
- 4) How much detailed direction does the learner require?
- 5) How well does the learner work with others on group projects?
- 6) How much pressure does the learner put on you (the teacher) to be an authority figure who dictates the learning cycle? Or to what extent does this student want to take charge of her own learning?
- 7) Can the learner practise on his own to assimilate the skills necessary to learn the subject?
- 8) In the case of a dependent learner, to what extent does the dependency result from a lack of skills (which he is learning), and to what extent does it result from a lack of interest, low confidence, low motivation, and discouragement?

After describing the stages of the learner and type/style of teaching required, Grow (1991) puts them into the following matrix to match and compare them in teaching-learning context.

Table 9.2: The Matching Table

S4: Self-Directed Learner	Severe Mismatch *1	Mismatch	Near Match	Match
S3: Involved Learner	Mismatch	Near Match	Match	Near Match
S2: Interested Learner	Near Match	Match	Near Match	Mismatch
S1: Dependent Learner	Match	Near Match	Mismatch	Severe Mismatch*2
	T1: 'The Expert'	T2: Motivator	T3: Facilitator	T4: Delegator

Note: *1 = Students resent authoritarian teacher.

*2 = Students resent freedom they are not ready for.

Source: www.essentialgptrainingbook.com/resources/.../Grow%20-%20SSDL%20model.doc.

This table is to help you match your style according to the learner's level of self direction to ultimately allow you to move them on to the next stage. For example, an S2 student

should be paired with a T2 teacher for an exact match. But from the table you'll notice that pairing with a teacher from either side, one step up (T3) or one step below (T1), will be near matches too. The problem is if you extend beyond this where you get start getting significant mismatches and therefore ineffective learning.

From the above table you will notice that:

- Problems occur when dependent learners are mismatched with non-directive teachers and when self-directed learners are mismatched with highly directive teachers.
- **T1/S4 is a severe mismatch:** Some S4 learners develop the ability to function well and retain overall control of their learning, even under directive teachers. Other S4 learners, however, *will resent the authoritarian teacher and rebel* against the barrage of low-level demands. This mismatch may cause the learner to rebel or retreat into boredom. S4 learners don't jump through hoops just because somebody says to (even though younger students are ordinarily expected to do so without question as in Grammar Schools and some Universities).
- **T4/S1 is also a severe mismatch:** Here, the teacher delegates responsibility that the learner is not equipped to handle which can reinforce any lack of confidence. Students *may resent or even hate the teacher for forcing upon them a freedom they are not ready for*.
- Remaining situations are "near match" and "match".

You need to appreciate the fact that the distance learners with diverse characteristics might represent all the self-directed learning styles mentioned above and the self-learning (instructional) materials and distance teaching methods and techniques must match to the learning abilities and styles of these learners to realize the educational objectives with possible dynamism required.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write you answer in the space given below.
 b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions".

4) Mention different characteristic stage styles of self-directed learning.

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9.3.3 Advantages and Disadvantages

Following are the **advantages** of self-directed learning.

- It offers an opportunity to overcome the natural curiosity of the learner to be led by teacher.
- It provides opportunities to pursue wider range of interests than is possible in a typical teacher-directed learning.

- It is relatively stress-free approach to learning which reinforces collaboration within and beyond the family.
- It promotes the natural development of self-confidence, initiative, perseverance and life satisfaction.
- The learners become motivated, persistent, independent, self-disciplined, and goal-oriented.
- It offers an experience of empowerment through the power of choice and decision-making on what, when, and how to learn.
- It enhances the level of learner's focus, since the learning process is controlled by the learner himself/herself.
- It improves attitudes toward learning and provides an opportunity to learn through the lens of the learner's own culture, worldview, and perspective.
- It offers an opportunity for development of higher order thinking, problem-solving, collaborating skills.
- It focuses on self-evaluation and monitoring of the progress of actual learning as opposed to evaluation or assessment of his learning by others.

Disadvantages: These include the following.

- The learner may fail to identify the learning needs according to his/her academic level and ability.
- The learner may not be able to find or access appropriate resources for learning.
- There is little opportunity for the learner to get peer feedback.
- Learner may find it difficult to evaluate his/her own progress.
- There is a possibility for frequent errors or repetition of the same errors.
- It encourages students to develop their own rules and leadership patterns.
- It thrusts greater responsibility on the learners for his/her own learning and monitoring.

9.3.4 Factors Influencing Self-directed Learning

In this section we focus on factors that influence self-directed learning.

i) Learning Materials

Self-directed learning or self-learning depends on the provision of effective learning materials which are specially designed to enable learners to learn independently. The quality of learning materials has a strong bearing on independent learning. The learning materials should be well-designed, developed and presented to make learning easy and manageable for the learner and also appropriate to meet the needs of the individual learners. Many distance educators emphasise the importance of clear objectives, instructions, realistic expectations and self-contained nature of materials for independent learning. Lack of clarity in the learning materials could lead to frustration, de-motivation and subsequent disengagement of learners from the programme, especially if external learning support is not adequately available.

Innovative teaching approaches and specially designed learning materials help/facilitate self or independent learning. The following factors related to course design found to be important by Dart (1997), are useful for a better understanding of self-learning:

- Course design helps learners to develop knowledge about their own learning by emphasising the importance of seeking meaning, understanding, and seeing things in a different way. This can be effected through the provision of activities that require accessing different sources of information.
- The course design should make the learners aware of their own learning process through activities that demand analysis, application, evaluation and reflection.
- The design should provide opportunities to the learners to experience autonomy and self-direction in their learning through their active involvement in the learning process.
- The learners should be convinced that the materials they are learning through are useful, interesting and challenging.
- The learners should be made aware of the models of desirable learning behaviours (processes) and outcomes (products).

It means that the approaches to teaching and the nature, type and quality of materials will have their bearing on self-learning.

ii) Educational Background

Educational background and job experience, grades / marks obtained in the previous study and academic ability are significant variables which influence the quality of self-learning. The past learning experiences of the learner also influence the quality of independent learning. Learners' perceptions of their academic ability and the ability to be an independent learner have appeared to be highly predictive of success or otherwise of their study attempts. From Units - 4 and 5 of Block-1 you might have noticed that some open learning institutions have developed bridge or enabling courses to help learners attain minimum level of pre-requisite qualifications to cope with the academic demands of a given programme of study.

iii) Environmental Factors

Learning, for that matter any human behaviour, is a function of the person in relation to his/her environment. The importance and the role of the environment in which learning takes place need not be over emphasised. It means that we should look at a learner's autonomy and his/her ability to exercise autonomy from environmental perspective.

iv) Operational and logistic support

The most important aspect of developing and sustaining the interest and motivation of distance learners is the efficiency with which an institution handles its operations and logistics. Timely admissions, clear schedules of dispatch of materials, assignments submission, counselling-tutoring and effective implementation of the schedules instill confidence in the learners and inspire them to study through the courses, even if the courses, are tough. On the contrary, a weak administration would create a chaos which in turn would de-motivate the learners, even though the courses may be very good and academically useful. For example, if the materials do not reach the students in time, the students will have serious problems in meeting the schedules of assignments submission and they won't be able to prepare themselves for the counselling session; and because of these and other related difficulties they may not like to appear in the examinations or even if they appear performance in the final examinations will be affected.

v) Learning Support

Teacher's support at an appropriate time also facilitates learning. According to Baath (1979), learners learning at a distance need help in defining their goals, selecting appropriate learning materials, working through their learning activities and evaluating their progress. Sewart (1978) recognises learners' constant need for advice and support throughout their studies. The introduction of human element plays an important role in facilitating self-learning. Opportunities for ready access to a teacher (or an academic counsellor) who can answer the queries which might arise in the course of their study and motivate the learners to keep up their interest to study must be adequate and satisfactory.

Further, to enable the learners to cope up with their studies, institutional support of different kinds at all levels is absolutely necessary to provide proper learning environment to the isolated distance learners at all stages of pursuance of their independent study. Therefore, there should be efficient support services to the distance learners which can empower them by providing proper conditions under which they can learn best.

9.3.5 Measures for Promoting Self-learning

Jarvis, Holford and Griffin (1998) reviewed research studies conducted by various experts and concluded that some measures are needed in order to promote self-learning/self-directed learning. Important measures are as follows:

- Provide information on certain topics through different sources of information.
- Serve as a resource for an individual or a small group of learners on certain portion of learning content.
- Assist learners to assess their needs and competencies so that each learner can map out his learning path.
- Provide feedback on their learning plan.
- Locate available resource or secure new information on topics identified through need assessment.
- Build a resource collection of information, media and models related to a variety of topics or areas of study.
- Work with learners outside formal and group settings as a stimulator.
- Help them develop an attitude about and approach to learning that fosters independence.
- Organize discussions, prompt raising questions and promote participation in small group activities to stimulate interest in the learning experience.
- Help develop a positive attitude towards learning and self-directed inquiry.
- Manage a learning process that includes such activities as continuous diagnosis of needs, acquisition of continuous feedback and fostering of learner involvement.
- Serve as an evaluator of learner accomplishment both throughout and at the end of a learning experience.

The above measures, if ignored, would affect self-directed learning.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

5) List out the factors that contribute to promotion of self-learning in the context of distance education.

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9.4 SKILLS REQUIRED FOR SELF-LEARNING

The learners should be advised on how to study on their own. Adequate skills for self-learning help the learners derive the greatest possible benefits from pedagogic activities like listening, viewing, speaking, reading and writing. They need to adopt essential strategies to learn independently and continue their study.

In this section we shall discuss, in brief, the study skills, reading skills and writing skills required by a learner for self-learning. The inputs in this section have been taken from the course materials of the Post-Graduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE) and the *Handbook: How to Study* of IGNOU.

9.4.1 Study Skills

Study skills help the learner gain maximum from the learning materials. These skills demand readiness and active mental exercise on the part of the learner. Thus, the learner has to apply all his capabilities to effectively handle and process information he/she reads. These skills help the learners spend less time in studying and learn more.

There are two aspects of self-learning. One, the learning materials should help the learners work more effectively. So the learning materials are designed in such a way to offer the learners maximum learning experience. Second, the learners should develop adequate study skills so that they can get the maximum from the learning materials — be they printed text or non-print media.

Learners with adequate study skills can make important decisions about various aspects of their learning. These aspects include:

- How to study: preferred methods and media of learning.
- Where to study: convenient locations(s) for studying materials.
- When to study: start/finish dates, and pace of learning.

Learning at a higher level relies upon a variety of basic learning skills. The learners adopt different approaches to study independently. In reality there is no one specific set of skills that constitutes effective studying. As there is no singular way of teaching or learning, there is not a ready-made formula of learning independently. Nevertheless, to become an autonomous learner you must improve your skills of acquiring knowledge

by reading, developing study techniques of your own, asking relevant questions (yourselves and others), participating in group discussion actively, taking notes, etc. Thus, the autonomous learner has to learn new learning behaviours to cope with his/her study.

It is difficult to make an exhaustive inventory of study skills. Considering the features of self-learning, we discuss here three vital concerns in developing effective study skills in autonomous learners. They are:

- When to study?
- Where to study?
- How much to study?

Let us discuss each concern in detail in the same order, as mentioned above.

i) When to study: To achieve the course objectives effectively and efficiently, the learner should plan his/her study time and spread it over a period of time. Taking other commitments and availability of spare time into consideration, one should learn as to how to plan one's own study. The learner should know about systematically planning and organising their studies. The learners should be made aware that being regular in their studies would help them retain and organise what they are studying.

Some adult learners might face problems in deciding when to study. Besides pursuing their studies, they have certain social, professional and family commitments to fulfill. Considering these commitments, they should plan their studies in such a way that they study on a regular basis and find some time from their busy schedule on daily basis. The point that we want to bring home is that there should be a regular schedule of study and nothing should be left to the examination time or the eleventh hour.

ii) Where to study: You might agree with us that a motivated, self-directed learner should be able to learn anywhere: in a quiet place like a library, in a crowded bus/train, in park. But let us be realistic. Most of us cannot entirely shut off our minds to distractions: environmental and psychological. By implication, the place of study should be as free as possible from such distractions as might steal away our attention. The place of study should be well-lit and properly ventilated. We should remember here that every learner may not get what he/she wants. Efforts, however, should be made to create conducive learning environment in the place of study.

iii) How much to study: The third step is to determine the amount of time to be spent in studying. It should be recognised that the amount of time we spend in studying will depend on the subject and the level of mastery we already have and that we want to attain. It also depends on whether you are a slow learner or not. It is, therefore, unrealistic to set a hard and fast rule about the amount of time we should spend on a specific subject. It varies from learner to learner. Fortunately, the more we plan our work the more time we get for deep thinking and reflection.

There are also other means which help us gain maximum from the learning materials. We shall discuss some of them here.

a) Knowing the text: The learners should know the various parts of the learning materials. Helping them know the parts of the learning materials can save their

time and effort. Here are a few suggestions that we should take note of while studying printed learning materials.

- *Survey the text:* A quick glance through the text helps us see how the teacher presents the content — whether he/she presents topic headings in bold letters or not; are there any headings in the margins too; whether there are diagrams, charts, graphs, etc.
- *Read the preface / introduction / foreward:* It contains the teacher's explanation of the learning material — his purpose/plan of writing the text, and his description of the organisation of the text. The preface also explains how the text is either different from others in the field or a further contribution to the field of knowledge.
- *Read the contents:* The list of contents will give us a comprehensive idea of what to expect from the learning materials. This also helps us to locate the topic(s) we want to read.
- *Glance through the index:* The index helps us identify whether or not what we need is included in the text. It really is a valuable aid, because it helps us find specific information that we need.
- *Check for a glossary:* A glossary of the key / crucial words is helpful because it gives us the meaning of specialised expressions, words or phrases used in the text.

b) ***Interpretation of non-verbal items:*** By non-verbal items, we mean maps, charts, tables, graphs, etc., which help us understand the complex and abstract concepts. Some of us employ these techniques to make the ideas clearer. If we are given opportunities to work with various types of illustrative materials, we shall certainly be in a better position to make out meaning from what we are reading. We, therefore, should acquire the skill of learning from non-verbal items.

We need to gain skills in interpreting illustrative materials. Maps, charts and graphs are the items we generally use in our learning materials. Let us talk about some non-verbal items.

- *Maps:* There are many different types of maps, and each stresses particular feature of a bit of information. Each map has a key that needs to be interpreted correctly to get the relevant information. For example, political maps use colour coding and definite boundary line types to indicate political divisions, administrative divisions, etc. Usually, maps present keys indicating what various colours, lines, scale, etc., represent.
- *Graphs and charts:* These are used to present data concisely. Most of us have at one time or the other prepared a chart to exhibit some information. There are different types of charts and graphs. The kinds of information that can be charted are too numerous to state and also out of context here to list all the different types of charts, graphs and kinds of information. Our purpose is to give a general awareness of the use of charts and graphs for self-learning.

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

- c) **Concept mapping:** When we study, we make a graphic representation of the topics (concepts) we are learning. This graph is the 'concept map' representing what we are going to study. Concept mapping is a learning strategy in which learners identify key concepts in the body of a subject matter and manage them in a meaningful way around the focus point. All the concepts are inter-linked with each other. Preparing a good concept map requires that we have the skill of critical thinking because we have to make insightful judgements on what formats, words and phrases best represent the information which we have gone through and what will help us to recall the information, whenever we need it.

Here is a technique we could use. We should:

- choose and determine the amount of information for studying;
- read through the whole material that has been chosen for studying;
- locate the central idea/theme of what is being read;
- re-read each paragraph to identify the main topic in each paragraph; and
- note down the central idea and the topics of the paragraphs studied in easily accessible format.

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

Related to this concept are outlining, note taking and summarising. These concepts will be discussed in Sub-section 9.4.3 of this unit.

9.4.2 Reading Skills

Different people use the term reading differently. Since the meaning of the word largely depends on the context in which it occurs, we should not, therefore, expect to find a single definition for reading.

Reading can be defined loosely as the ability to make sense of written or printed words. The learner uses the symbols to activate information from his/her memory and subsequently uses this information to arrive at a persuasive interpretation of written message. A broad definition that has been widely used and accepted is that reading is a process whereby a learner brings meaning to and gets meaning from printed text (the reading skill is related to the print/visual medium). This implies that learners bring their backgrounds, their experiences as well as their emotions in order to derive meaning from a learning text. If we are in conversation with someone, we can stop him/her and ask for explanations whenever, we need them. Similarly, when we have difficulties in reading, we need to interrogate the text. Since, in learning at a distance, the teacher is seldom available for consultation, the text is our only reference, and reading can, therefore, be described as our interrogation of or interaction with the learning materials.

Reading can be of two types: deep and surface. Some learners intend to reproduce the information to meet externally-imposed assessment demands, others may intend to understand what the writer was trying to communicate to them through the unit.

- A) **Stages in reading:** Keeping Barrett's (1972) taxonomy of reading comprehension as a model, we present here six stages a learner systematically passes through in the process of reading, when he/she moves from lower to higher level of learning.

The stages we have identified are:

- Recognition of words
- Association of meaning with symbols
- Literal comprehension
- Interpretation
- Critical reading
- Creative reading

Let us discuss each one of these stages in the given order.

- i) **Recognition of words:** By recognition of word, we mean the ability of the learner to translate orally or sub-vocally the written symbol into a spoken word. No reading can take place without recognising the word.

A majority of learners acquire the skill of word-recognition by the time they come to higher education. Even at the higher education level, they need consistent review and practice of the principles and procedures necessary for ease in word-recognition. Problems with word recognition may occur in any subject. Quite often in sciences a learner is faced with a number of new words with unknown pronunciations. These words have to be recognised, read, understood and learned.

- ii) **Association of meaning with symbols:** The learner may readily pronounce the word he/she is familiar with. A mathematical or scientific symbol often stands for a complex relationship, which may be as difficult to understand as abstract verbal symbols. When the learner comes across a new word and learns it, he/she recognises it in different contexts, and therefore, we say he/she has learnt a new concept. Let us take an example. A word like ‘*approximation*’ is used in Mathematics, English and Social Studies — in fact, a learner may come across it almost everywhere. Similarly, the word ‘*rational*’, for example, besides its general use in mathematics, is used in a special sense. There are words which have both highly generalised and technical meanings. There are also words which have only the technical meaning; they often belong to one particular area. Of course, with the passage of time such words also get generalised as they are used in more and more diverse contexts. All types of words have to be learnt because accurate communication takes place only when the teacher and the learner share a common understanding of the concept behind each word.

- iii) **Literal comprehension:** It involves important sub-skills — reading for facts and central ideas, noting down supporting arguments, etc. Various patterns of organization of details produce different effects, though they may be essentially the same. Learners, therefore, must learn not only to read for accurate literal understanding of individual facts but also to understand the particular relationship these facts may have with other facts in the learning material.

- iv) **Interpretation:** Interpretation takes the learner beyond the printed words and visuals by requiring him/her to put together ideas. It also requires the learner to see the connections between what he/she is reading now and his/her past reading and life experience. As an outcome of this process, the learner is able to make inferences and draw conclusions. In other words, he/she learns to understand implied meanings of the word or visual. This process of reading is required in all subject areas though with differing degrees of complexity.

