

Block

# 1

## **LEARNER SUPPORT: AN INTRODUCTION**

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# MDE-413: Learner Support Systems and Services

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

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# MDE-413: Learner Support Systems and Services

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## Course Outline

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### **Block 1 : Learner Support: An Introduction**

- Unit 1 : Learner Support: A Systems Approach
- Unit 2 : Learner Support: Some Basic Issues
- Unit 3 : Support Services: Institutional Arrangements and Models
- Unit 4 : Developing a Self-directed Learner

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### **Block 2 : Learner Support: Development of Skills**

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

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### **Block 3 : Counselling and Tutoring Services**

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

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### **Block 4 : Assessment of Learner Performance**

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

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### **Block 5 : Management of Learner Support**

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

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

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

**This course consists of five blocks. These are:**

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

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

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

**Block 4: Assessment of Learner Performance** > Various components

of Assessment in Distance Education like Tutor Comments, Tutoring through Correspondence and Supplemental Interaction have been emphasized.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **About this block:**

An experience has shown that though self-instructional materials in distance education help the majority of learners to study for their chosen courses successfully, there are still a large number of learners who find it difficult to use the materials in the best possible way because of their physical limitations or some other problems. These learners require additional help to achieve what they like to do. *The ways and means of providing these additional help are called 'Support Services'.*

This is the first block of the course "Learner Support Systems and Services". In this block, we have discussed about some basic issues of learner support services such as learner support services as sub-system of ODL, components of LSS, academic support services, administrative support services, evaluation support services, significance of learner support services, support services for disabled learners along with institutional arrangements and models elaborately in different units.

In the first unit, we have introduced the concept of LSS, its interrelationship with other elements of ODL System, theoretical background of LSS and factors affecting the nature of Learner Support Services (SSS). After going through this unit you are expected to understand the significance of LSS, recognize the factors responsible for nature and functioning of LSS and analyse different components of ODL System with special reference to LSS.

In the second unit, we discussed about the need of LSS and provision of support services at various stages such as before entry, during the course and after the course completion stage. In addition to these, some major issues for providing learner support like learners characteristics, physical resources, human resources, institution support, inter-institutional coordination and some external factors have also been emphasized. We have also made an attempt to analyse the issues related to the provision of special support services to the learners with various disabilities separately in this unit.

In open and distance education, different models and institutional arrangements are adopted for providing support to the learners. In the third unit, we have focused on all these points with regard to the nature and types of support services that are being provided through different models. Apart from this, we also discussed the institutional arrangements and the functioning style of different ODL institutions with examples.

In the fourth or the last unit of this block, we have made an attempt to discuss the meaning and nature of open learning, and also the importance of self directed learning. In open and distance education system, it is quite essential to develop self directed learning skills among the learners. This particular unit will focus some light on various components of self directed learning and the role of learner support in promoting this kind of learning.

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# UNIT 1 LEARNER SUPPORT: A SYSTEMS APPROACH

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## *Structure*

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Learning Outcomes
- 1.2 Open and Distance Learning System
  - 1.2.1 Course Materials
  - 1.2.2 Media and Technology
  - 1.2.3 Delivery of Academic Programmes
  - 1.2.4 Learner Support Services
  - 1.2.5 Evaluation
- 1.3 Learner Support Services as a Sub-system of ODL System
  - 1.3.1 Components of LSS
  - 1.3.2 Academic Support Services
  - 1.3.3 Administrative Support Services
  - 1.3.4 Evaluation Support Services
- 1.4 Relationship between LSS and other Components of ODL System
  - 1.4.1 Learners and LSS
  - 1.4.2 Course Materials and LSS
  - 1.4.3 Media and Technology and LSS
  - 1.4.4 Delivery of Courses and LSS
  - 1.4.5 Evaluation and LSS
- 1.5 Theoretical Framework of Learning vis-à-vis LSS
  - 1.5.1 John Baath's Views of Human Consideration
  - 1.5.2 Holmberg's Views on LSS
  - 1.5.3 David Sewarte's Ideas on Continuity on Concern
- 1.6 Factors Determining the Nature and Functions of LSS
  - 1.6.1 Learners Background
  - 1.6.2 Nature of Instructional Strategy and Delivery Mode
  - 1.6.3 Course-related Factors
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions
- 1.9 References and Further Readings

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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You are a student of Open and Distance Learning System (ODLS). Prior to joining the programme as well as during the course of studies many kinds of queries might have been raised by yourself or your fellow classmates regarding ODLS. Such probable queries are listed below.

- Is the specific course of ODL recognized by concerned professional body like UGC or AICTE or NCTE or Medical Council of India or Bar Council of India?
- Whether the degree obtained by ODLS gets international recognition?
- Is the ODL programme equivalent to the degree conferred by a state or central university in India?
- Can I be eligible to get government job after obtaining a degree in any open university?
- What kinds of combination are available for a particular degree programme offered by ODL?
- Do I submit migration certificate to register in a ODL degree programme?
- How many years are required to complete ODL degree programme?
- Is it not enough to study only text books to appear in ODL programme examination?
- Is it not a formality to submit assignments?
- Shall I contact any recognized expert for preparing a good assignment?
- Who will guide me to write my project?
- What shall I do as my supervisor does not give me time to guide my project work?
- What shall I do as my school head master does not permit me to complete school based practicals?
- What is the alternative for me as I find it difficult to be in regular touch with my counsellor because of long distance?
- What are the instructional facilities available for the visually impaired learners of ODLS?
- What can I do to submit on line assignments when because of electricity problems the network does not work?
- Can I get alternative study guides if the language of study material is very difficult?
- Is it compulsory to attend contact classes?
- In case I cannot attend contact classes what are the alternative modes of counselling?
- What are the alternative sources of procuring such books if the suggested reading materials are not available in market?
- How can I conduct practicals being a distance education student?

The number of such queries can be many depending on varied situations. Appropriate answers to such queries must be given by an ODL institution to its students promptly. An efficient ODLS makes



systematic attempt to take care of different problems and queries of students. Provisions for organized services made by ODLS in this regard is called Learner Support Services (LSS). On your part it is essential to be clear about the concept, nature and theoretical background of LSS. In this unit you will be introduced to the concept of LSS, its interrelationship with other elements of ODLS, theoretical background of LSS and factors affecting the nature of SSS.

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## **1.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Analyse different components of ODLS with special reference to LSS;
- Explain the significance of LSS;
- Identify interrelationship between learners, course material, media and technology, delivery and evaluation with LSS;
- Explain theoretical background of LSS; and
- Recognize the factors responsible for nature and functioning of LSS.

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## **1.2 OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM**

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As a student of ODL system you are aware of its different components. ODLS is understood as provision of learning opportunities and support by distance education institution to a distance learner through print based materials, methods, activities, media and technologies for achievement of curricular aims and objectives. This statement leads us to identify six major elements of ODLS, such as:

- Distance Learner
- Print based Study Materials
- Media and Technology based instruction
- Delivery system
- Evaluation and
- Learner support system

The learner in ODLS occupies a key position. The ODL aims at facilitating learning and development of its students who are located at a distance from a University/or a School.

The learners' social, cultural, ethnic, geographical, economic and psychological backgrounds reveal multiplicity as well as compositeness. Unlike traditional education the target group of distance learners belongs to a varied age group, working class, house wives, economically scattered classes, remote geographical locations, varied caste groups and different nationalities. They are self motivated learners. The major section of distance learners are the deprived ones who are capable enough to pursue studies but could not go through regular courses because of several reasons. You can very well link your experience with your classmates to understand the composition of background of learners. ODLS emphasizes on Learners Autonomy in promotion of higher studies. It aims at dealing with every student as an autonomous learner. Moore (1977) conceived the view of autonomous learner in terms of:

- setting of learning objectives
- choosing the methods of study and
- conducting self evaluation

These ideas have been focused by Higgs (1988). He states "an autonomous learner is one who has the capabilities for learning in an independent manner, who can recognize the advantages of schooling by alternative modes of learning in the context of learning goals." From these statements you can perceive your role in distance education as a significant and decisive stakeholder of ODLS.

### **1.2.1 Course Materials**

The course materials are significant inputs of learning in distance education system. Usually in the Indian context they are understood as print based self study materials. As a student of ODLS you have noticed that the study materials are classified into different areas of study in the form of Blocks and Units. Each course has been recognised in the form of a Block and the curricular inputs concerning each block have been organised in different units in self instructional form. Such materials are developed by subject experts and experienced persons keeping in view distance learners' background, their needs and problems, course objectives or expected out come of a course, resources available for organization of learning activities at the end of learner, institutional resources etc.

You have already noticed through your study materials that the study materials take care of each learning point in a sequence. The learning

contents are well organised in the form of headings and subheadings. While organising the content it is kept in mind that the learners' experiences are linked with the presentation of content. It follows the principle of known to unknown, simple to complex, and concrete to abstract. You will notice that with a view to encourage self-learning, the course writer presents the matter in conversational style. Your study is facilitated by examples, anecdotes, charts, maps, diagrams, figures etc. Many issue-based problems are also raised to encourage your reflections on the matter. Moreover, you will notice that a number of activities and exercises are incorporated to involve yourself actively in the learning process. A good quality course material, also links itself with other kind of learning inputs provided by media and technology, field works, group learning experiences, practicals, projects etc.

### **1.2.2 Media and Technology**

The emergence of information and communication technology (ICT) in education has contributed significantly towards ODLS. A distance learner gets ample opportunity to use ICT based learning materials and media for achievement of learning objectives.

There are institutions like Radio and Television Universities in China which use media and technology based learning inputs as the key component of ODLS. In the case of Indian situation, media and technology-based inputs like audio lessons, video lessons, radio broadcast, telecast, computer-assisted instructions (CAI) and networking-based instruction are used as additional inputs for course materials presented in the print based form. As it is in practice the major course inputs are presented in the self-instructional materials (SIM). Other forms of media and technology-based materials are added to the SIM-based learning activities. However, in the case of IGNOU and a number of State Open Universities ICT-based learning has been encouraged through learning materials, interactive learning, virtual classrooms, online entrance tests, online examination, online tutorials, e-library, etc. In some universities learning packages are also being used exclusively for ODLS.

### **1.2.3 Delivery of Academic Programmes**

The ODLS reaches at the doorsteps of learners through appropriate strategic delivery of study materials, media and technology. The ODLS makes use of various means of delivery of learning inputs following suitable communication network. The systematic delivery mechanism is adopted keeping in view the requirement and schedule of operation of curricular programmes. You may come across two kinds of delivery mechanism of academic programmes viz., one-way communication mode, and two way interactive mode.

One way communication covers postal delivery of SIM, handbooks, programme guide, radio broadcast, telecast and dispatch of materials to distance learners, Gyanvani and Gyan Darshan Programme. Two-way communication includes telephonic conversation between learner and the tutor, phone in interactive live programmes, one-way video, two-way audio conferencing, two-way audio, two-way video, conferencing, live telecast followed by group discussion etc.

The EduSat based satellite telecast and broadcast programmes have facilitated media based delivery at a faster rate with total coverage of target group of ODLS. Moreover networking involving interactive communication has provided ample scope for one way and two-way communication network. The synchronized and asynchronized communication have widened the opportunity for distance learners to have interaction with experts, tutors, counsellors, peers and many other sources of learning. The e-library concept has been popularized for efficient delivery of academic resources among distance learners.

### **1.2.4 Learner Support Services (LSS)**

As you know the ODLS makes provision for support of distance learners in various ways. Since the ODLS is a unique system of education, appropriate mechanism is evolved to extend support to learners at different stages viz. pre-entry stage, during studies and post-study stage. In traditional campus based education the students avail informal opportunities to interact with people and get many academic queries answered by the teachers and peers. Unlike such situations, the distance learner needs special support from ODL institution at different stages of studies continuously. The ODL institution facilitates self-learning of learners through different means in well organised forms. For instance, you get various facilities through Study Centres located in your region for answering many kinds of queries in the context of your academic progress. The academic counsellors and tutors take care of your problems, assess your progress in studies, give feedback for further development and facilitate learning by suggesting different sources of learning. The learning support services motivate learners in studies and sustain their motivation at different stages of learning.

### **1.2.5 Evaluation**

Learning and evaluation are integrated with each other. In ODLS evaluation is considered as one of the essential elements of distance learning. In open distance learning situation, the self evaluation is embedded with course material-based learning activities. Different kinds of evaluation inputs are incorporated in course materials to trigger self learning. They are presented in the different forms. For instance, in text questions are raised with a view to relate your previous experience with novel experience as a part of course works. You come across self-assessment questions while going through a unit. More reflective activity based questions also form a part of self-learning exercise.

You are also familiar with different kinds of assignments to be completed as a course requirement. Such assignments may be marked by the individual tutor or by the computer. The major purpose of such evaluation exercises is to assess your progress in studies and assist you to overcome various limitations. The semester end/course end evaluations are conducted in the form of terminal examinations. In the case of ODLS e-opportunities are provided in the form of **on-demand examination**. In a nut-shell you will find different kinds of evaluation practices like self evaluation, peer assessment, internet-based evaluation, computer marked assessment and terminal examination as essential input of ODLS.

### Check Your Progress 1

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

What are the major components of ODLS?

.....  
.....  
.....  
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## 1.3 LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES AS A SUBSYSTEM OF ODL SYSTEM

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You will be curious to be clear about the concept of learner support services (LSS), its nature, types and scope in ODLS. People presume that dispatch of print-based lessons to distance learners will lead to their learning. It is of confusing nature. Since a learner in distance education situation is away from the teacher and peers, he may need appropriate support to continue his studies. Hence, ODLS promotes learner support services as a prime function. According to the experts like Kaul and Ramanujam (1989) "student support services cover a wide range of functions, starting from producing the learning materials and making them available to students to arranging contact programmes and conducting examinations." In this case the broader concept of learner support and distance education overlap each other. The pedagogy of ODLS is of such nature that it performs the role of learner facilitation through different kinds of communication and feedback given to the learner on his/her progress in studies. Hence the broad meaning of learner support services means to facilitate learning and development of distance learner through different kinds of materials, methods, media and technology taking into account the needs and problems of learners at different stages of studies. Many people in the area of distance education treat print-based course materials, audio-video lessons, assignments, contact programmes and examination system as sub components of LSS. In other words, LSS function is treated as a hidden function of all such elements of ODLS. Such kind of explanation does not pinpoint LSS as a special function of ODLS.

You must have clarity about LSS as a separate component of ODLS having inter-relationship with other components to promote learning and development of distance learners. In this sense, learner support shall be treated as "Special kind of services organized by ODLS institution to enable distance learner to make optimum use of different learning and evaluation inputs provided through course materials, media and technology, expert guidance and continuous and comprehensive evaluation system". In this case LSS is treated as a learner centered facilitating function of ODLS which takes into account problems of distance learners at pre entry stage, during the course of studies and at course completion stage. You may go through the related literature and come across the terms 'informing', 'advising', 'guiding', 'tutoring' and 'counselling' in the context of LSS. In specific terms, LSS "bridges the gap of isolation and injects the touch of teacherhood to the distance learner ..... , it

helps in counselling, continuous assessment and facilitates the learning process” adopted by the learner (Harichandan, 2010). This definition may help you to get clarity in the concept of LSS that as a whole LSS adds spirit to the structure built in ODLS for distance learners learning processes:

- a) LSS enables the learner to sense the presence of teacher in teaching-learning inputs provided by ODLS.
- b) LSS takes care of human interaction in the teaching learning process through various means.
- c) LSS promotes feedback mechanism through continuous assessment of distance learners’ progress in studies.

### **1.3.1 Components of LSS**

Different authors have classified LSS into different forms. More over different institutions of ODL adopt different forms of LSS in their own perspective. Deshpande (1995) classified LSS in two groups viz. Administrative support and Academic support. Negi (2003) classified LSS in four groups: Administrative, Counselling, Library support and Assignment evaluation. Sathyanaryan (2001) classified them as Information support, Guidance support, Tutorial support, Counselling support and Library support. Harichandan (2010) classified the broad concept of LSS into six areas:

- Primary support provided in printed study material.
- Audio-video Programme.
- Support through face to face interaction with teachers during contact programmes.
- Counselling support
- Library support
- Assignment and feedback to learners.

Different kinds of LSS offered by ODLS like IGNOU, reads as;

- Pre-entry awareness support.
- Post-entry or during course academic support
- Post-course Awareness programmes

At open school stage the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) classified various components of LSS adopted by it as:

- Pre-admission support
- Enrolment and registration
- Advice and counselling on selecting courses
- Ensuring timely availability of self-study print materials
- Personal contact programmes
- Library services and provision of audio-video facilities
- Assignment evaluation and feed back to Learners

Your exposure to diversified forms of LSS as presented above may help you to identify certain core components of LSS. We shall analyze some core areas of LSS viz, academic support, administrative support, assessment and evaluation support in the following sections.

### Check Your Progress 2

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

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

What are the different kinds of LSS offered by Institutions?

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.....

### 1.3.2 Academic Support Services

Very often academic support services are provided through tutors, counsellors, mentors and distance education facilitators to solve academic problems of students. The distance learners face different kinds of problems concerning nature of learning through distance mode, learning experiences provided through different means. For instance you may face a number of problems like:

- How to proceed with studies through reading the materials, writing assignments and using multi-media input of learning?
- Is it enough to consult printed course materials to prepare assignments?
- What to do when I find it difficult to understand the concept(s) presented in the study materials?
- What can I do since the language of study material is not comprehensive?
- How can I adjust with my family engagements, office work and study schedule successfully?
- Who will help me in conducting practicals in my locality?
- How can I organize my study schedule systematically? And so on.

Some such questions come under the purview of academic support services. In the Indian context academic support services are further classified under two heads:

#### Tutorials and Counselling

##### Tutorial Support

The academic counsellors/subject experts provide different kinds of academic support at the initial stage of studies, during the course of studies and towards the completion of studies. They provide tutorial support in the Study Centres, Programme Centres as well as in the laboratories/workshops, the Sunday/holiday classes, Extended Contact Programmes (ECPs), summer/winter schools etc. Besides, tutorials are also organised with help of local area networking through ICT.

The tutorial function of academic counsellors include the learners in the study of subject matter. IGNOU has highlighted following nature of tutorial services for its learners:

- helping learners towards mastering of units of courses
- facilitating group learning through various methods
- monitoring academic progress of learners
- developing independence among learners through different activities
- assisting and monitoring practical based activities.

