

Learner Support services In Distance Education



**Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education
Indira Gandhi National Open University
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi - 110068**

IGNOU



Handbook

9

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Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110 068
India**

STRIDE HANDBOOK 9

Learner Support Services in Distance Education

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FOREWORD

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has emerged as a powerful tool in education creating opportunities for thousands who are in search of knowledge, skills and challenging opportunities. New technologies that are emerging have changed the very nature of the teaching-learning processes in Open and Distance Education institutions. At the national level, today in India, in addition to IGNOU and its national/international network of centres, we have 14 Open Universities and more than 110 conventional universities offering programmes through distance mode. During the 11th plan period, it is expected that the distance education system will cater to about 40% of the total enrolment in higher education. Such a large system of distance education to be of high quality in terms of its operations requires qualified and trained human resources.

Learner Support Services are crucial to the successful completion of programmes by distance learners in a variety of situations. Although Self-learning Materials and Technologies play their part to support the learners at a distance, it is the responsibility of ODL Institutions to design and implement appropriate Support Services to give academic support as well as psychological boost to distance learners who are otherwise deprived of the much needed social interaction among their peers and teachers. The present handbook on Learner Support Services in Distance Education is an important component in empowering the learner. It also empowers the academic counsellors to interact with distance learners with necessary understanding and sensitivity. I am sure, this handbook will help distance learners, teachers, tutors, counsellors and others who contribute to the successful implementation of ODL programmes of IGNOU and other institutions.

New Delhi
November, 2008

Prof. V.N. Rajasekharan Pillai
Vice Chancellor, IGNOU

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ABOUT THE HANDBOOK

A handbook on learner support system for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions calls for a balanced approach since the delivery mechanisms vary across institutions and even across courses/programmes in one institution. However, a broad framework can be drawn up based on the prevailing practices. The ideas expressed in this handbook provide a bird's eye-view on the practices as prevalent at IGNOU. In a way, the contents of this handbook have been drawn from the experiences and practices at IGNOU. While a certain degree of bias drawn from subjective experiences is inevitable, an attempt has been made to clarify the bias without concealing facts.

The field of ODL, particularly the area of the learner support system, is still evolving and a variety of course delivery mechanisms are being experimented on a pilot basis by ODL institutions. The personnel who work with these institutions are evolving as professionals through practice and research. Thus, sharing of experiences and learning from others contribute to empowering oneself as well as others through collaboration and teamwork. This approach would also help in knowledge generation in a specific discipline in general and other disciplines through the ODL mode. This has been adopted in the compilation of this handbook as well.

Adult learning is indeed a tough job, as adult distance learners are committed to various responsibilities at home and work place, and have to manage time for their studies. As aptly summed up by Phil Race (1994, pp. 155-168), "In the initial stages of their entry into ODL institutions, the learners feel excited, some feel apprehensive, whereas some curious and few feel that they have been exposed and vulnerable."

At the same time the task is not that entirely daunting if the learners plan well and adhere to a strict time schedule. The personal view expressed by a Director General of Police (name withheld), an adult distance learner himself, is an apt reference in this regard: "A person can show to his kids that if he can study at this age, why can't the kids have an organised and hard working approach towards their studies, since their main duty is only studies."

An effective Learner Support Service (LSS), therefore, should provide pre- and post-entry counselling service to all the learners, make them confident and enable them to take decisions to pursue their studies at a distance. An effective learners support system should make the entry into and exit from the ODL system easy.

A holistic approach to see the entire gamut of ODL and its functional coordination and monitoring linkages with different Divisions/Schools and with one another is very important. The ideas and models provided in this handbook are an attempt to improve practices at open and distance educational institutions. Observation, imagination, creativity, dynamism and attitudinal intervention to work with different people with collaborative strategies and team work are the milestones of any successful distance education learner support system.

Experience shows that some of the adult learners are highly egocentric and do not allow others to evaluate their performance and their academic credibility in the teaching-learning process. Such learners are to be handled sensitively without hurting their feelings. To deal with such delicate cases, the tutor counsellor/academic administrator needs to possess behavioural skills to see that learners are not antagonised towards distance learning. Here the emphasis of learner support system is more on effective attitudinal and behavioural domain rather than knowledge domain. It is appropriate to mention my teacher's comment here that the 'diversity of learners groups in distance education necessitates a flexible system or support services. This requires flexible administrative arrangements and more than that a flexible mindset'.

In the globalisation era of education, the support services are considered as a main system rather than a sub-system of distance education. There are many vendors of distance education in the market. Ultimately the quality ones will survive. The quality in distance education is quality of support services that institutions render for their isolated learners. It is said that the institutions offer what is important; on the contrary, how best services they provide to learners is more important.

Often learners have high expectations from the distance teaching institutions on issues relating to study and administrative aspects. Distance teaching institutions should evolve and maintain pedagogical and administrative flexible models, consolidate such strategies with an accountable corporate practices by using computer mediated systems.

This handbook is basically written for four purposes: first, to provide an account of Learners Support System in Distance Learning based on various concepts, experiences; second, to familiarize the functionaries of ODL institutions with the basic issues and concerns, which would be useful for existing distance education institutions and also for upcoming institutions; third, to familiarize the readers with the areas, the practices, initiated by IGNOU; and fourth, the areas discussed in this book are not exhaustive, it is mere illustrative on each area of learners support in open distance education.

It is hoped that this handbook will serve as a guideline, enabling other ODL institutions to come out with their own versions and readers would provide us with valuable feedback for future improvements.

Rampelli Satyanarayana
Reader in Distance Education

CHAPTER 1

DISTANCE EDUCATION: CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

1.1 Distance education

When the first Open University was established in India in 1982 at Hyderabad, there was no role model to follow. However, over the years it has evolved its methods and systems that have paved the way for more ODL institutions in India. Experience shows that open universities have responded to the needs and demands of the society. According to Prof. G. Ram Reddy, distance education is more suitable to a country like India, as it is socially relevant, mass-based and can address inequalities in educational opportunities and decreasing quality of education (Reddy, 1998).

In developing societies, for successful growth, development and expansion of any institution in general and educational institutions in particular, it is felt that the political and administrative support is very important. In Indian administration, the bureaucracy holds “the key power and a hostile bureaucrat has all the tricks in the world to undo a political will/decision, the weapons are armoury being in exhaustible”. He further says “For the consolidation of present Dr. BRAOU, Hyderabad, in the words of the then Chief Minister Shri. N.T. Rama Rao “If the Open University is waste my Chief Ministership is waste” (Reddy, 1988)

While an Open University is based on a larger philosophy and believes in flexibility of entry, accessibility of education anywhere, provides educational opportunities and creates educational equity by providing education at a distance, “Distance Education merely refers to a mode of ‘teaching from a distance’. The term ‘mode’ refers to a practice with or without flexible approaches and practices to provide education from a distance” (Rowntree, 1992). “The term flexibility is commitment, accessibility is promise and educational equity is its philosophy” (Satyanarayana, 1999).

The term ‘Open Learning’ refers to a philosophy; it denotes flexible system of entry, choice of courses, adoption of suitable methods and media, educational access to many and finally an attempt to promote educational equity by providing education to many.

Of late, Distance Teaching Institutions (DTIs) are adopting innovative practices including adoption of open and flexible learning strategies. This is due to heavy competition among the ODL institutions in both public and private sectors. Almost all distance education institutions are converting themselves into open education institutions adopting the philosophies of open universities (Satyanarayana, 2002). Above all, “establishment of open universities has

positively influenced many correspondence courses and institutions of conventional universities to reform/converge their teaching and delivery methodologies” (Powar, 1998).

1.2 Distance education is a paradigm shift in education

“Change is the only constant factor in all walks of life.”

Change is the only constant but inevitable factor in almost all walks of life. The entire Learner Support System (LSS) is undergoing a change to meet the high expectations of the learners in providing qualitative service and quantitative targets to educate the millions. ODL can take care of the educational needs of all the people, those who are privileged (elite) and also the masses. The system promises education to the underprivileged section of the society such as disabled, physically challenged, those who could not continue education for various reasons, especially women. The entire gamut of ODL delivery mechanism is undergoing a paradigm shift from institution to learners, from teaching to counselling, from tutor to technology mediated support service system to suit quality and quantity dimensions of ODL delivery practices.

Change is taking place in our public and personal lives, education being no exception and there was a need to understand the nature of change. This may take a long gestation period, spanning over generations, even proving to be a mystic phenomenon. Education as a sub-system is also influenced by socio-economic and cultural changes. Historically, some of the paradigm shifts in education are in relation to systems of education, teaching-learning, interactivity, multi-media component and the role of teacher.

1.2.1 Shift in the system of education

The system of education has seen the following shifts from:

- education as one time activity to education as a life long activity;
- education as a privilege to education as a right;
- conversion of distance education institutions to open learning universities;
- quantity to quality of education;
- teacher-based learning to system-managed learning;
- supply-driven education to demand-driven education;
- monopoly education to competitive education system;
- knowledge-based to learning-based systems; and
- public sector models to private sector educational models.

1.2.2 A shift in teaching-learning process

There has been a shift in the process from:

- professional traits of a cultural teacher (society oriented) to a corporate teacher (market driven) to a techno-managerial teacher (silicon valley);

- teacher based systems to learner based systems;
- subject/content based curricula to experience-based learning systems;
- rigid/closed instructional design to innovative experiments and breakthrough models; and
- study centre based delivery to multi-media/diversified approach model.

1.23 A shift in interactive and multi-media component

The shift has been from:

- a monologue system to dialogue to interactive learning system;
- one-to-one communication system to one-to-many system;
- radio based learning system to radio conference learning system;
- audio-video based system to tele-conferencing system; and
- computer assisted learning to computer-mediated learning.

1.24 Issues before distance education for the next quarter

Gajraj Dhanrajan's paper on "Distance education: promise, performance and potential" has taken stock of open and distance learning systems in the developing countries of the Commonwealth. He has summarized the major issues facing at the movement and also suggested corrective measures to fully realize the potential of the open and distance learning system in the developing countries.

While briefly outlining the reasons of growth and development of open and distance learning, he has aptly and succinctly put them as

- political derive to increase the access;
- economic desire to reduce the cost;
- social desire to egalitarian society; and
- educational desire to improve the relevance and quality of curriculum (Dhanrajan, 2001).

The major reasons for the present state of affairs in open and distance learning have been identified as:

1. Lack of access to technology
2. Lack of institutional commitment to the learners needs
3. Need for staff training
4. Profit orientation without being quality conscious
5. Transferring cost approaches to learners than bearing by institutions
6. Localizing curriculum
7. Alienation of academic community
8. Need for leadership
9. Sense of equity and equality of opportunity.