- v) **Critical reading:** The evaluation aspect of the reading act, often called critical reading, requires the learner to depart from the printed word or visual in a different direction. At this stage, he/she makes judgements rooted in what he/she has read. His/her personal feelings and prejudice have little role to play, as he/she sorts out facts from opinions and evaluates the logic of the reasoning presented in the material he/she reads. The learner considers the relevance, authenticity and utility of factual material.
- vi) **Creative reading:** Creative reading uses divergent thinking skills to go beyond the literal comprehension, interpretation and critical reading levels. At this stage, the learner tries to come up with new or effective alternative ideas, solution, etc. to those presented by the teacher in the learning materials.

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

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

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

B) SQ3R technique of reading

Different learning materials require different approaches, depending on what the learners expected to get from them. The implication here is that the strategy should be flexible in tackling text materials. One strategy that gained wide acceptance is the SQ3R technique. SQRRR or “SQ3R” is a reading comprehension method named for its following five steps:

- Survey
- Question
- Read
- Recall
- Review

The method was introduced by Francis P. Robinson in 1946 in his book *Effective Study*. We shall discuss each one of these in the given order.

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

- general subject area
- level of approach
- lesson writer's name, and
- date and place of publication

The preface/introduction of a learning material will give you more details. It will help you decide whether or not it deserves your attention. The structure of the lesson is yet another source you should never ignore when making a preliminary survey. A quick survey of the structure tells you what topics the teacher is dealing with and how the topics have been organised.

A survey of the structure will tell you instantly whether or not the text contains what you need. It will also help you save time and efforts by directing you straight to the most relevant learning points.

ii) **Question:** Your survey of the learning text will raise some questions in your mind. For example, after glancing at the title page, preface and structure, you might ask yourself.

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

These general questions are of some help to you in deciding how to treat the text.

When you turn from surveying the text as a whole to the specific theme/topic, your questions will become more specific. At times, the lesson writer himself will pose questions at the beginning or the end of a unit or lesson. Since questions are generally more helpful if given at the beginning of the unit, it is always better to take note of the questions stated at the beginning and at the end of the unit. We should not overlook the writer's questions which may prove very helpful to effective reading.

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

iii) **Read:** Reading text materials demands a critical mind. When we read a text, we apply our minds with all our critical skills. Unless we read 'actively' the questions which have been formulated can never be answered satisfactorily. Two important suggestions should be listed here:

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

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

iv) **Recall:** Reading a text is not the final step in learning. It is, instead, the first step in the learning process. What is read needs to be recalled for its retention.

Deliberate attempts to recall what you have read will help improve your learning in at least three ways — help improve concentration, chance to remedy misinterpretation(s), and develop critical reading.

- v) **Review:** The purpose of reviewing is to check the validity of our recall. The best way to review is to do a quick repeat of the other four steps — survey, question, read and recall.

Having discussed the SQ3R technique of reading, we should be able to say whether or not we should strictly follow the logical order in which SQ3R is presented if we adopt this technique. Although the steps of SQ3R are in a logical and natural order, there may be overlaps and repetitions between them. For instance, even while the emphasis is on survey or 'read' we may still find ourselves asking questions or we may want to interrupt the third stage (i.e. read) for the purpose of recalling and reviewing or even for the purpose of repeating 'survey'. Nevertheless, there is no harm in adopting SQ3R in the same order.

The SQ3R technique need not necessarily be confined only to printed materials. With suitable modification in the stages, we can apply this technique to electronic media too. The stage we may have to change is the third one, i.e. read. This may be replaced by either 'listen to' or 'watch' depending on whether we are dealing with an audio or a video programme. The rest of what we discussed in relation to printed materials might as well be applied to electronic media.

9.4.3 Writing Skills

A self-directed learner spends much of his/her time either in reading the course materials, listening an audio programme, watching a video programme or in writing responses to the assignments based on the course materials. Thus, writing skills are essential for him/her. Here, we shall discuss some of the techniques involved in taking/making notes, summarizing and outlining what we have studied.

Note-making/taking: Note-making helps us mainly in two ways:

- It keeps us active while we are learning (and thus aiding to our concentration).
- It helps us have a record of what we have studied (irrespective of the media).

If we really want to have a grip on what we have read, heard (audio) or watched (video), it is always helpful to put a few words on paper than to depend on hazy memories. The memories may drift away in course of the time unless you nail them down with words. And you can keep your written record as a permanent reminder.

Note-keeping: There may be many ways of keeping notes. Ideally we should arrange our notes in an order, so that the notes on a given topic are kept together — whether we collect them from reading printed text, listening to lecturers or watching video programmes. In such a situation, bound note books are of little help because we shall be forced to store our notes in the order we wrote them. With a loose leaf binder, on the other hand, we can re-arrange our sheets of papers, at times we can remove some, re-write some, add new materials, etc.

In making notes, you should always remember that you need to put in only the essentials. You should not end up with putting together the mini-text. In making notes on note cards, you can keep in mind the following:

- If you are quoting an author's exact words, make sure you put them in quotation marks.

- Try to summarise what you have read or heard but take care that you are stating facts, not opinions.
- If you are giving your or someone else’s opinion, make sure you record this on the card so that you will not confuse the opinion with fact.
- Try not to make notes on matters of common knowledge.
- Do not make notes on the same information twice.

Now, we shall talk about the ways of making notes. There are mainly two ways of making notes.

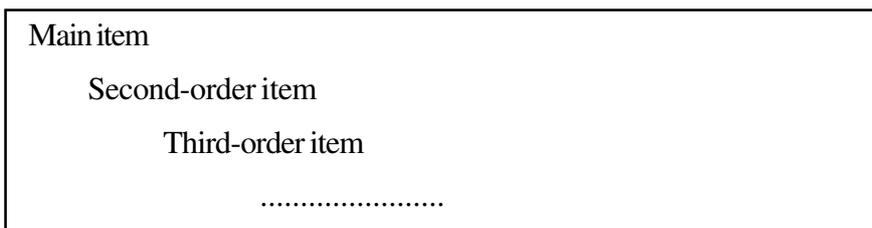
- Summarising
- Outlining.

We shall touch upon each of these below.

Summarising: Summary is a condensed version of the original. A good summary ought to be brief and ought to include only essential information. The main idea of the paragraph or the central idea of an article and the important facts should be stated not necessarily in the sequence presented in the passage (the sequence can be followed in the summary only if it is essential). In a summary we need to include only the information stated in the unit/lesson or article and not your opinions or what you think should have been included.

Outlining: Normally, we present the essential point in an almost diagrammatic fashion. This is called outlining. Where possible try to outline rather than summarise what we read or listen to. In an outline we can list even minute details which may not be possible in a summary. Here are a few guidelines for outlining whatever you read, see or listen to:

- Get a skeleton for your outline from the writer headings. Expand each heading into a meaningful sentence containing the main idea of the section or sub-section it belongs to.
- If the headings are only a few, you need to look at the topic, sentence or each paragraph in the section. It probably carries a main idea that you will need to put in your notes to help develop the argument. In case, you want to include important details, you can present them in parenthesis.
- Once you pick out the main ideas you can indent them from the margin according to their relative importance. For example, you can start the main items at the margin, indent second-order items by say half an inch; third order items go in by another half inch and so on. An illustration is given below.



You should not, however, indent too little or too much. If indentation is too little, the relationship won’t be clear and you may not have room for your notes.

It should not be construed that an outline could be made only by indentation. You can always use letters, numbers, bullets, etc to outline a given topic. Generally the following norm is observed for outlining:

- Roman numerals (I, II, etc.) for the main topics, putting a period after Roman numeral.
- Capital letter (A, B, etc.) for sub-topics with a period after each capital letter.
- Ordinary Arabic numerals (1, 2, etc.) for details under sub-topics and small letters under the details for less important points with a period after each number and letter.
- Roman numbers, capital letters, ordinary numbers, and small letters in straight vertical lines.
- Each topic begins with a capital letter, whether it is a main topic, a sub-topic or a detail.
- Topics are usually phrases, sometimes sentences. They should not be mixed.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

6) What are the important skills required for self-learning in distance education?

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9.5 SUPPORTING SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING: ROLE OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Throughout the world, communication technologies have acquired a central and powerful role in people’s learning. Communication technologies provide self-development opportunities for all through self-learning and empower them to become well-informed individuals of the society. The technologies which developed as part of the processes of industrialization became educational means for lifelong education. Technology can be used for managing both information and activities. It plays crucial role in self-directed learning.

Communication technologies are valuable means of learning, and provide and promote knowledge, skills and attitudes. Technology will change the teacher’s role from dispenser of knowledge to learners to that of facilitator of acquisition of knowledge from a variety of sources, in an individualised way. Technology, if properly designed, implemented and monitored can increase the productivity, in terms of both quality and quantity of self-learning.

One of the important initiatives for self-directed learning may be to establish a learning group which will permit learners to benefit from shared experiences of a group engaged in the same study. This has become more important for developing countries where all the learners may not have home-based access to modern communication technologies. The learning group (besides arranging affordable access to technologies) will provide opportunities to share and assess their ideas and points of view with others in the group. The group will provide a solid source of support for discussion and obtaining answers to important questions and believing that they could successfully complete the course. In fact, the learning group can contribute to the feeling that this was a 'real' class.

Communication technology provides the capacity for greater interaction, both immediate (such as in computer-assisted instruction) and delayed interaction (such as through audio/video cassettes). To gain from various technologies, the learners should have the intention (mental and psychological readiness for learning) and the skill to use interaction effectively to accomplish the objectives. They should involve themselves in various cognitive tasks in terms of listening, viewing, reading, speaking and any combination of the above. Meaningful involvement of the learners in those tasks will keep them alert and active in their learning.

We have discussed the limitations and potential of different technologies in Unit 6 of Block 2 of this course. Our aim here is not to discuss the role of any individual technology in learning at a distance. Some technologies permit greater degree of autonomy than others. But we are tempted to refer 'computer' as a significant technology in distance education. Computer can work as a gateway to resources, collaborative learning and individual achievements. It provides a mode of communication which increases the possibility of learning independently.

Computer has brought with it some very interesting possibilities for self-learning. One of the applications of computer is to access internet which is one of the most important technological innovations to reach individual users, thus giving tremendous capability to them to learn individually. And this it does at a low cost. It provides learners access to the global world of electronic (computer) communication. Simply by connecting a computer to a telephone line, through a modem, the learner can obtain access to other computer networks, including the internet. Education provided automatically by computers, connected to networks, is capable of adjusting to the requirements of every learner.

The learners learning through distance mode need orientation and training in the meaningful use of communication technology and technology-based sources of learning. They can be provided self-learning manuals giving step-by-step instructions to use communication technology-based components. It is important to try and understand as to how technology is to be effectively used in acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes. Appropriate use of technology in self-learning necessitates changes in the way learners engage themselves in the learning process.

9.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have analysed the characteristics of distance learners such as age, gender, social status, economic status, educational status, geographical location, language skills, academic traditions and disabilities which have implications for distance learning. The common problems faced by distance learners include: studying in isolation, lack of

motivation, poor study skills, difficulty in striking a balance between study and other commitments, poor course design, inadequate institutional support and the like.

We also discussed the concept of self-learning/self-directed learning. It refers to attending to, acquiring and understanding information independently, without or with little support of the teacher. Self-learning is managed and directed by the learner himself/herself. We have discussed the various characteristics and stages of self-learning. We have focused on the various factors influencing self-learning such as motivation, learning materials, educational background, environmental factors and learning support. The institutional arrangements that we have discussed relate to motivating the students including pre-enrolment counselling; efficient operations and logistics that take care of timely dispatch of materials, handling of assignments, organising tutorial-cum-counselling sessions; and practice of sound pedagogic principles in the design, development, implementation of academic programmes.

Further we have dealt with skills required for self-learning — study skills, reading skills and writing skills. In the last section we have discussed the role of communication technology in self-learning and argued that the existing and the emerging communication technologies have contributed to the effectiveness of distance education in general and to self-learning in particular. Computer and the internet are referred to as important technological innovations serving the cause of self-learning on a large scale at present which will continue in future as well.

9.7 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’ QUESTIONS

- 1) As a norm, distance learners of any institution or country do not constitute a homogenous community. They differ in their age, gender, socio-economic status, learning styles, geographical distribution, educational background, etc.

In India, distance learners have certain other special characteristics too. The caste and class divisions, centuries old poverty, illiteracy, prejudices, cultural traits, the rural-urban divides and belief-systems further differentiate the learners.

Language issues, particularly the use of English as a medium of instruction, academic traditions having a bearing on the learners’ attitude towards teaching-learning, and the disabilities of different types have greatly influenced the profile of distance learners in India.

- 2) We think that in a developing country like India, the following problems may seriously disrupt and disturb the study of distance learners:
- i) Non-receipt of learning-materials in time (this will demotivate the learners, besides upsetting their schedule of submitting assignments, etc.).
 - ii) Badly designed, poor quality learning materials (inappropriate design, wrong choice of content, or pitching it at the wrong level would cause early dropping out).
 - iii) Non-serious approach to assignments and other forms of formative, continuous evaluation that would misdirect the learners.
 - iv) Non-response and misleading responses to student queries;
 - v) Lack of academic rigour leading to fall in standards and eventual disrepute of the courses and the system would affect the enrolment negatively.

- 3) Self-directed learning in distance education is characterised by the following features:
 - i) Learner-centred approach to learning;
 - ii) Learner's responsibility for his learning;
 - iii) Flexible provision of education to meet individual needs, interests and requirements;
 - iv) Use of specially designed and prepared learning materials.
- 4) The characteristic stage styles of self-directed learning include: Dependent, Interested, Involved and Self-directed.
- 5) The factors that contribute to promotion of self-learning in distance education are:
 - i) Intrinsic motivation of adult learners
 - ii) Effective self-instructional (learning) materials
 - iii) Educational background of learners
 - iv) Autonomy of learning
 - v) Learning support made available to learners.
- 6) Study skills, reading skills and writing skills are the three important skills required for self-learning in distance education. If the major medium of instruction is audiovisual, through cassettes, radio broadcast and telecast media, or if there are audiovisual cassettes, radio broadcast and telecast supplementing print medium, then reading, listening and viewing skills are also equally important for self-learning.

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9.9 UNIT END EXERCISES

You may write brief notes or full-length answers to the questions given here in your own interest. Such notes or answers might help you during your preparation for examination.

Unit End Questions

- 1) What are the characteristics, problems and expectations of distance learners. (1000 words).
- 2) Explain the concept and stages of self-directed learning. How do you promote it? (1000 words).
- 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of self-directed learning? (500 words).
- 4) Discuss the factors influencing self-directed learning. (1000 words).
- 5) Discuss the skills required for self-directed learning (1000 words).
- 6) Explain how communication technology support self-directed learning (500 words).



Questions for Critical Reflection

- 1) While there is in-built teacher in the so called self-instructional material directing the distance learners all through the text in it, it is difficult to accept the concept of self-directed learning. Offer your critical comments on the statement.

Activity



Recall at least three major problems which you had faced in pursuing the BED Programme of IGNOU and record below how they were resolved, including the efforts made by you.

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UNIT 10 COUNSELLING AND TUTORING IN TEACHING AT A DISTANCE

Structure

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 Counselling in ODE
 - 10.2.1 Concept of Counselling
 - 10.2.2 Genesis, Need and Significance of Counselling
 - 10.2.3 Types and Stages of Counselling
 - 10.2.4 Organising Counselling
- 10.3 Tutoring in ODE
 - 10.3.1 Assignments Evaluation: Role of Tutor
 - 10.3.2 Types of Tutor Comments
- 10.4 Qualities of an Academic Counsellor/Tutor
- 10.5 Skills of an Academic Counsellor/Tutor
- 10.6 Use of Media in Academic Counselling and Tutoring
- 10.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions
- 10.9 References
- 10.10 Unit End Exercises

10.0 INTRODUCTION

Yourself being a distance learner you must have experienced the problems associated with absence of a classroom situation, the quasi-permanent separation from your institution, teachers and fellow learners. Also you are aware that, in order to minimise the negative impact of this physical separation on the one hand and to provide you an opportunity to come closer to your teacher / institution both psychologically and academically on the other, various support services have been devised and offered in the open and distance education system. The very purpose of these support services you have experienced till date is to make you feel that you are neither alone nor helpless during the period of your study. You are a member of a well-organised distance education institution which is ready to help you whenever you need help in order to complete your studies smoothly and successfully.

In this unit, you will therefore understand the essential learning support services provided to you in making your learning easy, effective and comfortable.

10.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- justify the need for student support services in distance learning;
- explain the significance of personal contact programmes or face-to-face interaction for distance learners;

- describe the ways of organising counselling sessions for distance learners.
- appreciate the role of assignments in continuous assessment of learning in ODE;
- analyse the implications of tutor-comments for distance learning;
- describe the qualities and skills of academic counselor / tutor in ODE; and
- discuss the role of media in counselling and tutoring in ODE.

10.2 COUNSELLING IN ODE

The idea behind student support in ODE is that there must be a real dialogue between the teacher and the learner as it can enhance confidence and self-learning among the learners. Geographical distance should not matter much if the teacher/institution provides the mental, emotional and academic link between the learner and the institution/teacher through various means and sources. The learner, who is learning independently, may feel deprived of support from the teacher/institution and may feel isolated, helpless and even de-motivated sometimes, particularly when he/she faces a problem in learning. Therefore, there must be some arrangement to provide assistance to the learner who is geographically far from the institution/teacher to address his/her felt needs and enable him/her to overcome the problems.

You will agree that to be an active member of the society all of us need help and cooperation from each other to solve our problems. During your studies for so many years till date, you must have felt helpless many times when you had to take some important decisions regarding certain do's and don'ts in various situations. And, you must have sought help from some persons who were more experienced and cooperative. These are not part of institutional support or services.

In ODE, student support services are provided through a large network of study centres which are linked with the headquarters/main institution through the regional centres. At the study centres counselling is organized for learners. Counselling is an important aspect of student support services. Let us understand what it is.

10.2.1 Concept of Counselling

In an academic set up also, whether conventional or distance education, a teacher helps students academically and non-academically by providing various bits of information about institutional rules, regulations, various administrative decisions, procedures and so on related to admissions, programmes, examinations, etc. The following are the major activities a teacher generally performs.

- Teaching : Lecturing, providing feedback, evaluation
- Administration : Action, advocacy, assessment
- Counselling : Informing, advising, counselling

From the above categorization, it is clear that counselling is an assistance given to the students to solve their problems, among other things. This assistance may be in the form of providing general information, giving advice on appropriate courses of action or helping the students to meet their needs, or solve their problems related to their study. In a broader sense, counselling constitutes all the three activities, i.e. **informing, advising, and counselling** altogether. The only difference between informing and counselling is that high level of information skills are needed in providing information to the students whereas in counselling high level of interpersonal skills are needed. Informing

is knowledge-dependent whereas counselling is student-dependent or student-specific. Advising is dependent on both knowledge and students. In other words, advising is somewhere between giving information and counselling.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

1) Imagine that you are a teacher in a distance education institution answering questions from students. What kind of response would you make to each case mentioned below – whether informing, advising or counselling?

i) Can you suggest me a good way to increase my power of concentration?

.....

ii) Can I give the examination without submitting any assignments?

.....

iii) What are the rules of examination?

.....

iv) I cannot sit for the exams — I am terrified of the exams.

.....

v) I do not find it easy studying independently. What is the appropriate way of reading through self-instructional materials?

.....

vi) Can I submit the assignments after the stipulated time?

.....