The tutorial functions of academic counsellors as highlighted by NIOS are stated as:

- Assessing the pre-entry stage background of learners
- Tutoring at the designated Study Centres
- Providing guidance to learners
- Facilitating in problem solving sessions
- Facilitation by Library studies
- Conducting practicals
- Facilitating learning with the help of audio-video programmes
- Additional service for learners with special needs of one short or another like learning disability, geographical remoteness, prisoners etc.

### **Counselling Support**

The counselling function includes advising and helping the learners in the study related personal matters. The counselling support has following objectives:

- to give the learner ideas important to his success
- to make use of available information about a student to solve his problems
- to develop mutual understanding between the counsellors and the learners
- to help learner to work out a plan for solving his difficulties
- to help the learner know himself better his interests, abilities, aptitudes and opportunities
- to encourage and develop special abilities and positive attitude among learners
- to inspire successful endeavour towards attainment
- to assist the learner in planning for educational and vocational fields.
- to sustain motivation of learners during the course



### 1.3.3 Administrative Support Services

Several queries are invariably raised by students like the following:

- What are the criteria of admission to a specific programme?
- Whether admission to a course takes place throughout the academic year?
- What is the meaning of credit system?
- What is networking?
- What are the boarding and lodging provisions for our stay during Extended Contact Programmes (ECPs)?

Such kind of queries are answered through learner support services division of ODLS. The administrative support to learners is possible through:

- Awareness programme about ODLS
- Dissemination of information about the programmes and courses
- Distribution of application forms by person or online
- Information about credit transfer scheme
- Registration of students by person or online
- Delivery of instructional materials by post or at Study Centres or online
- Conduct of tests and examinations
- Prior information regarding contact classes
- Making arrangement for practical experiments and other course based activities
- Organisation of the assessment of papers
- Communication of the progress of learners from time to time
- Provision for recording learners' grievances and attending to such grievances through proper mechanism
- Maintaining records of prospective candidates for enrolment
- Dealing with queries from present as well as past students
- Attending to the flow of learners programme-wise on different occasions like pre-stages; initial level of studies; contact sessions; submission of assignments, practical reports, and projects; prior to examination; during examination, post examination i.e. declaration of results etc.

Administrative support can be made available through several means like websites, information bulletins, programme guides, handbooks, telephone network, online queries, postal queries, radio broadcast, television, mobile learning, teleconferencing and common resources available at Regional Centres and Study Centres. The principles adopted for efficient administrative support are:

- Publicity and advocacy
- Timely dissemination of information
- Availability of prospectus to get registered
- Supply of handbooks and programme guides on time
- Delivery of study materials and media and technology-based programmes
- Proper networking of institutions (internal and external) to give prompt response to queries
- Establishment of grievance redressal to address the problems and queries of students
- Ensuring proper co-ordination between different components of ODLS like course development and delivery, delivery of media and technology based academic programmes, Study Centres, evaluation division and learners.

With a view to facilitate administrative support it is not enough to disseminate information from institutional end to the learners end. Many reputed ODL institutions have provision of guidance services in their regional centres and Study Centres. Such provisions consist of a group of services to assist distance learners in securing the knowledge and skills needed in making adequate choices, plans and activities essential for studying in ODLS etc. The course related queries at different stages of learning are attended by guidance services. Guidance services are provided by a wide range of media, such as self-study materials, on campus provision of telephone counselling, online queries, referral to local agencies, social advisor outreach work, local workshops, use of senior students as a resource.

Guidance services of ODLS make provision for different kinds of learner support activities like:

- Self-analysis for the learners to know their own capabilities and what they are trying to achieve
- Guidance on whether these aims are achievable and how to proceed with these aims
- Information on various programmes
- Development of skills to deal with entrance requirements
- Making appropriate preparation to proceed with courses
- Placement of products in prospective jobs etc.

### **1.3.4 Evaluation Support Services**

As presented above evaluation inputs are integrated with learning process on a continuous basis. The process-based learner evaluation support is provided distinctly in the form of assessment of assignments and course end examinations.

Feedbacks to learners are given for improvements in learning.

### Assessment of assignments and feedback to learners

This is a major function of academic counsellors. As a part of academic support they already give guidance on how to attend to different kinds of assignments incorporated as course requirements. They assess the learners' assignments to ensure learner performance in studies. They give grades and detailed comments to make learners aware of their progress in studies.

The tutors give group feed backs to learners during tutorial sessions. During group interaction sessions they also highlight the quality assignments to motivate learners in improving assignment.

The academic counsellors not only guide practical, field works and projects but also give feedback to learners on different stages of such activities. In the case of professional courses major weightage is given to tutor guidance and assessment of practicals, projects and different kinds of problem solving activities. The academic counsellors are also involved in conduct of examinations and valuation of answer sheets of students. On the basis of such experiences the academic counsellors facilitate learning activities during tutorials and counselling sessions. The computer marked assignments also facilitate this process.

#### Check Your Progress 3

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

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

Discuss the objectives of counselling support?

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Besides above kinds of evaluation support, **special counselling** is provided to motivate learners for preparing assignment, to help them identifying suitable resources for preparing assignments, the skill of writing short answer questions, skill of answering objective type questions and attempting long answer questions etc. Moreover in the case of ICT based evaluation system learner support is provided through ICT to prepare different kinds of assignments and evaluation practices. Maintenance of evaluation reports on individual students through ICT also helps learners as well as the institution to get comprehensive programme of learner on studies.

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## 1.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LSS AND OTHER COMPONENTS OF ODL SYSTEM

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In the first section you have read about different elements of ODLS. As per systems approach different elements of ODLS are interrelated with each other and achieve the aims and objectives of the system. In the following sub-section we shall examine the interrelationship between different elements of ODLS with LSS (see Table 1.1).

### 1.4.1 Learners and LSS

The central focus of LSS is to facilitate learning on the basis of analysis of social-psychological background of learners. For instance, learners

from far-fetched locations, learning by disabled learners, working women, on the job learners etc. require special support for learning and development. Their needs, motivation, expectations and abilities determine specific approaches of LSS. The students constitute groups on their own to help each other.

**Table 1.1: The Interrelationship between LSS and other Components of ODLS**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Components of ODLS</b>	<b>Components influencing LSS</b>	<b>Components Influenced by LSS</b>
1	Distance Learner needs and motivation	Socio-psychological background, expectations, group dynamics, forming self help learner groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guiding learners for selection of courses.</li> <li>Development of learning skills.</li> <li>Developing and sustaining motivation</li> <li>Shaping study habits</li> </ul>
2	Course materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nature of course materials and learning strategies involved in course work.</li> <li>Learning activities involved in study materials</li> <li>Further Reading</li> <li>Post reading activities.</li> <li>Integration of activities like projects, field work, practical etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guiding how to use course materials</li> <li>Clarification of concepts by counsellors</li> <li>Guiding learning experiences integrated with materials</li> <li>Provision of library support</li> </ul>
3	Media and Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate learning as an integral component of instructional system.</li> <li>Additional support for special groups of learners.</li> <li>ICT based LSS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experienced counsellors acting as tutors.</li> <li>Give feedback for development of need based media inputs.</li> <li>Media-based library and laboratory support provided in Study Centres.</li> </ul>
4	Delivery of courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information support</li> <li>Telephone counselling</li> <li>Broadcast and telecast-based LSS</li> <li>Interactive LSS through teleconferencing</li> <li>www net working synchronized and a-synchronized LSS</li> <li>mobile learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distribution of course materials</li> <li>Study Centre's role in organization of Audio-Video lesson classes</li> <li>Provision of CAI and networked based LSS</li> </ul>
5	Evaluation support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nature of Assignments, Projects, Practical, Examination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment of assignments and feedback to learners.</li> <li>Conduct of examinations through Study Centres.</li> <li>Feedback to learners by experienced teachers involved in assessment of examination answer books.</li> </ul>

The distance learners help each other to construct knowledge through experiential learning activities; on the other hand information services, guidance, counselling services, cater to the need of learners and help them to develop learning skills, promote their study habits and sustain their motivation in studies. LSS also provides guidance to learners for future course of action and placement after course completion.

### 1.4.2 Course Materials and LSS

You will notice that course materials act as an element of LSS in a broader sense. Course materials comprise different styles of learning and learning exercises and activities to help learner to study independently. Different kinds of self assessment questions and reflective thinking activities act as learner support exercises. Different kinds of integrated activities, projects, practicals, media-based learning activities are suggested therein.

The LSS act as a major facilitating source to strengthen course material based learning by means of clarifying learners' doubts by simplifying explanations in learners' language, assisting in improving comprehension of learning materials and organisation of course activities as highlighted in the course materials. On the other hand, the Study Centres organise practicals, assist in conducting field trips, provide guidance for projects and library support services in tune with the course materials.

### 1.4.3 Media and Technology and LSS

Multi-media learning facilities are treated as integral part of instructional system. The radio broadcast programmes through 'Gyan Vani' serve local specific needs of distance learners. 'Gyan Darshan' programmes enrich learning experiences through audio-video live demonstrations. The CAI packages and e-learning technology assist ODLS to a large extent. The LSS helps learners to avail such opportunity in Study Centres. The audio-video cassette based lessons and down linking facilities in Study Centres promote distance media based support to the learners, the special group learners of professional programmes, practical and project based learning. Opportunities are accelerated through demonstrations of practical components, expert guidance through live telecast programmes, skill based exercise and learning packages. The library facilities are also provided in the Study Centres.

### 1.4.4 Delivery of Courses and LSS

Media and technology based delivery system strengthens LSS in terms of providing information services, tutorials, counselling and resource support to ODLS. Radio broadcast, telecast, phone-in interactive programme broadcast, teleconferencing, www networking encourage two way interactions between learners and tutors and among learners. Advanced communication technologies and EduSat based educational programmes make virtual class room a reality in LSS. The LSS also reciprocate delivery facilities through Study Centres, counsellors guidance in making best use of media and technology based programmes in the Study Centres.

On many occasions teleconferencing based interactive sessions are treated as one of the major components of extended contact

programmes and special counselling sessions. The opportunities of CAI and network based support system are provided through Study Centres.

### 1.4.5 Evaluation and LSS

Evaluation of learner's progress in studies and LSS are treated as two sides of the same coin. Guidance is given for preparation of different kinds of assignments to distance learners through tutorial sessions.

After assessment of assignments, tutors and computerized feedbacks are given to individual learners. During counselling sessions students interact with tutors on feedback given to them on assignments. The experience gained through counsellors involvement in examinations and checking the answer sheets help in course modifications. Moreover, Study Centres act as a major resource for conducting examinations. The academic counsellors provide guidance to learners' progress in studies during the course of studies as well as after the completion of courses for better preparation of examinations. Post-examination guidance is provided for continuation with further studies and subsequent placement in appropriate jobs.

#### Check Your Progress 4

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

Explain the relationship between Media and technology and LSS?

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## 1.5 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF LEARNING VIS-A-VIS LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

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Learning in ODLS takes place through mediation of course materials, media and technology along with occasional interaction with tutors and counsellors. Since the distance learners mostly remain in isolation, the self instructional materials being integrated with support materials, different concepts need to be developed among learners. In this context course design takes into account cognitive factors of learners along with provision of conducive external environment. Of late, this has been realized that since ODLS is learner-centered, his/her experience must be considered for providing opportunities in construction of knowledge.

Learning theories categorised under the heads of different paradigms like Behaviorism, Cognitivism and Constructivism have made significant contributions towards building strategies of teaching-learning of ODLS. Even though these theories have their own models of learning, all of them agree on provision of support to learners either in individualized conditions or in group situations. Let us take examples of these theories.

One, the contributions of B.F. Skinner, a leading Behaviorist to Programmed Learning highlighted relationship between stimulus and response and reinforcement. The implications can be seen in writing of self-instructional modules where the expert provides basic knowledge followed by practices and exercises. Such exercises are followed by reinforcement step by step. LSS derived its origin from behaviorist theory in the form of incorporation of step wise presentations, learning activities/self check exercises and model answers given for self feedback to learners.

The cognitive theorists like J.S. Bruner insisted on learners involvement in discovery of relationships between different factors contributing towards occurrence of events. It advocates autonomy of a learner. It is presumed that when the distance learner increasingly engages himself/herself in learning it will lead to self-reward. In other words, the learner provides his/her own stimulation and in this way arouses his or her own curiosity. According to cognitive approach, the ODLS provides different support in the form of learning materials, experimental kits, source materials where the independent learner is engaged in different kinds of learning activities leading to **concept learning**. Different learning tasks and exercises are given to link learners' experience with new situations, identification of similarities and parallels, identification of dissimilarities, identification of major characteristics of the given concept etc. The learner gets self-feedback by identifying the concept or discovering new ideas.

The constructivist learning treats learner as an independent learner. It refers to a learning process where the learner is actively constructing both the knowledge and strategies used to acquire the knowledge. The learner constructs a new vision of reality from his own unique experiences, further he uses the self acquired knowledge to deal with any new experience in that field. According to constructivist approach the tutors' role is perceived as a facilitator of learning. The learning takes place individually or in group situations. Different kinds of reflective learning activities are incorporated in ODLS, where the learners get opportunities to explore the strategies of acquiring knowledge/problem solving as well as interpretation and construction of knowledge. Different practitioners of ODLS have conceptualized the nature of LSS and its scope in ODLS.

### **1.5.1 John Baath's View of Human Consideration**

John Baath analysed the contributions of behaviorists and cognitivists like B.F. Skinner, D.P. Ausubel, J. Bruner, Carl Roger and R.M. Gagne. He emphasized that since the distance learner is missing the presence of teacher in the learning process all possible efforts must be made to give human touch to the learning materials provided to the learner. He insisted on the provision of guided independent individualized instruction in distance education programmes. The learning materials must be integrated with human touch in the presentation and provision of feedback opportunities to learners. The assignment system followed by tutors comments can establish human touch to ODLS.

### **1.5.2 Holmberg's Views on LSS**

Holmberg conceived distance education as the kind of education which covers "the various forms of study at all levels which are not continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students

in lecture rooms on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organisation.” Holmberg insisted on Guided **Deductive (Didactic?)** Approach in presentation of study materials by which the course writer initiates dialogue with the reader on specific learning situations. Such presentation in dialogue form proceeds in a sequence to arrive at understanding a concept and its generalization. He called it Guided **Deductive (Didactic?)** Approach because the course writer plays the role of a teacher and leads the discussion in dialogue form in written course material.

The second point, Holmberg highlighted was the possibility of learner guidance and tutorial in ODLS. The distance learner may need guidance for study of materials. He may have academic problems which can be solved through occasional contacts with tutors in face to face situation. These ideas lead to integrate study of course materials with tutor guidance in Study Centres of distance education.

### **1.5.3 David Sewart’s Ideas on Continuity on Concern**

David Sewart, former Director of Regional Academic Services of the UKOU insisted on providing learner support to sustain his/her motivation in studies on continuous basis. He insisted on uniqueness of each student support system in any distance teaching system. The inputs of student support system depends on the nature of instructional package, the delivery from the status of the organisation and the socio-economic educational culture in which it operates. David Sewart highlighted the learner factor, course material and delivery factor, institutional factor and the contextuality determining the nature of learner support system.

According to David Sewart the learner perspective in LSS can be linked with the needs for:

- Information from and contact with the institution
- Peer group interaction and development of corporate identity
- Human contact with facilities, personal contact for feedback
- Guidance activities and methods for development of skills

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## **1.6 FACTORS DETERMINING THE NATURE AND FUNCTIONS OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES**

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The following factors determine LSS of any distance education institution:

- Learners Background
- Course Requirement
- Course delivery needs

### **1.6.1 Learners Background**

Much has been discussed about the learner factor concerning the provision of LSS. As you realize in distance education system, the



learners remain away from the campus. You do not get opportunity to interact with teachers and fellow classmates as it happens in traditional courses. Learners remain in physical and intellectual isolation from the teaching institutions, teachers and fellow students. This often leads to frustration and eventual dropout.

Learners of varied age groups, occupational backgrounds, scattered locations, secluded background, low motivation and low confidence level etc. need special attention. The structure of course material alone may not satisfy individual learner needs and local specific demands.

The family, peers, locality and social attitudes may often be biased against distance education in favour of conventional mode leading to depression, and eventually forcing the learner to dropout:

- Sometimes learners lack confidence in themselves and in their studies.
- Some learners lack sufficient funds to meet educational cost, in addition to their personal family expenses.
- Lack of opportunity to compare their performance with fellow students, hence they remain in confusion.
- Socially and culturally deprived sections of learners find it difficult to link their expenses with learning experience provided by course materials.
- The special category of learners in remand homes, prisons and other isolated locations face unique problems in a non-academic environment.
- Physically impaired learners find it difficult to get optimum benefit of standardized course materials.

As a whole learners' problems of social, psychological and personal type affect their studies through distance mode. LSS is designed taking into consideration such factors and provide support to different groups of distance learners.

### **1.6.2 Nature of Instructional Strategy and Delivery Mode**

ODLS incorporates varied nature of instructional inputs, processes, evaluation and feedback mechanism. As a learner you may find such experiences novel dealing with the learning strategies. Going through such kinds of instructional components require specific learning skills, to use such materials and methods and involvement in instructional process with perseverance.

On many occasions timely delivery of materials do not take place. Coordination between print based study materials and ICT based learning inputs get estranged. Lack of synchronization of media production and its delivery also affect learner's studies adversely. Whether a learner can depend solely on any specific material(s) or he/she is required to choose suitable material(s)/modes(s) create problems in media and material selection in ODLS. Moreover, non-availability of technology and the user facility at learners' end stand as a major barrier in pursuing studies. The identification of appropriate academic counsellors, course coordinators, their proficiency in dealing with distance learners and course specific needs also contribute significantly towards smooth function of LSS.

Distance learner finds it difficult to locate academic resources at their work place/locality, identifying local level course supervisors/tutors/facilitators and mentors to conduct practicals and projects, locating laboratories and worksheets for conducting practicals, availing equipment, chemicals and meeting laboratory based expenses are also counted as significant course related problems. Many other curricular experiences involving field works, simulated exercises, role playing, case studies, school/hospital, industry/judicial court based experiences, community services, games and sports, aesthetic experiences and personal development activities are not accommodated properly in ODLS. Lack of coordination and networking of institutions at intra department level and inter-institution level also determine the success of ODLS. An ideal institution of ODLS takes care of such problems through LSS.