To meet the challenges in the next 25 years, Dhanrajan (2001) says the stakeholders of open and distance learning have to concentrate on the following ten key issues:

1. Access and equity
2. Regulation barriers
3. Pedagogy
4. Standard assessment
5. Accreditation and certification
6. Staff training and development
7. Technology trends
8. Technology cost
9. Intellectual property issues
10. Research.

The suggestions/issues may not be entirely new, nevertheless they have not been given adequate attention for the success of open and distance learning system in the developing world. In the long term the quality of distance education will become a major issue for open universities. Quite a lot will depend on the capacity and ability of the open universities to respond to the growing newer needs and demands which are both social and individual in nature. In this context, better learner support becomes a crucial issue (Ramanujam, 2006). In this context it would be appropriate to evolve institutional vision mission statement, learner's charters in various pedagogical and administrative services and benchmarking of best practices in ODL system.

1.3 Gamut of distance education

“The entire gamut of open distance education is an exercise in student support services” Koul (1998).

1.3.1 A cyclic relationship

Learners support service is the main channel of delivery of a course/ programme in distance education. The gamut of distance teaching learning in an ODL institution revolves around five basic components namely, course plan/design, development, evolving an appropriate strategy for delivery channels to suit different programme structures, evolving viable/ desirable learners' assessment system and undertaking programme/course evaluation to give feedback on the course/programme of study for revision of a course/programme.

Figure 1 depicts the place of learners support service in the ODL transaction.

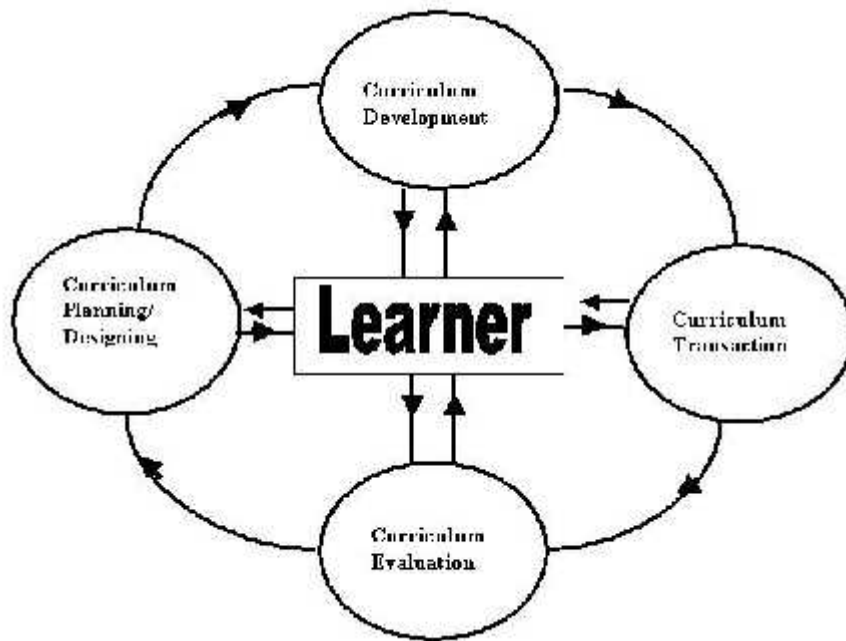


Figure 1: Learners support service in the ODL transaction

Source: IGNOU (2001) ES-316: Curriculum Development for distance education course material

1.4 Course planning and design

“Course design is comparable to building blueprint.”

Curriculum planning is an issue of utmost importance. The first step in curriculum design process is identifying social needs, levels of learners in an environment which involves systematic planning. Planning is the process of thinking before doing, i.e. the process of resolving all questions on What?... How?... When?... and Why? Hence, planning is an evolving stage to designing. It is also considered as a rational / brainstorming activity. It involves designing the issues based on need assessment survey of a particular course/programme in the form of research studies or feedback from the existing programme/courses.

While planning, one needs to determine the aims, objectives, target groups, instructional events and evaluation procedures of a course. It is a composite task, which involves activities such as outlining the actual content area, selection of theme and sub-themes, division of the content into blocks and units, planning of media and methods, timeframe and the approximate expenses involved.

The overall exercise can be considered as an arch structural design of a building/ a blueprint of a building on paper. Due care should be taken at this stage to shape a sound instructional design, whether it is face-to-face or distance education mode. If there is clarity in the instructional design it will reflect in the overall programme/course(s) including its delivery strategies.

1.5 Course development

“Undertaking the work of a building.”

Course development refers to the actual writing of lessons of a course/ programme. In ODL institutions it covers the entire gamut of activities such as writing of units, blocks, audio and video components, face-to-face counselling, tutoring assignments, self check exercises and practical components. The process includes tasks such as editing (content, format and language), development of programme guides, assignments and additional reading as far as print material is concerned, and the planning and development of audio and video script in the case of media materials.

1.6 Course delivery/transaction

“Presenting to the public for views and opinions.”

This phase is called course delivery or transaction stage or mechanism. Course distribution involves the dispatch of course materials (programme guides, blocks, assignments and additional communication, if any) to the distance learners, either at one go or in segments. Audio and video programmes are distributed to the study centres for use, and at times are also made available in the market at a price. It involves the formation of a network of people / institutions to empower open and distance learners. Networking has been defined as a chain of people or institutions working together to achieve common goals. It can be worked through individual/s. This transaction process is called *Learners Support System (LSS)*, where isolated learner gets help from the institution to carry out his / her studies.

1.7 Learner’s evaluation

“Reciprocally test the product value.”

IGNOU has adopted both grading and marking/scoring system to facilitate learner’s mobility from one institution to another. It could be face-to-face to distance education or distance education to face-to-face system of education. Such attempts pave the way for convergence of one education system with another and accreditation system in higher education. It also help to judge the effectiveness in design, development and transmission strategies adopted in a programme/course. It reveals how a distance learner effectively learnt the material and understood the stipulated aims and objectives. Learner’s evaluation is the exit point in the sphere of LSS and ODL system.

1.8 Course/programme evaluation

“Seeking public opinion on the usage value of the construction.”

Programme / course evaluation is a comprehensive exercise, conducted on the basis of feedback from all stakeholders of distance education. It is also a rational exercise towards rating the promise and actual performance of such institutions.

Here, stakeholders include learners, tutors, experts, academic and managerial staff, and finally the public. Public scrutiny is one of the most important areas of teaching and learning materials in distance education system. The institutions also undertake monitoring, interaction via tele-conferencing system and feedback through both formal and informal sources. The expected outcome is both qualitative and quantitative and has interrelations with one another. Research on learner support provides data on the gaps between the promises and performance of distance education system.

The programme evaluation can be taken up on a large, medium and small scale. The data must be supplied to the researcher wherein institutional vision and mission is to be stated clearly to avoid and neglect of institutional aims and objectives by the researcher.

Programme evaluation may be undertaken every three to five years, depending on the life of the programme/course material. This feedback is useful for revision of courses and multi-media component and overall improvement in both pedagogical/ administrative aspects.

The evaluation programme as a whole or one course or system can be undertaken as study, depending on convenience/needs, but the central idea behind the entire exercise of evaluation should have an organic link between the courses and the programmes.

As stated earlier, planning is a must for design, development, evolving appropriate transaction/learning strategies for learners comprehension and understanding, and finally, institutional feedback for effective reinforcement. The whole process has linkages and is chained; it cannot be seen in isolation.

As discussed earlier, course design, development, transaction, and both learners and programmes/course evaluation have cyclic relationship. One cannot be detached from the other. The strengths and weaknesses of ODL system depends upon the mutual, reciprocal and sound relationship with each other. Success and failure of a particular course depend upon the nature of relationship between instructional and institutional strategy of the ODL system.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINITIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF LEARNER SUPPORT

“In the conventional system the student creates problems to the institution, but distance education institution creates problems to the students.”

(Prasad, 1996)

2.1 Definitions of learner support

Phrases and idioms are altogether different in open and distance education vocabulary as compared face-to-face system. ‘Students’ is the term we use in the face-to-face system, while in the open and distance education we use the term ‘learners’. In the former system the teacher commands the students into classroom; whereas in the ODL system the teacher as an academic counsellor/tutor calls the learners into classroom by modulating his/her tone and requests the learners by saying ‘please come’, ‘let us study/learn and share our experiences’. Adult learning is based on the subjective experiences. Hence, the whole teaching-learning process is based on learner centered approach. Prof. Ram Reddy said that “today’s democratic society cannot afford to overlook the interest of Ekalavya’s nor Dronacharyas, say ‘no’ to them”. Distance education and open universities facilitate education to all. Open universities are universities for the modern Ekalavyas. He further emphasized “need to utilize the communication technology for the benefit of open and distance education, to teach more students and widen the opportunities and accessibility of higher education with the help of communication technologies. Aristotle can be taken to the students instead of asking the students to come to Aristotle” (Reddy, 1998). Let us review popular definitions on learners support services.

10. Prof Prasad gave an overview of the few important features of student support services in India as follows:

- “The services are mostly delivered through study centres
- The services are more group based than individual based
- The services are more subject based than system based
- The services are more structure and less flexible” (Prasad, 1996)

11. The learner satisfaction should be the criteria for determining the quality of services to the students. The open and distance learning institutions approach should be “bottoms up” approach and put the learner first and prepare him to face the challenges of independent learning and to look after his own learning needs (Murugan, 1994, p.211-222).

12. The importance of administrative and management operation of open and distance learning system for making it more responsive to student (client)

needs, greater cooperation among the providers of education and making suitable changes to the organization structures of the institution, further he stress on strongly for systematic research and evaluation studies so that necessary mid-course correction may be initiated for the success of technology based support system in open and distance learning (Dekkers, 1996).

13. Proper understanding of above principles/question is essential for any open and distance learning institution for evolving a model for student support services in open and distance learning and the staff working in it are “at the centre of things not at the periphery” (Tait, 1995).
14. Learner support is dependant on many things like, quality of information, guidance, and advice provided to the prospective students whenever they made their first contact with the institutions. Timely response to student enquiries will give confidence to the learners to pursue the programme with the institution. Institutional policy should be made explicit and should be sensitive to the needs and expectations of open learners (Reid, 1995).
15. A teaching package, even it is well structured may not provide the individualized learning to the students. Hence in correspondence tuition counselling plays a very important role in open university and in distance education. The tutors offer humane, constructive and supportive role in distance education (Sewart, 1983). Study centre is a ‘dustbin’ of teaching in distance education, where all-important function or too difficult or too expensive functions are carried out (Sewart, 1983).
16. The concept of ‘continuity of concern’ aimed to provide support and a ‘safety net’ to the distance learners wherein a wide variety of support services and counselling is provided. Continuity of concern for students gains importance “because of the educational background of most of its students who are adults returning to the study after a number of years, they would need a local and continuing advice on the problem which they encountered” (Sewart, 1978, p.9).
17. “The Future for Services to Students” provides a bird’s eye view of the operation of support services in Open University since beginning and the impact of communication technology on provision of services in future. It emphasizes some of the practices followed in United Kingdom Open University by using ICT (Black, 2000).
18. “Learner support in ODL refers to the meeting of needs that all learners have because they are central to quality learning” (p. 107). “All those elements capable of responding to a known learner or group of learners, before, during and after the learning process” (p. 108) “anything other than the actual course material which an institution provided to its students became support services” (p. 5) (Craft, 1991).

