



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

COURSE CODE: ODL 708

**COURSE TITLE: LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES IN DISTANCE
EDUCATION**

COURSE GUIDE

Course Code **ODL 708**

Course Title **Learner Support Services in Distance Education**

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ODL 708 : Learner Support Services in Distance Education is a semester, two credit unit course. It is a course for students who offer Postgraduate diploma in distance education programme however, it is also a suitable course of study for anyone who wants to acquire some knowledge of how to provide support to learners in distance learning.

The Course

This course is made up of three modules. Each module comprises five units and in all, there are 15 units. The units are, meaning of learner support services in open and distance learning, reasons for providing support to learners, theories of learning for learners' support, characteristics of distance learners, learning styles and orientations in distance

education, important elements in learner support services, role of study materials in open and distance learning, counselling/tutoring support services, technology mediated support services, interaction through assignments, personnel in learner support services, capacity building for support service providers, student information systems in ODL, research in learner support services and models of learner support in selected ODL institutions. The course material has been developed to suit not only distance learners in Nigeria by virtue of the fact that it has practical examples from the local environment but to also suit distance learners elsewhere given examples and illustrations of universal dimension. The intention is to make use of local experiences and situations including international illustrations to support the students while studying and to ensure that the content remains current.

This Course Guide is a window into the course because it tells you briefly what the course is about, what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through the materials. It suggests some general guidelines for the amount of time you should spend on each study unit of the course in order to complete it successfully. It also gives you some guidance on your tutor marked assignments (TMAs). Detailed information on TMAs is similarly made available. There are regular tutorial classes that are linked to the course. Though tutorial classes are not compulsory, but you are advised to attend these sessions.

What you will learn in this Course

This course material on Learner Support Services in Distance Education will provide you with interactive approach of finding out and understanding the meaning of learner support services and the reasons why support should be provided to you as a learner in distance education. It will take you through a process of examining the mechanisms/strategies of providing support services, give you handy information on the characteristics of distance learners, reveal to you the different types of available supports services with explanation on the theories that are relevant in providing support to learners just as it will examine the various types of support services like tutoring and teaching; advising and counselling; and the administrative services including the use of on-line and interaction through assignments. Similarly, you will come across and identify specific examples of how support service providers can interact with you as a learner using support as a platform to meet your needs. This course material will also show how support staff should be trained in order to improve on service delivery to learners. In addition, you will learn the steps to take on how to carry out research that are related to providing support in a distance learning outfit. Similarly, information would be provided on how some selected Open and Distance Education institutions across the world provide support to their learners out of which you can come up with your own version of how support service should be rendered to learners. As you go through the study material, you will learn important expressions and acquire knowledge that can be applied when you find yourself in a circumstance that require giving support to learners in a distance learning environment.

Course Aims

This course aims to give you an understanding of the concept of learner support services in ODL. The elements of learner support services, role of the support service providers and how they can function to assist learners by ensuring that they are well adjusted while study is made easy for them in the distance education programme.

These aims will be achieved by:

- a. Introducing you to the definitions of the concept of learner support services;
- b. Explaining to you what constitutes support services in ODL;
- c. Mentioning and describing theories of learning for learners' support;
- d. Outlining the characteristics of distance learners;
- e. Enumerating and explaining to you the learning styles and orientations in distance education;
- f. Listing the important elements in learner support services;
- g. Explaining the role of study materials in open and distance learning;
- h. Describing counselling/tutoring support services;
- i. Explaining how technology is being used in support services;
- j. State how interaction through assignments can be used to support learners in their studies;
- k. Mention the personnel in learner support services;
- l. List reasons to justify capacity building for support service providers;
- m. Explain the importance of student information systems in ODL;
- n. State the functions of research on learner support services in the development of ODL;
- o. State lessons that can be learnt from the models of learner support in selected ODL institutions

Course Objectives

In order to achieve the aims set out above, some carefully stated overall objectives must be considered. In addition, each study unit also has specific objectives. The study unit objectives are always included at the beginning of a study unit; you should read them before you start working through the study unit. You may want to refer to the objectives as you go through each unit to check on your progress. You should always look at the study unit objectives after completing a study unit. In this way, you can be sure that you have done what was required of you by the study unit. Set out below are also the wider objectives of the course as a whole. By meeting these objectives, you should have achieved the aims of the course. On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

1. Define the concept of learner support services
2. Explain using some specific examples, what the concept of learner support services means.
3. Itemise the reasons why it is important to provide support to learners.