The teacher must be clear about the difference between teaching and counselling. Teaching is course-centred, and the communication starts from the teacher to the learner. A classroom teacher must be a good talker, effective presenter of the content, etc. Contrary to this, counselor must be able to give advice to the students. It is purely student-centred. Here, the communication starts from the learner and the counsellor responds. If you want to become a good counsellor, you should know very well that art of listening, as a counselor must be a very good listener too.

10.2.2 Genesis, Need and Significance of Counselling

Counselling was introduced formally in DE system in 1984. The International Council of Distance Education (ICDE) and British Open University held a joint Conference on counselling in 1984 followed by second conference in 1987. After that the British Open University (UKOU) developed a range of correspondence, video and face-to-face staff development materials including a section on counselling. Similarly, the Association of European Correspondence Schools has instituted a Diploma in Correspondence Education which also contains a counselling module.

Need and significance of counselling

Counselling is needed when a person tries to arrive at a decision, but fails. In such a situation, he/she needs somebody’s assistance to do the same. In the DE system, the decision-making may range from choice of courses, time, budgeting, preparation of

assignments, betterment of grades, learning style best suited for independent study, etc. (Please be clear that it is not necessary that each and every distance learner needs counselling while working through the course material or studying through this mode. There are many students who are confident enough to take decisions on their own). But, in general, distance learners need help in taking decisions at various stages of their study.

Counselling is also needed when a student feels any kind of difficulty in the process of learning. The barriers may be related to the following problems:

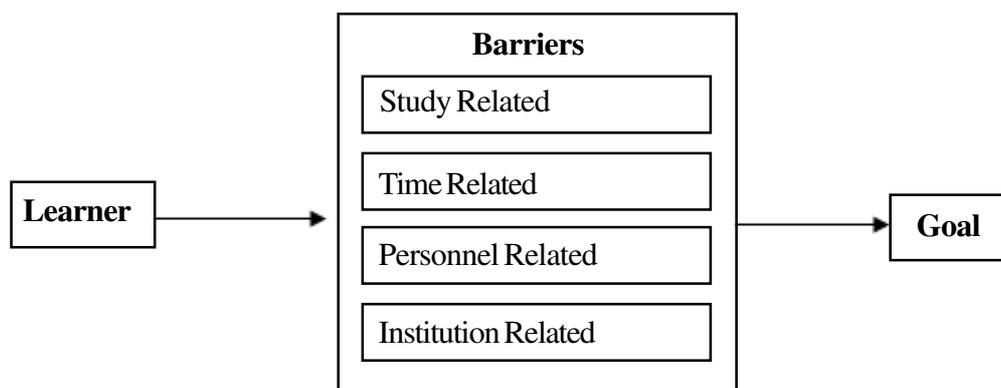


Fig. 10.1: Counselling on barriers to learning

What is the significance of counselling in ODE? From the Fig.10.1 you may understand that there are various types of barriers which may affect the learner's study process. These barriers may be study-related (completion of assignment, preparation for examination, etc.); time-related (planning of time, etc.); personal (health, family problems/mishaps in family, career/financial problems); and institutional (dealing in mailing, ill-suited rule/regulations). Besides, there are some extraneous barriers such as extra pressure of work, meager educational opportunity at home, etc. which act as barriers in the way of smooth learning. To overcome these barriers counselling is essential. Personality traits of learners also play an important role in overcoming the barriers. For some people these barriers are not very powerful, instead they feel like getting energy from the difficulties and they accept challenges in a heroic manner whereas there are some other learners who became anxious and worried, and they need assistance and intensive counselling to overcome these barriers.

Timely counselling will help them overcome their problems and have smooth progress in their studies. Otherwise, it will lead to frustration, stagnation and finally their withdrawal from the course of study or programme. Thus, counselling in ODE place paramount role in addressing various problems of the diverse groups of learners. The counselling is generally organized as short-duration sessions of two-three hours, depending upon the type of counselling service required for learners. They are popularly called personal contact programmes, in common parlance, though they are intended to provide academic counselling and tutoring as may be required for the distance learners.

Many students have the ability to solve their problems on their own. A self-reliant, self-confident and self-sufficient student generally does not need counselling. But, there are some other types of students who feel shy to admit that they cannot solve their problems. Similarly, there are others who may feel that their problem is so intense, acute and deep-rooted that nobody is able to solve it for them. Counselling is usually sought to solve the problems such as withdrawal from a course, evaluation patterns, career choice, study related issues, etc. Whether the students are women or men of any course, be it

arts, science, social science, commerce, medicine, engineering or computers, they need counselling whenever they face such problems. A learner seeks counselling to arrive at a decision or to overcome certain barriers in learning. Particularly, every crucial problem in their study through the programme requires timely counselling. If they are not provided timely counselling they may suffer from certain adverse consequences for they may take wrong decisions.

Significance of Personal Contact Programmes: Distance learners differ from the conventional learner as they study independently without having the opportunity to interact with their teachers and peer group regularly. The positive side of this self-study however, is that the learners can continue their study without any pressure or interference of time, pace, quality, and rules and can in turn become self-confident, self-reliant and more knowledgeable. The negative side of this freedom is that the learners have to do each and every thing to solve their problems on their own. This situation generates the feeling of loneliness, helplessness, de-motivation in the distance learner and in turn affects his/her learning pace and ability. To avoid these problems, it is important to have a place where the learners can enjoy the facility of interacting with the teacher as well as the peer group in face-to-face situation. This type of contact may help learners cognitively (solving the course content related problems) as well as effectively (solving their psychological problems to some extent). Thus, personal contact programmes provide opportunity to distance learners to feel at home academically as well as personally. During the contact programme, the distance learner may exploit the opportunity of viewing course related video cassettes, listening audio cassettes, interacting with the counsellor as well as peer group, going through the text as well as reference books to get in-depth knowledge of the subject and so on.

The significance of personal contact programme, particularly in teacher education, is very well recognised by many of the distance learning institutions all over the world. We cite some universities where personal contact programmes are being organised in a very effective manner at their study centres: The National Correspondence College of Zambia; The University Sains Malaysia (USM); UK Open University; Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand; and Indira Gandhi National Open University, Kota Open University, Yashvantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University in India. These examples of some of the universities in India and abroad, would have helped you in appreciating the significance of personal contact of distance learners with their tutor and counselor as well as their fellow students in ODE system.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write you answer in the space given below.
b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

2) i) What is counselling?
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

ii) When is counselling needed?

.....

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10.2.3 Types and Stages of Counselling

When a distance teacher provides assistance in decision-making at various stages of learning the counselling is called *developmental counselling*. When the distance learner seeks counselling to overcome his barriers or problems, it is called *problem-solving counselling*. The types and stages of counselling are inter-connected. To understand this interconnection between the types and stages of counselling, let us discuss the problem-solving counselling first.

Problem-solving counselling

Please go through the Table 10.1.

Table 10.1: Problem-solving Counselling

Barriers	Example of Barrier	A Problem related with the Barrier	Probable response of the Counsellor
Personal	Illness, ageing, work pressure, emotional imbalance, etc.	I am finding it hard to complete the assignment due to ill health.	He may advise the learner to go to a better skilled person like doctor.
Study Related	Developing appropriate study habits, assignment submission, visiting library, etc.	Whenever I study I feel that nothing retains in my mind.	He checks the anxiety level of the learner first and then advises him to acquire suitable study skills and habits.
Institution Related	Dealing with system breakdowns, unsuccessful appeals, dissatisfaction with evaluation, etc.	I am sorry to say that I could not get back the checked assignment yet.	Here first the anxiety level of the student should be checked and then he/she explains relevant rules and procedure.
Time Related	Organising, structuring, and prioritizing time	I am not finding much time to complete the assignment	Here motivation of the learner should be checked first and then help in tailoring time.
Assessment Related	Essay writing, skill of writing within the stipulated word limit, examination anxiety.	I am seriously thinking of not appearing in the examination.	Here check the anxiety level and then give tips on doing assignments on priority.

From Table 10.1, you might have understand various barriers that make the learner helpless and how a counsellor should be intelligent and mature enough to handle the student’s problems.

Developmental counselling

There are, however, various decision-points at different stages, which demand help in arriving at any conclusion. These decision-points may range across various stages from initiating the courses to withdrawal from the course(s). Some of the decision points, issues related to particular point, problems that the learners may raise can be understood by going through the table presented in Table 10.2.

Table 10.2: Decision Points Requiring Problem-Solving Counselling

Decision point	Issue	Example of problems/issues raised
Pre-entry	Preparatory advice, entry requirement, course information, time allocation, motive classification, etc.	Please send me the list of courses run by the institution. I wanted to look at them before joining the institution.
Entry	Orientation to study at a distance, study skill, institutional requirements, preparing assignments.	I feel difficulty in studying through self-instructional materials. I do not know whether I would be able to continue the studies
Course Choice + Career Choice	Course information, recognition of courses, levels of difficulty, possibilities of employment, job hunting skill.	What are the prospects, if I join management courses run by the institution?
Withdrawal	Clarifying reasons, helping to deal with the sense of frustration and disappointment, alternative courses.	I feel that I cannot proceed further with the studies as I am finding it extremely difficult.
Motivational	Classification of motives for study, re-motivating, relating motives to appropriate courses, organising and structuring time and social demand.	I become anxious sometimes thinking that this course will not help me in future to get a job.

From Tables 10.1 and 10.2 you must have developed clear understanding that counselling is devised to help the learner in overcoming his/her various barriers in taking decisions in the conflicting situations. As far as the stages of counselling is concerned, developmental counselling is done at each and every stage of learning.

We can also categorise counselling into two other types – academic and non-academic - depending upon its nature.

Academic counselling: It covers all courses and course-based topics. These topics may be related to selection of course at pre-entry stage, study habits, assignment preparation, learning styles and appearing in examinations, etc. The special feature of this type of counselling is that it always deals with specific pin-pointed problems, issues, etc. related to the programmes of study.

Non-academic counselling: The remaining assistance provided to the learner, which is not academic in nature, comes under the non-academic counselling. In other words, non-academic counselling deals with general, administrative and personal issues.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

3) What category of counselling – academic or non-academic – might be appropriate in the following queries of issues?

i) Please inform me about the entry requirement for B.Ed course.

.....

ii) I did not receive the checked assignment yet. Please inform me whether you received the assignment or not.

.....

iii) Which type of course would be best suited for studying human resource development?

.....

iv) I am very much anxious about the forthcoming annual examination.

.....

v) Give me a few tips for organizing time for study.

.....

vi) I am finding it difficult to write assignment response.

.....

10.2.4 Organising Counselling

The organisation of counselling sessions is not an easy task. It needs a full-fledged and well-organised channel of communication, trained personnel and physical infrastructure. Counselling is the most lively aspect of student support services. It is done by a trained academic counsellor who is available at the study centre at specified timings to help/assist the learner if he/she is facing any personal, academic and non-academic problem or barrier in the process of learning. In order to offer effective counselling, a well organized network of study centres, regional centres and the headquarters is necessary. Study centres are attached to the headquarters through regional centres. Study centres are the main work places of counsellors where they assist students through face-to-face interactions.

10.3 TUTORING IN ODE

You are aware that IGNOU uses print as main medium of instruction and the major part of teaching-learning takes place through SLPMs and assignments. This communication is all at a distance. Sometimes, it may take place even through writing of letters to the learners, talking on telephone, interaction through teleconferencing and radio, face-to-face counselling, computer-assisted teaching or through ‘guided didactic

conversation' by writing proper comments on their assignment responses. All these activities are mainly facilitated by the distance teachers who include the academic counsellors and tutors.

10.3.1 Assignments Evaluation: Role of Tutor

One of the major differences between the conventional system and ODE system is that in the former the written work is primarily for correction, assessment and indicating progress of the learner and in the latter the most important function of the assignments is teaching and learning, rather than simply awarding grades/marks. In ODE assessment of assignments is simultaneously an act of teaching as well. The aim of the tutor should be to promote the learning by the learner. And the assessment through assignments is in the form of a dialogue between the tutor and the learner. It is the same academic counsellor who performs this role as a tutor. So, the most important task is to effectively teach through tutor comments. Therefore, the distance teacher should have a thorough understanding of how to write teaching-type comments on the assignment scripts to promote effective two-way communication between him/her and the learner.

A) Assignments evaluation: A two-way communication

The two-way communication through assignments evaluation in distance education generally serves the following purposes:

- Supports learner's motivation and interest;
- Supports and facilitates student learning by enabling them to apply the knowledge and skills acquired from tutor's comments, explanations and suggestions; and
- Assess students' progress and provide them with an instrument by means of which the learners can judge their educational situation and needs.

Kulhavy (1977, p.229) states "there is little doubt that feedback works to increase what a person learns from an instructional unit". To make teaching more effective through tutor comments, the right strategy should be to start with well written and positive points, then move on to indicate the weak points, omission, etc. in the answers. The comments should be concluded with an encouraging remark to keep the morale of the learners high. While writing the comments the tutor should be careful about such comments that may generate in the learners an adverse emotional reaction. The best quality of the tutor is to acknowledge the hard work, effort and considerable lengths of time the learner has invested in it.

To make teaching-learning interesting through the comments written on the assignment responses, the tutor will have to remind learners throughout the year to take time to learn from the comments and write back, in case something is not clear from the comments written by the tutor. It is important that the comments are written legibly to promote different levels of communication, so that the learners feels that their effort has been respected by the tutor.

B) Levels/Types of Communication

Teaching-learning depends on how better your communication is, particularly in the present age when there are different channels of communication. The levels of communication between the learner and the distance tutor are categorised mainly into the following three broad types:

- academic communication;

- personal (non-academic) communication; and
- supplemental communication.

i) Academic Communication

In academic communication, the tutor concentrates fully on writing the comments of only academic nature on assignment responses submitted by the learner. The tutor goes through the assignment and writes his/her comments on the assignment. These comments are based on the content given in a particular course. At the academic level, the distance tutor has to read the assignments with care and write comments on these assignments known as marginal comments and global comments, and award the grade for the assignments according to the information given in the assignment responses by the learner.

Whatever is being communicated between the distance tutor and the distance learner is at the academic level only. The comments written by the tutor communicate to the learner about the content, presentation, precision, expression and the planning of assignment response. The distance tutor, unlike a conventional teacher, has to address every student individually and the main means to do so is to write comments on the assignment responses. The task of writing academic comments on the assignments is much more difficult and challenging when compared with his/her counterpart in the face-to-face classroom teaching. Such task deserves great attention and patience. It should be the concern of the distance tutor to break isolation of the distance learners through his/her comments.

ii) Personal Communication

The personal communication is from the distance tutor to the distance learner in his/her personal capacity. With the help of personal comments a tutor can develop confidence in the learner. The distance tutor has to give a feeling that he/she is there to assist the learner in his/her studies in a personal manner. For this purpose, there has to be a non-academic level of tutor comments also, which will break the isolation of the learner and provide extra incentive/motivation and help. The personal comments which are different from academic communication should help the learner to continue with the course, and also to achieve the learning objectives. Personal comments will have to be well thought out, deliberate, precise and pedagogically purposeful.

iii) Supplemental Communication

This type of communication emerges out of academic and personal communication. This communication is possible from either side, i.e. from distance tutor or distance learner. The distance learner may like to ask the tutor about the comments written on the assignment responses or the grade/marks awarded to him/her on these assignment responses. Sometimes, the comments written on the assignments by the tutor may invite some questions. A tutor may also discover that some assignments are difficult and cannot be handled by the distance learners easily. Therefore, the tutor should prepare a supplemental communication in the form of model answers or notes to help the learners.

The distance learner may sometimes react strongly to the comments written by the tutor or even challenge the grade/marks awarded to him/her. The distance educator must explain his/her view point clarifying the issues to the learner. Therefore, the supplemental communication from the tutor should add to the credibility of the assessment scheme and also act as a teaching tool. This kind of interaction, rather

two-way communication, is bound to make learning more effective and motivate the learners to learn at a faster rate.

C) Functions of Tutor

A distance tutor performs the following three functions:

- i) Reads the assignment-response of distance learner,
- ii) Writes comments on the answers/assignment responses, and
- iii) Evaluates the answers/responses by way of awarding a grade to it.

When the tutor reads the assignment-response of a learner, his/her likely comments are born of his/her attempt at correlating and comparing his/her own interpretation of a particular course-unit with the corresponding learner response in terms of both content and presentation. The content of the course-unit, the tutor's own expertise in the field, the corresponding expertise of his/her colleagues, and his/her own idea of the ideal response (for a particular assignment) form the bases of his/her comments and the grades he/she awards. It should also be mentioned here that the tutor's idea of the ideal response is a variable that is affected as much by his/her own views as by the range and variety of the assignment-responses he/she receives from different students.

Further, to distance teach effectively he/she must understand each and every student. Unlike a classroom teacher who addresses a collective mass of students, the distance teacher/tutor has to address every student individually. And a major means of addressing his/her students is to write comments on the assignment-responses.

The distance teacher/tutor must:

- i) correct-his/her student and guide him/her where he/she may have gone wrong,
- ii) elaborate on what he/she may have attempted summarily,
- iii) point out and confirm the acceptable aspects of his/her responses, and
- iv) assess the level of his/her achievement and explain the basis of that assessment so as to ensure better student performance in future.

It is the duty of the tutor to repeat all the above mentioned tasks over and over again with every student. This certainly is a task that demands great attention, besides patience in writing a variety of comments appropriate to each of the assignment responses.

10.3.2 Types of Tutor Comments

The teaching comments and the supplemental communication from the Academic Counsellor / Tutor would help the learner understand two important points:

- i) What is expected of the learners when they write their assignment responses?
- ii) Whether the grades/marks given by the assessor are justified by the tutor comments?

The tutor comments are broadly categorised under two groups — namely teaching, and non-teaching comments. The Figure 10.2 presents, schematically, the classification of these comments.

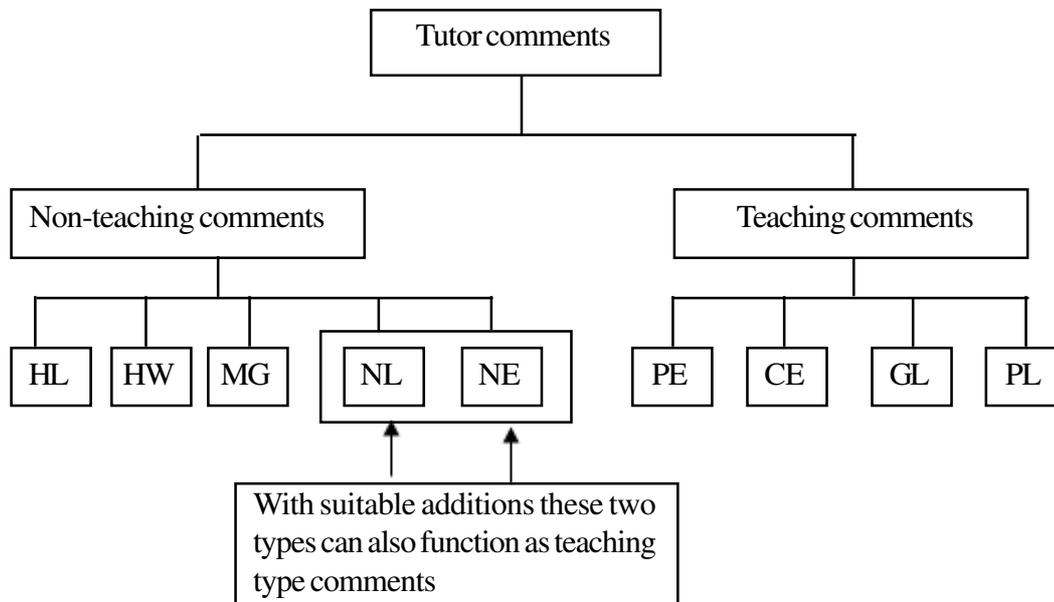


Fig. 10.2: Types of Tutor Comments

HL = Harmful comments

HW = Hollow comments

MG = Misleading comments

NL = Null comments

NE = Negative comments

PE = Positive comments

CE = Constructive comments

GL = Global comments

PL = Personal comments

Since the comments given in Figure 10.2 are not exhaustive one may think of some more types of comments. But these are globally accepted comments. However, there is no hard and fast rule of expressing these comments. One comment can be expressed in many ways. The tutor has to be very careful in writing comments so that a teaching comment does not change into a non-teaching comment.