### **1.6.3 Course Related Factors**

Courses offered in ODL can be of general nature as well as professional nature. Major emphasis of general or liberal courses highlight theory based disciplinary programmes in social sciences, humanities and science branches. There can be general courses of interdisciplinary nature with emphasis on social, human, environmental problems and development orientation. In general courses emphasis is laid on development of knowledge, attitude formation and skill acquisition in a sequence.

The professional courses deal with skills related to a profession, theoretical knowledge concerning it and professional ethics. The fields like medicine, engineering, management and teacher education come under such categories. The curricular experiences for general courses differ from that of professional courses. While general courses lead to interaction based experience, value formation, creation of novel ideas and refinement of thoughts. The LSS provided to general courses take into account such considerations. The professional courses are controlled by the guidelines and norms set by specific bodies. The course requirement gives such stress on practicals, internships, field experiences, projects, situation specific case studies and skill based exercises under continuous guidance of experts. Hence, LSS take care of such experiences in Programme Centres or Special Study Centers with ample scope for professional development of distance learners.

#### **Check Your Progress 5**

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

List the factors that determine LSS of any distance education institution?

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## **1.7 LET US SUM UP**

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So far, you have been introduced to the fundamentals of LSS in the framework of ODL as system. How different nature of questions raised

by students are taken care by ODL have been explained in terms of academic, administrative and assessment and evaluation services. You also noticed the interrelationship between different components of ODLS with LSS in a system perspective. Moreover, it has also been highlighted that even though different learning theories have different perspectives, learner support in or other way is given prime importance by all of them. The theoretical background of LSS and factors influencing LSS have been well explained with the perspective of enhancement of provision for course specific learning experiences to distance learners. Such understanding is going to form a base for you to take the course on LSS with more clarity.

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## **1.8 FEEDBACK TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

The major components of ODLS are:

- Distance Learner
- Print based Study Materials
- Media and Technology based instruction
- Delivery system
- Evaluation and
- Learner support system

### **Check Your Progress 2**

The different kinds of LSS offered are:

- Primary support provided in printed study material.
- Audio-Video Programme.
- Support through face to face interaction with teachers during contact programmes.
- Counselling Support.
- Library support.
- Assignment and feedback to learners.

Different kinds of LSS offered by ODLS like IGNOU;

- Pre-entry awareness support.
- Post-entry or during course academic support.
- Post-course Awareness programmes.

At open school stage the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) classified various components of LSS adopted by it as:

- Pre-admission support
- Enrolment and registration
- Advice and counselling on selecting courses

- Ensuring timely availability of self study print materials
- Personal contact programmes
- Library services and provision of audio-video facilities
- Assignment evaluation and feedback to learners

### **Check Your Progress 3**

The counselling function includes advising and helping the learners in the study related personal matters. The counselling support has following objectives:

- to give the learner ideas important to his success.
- to make use of available information about a student to solve his problems.
- to develop mutual understanding between the counsellors and the learners.
- to help learner to work out a plan for solving his difficulties.
- to help the learner know himself better through his interests, abilities, aptitudes and opportunities.
- to encourage and develop special abilities and positive attitude among learners.
- to inspire successful endeavour towards attainment.
- to assist the learner in planning for educational and vocational fields.
- to sustain motivation of learners during the course.

### **Check Your Progress 4**

Multi-media learning facilities are treated as integral part of instructional system. The radio broadcast programmes through 'Gyan Vani' serve local specific needs of distance learners. 'Gyan Darshan' programmes enrich learning experiences through audio-video live demonstrations. The CAI packages and e-learning technology assist ODLS to a large extent. The LSS helps learners to avail such opportunity in Study Centres. The audio-video cassette based lessons and down linking facilities in Study Centres promote distance media based support to the learners, the special group learners of professional programmes, practical and project based learning. Opportunities are accelerated through demonstrations of practical components, expert guidance through live telecast programmes, skill based exercise and learning packages. Library facilities are also provided in the study centres.

### **Check Your Progress 5**

The following factors determine LSS of any distance education institution:

- Learners Background
- Course Requirement
- Course delivery needs

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## 1.9 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 2 LEARNER SUPPORT: SOME BASIC ISSUES

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### *Structure*

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Learning Outcomes
- 2.2 Significance of Learner Support Services
- 2.3 Need for Learner Support Services
  - 2.3.1 Learner Based Requirements
  - 2.3.2 Course Based Requirements
  - 2.3.3 Sustaining Learners' Motivation
- 2.4 Support Services at Various Stages
  - 2.4.1 Support Services: Before Entry
  - 2.4.2 Support Services: During Course
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- 2.5 Major Considerations for Provision of Learner Support Services
  - 2.5.1 Learners Characteristics
  - 2.5.2 Course Objectives
  - 2.5.3 Physical Resources
  - 2.5.4 Human Resources
  - 2.5.5 Institutional Support and Guidelines
  - 2.5.6 External Factors
  - 2.5.7 Inter-institutional Coordination and Collaboration
- 2.6 Support Services for Disabled Learners
  - 2.6.1 Disability: The Genesis
  - 2.6.2 Mechanisms
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.9 References and Further Readings

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### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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Learner Support Service is the core of distance learning system. A learner may be highly enriched and talented but cannot maximally benefit from the courses through distance mode if s/he is not oriented for the ODL system. Everyday there are new innovations and developments taking place in every branch of knowledge and, therefore, learners need to be updated with those developments regularly. Simply accessing or assimilating information is not sufficient in the ODL system as realized by the educational community today. The learners in the ODL system, therefore, need two way communications for analyzing and developing knowledge with the help of varieties of modern communication technologies. Moreover the dialogue between the tutor and the learner is essential to build up confidence in the later that helps self learning. In distance learning the real distance has been bridged to a great extent by various means or sources. The emotional, mental and academic link between the tutor

and the taught is established through a multiple layer of support services. In the absence of these supports distance learners feel helpless and isolated. Therefore, sufficient arrangements are need to be made in the Open Universities (OU) and Distance Learning Institutes (DLIs) for providing support services to the learners to overcome these problems.

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## **2.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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In this unit, we have discussed the various dimensions of support services in the ODL systems and their effective utilization.

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

- Explain the need for support services in the ODL system
- List various stages of support services
- Discuss various considerations for learner support services
- Analyze socio-academic issues for support services
- Justify the need of support services for the disabled learners.

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## **2.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES**

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ODL system has shown tremendous growth during the last two decades due to its unique feature of being a user-friendly system. This system came in to existence with the basic objective of providing wider access to higher education with the help of a chain of attractive support services. Since Open Universities and DLIs are known by their quality, maximum emphasis was obviously put on the support services which are considered as essential components of distance learning. The basic objective of Learner Support Services is to develop confidence in the distance learners for effective learning. Support services such as academic counselling, support through assignments, teleconference, interactive radio counselling, e-Gyankosh, online grievance redressal, provision of reference books, library facilities, audio-visual programmes, CD-ROM, access to internet etc. are some of the highly popular support services learners are availing in the present day Open university systems.

In fact, the success or failure and the overall corporate image of a DE Institution is determined by the strength and weaknesses of the second major sub-system, i.e. student support services. The major objectives of this essential component are:

- To create an environment conducive to distance learning
- To facilitate the learning through the distance learning method
- To motivate learners to continue their education
- To encourage socialisation and to promote team work and team spirit
- To improve the educational standards of the students.

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## 2.3 NEED FOR LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

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There is no exaggeration of the fact that the LSS play a crucial role in imparting quality education to distance learners but their management is probably the toughest task. When a learner takes admission in a programme in the DE system for the first time, s/he finds himself/herself in an unfamiliar situation. S/He has experienced learning in association with a teacher who usually teaches in the class being physically present. But in DE system a good portion of the course is expected to be covered by himself/herself in the absence of a teacher of his/her physical presence. Another important factor is that the learners in this system are mostly adults and are basically part time learners who are not sure of their capacities and capabilities. The learning package for them may be an unpleasant experience as they have lost touch with their studies. The main aim of the LSS in Distance Education is to promote self-study/independent study, particularly in the absence of regular face-to-face contact. However, the process of distance learning requires the interaction of the learners, both with the materials and with the teacher. The quality of the support system affects learning and this is precisely the basic rationale/premise for the need of learner support in DE system. A glimpse of the learners requirements, requirements for the course and learners' motivation will help us understand it better.

### 2.3.1 Learner Based Requirements

A learner in any system of education occupies a pivotal position around whom revolves the entire process of teaching and learning. In distance education the common characteristics of a learner are that, s/he is a mature adult learner and wishes to learn at his/her own pace. For this reason s/he feels sometimes isolation from his/her peer groups and teachers concerned. Because of the physical and psychological isolation s/he needs academic and emotional support from the distance teaching teachers as well as the distance institution.

### 2.3.2 Course Based Requirements

Learner support services are the key to success of the distance learners and its purview is very vast. Starting with pre-admission counseling, it continues till the students complete the course and get suitable employment. As far as course based requirement of support services is concerned, the DE learners need it in every step of the programmes they pursue. Majority of the support s/he gets during academic counselling classes and through home assignments. To make the learners self-reliant, independent and self confident, the distance teachers prepare self instructional materials and home assignments. The assignments are evaluated by the academic experts called tutors. While evaluating the assignment responses the tutors write constructive comments to help the learners improve their performance. Likewise, in the counselling sessions the learner gets face-to-face support from the counsellors who are academic experts in the relevant field. Counselling is an assistance extended 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 learners meet their needs, or solve their problems related to their study. It involves informing, advising, and counselling and



decision making. In order to impart effective counselling a tutor must have the requisite qualities of a counsellor. S/he must have thorough knowledge of the Distance Education system and the learning materials used by them. Open universities today are using Self Instructional/Learning Materials(SLM/SIM) for the independent learners. Self instructional materials are unique in the sense that they contain sufficient information and guide the learners properly through access devices such as structure of the unit, objectives, illustrations, self check exercises, explanations, suitable directions, unit end exercises and above all answers to all in-text questions. The counsellor must be fully conversant with all these aspects of SLM, so that he can guide the students properly.

Initially Distance learners face difficulty in dealing with the SLM and its technicalities but gradually overcome these hunches and feel more comfortable with assistance from the tutors/counsellors.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

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

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

Describe how support services are essential for the distance learner. Answer in about 100 words.

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### **2.3.3 Sustaining Learners' Motivation**

Motivation being one of the most important factors in the field of teaching and learning, plays a crucial role in distance education as well. Since the learners are fairly matured and adult they are simultaneously engaged in various other activities while pursuing their studies. It is very difficult for them to sustain motivation for completing their studies. But with lots of efforts and proper counselling the motivation level of these learners can be restored, sustained and the learners could be helped to be successful in their work

When a learner newly joins a programme through the distance mode, s/he is motivated to some extent. Without some sort of motivation nobody would like to spend their hard earned money and time to be successful in their studies. Further it is the same motivation which helps a learner develop interest and complete the course. Motivation from distance teachers, tutors and counsellors at various stages help the learners overcome their difficulties and give up the idea of dropping out from the course. Every institution must have the necessary infrastructure to provide motivation to the learners, so that a sense of belongingness can be created. The learner needs to be supported at every stage, starting from the admission advertisement, sending the offer of admission, dispatch of material and finally award of degrees are some of the stages. Constant interaction and mutual trust between the learners and tutors would certainly develop a sense of belongingness and create positive environment for learning.

Accuracy and timely supply of information about courses and programmes at the entry stage would help the learners decide about their strategies of learning. Timely admission, timely dispatch of study materials, clear counseling schedule and assignment submission schedule instill confidence in the learners and inspire them to study hard. If the above services are not properly monitored, the students face difficulty and their performance level gets affected and finally they become the victim of dropout syndrome. Another important factor in this problem is that, the assignment responses submitted by the learners must be assessed, commented upon and returned in time. The purpose of assignment is to teach the learners effectively by giving them timely feedback on their strengths as well as their weaknesses. This feedback is helpful to the learners in tracking their own progress. But the irony is that neither the assignments are submitted by the learners in time nor are they assessed by the tutors/counsellors and returned to the students in time. This type of approach is thoroughly demotivating and the very aim of DE is defeated.

Counselling is considered to be very important in DE system. Despite the claims of the distance educators about its inherent strengths, the isolated distance learner always needs the opportunity of face to face meeting with his/her teachers and peer group. Counselling sessions are one of the best channels through which the learner interacts freely with the counsellors and peers and solves majority of his/her problems. It is therefore imperative on the part of DE institutions to see that counselling classes are organized systematically and good counsellors are entrusted with this noble job. This will bring motivation to a great extent and help satisfy the very purpose of DE.

Lastly the preparation for the TEE is a great challenge for the DE learners. Timely conduct of examinations and timely declaration of results gives tremendous amount of satisfaction to the DE learners and really motivates and helps the learners to continue their learning activities on time.

**Check Your Progress 2**

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

How can you enhance motivation of the distance learners? Write in 50 words.

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## **2.4 SUPPORT SERVICES AT VARIOUS STAGES**

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DE institutions at present depend on a variety of media to provide support services to their learners. Apart from the print and non-print media there are many other elements that support distance learners at various stages of their studies. Since DE learners are comparatively matured and belong to diverse group, they need support at every stage of their learning endeavour. Let us discuss some important stages of support services.

### 2.4.1 Support Services: Before Entry

Learners' needs are unlimited and as far as possible they need to be properly addressed in order to save them from maladjustment and from dropping out prematurely. It is therefore essential to provide them support service from the very beginning and at every stage. In the pre-entry stage the learner comes to the DE institution or the distance teachers or counsellors to enquire about the following:

- Availability of Academic programmes
- Course fee
- Methods of teaching
- Entry requirement
- Study materials
- Recognition of degrees
- Reimbursement of fees
- Institution and its credibility
- Employment opportunities etc.

At this stage, the prospective learner is very much curious to know many things from the institution and therefore s/he should be properly guided, counselled, informed and advised for whatever he/she needs.

### 2.4.2 Support Services: During Course

In the Pre-Entry Stage the learner generally forms a positive attitude and develops a kind of confidence in studies for which he prepares a line of action. After deciding a particular programme for study, the learner prepares for admission. Once admitted he/she gets his/her study materials, assignments and a programme guide. He/she also gets a counselling schedule after some time. All these things bring a kind of confusion in the mind of the fresh distance learner as to how to use the study guides, how to use the study materials, how much time to devote for different courses for completing the programme successfully. During this stage the learner may not feel confident enough and may think of dropping out from the course. Sometimes personal problems arise and affect their studies. Learners often suffer from examination fever due to excessive anxiety. Therefore, they need the proper guidance. Out of many some of these are highlighted below:

- Compulsory organization of Induction programmes to introduce all the counsellors and Study Centre staff to the learners and clarify the doubts of the learners regarding student support services.
- Timely distribution of learning materials for timely preparation for the examination.
- Providing proper and timely information to the learners about the radio broadcast, TV programmes and teleconference etc.
- Making provision of library facilities.
- Timely conduct of theory and practical/lab classes.

- Fair conduct of Term End examinations
- Timely declaration of results
- Time to time encouragement to the learner to gather confidence on them.

### **2.4.3 Support Services: After the Course Completion**

In the post programme/course stage, the learner has successfully completed the course and requires the help of the counsellor or the DE institution for getting the degree/certificate or mark sheet. He may also require right information about the job avenues, so that he/she can choose a suitable career. Proper guidance at this stage will not only increase the morale but also bring satisfaction to the learner about the institution.

The following are some of the possible supports the learner needs at this stage:

- Communication of the final result and issuance of degree at the convocation.
- Advice on career advancement and future prospects.

#### **Check Your Progress 3**

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

b) *Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.*

i) What are the stages in which a learner needs support?

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ii) What kind of information does the learner require during pre-entry stage?

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## **2.5 MAJOR CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROVISION OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES**

DE institutions should take into account many factors while making provisions for providing various support services. Some of the factors are enumerated below:

### **2.5.1 Learner Characteristics**

The characteristics of distance learners are different from conventional learners. In case of the distance learner, learning is a part time activity whereas for a learner in the conventional system, it is a full time activity. The part-time learners in most of the cases have resumed the activity of learning which they had given up quite some time ago. The

conventional learner, on the other hand, regularly attends classes. S/He belongs to an institution but the DE learner may have to be associated with so many institutions for better learning. In the conventional system the distance learner is in easy contact with the institution whereas in DE, the learner is an isolated person as the contact classes are occasionally organized or organised at long intervals. Sometimes counselling classes are organized through various other modes of learning at a distance.

The following table gives a clear picture about the difference between DE learners and conventional learner.

**Table 2.1: Learners in Conventional and DE System**

<b>Conventional System</b>	<b>DE System</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning is a full time major activity.</li> <li>2. The learner belongs to an institution.</li> <li>3. The learner is usually young.</li> <li>4. The learner is in easy contact with fellow learners.</li> <li>5. The learner has easy access to the institutional resources.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The learner returns to a role h/she had some time ago.</li> <li>2. The learner is a member of many institutions.</li> <li>3. The learner is an adult.</li> <li>4. Contact with fellow learners may not be easy.</li> <li>5. The learners' contact with the institution is infrequent and often takes place across a distance.</li> </ol>

A learner in the conventional system has to attend classes on a full time basis but the distance learner devotes only a part of his/her time to studies. Distance learners are generally adults who have equal responsibilities towards their jobs, family and other commitments whereas a conventional learner is not burdened with such commitments.

### **2.5.2 Course Objectives**

The need for learner support also arises because of certain course objectives. Course objectives are normally specified in the beginning of the course and presentations are made keeping in view the specified objectives. While going through the learning materials and various access devices, the learner comes across certain difficulties. In fact some learners find it difficult to handle the SLM because that requires special study skills which can only be provided by human support.

#### **Check Your Progress 4**

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

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

Differentiate between a distance learner and a conventional learner in about 100 words.

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### 2.5.3 Physical Resources

Learner support depends on the availability of various physical resources also, such as class rooms, library, laboratory, internet facility, reading room at the Study Centre and Regional Centre, Audio Visual room, Self Instructional Materials etc. Just like the learners of the conventional educational institutions, the distance learners need the above facilities from time to time for their successful learning.