2.2 Organic approach to understand administration of distance educational institutions

Teachers in the open and distance education, design, develop and undertake review and revision of courses as core staff. At the delivery point academics/managers take the courses to the learners. The failure of a distance learner should be attributed to the failure of teachers and academics together than to individuals. This is what is known as organic linkages. To simplify organic theory in terms of learner's support system, the whole university and its teaching learning systems is to be attributed to the human organism; if one part of the body gets hurt it amounts to pain in the entire body. Hence it is difficult to detach idea and activities of teaching at distance.

2.3 Systems approach to understand administration of distance educational institutions

The attribution of systems theory into learners support system denotes to sound input (design and development,) output and its process, to reach the un-reached people and places (as a transactional strategy). Feedback mechanism (a desirable learner evaluation and system / course evaluation) and finally the reinforcement mechanism to systems improvement and development in the course/programme, and revision activities (Figure 2).

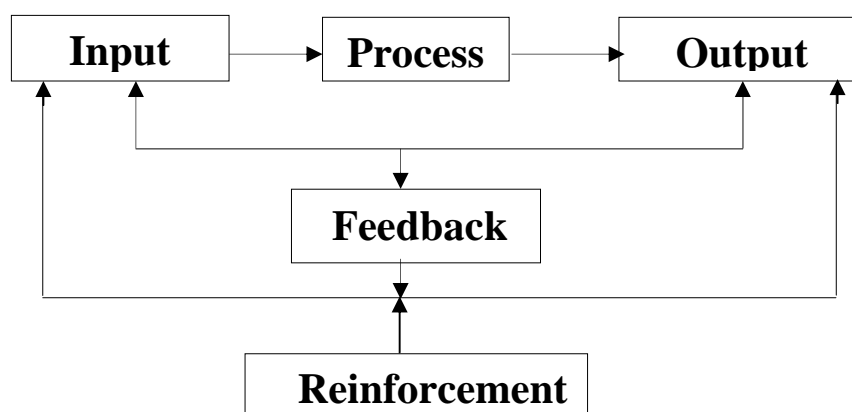


Figure 2: Systems approach to understand distance education system

Input	:	Course design and development
Process	:	Course delivery
Output	:	Learners evaluation/certification
Feedback	:	Programme/course evaluation (Research/strategy)
Reinforcement	:	Taking feedback for policy formulation revision of course material (revision activities)

2.4 Customer and service driven approach to learners' support system

Sewart emphasized that "A service industry is an activity". Further, "A service industry relates a product to its customers such that the production and consumption are connected; the services are produced at the point of consumption or are produced and consumed almost simultaneously." Finally, "Customers take part in the process of a service industry" (Sewart, 1992). The

student support element of distance education is similar to the service industry, which meets most of the general criteria of the industry. Service driven approach denotes learners-oriented/ friendly system, process and products. “Whether, we accept it or not, we have to live with the reality that the Open and Distance Education has been globalised and commercialised with it having acquired the shape of a commodity” (Satyanarayana, 2003, pp.12).

This is possible only when the institution encourages and develops self-help groups among the open and distance learners. When we look at this from the learner’s perspective, learners are no longer in favour of institutional brand of a product or its degree. Rather, they are interested in the effectiveness of the services rendered and smooth and problem free entry into and exit from the open and distance education institutions. To be precise and simple, it’s all about “after sales service” (Simpson, 2000).

2.5 Learner-centered learning in Indian tradition

“Students support service play very crucial role in the delivery of academic programmes of open and distance learning institutions. It aimed at coping skills” (Khan, Gupta, Garg, 2001) to make it more relevant in the test of the times. The desirable strategy of designing open learning material is experience based rather than content based; the material should facilitate conceptual exposure to learner’s subjective experiences.

The learner centeredness is considered an important defining character of distance education similar to people-centeredness in democratic politics and consumer-centeredness in capitalist market system. The learning process is to be designed keeping in mind the requirements and conveniences of the learner.

Though India is passing through first and second generation of English education, learning and adaptability is the dominant feature of India’s cultural tradition. The Indian society has been witnessing social and cultural alienation among various groups but has been able to withstand pressures only due to the principle of cultural adaptability.

Alienation in education can be aptly understood with the example of *Ekalavya* – a symbol of seriousness and commitment towards self-learning. This shows that the tradition of independent learning has been embedded in the Indian culture.

This also brings out the difference between face-to-face and distance education. “The situation of the Student of Conventional System is comparable to *MARJALA SUTA NYAYA/MARJALA KISHORA NYAYA* (cat’s justice to her kitten) in which mother cat protects and trains her kids, by shifting from one house to another. The situation of the Student of Open University is like *MARKATA SUTA NYAYA/MARKATA KISHORA NYAYA* (monkey’s justice to her baby monkey) in which the mother monkey does not protect her kids, but the kids should protect themselves by clinging on to the belly of their mother...” (Chendrashaker Rao, 1998).

Markata Suta/Kishora Nyaya
“Monkey’s Justice to Baby Monkey”

Marjala Suta/Kishora Nyaya
“Cat’s Justice to her Kitten”



<i>Learners in Open and Distance Education</i> (Learner Centered Education)	<i>Student in Face to Face Education</i> (Teacher Centered Education)
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Figure 3: ODE vs. F2F education

It is also observed that the feelings of Indian distance learners are like “Some distance learners suffer from ABHIMANYU SYNDROME i.e... They know how to enter Open Universities but do not know how to come out successfully” (Prasad, 2000, pp.1-10). In terms of ODL accessibility, it is observed that these institutions provide second chance to students to continue their education but not second-class education to its learners. Quality is an important issue for these institutions.

2.6 Dependency model

Most of the study centres in Indian institutions use human and physical resources from the host institutions and pay for the services rendered. This is known as dependency model (Venkaiah, 1993, pp.53-58) in which administrative support is expected by co-ordinators in organizing face-to-face contact classes, examination and other student support services. In this model, experienced practitioners say that the host institutions are not extending the required co-operation to the study centre coordinators, and periodic meeting between Open University and the principals/head of the host institutions may provide a good opportunity to sort out difficulties and create cooperative environment. The change in attitude of all the functionaries associated with the university on part-time and full time basis will help to realize the objectives of student support services (Venkaiah, 1993).

2.7 Indian open universities’ concerns for learners support

Dr. B.R. Ambedker Open University, Hyderabad declared 2003 as the year of Students Service and evolved Mission and Vision for the University; and developed a learners’ charter. The first slogan of the university is “University at your doorstep” which denotes the will of the university to provide education at the doorstep of such learners, who wish to upgrade their knowledge. Their recent slogan is “the journey from first to best”.

The slogan of Yaswantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) “*Gyana Ganga Garo Gari*” refers to access to knowledge and wisdom for each house. YCMOU brochure titled “liberating the learner” aptly expresses the philosophy of distance education.

IGNOU Regional Centre, Pune calls Open University as “Every Family’s University”.

IGNOU has evolved a multi-faceted Student Support System. IGNOU, today, is reaching people and places hitherto un-reached. The recent vision and mission document of IGNOU says: “providing effective student support services is crucial for learner satisfaction and their success. The University, has succeeded in creating a wide network of regional centres (RCs) and study centres (SCs) across the length and breadth of the country. There is, however, a need to make it more effective. It has become particularly important now because of growing local, regional and international competition faced by the University in the context of WTO and GATTs” (IGNOU, 2002).

2.8 Experiences from outside

An example often quoted from British Open University system, is “continuity of concern” (Sewart, 1992) for its learners. Planning dominates the university’s calendar, in which a variety of media devices are used to motivate the learners. In the present phase, they call it 3rd generation media devices where Computer Mediated Learning is getting popular. Whereas in Indian situation it is the organization first and planning is a secondary activity. Individuals’ priority at each level gets more importance than institutional vision and mission.

The Australian model, especially at the University of South Australia, convergence from Open and Distance to face to face and from face to face to Open and Distance is popular; it makes learners mobility from one institution to other possible. This system is yet to be explored in the Indian context.

2.9 Technology mediated learner support

Technology is a powerful tool in the teaching learning process both in the case of face-to-face and open and distance education. Online learning is the order and need of the day. All the services provided face-to-face can be equally made successful and effective through online guidance. Various user/learner-friendly packages can be evolved, experimented and consolidated and pen-and-paper-less examination can be made possible through technology. Developing proper infrastructure is very important for networked education and guidance. All the initiatives such as pre-entry, post-entry, counselling, writing examinations, getting other administrative services, research and analysis are equally possible through the use of information and communication technology.

“The technology mediation helps in overcoming the space and time limitations and design educational processes based on learner’s needs. The mis-match between supply and demands, quality and quantity issues can be balanced through technology interference. The basic concept of Open and Distance Education, being its availability anywhere, everywhere and all time education, finally, the whole ICT issue should not be seen as a religious practice or as a

dogma. On the contrary, it should be viewed as one of the important tools to practice teaching-learning process” (Satyanarayana, 2002).

Finally, the issue of learner support is related to the attitudinal issue towards the system and its process rather technology per se. Technology is a tool to serve, but it cannot afford to play a master role. The concern, commitment and competencies to solve learner’s needs is the desirable attitude for learner centred education. The ODL functionaries’ attitude and concern for the system, and their commitment serve as the foundations of ODL institutions. In the public institution a paternal attitude towards its clientele is observed, but the system demands maternal attitude (rather paternal) by which one can assure love, affection, faith on the learning abilities and confidence to create a substance in the system and its process. A better and flexible pedagogical, administrative, monitoring, research and training system would definitely lead to the success of the system.

In this context it would be appropriate to quote Sir John Daniel’s concept of the four Big Bs’ – bias, broad thinking, balanced approach and balanced technology. He cautions the academics of the world to guard against the first ‘B’ bias of the vendors of technology, who argue that technology is answer to all problems in education. Promoting technology at any cost is also a curse. Quoting Ted Turner, an American media baron, he says that there is no point in giving computers to people who have no electricity to run them, he calls upon the educators, however to use the two good ‘B’s broad thinking and balanced approach (Daniel, 2003).