When the learner goes through these comments carefully then the real communication takes place between the tutor and the learner. Let us now discuss these comments one by one and see what exactly they mean.

D) Non-teaching Comments

Non-teaching type comments are of the following types.

a) Harmful (HL) Comments

This type of comment hurts the learner and de-motivates him/her and may even lead to the withdrawal of the learner from the course. Instead of helping the learner the comment discourages him/her. Such comments are rude and fail to build a purposeful rapport between the distance learner and the distance tutor. Some learners may object to these type of comments and develop hatred towards the tutor. With this type of comments all possibilities of communication get blocked. For example: 'Horrible language', 'this is foolish', 'you do not know anything', 'do you think you have written everything about the unit?' etc.

b) Hollow (HW) comments

These comments do not carry any thing for the learner. They do not suggest anything to the learner, neither do they guide nor do they help the learner in any way. The learner

does not get any benefit out of this type of comments. The comments do not serve any purpose. For example: ‘Your answer is not to the point’, ‘Go through the lesson once again’, ‘Try to write a good answer’, ‘Your assignment contains many unnecessary materials’.

c) *Misleading (MG) comments*

At times the tutor writes such comments which mislead the learner and put him on the wrong track — the learner is asked to do something that does not serve any purpose for him. This type of misleading comments, often, will have an adverse effect on teaching-learning process. There are instances when the distance tutor contradicted with correct answers/responses of learner as the tutor himself/herself was not clear about a concept. Sometimes, he/she may express his/her view point differently which misleads the distance learner. For example: your understanding is not clear, please read the unit again and re-do the assignment.

d) *Null (NL) Comments*

These comments do not convey any meaning to the learners nor do they help him in any way. These comments neither confirm nor question nor explain nor approve anything. The distance teachers tend to put signs and symbols while going through the assignment responses. For example, the non-verbal marks like (?), (-), (=), (II), (??) (/ /) do confuse the learner. It is therefore, important for the distance tutor to avoid writing meaningless symbols as comments and express his/her views in words and sentences so that the learner understands these comments and improves his/her other assignment responses.

e) *Negative (NE) Comments*

Through these comments the distance tutor wants to point out the weaknesses and strengths in the assignment responses. Such comments usually carry a negative element in them. The words like ‘no’, ‘none’, ‘not’, etc. are mostly used for this type of comments.

Let us see the following examples:

- i) The answer to this question is not up to the mark.
- ii) The answer is not sufficient.
- iii) The explanation given is not clear.
- iv) Coverage of facts is not adequate, etc.

These comments do not convey complete message for the learner. Therefore, the distance tutor has to categorically indicate and explain as to “what” can be added or changed to make the answer complete and correct.

II) Teaching Comments

Teaching type comments are of the following types.

a) *Positive (PE) Comments*

Positive comments always help the learner at a distance. These comments motivate and encourage the learner to improve his/her future performance. Such comments are to the point and clearly written. The distance tutor should have lot of clarity and patience to write these comments.

Positive comments are presented in a straight forward, clear, and complete manner in favour of the argument put forward by the learner. For example, “your answer is to the point. Illustrations have made the answer clear and stronger.”

b) *Constructive (CE) Comments*

These comments offer constructive suggestions to improve upon the response. For example: “You could have made your arguments stronger by giving two or three specific examples.”

c) *Global (GL) Comments*

Global comments are written separately on the assessment sheet supplied with the assignment to give comprehensive response on the assignment. The important function of these comments is to justify why a particular grade/mark is given to the particular assignment. These comments cover the entire assignment-response in terms of the accuracy, information, comprehensiveness, logic, planning, expressions, size, etc., of the assignment response. These comments do not necessarily repeat the details of the marginal comments. Global comments categorically spell out the reasons why has he/she awarded a particular grade, be it A, B, C, D or E to the assignment. The explanation given in the global comments helps the learner to know his/her weaknesses and improve his/her performance in the subsequent assignment responses.

d) *Personal (PL) Comments*

As discussed in sub-section 10.3.1 above, the main function of the personal comment/personal communication is to break the isolation of the distance learner. Writing a comprehensive personal comment and breaking the isolation of the distance learner is much more difficult than writing any other teaching type of comments.

Personal comments are very useful to the learners, for these involve the affective domain of the learner. Personal communication brings the distance tutor and the distance learner closer to each other, and thus help them in promoting their mutual understanding. These comments give a sense of feeling to the distant learner that there is someone to help him/her. He/she gains confidence by writing to the distance tutor and by getting clarifications from time to time at personal level.

An example of a good personal comment is given below:

“Your performance proves that you can manage very well as a distance learner. Should you have any problem of writing out the descriptive portion with hand, it can be typed and sent. If you still prefer writing to typing, you can wait till your fractured arm is alright”.

The distance tutors should, therefore, be thoroughly oriented on writing tutor comments. They should never write non-teaching comments. It is essential that there should be a logical link between the tutor comments and the grading in the assessment scheme for distance open learning. You need to keep these things in mind, if you become a distance tutor.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

4) List the non-teaching and teaching type of tutor comments.

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10.4 QUALITIES OF AN ACADEMIC COUNSELLOR /TUTOR

The term academic counselor/tutor is used for him/her who teaches as well as advises through correspondence or who conducts face-to-face tutorial / counselling sessions at the study centre. The counsellors are advisors, tutors and teachers in open and distance education. The qualities they are expected to possess must correspond to the duties/responsibilities they perform in distance education. Let us first know about their duties/responsibilities.

Duties/responsibilities

The *duties/responsibilities* of an academic counselor/tutor are:

- To foster further academic discussion in the face-to-face sessions at the study centres;
- To respond to student queries, problems, doubts, etc about the course material;
- To assist students to become independent learners by helping them to develop sound skills appropriate to distance education;
- To evaluate assignment responses, grade them and give feedback to students;
- To encourage and support students to overcome the barriers to learning or to take academic decisions. These barriers and decision points may be related to their study; examinations, assignments, language as instructional medium and so no.

In order to perform these duties/responsibilities mentioned above, the academic counsellor is expected to possess certain *qualities*. What are those *qualities*?

Qualities

Rogers (1984) (who introduced non-directive, client-centred counselling) has identified four qualities of an effective counsellor. They are: *warmth*, *acceptance*, *genuineness* and *empathy* — simply called **WAGE**, to remember easily, as each letter in it stand for each quality mentioned above. Given below are some illustrations. These illustrations may help you understand the importance of these four qualities in a counsellor.

Suppose you, as a counsellor, are sitting in your room. A student who is worried and a bit nervous approaches you. He tells you: “I am fed up with the strict regulations regarding submitting assignment responses within the stipulated time. I feel like leaving

this course as I am unable to complete them. Writing assignment responses is very difficult and it is beyond my ability.”

You may respond to that learner in the following manner, reflecting the four qualities or attributes of a good counsellor.

- It’s true. But can I help you? (**Warmth**).
- “It sounds that you are bit anxious about this business.” (**Acceptance**).
- “Do not be very much anxious about it. Honestly speaking, this is not only you who are facing this problem. Sometimes, I also feel it difficult to finish the assignment within the stipulated time. However, proper planning and budgeting of time can definitely solve your problems.” (**Genuiness**).
- “I can understand how anxious you are about the completion of the task”. (**Empathy**).

Now, having so responded, you can be placed in the category of a good counsellor.

Contrary to the above, if you react in the following manner, what happens, then?

- “I am busy, be brief, in your Statement.”
- “We cannot change our regulations for you. If you are finding it difficult, better leave it.”
- “You have chosen the course to study. Now, you have to get on with it.”
- “You must not feel that completing assignments within a stipulated time is a difficult task at all”.

As discussed in sub-section 10.3.3 above, with the help of personal comments a good tutor can develop confidence in the learner. If the distance tutor has to be able to do this, he/she needs to possess the following extra qualities:

- a) Very high degree of patience,
- b) Linguistic sophistication, and.
- c) Feel for appropriate placement of the personal comments.

The student would have left the room, before you complete your response. Therefore, if a counsellor wants to solve the problems of students, he/she has to communicate with personal warmth and empathy to make students feel at ease. Similarly, you must possess the quality to accept other people and their feelings without criticising or judging them personally (acceptance). You have to be genuine with the students by showing the ability to be naturally open, friendly and un-defensive. Lastly, you should sense the feelings and experiences of others and fully appreciate them. These qualities, along with some other traits such as patience, courtesy, affection, tolerance, etc help you become an effective counsellor/tutor.

10.5 SKILLS OF AN ACADEMIC COUNSELLOR / TUTOR

To be a successful academic counselor/tutor, besides the above qualities, you need to possess certain *skills* as well. What are these skills you need to master?

You should master the following three essential skills

- Selecting,
 - Listening, and
 - Structuring.
- i) **Selecting:** It is nothing but the skill of categorising student’s/learner’s response into *informing*, *advising* and *counselling*. Suppose a learner wants some information about the admission process he/she should be provided with that information which he/she requires specifically. We have already discussed it in detail in sub-section 10.2.1, as to what type of enquiries come under which specific category.
- ii) **Listening:** The second important skill a counsellor should possess is *listening*. Keeping ‘mum’ or intelligent listening is the best way of understanding the problem of any individual learner. While doing effective listening the counsellor may ask open-ended questions, acknowledge what the learner is saying, reflect/repeat what the learner has said, and, if needed keep active silence when the learner is trying to express his strong feelings. The counsellor should be able to do all these in such a manner that the student may not feel disturbed or interrupted while saying something.
- iii) **Structuring:** The third skill required is *structuring*. It consists of three stages - *clarification*, *checking* and *consequences*. Look at the Table 10.3 to know more about these stages mentioned under this skill.

Table 10.3: Stages of Structuring

Stages	Activity / Work done	Examples
Clarification	Clarifying the issues or problems through dialogue with the students.	S: I am interested in a career in teaching. C: Teaching at which level – primary, secondary, or higher. S: Oh! I meant in secondary level. C: Secondary level, O.K.
Checking	Going back to the students to ensure that the problem or issue is completely clear.	C: I have a leaflet about that. I could send it to you if you like. S: Oh, yes please.
Consequences	What will the counsellor try to do (action or advise) as a result of the interview with the student.	C: Fine, I will put that in the post to you today and then if you have any question after reading it you are welcome to contact me again. S: Thank you very much.

Note: C = Counsellor; S = Student

From the above discussion it should be clear now that if you want to become a good counsellor; you must have qualities like warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy along with skills of selecting, listening and structuring.

Now, let us discuss organising counselling sessions for the distance learners. Examine the following illustration in the box below.

Box 10.1: How I act as an academic counsellor

If I have to perform the role of a counsellor who is to counsel the beginners of the course, who assembled before the submission of first assignment of the B.Ed. course, I will conduct the counselling in the following manner:

Counsellor: Hello! How are you? Feel free and make yourself conformable here. This is your institution and we are all members of one family. I am physically present here to make you feel at home and help you”.

Student:’

Counsellor: What are your reactions to the course material specially designed for you? I agree with you that studying through the course material independently is a bit difficult task, but do not worry. It happens when we have to de-condition ourselves from something and try to condition to something new. You have to face a similar situation here in this system too. However, studying independently is not very difficult if you use certain skills while studying the course material. Similarly, doing an assignment is not at all a difficult task, if you do it properly. For example, to write an assignment response, first prepare the framework of the assignment response keeping in mind the following.

- i) The meaning of the question,
- ii) Word limit specified for the response,
- iii) Points of emphasis, and
- iv) Illustrations, if needed.

When you frame the answer keeping in mind the above four points you will be definitely able to overcome the difficulty in writing the assignment response. If the assignment questions are not very clear to you, you may get it clarified here itself. I am here to solve your problems. Feel free to ask about anything that makes you anxious.

The above illustration shows how counselling can be organised for the beginners of any course. Thus, in order to conduct effective counselling sessions, counsellors will have to perform the following activities in a phased manner or in proper order:

Phases of activities:

- opening the session
- establishing rapport
- exploration of the problem of the student
- exploration of the causes of the problem
- discovering alternative solutions
- termination of the session
- follow-up.

In other words, counselling involves the following phases:

- i) The counsellor may start the session with a few preliminary introductory remarks about the learners. This is intended to set the counselling going in smooth manner and provide a setting for counsellor-learner interactions.
- ii) The second phase is the establishment of rapport by the counsellor with the learner. This activity is the most important one as the whole process of counselling depends

on the rapport the counsellor establishes with the distance learner. To establish this rapport the counsellor must use all his abilities and skills very effectively so that the learner may feel free to initiate a dialogue with the counsellor.

- iii) It also helps the counsellor to identify the actual problems of the learner. Unless the counsellor understands the problem correctly he cannot help the learner properly.
- iv) The counsellor, after understanding the learner’s problem, assists him/her (learner) in working out solutions in the form of readjustment plans. Here, the counsellor’s duty is to ensure that the learner accepts the best strategy that suits him.
- v) When the counsellor is satisfied with the outcome of the discussion, termination of the session takes place. In this phase, the counsellor asks the student to review the causes of the problem and the readjustment strategies he/she has planned. Along with this, the counsellor reassures and gives encouragement to the student to use the re-adjustment strategy effectively.
- vi) They plan together to evaluate the readjustment strategies evolved from the discussion are effective.

These are some of the activities which a counsellor has to perform when he/she organizes counselling sessions for the learners. Here, there are no hard and fast rules to be followed. The counsellor’s concern should be to solve the problem, and not to stick to the rules he/she has to follow. Similarly, counselling may be provided in the form of informal interactions, formal, well planned interviews, lecturing (on a difficult content-related problem-solving) advising (assignment writing or language related problem); improving (about examination, admission, etc.) and so on.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

5) Mention the activities generally performed by the counsellor in conducting a counselling session.

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10.6 USE OF MEDIA IN ACADEMIC COUNSELLING AND TUTORING

Various media are useful in academic counselling and tutoring. All those media which have relevance for distance education are equally applicable for academic counselling and tutoring. Here, it is good if you revisit Unit 6 of Block 2 of this course. From this unit, you will understand that all the media, viz. visual, audio, video, television, computing

and communication media will be useful in varied contexts of counselling and tutoring. So you can use the following media depending upon the need, convenience, availability, and suitability, among others.

- Text / Visual media, including graphics – Course units, supplementary print materials; correspondence tutoring
- Computer media — Databases, electronic publishing, Computer-aided learning, conferences; audio graphics, multimedia, e-mail.
- Audio media — Cassettes, Radio Programmes, telephone tutoring, audio conference.
- Television — Broadcasting (Programmes), Video Cassettes/Discs, lectures; video conferences, etc.

While choosing the relevant media for counselling and tutoring, its appropriateness to the context, purpose and the background of learners must be duly considered by the counselor/tutor.

10.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the genesis, need, significance, types, stages and organization of counselling. We have also discussed the role/place of assignments and the tutors and tutor comments in assessment, didactic communication and evaluation in open and distance education system. We have highlighted the duties/responsibilities, qualities and skills to be possessed by the counselor/tutor in organising counselling for distance learners. You will agree that we cannot ignore/avoid counselling sessions and tutoring in distance learning, as it is the only way to avoid loneliness, helplessness and danger of de-motivation among distance learners.

10.8 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’ QUESTIONS

- 1) i) Counselling
ii) Informing
iii) Informing
iv) Counselling
v) Advising
vi) Informing
- 2) i) Counselling is a face-to-face interaction between a counsellor and a learner in which former attempts to help/assist the latter in solving his problems of different nature and kind.
ii) Counselling is needed when the learner has to make decisions as well as to overcome the barriers, problems, difficulties, etc., in the course of his study.
- 3) i) non-academic ii) non academic iii) non academic
iv) academic v) academic vi) academic
- 4) The tutor comments are of two types — non-teaching and teaching. *Non-teaching comments* include: Harmful, Hollow, Misleading, Null and Negative comments.

Teaching comments include: Positive, Constructive, Global and Personal comments.

- 5) Activities generally performed by the counsellor while conducting a counselling session are:
- establishing rapport
 - exploration of the problem
 - exploration of the causes of problem
 - discovering alternative solutions
 - termination of the session
 - follow-up

10.9 REFERENCES

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10.10 UNIT END EXERCISES

You may write brief notes or full-length answers to the questions given here in your own interest. Such notes or answers might help you during your preparation for examination.

Unit End Questions

- 1) Define counselling. Explain with the help of example(s) how it differs from tutoring/teaching. (250 words).
- 2) Explain with illustrations the need and significance of counselling in distance education system. (250 words).
- 3) Explain with suitable examples the interrelationship between the types and stages of counselling. (500 words).
- 4) What are the qualities of an academic counselor? Substantiate your answer with the help of examples. (250 words).
- 5) What are the skills to be possessed by an academic counselor? (250 words).
- 6) What are the functions of a tutor in distance education? (250 words).
- 7) What are the different levels of communication that take place between distance learner and tutor?
- 8) Discuss different types of tutor comments with suitable examples. (1000 words).



Questions for Critical Reflection

- 1) Do you think there is perfect match between the comments made by the tutor on your assignments and the grade awarded to the respective assignments of your BEd courses? Justify your answer with your individual critical observations on the comments of the tutor.

Activity



Suppose you and your colleague of the BEd programme have completed all courses of first year. You exchange a photocopy of an evaluated assignment of yours' of a course with that of your friend of the same course. and of the same batch/year . You compare the strengths and weaknesses of evaluation done of your assignment and of your friend with due consideration of the comments written and the grade awarded by the tutor(s). Note down the points of discrepancy on a separate sheet of paper in the light of what you learnt under section 10.3 above. Both , you and your colleague, can discuss these discrepancies, if any you noticed in the tutors' evaluation vis-à-vis the comments offered thereof, to mutually validate or otherwise of your views of discrepancy.

UNIT 11 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNER PERFORMANCE

Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 Learning Assessment and Evaluation in ODE: An Overview
 - 11.2.1 Evaluation
 - 11.2.2 Assessment
 - 11.2.3 Significance of Assessment and Evaluation
 - 11.2.4 Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation
- 11.3 Present System of Continuous Assessment
 - 11.3.1 Continuous Assessment through Assignments
 - 11.3.2 Functions of Assignments
 - 11.3.3 Monitoring of Assignments
- 11.4 Grading System in ODE
 - 11.4.1 Disadvantages of Marking
 - 11.4.2 Advantages of Grading
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- 11.5 Alternate and New Ways of Continuous Assessment
 - 11.5.1 What is Alternative Continuous Assessment?
 - 11.5.2 Rubrics
 - 11.5.3 Project
 - 11.5.4 Open Book Examination
 - 11.5.5 Term-paper
 - 11.5.6 Open Badges
- 11.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.7 Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions
- 11.8 References
- 11.9 Unit End Exercises

11.0 INTRODUCTION

In Unit-10, we discussed the need, concept, significance, role and aspects of counselling and tutoring in ODE. In Unit-11, we shall discuss the assessment of learner performance. As we know teaching-learning process is a continuous activity. It needs to be evaluated from beginning to the end. Hence, assessment and evaluation of learner’s performance form crucial component of every educational system — conventional or open and distance education. It is crucial in the sense that it enables the teacher to know the level of learner’s achievement vis-à-vis the set objectives. In other words, it helps in understanding the gap between the level at which instruction is presented and the level at which student learning takes place. Otherwise, there is possibility to lose sight of the gap and judge the quality of courses by the quality of the learning materials rather than by the quality of the learning which takes place. It is therefore more important to pay due attention to mechanisms intended for assessment and identifying the gap between what is taught and learned that helps in contributing towards closing of that gap.