**Class Rooms:** Class rooms are a bare necessity for providing academic support to the learners through face to face counselling. Class rooms are the meeting point of learners where they also interact with their counsellors. It is the class room which gives a feeling of involvement to the learners and removes the feeling of isolation. Important academic discussions take place among the peer group and proper solutions to various problems pertaining to the course are sorted out. Every Learner Support Centre should, therefore, have sufficient class room facilities with adequate infrastructure like Black Board, OHP, LCD projector etc. for effective learning.

**Library:** Library is an essential component of every educational institution. It is considered as the temple of education. The basic elements of a good library are good reference books, journals, periodicals, Encyclopedia and a well organized cataloguing system. Distance learners invariably require library support in their Study Centres though the Self Instructional Materials are considered to be self contained. Learners take the help of library while preparing for their examination and while writing the answers to the assignments. Besides the reference books which the learners use the most, there are Project Reports of various courses available in the library. The learners while working on their projects refer to these projects and get concrete ideas about how to select a new project and prepare for it. Libraries also give them an exposure to the internet through which collection of information and subject materials becomes easier and faster. Students also get exposed to various E-library resources such as E-gyankosh, WIKI services etc. for their independent learning. A good library, therefore is an asset for the distance learners.

**Laboratory:** There are many practical oriented academic programmes being offered through distance mode of learning. Initially there was lot of confusion as to how to organize the practical classes for the distance learners. But this confusion has been completely eradicated by making provisions for the distance learners for practicals at the Study Centers. Now most of the DE institutions in the world provide adequate practical facilities with good practical counsellors for the practicals. From time to time laboratory equipment are being provided and sufficient consumable and non-consumable items for the practical are supplied to the Study Centres. Distance learners need science labs for Science subjects (Physics, Chemistry, Life-sciences etc.), computer labs for Computer Science subjects and different other labs with sufficient infrastructure for different subjects with practical components.

**Reading Room:** Sometimes learners due to their busy work schedule prefer the Study Centre than home to sit and prepare for the examination. They require a place where they can sit and read comfortably. It is therefore essential to have some provision at the Study Centres for a Reading Room. The Reading Room of the Study

Centre should be ideally located and should be free from disturbances. All the learning materials must be provided to the learner as per his/her requirement. The Study Centre functionaries must remain present in the Study Centre and if required some counsellors be entrusted to help the learners. In some Study Centres of the present day Open Universities, it is found that the Reading Room facility is provided in the library itself by making provision for the learners.

**Internet Connectivity:** Distance learning has been greatly influenced by the internet. DE institutions are providing time to time information through internet and collect online feed back from the learners for improvement. These days admissions are done online and examinations are also conducted online for quick declaration of results. Students can check up their progress through internet and try consistently for better results. Every reputed institution has its website and all relevant information pertaining to every activity are given on their website. Moreover, there are digital repositories of learning materials in many websites and it is only through internet that one can get access and get to know various kinds of information. Many online programmes are also webcast where there are precious presentations on important topics and only internet can enable a student to avail this facility. The Learner Support Centres therefore should have internet connection for the extensive use of the learners and to support them effectively.

**Audio-Visual Room:** Audio visual facility is very essential for the distance learners. Recordings of important presentations by eminent experts of various subjects are preserved in Video CDs and they are played at the Study Centres for the benefit of learners. Similarly quite a lot of audio CDs of important lectures are also played in CD players which are proved to be extremely useful. Besides the pre-recorded Audio and Video CDs, there are Teleconference facilities and Audio-conference facilities. In teleconference the learners get opportunity to interact with the eminent experts sitting at the studio while seeing them in television. It is a one way video and two way audio teleconference system. IGNOU has been extensively using this system for teaching the distance learners for quite some time. These days in India EDUSAT supported teleconference has become very much popular. This is the platform where the learner gets two way video and two way audio teleconference system. All these facilities have tremendous educational potential and therefore must be made available at the Study Centres as far as possible for the use of distance learners.

### **Check Your Progress 5**

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

Write the utility of each of the following in 2 lines.

- a) Audio-Visual Room

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b) Reading Room

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c) Library

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### 2.5.4 Human Resources

Learner Support Services require involvement of a good number of persons. It depends on the organizational structure of the institution. As for example, in IGNOU, there is a three tier structure. On the top, there is HQ; in the middle, there are Regional Centres and at the bottom there are Study Centres. HQ is supported by teachers (Asst. Professors, Associate Professors and Professors) and various administrative staff in various schools of studies and divisions are supported by various academic and administrative staff to address the issues of the Regional Centres and Study Centres under their jurisdiction. At the Regional Centres various academic staff such as Regional Director, Asst. Regional Directors and other administrative staff such as Deputy Registrars, Asst Registrars, Section officers, Assistants and attendants etc. are appointed to take care of the day to day needs of the learners of the region. Study Centres are mostly supported by part time functionaries, such as Coordinators, Asst. Coordinators, Assistants and attendants. Besides the above functionaries in the Study Centres there are tutors/Academic Counsellors drawn from various subject areas keeping in view their expertise and experience. Since the actual teaching and learning takes place at the Study Centres, there is the requirement of quite a variety of personnel. In addition to academic counsellors, there is the requirement of project guides, evaluators, invigilators for the examinations and examiners for various practical examinations. It is therefore evident that DE institutions take the help of number of academic and administrative staff to provide support services to the learners.

### 2.5.5 Institutional Support and Guidelines

DE institutions all over the world have now fully realised that without proper institutional support the distance learners' feeling of being isolated can never be removed. Moreover it is the institutional arrangements which give a feeling of institutional learning. Counselling sessions and Audio Video sessions are therefore organized at the learners' centres very frequently for the learners to clarify their subject specific doubts and give them an opportunity to interact with the subject specialists. Large numbers of Learner Centres are established by open universities for the distance learners. These centres are either under some Regional Centres or under direct administrative control of the University/institution. Clear-cut guidelines are framed in the form of Acts and Statutes to enable these institutions to function and provide support services. Let us now discuss the various institutional arrangements for support services for distance learners.



## **Study Centres**

A Study Centre is a place where institutional learning takes place. This is carried out in the form of counselling, viewing video CDs, participating in teleconferences, attending library, meeting peer groups and above all interacting with SC functionaries and counsellors for writing assignments. Study Centres are established in conventional educational institutions and the infrastructure facilities of the host institution are utilized for supporting the learners. The staff are usually part time staff and the counsellors are drawn from the host institution or from outside institution. Study Centres function only on holidays and during nonworking hours of the institution. In some countries Study Centres are open during working hours. Open Universities or DE institutes set up network of Study Centres keeping in view the number of learners in a particular area. The basic idea is to provide learning facilities to the learners within a manageable distance. It is not easy to provide most learners easy access to Study Centres. It is also not possible to establish Study Centres in inaccessible areas of every region. For those learners, it is necessary to think of alternatives, such as telephone contact, audio-video CDs, postal counselling through letters etc.

The Study Centres in DE system must be enriched with quality reference books, sufficient number of SLMs, good laboratory facilities for practical, Audio-Video section with CD player and computer, slide projector, Language lab, Notice Board, and all necessary furniture for the staff and the students. It should have sufficient classrooms for holding counselling sessions and examinations. The office room needs to be spacious and well managed as it is considered to be the university in its miniature form. The primary responsibility of the study centre is:

1. Conduct of counselling classes
2. Conduct of Examinations
3. Organisation of Teleconference sessions for the learners
4. Organisation of Audio-Video sessions for the learners
5. Taking care of the day to day academic and administrative problems of the learners
6. Providing library facilities to the learners
7. Evaluation of assignments
8. Conduct of orientation programmes for the academic counsellors
9. Promotion of Distance education and popularizing the academic programmes in the locality.

## **Regional Centres**

The Regional Centre is a connecting link between the University and the local Study Centres. It is the main administrative and academic wing in the region. Not all distance teaching institutions have Regional Centres. Large open universities have generally Regional Centres to have greater efficiency in administration and academic affairs. Regional Centres are established to look after a cluster of Study Centres. The UKOU has 13 Regional Centres where as IGNOU has 61 Regional Centres. Regional Centres have important administrative functions such as appointment of academic counsellors, admission of students,

training of Study Centre staff and counsellors, distribution of study materials to the learners of Study Centres, promotional activities in the region for creating awareness among people etc. Regional Centres also perform a lot of academic functions such as: training of tutors, conduct of examinations, evaluation of assignments, etc. Regional Centre is the nodal point for solving student problem. The major function of the RC is to monitor the activities of the Study Centres. Organisation of Annual Convocation and promotion of systemic research are two other important responsibilities of the Regional Centres.

Regional Centres have good facilities like Reading Room, AV Room, Tele-Conference Room, Library, Conference Hall, internet connectivity, student records, books and journals, training equipment, office furniture for staff and students. The Regional Centre is headed by a Regional Director. He is supported by 2/3 Asst. Regional Directors, 1/2/3 Asst. Registrars, 1/2 Section officers and a group of Administrative Staff.

**Work Centres**

Work Centre is a place where practical activities are conducted. These centres are established in such places which are convenient to reach and have sufficient infrastructure to hold the practical activities. Basically Study Centres conduct the theory and practical activities of different programmes activated there. But there are some remote and inaccessible areas where the Study Centres do not have minimum infrastructure for a particular programme of study and therefore take the help of other institutions as Work Centres. Sometimes the distance factor creates hindrance for the learners and they demand their activities to be conducted in a nearby place. In order to help the distance learners and provide them proper support services many Work Centres have been set up by open universities. It is a well known fact that institutions depend on each other and share their resources for imparting quality education to the learners. There are quite a good number of Learner Support Centres where there are little resources for conducting various activities and hence those centres take the help of other institutions and use them as Work Centres.

**Check Your Progress 6**

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

- i) Write five important functions of a Study Centre.  
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- ii) Regional Centre in IGNOU set up is the connecting link between HQs and Study Centre. Discuss in about 50 words.  
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## 2.5.6 External Factors

In addition to what are discussed above, there are other factors affecting the learner support services and thereby affecting the learning as well. Let us discuss some of these factors and see to what extent they affect the entire gamut of support services.

### Workplace

In distance education majority of the students belong to working class, who due to some reason or the other had missed higher education and entered into different vocations for their sustenance. The job profile of distance learners vary from a teacher to a professor, from an agricultural worker to an agricultural scientist, from a computer technician to a software engineer, from a road-side mechanic to a top class engineer, from a village quack to a noted surgeon, from a simple office assistant to a senior bureaucrat and so on. Moreover, there are learners who are housewives and have the desire to upgrade their knowledge. The workplace of each category of learners offer a different environment for their learning and therefore these learners need different kinds of support services. A teacher who is exposed to a great deal of learning materials may not need the library support but may require other material support like space, financial help, administrative support etc. An engineer may not need financial help but may require quality academic support. A house wife may be very much in need of moral support and support for developing study skills. She may also need help as to how to get prepared for the test within her busy schedule.

Workplace, therefore, plays a greater role in the education of distance learners. If the workplace is conducive and the learner is motivated, there is bound to be good learning and there will be little requirement of support.

### Learning on demand

Before distance learning courses were developed, everyone had to learn in traditional classrooms. We had no choice. However, now we have a choice as learning is possible either in a traditional classroom or through a distance learning system. I think distance learning programmes are effective only for some people. They work with only certain instructors and students. Distance education is not for everyone, at least not yet. Students taking a distance learning course need to have the ability to keep up and never let themselves get behind.

In order for distance learning programmes to better serve the needs, I think customization will be a key issue. In the near future, a distance learning programme should allow students to choose the medium with which they learn, take tests, discuss, interact, and get evaluated. There may be someone who prefers news groups as the means of discussions and another who prefers chat rooms in the same course. It is the instructors' choice whether to give an option to students or not. If they do, allowing students to interact via different mediums might be a new way to overcome some of the problems. A freedom of customizing a distance learning course to ones own needs might appeal to students who are not happy with distance education now. And that is not all. It might attract other people who did not even

consider learning again. Improving distance education by increasing social interactions might result in improving the whole education level in the world.

### 2.5.7 Inter-institutional Coordination and Collaboration

Institutional collaboration is sharing resources of any type with one or more partner institutions. In DE, collaboration may be between institutions in the same neighbourhood or state, within the same country or region, and anywhere in the world. Institutions do not have similar interests or a similar level of expertise to collaborate, but they do need to have resources that other institutions would like to share. In collaboration, institutions share:

- **Knowledge and expertise**, for example joint research projects, designing and delivering curriculum and course material
- **Infrastructure**, for example information and communications technology (ICT) facilities such as video, audio conferencing equipment and computer rooms
- **Human resources**, for example formal arrangements for external examination or peer review
- **Services**, such as libraries, bookstores, student counselling
- **Costs** of starting or maintaining educational programmes
- **Institutional culture and perspective**, for example through student or faculty exchange programmes.

The present era is the era of coordination, collaboration and convergence. There must be scope for Public Private Partnership (PPP) for inclusive growth and development. All DE institutions must collaborate and cooperate one another for strengthening the DE system in the country. IGNOU, therefore, has made a good beginning by introducing the Convergence Scheme in which both conventional as well as DE institutions/universities will partner with IGNOU in offering need based programmes through intensive support services. This is the best way of resource sharing to achieve the basic objective. Collaboration is possible in almost any area, including:

- Administration
- Advertising
- Certification
- Curriculum design
- Curriculum development, including choice of media i.e. print, audio, video, Internet
- End-term evaluation
- Library support
- Mid-term evaluation
- Network support
- Student admission/selection
- Student support/academic counselling.

## Benefits of institutional collaboration

A culture conducive to collaboration exists in many DE environments, as faculty and staff are trained to work with diverse people and situations. In DE, institutions collaborate primarily to share the financial burden of developing, providing and maintaining educational resources. Institutions that will benefit most from collaboration are those from small or developing nations that lack the individual expertise or funds to develop course material, or to maintain a wide range of services.

## Resource sharing and flexibility

Institutions can develop and offer a wide range of quality human, academic or technology resources through collaboration for a relatively low cost. For example, many institutions cannot afford to offer a programme or course if its enrollment numbers are low. However, a low-enrollment programme may still be made available to students through an arrangement with another institution at which the programme is in high demand.

## How to form a collaboration

- Have a concrete reason for sharing resources, for example, to provide DE through ICT, or to provide expanded library services to an institution's distance learners.
- Identify and approach other institutions that may make suitable partners, for example, other institutions in the region who may have similar needs as yours, or an institution in another region or country with the expertise, infrastructure or knowledge you are looking for.
- Create a co-ordination committee involving all stakeholders that will be in charge of negotiating and managing the collaboration.
- Set obtainable objectives and areas for collaboration, for example, set a trial period for limited delivery of joint library services before attempting to offer a full suite of services.
- Decide what permanent personnel you will need to manage the collaboration, if any additional personnel are needed, and what kind of training they should have.
- Identify and provide for one-time and ongoing expenditures, such as a one-time infrastructure upgrade or ongoing hiring and training of new staff.
- Identify potential funding sources for additional expenses, such as government grants or through implementing student and faculty user fees.
- Draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with input from all Partner Institutions (PIs), including a mission statement that clearly outlines the area(s) for collaboration, the role and jurisdiction of each partner, and the collaboration's objectives.
- Include provision for periodic review and updating of the collaboration's policies and responsibilities, to reflect upon changed circumstances, for example, if the DE programme at one of the collaborating institutions is expanded to include more or different

courses. This may mean that the services shared by that institution need revision or upgrading.

### Collaboration through consortium

An education consortium is an association of several institutions on a joint education venture that is funded, governed and staffed by partner members and other stakeholders. A consortium provides an effective framework and support system for inter-institutional sharing and collaboration, and helps institutions develop co-operative internal and external institutional DE policy. Consortia can be formed regionally, nationally or internationally. To work efficiently, a consortium must have:

- A clear mission statement that reflects the interest of all partners. To be inclusive and fair, the consortium's mission statement must also not be similar to, nor contradict, the existing mission statement of any partner member.
- A shared, ongoing governance structure with clearly defined roles for each member institution.
- The firm support of all partners.
- A funding policy agreed upon by all partners.
- Short term as well as long term benefits to all partners.

The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), formed in 1987, is a working example of the consortia approach. EADTU members are education institutions in the European Union (EU). All differ widely in terms of their entry qualifications, courses offered and the media and technology in use at each institution. In spite of these differences, EADTU has promoted effective collaboration and cooperation in faculty exchange, curriculum design and development and research. The consortium employs more than 4,000 academic staff across Europe. Programmes/Courses are delivered through Study Centres at various universities, as well as designated Euro Study Centres. Similarly, The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was created in 1988 by Commonwealth Heads of Government to coordinate and share distance education activities among Commonwealth nations, especially in the area of resources and technologies. COL staff is from educational institutions throughout the Commonwealth, and the organisation has been instrumental both in identifying key areas of need, as well as in pooling resources to help groups and countries achieve educational objectives.

In India, the Distance Education Council (DEC) at IGNOU promotes, maintains and co-ordinates open and distance education between regional institutions within the country; the Universidad Virtual del Sistema Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico coordinates education initiatives between universities in Mexico and other universities abroad. Other non-education specific collaborative agencies, such as the World Bank, also provide access to useful education resources and information. Examples of national consortia in the United States include The American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC), the National Learning Infrastructure Initiative (NLII) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

### Check Your Progress 7

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

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

i) What are the possible areas of collaboration?

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ii) Mention five points required to form collaboration.

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## 2.6 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR DISABLED LEARNERS

The terms 'impairment', 'disability' and 'handicap' as defined in the medical parlance do not convey the distinct meanings in societies where the awareness about disability is very low. The first two terms refer to loss of function or physical damage of limbs and organs and the third refers to the environment that affects negatively the functioning of the people with either impairment or disability. Impairments and disabilities may be by birth or due to diseases and accidents. However, the distinctions of meaning are usually ignored, not only by common people, but also by those deal with these issues at different levels if a given society is sensitive to these issues. Support services for the education of the disabled has been an important and challenging aspect and in an educationally conscious society everyone must understand the reality of the situation. The following few steps give a concrete picture of this aspect.

### 2.6.1 Disability: The Genesis

Times are long past when teaching and learning of disabled persons at higher education level took place exclusively in the lecture rooms of universities. Open learning and distance education as well as the new communication technologies have for a long time now offered additional educational opportunities to all those who, for a variety of reasons, cannot study at traditional face-to-face Universities. Distance study, open and flexible learning have firmly established themselves in the different education scenes worldwide as a viable alternative for the disabled and the chronically ill.