CHAPTER 3

BROAD AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF LEARNERS SUPPORT IN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

“The ultimate aim and objective of Open and Distance Education is to empower its learners into self and independent learners.”

3.1 Aims of learner support

The above quotation is appropriate to specify the broad aims of learner support in open and distance education. The broad aims are to:

- make learners’ entry easy (i.e. flexible) and exit (i.e. successful completion of study) problem-free;
- empower the distance learners by building confidence in them; and
- make the isolated learners feel that the ODL institutions have concern for them.

3.2 Broad objectives

The broad objectives of learner support in ODL can be classified under the following heads:

- General objectives
- Empowerment of distance learner
- Providing multi-media support
- Pedagogical support
- Providing learners friendly administrative systems
- Initiation of best practices based on the learners’ context and concern.

Let us discuss the above areas in detail.

3.3.1 General objectives

- To reach the un-reached and provide ‘education for all’.
- To give right kind of induction meeting, clarifying what ODL can do for DL and what DL should do and practice for successful learning.
- To make effective Higher Education Learning Practices (HELP) for adults.
- To provide alternatives to take right *decision* in pertaining to their studies.
- To increase awareness among prospective learners on the university courses/programmes.

- To encourage learners to make full use of all facilities available towards the cause of learning support.
- To stimulate learners to assimilate on what they have learnt.
- To create confidence on ODL system.
- To explore and establish proper multi-media learning strategies.
- To develop flexible pedagogical and administrative flexible system in order to provide efficient LSS.
- To provide information to the prospective learners at the pre-entry, post-entry levels to undertake their studies without any barrier.
- To encourage formation of Self-Help groups by and among learners.

3.3.2 Empowerment of distance learners

- To motivate the isolated learners towards continuous learning.
- To apprise about the facilities given by the ODL institutions (in induction meetings as well as in the counselling sessions).
- To provide a place to DL to socialise them with their peer groups, counsellors, tutors and with others.
- To develop an efficient evaluation and students registration mechanism.
- To evolve learners friendly grievances redressal.
- To develop a feeling and satisfaction among the learners that the institution has concern for the learners.

3.3.3 Providing multi-media support

- To provide audio, video, radio and face-to-face counselling.
- Explore and establish proper multi-media learning strategies.
- Successful experimentation of all available media such as tele-conference, computer mediated learning and facilitate interactive process between the ODL institutions and the isolated distance learners, besides, establishment and consolidation of Interactive Voice Recording Services (IVRS).

3.3.4 Pedagogical Support

- To provide proper counselling to the isolated learners.
- To provide proper counselling and tutoring services and clarifying issues from SLM.
- To provide two-way communication through assignments.
- To develop proper learner friendly course material in terms of its language, style, format and context based on the feedback from the learners.
- To get clarity over course/programme institutional design and objectives and translate them into effective learning.
- To provide well written books in self-instructional style with good content, language and format editing to create interest in study.

- To provide appropriate counselling, tutoring and personal contact programme services to the learners from time to time to motivate them.
- To provide appropriate technology for teaching learning, counselling and communication /interaction process.
- To facilitate two-way communication process by giving tutor comments to the learners on their performance.
- To provide access to library services.

3.3.5 Providing learner-friendly administrative systems

In the face-to-face system of education the learners trouble the educational institution; on the other hand in open and distance education, it is the institution that mostly troubles the learners due to lack of provision for adequate learner support services. The ODL institutions should not only provide flexible and friendly entry system but also a flexible and friendly administrative system. For ODL institutions, concerns for the learners must be the ultimate aim.

3.3.6 Initiation of best practices in open and distance education system

The efficient and effective learner-centered educational system is one of the primary concerns of any open and distance education institution. It is presumed that learner expectations are very high and the systems are not able to cope with the demands. The common minimum best practices expected are the following:

- timely dispatch of study materials;
- timely conduct of examinations; and
- timely declaration of results.

3.4 Main features of learners support

Institutions have been following varieties of instructional models of learners support services to suit the course/programme requirements. Some of the prevailing features can be summed up below:

- Mostly study centre based.
- Mostly group based then individual based.
- Mostly subject based then system based.
- More structures and less flexible.
- Geographical and students ratio based.
- Sharing the intellectual and physical resources from the host institution and pay for it.
- The arrangements of learner support services are less flexible and designed to meet institutional requirements rather than learner's requirement.
- Most of the learners are not properly using the provision of LSS due to their economic problems and distance problems from their place to study centres.
- The institutional expenditure is more with less monitoring.

- Poor feedback system and enforcement mechanism.
- Proper and timely training is a serious issue.
- Application of appropriate technology and reaching out to the learner.

3.5 Home based learning (personalized learning)

Audio, video, radio, self-learning material, CD telephones are useful devices to make use of all available resources from ODL institutions. The media used for supporting the learners are:

- Printed Self-Learning Materials (SLMs)
- Supporting Audio/Video and CD players
- Textual referral material
- Enrichment reaching
- Educational Radio/TV Broadcast/Cable TV (Interactive if Telephone/ Fax available)
- On-line computer network services

3.6 Work place based learning (experiential learning)

Some of the programmes in distance mode are for continuing education and here in service experience and learning experience at work place is must to support learning activities including:

- Field-Shop work/observations
- Experimentations/Project work
- Product development
- Group learning (Prayog Pariwar)
- Action Research

3.7 Community based learning (societal learning)

Various institutions evolve various model based on their experiences in the areas of learner support services. Some distance education institutions provide opportunities to meet distance learners, through self help groups, besides exploiting media resources for open and distance education. Some of these approaches are:

- Group problem solving (self-help groups, women, youth)
- Group learning (*Swadhyaya Pariwar*).
- Participation in related community service/development activities.
- Learning at community/peoples' learning center where multi-media learning facilities are available (Radio, TV, VCR, Library, Computer on-line services, ITV etc.).

3.8 Institutional initiatives to promote learners support services

Institutional concerns in Open and Distance Education are broadly the following:

- Pre-entry counselling
 - Post-entry counselling
 - Self-instructional Materials
 - Counselling services
 - Multi-Media Learning
 - Assignments
 - Exams/Evaluations and
 - Other Administrative Support Services.
- (Source: Satyanarayana, 1999)

3.8.1 Pre-entry counselling

Before the learners join an open and distance education institutions, they should be made aware of the course/programme availability, eligibility criteria, fee structure, syllabus / curriculum details, minimum and maximum duration of completion of studies, the teaching and learning process and the institutional recognition, adoption of study strategies and finally what ODL institutions can give to their learners.

3.8.2 Post-entry counselling

It is one of the important mechanisms and a practice in the distance education. Post-entry counselling involves induction meetings, where all the new entrants meet and exchange their views, backgrounds, and experiences and facilitate a peer group interaction. This provides opportunities for socialization among the isolated open and distance learners to make new friends and exchange experiences.

Post entry counselling can also be given through teleconferencing/ODL newsletters, in-house magazines and through audio, video, CD, radio, TV and internet chat programmes Post-counselling aims to guide the learners how to study. This and make optional use of their study materials.

3.8.3 Self-learning materials

The Self-learning materials play a dominant role in distance teaching and learning process. These materials facilitate and provide in-built teacher, learner and an evaluator for distance learner. It also provides a conceptual exposure that suits to heterogeneous learners for further generalisation from the learner's point of view.

Self-learning materials are the real tools of learning and a device to disseminate knowledge with desirable formats through its expressions to suit adult and distance learners.

The format of self-learning material provides adequate space to write learners experiences and reaction to the content for memory as well as reinforcement. Frequent in-text questions and ready-made answers are also provided in the self-learning materials. Right and clear expression, an appropriate content and presentation styles are important for effective self-learning materials.

Self-learning materials are dominant learning devices in the open and distance educational institutions. The other multi-media devices are used as supplementary and complementary tools in the open and distance education.

(For further details, see *STRIDE Handbook 5*)

3.8.4 Academic counselling services

Experience shows that no matter how self-sufficient the self-learning material is, a certain element of human interaction is a must for isolated distance learners. To avoid isolation, distance education institutions provide face-to-face interaction. The counselling sessions are not compulsory but some of the professional programmes insist for 75 percent attendance, to impart skills to the learners. It varies from programme to programme.

The concept of academic counselling is different from face-to-face teaching. The learners are expected to read the self-learning materials and jot down the doubts and come prepared for the classes for discussion. But in practice, it has been found that mostly face-to-face teaching takes place in the counselling sessions. It may be due to the cultural context of the teachers and learners. It is also evident that all the learners do not attend counselling classes. Based on his /her background, we can broadly divide open and distance learners into three categories: deep-learners, surface learners and strategic learners. They could be classified as confident, over-confident and diffident learners. Mostly the diffident learners require counselling. For a teacher, it is always a challenging task to face open and distance learners.

Counselling is always desirable for individual learner's specific needs and study orientations. As such, in IGNOU, all tutors are called Academic Counsellors. Counsellors associated with the distance education should be sensitive towards prospective learners' age, experience, needs, aptitude, interest, ego levels and their orientations. The teacher who is supposed to be a counsellor in ODL system should be aware of all sensitive factors associated with the issues. They need to be impressed with the open and distance educational approaches/philosophies such as accessibility, flexibility and an institutional desire to promote education equality. (Further details, see *STRIDE Handbook 3*). The goal of LSS is to minimize the negative effects of isolation by providing counselling to overcome the personal difficulties and identifies the problem faced by student as isolation and alienation (Craft, 1991).

3.8.5 Multiple-media learning

The National Policy of Education (1986) expressed the need for utilizing all available media for educational purposes. Distance education teaching-learning

process is being identified as multi- /multiple media learning, i.e. learning through multi-media like audio-video, radio, television, teleconferencing, and through other electronic media. Media can be used as supplementary or complementary or integrated to self-learning materials. While advocating the use of media for distance education, the organizations and the people in it should select the appropriate media for delivery of the programmes. It is also emphasized that the media has to be integrated with the print medium so that the learners take greater advantages of non-print media. The factors like availability, accessibility, economics and validity should be taken into consideration before selecting a media mix of distance education.

3.8.6 IGNOU's experiments on FM radio

IGNOU is successfully utilising the services of FM stations for Open and Distance Education. Gyan Vani (tele-counselling) is a local FM Radio Station which caters to educational, cultural, agricultural and awareness programmes under decentralized activity where IGNOU is a stakeholder to promote distance education. The experiment has been popular, attracted the attention of people and there is a lot of positive feedback from the listeners. IGNOU is committed to supporting this activity throughout India by collaborating with private and public institutions.