Continuous assessment of learner performance is of particular interest in ODE, for it provides such mechanism which can help not only in identifying the extent of the gap but also in contributing towards learner motivation and closing of the gap between expected and actual learning. However, continuous assessment done just through tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and computer-marked assignments (CMAs) is not a particularly effective mechanism for closing such gap between teaching and learning. Assessment of learner performance functions as an aid to teaching and learning and to grading learner performance. This is essentially done by giving following opportunities to the learner to:

- Perform a meaningful tasks;
- Demonstrate his/her ability in performing the tasks;
- Receive feedback from a qualified person in terms of relevant and defensible criteria; and
- Know about graded level of his/her performance.

Nevertheless, continuous assessment alone cannot make the learner assessment comprehensive. Hence, in addition to assignments, many other activities such as contact programmes, practical activities, project work, dissertations, self-assessment, peer-assessment, term-end examination, etc. are used as the means through which continuous and comprehensive assessment is accomplished. All these together form continuous and comprehensive evaluation of the learner performance, as followed in ODE.

Yet, it is further recognized that there is always scope for improvement of the present system of continuous assessment. This is in the form of alternative continuous assessment mechanisms that may be considered for closing the gap in the expected and the achieved levels of learning, though the disadvantages they suffer from also cannot be ignored. In this Unit, we will therefore attempt to highlight all these aspects and issues related to assessment of learner performance.

11.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the concepts of assessment and evaluation and their significance in ODE;
- Describe the continuous and comprehensive evaluation followed in ODE;
- Appreciate the present system of continuous assessment in ODE;
- Explain the system of grading followed in ODE; and
- Critically analyse the relevance of alternative continuous assessment in ODE.

11.2 LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION IN ODE: AN OVERVIEW

Distance educators need to explore diverse ways in which the learner autonomy, transparency, effective feedback and learner participation in assessment is ensured for improved and effective learning. Assessment of learner performance assumes a great significance in this regard. Learning assessment and evaluation in ODE is a complex process. A major challenge, as we know, emanates from the very distance that exists between the learner and the teacher. This necessitates creation of such a situation whereby the control of the teacher is reduced and that of the learner is increased in

order to reduce the gap in what is taught and what is learnt. This, of course, is not an easy task.

In this section, we will take a broad overview of the learning assessment and evaluation in ODE.

11.2.1 Evaluation

The term *evaluation* means different things in different contexts. Sometimes, it refers to the assessment of students for the purpose of awarding marks; and at times to the judgement of complete educational system. It is a more comprehensive term which encompasses both quantitative and qualitative descriptions of the student behavior including the value judgments thereof. Teaching for successful learning cannot occur without high quality evaluation. Evaluation, therefore, needs to be integrated with the process of teaching and learning.

According to Mary Thorpe (1980) evaluation is the process of collection, analysis and interpretation of information about any aspect of a programme of education. The bases of evaluation are learning objectives, performance standards and achievement tests on the one hand, and learner' and experts' opinions on the other. Evaluation helps to build an educational programme, assess its basic achievement and improve upon its effectiveness. It also provides valuable feedback on the design, development and implementation of the programme. It is, of course, an important component of the teaching-learning process. It helps in making the value judgement, determining educational status, or measuring achievement of learners. Thus, educational evaluation, like in conventional education system, has special implications for ODE system too.

Evaluation as a process can be categorized into two types: formative and summative. *Formative evaluation* is concerned with identifying learner weaknesses with a view to help the learner to overcome the same. This should be performed at regular or periodic intervals during the course of study. *Summative evaluation*, as the term suggests, is evaluation at the end of a course.

Evaluation during the learning process (continuous assessment), often termed as '*formative evaluation*', is important for learners and teachers alike. In distance education, continuous assessment forms the basis of the main communication between the teacher and the learner. This assessment is the essential part of the learning process itself. It is accomplished in the form of evaluation of assignment in ODE, which reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the distance learners, so that the learners have better opportunity to understand and improve themselves. It is helpful to the distance teachers also. It provides feedback to them to reshape their teaching strategies according to the needs of the learners. Evaluation thus becomes imperative to know to what extent the goals of education have been achieved.

11.2.2 Assessment

'Assessment' refers to the process of obtaining information about a learner's learning and achievement in a course, with a view to bring in improvement in his learning. In ODE, assessment is an integral part of the teaching-learning process. It includes the processes and instruments that are designed to measure the achievement of learners when they are engaged in an instructional programme.

Assignments, in ODE, are the tools that form the basis of academic and didactic interaction or communication between the distance learner and the distance teacher.

Assignments enable the students to ensure that they have actually learnt what they are expected to learn from their course materials. Assignments also form part of assessment and, thus part of evaluation of a student performance in an ODL course/programme.

The assessment of learners' progress and achievement is needed both to provide feedback to learners and to grade their performance so that they know how they succeed. This is essential for all the cases when graded certificates, diplomas or degrees are required to be issued to learners. In all evaluation systems, it is important that the tests administered should be both valid and reliable. Assessment helps the learners know about their strengths and weaknesses. It gives the learners an opportunity to improve their performance and overcome the difficulties faced by them.

The assessment of learner performance in ODE is broadly of two types: a) Internal assessment (Continuous assessment); and b) External assessment (Terminal assessment).

- i) **Internal assessment (Continuous assessment):** Internal assessment is the one where the learner and the tutor are directly involved in assessing the progress of student learning. In IGNOU assignments, practical activities, contact programmes, project work, dissertations, etc. are the means through which internal assessment is made.
- ii) **External assessment (Terminal assessment):** External assessment refers to the tests conducted by the educational institutions or by an outside agency. External assessment may be *terminal assessment* and it is usually conducted at the end of the learning period. In such cases, it is also known as *summative assessment* or *term-end assessment*. However, the single strongest influence on learning is surely by the assessment procedures. The improved assessment procedures should:
 - make measures of learning more rigorous;
 - provide students with formative feedback;
 - provide better quality summative information for students; and
 - enhance the learning processes.

Assessment can both support and shape learning. A quality programme in higher education should be characterised by an assessment system that has the following features:

- It should have clearly defined objectives;
- It should clearly express the expectation attached to each objective;
- It should be capable of assessing a range of learning outcomes, both subject-specific and generic;
- It should integrate the entire assessment;
- It should provide to the learners useful feedback on their work through interaction with the tutor and their peers;
- Its (assessment's) data should give an indication of students' learning and, as such, should inform the processes of continuous improvement of quality.

The external assessment is done by the teachers and the institution as a part of formal institutionalized assessment and evaluation system. Sometimes, it may involve the teachers from other institutions also as evaluators of certain aspects of learning to make the assessment more broad-based and objective.

In addition to the above two broad types of assessment, there are other types of assessment followed as the effective means to improve students' learning and assessment by themselves, without direct involvement of the teacher in the assessment process. These include *continuous self-assessment* and *peer assessment*.

- iii) ***Continuous self-assessment:*** You can notice from your SLPs that there is in-built provision for self-assessment by the distance learner himself/herself. However, there is no formal way of assessing whether the learners have done it or not. Thus, it does not form part of internal assessment or external assessment.

Woods, et al (1988) call self-assessment as self-performance assessment. They describe the use of self-assessment in chemical engineering at MC Master University in Canada, open their report with the following definition.

“Self-assessment is the ability of a person to accurately evaluate or assess his/her performance, and his/her strengths and weaknesses. Mature self-assessment recognizes that evaluation concerns the performance and not the person. When an assessment is made, the judgement is not of whether the performance of a person was ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Rather it is, of the performance of a task, whether it was ‘good’ or ‘poor’. To emphasise this point, self-assessment might be renamed “*self-performance assessment*”.

From the above definition, it is obvious that even in those institutions or programmes where the assessment is completely dominated by a particular group of people, the essential element of student learning is that the students should be able to evaluate their own progress. Self-assessment is a participative process in which the learners are themselves involved. This exercise motivates the learners to complete the study programmes of their choice. In fact, it calls for different tool or mechanism of assessment.

The IGNOU's self-learning material provides an opportunity to the learners for self-assessment through self-check exercises, and activities like check your progress exercises. These self-check exercises do contribute significantly to the individual's learning. The learner gains a lot of confidence by repeating the exercise regularly during the span of the course. The self-check exercise activities work as a revision process of the unit or portion of studies the learners have done. The learners assess themselves by comparing their answers with the sample answers given at the end of the unit. The learners gain confidence and help themselves while learning. These self-check exercises also arouse interest amongst the learners and further motivate them to complete the programme successfully. There is no fear of criticism involved in this kind of assessment.

- iv) ***Peer-assessment:*** Peer assessment is a practice existing in the conventional system of education. The students, in a group, share their experiences and learn better from each other. The students sharing each other's experiences and assessment can be more objective when the assessment is based on a shared set of assessment schedule.

The peer-assessment can further develop cooperative learning and team skills. The learners can overcome their difficulties easily and do better in their studies. The peer-assessment could be more helpful to distance learners, though the minimal face-to-face interaction limits the opportunity of peer-assessment, which is of immense help to the learners studying in isolation. This is not vogue and global in

practice in ODE. Of course, this type of assessment requires policy decisions by ODEIs and related institutional arrangements in the mechanism of assessment and evaluation of students.

Now, let us look at the significance of assessment and evaluation in ODE.

11.2.3 Significance of Assessment and Evaluation

In ODE system, the continuous assessment and terminal assessment are also known as formative assessment and summative assessment respectively. The use of regular tests and assignments through a unit of study, where results for each piece of work contribute to the final result, is frequently referred as 'continuous assessment'. The main purpose of this type of assessment should be to provide regular feedback to students in order to stimulate learning and provide students with information which will help them judge the effectiveness of their learning strategies. Exercises, assignments and progress tasks given to students throughout the academic semester or year may serve as formative assessment tools. This kind of assessment gives students practice in the essential skills such as essay or assignment writing, computation, problem solving, drawing, use of scientific apparatus or the operation of equipment without the fear or failure.

However, while assessing formative tasks, the following principles should be observed:

- The learners should be informed of the grades/marks as quickly as possible. The purpose of this feedback is to provide the learners with information on the level of their performance in relation to the tutors'/academic counsellors' expectations.
- The tutors should provide detailed and constructive criticism so that students know what is expected of them and how they might improve their performance.

We must bear in mind that formative assessment, if used badly, can be a disincentive to further learning. It is, therefore, essential that the learners are told where their performance is below expectations or where they have misunderstood assessment tasks. However, this should be done carefully so that the learners are not discouraged which in certain cases may result in dropout. Misleading information given to the students by the tutor may be very harmful in both the cases — of low marks/grades or high marks/grades. The low marks/grades may either persuade the learners to work harder or to withdraw from the programme. Similarly, high marks/grades may give them a false sense of confidence in their own ability and knowledge.

Continuous internal assessment represents continuous awareness of the teacher about the development and knowledge of his learners. It is a process which extends over a period and adds to the gradual build-up of a cumulative judgement about the performance of the learners. It also enables a teacher to look for signs which indicate acquisition of the desired, objectives, e.g. the varying abilities towards which the teaching is aimed at. It further helps the teacher to plan his/her remedial materials/exercises on the basis of diagnosis of the students' difficulties, problems, etc. However, while talking about the continuous assessment, we must know that there are merits and demerits of this type of assessment, which are summarised below.

a) *Merits*

- i) The danger or chances of failure in the internal assessment are reduced making assessment possible on a number of times.
- ii) During internal assessment, a wide variety of means are used.

- iii) Continuous internal assessment requires the tutors/academic counselors to think about the assessment in terms of educational and assessment objectives.
 - iv) Each section of a unit can be tested in more details than would be possible with one final examination. Therefore, if remedial work needs to be done that can be prescribed at the most relevant time with the help of internal assessment.
 - v) If a student is sick or unavoidably absent for some time, it is meaningful to arrange for an alternative test.
- b) **Demerits**
- i) There are greater opportunities for copying, as the assessment tasks are not undertaken under an effective supervision.
 - ii) The students have little time for in-depth studies as they are constantly preparing for the next test without receiving adequate feedback on their performance.
 - iii) The continuous internal assessment can sometimes be biased, hence the possible strain in the relationship between the learner and the tutor.
 - iv) It can give rise to suspicion in the minds of users about the validity and reliability of assessment.

Learner performance is thus most often analyzed through formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment is ongoing and provides information needed to adjust teaching and learning for a more effective outcome. It not only helps to monitor student progress throughout an activity, but can also gauge student understanding and readiness to proceed to further tasks. Alternately, summative assessment focuses on a particular point in time, such as a test at the end of a unit or grading term. However, rather than grade the end product, distance educators must focus on the process to enable greater involvement and progress of the learner throughout the whole programme of study rather than the particular assignment or activity as totally separate from the other.

The formative and summative evaluation as discussed above together form continuous and comprehensive evaluation in an ODL programme.

11.2.4 Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation

Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation in ODE can be mainly grouped into three categories: self-assessment, continuous assessment, and term-end examination.

- **Self-Assessment:** In self-assessment, the self assessment questions (SAQ) or check your progress questions are spread throughout the SLPMs of a given course/ programme. A distance learner would like to know his/her progress. But, in this regard, there is no provision for feedback from the teacher to the learner. However, the distance learner can assess his/her performance by comparing his/her answers with those given at the end of the relevant Unit, and thus get self-feedback from the distance learning materials itself. These SAQs and answers are the formative evaluation tools to help the learners to learn or perform better. These questions include either objective type questions or short-answer questions or both. There is no way of ensuring whether this is happening or not and *it does not form part of institutional scheme of evaluation of distance learner's performance.*
- **Continuous Assessment:** This is done in ODE through assignments. Normally, assignments carry 25-30% weight in overall assessment. Commonly this is a two-

way process between learner and the tutor/teacher. Assignments also help the learner to decrease the sense of isolation as a distance learner. The feedback on written assignments is important as it is expected to improve the student performance in the next assignment submission.

- **Term-End Examination:** This includes the term-end, semester-end and final examination. This can be organised once or twice in a year depending on the institutional policy and the complexity of the course. Mostly, this is paper-pen based activity. The term-end examination normally carries about 70-75% weight in overall assessment.

Of course, there are other components of CCE.

- **Other Components:** Components such as internship, practical work, project work (which may include viva-voce /oral examination), seminar presentation, etc are also used to assess learner’s performance depending upon the nature of the course/programme.

In section 11.3, we provide you deeper understanding of the present system of continuous assessment popularly followed by ODEIs.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

1) Comment briefly on continuous assessment.

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11.3 PRESENT SYSTEM OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

Continuous assessment of student learning or performance is of particular interest and importance in ODE as it provides for a mechanism to assess the learner’s progress as well as helps in identifying the gap between the expectation of teaching and achievement of learning, and thus contribute towards student motivation and reinforcement of learning towards closing such gap.

As we know, communication with the learner at a distance takes place through self-learning materials, writing of letters to the learners, talking on telephone, interaction through teleconferencing and radio, face-to-face counselling, computer-assisted teaching/learning or through ‘guided didactic conversation’ in the form of feedback on student’s assignment responses. In ODE, assignments are the institutionalized basis of academic and didactic communication between the distance learner and the distance teacher. Assignments enable the students to ensure that they have actually learnt what they are expected to learn from their course materials. The actual teaching-learning takes place through assignments.

The two-way communication through assignments evaluation in distance education generally serves the following purposes:

- Supports learner's motivation and interest;
- Supports and facilitates students' learning by enabling them to apply the knowledge and skills acquired from tutor's comments, explanations and suggestions; and
- Assesses students' progress and provides them with an instrument by means of which the learners can judge their educational situation and needs.

The best quality of the tutor is to acknowledge the hard work, effort and considerable lengths of time the learner has invested in it. While writing the comments the tutor should be careful about such comments that may generate in the learners an adverse emotional reaction. The comments should be concluded with an encouraging remark to keep the morale of the learners high and help them rise up to the expected level of performance.

11.3.1 Continuous Assessment through Assignments

The actual teaching-learning takes place through self-instructional material (SIM) and associated assignments. Assignments are the important tools of academic and didactic interaction or communication between the distance learner and the distance teacher. Assignments enable the students to ensure that they have actually learnt what they are expected to learn from their course materials. But different types assignments used in ODE serve different functions in assessment of learner's performance. Let us look at the types of assignments.

Types of Assignments: There are two types of assignments used for assessment of learner-performance in ODE. These are:

- Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA), and
- Computer Marked Assignments (CMA).

Some programmes/courses have only tutor marked assignment (TMAs), some have only CMAs and some others may have both TMAs and CMAs. These assignments form an essential component of continuous assessment which contributes to the final evaluation of the learners. Submission of these assignments is compulsory for all the learners and a pre-requisite, in many ODEIs, to take the term-end or final examination.

i) **Computer marked assignments (CMAs):** Computer marked assignments (CMA) are set by the course team/faculty. CMAs consist of objective type questions and the student is asked to select answers from the given alternatives. The student records his/her answers on a special form, Optical Mark Reader (OMR), by marking with pencil through the relevant cell for the question on the forms. The learners are provided feedback on these assignments as well.

CMAs test the student's abilities to recognise or recall certain facts, patterns and information or manipulate specific argument in the course material. The use of 'objective testing' in CMAs has been a subject of controversy. However, those who argue in favour of CMAs say that they (CMAs) enable the rapid marking and return of enormous number of assignment items, regardless of any debate about relative educational merits.

ii) **Tutor marked assignments (TMAs):** The tutor marked assignments (TMAs) test the conventional skills of being able to discuss a topic, apply an argument or

carry out some practical task. TMAs rely on long answer, short answer, essay type and problem-solving questions set by the course team or the course writer or the faculty concerned. The student is required to construct his/her own answers. In some courses, learners are required to complete a project or attend an extended contact programme/workshop which may be equivalent to two or three normal assignments.

The assignment responses are submitted by the students to the study centre/programme centre. These responses are evaluated by the trained academic counsellors appointed for this purpose. They write marginal as well as global teaching comments on these assignments and also assign grade/marks to each assignment. The evaluated assignments are sent back to the learners in time to provide them feedback on their learning.

Here, you may revisit Unit-10, where we have discussed different types of tutor comments. In the context of TMA evaluation, you may try to recall the positive comments that the tutors are expected to write in order to improve the performance of the learner. In fact, the TMAs serve different functions.