These systems with their flexible teaching and learning enable a continuously increasing circle of disabled or chronically ill persons to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions in their life and learning environment, their profession and society in general.

We live in an age of bits and bytes, characterized by fundamental changes in society and technology. Distance teaching, using the new technologies, can play a special role for these target groups in their efforts to adapt their individual living conditions to the changes in society.

In the Indian education system, distance study is especially important for the disabled. This is particularly true when seen against the background of increased co-operation between higher-education institutions and industry on the one hand and the growing mobility and improved education standards of Indian citizens on the other.

The increasing tendencies towards individualization require an alternative and reliable support system in distance study. This necessity arises above all because more and more disabled people prefer autonomous ways of life and stop expecting inclusive care. The paradigm, 'to determine one's own life' is an expression of the changed way in their own choices and an independent way of living, independently of the types and severity of their disability.

Parallel to this, the relationship between disability and society is now viewed differently. There is a new approach to the provision of services and, at the same time, change in traditional work with the disabled. Although any type of consciousness change will take some time and will not produce any comprehensive results overnight, major changes are indeed taking place in many areas of the disabled's lives. These changes require society to break away from the traditional, deficit-oriented understanding of disability with its tendencies towards all-encompassing care and the claims of representation. They make it necessary to turn towards new ideas meaning a view of disability that is oriented towards the needs of the individual.

The disabled can, however, only realise autonomous forms of study and living if they can rely on a system of services and aids that cater for their individual needs and guarantee continuous and reliable security. Recently a lot of emphasis is put on the integration of minorities and therefore a lot is demanded of distance study in this respect. All higher educational institutions are expected to readily cooperate in adopting study conditions as per the need of the disabled and encourage them.

This integration of the disabled presupposes greater competence in distance-teaching universities relating to organization and contents of the studies for the disabled. As a result of the internationalization of study organization, flexible education and training for the disabled can be developed. But at the same time face-to-face universities can also supplement their programme with distance-study modules that are adapted to the needs of the disabled.

In the course of development, international structures — including those in the areas of distance education and research — should grow into an international distance education landscape for the chronically ill and the disabled. Distance study can play an important role as an innovative element in education and training. Govt. of India is encouraging DE Institutions to complement and support the promotion of open and distance learning on a national level. Number of new initiatives are therefore designed to enable people with a handicap to study at a distance. This is possible because distance



learning courses can be tailored to learning and teaching methods that are accessible to all, irrespective of the handicap they suffer from.

Education, training, and social integration through Open Distance Learning (ODL) can play a crucial role in meeting the needs of the disabled people in India in the following ways by:

- a) Increasing the accessibility to the existing courses/programmes which the disabled people want to do
- b) Designing new courses — both academic and vocational — suitable to the special needs and abilities of the disabled
- c) Offering training programmes which would equip the disabled to take up appropriate jobs
- d) Offering awareness programmes for the parents, the general public and the policy makers
- e) Enhancing the quality of the existing training programmes for the personnel working with the disabled
- f) Expanding the scope of the present training programmes to cover greater number of trainees
- g) Designing and offering new training/staff development programmes for the pre-service and in-service staff and the NGOs working in the disability sector.

### **Accessibility problems for disabled learners**

The rapid development of adaptive technology makes it possible for almost anyone to access computing resources. Adaptive technology includes special hardware and software that allow individuals with a wide range of skills to make productive use of computers. Described below are examples of access challenges faced by students and instructors in typical distance learning courses.

#### **Visual impairments**

A student or instructor who is blind may use a computer equipped with text-to-speech software and a speech synthesizer. Basically, this system reads with a synthesized voice whatever text appears on the screen. S/He may use a text-only browser to navigate the World Wide Web or simply turn off the graphics-loading feature of a multi-media web browser. He cannot interpret graphics unless text alternatives are provided. For example, his speech system will simply say “image map” at the place where an image map would be displayed to someone using a multimedia web browser. Printed materials, videotapes, and other visual materials also create access challenges for him.

A student who has limited vision can use special software to enlarge screen images. He may view only a small portion of a web page at a time. Consequently, he is confused when web pages are cluttered and when page layout changes from page to page. Standard printed materials may also be inaccessible to him.

#### **Specific learning disabilities**

Some specific learning disabilities impact the ability to read, write and process information. Students with learning disabilities often use audio-taped books. For some, speech output or screen enlargement systems

similar to those used by people with visual impairments help them read text. People with learning disabilities often have difficulty understanding websites when the information is cluttered and when the screen layout changes from one page to the next.

### **Mobility impairments**

Students with a wide range of mobility impairments may enroll in a distance learning course. Some have no functional hand use at all. They use alternative keyboards, speech input, and other input devices that provide access to all of the Internet-based course materials and navigational tools. Some options use keyboard commands to replace mouse functions and thus cannot fully operate software that requires the use of the mouse. Some students with mobility impairments do not have the fine motor skills required to select small buttons on the screen. Those whose input method is slow cannot effectively participate in real-time “chat” communications.

### **Hearing impairments**

Most Internet resources are accessible to people with hearing impairments because they do not require the ability to hear. However, when websites include audio output without providing text captioning or transcription, this group of students is denied access to the information. Course videotapes that are not captioned are also inaccessible to individuals who are deaf. Deaf students also cannot participate in teleconferencing sessions, in spite of being one important part of a distance learning programme.

### **Speech impairments**

Students with speech impairments cannot effectively participate in teleconferences that might be part of distance learning programmes. Potential students and instructors in an Internet-based distance learning class may have visual, hearing, mobility, speech, and learning disabilities that impact their participation in the class. Planning for access as the course is being developed is much easier than creating accommodation strategies after a student with a disability enrolls. Simple steps can be taken to assure that the course is accessible to those with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. People without disabilities also benefit when “universal design” is considered in the course development process.

## **2.6.2 Mechanisms**

IGNOU as an apex body in Distance Education can set up an appropriate mechanism to offer the above programmes, monitor them and evaluate them within a time frame. Multimedia approach to both development and delivery of educational as well as training programmes will work effectively, if the existing resources and facilities at IGNOU could be utilised appropriately. Transformation of the learning materials of the existing staff development/training programmes into Self-Learning Materials (SLMs) can be carried out in collaboration with RCI. The RCI can also offer training/professional programmes through distance mode, preferably in collaboration with Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

**The following steps can be taken up on priority by any Distance Open Learning institution:**

**Learner Support:  
Some Basic Issues**

- Develop tie-ups with public funded national and state level institutions having responsibilities for education and welfare of disabled children for education and welfare of disabled children and adults and to offer the existing programmes through distance mode after adoption.
- Develop awareness programmes for the parents, general public and the policy makers with a view to sensitising them on disability issues.

**Educational programmes**

1. Certificate Programme on the Special Educational Needs of Students with Disabilities
2. Diploma Programme on the Education and the Employment of People with Disabilities
3. Certificate Programme on the Social Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities
4. Post-graduate Programme in Disability Studies

**Promotional programmes**

1. A Hand Book on information about the number of disabled persons of different categories (Children above 4 year and adults) – their education; medical facilities and employment; social integration (family life, etc)
2. A Directory of Institutions offering Special Education and Integrated Education – Types of disabled children and adults attended to – Intake (enrolment, hostels, etc.)
3. A Directory on Facilities for the disabled in the general (common) Educational Institutions, Places of work etc.
4. A Handbook on the ways in which the advanced countries plan and implement programmes for the disabled (At least 10-15 Case Studies). A resource mapping has already been done in consultation with RCI, National Association of the Blind (NAB) and the World View. Various governmental, non-governmental and international agencies could also be involved in the collaboration activities.

**Adequate support services**

Only creating opportunities for the disabled learners is not going to help them. What is required is how best these facilities can be extended to them. In other words proper support services is essential for these categories of learners. The following are some of the considerations for them:

- Free of cost educational packages should be provided to the disabled and utmost care should be taken to bring them to the mainstream.
- Educational equipment such as computers, scanners, printers should be provided to them at concessional rates. Reading

software for the blind must be supplied free of cost for better learning.

- Scholarships/Stipends to every disabled student be provided till he/she completes the programme.
- DE institutions must take special care in providing basic support like counselling, library facilities, practical, teleconference, audio programmes, assignment evaluation etc. to the disabled people
- Timely feedback in the form of positive and constructive comments should be given to the disabled students for creation of interest in studies.
- Telephone conferences and video presentations should be frequently organized to sustain motivation of the learners with disabilities for effective learning.

Since disability is a major handicap in the way of independent learning, all possible measures must be taken by the DE institutions to make them at par with normal human beings. In the present day situation throughout the world the problem of disability has been considered as a challenge and therefore quite a lot of efforts are made to tackle the problem. Good allocation of funds are being made in various countries to uplift the disabled. The status of them are therefore being increased gradually.

### **Check Your Progress 8**

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

b) *Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.*

- i) What is disability? What are the various types of disabilities?  
Answer in 50 words.

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- ii) Write 5 important roles of a distance teaching institute to meet the needs of the disabled.

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## **2.7 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we have discussed various aspects of support services and seen that every aspect is important for distance learners. We are fully aware that distance learners have special needs and requirements and have special characteristics. Special support is therefore needed for them with the help of all possible modern communication technology.

Efforts are also to be made to draw their motivation towards learning and development of study skills as they left studies quite some time back. In this unit a clear and elaborate discussion has been made on various physical resources and human resources for extending various support services to the distance learners. Institutional support is the core of distance learning and an essential component of support service. Learner Support Centres are the pivotal in the open and distance learning system. Facilities are made available at these centres for the learners to overcome difficulty in their learning. Availability of tutors, practical facilities, and other external factors affecting support services has been discussed.

At the end of the unit various social issues vis-à-vis education and their implication for the distance learners have been explained. Inter-institutional coordination and cooperation has become the law of the day. Hence care has been taken to explain how convergence scheme has proved fruitful and the guidelines for successful collaboration have also been presented. Various issues pertaining to disabled learners such as types of disability, disability scenario of our country, and measures required to be taken for upliftment of disabled learners occupy a prominent place in this unit. A student-friendly DE system needs to tackle the problems of disabled students for their better education. It is therefore felt that this issue can be properly addressed through proper support services.

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## **2.8 FEEDBACK TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

In Distance Education, support services are needed because of:

- (a) Age factor
- (b) Socio-economic factor,
- (c) Educational Status
- (d) Geographical location
- (e) Linguistic skill of the learner etc.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

Motivation of the distance learner can be drawn by organising proper counselling and taking care of their needs. The counselling should be provided at different stages such as before entry into the Programme, during the Programme and after the completion of the Programme. During counselling issues like about the institution, about the programme, validity of the degree, course fee, information about the study centres, medium of study and duration of the programme should be given importance.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Pre-entry stage, during the course stage, after programme/course completion.
- ii) Availability of Academic programmes, Course fee, Methods of teaching, Entry requirement, Study materials, Recognition of degrees, Reimbursement of fees, Institution and its credibility, Employment opportunities etc.

### Check Your Progress 4

#### Learners in Conventional and DE System

Conventional System	DE System
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning is a full time major activity.</li> <li>2. The learner belongs to an institution.</li> <li>3. The learner is usually young.</li> <li>4. The learner is in easy contact with fellow learners.</li> <li>5. The learner has easy access to the institutional resources.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The learner returns to a role h/she had some time ago.</li> <li>2. The learner is a member of many institutions.</li> <li>3. The learner is an adult.</li> <li>4. Contact with fellow learners may not be easy.</li> <li>5. The learners' contact with the institution is infrequent and often takes place across a distance.</li> </ol>

### Check Your Progress 5

- a) **Audio-video room:** gives all facilities of electronic gadgets supplementing learning: TV, VCD, Audio System, Teleconference facility etc.
- b) **Reading room:** gives an education environment for effective learning without disturbance. Good number of learning materials are also available here. It gives peer group help too.
- c) **Library:** gives facility of reference books, journals, magazines, newspapers, periodicals, etc.

### Check Your Progress 6

- i) Organising counselling classes, evaluating assignment responses, organising AV sessions, extending Teleconference facility, conducting examinations, promoting distance education and other academic programmes in the locality.
- ii) Regional Centre takes the educational programmes of the university to the Study Centres to offer them to students. It monitors the activities of the Study Centres. It provides funds for smooth management of the Study Centres. It passes on all the important information received from HQ to Study Centres and vice versa.

### Check Your Progress 7

- i) Administration, Advertising, Certification, Curriculum design, Curriculum development, including choice of media i.e. print, audio, video, Internet, End-term evaluation, Library support, Mid-term evaluation.
- ii) Resource sharing, financial benefit, staff training, development through partnership. Set obtainable objectives, create a coordination committee, Identify the potential funding resource, identify the approach of other institution.

## Check Your Progress 8

Learner Support:  
Some Basic Issues

- i) Disability is physical impairment of any kind (Physical or mental). Physical disabilities are: visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech impairment, orthopedically challenged, mentally retarded etc.
- ii) Designing new courses, offering training programmes, enhancing the quality of the existing training programme, creating job opportunities.

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## 2.9 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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## UNIT 3 SUPPORT SERVICES: INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND MODELS

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### *Structure*

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Learning Outcomes
- 3.2 Evolution of Learner Support
  - 3.2.1 First Generation: Correspondence Education (1840 Onwards)
  - 3.2.2 Second Generation: Open and Distance Education (1970 Onwards)
  - 3.2.3 Third Generation: Online Education (1990 Onwards)
- 3.3 Models of Learner Support
  - 3.3.1 Model 1: Under Correspondence Education
  - 3.3.2 Model 2: Under Open and Distance Education
  - 3.3.3 Model 3: Under Online Education
- 3.4 Institutional Arrangements
  - 3.4.1 Centralized Model
  - 3.4.2 Decentralized Model
  - 3.4.3 Web Based Model
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.7 References and Further Readings

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### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

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So far in this block we have discussed the system's approach to learner support. Now we turn to institutional mechanisms and models of learner support. As you know, the focus of all Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions is directed towards the packaging and delivery of instruction for the independent distance learner. Equally ODL institutions are concerned about the design and development of an appropriate learner support system to support the learning endeavour of distance learners. As Keegan (1990) pointed out that the planning and preparation of learning materials and the provision of learner support services is that which distinguishes Distance Education (DE) from private study and teach yourself programmes.

In this unit we will discuss the changing face of learner support in the context of the evolution of DE through three generations namely, correspondence education, the open and distance education and the online education. The models that have emerged will be described with the help of suitable examples. Institutional arrangements for learner support will be dealt with in detail. We shall consider the role of Headquarters, Regional Centres as well as Study Centres as a means of providing support to distance learners. Finally we shall discuss how with the adoption of ICT, the institutional arrangement for learner support can be totally redefined. You will soon realize that the learner no longer has to go to a site i.e. either to the Headquarters or to a Study Centre or Regional Centre but can access support services 24x7



sitting at his/her desktop using a personal computer with an Internet connection.

This unit should interest you as it will make you more aware of how an ODL institution supports your learning endeavour. You will also be able to identify the category to which your institution belongs and finally be able to evaluate the support being provided to you.

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## 3.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

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After going through this unit you should be able to:

- Enumerate and describe the three generations of Distance Education;
- Trace the evolution of Learner Support through these three generations;
- Identify the various models of Learner Support;
- Outline the support provided by Directorates of Distance Education, Open Universities, and Online Universities;
- Describe the role of Headquarters, Regional Centres, Study Centres and Web based support.

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## 3.2 EVOLUTION OF LEARNER SUPPORT

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As you know that the distance education system came into existence 150 years ago as an effort to replace classroom based instruction by adopting technology mediated methods of instruction. You may recall the famous Pitman notes, pertaining to shorthand, and how Sir Issac Pitman came up with the ignominious idea of delivering these through penny post in England in the 1840s. It is often quoted as the beginning of Correspondence education in the world. Correspondence education is considered the oldest form of DE. Ever since then DE has evolved and taken on several distinctive forms. DE institutions have been at the fore-front of adopting new technologies to increase access to education and training opportunities. Broadly, it can be said that DE institutions have evolved through three generations, namely Correspondence Education, Open and Distance Education and Online Education. The models of DE institutions that emerged under these three generations and evolution of learner support at these DE institutions is presented below in **Table 3.1**.

### 3.2.1 First Generation: Correspondence Education (1840 Onwards)

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, distance learners were provided only with the course outline, some written notes related to the course, previous examination papers and a list of places where the examinations were conducted. However, over a century's worth of research into cognition, there emerged pedagogical methods and the concept of providing effective support to the distance learner. Essentially the one-way communication offered by pre-prepared teaching materials which were in the form of printed notes distributed by a variety of media was augmented by the limited use of two-way communication through face to face contact, postal correspondence and possibly telephone contact

between a learner and a tutor. However, this distance education model was a teacher centred one with limited teacher-student interaction. Even today this model is continuing at Directorates of Distance Education functioning at conventional universities.

**Table: 3.1: Models of DE Institutions**

<b>DE Institutions</b>	<b>MODEL-1 CORRESPONDENCE COURSE INSTITUTES</b>	<b>MODEL-2 OPEN UNIVERSITIES/ DIRECTORATES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION</b>	<b>MODEL-3 ONLINE/VIRTUAL UNIVERSITIES</b>
<b>Characteristics</b>	First Generation Correspondence Education (since 1840s)	Second Generation Open & Distance Education (since 1970s)	Third Generation Online Education (since 1990s)
<b>Goals &amp; Target Group</b>	To reach out to those at a distance from the educational institution	Respond to the problems of distance but mainly to the needs of the disadvantaged	Less about distance or disadvantaged. More about more education to more students anywhere, anytime to provide on campus, off campus access
<b>Pedagogy</b>	Teacher centered modelled on face-to-face pedagogy	Guided independent study through SLMs	Collaborative/Co-operative (virtual) learning, using distributed learning resources
<b>Instructional Design</b>	Content centered	Learner centered and Content centered Packaged knowledge facilitated by tutors	More learner centered problem based Technology mediated flexible learning Enhanced interactivity both individual and social interaction
<b>Delivery (use of technology)</b>	Print	Print, audio & video tapes, CML, CAL, Broadcast TV, Radio and Teleconferencing (Audio & Video conferencing)	Interactive multimedia, CD-ROM, Internet based CMC
<b>Learner Support</b>	Absence of Effective Support Limited student teacher interaction F to F Contact Written Communication Telephone Contact	Through Regional and Study Centres More frequent Student-Teacher-Peer Group interaction: F to F Sessions Through Interactive technologies	Enhanced quality interaction anywhere, anytime Synchronous & asynchronous communication Equal opportunity to participate/contribute Interpersonal interaction tutor, learner, peers Social Networking and Collaboration

Source: Srivastava & Reddy (2002)

### 3.2.2 Second Generation: Open and Distance Education (1970 Onwards)

The second generation distance education coincided with the establishment of the first Open University namely the Open University, UK, in 1969, which introduced the concept of planned and systematic learner support as an integrated activity to make the learners interact with the materials and provided continuity of concern through personal and individual support. For the first time a separate department was set up to systematically plan and provide effective support services to distance learners as close to their homes as possible through a network of Study Centres and Regional Centres. Emulating the example of the first Open University, many Open Universities provide learner support services through Study Centres and Regional Centres. At the Study Centres, the distance learners have face to face contact with academic counsellors and the Regional Centres facilitate and oversee the functioning of the Study Centres. Such thought and action are a consequence of how the founders of the Open University of the UK, as well as others who followed them, viewed distance education as essentially a learner centred system.