3.8.7 Gyan Darshan and television programmes

Gyan Darshan is an exclusive educational channel implemented and promoted by IGNOU's Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC), and is a collaborative effort of other media and educational media agencies in the country that has made it a 24 hours channel. There are enough possibilities to expand further into many educational channels from EMPC of IGNOU.

Doordarshan, through its terrestrial networking also provides broadcasting time to the local Open and Distance educational Institutions. Some of the State Open Universities are successfully utilising it to promote Open and Distance Education.

Another important milestone in media is tele-conferencing through EduSat – an exclusive satellite dedicated for education. It may be one-way video and two-way audio. It is a cheaper device to educate many with less cost. It is also an effective tool to reach many. Some of the state governments are using this mode to make official deliberations with this mode.

3.8.8 Assignments

Assignments are an important tool to facilitate two-way communication between teacher distance learners. The learners write the assignments and submit for evaluation, and get feedback on their performance. Effective management of assignment as both administrative activity and pedagogical activity is important for successful learner's support system. Writing appropriate/educative comments without hurting the isolated adult distance

learners is very important. While dealing with the academic, personal and supplemental comments, it is always desirable to have positive comments rather than negative comments. Tutor comments are effective tool to make healthy and meaningful dialogue with isolated distance learner (Further details, see *STRIDE Handbook 4*).

3.8.9 Evaluations

In the areas of evaluation IGNOU had made remarkable shift in comparison to face-to-face education. IGNOU introduced its courses with credit system; study hours are being quantified; and the grading system has been introduced. These efforts would certainly lead to future accreditation and mobility from one institution to another. IGNOU is also conducting term-end exams twice yearly at places for its national and international students (Further details, see *STRIDE Handbook 4*).

3.8.10 Other administrative support services

In distance education, besides provision of pedagogical support and flexibility, it is very important to provide sound administrative support and flexibility to the learners. The best practices in ODL institutions are assumed in three areas: timely receipt of course/study material, timely conduct of examinations, and declaring results as early as possible to maintain calendar of events of the learners and the institution. The other services can be classified as administrative services, which facilitate successful completion of programmes for which learners are admitted. It is said that open and distance education institutions not only provide pedagogical flexibility in choice of courses and programmes but also provide administrative flexibility to the required service to its learners. The administrative services includes: timely despatch of course material, proper response from the institutions on learners' queries, timely receipt of the proper information about re-registration/registration for another semester/year, exams intimation, conduct of the examination and declaration of the results; and service oriented attitude to all the functionaries.

3.9 How to pursue studies in open and distance education

- Undertaking studies for an adult is a difficult tasks but not impossible to achieve.
- Learning is learner's responsibility.
- Organise time, place of study, adhere study planner and complete the required assignments.
- Organising academic and administrative issues are very important to maintain Open University academic calendar.
- Develop proper study habits, place of study, time and schedules, calendar of assignments and adhere to it.
- Develop peer group interaction and establish Self-help groups.
- Plan and undertake study steadily for examinations.

- The purpose of study is more important, such as, why I am studying, what I am studying, whether, it related to my experience. If not, I need support to simplify and generalize the concepts exposed in the course material, if possible provide case studies.
- How to empower myself as a distance learner? How to draw and implement my own calendar to make my studies more effective? These are all questions related to one's determination competent and commitment.
- Develop as much as peer group interaction to have fresh insights and wider outlook.
- Read study material, relate it to your experiences. If time permits, read the journals, books, reference books and jot down important points.
- Attend seminars, workshops and learn to unlearn.
- Adopt frank and transparent approach and share your experiences with others.
- Use all available media (audio, video, radio, teleconference, radio conference, internet chat and WWW).
- Adopt a long term and short terms goals and check out the plan.
- Develop a course/programme file in which, learner should keep all documentary evidences from the beginning stage, its process and exist. This is important.

(Please see *STRIDE Handbook 2* for more details and for guidelines)

CHAPTER 4

INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR LEARNERS SUPPORT

“Good news about an institution spreads slowly, but bad news spread like rash! Any bad news about the learners support will affect the institutional financial viability and enrolment.”

(Reid, 1995)

An overview of the few important features of Learners Support Services (LSS) in India is given as follows: The concept of ‘Learners Support Services’ is understood differently by different institutions of distance education” (Pandit, 2004). As suggested by Prasad (1996), in the institutional perspective, the nature of Learners Support System (LSS) broadly covers the following:

- The services are mostly delivered through study centres;
- The services are more group based than individual based;
- The services are more subject based than system based; and
- The services are more structured and less flexible.

4.1 Broad functions of main tiers of a distance teaching university as follows:

Central office/Headquarters

19. Evolving institutional vision and mission
20. Evolving overall Planning operations and institutional strategies
21. Course planning
22. Course development
23. Course production
24. Course distribution
25. Designing Learners Support Services
26. Students admission
27. Students evaluation
28. Programme/Course revision
29. Programme/Course evaluation
30. Providing administrative and financial guidelines
31. Monitoring assignments
32. Evolving media strategies in teaching learning process

Headquarters/RC/RSD

- Developing learner friendly mechanism
- Evolving various strategies to develop HRD

- Providing data and mission/vision statement to researchers
- Liaising with state, central governments, NGOs and various institutions
- Evolving promotional/publicity strategies
- Developing and maintaining university archives
- Assuring quality maintenance and consolidation
- Expanding international links

Regional centre

- A constant interaction between headquarters and regional centre
- Promotion and Publicity of Distance Education system
- Liaison between headquarter and study centres
- Staff Development (periodical training programmes for different categories of staff at the study centres)
- Pre-entry and post entry counselling for both prospective and enrolled Learners
- Exploring and establishing new study centres
- Recruiting Part-time tutors counsellors and their renewals
- Liaising with local Open and Distance educational/institution and government
- Examination arrangement
- Periodical monitoring and annual inspection
- Periodical review of various activities
- Projecting a better image of the institution.
- Networking to promote distance education by making use of local cable TV and other media
- Popularizing university website
- Encouraging computer enabled/mediated learner support services.
- Gaining and retaining good political will towards distance education system in the region
- Creating a sense of confidence among learners that the distance educational institution would take care of the teaching, learning and administrative needs
- Explore the possibilities of establishing and maintaining a “Model Study Centre in the premises of regional centre
- Arranging periodical meetings with all academics and non-academic functionaries of study centres and regional centres
- Providing base line data of the region for the research purposes
- Undertaking research on the various areas such as learners’ profile, educational needs and on existing programmes
- Periodic rationalisation of process, product and values as per the guideline of the university
- In the financial spheres of attainment of cost-effective and cost efficiency
- Delivery strategies on undertaking experiments on pilot basis.
- Regional Centre is always ready to evaluate any assignment emerging from Study centre and its headquarters

Study and programme centres

Study centre and programme centre is the real university of distance learner. The following are the broad functions of the study centre:

- Promoting and Publicing Distance Education and its programmes
- Providing Tutoring and Counselling
- Providing of Lab/Clinical/ Computer and Field experiences
- Pre-entry and post- entry counselling for both prospective and enrolled learners
- Maintaining file and records
- Liaisoning with local industries and educational institutions
- Handling /administration of assignments
- Continuous evaluation of learners
- Providing Audio, Video, Radio, T.V., teleconferencing
- Library facilities
- Marking and Grading of learners performance on assignments
- Conduct and arrangement examination
- Ready for annual inspection and monitoring
- Acting as local resource centre for ODL activity.
- Providing timely feedback to regional centres and headquarters.

At the micro level the functions of learner support services can be broadly classified as follows:

4.2 Functions of learner support services

Academic support functions

- 2 Counselling
- 3 Tutorial
- 4 Selection of counsellors / tutors
- 5 Media accessibility

Physical facilities

Audio-visual equipment

Rooms for tutorials, library etc.

Library containing reference books, videocassettes etc.

Conducting examinations

Administrative functions

- Public relations
- Management of study centre finances Examination and evaluation
- Promotional activities

Miscellaneous functions

- Promotion of Distance Education System in and around Study Centres
- Local representation of the University
- Helping in the organization of long term contact programmes outside centre.

The basic task should be to make a beginning to promote distance education.

4.3 Expected physical arrangements for study centres

- Two or three rent-free rooms for study centres establishment in the host institution.
- Arrangement for tutoring and counselling of both teachers and classrooms.
- Drinking water and toilet facilities.
- Book (correspondence texts, reference books), and background material.
- Periodicals on different subjects and on distance education.
- Laboratory equipment for science subjects or for any other subject with practical component or project work.
- Audio-visual aid and computing equipment (VCR, television set, radio set, tapes).
- Classroom equipment (overhead projector, slide projector, back-board, etc).
- Stationery and office materials
- Cupboards and cabinets.

4.4 ODL institutional philosophy, perspectives

In the process of collaboration and networking, ODL institution believe:

- In sharing of human and physical resources from all sources suitable to them and adequately pay to the host institutions for the services and infra-structural facilities.
- That they are only good monitors when they pay them adequately for the services they take from the host institutions.
- In sharing of space in a local education institution or non-educational organization their own identity.
- In encouraging and utilizing local part-time staff for the ODL institutions.
- In using part-time limited working hours / longer hours staff.
- Borrowing of talent and resources to extend seamless education to the public.

4.5 Network for support services

Efforts are now on to develop an Open Learning Network in the country to ensure cost-effectiveness and optimum utilization of the available expertise. A study conducted by BRAOU, Hyderabad (Raja Mouli, 1997) found “networking among various open and distance learning institutions will help to reduce the costs in planning, designing, commissioning and production of course materials and audio video programmes”.

Institutional collaborations and arrangements

Collaborative efforts at the individual as well as at the institutional level are important features of the ODL systems. Collaborations with institutions engaged in professional activity in specialized areas to provide training by resource pooling, both in terms of manpower and material is a useful strategy in ODL system.

Various forms of support service mechanism have been evolved to provide services for the distance learners. The arrangement differs from institution to institution; further there are distance teaching universities/institutions without regional and study centres placed in, and are called single tier system. There are some open learning institutions with headquarters and study centres, they are placed a two tier system, whereas institutions like IGNOU have headquarters regional centres and study centres, they are called 3 tier system.

Networking requires a paradigm shift from competitive spirit to collaborative spirit in which MoUs for collaboration are worked out in clear-cut terms. When Archimedes discovered the principle of lever, he said, “Give me a place to stand a lever, I will move the world”. If there is one lever that is required for our transition towards a learned society, it is the lever of education. The methodology of distance education with the emerging trends in student support services is going to act as the lever of education by increasing its scope and reach. The networking approach in student support services enables us to view education in the following ways:

- A shift from the “dissemination” approach concerned with effective distribution of information, to “development” approach focused at the effective distribution of information.
- Adoption of an essentially constructivist approach to curriculum development involves the use of relevant instructional designs that are linked to the personal situations of students.
- Interactive learning can occur in mediated settings available through audio and computer conferencing technology or in face-to-face situations as provided in study centres.