11.3.2 Functions of Assignments

Assignments form an important component of teaching-learning process at a distance. These assignments perform the following functions:

- ***Initiate dialogue/pedagogical interactions:*** The learner gets an opportunity to have a dialogue with the tutor through assignments and thus have pedagogical interactions which accelerate the teaching-learning process.
- ***Break the feeling of isolation:*** With the submission of assignments at regular intervals and receiving timely feedback, the learner does not feel completely isolated. The learner becomes psychologically strong which helps in his/her fast learning.
- ***Provide feedback to both distance learner and distance tutor:*** The tutor comments, in teaching terms, express the strengths and the weaknesses of the learner in a very soft manner. The learner overcomes his/her difficulties easily. And, at the same time, teacher also gets feedback about the learners and himself/herself. The teacher assesses his/her teaching ability to communicate with the learner and if required modifies his/her strategies accordingly.
- ***Reinforcement of learning by students:*** Assignments support and facilitate student learning by enabling students apply the knowledge and skills acquired by tutor comments, explanations and suggestions. The assignments, when handled properly, reinforce learning by quick communication and feedback from the tutor. The teaching comments written by the tutor help the learner to shape and complete their future assignments better and in time. They effect the two-way communication between the tutor and the learner.
- ***Continuous assessment:*** The assignments provide for continuous assessment of learners. They also provide an opportunity to the learner to improve himself/herself in the light of the feedback as discussed earlier.

Thus, assignments are the tools not only to facilitate and promote learning among the distance learners but also to assess learner performance. In order to promote effective learning there is need for effective monitoring of the assignments.

11.3.3 Monitoring of Assignments

Monitoring and maintenance of assignments is an important aspect of effective implementation of distance education programme. Or else, the system may collapse affecting the quality of teaching and learning adversely. The assignment scripts marked by tutors are required to be monitored properly to ensure that:

- a) a reasonable degree of uniformity of making standards are maintained; and
- b) appropriate teaching comments have been made on both the assignment scripts and the assessment sheets respectively.

The important purpose of monitoring is to provide feedback to:

- i) the students who submitted their assignment responses;
- ii) the tutor who assessed the assignment responses; and
- iii) the faculty who prepared study material and designed the assignments for the learners.

This also helps to retain competent tutors. Throughout the year, a proportion of the assignment scripts duly evaluated by the tutor is randomly selected and sent to the faculty at the HQs or any other course team appointed for this purpose. If, as a result of the monitoring of the assignments marked by a particular tutor, the monitor finds that the tutor is either lenient or severe or inconsistent as regards the standards or the teaching comments, the monitor informs the tutor of his/her findings. The information is sent to others concerned as well for appropriate action for improvement.

We at IGNOU adopt a monitoring mechanism subject to change from time to time. However, it is possible that different kinds of mechanisms may be adopted. The monitoring can be meaningful only when the objective judgements of the monitor are sincerely implemented.

The process of monitoring of assignments encompasses the following.

- a) Despatch of:
 - schedule of assignments, relevant guidelines, etc related to the courses of the programme;
 - relevant course material and assignments to the students on time.
- b) Management of:
 - submission of assignments by students;
 - handling of assignments by the study centres;
 - despatch of assignments to evaluators;
 - despatch of selected evaluated assignments to headquarters for monitoring;
 - submission of assessment sheets by study centres to headquarters;
 - submission of monthly evaluation records by study centres to regional centres, etc.
- c) Academic Aspects
 - errors identification;
 - teaching comments;
 - appropriateness of tutor comments;

- correctness of grades;
- justification of global comments;
- counsellors' comments on the assignment grade itself.

Monitoring of assignments thus plays a crucial role in effective continuous assessment of learner performance.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions".

2) What are the main functions of an assignment in ODE?

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11.4 GRADING SYSTEM IN ODE

One of the major differences between the conventional system and the distance education system is that in the former the written work is primarily for correction, assessment and indicating progress of the learner, and in the latter the most important function of the assignments is teaching and learning, rather than simply awarding grades/marks. Assessment of assignments is simultaneously an act of teaching as well. The aim of the tutor should be to promote the learning of the learner. And the assessment through assignments is in the form of a dialogue between the tutor and the learner. So, the most important task is to effectively teach through tutor comments. Therefore, the distance teacher should have a thorough understanding of how to write teaching type comments on the assignment scripts to promote effective two-way communication between him and the learner, amongst other things. All these comments have been thoroughly discussed in Unit-10.

In India, grading is relatively a recent innovation. Both the traditional practice of 'marking' and the recent innovation of 'grading' are concerned with reporting and interpreting the assessment and examination test results. Marking has its deep roots and has been in use for a long time. Even now most of the educational institutions/systems depend on the same practices. In the practice of marking, the examination results of individual papers are usually expressed on a scale ranging from 0-100. In the case of grading system, the results are expressed in grades that may have a range of 5, 7 or 9 points. These grades are usually expressed in terms of alphabets such as A, B, C, D, E, etc. or in terms of numerals such as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. IGNOU follows five-grade system of A, B, C, D and E representing the grade points of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

Every system – marking or grading — has its relative merits and demerits. However, in the fitness of the circumstances there could be variations in the ratio of merits and demerits. Somewhere merits may be more and demerits less and vice-versa. Therefore,

whenever any need for an alternative system is found, it results in innovations. Marking system helps the authorities not only to express the learning outcomes/performance in numerical indices or scores but also to select and admit learners to various courses. However, it suffers from numerous disadvantages as well.

11.4.1 Disadvantages of Marking

The important disadvantage of the marking system is the extent of “error” involved in the practice of marking. This error occurs mainly because of two types of variations namely ‘marker variability’ and ‘subject variability’. Let us discuss these below.

i) Marker Variability

We have, in general, two types of question papers — objective type and subjective type. In objective type tests, the reliability of scoring is guaranteed even if the same answer script is checked by more than one examiner. Every examiner will score the same marks for the same script. But when an essay type answer script is evaluated the reliability of scoring is not guaranteed. It is difficult for different examiners to demonstrate objectivity. Sometimes, it so happens that even if one subject-type answer-script is given for marking to an examiner at different times, the same examiner may not be consistent in his/her scoring. The scores may be varying all the times and from an examiner to an examiner. It is difficult to maintain consistency in this kind of marking.

Secondly, the correctness of the decision of the examiner to award 40 and not 41 out of 100, and vice-versa can always be questioned.

Thirdly, the marking can be biased. The examiner favours student ‘A’ and disfavors student ‘B’, which makes the marking system a defective system, because of marker variability.

ii) Subject Variability

In the traditional practice of marking, the lower and the upper limits for the ‘range’ of marking vary from discipline to discipline. For example, in Mathematical Sciences the whole range from 0-100 is utilized in marking / scoring, while in literature the range may fall appropriately between 15-60. In this kind of marking a score of 60 in both Mathematics and English Literature may not have similar connotations. So, because of these variations in the range of scores across subjects/disciplines, it becomes difficult to compare the scores of students from different subjects/disciplines. For example, a student securing 70% marks in mathematics cannot be considered superior to a student securing 60% marks in literature.

To summarise, we identify three serious errors associated with the traditional practice of marking. They are:

- False assumption about achieving precise and objective measurement of human ability;
- Wide inter-examiner differences in marking; and
- Falsity of score comparability between different subjects.

11.4.2 Advantages of Grading

The recent innovation of grading system is the result of our inability to measure the human qualities with precision. Unlike marks, grades are not influenced by the variations in discipline/subjects. Some of the main advantages of grading are summarised in the following few lines.

- i) The Grading is more precise and reliable than marking due to the fact that 0-100 scale is reduced to a five point or seven point or a nine point scale. It provides an overall estimate of human ability.
- ii) Because of a very precise scale, the chances of error due to marker variability in grading the same assignment response are minimised.
- iii) The error due to subject variability is lower, because the grading minimises the disparity in the value of scores/grades in different subjects.

11.4.3 Grading System at IGNOU

IGNOU has adopted the grading system to measure the achievements of its learners. It follows a letter grading system of 5 point scale with A, B, C, D and E grades, in which A is the top (highest) grade and E the lowest. A student is required to obtain at least D grade in each of the assignments and terminal examination of each course. However, overall or average grade has to be 'C' to be declared as having completed the course. The values assigned to these grades are given in the following table.

Table 11.1: Grading system at IGNOU

Letter Grade	Grade Points	Qualitative Level	Point Range	Equivalent Percentage Range
A	5	Excellent	4.50 & above	80% and above
B	4	Very Good	3.50 to 4.49	60% to 79.9%
C	3	Good	2.50 to 3.49	50% to 59.9%
D	2	Satisfactory	1.50 to 2.49	40% to 49.9%
E	1	Unsatisfactory	1.49 & below	Below 40%

Apart from these grade points, if a student does not make any attempt or the response given is absolutely incorrect, grade point 'zero' is awarded.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions".

3) What are the advantages of grading?

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However, it is difficult to say whether the existing practice of continuous and comprehensive evaluation in ODE is truly comprehensive. In this context, we can take a look at alternative ways of continuous assessment which might deserve consideration for their use or application in distance education. We will discuss these in Section 11.5.

11.5 ALTERNATE AND NEW WAYS OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

Existing system of continuous assessment (See Section 11.3 above), based on tutor-marked and computer-marked assignments, does not serve the intended purpose of reducing the gap between the expectation of teaching and achievement of learning. The main reasons for this are: i) the fact that deadlines do pressurise the learners unnecessarily, especially when the system allows them to work at their own pace; ii) assignments are mainly a teaching device and only secondarily a testing device; and iii) there is nothing in the system to help the student to take full advantage of what is available, or make what all he/she learnt to appear to be valid.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the present system of recording student progress in terms of assignment scores/grades does not provide us with a particularly clear picture of what students have learned, or have not learned. Therefore, it is not out of context to consider alternative continuous assessment.

11.5.1 What is Alternative Continuous Assessment?

Alternative assessment has been widely used in assessing the effectiveness of education at tertiary level. The key features of alternative assessment are active participation of learners in evaluation of their own performance and the development of reflective thinking. Success of alternative assessment depends on performance tasks that demonstrate what learners can do. Alternative assessments can include essays, performance assessment, oral presentations, demonstrations, and portfolios. Alternative assessment is often understood as the utilization of non-traditional approaches in judging students' performance. (Kavaliauskienė and Anusienė, 2007).

Differences between the traditional and alternative assessment are highlighted in Douglas Brown (2003, cited in Kavaliauskienė and Anusienė, 2007) which are given in Table 11.2.

Table 11.2: Comparison of Traditional and Alternative Assessment

Traditional Assessment	Alternative Assessment
One-shot, standardized exams	Continuous long-term assessment
Timed, multiple-choice format	Untimed, free-response format
Decontextualized test item	Contextualized communicative tasks
Scores suffice for feedback	Individualized feedback and washback
Norm-referenced scores	Criterion-referenced scores
Focus on the 'right' answer	Open-ended, creative answers
Summative	Formative
Oriented to product	Oriented to process
Non-interactive performance	Interactive performance
Fosters extrinsic motivation	Fosters intrinsic motivation

In practice, we can, however notice that many forms of assessment generally fall in between the traditional and alternative assessment, and some combine the best of both as we can recall from the present system of continuous assessment discussed under section 11.3 above.

In the alternative approach to continuous assessment the award of a pass grade (or percentage) on a given assignment is dependent on students achieving a specified level of performance. Typically this is set as high as required in order to keep the gap between teaching and learning as small as possible. But in this approach students are permitted to determine their own rate of progress and to decide for themselves when they are ready to respond to given tests. The point is that the students with different abilities are likely to require varying degrees of time and support in order to achieve a given performance level, while some may never achieve certain performance specifications. Student profiles are therefore typically developed to identify those areas in which students have achieved the desired performance levels. When they feel confident that they have remedied their weaknesses they are free to take an alternative form of the same assignment. The remedial cycle may in fact be repeated more than once if necessary till they achieve the desired level. In this type of approach the primary concern is not with the score achieved but with whether or not the student has ultimately achieved the desired level of performance. Thus, the purpose of using alternative assessments is to assess students' proficiency in performing complex tasks that are directly associated with learning outcomes, which the present system of assessment does not provide for adequately.

The prime advantage of this type of approach is that:

- i) it focuses attention on bridging the gap between what is taught and what is learned, and gives primary consideration to ways and means of closing such gap;
- ii) it tends to highlight the need to treat different types of students differently according to their particular needs and required remedial support;
- iii) it ensures that the learners have every chance of achieving the standards of knowledge and skills specified; and
- iv) it appreciates the fact that different students will tend to master varying aspects of a given course to differing extents and at varying times or duration.

Alternative assessment is useful in taking note of the extent to which students are able to achieve the specified criteria, and consider whether there is a need to modify some of the standards that have been set. It also helps in assessing higher-order thinking skills of students. Students get better opportunity to demonstrate what they learned. All this is possible only through alternative assessments.

This type of assessment tools focus on the growth and the performance of the student. That is, if a learner fails to perform a given task at a particular time, s/he still has the opportunity to demonstrate his/her ability at a different time and in different situation. Since alternative assessment is developed in context and over time, the teacher has a chance to measure the strengths and weaknesses of the student in a variety of areas and situations (Law and Eckes, 1995).

Guidelines for Constructing Alternative Assessments: These guidelines are as follows (<http://ctl.byu.edu/using-alternative-assessments>)

- Define the instructional outcome you want to assess as clearly and unambiguously as possible in terms of both the subject-matter content and the set of skills, criteria that the learner should display.

- Distinguish between those outcomes that can validly be assessed *solely* by performance assessments and those that can be assessed just as effectively by objective measures.
- Create tasks that elicit evidence of the student’s ability to perform the targeted skill.
- Decide what kinds of teacher guidance can be used while still allowing students the freedom to learn and do it their own way.
- Try out the assessment and make revisions as necessary.

There are different alternative ways of continuous assessment, such as the following, which the distance educationists can consider for adoption in ODE.

11.5.2 Rubrics

In this sub-section, you will understand how rubrics serve as alternative way of assessment of student’s performance.

What is a Rubric?

A rubric is a multi-purpose scoring guide for assessing student products and performances. Rubrics help improve teaching, contribute to sound assessment, and serve as source of information for program improvement (Wolf and Stevens, 2007). A rubric for assessment, usually in the form of a matrix or grid, is a tool used to interpret and grade students’ work against criteria and standards. A rubric makes explicit a range of assessment criteria and expected performance standards. Rubrics are sometimes called “criteria sheets”, “grading schemes”, or “scoring guides” (<https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessment-rubrics>). Rubrics serve as a guide to both students and the teachers. For students, for example, it serves as a guide for self-assessment of their performance and also know what to expect on how a teacher will be grading their assignment. It also guides them to complete their assignments. On the other hand, teachers can use it to assess student’s work in an assignment or in a course and ensure objectivity in their grading. .

Constructing/Developing a rubric

It takes time to decide on the different criteria you want to assess students for an assignment and construct a rubric, but it will save time later when you grade them. Rubrics are often represented in a table format. Different criteria are used to evaluate or measure whether particular activity/category/objectives is being met by students against a scale with points ranging from highest to minimal proficiency (1-5 points — excellent-poor; exemplary-unsatisfactory; etc). Students can print out the rubric to keep track of their learning. (<http://elearningfacultymodules.org/index.php/Rubrics>)

Developing a rubric involves the following steps: i) Identifying Performance Criteria, ii) Setting Performance Level, iii) Creating Performance Descriptions, iv) Organizing the descriptions into a tentative rubric; and v) Evaluating and revising the criteria.

For example, you can have a look at the types and formats of rubric below.

Types of Rubric

Rubric can be *simple*, with a few criteria, or *complex*, with several criteria adding up to a score. Rubric can be *holistic* (simplistic) or *analytic* (detailed). It can be *general* or *task-specific*. In other words, rubrics are usually categorized based on two different aspects – *assessment criteria* and *performance tasks*.

A) **Types based on assessment criteria:** Based on the assessment criteria the rubrics are of two types: holistic and analytical.

i) **Holistic rubrics:** These rubrics are:

- single criteria rubrics (one-dimensional) used to assess participants' overall achievement on an activity or item based on predefined achievement levels; and
- performance descriptions are written in paragraphs and usually in full sentences.

If you are assessing an address to a gathering by a student and intend to have holistic (simplistic) rubric you can see the following, as an example.

Table 11.3: Example of a holistic rubric

Criteria	Points				
	5	4	3	2	1
Organisation and use of prescribed format					
Content					
Integration of source materials					
Grammar and Mechanics					
Insights and Ideas					
Comments:					
Final Grade:					
1 = Not Present; 2 = Needs Revision; 3 = Satisfactory; 4 = Strong; 5 = Outstanding					

ii) **Analytic rubrics:** These rubrics are:

- two-dimensional rubrics with levels of achievement as columns and assessment criteria as rows. It allows you to assess participants' achievements based on multiple criteria using a single rubric. You can assign different weights (values) to different criteria and include an overall achievement by totaling the criteria; and
- written in a table form.

For example, to assess PowerPoint Presentation on a given topic, you may use an analytic rubric like the one given below.

Table 11.4: Example of an analytic rubric

	Excellent (Exceeds Expectation) 17-20	Very Good (Up to the Expectations) 13-16	Average (Close to Expectations) 9-12	Below Average (Below Expectations) 5-8	Poor (Most Disappointing) 0-4	Total
Design (20)						
Knowledge (20)						
Application (20)						
Presentation (20)						
Process (20)						

- B) *Types based on the performance tasks:* These rubrics are of two types.
- *General* – It could be used with a family or group of similar tasks.
 - *Task-specific* — Only applicable to assessment of each task.

A rubric is a scoring tool that explicitly represents the performance expectations for an assignment or piece of work. A rubric divides the assigned work into component parts and provides clear descriptions of the characteristics of the work associated with each component, at varying levels of mastery.

Advantages and disadvantages of different types of rubrics are summarized below.

Table 11.5: Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Types of Rubrics

Type of Rubric	Definition	Advantages	Disadvantages
Holistic or Analytic: One or Several Judgments			
Holistic	All criteria (dimensions, traits) are evaluated simultaneously.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoring is faster than with analytic rubrics. • Requires less time to achieve inter-rater reliability. • Good for summative assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single overall score does not communicate information about what to do to improve. • Not good for formative assessment.
Analytic	Each criterion (dimension, trait) is evaluated separately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives diagnostic information to teacher. • Gives formative feedback to students. • Easier to link to instruction than holistic rubrics. • Good for formative assessment; adaptable for summative assessment; if you need an overall score for grading, you can combine the scores. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes more time to score than holistic rubrics. • Takes more time to achieve inter-rater reliability than with holistic rubrics.
Description of Performance: General or Task-Specific			
General	Description of work gives characteristics that apply to a whole family of tasks (e.g., writing, problem solving).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can share with students, explicitly linking assessment and instruction. • Reuse same rubrics with several tasks or assignments. • Supports learning by helping students see “good work” as bigger than one task. • Supports student self-evaluation. • Students can help construct general rubrics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower reliability at first than with task-specific rubrics. • Requires practice to apply well.
Task-Specific	Description of work refers to the specific content of a particular task (e.g., gives an answer, specifies a conclusion).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers sometimes say using these makes scoring “easier.” • Requires less time to achieve inter-rater reliability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot share with students (would give away answers). • Need to write new rubrics for each task. • For open-ended tasks, good answers not listed in rubrics may be evaluated poorly.

Source: Susan M. Brookhart and Anthony J. Nitko. (2008). *Assessment and Grading in Classrooms*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

As you can see from Table 11.5, each type of rubric has its advantages and disadvantages, and you have to decide which rubric suits to your purpose.