In their endeavour to be learner-centred, OUs also provide personal support to each of their learners through a specially designed learner support system and dedicated faculty and staff trained to facilitate heterogeneous learners. **The teachers who are involved in learner support services are not involved in preparing the course materials, and are known as academics.** They provide counselling and tutoring support to the learners through interactive technologies including limited face-to-face sessions arranged at Study Centres. Thus a paradigm shift has taken place from a teacher centred model to a learner centred model. Avenues for interaction and feedback are created by the OUs through systematically organized periodic face-to-face contact sessions, technologically mediated sessions like radio counselling, telecounselling, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, etc., which can be even online. The learning experience is mediated through the efforts of the academic counsellors who create learner-centred environments through specially designed collaborative activities, peer interaction, interaction with the SLMs (courseware), mentoring, reflection tutoring, etc., in groups or even on a one-to-one basis (individually). Practice sessions are also conducted for transmission of required skills and competencies depending on the nature and requirement of the programme. Collaborative and self-paced learning environments are specially offered to learners enrolled at OUs to facilitate their learning. Learners' performance is also assessed through formative, continuous evaluation. Assessment is used as a valuable pedagogical tool (Srivastava, 2012).

Thus, the second generation distance education goes beyond the use of mere text and postal correspondence which are typical of first generation distance education, by adopting multiple media to provide instruction as well as support services to distance learners.

### 3.2.3 Third Generation: Online Education (1990 Onwards)

The third generation of distance education that evolved is the current online education phase. After the establishment of the Open Universities, the creation of Online Universities has been an equally dramatic shift in the world of ODL, caused by rapid developments in

information technology, specially the Internet. This technology promises greater learner-centeredness than before, as also better quality of interaction.

This evolution is moving the locus of control of learning to the learner. As the learner can now access all types of support from his/her own networked computer rather than having to go to a Regional Centre or a Study Centre. Online education has also changed the method of distance education by providing all services from programme selection and registration to programme completion and award of degree, at the click of a mouse. Online education provides synchronous and asynchronous interactive modes of assisting the learning process. A dynamic website powered with a Learning Management System (LMS) and Learning Content Management System (LCMS) gives access to course content in multimedia format (text, audio, video, and animation), library, virtual labs, virtual tours, institutional information and updates, facilities for registration, re-registration, online testing, counselling services, evaluation services, feedback on performance, and above all 24x7 interaction with the institution, with peers and teachers. Computer mediated communication (CMC) has made speedy communication among distance learners and teachers possible and also subverted all hierarchies and biases that can occur in face-to-face mode. ICT technologies that online universities use, enable more two-way communications and dialogue to take place between the learners and teachers and among learners themselves: one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many from any location.

**Check Your Progress 1**

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

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

Briefly describe the support services provided by Open Universities. Answer in about 50 words.

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Thus, Online Education is providing an antidote to the main weaknesses of both the first and second generations i.e. the lack of frequent contact between learners and dependence on the teacher.

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### **3.3 MODELS OF LEARNER SUPPORT**

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If we analyze the existing models of learner support we could broadly group them under three heads: models existing under Correspondence Education; Open and Distance Education and Online Education. We will explain each model with the help of suitable examples drawn from each of the categories mentioned above.

#### **3.3.1 Model 1: Under Correspondence Education**

The institutions that are offering Correspondence Education are providing support services to their learners from the main campus i.e. the Headquarters of the institution. All services such as enquiry, admissions, tutorial support, library facilities, practice sessions etc. are centralized at the main campus. However examinations may be

conducted at other venues besides the main campus. Sale of application forms for admission to various programmes may also be available at other venues in order to expand the outreach and enhance the enrollment opportunities.

As mentioned above, in India most of the Directorates of Distance Education attached to conventional universities are still following this model.

Let us look at an example. The Directorate of Correspondence Courses (DCC) attached to Panjab University, Chandigarh provides all support services to its distance learners from its main campus located within the university campus. Like other Directorates of Distance Education, it offers classroom based instruction via face-to-face contact sessions in one spell of 10-14 days in an academic year. This is basically a teacher-centred approach that is being followed. Such institutions are yet to adopt learner centred approaches even though many of them including DCC, Panjab University have transformed teachers' notes into printed self-learning materials (SLMs). Generally the teachers who coordinate the design and development of course materials at the Directorate are the ones who conduct the contact sessions and handle all the student queries and provide counselling and tutoring services to their learners.

### **3.3.2 Model 2: Under Open and Distance Education**

In the Open and Distance Education model that is best represented by the Open Universities, OUs have a Support Services Division at their HQs and some of them have adopted a two tier/three tier approach by operating through Study Centres (two tier) or through Study Centres and Regional Centres (three tier). The academics who are teachers working in the Support Services Division and are appointed by the institutions on a full time basis are posted at the HQs and Regional Centres.

There is yet another set of full time faculty members who are known as teachers and who are involved in the instructional design and coordination and development of the programmes of study. It is they who also design the delivery mechanism and detail out the learner support services (specific to a programme) that need to be provided to the distance learners. The technological media to be adopted for delivery of instruction as well as to support the two way communication with the learner and provide support services is decided by these teachers at the planning stage itself. Even the qualifications and experience of the academic counsellors to be appointed for a particular programme is decided by these teachers at the planning stage. The entire blue print is then submitted to the Support Services Division for implementation by the academics posted there.

Regional Centres are the branch offices of the university that are set up to expand the outreach of the university and are manned by full-time staff of the university. Regional Centres in turn identify suitable educational institutions/industrial units/Skill Development Centres/Primary Health Centres/Hospitals, etc. depending on the programme requirements to serve as Study Centres. The academics posted at Regional Centres/HQs are responsible for identification and operationalization of Study Centres. They are also responsible for appointment of part time staff and faculty (academic counsellors) at Study Centres. It is the academic counsellors who provide academic

support and counselling services to distance learners attached to Study Centres. The academics oversee the functioning of Study Centres and also constantly monitor their performance.

We have taken the example of OU Malaysia that has adopted a two-tier approach and provides support from its HQs and through its network of 17 Learner Support Centres. The other example is that of IGNOU that has adopted a three tier approach and is offering support from its HQs, its 62 Regional Centres and more than 2500 Study Centres. For details of types of support services provided through this three tier system refer Table 3.2. Most OUs have adopted a three tier system of learner support in addition to other channels through the adoption of interactive technologies such as interactive radio, interactive TV, videoconferencing, teleconferencing, computer conferencing, SMS alert services through mobile phones, online counselling through e-mail, online support to a dynamic website and Learning Management System (LMS) etc. In fact some OUs have set up Mobile Learning Centres by using big vehicles that transport both human resources and materials to the interiors, particularly to support the learners residing in remote and rural areas, which are quite a distance from the nearest Study Centre. This approach has come to be known as 'a diversified delivery system'. Most OUs have adopted a diversified delivery system to handle the increase in the number of students as well as the number of programmes that Study Centres alone cannot serve. Also new technologies facilitate the reaching out to the unreached, which is yet another reason for OUs to adopt this approach.

### **3.3.3 Model 3: Under Online Education**

Under Model 3 we may consider all Online Universities also known as Virtual Universities where all services are delivered online from registration to examination, that are provided to learners directly to their homes. In such a system the learner must have a personal computer (PC) with an Internet connection and for those who do not have the facility, some universities like African Virtual University has set up Learning Centres (LC) where state of art workstations have been provided to learners to access all online learning resources, as well as avail online support services that are organized and managed by the university. Examples are African Virtual University (Africa), Australian Universities' overseas campuses, Kentucky Virtual University and other such Online/Virtual Universities of the world (Srivastava & Reddy, 2002).

Some of the common services that are available to the learners on-line are: access, control, personalized user-interfaces for registration/re-registration; payment of fees; course content and assignments; video on demand; video and audio clips; portals and repositories; library services; counselling and tutoring services; information updates regarding the institution and programme of study; discussion forums; contact details of peers and teachers; student presentations; project work; self testing; formative and summative evaluation tools; feedback on performance; information about grades and results. These can be understood in a grid system where various services are phased in a serial manner – The information phase, the guidance phase, the registration phase, the help desk, the learning phase, the evaluation phase and the final results phase. As it suggests the pre admission information, course selection, admission, the knowledge acquisition

period and the terminal information and various placement and career counselling associated services are also provided on-line to the learners.

Under this category there are other models too, namely the Consortium Certification model. A highly specialized online provider pools together a large number of distance education courses offered by different institutions into a consortium. Such a consortium does not provide instruction but is authorized to award credentials and to provide a variety of services such as registration, assessment, maintenance of learning records etc. Examples are Regents College (US), Western Governors University (USA), Open Learning Agency (Canada), etc.

There is yet another model, namely the Consortium Service Provider model. This type of consortium offers a pool of courses offered by different institutions and provides a variety of services, but does not have the right to confer certification/awards. Example: California Virtual University (USA).

We may conclude that today what is emerging is a 'blended learning' environment, which is promoting social and collaborative learning leading to deconstruction of hierarchy, and the anonymity of relationships between the learners and the support staff etc. The "call centre" approach is being adopted by many Open Universities of the world, which are gradually replacing local officers posted at Study Centres and Regional Centres, and FAQs placed on their websites are replacing enquiry services on telephone. So what we are heading towards is the industrialization of services.

### Check Your Progress 2

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

What are the support services that can be provided online to a distance learner? Answer in about 50 words.

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## 3.4 INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUPPORT SERVICES

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We have discussed in section 3.2 about the evolution of learner support through broadly three generations of DE, namely Correspondence Education, Open and Distance Education and Online Education. We have also pointed out that how each model of learner support that evolved under the next generation was an improvement over the previous one. Let us recall under Correspondence Education, there was hardly any method used to provide feedback and advice to the distance learner. Hence there was a distance between the teacher and the taught. To combat this, OUs set up local Study Centres as a site for contact and Regional Centres as a bridge between the HQs and the Study Centres. We have also discussed that with the advent of ICT, the concept of a support services has been redefined that has resulted in a move towards learner centred learning and the integral role of support services in promoting the intellectual development of the distance learner through continuous interaction and active participation

in the learning process from his/her own networked personal computer without having to go to a Study Centre or Regional Centre for the same. Thus overcoming the problems of limited interaction, and distance between the learners, peers and teachers. Against this backdrop we will discuss the institutional arrangements for learner support under various models of ODL outlined in this unit namely: the centralized model, the decentralized model and the web based model (online model).

### **3.4.1 Centralized Model**

In the centralized model, support services are provided only from the headquarters/main campus of the institution. The Directorates of Distance Education set up by conventional universities come under this category. Each Directorate of DE has a dedicated building which has office rooms, classrooms, seminars halls etc. The university's library, laboratories, hostels, canteen etc. are used by both the regular as well as distance learners. The terms and conditions may vary. For example, hostel facility may be provided to a distance learner only during the limited period of contact sessions which is 15-20 days in a year. A distance learner may be permitted to use the library for reference purposes only and may not be able to issue books like regular learners. For availing any type of support the distance learner has to come to the Directorate or contact the Directorate over telephone or email.

The Directorates have dedicated full time staff both academic and administrative to perform all the activities of a DE institution. The Directorate is headed by a Director who is a senior teacher of the university who is the overall in charge of the Directorate and functions under the supervision and control of the Vice Chancellor of the university. The Director is provided both academic and non-academic staff for discharge of academic and administrative responsibilities of the Directorate. The staff strength and nature of staff i.e. permanent or temporary contractual varies from Directorate to Directorate. However as per norms, there has to be one full time faculty member to coordinate a programme offered by the Directorate. Hence the faculty strength is determined by the number of programmes on offer/to be offered. The faculty members are responsible for coordinating the programme right from its inception to its delivery. Course design and development is a major activity that involves the regular faculty of the university and the various statutory bodies of the university. The faculty members organize and conduct contact classes, provide counselling support and also do the evaluation work assigned to them. Directorates have full-fledged administrative staff to manage the admissions, support services, providing information and counselling, conducting evaluation as Directorates function as autonomous bodies with the parent universities. The examination system is centralized and examinations are conducted by the Evaluation Department of the university. Even declaration of results and award of degrees is the responsibility of the Evaluation Department of the University and not the Directorate as degrees are conferred by the University.

### **3.4.2 Decentralized Model**

The Open Universities mainly represent the decentralized model of support services. As mentioned earlier, OUs have set up Study Centres to provide support services as close to the learner as possible. Many OUs that have a large number of SCs have established Regional Centres for greater administrative efficiency and serve as a channel of communication between the HQs and the local Study Centres.



At an OU, support services are available to a distance learner at the – Head Quarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres. However, the type of support available varies as the services are decentralized by the Head Quarters to the Regional Centres and Study Centres. This has been presented in Table 3.2 given below.

**Table 3.2: Types of Support Services Provided at Head Quarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres**

<b>STUDY CENTRES (SCs)</b>	<b>REGIONAL CENTRES (RCs)</b>	<b>HEADQUARTERS (HQs)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promotion and publicity of the OU and its programmes</li> <li>● Sale of Prospectus</li> <li>● Attending to student queries</li> <li>● Pre-admission counselling</li> <li>● Organization of induction for newly enrolled learners</li> <li>● Maintaining of student records pertaining to; student admission; attendance; assignment submission; evaluation (grades awarded) etc.</li> <li>● Preparation and distribution of counselling schedules</li> <li>● Organization of academic counselling (Theory)</li> <li>● Conducting practical's</li> <li>● Playing of audio/video programmes</li> <li>● Organizing workshops, seminars, extended contact programmes, field visits etc.</li> <li>● Providing library facility</li> <li>● Arranging teleconferencing</li> <li>● Handling of assignments (receipt and return after evaluation)</li> <li>● Evaluation of Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs)</li> <li>● Providing feedback on TMAs</li> <li>● Tabulation of grades awarded</li> <li>● Submission of grade lists to Evaluation Division</li> <li>● Conduct of entrance examinations and Term-end-Exams (theory and practicals)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promotion and publicity of the OU and its programmes</li> <li>● Sale of Prospectus</li> <li>● Pre-admission counselling</li> <li>● Student registration</li> <li>● Distribution of students among SCs</li> <li>● Collection of fees from students and issue of the receipts</li> <li>● Attending to student queries</li> <li>● Facilitating scholarships for distance learners</li> <li>● Planning/organization of induction for newly enrolled students</li> <li>● Facilitating dispatch of study material to students and RCs and SCs</li> <li>● Facilitating change of SC/RC</li> <li>● Maintenance of student records</li> <li>● Providing library facility</li> <li>● Training of staff of RC/ SC</li> <li>● Organization of Seminars/Conferences/ Workshops</li> <li>● Conduct of teleconferencing at downlink centres</li> <li>● Planning and organizing of interactive radio counselling</li> <li>● Monitoring of support services provided by Study Centres</li> <li>● Coordination of assignment grades forwarded by SCs to HQs</li> <li>● Monitoring conduct of Term-end-Exams</li> <li>● Conduct of project evaluation and viva-voce</li> <li>● Issue of migration certificates to students</li> <li>● Arranging convocation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promotion and publicity of the OU and its programmes</li> <li>● Preparation and printing of prospectus</li> <li>● Forwarding guidelines for student admission</li> <li>● Sale of prospectus</li> <li>● Pre-admission counselling</li> <li>● Attending to student queries</li> <li>● Facilitating dispatch of study material to students and RCs and SCs</li> <li>● Dispatch of Assignments to students and RCs and SCs</li> <li>● Consolidation and maintenance of student records</li> <li>● Organization of seminars/conferences/workshops</li> <li>● Framing guidelines for conduct of counselling and evaluation</li> <li>● Planning Term-end-Examination</li> <li>● Conduct of Teleconferencing</li> <li>● Organization and conduct of Telecasts and Radio broadcasts</li> <li>● Receipt and evaluation of project synopsis and project reports</li> <li>● Planning and organization of Term-end-Exams (theory and practicals)</li> <li>● Tabulation of grades of Assignments and TE exams</li> <li>● Receipt/acceptance of Term-end-Exam forms and issue of hall tickets</li> <li>● Declaration of results</li> <li>● Issuing of grade cards</li> <li>● Award of degrees</li> <li>● Issuing of migration certificates</li> <li>● Monitoring support services provided by RCs and SCs</li> </ul>

Source: Compiled by the Author

### *Role of HQs*

At the HQs of the OU there is a dedicated department for the planning, organization and implementation of support services. The Support Services Department/Division develops the network of support services of the OU through identification and establishment of Study Centres within the jurisdiction of the university.

To manage large clusters of Study Centres, it may set up Regional Centres at different locations. All policy and planning pertaining to the running of Regional Centres and Study Centres is done by the Support Services Division at the Head Quarters. The Support Services Division is headed by a Director who is supported by a team of Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors and administrative staff. All are full time faculty appointed by the university and are known as academic. Academics are teachers not involved in course design and development of programmes but are appointed only for delivery and implementation of the programmes.

### *Role of Regional Centres*

Regional Centres are the sub-offices of the OUs and are also intended to act as resource centres of the university in respective regions. The Regional Centre is headed by a Regional Director who is overall in-charge of activities of the university within the region. The principal responsibilities of the Regional Director are to direct and monitor academic operations and to coordinate the working of the Study Centres. Regional Director is provided with both academic and non-academic staff for discharge of academic and administrative responsibilities of the Regional Centre. The Regional Centre functions under the supervision and control of the Support Services Division at the Headquarters.