4.6 Categories and functions of regional and study centres

The regional centres are established to provide an effective link as liaison centres between headquarters and study centres. They are also local promotional centres of open university that direct, control, coordinate, guide and monitor the activities of the university in the region.

The study centre acts as a local resource centre to students. The students do not use the facilities, which the university provides, to them but they are essential (Stewart, 1983). The study centres are established to provide a meeting place for socialisation of the learners, contact classes, view/ listening audio and video lessons and getting the latest developments about their programmes. The study centres pedagogically empower learners by providing adequate counselling and

tutoring services for successful completion of programmes. The counselling and tutoring services provides stability, continuity and sustainability of learning of distance learners “The staff at the regional centres managing learning support must act as a single gateway to learners support and be pro-active to meet the learners’ needs and should have flexibility to respond to the learners needs. Staff development and training are very crucial for the staff working in the managing learner support. The learner should be the centre for all the activities aimed towards “learner support”. (Reid, 1995)

The network of Regional and Study Centres can be broadly categorized into (Satynarayana, 1988):

1. Strong Regional Centres and Strong Study Centres
2. Strong Regional Centres and weak Study Centres
3. Weak Regional Centres and strong Study Centres
4. Weak regional Centres and Weak Study Centres
5. Study Centres with Regional Centres
6. Regional Centres without Study Centres”

4.7 Nature of study centres

Study Centres, as far as possible, should be located in the existing academic institutions like colleges, schools and libraries. As the study centres remain open in the evenings and during holidays and vacations, it may not cause any inconvenience to the normal work of the institutions where they are located. This has the advantage of making use of an already existing infrastructure of the existing educational institutions such as laboratories, workshops etc. by the Open University.

4.8 Role of coordinators

Part-time Coordinators are drawn from institutions where the Study Centres are located to manage the Study Centres. IGNOU, coordinators are very senior people in the position of Principals/Vice-Principals/Senior Teachers/ Heads of University Departments, Professional Organisations/ and Voluntary Bodies.

The broad functions of a coordinator are as follows:

The Coordinator is responsible for all the activities of the study centre. He/she:

- i) Co-ordinates the work of all the counsellors and liaise with the university, the regional centre and the study centre;
- ii) is responsible for the maintenance of all records and registers in respect of all academic or administrative activities of the study centre;
- iii) supervises the work of the non-teaching staff of the study centre;
- iv) attends to all communications from the university, the regional centre and the study centres and sign all the papers pertaining to the study centre;
- v) informs the students of the time and date allotted to them for attending the contact programmes, tutorials etc.;

- vi) keeps the study centre open on days fixed by the university and assign specific days for counselling;
- vii) ensures timely evaluation of the written assignments by counsellors concerned and arrange to dispatch the corrected to the learners and maintain a record of the assignments;
- viii) ensures that the library services are properly maintained; and
- ix) performs such other duties as assigned by the university from time to time for the effective functioning of the study centres.

To provide effective Learner Support Services, some of the responsibilities performed by the coordinator are:

- Initiative leadership and commitment;
- Write introductory letters and reminding students about meetings/ sessions;
- Encourage group listening viewing of audio/ video programmes;
- Encourage to form self help group among the learners;
- Arrange informal meetings for counsellors or between counsellor;
- Arrange occasional lectures by outside speakers on different subjects; and
- Promote distance education to develop good relationship with local media.

4.9 Characteristics of 'good' study centres

Study centres are considered as resource centres to provide information, advise and counselling to the learners properly. A study centre creates an environment where:

- learners are attracted to attend counselling session regularly;
- a significant number of students take part in self-help groups and make use of the facilities provided; and
- self-help groups generate a sense of identity among learners and study centre becomes a social as well as an academic meeting place for them.

The success of the study centres depends to a greater extent on the initiative and commitment and academic leadership of the coordinator.

4.10 IGNOU's initiatives in learner support networking

Study centres network

In the entire gamut of Learners Support Service, IGNOU has undertaken various experiments. The university at present has a network of

- 1804 Study Centres (comprising study centres, specific programme centres, work centres, skill development centres) besides 46 Overseas Centres in Army, Air Force, Navy, Para-military (Assam Riffle, Project) (IGNOU, 2008) and 58 Regional Centres covering nationwide.

Regional centres net work

- 25: IGNOU Regional Centres (Regular)
- 8: IGNOU North East Regional Centres
- 7: IGNOU Sub Regional Centres
- 5: Recognised Army Regional Centres
- 8: Air Force Regional Centres
- 4: Navy Regional Centres
- 1: Assam Rifles Regional Centres
- 7: Recognised CRPF Regional Centres
- **65 Total** (IGNOU, RSD 2006)

IGNOU has many institutional strategies of learner support networking systems. Among them, some have been experimented upon and some are at discussion stage. The experiences and practices at IGNOU have led to organization of brainstorming sessions from time to time to expand the network of learners support. The ideas/institutional strategies expressed in this handbook are taken from IGNOU's archives. The learners support networking system shows that there are enough space for innovation and networking in the areas of learners support system. Figure 4 shows the institutional strategies of learners support services rendered by IGNOU.



Figure 4: Learner support services at IGNOU

4.11 Regular study centres

These Study Centres (SCs) offer most of the programmes of ODL institutions and are located in host institutions, which have provided rent-free accommodation. Study Centres are draw upon the existing talent and infrastructure of the host institutions on pay for the services. The main area of

teaching learning activities is organising tutor-counselling services through face-to-face and chalks and talks. The basic media such as audio, video, radio and teleconferencing equipment are generally provided by the ODL institutions to such centres. The ODL institution bears all the recurring and non-recurring expenditure of running the centre. All the study centres are provided with a library, necessary furniture and equipment. In BRAOU, Hyderabad as some of the Study Centres are headed by permanent staff of the university at the level of Assistant Director/Deputy Director whereas in IGNOU all the Co-ordinators at study centres are senior academicians of host institutions acting as part time staff. The IGNOU model of regular study centres is largely being followed by all the ODL institutions and dual mode institutions are adopting it with minor variations. The Study Centres also act as examination centres where learners have accessibility and convenience.

4.12 Sub-study centres

A sub-study centre (SSC) is established within the area of jurisdiction of a regular Study Centre, usually under its control. These SSC's are headed by an Assistant coordinator who reports to the coordinator of the Regular Study Centre. The justification for establishing such SSC's is that when the regular study centres are over crowded and are not able to provide proper services, then the regular study centre could explore the possibility of establishing sub-study centres as per the guidelines of the Regional Centre of the region. This sub study centre also acts as an examination centre.

4.13 Recognised study centres (RSC's)

This model is also being practiced at IGNOU. Recognised Study Centres are established by the initiative of industries, voluntary organisations, government undertakings and other charitable institutions. This type of study centres can be viewed as self-financing study centres. The ODL institution does not bear any recurring and non-recurring cost except payment made to the Co-ordinator, and however, if student enrolment increases, payment may be paid to an assistant co-ordinator. The host institution provides rent-free accommodation, furniture and equipments, and meets the expenditure on counselling. These study centres are established due to non-accessibility / viability of regular and sub study-centres of ODL institutions. From the sponsorship point of view also, it is encouraged to retain their employees by providing continuing educational opportunities as a welfare measure.

4.14 Special study centre

ODL institutions establish this special centres to take education to hitherto un-reached segments. A Special Study Centre is located in an institution like Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Voluntary Organisations, Panchayats, Co-operatives, Government Departments, public institutions, Jails and in Self-Help Group organisations. A special study centre can also be specially designated for women, or for visually challenged learners.

4.15 Partner institutions

The partnership arrangements have been made to supplement the ODL programme delivery mechanism and to expand alternative base of ODL delivery strategy. The primary objectives are to draw upon the resources already available with various organisations and institutions for effective delivery of ODL programmes. The limitation of this sort of study centre is to be seen in the perspective that these institutions should not be overloaded with profit motives, should be under rigorous control to be stipulated in the MOU, and overall control should lie on the ODL institutions. The partner institution should be considered as the service centre of the ODL institution. IGNOU started this with the computer programmes having partnership with APTECH, but discontinued it later. Partner institutions are there at present in IGNOU for international delivery of programmes.

4.16 Programme study centre

A programme study centre facilitates necessary learner support services for a particular programme, where there is thrust on practical component of teaching/learning process. Normally headed by the professionals, programme study centres cover professional and practical/skill-oriented disciplines like: Science, Technology, Engineering, Computers, Health Sciences, Library and Information Science and other professional and vocational courses.

These are headed by a Programme-in-Charge who is made responsible for planning and organization of all academic activities pertaining to the programme, viz. counselling, practicals, demonstration, field-work, assignment evaluation etc. The Programme-in-Charge is supposed to report directly to the regional centre and submit periodical reports.

The charges for use of equipments, laboratories etc. are to be paid by the ODL institution as per approved norms of payment. For secretarial assistance lump-sum charges may be paid on per student basis or as mutually accepted by both the host institution and the ODL institution.

4.17 Work centres

The work centres are similar to the programme study centres as they perform the same functions, but their nomenclature is different. These can be located in institutions and organizations having programme-specific equipment / laboratories for the conduct of practicals. For example, institutions providing computer facilities can arrange the conduct of practicals as and when required. These may function under the concerned programme study centre.

4.18 Satellite learning centre

This idea was popular at the stage of IGNOU's development. Using the facilities of transmission via satellite, we can reach the remotest part of the country. Thus, we have adopted the mode of 'Teleconferencing' by way of which classes conducted at IGNOU headquarters are telecast live via satellite through a dedicated channel called Training and Development Communication Channel (TDCC). Such classes are held normally 15 to 20 days per month. Under this scheme which is underway in collaboration with ISRO, Satellite Learning Centres (SLC) are provided with a dish antenna (with extended C-Band LNBC), a satellite receiver and a colour TV. The centre should have a hall and furniture free of cost with the capability of accommodating about 40 persons. The total cost of accessories along with that of installation comes to about Rs. 45,000/-, which is much less compared to the initial capital expenditure, required for a study centre. The SLC also should have an STD-telephone facility so that the learners viewing the programme may interact directly with the faculty members/experts at headquarters. The teleconference mode for providing instructions is already underway in the country. The schedules for teleconference are sent well in advance and the learners are asked to send queries which are consolidated at the transmitting end and responded to by the resource person at the studio. Queries may be sent by post or on the same day by fax.