Use of Rubrics in ODE

Once you have familiarised students with the idea of rubrics, you can have them assist in the rubric design process, thus taking more responsibility for their own learning in relation to any assignment. Thus, rubrics are beneficial for both students and teachers as they serve as a transparent, clear, objective and fair assessment tool in education. You can therefore use rubrics in various teaching-learning situations and assessment of learners' performance in various activities/tasks in ODE. You can use rubrics to assess drawings, charts and text within a document as in SLPs. Similarly, you can use it in assessing projects or multimedia activities, or in assessing the use of any web 2.0, for example, a blog which has a unique set of possibilities such as hypertext, embedded video, interactive imagery, etc.

11.5.3 Project

A Project is a planned set of interrelated tasks to be executed over a fixed period and within certain other limitations. At educational institute or a university, a project is a research assignment which requires a larger amount of effort and more independent work by the student. The student carries out the work under an approved guide or supervisor. The student identifies a topic of his/her interest and undertakes fact-finding or primary data collection through appropriate tools and techniques or secondary data either from library/internet research, among others. The written report of the project is usually in the form of a dissertation, which will contain sections covering details of the project's inception, methodology, analysis, findings and conclusions, and recommendations.

Project is an effective alternative means of continuous assessment of an individual student's ability to undertake the assigned work as a part of any course or programme undertaken through ODE.

11.5.4 Open Book Examination

An "open book examination" is one in which examinees are allowed to consult their class notes, textbooks, SLPs and other approved material while answering questions during the examination. In an open book examination, it is therefore meaningless to ask questions for which relevant information from the textbook or other relevant material can be directly copied into the answer book. Given the availability of textbooks or other material in the examination room, teachers will not ask questions that require the mere transfer of information from the textbook to the examination (answer) booklet. While close book examinations are suited to testing rote learning which involves passive and static memory, open book examinations can be used effectively to train students in the use of active memory. However, these examinations are required to be chosen depending upon the purpose.

We know that rote-learning among many learners has become the necessary evil fostered over the years by closed book examination, elimination of which is equally difficult because of the practicalities associated with open book examination. If the *purpose* of an examination is to test the information that students have memorised, open book examinations are inappropriate, since students can easily transfer the information in the textbook or lecture notes to the examination paper. Suppose the examination consists of information based questions like, "Who invented the theory of

relativity?”, or “Explain the term *Standard Deviation*”. Students can then easily find the answers in the textbooks or notes, and copy them in their answer books. On the other hand, if the examination tests the skills of problem-solving and critical thinking, then there is no harm in students consulting their text books and class notes. If students have to evaluate a conclusion that crucially involves their understanding of the concept of standard deviation, reproducing what the text book says would be pointless (K. P. Mohanan <http://www.iiserpune.ac.in/~mohanan/educ/openbook.pdf>).

Needless to say, indirect problem-solving questions that test the students’ thinking skills can be used in closed book examinations as well. *One might therefore be tempted to argue that what matters is designing the right kind of questions, rather than setting open book examinations.* But this would be an argument for living with a conflict, rather than resolving it. The *essential difference* between closed book examinations and open book examinations is that the former can still be used to evaluate how much the students have memorised, while the latter cannot. If we are not interested in testing memorised information, why use closed book examinations?

Types of Open Book Examinations

One may think of two kinds of open book examinations — the restricted type and the unrestricted type.

In the *restricted type* of open book examinations, students are permitted to bring into the examination room one or more specific documents approved by the course instructor. Students may be permitted to consult printed documents such as the logarithmic tables, dictionaries, or complete works of Shakespeare, but not handwritten material or printed documents without prior approval. One may also need to make sure that the printed documents that students bring do not contain any scribbles on the margin. In this type of examination, the approved documents function more or less as appendices to the question paper itself.

In the *unrestricted type* of open book examinations, students are free to bring whatever they like. There are no restrictions on what the students can bring. They may bring any books (with or without scribbles on the margin), lecture handouts of the course instructor, or their own handwritten notes. The use of such examinations presupposes certain teaching strategies and types of questions. In particular, it demands that the course focuses on a set of intellectual skills, rather than on the information content, and that no content-based questions be asked in the examination. If the course instructor has concentrated on handing down currently available knowledge, and the question paper contains traditional content based questions like “Write an essay on the difference between British and American English”, the use of the unrestricted open book examinations would be disastrous. In other words, it will be pointless for students taking the unrestricted open book examinations to consult any material they have brought, if the questions are designed in such a way the answers will not be found in the textbooks, handouts or class notes. An intelligent student who has had the experience of such examinations once will not bother to bring anything for the next examination, since (s)he will know that no prepared material will be of any use. The use of these examinations then acts as symbolic gesture that makes the students realise the nature of the course and the examinations, and shocks them into a mode of studying that does not involve cramming.

Indian Experience in Open Book Examination

It is noteworthy that Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had introduced its Open Text Based Assessment (OTBA) in final examinations for Classes IX and XI as an alternative mode of assessment since the 2013-14 academic year. The CBSE implemented this approach in such subjects as English, Hindi, Mathematics, Science and Social Science in Class IX; and in Biology, Economics, English and Geography in Class XI. The CBSE has sought feedback on OTBA and is exploring the option of implementing OTBA in other subjects as well. Prima facie, students, teachers and parents have been appreciative of the CBSE-OTBA scheme in general; however, it is yet to be evaluated whether the scheme has met its goal of encouraging independent thinking amongst students. (<http://www.firstpost.com/living/open-book-exams-are-a-nice-change-but-successful-implementation-needs-education-reform-2582726.html>).

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has been rapidly changing the pattern in which it conducts its examination; there have been changes in the syllabus of November 2015 and May 2016 as well. Now it is being notified that the examination will be open book exams, this change is to be implemented from May 2017. The exams are currently held at three levels CPT, IPCC, and Final. However, the open book exams will only be for the CA final students, i.e. the open book pattern is applicable only for the students who have cleared CPT and IPCC which are expected to remain on their previous formats (<http://caconnectindia.com/ca-ipcc/open-book-exams-from-2017/>).

Open book examination (OBE), whether restricted or unrestricted, has its operational or implementation problems in terms of which material is to be allowed which is not to be allowed as well as assessment mechanisms. OBE can pave the way for making education truly open from the point of view of both teachers (teaching), students (learning), and evaluation. Also, it calls for adoption of appropriate the teaching and learning strategies. The changes will be inevitable. Nevertheless, it will take some time and effort on the part of students and teachers to adapt themselves to the demands of OBE.

Advantages and disadvantages: Following are the advantages and disadvantages of Open Book Examination (http://ar.cetl.hku.hk/am_obe.htm).

Advantages: These include the following.

- *It is less demanding on memory* because it is no longer necessary for students to cram a lot of facts, figures and numbers for open-book examination.
- *It provides a chance for students to acquire the knowledge during the preparation process* of gathering suitable learning materials rather than simply recalling or rewriting it.
- *Its promotes information retrieval skills* of students through finding the efficient ways to get the necessary information and data from books and various resources.
- *It enhances the comprehension and synthesizing skills* of students because they need to reduce the content of books and other study materials into simple and handy notes for examination.

Disadvantages: These include the following.

- *It is difficult to ensure that all students are equally equipped* regarding the books they bring into the exam with them, because the stocks of library books may be limited and also some books may be expensive to students.

- *It requires more desk space for students during the examination* because students often need lots of desk space for their textbooks, notes and other reference materials.
- Sometimes students may spend too much time on finding out which parts of the books to look for answers instead of applying the knowledge, practical skills and reasoning ability.
- *A lot of students are unfamiliar with open-book examinations.* They must be provided with clear procedures and rules.

From the above discourse you can understand that both closed and open book examinations have their merits and demerits on which there has been an endless or inconclusive debate. Nevertheless, ingenuity lies in adopting both the examination systems in order to address many problems and issues that plague the conduct of examinations by educational institutions, including the ODEs.

11.5.5 Term-paper

A term paper is a research paper written by students over an academic term, accounting for a large part of a grade or overall marks. Term papers are generally intended to describe an event, a concept, or argue a point. A term paper is a written original work discussing a topic in detail, usually several typed pages in length and is often due at the end of a semester. There is much overlap between the terms *research paper* and *term-paper*. The phrase *term paper* was originally used to describe a written assignment (usually a research-based paper) that was due at the end of the “term” — either a semester or quarter, depending on which unit of measure used. However, not all term papers involve academic research, and not all research papers are term papers. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Term_paper).

In the present day an entire industry has sprung up to provide plagiarized, pre-written or customised written term papers for students of varying levels of education. There are many websites that sell term papers of all levels of quality and writing proficiency, but are often claimed by academic institutions as seriously undermining the academic integrity of the student. Also, plagiarism can be unknowingly committed by students (Ibid).

11.5.6 Open Badges

The badges can be achieved by completing tasks and goals set by an issuer, such as a learning provider (awarding badges for achieving soft skills) or a website (for completing an online task), basically anyone who wants to keep a user motivated and interested. The issuer creates the criteria needed for the user to achieve the badge. This is embedded inside the badge in the form of metadata, along with who issued the badge, when it was issued and an expiry date if relevant (<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/so-what-are-open-badges-28-aug-2013>).

Open Badges take that concept one step further, and allows you to verify your skills, interests and achievements through credible organizations and attaches that information to the badge image file, hard-coding the metadata for future access and review. Because the system is based on an open standard, earners can combine multiple badges from different issuers to tell the complete story of their achievements — both online and offline. Badges can be displayed wherever earners want them on the web, and share them for employment, education or lifelong learning. (<http://badges.thinkoutloudclub.com/modules/what/know/>). Thus, as a disruptive innovation, Open Badges are

reimagining ways to recognize learning beyond formal credentialing systems. Today, Open Badges are an emergent technology and require further development for widespread market development and adoption. Open Badges is a new online standard to recognize and verify learning. Open Badges empower individuals to take their learning with them, wherever they go, building a rich picture of their lifelong learning journey.

Practice of Open Badges

Thousands of organizations across the world are already issuing Open Badges, from non-profit organisations to major employers to educational institutions at all levels (<https://openbadges.org/about/>).

The Open Badges Infrastructure (OBI) — developed by the non-profit Mozilla Foundation and shaped by an international community of developers — can be used to issue, display and earn the digital awards. Mozilla created Open Badges in 2011, which are not proprietary — they use free software and an open technical standard. That means that any organization can create, issue and verify digital badges, and any user can earn, manage and display these badges all across the web (https://www.google.co.in/?gws_rd=ssl#q=What+are+open+badges). A number of organisations, educational providers and communities such as NASA, the Clinton Global Initiative, De Paul University, DigitalMe and the City of Chicago are already using Open Badges to reward and recognise a variety of skills and achievements.

Badge the World is the new social and technology movement to capture recognition for learning that happens anywhere. Badge the World also aims to create a community and foster discussion amongst those involved in Open Badge projects (<http://www.badgetheworld.org/>).

IMS Global Learning Consortium (IMS Global/IMS), the Mozilla Foundation, and Collective Shift/LRNG announced on 28 October 2016 an agreement for IMS Global to become the organization responsible for advancing the development, transferability, and market adoption of the Open Badges specification beginning January 1, 2017. As an open-governance, member-based standards consortium, IMS Global is committed to furthering the adoption, integration, and portability of digital badges to meet the needs of learners, educators, and employers. (<https://www.imsglobal.org/article/ims-global-mozilla-foundation-and-lrng-announce-next-steps-accelerate-evolution-open-badges>). The aim is to create a global skills currency based on the Open Badges Specification, under the leadership of IMS members with the support of the Open Badges community.

Scotland's interest in Open Badges has been growing. *Borders College in Scotland* has been piloting the use of badges using Moodle. They have developed three badge levels (Bronze, Silver and Gold) allowing students to be awarded their first badges for best practice in Moodle use. There is also a higher level badge (Platinum) which is available to both staff and students who are considered to show outstanding contributions to the use of technology in the classroom. One potentially more radical element of the pilot is that students have also been given the opportunity to vote for the lecturer they believe displays the best use of Moodle across their course. The intended outcome of this aspect of the project is that lecturing staff will also receive recognition for the time and effort they invest in using Moodle, which will hopefully encourage an increased use of innovative techniques.

Open Badges in Scottish Education Group (OBSEG) is a recent formation which performs an overview and mapping function of Open Badges developments in Scotland.

The OBSEG hopes that through the input of representatives from a variety of educational institutions and agencies in Scotland, it will be able to consider synergies between different stages on a learner’s formal and informal learning journey and contribute to the development of a badge eco-system within Scotland.

To conclude, the attempt made in this section has been to give you an understanding of alternative continuous assessment so that you can appreciate its relevance and significance in the context of assessment of learner performance in the emerging scenario of teaching and learning in ODE. We hope the developments such as Open Badges become embedded within learning, and more so in the context of lifelong learning, and will become a popular practice worldwide!

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

4) What do you understand by alternative system of continuous assessment? Mention five tools/ways of alternative assessment.

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11.6 LET US SUM UP

We have presented to you an overview of assessment of learner performance and the role and place of assignments in the overall scheme of and evaluation system in ODE. We have highlighted grading system, which is an innovation over marking in assessment and evaluation of the achievements of the learners, and also touched upon the disadvantages of marking and the advantages of grading. We have discussed the present system of continuous assessment, with emphasis on the types of assignments and the purposes they serve in assessment of learner performance. Besides explaining some of the weaknesses of the present system of continuous assessment, we have also highlighted the significance of the alternative system of continuous assessment with special reference to Rubrics, Project, Open Book Examination, Term-paper and Open Badges as some specific alternative ways of continuous assessment possible and practiced in the context of lifelong learning and assessment in the emerging global scenario.

11.7 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’ QUESTIONS

1) Continuous assessment or formative assessment is the regular assessment during the course, which contributes to the final results of learners. It provides regular feedback to learners. Assignments, exercises and other tasks given to the learners throughout an academic semester or year serve as effective tools of continuous assessment.

- 2) Assignment serves the purposes of two-way communication. It initiates dialogue/ pedagogical interactions, breaks the feeling of isolation, provides feedback to both distance learner and distance tutor, reinforces learning by students and serves as the tool for continuous assessment of learning.
- 3) Main advantages of grading include the following: i) Grading is more precise and reliable than marking due to the fact that 0-100 scale is reduced to a five point or seven point or a nine point scale. It provides an overall estimate of human ability; ii) Because of a very precise scale, the chances of error due to marker variability in grading the same assignment response are minimized; and iii) The error due to subject variability is lower, because the grading minimises the disparity in the value of scores/grades in different subjects.
- 4) Alternative system of continuous assessment is useful in assessing students' proficiency in performing complex tasks that are directly associated with learning outcomes, which the present system of continuous assessment does not provide for. It is not only viable alternative, but it also provides the basis for an approach specifically designed to close the gap between what is taught and what is learnt. Thus, in alternative assessment the award of any grade or credit for the assignment is dependent on the specified level of performance being achieved regardless of the time when this occurs, while the award of any credit for the course as a whole may be related to appropriate levels of performance being achieved on a specified number of assignments. In recording student progress on a course using this type of approach the primary concern is not with the score achieved on any given test, but with whether or not the student has ultimately achieved the desired level of performance. Student profiles are therefore typically developed to identify those areas in which students have achieved the desired performance levels.

Rubrics, Project, Open Book Examination, Term-paper and Open Badges are some of the alternative ways of continuous assessment.

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11.9 UNIT ENDEXERCISES

You may write brief notes or full-length answers to the questions given here in your own interest. Such notes or answers might help you during your preparation for term-end examination.

Unit End Questions

- 1) Give an overview of learning assessment and evaluation in ODE. (1000 words).
- 2) Describe the existing system of continuous assessment followed in ODEIs (500 words).
- 3) What are the disadvantages of marking system? (250 words).
- 4) What is grading system? What are the advantages of grading system? (250 words).
- 5) What do you understand by Alternative Continuous Assessment? Explain it with suitable examples. (1000 words).



Questions for Critical Reflection

- 1) Examine the suitability of open book examination in ODE.
- 2) In your opinion, which alternative ways of continuous assessment discussed above are suitable for adoption in ODE system? Give reasons.
- 3) Do you think Open Badges will be the dominant practice in future at global level? Justify your answer.

Activity



Suppose the workshop of your BEd programme is going on. Consider an activity of your choice (be it individual-based or small group-based activity) at the workshop in which you are engaged, and prepare a rubric for assessment of your performance. Discuss it with your colleagues and resource person(s) for its improvement to make it a better tool for assessment of your performance of that activity.

UNIT 12 LEARNER SUPPORT SYSTEM AND SERVICES

Structure

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 Learner Support Services
 - 12.2.1 Concept
 - 12.2.2 Need
 - 12.2.3 Types
- 12.3 Management of Sub-systems for Learner Support: Issues of Coordination
 - 12.3.1 Course Design and Development
 - 12.3.2 Student Registration/Admission
 - 12.3.3 Educational Media
 - 12.3.4 Student Support Services
 - 12.3.5 Learner Evaluation
- 12.4 Organising Support System and Services
 - 12.4.1 Institutional Basis
 - 12.4.2 Factors Affecting Provision
 - 12.4.3 Organisation
- 12.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions
- 12.7 References
- 12.8 Unit End Exercises

12.0 INTRODUCTION

In pursuing your course of study through open and distance learning mode, you might have experienced the problems associated with absence of a classroom situation, the quasi-permanent separation between the learner and institution/teacher. In order to minimise the negative impact of the problems of this physical separation on the one hand and to provide the learner an opportunity to come closer to the teacher / institution psychologically as well as academically on the other, various support services have been devised and provided for in the distance education system. The very purpose of these support services is to make you feel that you are not alone or helpless during the period of your study. You are a member of a well organised institution which is ready to help you whenever you need help in order to complete your studies successfully.

In Units 10 and 11 we have discussed how the support service components of counselling, tutoring and continuous assessment of student learning will help minimize the gap between distance teaching and learning, i.e. between expected and actual learning. For effective implementation of these support services, among others, require proper learner support system as an integral part of the broader institutional structure or mechanism.

In this unit, we therefore discuss different types of learner support services required for distance learners and functional sub-systems of management of ODEI that form learner

support system for providing different learner support services and factors affecting provision of these services.

12.1 OBJECTIVES

After working through this unit you should be able to:

- explain the concept of learner support services in open and distance learning;
- justify the need for student support services;
- identify different types of student support services;
- understand different sub-systems of ODEIs related to student support system; and
- analyse the institutional bases and factors involved in organization of student support services.

12.2 LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

We know that learner support services play a crucial role in ODE. In the conventional system of education the teacher provides academic as well as non-academic support to his/her students and they enjoy even the opportunity of interacting with his/her peer group about various issues/services. Contrary to this, the distance learners have to study on their own in an entirely different situation using the self-learning material. Secondly distance learners besides being separate from each other, they have intra- and inter-group variations in terms of their age, interests, background, needs, experiences, and so on. They all require suitable support services for their smooth progress through their study and successful completion of their programme. How are the learner support services conceived?

12.2.1 Concept

As mentioned above, the distance learner's situation is quite different from their conventional counterparts. As you know the distance learner, who is learning independently, may feel deprived of required support from the teacher/institution and his/her peer group and may feel isolated, helpless and even de-motivated to drop out, particularly where he/she faces a problem in learning or there is lack of administrative or non-academic support service at crucial times. The main purpose or objective of support services is to motivate the students to be on the right track and to encourage them to make use of the facilities provided for promoting their learning.