Regional Centres identify institutions that can serve as Study Centres. They also appoint staff at Study Centres and train them in distance education methodology. Regional Centres play a major role in handling admissions, student registration, material distribution, finalizing internal assessment of learners, answering student queries, identification and monitoring of examination centres and maintaining learner records. In some OUs, learners' assignment responses are evaluated at Regional Centres. Regional Centres may also be involved in organization of term-end examination. The degree of responsibility will depend on the level of autonomy granted by the central institution to the Regional Centres. Many Regional Centres also organize annual convocations (degree awarding functions) such as UKOU and IGNOU.

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

The Regional Centre has to organize and implement the academic programmes launched by the OU. Apart from that they also play an important role in identifying, developing and implementing such academic programmes as may be required and feasible in the region. Academics posted at Regional Centres are additionally in a good position to collect feedback from the academic counsellors and learners to the teachers at the HQs on the courses developed by them. This is particularly useful at the time of revision of courses. Regional Centres

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

Regional Centres have an important role to play in counselling. They act as the reference point for serious problems, sometimes resolving the problems themselves, sometimes sending them to the HQs. They may also organize summer schools, residential schools, field work, and laboratory work for the benefit of those learners who are geographically dispersed or whose numbers are low. One of the major functions of Regional Centres is to closely monitor the functioning of Study Centres of their regions in order to maintain quality of support services provided to learners (Srivastava, 2012).

### *Role of Study Centres*

Study Centres are the nerve centres of the University and also the face of the OU for the learners. Study Centre identification is a systematically planned activity that OUs have developed for accessing both infrastructural and academic requirements to transact the academic programmes effectively. Another major consideration is the proportion of learners who can make use of the Study Centre. Study Centres are usually borrowed rooms/laboratories/work centres in buildings at the above mentioned institutions that are used by concerned OUs outside the normal working hours, i.e., in the evenings and on weekends. The staff at the Study Centres is usually part time, majority of them are drawn from the host institution. A Study Centre is supposed to serve as a resource centre for learners as well as a meeting place for them to interact with their subject experts/teachers and their peers. Learners may come for seminars, private study or individual meetings with a tutor or counsellor, or to meet with other learners. It should be the first place that they turn to for finding the resources they need to supplement the materials they receive at home. Hence a Study Centre has a complete set of the institution's course material, including printed self learning materials, audio-visual materials and playback facilities and reference books. The Study Centre might have a library and a space for reading and classrooms/halls to conduct face-to-face counselling sessions and laboratories to conduct practice sessions for those courses that require special components. Study Centres are required to maintain records of learners and of local academic counsellors attached to it. It is at the Study Centre, however, that the learner has the best opportunities for counselling of all kinds, as there is access to advice from subject specialists, help with study skills, information about choice of courses, and assistance with non-academic problems. The environment of the Study Centre, the resources available, and the way in which the contact programme is organized, all contribute to providing opportunities for counselling to take place informally and naturally. Study Centres also provide enquiry services for prospective and registered learners and induction programmes for new entrants. Internal assessments and term-end examinations are organized and conducted at Study Centres. In other words, Study Centres are a one stop for all the services offered by the university ranging from providing information to academic support in the form of face-to-face counselling sessions for theory as well as practical courses, library facilities, audio visual aids, assignment evaluation and other methods of internal evaluation besides serving as the venue for term-end examinations (Srivastava, 2012).

### 3.4.3 Web Based Model

Online universities function through a dedicated website by adopting Learning Management System (LMS) and Learning Content Management System (LCMS). General information about the institution and its programmes, contact persons (Head of the Institution, Heads of Departments, Faculty members, etc.), current information and happenings etc. can be accessed by anyone, anywhere 24x7 from the institution's home page. To gain access to the registered programmes and courses in multimedia format including other resources posted by the institution for obtaining instruction and support, the learners are given a user id and a password. This enables the learner to utilize all the services that are provided online such as interaction with the faculty and their peers, counselling and tutoring services, library services, access to archives, information updates, project work, self testing, queries, submission of assignments, attempting examinations, obtaining feedback on performance and declaration of results.

Today there are several technological options available that are interactive and provide two-way communication such as discussion forums, chat sessions, video conferencing, virtual laboratories etc. that provide a class-room situation and real time synchronous interaction.

#### Check Your Progress 3

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

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

- i) Write a brief note on Decentralised model for providing support to the learners.

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.....  
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- ii) Consider a local Study Centre that you are familiar with. List its equipment and teaching resources. In your opinion what other resources might be useful?

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## 3.4 LET US SUM UP

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Even though DE is regarded as an industrial model of education but having moved from a teacher centred system to a learner centred system, the focus of all DE providers is to enable more two way communication and dialogue between the distance learners themselves; one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many.

In this unit we have discussed that how from a near total reliance on print based courses; technology used in DE has expanded to include a plethora of technologies, shifting the emphasis from single technology delivery systems to integrated approaches using multiple technologies. Also with respect to the teaching-learning methodology there has been

a paradigm shift from Correspondence Education to Open and Distance Education and more recently to Online Education. Correspondence education totally lacked live/real time communication or for that matter any type of communication besides the course material. Gradually limited face-to-face contact sessions were introduced which are organized on the main campus of the institution. This practice is still continuing at Directorates of Distance Education attached to conventional universities.

However with the emergence of OUs (Open and distance Education) the first systematic effort to design a learner support system was made. A separate Support Services Division was set up by OUs that in turn established Regional Centres and Study Centres or only Study Centres in order to decentralize support services and take them as close to a learner's home as possible. Thus the two-tier and three-tier approaches to providing learner support emerged. With the adoption of more interactive technologies, multi channel delivery of support services, were introduced. Thus the diversified delivery system of providing learner support evolved. This is the most preferred approach adopted by most OUs of the world.

With the advancement of ICT purely online services are being offered by mainly online Universities. From student registration to award of degree, i.e. from entry to exit the learner receives support on his/her networked personal computer. Besides there are consortia that are providing online support services on behalf of a group of DE institutions. Some such consortia are even empowered to award degrees on behalf of the member institutions besides providing support services.

Finally the institutional arrangements for support services that have come up under the various models have been discussed in this unit. The role of Headquarters, Regional Centres, Study Centres and Web-based support has been outlined.

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## **3.6 FEEDBACK TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

Please refer sub-section 3.2.2.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

In the online model all services are delivered online from registration to examination, that are provided to learners directly to their homes. Some of the common services that are available to the learners on-line are: access, control, personalized user-interfaces for registration/re-registration; payment of fees; course content and assignments; video on demand; video and audio clips; portals and repositories; library services; counselling and tutoring services; information updates regarding the institution and programme of study; discussion forums; contact details of peers and teachers; student presentations; project work; self testing; formative and summative evaluation tools; feedback on performance; information about grades and results.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) The Open Universities mainly represent the decentralized model of support services. Many OUs that have a large number of SCs have

established Regional Centres for greater administrative efficiency and to serve as a channel of communication between the HQs and the local Study Centres. At an OU, support services are available to a distance learner at the – Head Quarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres. However, the type of support available varies as the services are decentralized by the Head Quarters to the Regional Centres and Study Centres.

- ii) Visit your local study centre and prepare the response accordingly.

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### **3.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS**

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## UNIT 4 DEVELOPING A SELF-DIRECTED LEARNER

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### *Structure*

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Learning Outcomes
- 4.2 Nature of Open Learning
  - 4.2.1 Individualized Learning
  - 4.2.2 Independent Learning
  - 4.2.3 Guided Learning
  - 4.2.4 Group Learning
- 4.3 Characteristics of Distance Learners
- 4.4 Self-directed Learning
  - 4.4.1 Models of Self-directed Learning
  - 4.4.2 Component of Self-directed Learning
- 4.5 Role of Learner Support Services in Promoting Self-directed Learning
  - 4.5.1 Role of Technology for Promoting Self-directed Learning
  - 4.5.2 Evaluation of the Self-directed Learning
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.8 References and Further Readings

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### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

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Today, you can observe that there is a growing pressure for increased results from the learners but with respect to the growing number of learners, there is a shortage of qualified and experienced teachers. This situation demands heavy investment in learning and development of individuals. One way through which the problem can be tackled to some extent can be through developing our learners as self-directed i.e. they become autonomous learners, who are in constant search of knowledge on their own. It is important to note here that the capability to become autonomous lies in each individual. Even, Greek philosophers as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle gave importance to the self study.

John Dewey (1916, 1938) also stated that all persons are born with an unlimited potential for growth and development; further he defined education as the agency that facilitates this growth and also cautioned that the teacher must guide rather than interfere with or control the process of learning. We also understand that learning is not limited to the classroom situations only but it can be extended to all situations. Since the self-directed learners are self motivated, they are attempting to gain new skills, knowledge, and attitudes to improve their performance in any field. The self-directed learning can be useful in improving family life and health, enjoying the arts and physical recreation, participating in a hobby, or simply increasing their intellectual capital. Hence, the only trait which is needed for the self directed learning is to have motivation.

In this unit, we would understand the meaning and nature of open learning, and also the importance of self directed learning. As a learner or as a teacher, the important task is to develop self directed learning skills among our learners. This present unit will throw some light on various components of self directed learning and the role of learner support in promoting this kind of learning.

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## **4.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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After completing this unit, you should be able to:

- examine the nature of open learning;
- explain the characteristics of the distance learners;
- elucidate the meaning of Self Directed Learning;
- describe various components of Self Directed Learning;
- discuss the role of support services in promoting the Self Directed Learning; and
- analyse the importance of technology in promoting Self Directed Learning.

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## **4.2 NATURE OF OPEN LEARNING**

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Distance learning is an excellent medium of learning for the adult learner. Because of the competing priorities of work, home, and school, other characteristics which have been discussed later, the adult learners desire a high degree of flexibility. Through distance learning, they prefer to have a possible control over the time, place and pace of education; however, it is not without problems.

Moore (1973) introduced the theory of independent study which is an important foundation of distance education; it suggests that successful teaching can take place even though teacher and learner are physically separated during the learning process. While this separation can occur in several ways depending on the nature of the course content and delivery medium, i.e. either electronically mediated (i.e. real-time, computer network or video teleconferencing) or traditional coursework (i.e., through print materials).

Hence, we understand that through distance education significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner through electronic or print mediums. Open learning, in turn, is an organised educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on study are minimized in terms either of access, or of time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination of these.

McKenzie, et.al. (1975) suggests that open learning systems are designed to offer opportunities for part-time study, for learning at a distance and for innovations in the curriculum. The defining features of an open learning system include:

- a) maximization of the component of flexibility
- b) deliberate planning of educational opportunities
- c) increasing the access of knowledge to individuals by using all modes of media thus ignoring the geographic distance.



The term 'open and distance learning' is used as an umbrella term to cover educational approaches to provide learning resources to learners who are at a distance. Open and distance learning often makes use of several different media. Students may learn through print, broadcasts, the internet and through occasional meetings with tutors and other students.

The 'open' nature of distance learning has been formalized through open admissions, and freedom of selection of what, when and where to learn. The openness of distance learning is also seen in relatively flexible organizational structures, delivery and communication patterns as well as the use of various technologies to support learning.

Thus, open and distance learning (ODL) combines two forms of education – open and distance – that focus on expanding access to learning. It is characterized by two factors: its philosophy and its use of technology. It can be summarised that most ODL systems have following aims:

- remove barriers to education
- allow learners to study what they want, when they want and where they want.

Open learning is characterized by the use of learner centred instructional methods of learning. As discussed, open learning is flexible and it is inbuilt in the nature of learning promoted in the open learning systems. Let us now understand the various forms of learning, which actually differentiate it from learning in formal settings.

#### **4.2.1 Individualized Learning**

Open learning is characterized by individualized learning as it is directed by the individual in order to meet learning objectives. During the individual learning process knowledge is created through the transformation of experience i.e. by making meaning out of the knowledge presented to him/her and then integrating it with the knowledge they have. This process is very much similar to the cognitive processes (assimilation and accommodation) as suggested by Piaget.

The nature of individualized learning is also very similar to distributed learning where the learning takes place using distributed resources. According to Saltzberg and Polyson (1995), "distributed learning is an instructional model that allows instructor, students, and content to be located in different, non-centralized locations so that instruction and learning occurs independent of time and place."

##### **Benefits of individualized learning:**

- a) Provides an amicable ambience, safe, free from peer pressure

As the learners set their own learning objectives and also execute them on their own, therefore the peer pressure which rises in the formal systems due to competition, is not experienced here.

- b) Enhances intrinsic motivation:

- Challenged by competing with oneself (doing better next time)

**Learner Support:  
An Introduction**

- Curiosity (can explore new interesting facts without justifying it to the group)
  - Control (use own time and sequence, do not need to report to others)
- c) Develops self-discipline
- d) Can accommodate ones' own learning style, cognitive style and learning approach
- e) Inspires learners to work on their own time and at their own pace
- f) Encourages learners to practice skill as often as they wish and to master them
- g) Develops personal gratification
- h) Provides opportunity for authentic learning to take place based on the individual learning style

### **4.2.2 Independent Learning**

Independent study is a process, a method and a philosophy of education whereby a learner acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for enquiry and critical evaluation.

Learner independence is also known by a number of other terms: learner autonomy, independent learning, lifelong learning, self-directed learning or self regulated learning. All these terms refer to a concept where learners are involved in their own learning process. The learning process involves self setting own performance standards, evaluating the performance and reinforcing themselves. By being involved in this process, they start to make meaningful connections with the world and take responsibility for thinking and learning themselves. Hence, learning becomes more than the rote memorization of a series of facts and continues even after the learner has completed full time education.

It is a challenge to provide the correct amount of guidance without providing too much direction. Direction is needed to help learners on identifying areas of difficulty but too much direction distracts from their sense of ownership of the learning. There are a number of ways in which independent learning could be promoted in open learning systems. They are as follows:

- **By giving choices**

Giving opportunities to learners to make choices encourages them to reflect on their own interests and preferences. It will also make them start to take responsibility for learning. Examples of choices could be 'Choose activity A or B for the assignments' or 'by giving choices to answer 3 out of the 5 questions'.

- **Encourage learners to predict how well they did on tests**

Before teachers return a test paper to their students, they could encourage the students to understand how well they did. One example could be to give a blank copy of the test paper to students to review in groups. This will start them reflecting about their strengths and weaknesses and the progress they are making. The reflective aspects of this process could help the students make an appropriate learning

plan. It will also help learners see that they are responsible for their learning.

- **Use authentic texts**

Authentic texts are the activities which are related to real life situations, hence are more meaningful for learners. While, designing the questions for assignments, they can be based on authentic activities.

- **Encourage learners to keep learner diaries**

These diaries can form a dialogue between the teacher and the learners which is mutually beneficial. It is an opportunity for teachers to see which areas students find interesting and where they might be having problems, and also it is a vehicle for students to reflect and write (or draw) honest comments about their learning. The diaries can be semi-guided initially but gradual ownership will give learners a sense of responsibility.

### 4.2.3 Guided Learning

If one talks about the meaning of guided learning, then it is an instructional strategy for small groups and works best when learners are acquiring and developing concepts or skills in a subject. It can also be used to consolidate and refine skills and understanding. Guided sessions are flexible and can last from 10 to 30 minutes depending on the nature of the task and objectives. But, even in guided learning the emphasis is working independently on a particular aspect.

Here, the learner takes *control of their learning* through a managed process. In the open learning systems, the learners are provided structured learning material, with just the right amount of challenge and support so that they can control their learning. Since, the teacher is not present physically, the text is arranged in such a way that it is easily understood and clues or access devices are provided in the text to complete the learning task. For example, the programme guide, where the information regarding the nature of programmes, demands from the learning, how to proceed for the successful completion of the programme is provided, which helps the learner in successfully completing the programme.

It is important to note here that there should be sustained and proactive support and challenge must be provided to the learners by intervening time to time during the course of learning. In the open learning systems, this is done by giving exercises in the text in the form of developing a design, plan or practice.

### 4.2.4 Group Learning

Group learning is an instructional strategy where multiple knowledge and stimuli (from the group members) can give the individual opportunities to learn new things or inspire that individual with 'hints' to help him/her learn. Group learning allows students to develop problem solving, interpersonal, presentational and communication skills. These are generic skills that are beneficial in any walk of life. These are usually promoted at the Study Centres where the learners are provided a chance to meet with the peers.

### Check Your Progress 1

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

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

i) How is individualized learning similar to distributed learning?

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ii) How can independent learning be promoted in open systems?

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Interaction usually takes place in the workshops, contact programmes being conducted for the learners.

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## 4.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

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Distance education has provided an opportunity for students to learn life long. Much of this increase in the number of learners in the distance education programmes is because of the flexibility in terms of age and time provided by distance education. This distinguishing nature of distance education differentiates its learners from the conventional face to face learning. Most of the distance education students in higher education are adult learners. According to Harper and Kember (1986), approaches to the study of the characteristics of the distance education students are basically similar to those of students studying in conventional (face to face) environments.

Let us discuss these characteristics:

- a) Learners belong to remote/widely scattered geographic areas
- b) Conveniently located institutions offer limited programme options
- c) Their work schedules conflict with campus-bound course schedules. This includes people who work on shifts, travel frequently on business, work for long hours, and/or are in the armed forces
- d) Personal and family commitments conflict with campus-bound course schedules. This includes having children at home and taking care of aging parents.
- e) Learners are intrinsically motivated, which is also a pre-requisite of distance learning because of the many barriers distance learners encounter. Barriers appear to be learning conditions such as geographical distance, isolation from instructor and peers, lack of

access to support such as libraries, technical assistance, financial aid, tutors and academic advisors.

- f) Dille and Mezack (1991) studied the profile of students who enrolled in telecourses (courses delivered through television) focusing on locus of control (internal/external attribution of success and failure) and learning style (e.g., verbal, visual, or kinesthetic) as predictors of success among college distance education students. They found that locus of control is a significant predictor of success and persistence in distance education courses.
- g) Distance learners have accumulated life experiences in diverse areas. They tend to favour practical learning activities that enable them to draw on their prior skills and knowledge.
- h) They are autonomous and self-directed. They are self-reliant learners and prefer to work at their own pace.