4.19 Mobile study centre

A Mobile Study Centre is a van fitted with audio / video equipment and cassettes, library and folding furniture. It can go to remote places in a particular area on appointed days and timings with respective counsellors to provide counselling and audio / video support at the learners' doorstep, and also collect feedback of assignments and information. In the earlier stages of student support, some of the Regional Centres experimented with it and reached out to its learners who otherwise do not have access to regular study centres. Mobile science practicals was launched by Dr. BRAOU, Hyderabad in collaboration with Commonwealth of Learning but it was not found successful, it is an excellent concept that can be put to useful practice.

4.20 Distance learning facilitators

Distance Learning Facilitators (DLF) is a novel idea to spread the network of support services. DLFs will be persons, preferably retired, who have reasonably good background and experience in distance teaching. They are expected to provide general and if qualified, course specific counselling to the learners so that they do not suffer from a sense of isolation. The DLFs may be initially paid retainership charges and with an increase in learners they may be paid on per students basis. They will report to a specified officer of the university. This system is otherwise called single person study centre, but experience reveals that this system requires specific discipline expertise, and therefore, it is desirable to have a DLF on subject specific basis.

4.21 Mentoring

Mentoring is an emerging popular teaching-learning process predominantly used in the context of management/corporate training. Mentoring is an important device of support in the open and distance learning. It gained popularity especially in the professional studies, where practical/field level exposure is a must.

Mentoring has been defined as “facilitating experiences from a senior to junior” and a “process by which persons of superior rank, special achievements and prestige instruct, counsel, guide and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés”. Learning from each other, respecting elder’s experiences and one’s own are the elements of mentoring. Distance education is providing nevertheless self-learning material to its learners, it is observed that human support is a must. Hence, the ODL institutions try to provide this component particularly in the professional programmes like B.Ed, B.Sc (Nursing), computers, engineering and Post-graduate Diploma in Post-Maternity Child Care. In B.Ed programme of IGNOU school-based activities are undertaken by learners accompanied by the mentor to the extent that the activity was actually undertaken by learner in the school. In the areas of health sciences, particularly in B.Sc (Nursing) programme, the learners have to adopt one of the neo or post-natal mother and infant. As a part of curriculum the learner play the role of a mentor and the learner’s supervisor (specialist) also plays the role of mentor to the learner. Thus varied experiments are possible in ODL system.

4.22 Single window operations

Under the concept of diversified delivery system, IGNOU has “Entered into a collaboration with Indian Army, Air force and Navy, with the objective of extending the reach of education to the service personnel” (IGNOU, 2003 pp.16). Subsequently, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was also signed with Assam Riffle Project. These are called educational projects with the above organisations. This operation is called single window operation. “This scheme will facilitate greater participation by service personnel in the educational programmes without actually moving out of their units, except for counselling and examinations. All the Commands units will act as Recognised Regional Centres of Army, Air force and Navy and will co-ordinate all related activities in consultation with the Regular Regional Centres of IGNOU functioning in that region. Recognised Regional Centres have been established at five Army HQ Commands, eight Air Commands and four Naval Commands” (IGNOU, 1999).

4.23 Regional computer lab

For extending the learners support services for distance learners, IGNOU has established regional Computer Labs called ‘Tele-Learning Centres’ (TLCs) in 14 regional centres. Private institutions also run the TLCs for IGNOU. The learner goes to Tele-Learning Centre (for web-based), for information, internet access and face-to-face counselling programmes. The courses requiring TLC attendance insist on physical presence of the learners for practicals.

4.24 Multimedia learning centre

The Multimedia Learning Centre (MMLC) is at conceptual stage in IGNOU. Programme specific MMLC will be identified in the same manner as the existing Study Centres are identified. Specialized institutions in the programme areas, having the requisite facilities will get preference.

MMLC, which (can provide value-added services) could be set up by organizations, institutions or individuals capable of making the initial investments. For that they will have to obtain appropriate approvals to secure access to the IGNOU network. Then they can avail of the services, charge the students and share the proceeds in as agreed upon with IGNOU. There could also be a system of licensing MMLC on an annual fee basis which needs to be settled for each type of service.

MMLC would follow service-oriented approach in charging fees from learners based on the use of facilities.

It is the responsibility of the sponsoring organization to establish MMLC. Similarly, costs involved (i.e. capital and recurring costs) in installation and operation on various gadgets at MMLC will be borne by the sponsoring organization.

4.25 Self-help peer groups

The ODL institution by belief, conviction and commitment believes in learner-centered education. It is desirable to promote formation of Self-Help Group of learners. The ODL institutions should promote and sustain them for subsequent batch as of learners in a particular area. One way of establishing such groups is to establish contacts with people who are also studying (Hookham, 1995) in the same institution, may be in the same programme of study or other programme. These Students can form a peer group meeting at least once in a month to discuss their problems as well as achievements. Their problems can be classified and represent to the University. Learners coming from similar places and interior regions can share their knowledge and resources through SHGs. These groups are assigned with a resource person to take care of their needs and activities. The peer groups can meet and interact mostly during contact periods and share their learning experience, activities and difficulties and evolve appropriate and suitable learning strategies among themselves. SHGs could facilitate socialization and cultural transmission process among the open and distance learners.

Table 1: Functions of MMLC

Inputs by IGNOU	Output/services to be provided by MMLC (expected output)
Academic Services	
Study materials	a) Provides access to students for reference/supplies copies

i) ii)	Audio and Video Cassettes Specially prepared A/V tapes	b) Provides facility to listen/view A/V tapes (general and special tapes) Provides recorded A/V for those who are willing to buy them
	<i>Broadcasts & telecasts from AIR and DD</i>	c) Arranges facility to listen/view broadcast (radio and TV) lessons
	Audio and Video Tele- conference/tele-counselling	d) Facilities to participate and interact during tele- conferencing counselling and audio conferencing
	<i>Computer assisted learning VAN, E-Mail & other networks</i>	e) Facilities working and interacting on computers, E-Mail, VAN and other networks f) Provides arrangements to submit assignment responses (TMA) and get them evaluated through RCs
	Library	g) Arranges library facilities for reference (books and other relevant material)
	Newsletter	h) Provides copies to learners for information
	Performa/forms	i) Provides printed/copied performa
Administrative Service		
	Handbook & Prospectus H&Ps	Sells Handbook and prospectus
	Schedules	Provides schedules of multimedia diffusion to learners especially to those who register their names in MMLC mailing list.

4.26 Support for the differently-abled

Since ODL objective has been defined as “to provide education to deprived millions”, it is our responsibility to provide services to learners, who are differently-abled. The ODL can explore various ways to provide learning services under special study centre schemes to educate differently-abled people. Though a lot have to be done in this area, IGNOU provides audio learning materials for visually challenged learners. IGNOU also facilitates blind students to write examination by providing the services of amanuensis (IGNOU, 2003). However, a great deal needs to be done in this area.

CHAPTER 5

MANAGERIAL AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN LEARNERS SUPPORT

“Management of University should be based on the principles of participation, decentralization, autonomy and accountability” – Report of the UGC Committee towards a New Educational Management, 1990.

5.1 Managerial and administrative issues in learner support system

Management and administration are very important aspects of any organisational theory and practice. Management has been defined as ‘getting things done’, which includes human relations, productive forces, production and marketing. Administration also views organisational concerns more than enforcement and fulfilment of public policies. The manager / academic administrator in ODL institution should keep in mind all these issues and norms to make organisational goals attainable. Academic administration always emphasises on autonomy to design, develop and experiment things on pilot basis to consolidate the programmes and experiments. The issues of rigid administrative rules may not be workable; hence prudent decision-making without violating administrative and financial code is must on the part of academic managers.

In the face-to-face system, the teacher is confined to four walls of classroom, research and extension activities. Whereas in the open and distance education, the teacher in addition to designing, developing, acquiring feedback on the courses / programmes needs to collaborate and co-ordinate with various people such as academic and non-academic, technical and media people to develop self-learning packages for the cause of open and distance education.

The teacher in ODL system is a catalyst to organise and associate with various people to get the things done for ODL institutions. The teacher here appears to be a generalist and also a specialist in open and distance education. In this context, the teachers who are working for open and distance education should have multi-faceted traits, which are not practiced in the face-to-face institutions. The professional traits are broadly, cultural teacher, cultural obligation towards the society to bring a suitable learning package (as an agent for cultural society), a corporate responsibility to market the product (by means of pre, post and promotional activities of ODL system). Finally, the teachers are at distance with various experts, hence they need to be trained in techno-managerial skills to run the system more effectively, in an efficient fashion to satisfy their clientele as a consumer in market interpretations.

As stated above, any success of open and distance education system depends on pedagogical and administrative flexibility followed by consensus and

accountable system. Accountability with various monitoring devices is the milestone of managerial issues in open and distance education.

5.2 Managerial principles

To be a successful open and distance education, sound managerial principles and administrative set-up is must to maintain human and organisational behaviour. Let us see what are broad managerial principles involved in administration and management.

Luther Gullick, a renowned administrative thinker has propounded administrative functions as ‘**POSDCORB**’. Let us see this in detail.

- P – Planning:** Planning is an important activity for any organisation. It has been defined as ‘thinking before doing’. It is also a rational question on How? What? When? How? and Why? Questions are to be answered by the organisation. If we see from the best-practiced model of British Open University, planning constitutes an important functional element in the University administration. Planning of university policies based on short term and long term, reflects University’s vision and mission in wider context.
- O – Organising:** Organising both pedagogical and administrative are very important. Functional linkages among the various divisions in the open and distance education and its co-ordinating mechanism among its divisions and sub-divisions are also important for successful running of open and distance education institutions.
- S – Staffing:** Staffing is one of the most important activities in open and distance education system. The organisational pattern in open and distance education is totally different from face-to-face educational institution. It is both teaching and non-teaching staff, their co-ordinated efforts, institutional direction and integrity would be the milestones of its success.
- D – Directing:** Directing is an important activity in the open and distance education institution. It is the leadership and vision and mission and their staff development strategy that sets the organisational goals.
- Co – Co-ordinating:** Open and distance education is treated as an industrial form of education, where excessive functional distribution of work is being involved. It is said the left hand and right hand co-ordinated work would yield much better results rather than not knowing each others work. Co-ordination in the various areas of data gathering, functions and management is essential to provide better services to the isolated learners to make him a successful learner.
- R – Reporting:** Another area of operation in the open and distance education is reporting. Reporting mechanisms in formal and informal sources are must to get feedback from the operational areas to make desirable policies for

the system and distance learners. The whole exercise can be undertaken with effective and efficient management of information system, through people, records, research, monitoring and inspection reports.

