
UNIT 11 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNER PERFORMANCE

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11.0 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

11.1 OBJECTIVES

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

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

11.2 LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION IN ODE: AN OVERVIEW

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

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

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

11.2.1 Evaluation

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

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

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

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

11.2.2 Assessment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11.2.3 Significance of Assessment and Evaluation

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

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

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

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

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

a) *Merits*

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

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

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

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

11.2.4 Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation

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

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

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

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

Of course, there are other components of CCE.

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

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

Check Your Progress

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

1) Comment briefly on continuous assessment.

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11.3 PRESENT SYSTEM OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

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

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

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

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

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

11.3.1 Continuous Assessment through Assignments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11.3.2 Functions of Assignments

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

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

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

11.3.3 Monitoring of Assignments

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

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

The important purpose of monitoring is to provide feedback to:

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

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

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

The process of monitoring of assignments encompasses the following.

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

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

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

Check Your Progress

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

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

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

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11.4 GRADING SYSTEM IN ODE

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

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

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

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

11.4.1 Disadvantages of Marking

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

i) Marker Variability

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

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

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

ii) Subject Variability

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

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

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

11.4.2 Advantages of Grading

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

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

11.4.3 Grading System at IGNOU

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

Table 11.1: Grading system at IGNOU

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

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

Check Your Progress

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

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

3) What are the advantages of grading?

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

11.5 ALTERNATE AND NEW WAYS OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

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

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

11.5.1 What is Alternative Continuous Assessment?

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

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

Table 11.2: Comparison of Traditional and Alternative Assessment

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

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

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

The prime advantage of this type of approach is that:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11.5.2 Rubrics

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

What is a Rubric?

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

Constructing/Developing a rubric

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

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

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

Types of Rubric

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

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

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

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

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

Table 11.3: Example of a holistic rubric

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

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

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

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

Table 11.4: Example of an analytic rubric

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

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

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

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

Table 11.5: Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Types of Rubrics

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

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

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

Use of Rubrics in ODE

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

11.5.3 Project

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

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

11.5.4 Open Book Examination

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

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

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

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

Types of Open Book Examinations

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

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

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

Indian Experience in Open Book Examination

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

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

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

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

Advantages: These include the following.

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

Disadvantages: These include the following.

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

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

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

11.5.5 Term-paper

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

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

11.5.6 Open Badges

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

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

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

Practice of Open Badges

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress

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

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

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

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11.6 LET US SUM UP

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

11.7 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’ QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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11.9 UNIT END EXERCISES

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

Unit End Questions

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



Questions for Critical Reflection

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

Activity



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