You might have discussed these characteristics in detail in your other courses as well.

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## 4.4 SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

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John Dewey (1938) proposed that all individuals are born with an unlimited potential for growth and development and suggested that education is the agency that facilitates this growth. Further, he cautioned that the teacher must act as a guide and should not interfere or control the process of learning. Contemporary adult learning theory, which also values a learner-centred approach to adult education and places experience at the heart of learning, is a testament to the enduring influence of Dewey.

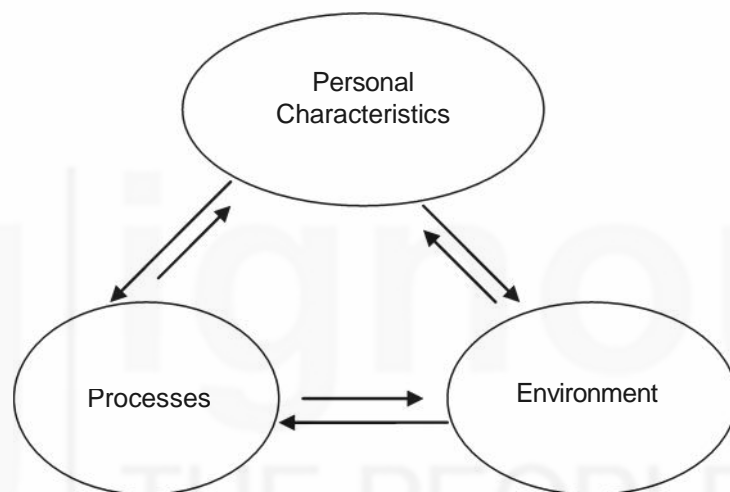
The term 'self-directed learning' emerged in the North American literature in the mid-1970s as a result of learning projects research conducted by Tough's (1971) in which he demonstrated that self-teaching was a natural process among many adults, and Malcolm Knowles built his andragogical model on the basic assumption that adult learners are self-directing (Knowles, 1975, 1980) and provided a first definition of self-directed learning. He described it as a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resource for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.

Since then, self-directed learning has become a prominent feature of adult education and some educators suggest that adult education is synonymous with self-directed learning. Philip Candy (1991), did the most comprehensive analysis and discussion of self-directed learning, he proposed in his conceptual framework that self-directed learning is both a goal and a process which embraces four distinct phenomena: personal autonomy, self-management, learner control, etc. Not surprisingly self-directed learning is also known as autonomous learning or self regulated learning. Zimmerman, (1986, 1989) described it as degree to which learners are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process. Such learners personally initiate and direct their own efforts to acquire

knowledge and skill rather than relying on teachers, parents, or other agents of instruction.

It is important to note here that during self-directed learning individuals can become empowered to take increasingly more responsibility for various decisions associated with the learning but it does not necessarily mean all learning will take place in isolation from others; thus, whatever is learnt from one situation in terms of both knowledge and study skill, they are able to transfer in another situation.

Thus, self-directed learning involves the consistent and appropriate application of self control skills to new situations. It is a product of interactions between three components as suggested by Bandura's (1997) triadic model; personal characteristics, processes, and environmental factors as shown in the figure below:



a) *Personal Attributes/Characteristics*

Personal attributes refer to learners' motivations for and capability of taking responsibility for their learning (Garrison, 1997). It also includes the use of resources and cognitive strategies. These personal attributes/characteristics of learners in a specific learning context, together with their prior knowledge of the content area and prior experience with the learning context affects the learning outcome.

b) *Processes*

Processes refer to learner's autonomous learning processes. These processes include planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning. Depending on the level of learner autonomy, a learning experience can range from an instructor lecturing 100% of the class time (no learner control) to an independent study experience (almost complete learner control).

c) *Context*

Context focuses on environmental factors which impact on the level of self-direction provided to the learner. This includes both the instructional design elements and support elements. Design elements include the resources, structure and nature of the tasks in the learning context. These resources could be embedded in the specific learning context and could be designed by the instructor as instructional support. Similarly, the specific learning context may decide on the structure of the course.

The self directed learners set their own learning performance standards, evaluate the quality of their performance, and then reinforce themselves against their internal standards. According to Zimmerman (2000), self regulation or self direction is both cyclical and dynamic process. It is cyclical because results of prior performance are used to guide and refine current affairs. It is dynamic because personal, behavioural and environmental factors which affect learning are constantly changing. But the self directed learners monitor their use of cognitive processes, their affective states, and their environmental conditions in such a way that they maximise their chances to achieve their pre-decided goals (Zimmerman, 2000).

There have been different perspectives about the nature of self directed learning; but after reviewing the literature you can find that self directed learning has been seen both as a process and a personal attribute. Let us go through some definitions in order to understand its nature. According to Harrison (1978) it as a *process* of organizing the instruction focusing their attention on the level of learner autonomy over the instructional process. Others view self-direction as a *personal attribute* (e.g., Guglielmino, 1977; Kasworm, 1988), with the goal of education described as developing individuals who can assume moral, emotional, and intellectual autonomy (Candy, 1991). Also, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), who presented their views of self-directed learning as instructional method and as personality characteristic, said that the first perspective involves a process which the learners assume primary responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating their learning. The second dimension centres on a learner's desire or preference for assuming the responsibility for learning (Brookfield, 1987).

### Check Your Progress 2

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

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

i) What do you mean by self-directed learning?

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ii) Explain self-direction as a personal attribute.

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#### 4.4.1 Models of Self-directed Learning

Several models have been proposed to understand SDL, starting with Mocker and Spear's *Two Dimensional Model* in the early 1980s to a more recent model from Garrison's *Three Dimensional Model* in the late

1990s. Let us discuss them briefly, in order to gain better understanding of Self Directed learning:

- a) *Candy's Four-Dimensional Model*
  - i) According to Candy (1991), SDL is an umbrella concept having four dimensions and also it was suggested that a learner's self-direction might be different in different *content* areas. The proposed four dimensions are as follows:
    - a) Self-direction as a personal attribute (*personal autonomy*);
    - b) Self-direction as the willingness and capacity to conduct one's own education (*self-management*);
    - c) Self-direction as a mode of organizing instruction in formal settings (*learner-control*); and
    - d) Self-direction as the individual, non-institutional pursuit of learning opportunities in the natural societal setting (*autodidaxy*).

- b) *Brockett and Hiemstra's Personal Responsibility Orientation Model (PRO)*

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) provided a rationale for SDL as a process and goal. According to them, SDL is a process in which a learner assumes primary responsibility for planning (includes assessing needs, securing learning resources), implementing, and evaluating the learning process and SDL is a *goal*, which focuses on a learner's desire or preference for assuming responsibility for learning in terms of learning, it is the ability or willingness of individuals to take control over the choices they want to pursue. Along with this goes responsibility for accepting any consequences of one's thoughts and actions as a learner.

Here, you can observe the combination of both the process and personal attribute perspectives. Also there is an integrated social context in this model which has implications for the role of institutions and policies in SDL. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) defined the social context as different physical institutions where learning takes place, such as community colleges, libraries, and museums.

- c) *Garrison's Three-Dimensional Model*

Garrison's model of SDL also includes the perspectives of SDL as a personal attribute as well as a learning process. According to Garrison (1997), SDL is accomplished by three dimensions interacting with each other: self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation. In educational settings, self-management involves learner's use of learning resources within the learning context. Thus, the focus of Garrison's (1997) model is on resource use, learning strategies use, and motivation to learn. Garrison explained that self-management involved learners taking control of the learning context to reach their learning objectives.

### **Characteristics of the self-directed learner**

According to Winne (2001), the self-directed learners have following characteristics:



- a) Set goals for extending their knowledge and sustaining their motivation
- b) Can manage the emotions well
- c) Periodically monitor their progress towards the goals
- d) Revise their strategies to fine tune their progress towards goal
- e) Evaluate obstacles that may arise and necessary adaptations.

**Knowles (1971) puts forward three immediate reasons for self-directed learning, which are as follows:**

- a) Self directed learners take the initiative in learning (proactive learners), learn more things, and learn better, than do people who sit at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners).
- b) Self-directed learning is more in tune with our natural processes of psychological development i.e. maturation. The learner develops the ability to take increasing responsibility for our own lives.
- c) The new developments in education put a heavy responsibility on the learners to take initiative in their own learning. Students entering into these programmes without having learned the skills of self-directed inquiry will experience anxiety, frustration, and often failure, and so will their teachers. Hence, it can be deduced that self-directed learning not only actively involves the learners in the learning process but also develops them as more responsible and effective social beings.

Now, having understood the meaning of self-directed learning, it is important to understand the various components of the self-directed learning process. Let us discuss them in the following section.

#### **4.4.2 Components of Self-directed Learning**

According to Zimmerman (2000), the components of the self-directed (self regulated) learning can be grouped into three categories, which are as follows:

- a) Forethought Process and self beliefs that are there prior to learning
- b) Performance Process that are present at the time of the task
- c) Self reflection Processes that occur after the completion of the task.

Since, the self directed learning is a cyclical process, hence the components of SDL occurs in different phases which are as follows:

##### a) *Forethought Phase*

As understood, this phase comes before starting the task. Therefore, it covers all the activities which the learner performs before actually starting the task. This phase has been divided into two categories: goal setting and preparing strategies. During goal setting, the self-directed learners, not just specify the long term goals but divide the goals into achievable sub-goals. For example, in order to get 'A' grade in the Term End Examination, the self-directed learner, will set sub goals i.e. number of hours to be devoted to a subject, working on the unit end

exercises, working on previous year question papers and so on. Thus, self-directed learner will constantly assess themselves and the learning tasks to select the appropriate strategies necessary for attaining the learning goal.

b) *Performance Phase*

This phase is also divided into two categories/components: the self control and self observation. You can understand that the self control processes will be necessary to focus meaningfully on the task. This can be achieved through self instructing about the steps to carry out the task and by using metacognitive skills which help in understanding one's own process of learning. For a distance learner, it is very important to have a skill of self control as there could be many distracters (pressure of workplace, family responsibility etc.). Another component of self observation is also known as self-monitoring, includes self recording through keeping a journal or a logbook about the activity carried out and self experimentation or trying out different behaviours.

c) *Self-Reflection Phase*

Like the above two stages, this stage also consists of two categories: self judgement and self reaction. Self judgement is also known as self-evaluation, whenever we label our performance as good or bad, we are engaged in self-evaluation. This can be done through comparing our present performance against previous performance or our expectations. Self reaction is composed of self satisfaction, which one gets after achieving the goal set in the forethought phase. Now, you might have got an understanding about the meaning and components of the self directed learning. In the next section we will focus on how to develop the self- directed learner and what kind of support is needed for becoming the self-directed learners.

**Check Your Progress 3**

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

i) What are the four dimensions of the self-directed learning as proposed by Candy?

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ii) How is forethought stage different from self reflection stage?

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## 4.5 ROLE OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES IN PROMOTING SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

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The dominant feature of distance education is the physical distance that separates the teacher and learner. Because distance students are often placed in a unique situation in which neither teachers nor fellow students are physically present to clarify, discuss, or provide feedback, effective distance education requires a sound learner support system (Gunawardena, 1988).

Wright (1991) describes learner support as the requisite student service essential to ensure the successful delivery of learning experiences at a distance. Thorpe (1988) describes learner support as the elements of an open learning system capable of responding to a particular individual learning.

If the adult learners are willing and able to be self directed, then distance education systems have to modify their teaching in order to give chance to each individual to exercise autonomy. Knowles (1970) has made following suggestions:

- a) Provide the physical environment and importantly psychological environment that shows that the learner is accepted, respected and supported and there exists a positive interdependence among the learners and teachers as joint learners or enquirers.
- b) Put emphasis on self diagnosis of the learning need by diagnosing the present level of competence and minimizing the gap between desired competence and present competence.
- c) Involve learner in planning a personal programme based on the diagnosis of needs, specifying the learning objectives and evaluating the extent to which they can be achieved.
- d) The counsellor must act as a facilitator rather than a content expert.

The amount of support services an institution can offer largely depends on that particular institution's capacity and resources at its disposal. However, these can be put into two categories like the following:

- a) Academic, including such packages as tutorial, advising and counselling services.
- b) Administrative functions, such as enrolment; admission and registration; record keeping; information provision; and delivery of study materials (Molefi, 2002).

But for developing a self-directed learners, the academic support plays an important role than administrative support. Therefore, in the following section, we will focus more on an academic support.

Following can be kept in mind, while designing self-learning materials:

- a) Use modeling techniques: if you are planning to demonstrate the correct way to perform an activity, for example, helping the students to do the assignment in the better way. You can provide model answers, clues to write good answers.

- b) Include the development of the self directed learning skills in your objectives for the unit.
- c) Provide guided practice and corrective feedback: As you have noted earlier, self monitoring is important for developing a self directed learner. Thus, provide opportunities to evaluate their learning on a regular basis, which can be done through providing the self check exercises, assignments etc.
- d) You can also ask them to keep a log or journal in which they can (i) state goals (ii) note how they prepared for and addressed the demands of their projects, assignments and other tasks (iii) assess the extent to which they have achieved the goals.

**Role of the academic counsellors:**

- Encouraging learners to articulate their learning goals. In the beginning learners need help developing their learning plan and establishing short-term goals so that they gain the skills necessary to manage their goals and plans later in their programmes.
- Helping learners understand their learning orientations, strengths, and areas for improvement early in their programmes so that they can use this information to develop their plans, goals, and assessment of their learning progress.
- Advising learners on the exploration and selection of learning opportunities that will meet their needs during the initial development of their learning plans. Later, learners will take greater responsibility for identifying their learning resources.
- Guiding learners as they progress toward established goals and encouraging them to evaluate their own progress.

### **4.5.1 Role of Technology for Promoting Self-directed Learning**

As you might have noted, developing a self-directed learner will require a lot of effort in terms of time. In order to minimize the time, you can take help of technology to supplement your efforts. Online learning provides a platform to promote self directed learning. Now, let us examine how online learning supports three processes of self directed learning i.e. planning, monitoring and evaluation, which have been discussed earlier.

a) *Planning*

Unlike traditional classrooms, online learning provides flexibility for learners to pace their own study. Since online learning has asynchronous feature, the learner can plan learning anytime, anywhere. In synchronous learning (e.g., live chats or virtual classrooms), learners still have the flexibility to choose the most convenient place from which to participate.

b) *Monitoring*

In an online learning environment, the monitoring responsibilities are in large part left to the learner. They must decide whether they understand the subject correctly (Shapley, 2000) or are heading in the right direction with their course work.

c) *Evaluating*

In an online learning environment, the learners can get a instant feedback from the teacher and also from the peers.

To understand SDL phenomenon is only a first step in achieving the educational goal of facilitating learners' learning. The key lies in the design of an effective online SDL environment.

### **4.5.2 Evaluation of the Self-directed Learning**

As evaluation is the important component of the entire learning cycle, in the self-directed learning process the students are actively involved in the process of learning. Therefore it is important that a habit of self-monitoring/self-evaluation has to be established among the learners. Self-evaluation is defined as students judging the quality of their own work, based on evidence and explicit criteria, for the purpose of doing better work in the future. When we teach students how to assess their own progress, and when they do so against known and challenging quality standards, we find that there is a lot to gain. Self-evaluation is a potentially powerful technique because of its impact on student performance through enhanced self-efficacy and increased intrinsic motivation. Hence, the teachers need to encourage learners to reflect on what they did and revise attempted work. In the open and distance education system, it is done through posing self check answers in the text, in the form of assignments etc. Apart from these, there could be various other ways to promote and maintain self-evaluation:

- a) By maintaining a journal
- b) By keeping a dairy of events
- c) By maintaining a personal portfolio: A portfolio contains a purposefully selected work of the students. This may include highlights of the student's progress, samples of earlier and later work, and comments about the growth in learning. Then, the student and/or teacher might select items that illustrate the development of one or more skills with reflection upon the process that led to that development to show growth or change over time. These comments are made in the portfolio either by the learners or by teacher and sometimes by both teacher and students after identifying best pieces of work to showcase a student's strengths or accomplishments.

The portfolio helps in following ways to the learners:

- to help develop process skills such as self-evaluation and goal-setting
  - to identify strengths and weaknesses
  - to track the development of one or more products/performances
- d) By rubric: It is a scoring guide which organizes the criteria that describes what students need to complete for an assignment, and it measures the levels of proficiency of student work. Rubrics can be used in any content area. They are time consuming to create, but they allow students and parents to know exactly how a teacher will grade an assignment. When teachers design specific performance criteria, students know how they will be evaluated.

Rubrics allow students to better understand the meaning behind their grade. If students know exactly how their work will be evaluated, they are more likely to produce higher quality work. Rubrics allow students and parents to see specifically how a teacher arrived at a specific score. In addition, rubrics give teachers well-defined criteria for areas in an assignment that are subjective, such as artwork or style.

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## **4.6 LET US SUM UP**

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In the present day educational scenario, where there is growing demand on the learners and the teachers to take the responsibility of learning. It is important that the self-directed learning skills are developed among the learners. The self-directed learning is a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes. In this present unit, various models like Candy's Model, Hiemstra Model of SDL have been discussed which have focused on the learning as an active process. It has also been discussed that the self-directed learning process starts with the diagnosing of the learning needs of the learners and ends with the evaluation of the learning. But in the entire process right from the identification of the learning needs till evaluation, it is the learner who actively decides all the aspects of learning. Although, the learner is incharge of learning but the role of the teacher is not diminished but had changes from knowledge provider to knowledge facilitator. In this unit the support needed to promote self-directed learning through distance education has also been discussed in the unit. For any learning, the most important task is evaluation. It has been discussed that self-directed learning could be best evaluated through self-evaluation, for that the students can maintain portfolios, dairies of the activities performed by them.

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## **4.7 FEEDBACK TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) The nature of individualized learning is also very similar to distributed learning because here learning takes place using distributed resources.
- ii) By giving choices, authentic tasks, encouraging to keep dairies etc.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) It is a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes.
- ii) Self-directed learning is a personal attribute because it develops individuals who can assume moral, emotional, and intellectual autonomy.

- i) The four dimensions proposed by Candy are: personal autonomy, self-management, learner-control and autodidaxy.
- ii) Forethought stage is a planning stage and self reflection is an evaluation phase.

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## **4.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS**

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