B – Budgeting: Budgeting is also one of the most important activities in the open and distance education system. It should be a planned activity. Every rupee spent from the government treasury must be planned and it is auditable and accountable. If violated, the people who are responsible are punishable under the violation of financial credo/code.

Besides the POSDCORB, it is very important to have effective training for the people who are working for open and distance education. The ODL institutions recruit various people from various sectors. Their orientations and attitudes are different, hence the ODL institutions have to mould them according to the needs of isolated learners.

Classified by criteria of performance, the staff of public institutions can be classified into four groups (Prasad, 2000):

- The competent, but not committed
- The committed but not competent
- Neither competent not committed
- ‘Competent and committed’ (mostly required by ODL institutions)

It is stated that “The whole education process has not been provided the confidence to evolve its own value framework with frankness to confess the deficiencies of its practices. This could lead to a better understanding of ourselves, develop leaders within the educational institutions and finally, prevent individual glorification and institutional decay” (Satyanarayana, 2003). Keeping the application problems in view, it is felt that there should be administrative flexible system, where processes should be followed by a sound consensus and monitoring and accountable system of management and administration are in place. Coordination among the various divisions and integrity among the individual who are working for the cause of education would certainly ensure the success of open and distance education system.

CHAPTER 6

TRAINING FOR THE PART-TIME FUNCTIONARIES

“Solutions are likely to depend on dialogue and the involvement of people at various stages of the development of policy and practice, and the display of leadership qualities showing that one not only preaches, but ‘does’ ”
(Panda, 2004).

6.1 Introduction

Training for all functionaries involved in distance education is of utmost importance, since people working in the ODL institutions are drawn from various sectors / disciplines from the face-to-face institutions. Training is an important component to properly induct / assimilate personnel in the open and distance education institutions, to orient both teaching and non-teaching staff for working efficiently in the open and distance education. In the theory of open and distance education this is called ‘unconsciously induced face-to-face teaching bias into open and distance education institution’. Hence to avoid various organisational influences, training should be regular / continuous to induct people into ODL system. Let us examine various issues related to training in detail.

6.2 Nature of training programmes

Variety of training programmes are conducted in the open and distance educational institutions to cater to the training needs at various levels. The focus on staff development is to cater continuous training needs of the system.

The objective of an orientation programme is to familiarize with the job profile of part-time employees working at the study centre. Training is aimed for teaching and non-teaching staff, and periodical orientation, re-orientation is must to retain and refresh the staff in ODL institution.

The core skills required of a teacher now include the ability to interface with the technology, the ability to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each medium for effective instructional design and the ability to communicate effectively with students using different media. Normally there are three types of training of part-time functionaries:

- Induction
- Orientation
- Re-orientation

Induction meeting is the initial stage of a training programme to induct people into the system. It is desirable to conduct the induction meeting at the beginning of a job.

Orientation: There is also a training programme after the entry level, called *orientation programme*. It orients people in the system, its process, product and output. As we have emphasized earlier, open and distance education, follows industrial mode in its activities, but while rendering its services, it acts as the service sector.

Re-orientation is a periodical activity that can be undertaken after the orientation programme. It is a way to update the issues with latest developments. The study centres are managed by part-time people but entrusted with huge responsibilities. Hence, in a particular region, the main responsibility of a Regional Director and its staff is to orient and induct part-time staff in the business of open and distance administration and pedagogical issues.

6.3 Desirable aims and objectives of training

The objectives of training include the following:

- The process of training must be competent and committed so as to impart desirable traits and skills of the various personals and learners.
- Training is to impart abilities for system development.
- The oneness of communication is the aim of the institutional training; it denotes that right from part-time lower cadre staff to chief executive of the university would have the same information about the system and process.
- Training must evolve a model study centre within the region. As per IGNOU practices, it is usually done under one-day orientation programme for administrative staff of the study centre and one-day exclusive orientation programme for academic and tutor counsellors. However, besides this, exploration and examination model study centre, its activities and process will significantly enrich the personnel working in the system.

6.4 Areas covered in a training programme

Following areas may be covered in any such training programme:

For administrative staff

- 6 Basic theoretical issues of open and distance education including learners as the centre of ODL systems.
- 7 Ways and means of maintaining a study centre.
- 8 Maintenance of financial code and procedure for accountability.
- 9 Maintenance of records of library and counselling schedules
- 10 Handling of assignments and conduct of term-end examinations.

For tutor/academic counsellors

11. Concept of ODL and paradigm shift in education.
12. Concept of SLM and its implications: format, content and language issues.
13. Issues related to academic counselling.
14. Role and importance of assignment providing two-way communications.
15. Tutor comments and their significance in the ODL system.
16. Maintenance of schedules of assignment submission and counselling reports by the study centre.
17. Guiding learners to become independent learner in open and distance education.

6.5 Duration of training

Training activity can be both long as well as short-term:

- One-day programme as an induction.
- Half-day programme for learners' induction into the system.
- Three days programme, first day for open and distance education issues with functional relevance; second day for covering content areas and the final day for issues relating to first two days as brainstorming activity.
- Re-orientation programme can be of one, two or three days, depending on the needs and issues concerned.

6.6 Concerns of training

- Training should be an on-going activity.
- Every training outcome must be followed by desirable exist behaviour / systems orientation.
- It is taken not as on-job holiday.
- Training with application oriented objectives.
- Multimedia approach using audio, video and other devices.
- Training should be continuous with a consensus on the approach or strategy.

6.7 Traits of the trainer

33. He / she is good facilitator, guide and philosopher.
34. The trainer is both a teacher and a leader.
35. He / she should be an *Ajatha Satruvu* – a friend to everyone, an enemy to none.
36. A good communicator and a good listener.
37. Trainer is one who accepts his / her trainee as a future trainer.
38. Trainer should be pragmatic and involved a variety of people and experiences.
39. Trainer should believe in decentralization of activities.

40. Trainer should be culturally sensitive, corporately responsible and possess techno-managerial skills.
41. Trainer should empower the trainee.
42. Trainer must appreciate collaborative and team efforts.
43. Trainer must be academically pragmatic, functionally adoptive, professionally competent and committed to learners from system and its processes.
44. For a trainer, the system is the beginning and the end in itself.

6.8 Sum up

Training is continuous and an ongoing activity right from the stage of entry through the processes to the exist stages of ODL systems. Training minimizes culturally induced face-to-face teaching bias and practices into distance education.

CHAPTER 7

FUNCTIONAL ISSUES IN THE FIELD OF MONITORING

“Monitoring is not act of policing, but a shared responsibility for all the functionaries.”

7.1 Introduction

Monitoring is an important activity in the ODL system. The system runs on the philosophy of using spare human and intellectual resources from the host institution and pays them adequately. ODL system also believes that a good paymaster is a good monitor. Part-time people mostly run the ODL institutions, but in reality they have full time responsibilities. Learners expect full time services with higher degree of efficiency.

To deal with a variety of learners / issues / problems, the functionaries are equipped with proper orientation and attitudes. Hence there is a need to provide orientations to the functionaries. Besides, the orientations, periodical monitoring “for effective functioning of such a system, proper coordination and follow-up at every level” (Pandey and Parveez, 2006) is a must. In the monitoring process, pragmatic solutions should be evolved to simplify heavy responsibilities.

7.2 Issues relating to monitoring

While undertaking monitoring the following points may be considered:

- Monitoring is not policing over study centres’ functionaries.
- It is an attempt to organize functions / activities at the study centres to reach out to distance learners and achieve the objectives of distance learning.
- It is a matter of accountability on the part of Regional Centre / Study Centre to its headquarters.
- It is an act of aiding, advising, helping and directing the study centre with promised activities.

7.3 Various objectives of learners support services

- Learners Support Services (LSS) may be broadly viewed as all those services that are supportive of the learning experiences of the students either individually or collectively. The management in LSS covers the whole process of planning; organizing, command and control of effective and efficient provision of LSS to enable students attain the learning objectives. LSS forms an integral part of Open University system. It refers to any service other than actual course material, which an institution provides to its students to realize instructional objectives of the course.

- The main objective of the LSS is to motivate the students towards continuing learning.
- To provide all relevant information to the learners.
- To encourage students to make full use of the facilities provided by the university.
- To stimulate students to assimilate what they have learnt.
- To provide necessary counselling to motivate students.
- To create a climate of friendliness and socialization among students, faculty and as well as administration.

The pattern followed by most of the dual-mode distance education institutions is as given below:

- The LSS are mainly related to subject based tutorial services (personal contact programmes).
- The services are more in the form of one time contact group services.

The pattern followed by most of the single mode distance education institutions is:

- The LSS services are structured as a continuous activity.
- The LSS services are provided through the institutions of Study Centres (SC) and with multimedia aids.
- The LSS includes subject tutorial services, personal counselling and system based services.

7.4 Best initiatives to learners to support services

Besides the consolidation of systemic issues as given below, there is a need to explore technology mediated information communication technologies (ICT) devices to make monitoring activities a success. The various issues required for consolidation are listed below:

- Evolving a system of learner support management which facilitates pedagogical flexibility followed by consensus and an accountable system.
- Evolving a mechanism of learners support services to maintain continuity of concern for the learners from the entry to exit point.
- Exploring the possibility to provide drinking water, toilets, if possible, crèche and canteen facilities.
- Attending learner's query to make learners feel that the ODL has concern and care for their studies.
- Establishing a system of time-to-time monitoring system. Proper training must be given (i.e. those who are doing monitoring and those who are being monitored).
- The system of monitoring should not be taken as an act of policing but, on the contrary, it should be viewed as keeping up the promises and performances towards educational development.

- All the part-time functionaries' orientation / training must be done before entry into the ODL system.
- Criteria and procedure for selection of suitable functionaries at various levels be formulated by taking into consideration local factors and situations.
- Developing an induction kit and conducting programme-wise induction meetings.
- Developing student charters depending upon the institutional norms.
- Organizing adequate and efficient counselling / tutoring classes.
- Developing learner-friendly packages to resolve learner's queries.
- Evolving special strategies to solve the operational problems of special groups such as differently-abled person's, women and prisoners.
- Exploring the possibility to evolve postal, email, internet-supported counselling.
- Evolving and implementing monitoring mechanism for counselling / tutoring and assignments, and also providing feedback to the learners.
- Exploring the various possible ways to empower the learners especially in the areas of study skills, learning strategies and writing skills.
- Providing home study experimental kit in case of science and technology related programme.
- Encourage peer group interaction to promote co-operative learning.
- Working and managing needs to be reviewed on a continuous basis.
- Encouraging self-help groups in ODL system to share, learn, organise studies.

Adoption of the best models of monitoring shall facilitate mutual learning and sharing of experiences and feedback to the system will increase effectiveness and efficiency in the system and its practices.

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