Different distance educators conceive support services differently. Learner support services are described as: the elements of an open learning system capable of responding to a particular individual learner (Thorpe, 1988); support incorporated within the self-learning materials, the learning system and assignment evaluation or marking (Hui, 1989); and the essential support services required to ensure the successful delivery of learning experiences at a distance (Wright, 1991). Further, some conceive learner support services as integral part of the course, others conceive it as a supplement while some others include in it the administrative and delivery operations related to the course (Robinson, 1995).

With this clarity about the concept of learner support services, we will now try to understand the need for these services.

12.2.2 Need

The need for learner support services in ODE can be understood from the point of view of the characteristics of distance learners, the characteristics of learning material and the learning strategy. Let us discuss them in brief below.

i) Characteristics of distance learners

We have discussed in detail the characteristics of distance learners in Unit-9, which might have provided you an understanding of the nature and type of problems they face in their learning. We may recall and sum up the distance learners' special characteristics which reflect the diversity in their background and learning abilities.

- Distance learners are more mature, working and have a lot of personal, professional as well as other experiences.
- They lack teacher as well as peer association, as there exists a quasi-permanent separation between teacher/institution and learners.
- Their attitudes toward learning are different from those of the face-to-face learners who often simply follow their peers, teachers or obey their parents' wishes while choosing their courses/programmes.
- The distance learners may have discontinued their formal education for economic or environmental or circumstantial reasons. Some of them may be school dropouts with an incomplete education.
- They are second chance learners but not second rate students. They approach their studies tentatively and with little confidence because of their inadequate educational background and lack of resources.
- They have to learn from the written word (specifically through well designed study materials) instead of word of mouth (face to face teaching as in the conventional system).
- They may need assistance in solving the problems related to their study habits, time management, motivation, academic guidance, etc., as they do not have the opportunity of interacting frequently with the teacher.
- Some of them understand and learn more quickly than the younger people if they are experienced and mature enough to take decisions.

From the above characteristics we can understand that the learners are heterogeneous and can be divided into different groups. Koul, et. al. (1989) categorises learners into three categories: i) learners who have confidence in their learning ability to work on their own; ii) learners who actually need talking to someone to seek help in solving their problems; and iii) learners who are really sitting on the wall, i.e. when they run into intractable problems they approach the counselor for help. The second and third categories really require support services when they really need them.

Thus, the diversity of background characteristics and their varying abilities to learn in isolation, establishes the need for learner support services at different times of their learning.

ii) Characteristics of learning material

We have discussed in Unit-8 of Block 2, in open and distance education system, self-learning is promoted through specially designed and developed course

materials called self-instructional/learning materials (SIMs/SLMS) and predominantly the self-learning print materials (SLPMs). These materials are designed and developed by specialist course writers so as to:

- help the individual learners to find their way into and around the subject by reinforcing the content;
- tell the students what they need to do before tackling the material;
- enable them to understand clearly the specific objectives beforehand and what they should be able to do on the completion of the material;
- encourage the students sufficiently to make whatever effort is needed in coming to grips with the subject;
- acquaint them with various exercises and activities so that they may work with the subject matter in depth and independently;
- give feedback to the learner on these exercises and activities enabling them to judge for themselves — whether they are learning successfully; and
- help the learners to sum up their learning at the end of the unit.

You may ask: if the material is designed in such an effective manner why does the learner need support? The answer is that the distance learners are the second chance learners with diverse background and learning abilities/skills, but these materials are same for all learners. They have spent so many years studying in conventional face-to-face system and due to this they are conditioned to learn with the help of teachers. While learning through self-instructional/learning material they have to de-condition themselves from their earlier learning habits and this is not an easy task. Therefore, they need help from the teachers/institution in coping with the new learning culture. Various support services like counselling at the study centres, teachers' comments on assignments, audio-video programmes, books, etc may prove helpful to improve the condition of the learners to work through these specially designed learning material.

iii) Learning strategy

The distance teachers prepare self-instructional/learning material with the help of a course team, at Headquarters. To make the distance learner more self-reliant, independent and self-confident in learning through these materials, distance tutors (teachers) or academic counselors are provided in the system, and are spread across different study centres. The academic counselor/tutor checks assignment responses and gives suitable comments to help the learner improve his/her responses to assignments, and also organises counselling sessions to provide the facility of face-to-face interaction at the study centre. Thus, in this system, main emphasis is on making the learner able to learn himself/herself independently.

In fact, the distance learner, while studying at home with the help of self-instructional/learning material without having regular assistance of a teacher the learner may face lots of academic problems (besides personal problems). Therefore to assist distance learner in his/her independent study, the student support services are devised to perform the following services:

- To respond to the dialogue initiated by the student in his/her written work, i.e., assignment responses and to assess that work to foster further academic discussion;
- To respond to students' queries and/or confusions about the course material;

- To assist students to plan their study/schedule properly and help them to develop sound study skills appropriate to distance learning/education; and
- To encourage and support students when they reach barriers to learning or points of decisions.

From this sub-section you must have understood the need for learner support services in ODE.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.
 b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

1) Explain the need for support services for distance learner.

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We will discuss different types of learner support services in sub-section 12.2.3.

12.2.3 Types

You will appreciate the fact that the students need help and support in many different ways apart from tuition. You might like to recall your experiences and think about different kinds of support you might have received as a student in your previous studies, or that you as a teacher have provided to your students (after you entered the teaching profession), and now that you received or are receiving as a distance learner through this course.

Student support services can be categorized into the following three broad classes explained with possible examples.

Table 12.1 Broad categories of support services

Sl. No.	Category of support	Activities	Possible examples
I	Teaching	Tutoring	Giving a lecture
		Feedback	Offering comments
		Grading	Marking an assignment
II	Administration	Action	Arranging transport for a student with a physical disability
		Advocacy	Giving a reference
		Assessment	Testing if someone has the right qualifications for a course
III	Counselling	Informing	Telling someone about a university regulation
		Advising	Advising someone on the best way to study
		Counselling	Helping someone choose the right course for the future

Source: Block 3: Conuselling. *DE-4 Student Support Services*, IGNOU, New Delhi, 1993, pp.9-10.

This categorization may appear rather arbitrary if you have probably thought of an action that either does not fit into any of the above three classes, or fit into two or all the three. Nevertheless, you will find it helpful to keep these broad distinctions in mind about student support services and whilst you are at work, stop and ask about yourself occasionally. You may also reflect upon activities you performed at different times and ask yourself whether you are a teacher, administrator or counselor. It provides you an idea of the range and nature of support services. These support services are required to the learners at different stages – pre-admission, during the course and post-completion of course.

Geographical distance of learner from the teacher/institution should not matter much if the teacher/institution provides the mental, emotional and academic support through various means and sources. The idea behind student support is that there must be a real dialogue between the teacher and the learner as it can enhance self-learning and also build confidence among the learners. Therefore these services must be diverse and comprehensive enough to provide different types of assistance to the learner who is geographically far from the institution/teacher to overcome the problems related to learning, among other things. These service need to provide the following kinds of support.

- Material support
- Monitoring support
- Information support
- Guidance support
- Tutorial support
- Counselling support
- Media support
- Library support
- Administrative support
- Assessment and evaluation support

These support services become possible only through established institutional mechanism. Student support services are provided through a large network of study centres which are linked with the headquarters/main institution through the regional centres. These services are, of course, interlinked with and dependent upon certain operational units within the broad institutional mechanism. We will discuss these details in Section 12.3.

12.3 MANAGEMENT OF SUB-SYSTEMS FOR LEARNER SUPPORT: ISSUES OF COORDINATION

Though a variety of functional units operate in a distance teaching/education institution, its major activities centre around course design and development, development and production of media materials, registration of students, provision of student support services, and continuous assessment and term-end evaluation. These activities are carried out by a variety of functional units in the institution, operating as sub-systems. In the following sub-sections (12.3.1 to 12.3.5) we discuss these sub-systems in greater detail, which would provide you broader understanding of learner support services.

12.3.1 Course Design and Development

The course design and development exercises are mainly handled by the teachers and academics. In IGNOU, for instance, the operational units involved in course design and development are called 'Schools of Studies'. The in-house faculty is largely involved in designing of academic programmes using the expertise received from faculty outside IGNOU, i.e. other institutions. In most cases, the course units are largely written by subject experts of different institutions. But, in some cases, the faculty have substantially contributed to the development of course units in terms of either writing units themselves, or editing substantially the units written by others, or wherever necessary, even rewriting completely the course units contributed by outside experts.

A team is involved in the course development activity. Course development is a team process involving usually the programme and course coordinators (and the faculty of the discipline instructional designer, course writers, content, language and copy editors, graphic artists, media producers, and the printer. Each one has an assigned role to play and is accountable for it. The courses are developed based on certain models (like course team model, writer-editor-faculty model, etc.), and the outcome is the self-learning print and non-print packages. Management of the entire process is a difficult and tedious one, and requires specialised skills for bringing out effective learning materials.

A course passes through many stages before it gets printed finally. Statutory bodies, external funding and collaborative agencies (if any involved), in-house faculty and market research suggest the kind of programme to be developed. The concept paper is developed by the programme coordinator or discipline / inter-disciplinary area coordinator. It is normally discussed in the School Council, Coordination Committee, School Board, Expert Committee, Programme Advisory Committee, Planning Board, Academic Council, etc. for giving a final shape or design. The 'concept paper' gives the rationale, objectives, level, structure, media components (like print, audio, video, practical, counselling, teleconferencing, etc.), medium of instruction (i.e. language), course design, strategy of course development, programme delivery, evaluation strategies, and procedure of certification.

The role of various functional divisions and units, including regional centres, study centres and other units are chalked out beforehand, as a part preparation for launching of the programme. These include ensuring availability of printed and other study materials for distribution by the concerned units and readiness of other operational units.

12.3.2 Student Registration/Admission

The preparations for registration or admission of students to various programmes actually start much before the commencement of the academic session. Decisions about minimum eligibility criteria, fee details, students intake, mode of admission (online / offline or both) whether based on entrance test or general merit list (without entrance test) to different programmes, etc are required to be taken in consultation and coordination with concerned academic units, statutory bodies and officers, among others. Finalisation of admission booklet / prospectus, issuance of admission notification, monitoring and processing of applications, finalization of admission procedure, etc are important operations pertaining to student registration/admission which involve methodical execution of various relevant activities. Maintaining the databases of each batch of students on roll for each academic session/year for programmes of two years and longer duration is highly demanding service requiring utmost accuracy. Further,

change of courses/electives, change of medium of instruction, correction/change of addresses, transfer / change of students from one Study Centre / Regional Centre to the other, etc requires very careful handling of data. In case of mega-universities the tasks involved are herculean. For instance, in IGNOU, Student Registration Division is responsible for monitoring of registration of students and maintenance of database of students of different programmes offered by the University. These operations require thorough coordination with different operational units at different levels of the system at different times. For providing effective support services, timely registration/admission of students for different academic programme for different academic sessions/year is very essential.

12.3.3 Educational Media

Educational media in a multimedia self-learning package may include audio, video, radio, television, teleconferencing, interactive multimedia, and the like. Use of media involves the tasks of designing and developing the media programmes, and providing interactive learning experiences to the learners through these media. Development of these programmes involves scripting, shooting and production, and dispatch/delivery (in packages or live) for actual use at the learner's end or at designated study centres or media centres. In IGNOU, for example, these activities are carried out by Electronic Media Production Centre.

A decision on the quantity and strategy of media use is taken at the stage of developing the concept paper for the course, and subsequent discussions on it at various forums. Once a decision is taken on the nature and the extent of media use, preparation of academic notes, academic scripts, production scripts, leading to actual programme production (in that order) will take place along with the development of printed course units either simultaneously, or at a later stage. Another decision concerns the media choice/policy: supplementary, complimentary or integrated. These decisions do affect the design and development of media materials. Managing a media production crew and adopting an academic-producer collaborative approach to development of media materials requires sufficient experience and patience. At times, for instance, it may so happen that off-line editing and preview of programmes continue for indefinite period, giving greater strain to the producer, the academic and the exchequer. In the process, the material may get too delayed to be used by the learners. Effective involvement of instructional designers, formative evaluation, and quick decision-making usually help the timely production of good quality programmes that can be very useful to the learners.

12.3.4 Student Support Services

Coordination of activities for timely admission of students, despatch of study materials and all communications to learners, proper conduct of counselling sessions, efficient handling of turn-around time of assignments and their reliable evaluation, maintenance of a continuous feedback and communication system require competent and committed functionaries with specialised skills. In IGNOU, for instance, Regional Services Division plays crucial role in these matters, among others, requiring maintenance of various student support services.

Management of student support services involves: interaction and coordination with the Schools of Studies and other service units of the institution; management of regional centres, study centres, work centre, web centres, etc.; management of material distribution and other communication to learners; management of assignments (continuous evaluation) and counselling; training of support personnel; liaison with outside

society and institutions, and management of the provision of individualised support to learners.

Tutors and counsellors (i.e. Academic Counsellors) are the most crucial agents of distance teaching-learning; they act as subject experts, feedback providers, mentors, assessors, and information providers. Management functions of these roles include setting the role, monitoring and supporting the role, and evaluating the role for their continuing professional development.

Sometimes, slow learners and below average learners may need extra support. This involves strong and sustained mentoring. Further, the learners may need extra workplace support and guidance. Workplace learning skill development, workplace projects, workplace log books and diaries are important mechanisms which need to be managed properly to provide extra support to such learners.

Management of support also includes the support of self-help groups, and peer groups. In case of programmes having low enrolment, the students require special care and support, especially when the support centre mechanism is inadequate due to various reasons.

12.3.5 Learner Evaluation

Evaluation of distance learning involves continuous and final (term-end) evaluation. Continuous evaluation requires assessment of tutor marked and computer marked assignments, individual and group projects, experiments, and hand-on on-line tests, among others. The final evaluation is done through term-end examinations. Decisions need to be made regarding the procedures and formats of the assessment, what tests to give, when to give, how frequently, the level of testing, and the workload involved in preparing, conducting and responding to such tests. Management of computer-based tests needs alertness, immediacy, on-line response system, on-line updating, individualised pacing, and flexibility regarding the timing of these tests. Multiple-choice questions need to be generated and validated for on-demand and on-line assessment and immediate feedback.

Management of assessment of assignments, and examinations is very complex and difficult to handle due to wide geographical distribution of learners, and individualised pacing of learning. However, learners need to be constantly informed about the evaluation activities so that they can make appropriate decisions at appropriate time. At IGNOU, Student Evaluation Division looks after all these operations in coordination with concerned Schools of Studies and Regional Services Divisions, among others, as may be required.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

2) How do you distinguish the management of course development from management of student support services?

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In section 12.3 we have discussed different sub-systems of ODEI that constitute learner support system. In Section 12.4 we will focus on organization of learner support services.

12.4 ORGANISING SUPPORT SYSTEM AND SERVICES

Organising student support services within the system requires thorough consideration of institutional basis as well as the factors that affect organization of these services. We discuss these in the following sub-sections.

12.4.1 Institutional Basis

The type of institution within which the distance education system operates can greatly affect its effectiveness. In some cases distance education departments are established within conventional universities where they adapt or modify existing courses. But this can lead to problems, if the faculty and staff of the traditional departments are reluctant or uncertain about their different roles in the distance education system of the institution. Very often the distance education system is seen to be of inferior status when in fact it is different but just as valid. On the other hand, some very effective distance education systems operate in 'mixed economy' institutions and may flourish if they have high degree of autonomy and have an essential commitment to distance education as their main or only activity. In such a case, the institutional staff have a clear primary involvement in the success of a distance education system.

It is therefore important to note that the student support system cannot be seen in isolation from other parts of the system of an institution through which distance education is provided. If the course material is inadequate or obscure or is delayed by maladministration, extra demands are made of those supporting the students; likewise, if, for example, assignments are inadequately commented upon by academic support staff (tutors / academic counselors) this limits the effectiveness of the course material. Thus the quality of support service provided depends on the institutional basis and orientation, involvement and commitment of its staff.

12.4.2 Factors Affecting Provision

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

Main concern is of students for whom the services are provided with a view to help them sustain their learning through the course/programme. Then we concern ourselves with the institutional factors that facilitate and/or constrain the means of support to students. These are considered under locational factors, media constraints and cost factors. In other words, students needs, location factors in the institution (e.g. course preparation, administration, decision making, material dispatch, etc at Headquarters; devolved administration of support services at Regional Centres and study centres level including face-to-face support services, media constraints and cost factors affect provision of learner support services.

12.4.3 Organisation

For effective organization of learner support services, we would expect the institutional headquarters to:

- 1) carry out overall planning and policy making of the student support sub-systems;
- 2) organise and run this system;
- 3) supervise the staff working within the student support system; and
- 4) provide and disseminate information through the institution.

Some of the functions of 2) and 3) above might be devolved to Regional Offices. Local support centres/study centres are best placed to provide:

- a) face-to-face sessions related to course material and practical workshops;
- b) academic and non-academic counselling;
- c) aspects of advisory services.

This provides you an idea of the gamut of organistiaon of learner support system and services.

12.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen that student support services are very important for distance learners. We have known that distance learners have some specific characteristics and the learners have to learn independently with the help of specially designed self-instructional/learning materials. In order to work through these learning materials smoothly distance learners need assistance of different kinds at different times of learning that takes place through ODL mode. You will agree that we cannot ignore/avoid student support services in distance learning, as it is the only way to avoid loneliness, helplessness and danger of de-motivation and dropout among distance learners. We have thus discussed different sub-systems of leaner support and the aspects and issues related to organization of the support system and services as a whole.

12.6 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’ QUESTIONS

- 1) The distance learner studies on his own using the self-leaning material and does it in isolation. Besides being at distance from his teacher/institution he/she is also separate from fellow learners. Further, the distance learners have intra- and inter-group variations as far as their age, interests, background, needs, and experiences are concerned. The distance learner’s situation thus is quite different from that of their conventional counterparts. The distance learner, who is learning independently, may feel deprived of required support from the teacher/institution and may also feel isolated, helpless and, at times, he/she may even get de-motivated to dropout, particularly when he/she faces a problem in learning or there is lack of administrative or non-academic support service at crucial times. Student support services are therefore essential for distance learners.
- 2) In the case of course design and development, academics are involved, and the exercise is largely academic in nature with little logistical decision-making, while in student support services the exercise is largely logistical and managerial/

administrative in nature guided by academic concerns. In the latter, though the teachers are involved in the evaluation of assignments and in presentation of counselling sessions, the management by coordinators of Study Centres and of Regional Directors of Regional Centres largely involves administrative and managerial decision-making. However, in both the cases, the concern is to facilitate and improve student learning.

12.7 REFERENCES

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Suggested Readings

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12.8 UNIT END EXERCISES

You may write brief notes or full-length answers to the questions given here in your own interest. Such notes or answers might help you during your preparation for term-end examination.

Unit End Questions

- 1) What do you understand by learner support services? (250 words).
- 2) Justify the need for learner support services in ODE (500 words).
- 3) How do you categorise learner support services? (250 words).
- 4) What are the different sub-systems required for learner support in ODE? Discuss different issues involved in managing these sub-systems? (1000 words).

- 5) Discuss different aspects of organizing learner support system and services. (500 words).



Questions for Critical Reflection

- 1) Success or failure of ODE system solely depends on the quality and efficiency of its learner support system and services. Critically examine the statement.

Activity



Write a critical report of the learner support services that IGNOU promised to you as the student of BEd programme and the quality with which these services were provided to you during the course of your study from beginning till date. Cite your experiences as anecdotes of relevant services.



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