4. Identify variety of theories that are related to support services in Open and Distance Learning
5. Mention ways by which the theories can be used to provide support and enhance success of learners in Open and Distance Learning
6. Identify variety of characteristics among learners in distance education
7. Briefly state the meaning of learning style and learning orientation
8. List three examples of:
 - a) Learning styles
 - b) Learning orientations
9. Identify the key elements of ODL support services
10. Give simple description of how study materials can be written in such a way as to break the challenge of isolation in distance education
11. Mention at least five examples of the services that can be rendered through counselling support
12. Mention at least three reasons why technology support is needed in the education service delivery system of distance learning
13. Enumerate at least five ways by which assignment can be used to encourage learning
14. Enumerate at least five personnel that are involved in providing support to distance learners and identify specific types of support services which they render.
15. Identify the different steps that can be undertaken by an ODL institution to build capacity for its learner support service providers
16. Identify areas needing research in ODL learner support service.
17. Mention five functions of student information system in Open and Distance Learning institution
18. Explain five lessons that can be learnt from support service delivery in the ODL institutions that were mentioned in this unit.

Working through This Course

To complete this course you are required to read the study units carefully and other relevant and other materials stated in the section on further reading. Each study unit contains Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) and Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) and at each point in the course you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of the course is a final examination. You will also find listed, all the components of the course, what you have to do and how you should allocate your time to each study unit in order to complete the course successfully and in good time.

Course Materials

Major components of the course are:

- 1) Course Guide
- 2) Study Units
- 3) References
- 4) Presentation Schedule

Study Units

The study units in this course (ODL 708) are as follows:

Module 1

Unit 1 - Meaning of learner support services in Open and Distance Learning

Unit 2 - Reasons for providing support to learners

Unit 3 - Theories of learning for learner support services

Unit4 - Characteristics of distance learners

Unit5 - Learning styles and Orientations

Module 2

Unit 1 - Important elements in learner support services

Unit2 - Role of study materials in providing support to learners

Unit 3 - Counselling/Tutoring support services

Unit 4 - Technology mediated support services

Unit 5 - Interaction through assignments

Module 3

Unit 1 - Personnel in learner support services

Unit 2 - Capacity building for support service providers

Unit 3 - Student information systems in ODL

Unit4 - Research in learner support services

Unit 5 -Models of learner support in selected ODLinstitutions

- University of South Africa
- Open University of United Kingdom
- University of Nairobi
- Open University of Sudan
- Open University of Sri Lanka
- University of Papua Guinea
- University of Bostwana
- The University College of Education, Winneba
- Zimbabwe Open University
- The Open University of Tanzania

Presentation Schedule

The presentation schedule included in this course material gives you the important dates of this year for the completion of tutor-marked assignments and for attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments by the due date. You should guard against falling behind in your work.

Assessment

There are three aspects in the assessment of the course. First is a set of Self – Assessment Exercises (SAEs), second is a set of tutor-marked assignments (TMAs), and third is a written end of semester examination. In tackling the assignments, you are expected to be sincere in attempting the exercises; you are expected to apply the information, knowledge and techniques gathered during the course. The assignments must be submitted to your tutor against formal deadlines stated in the presentation schedule and the assignment file. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will make up 40% (post graduate) of your total course mark. At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final written examination of two hours' duration. This examination will make up the remaining 60% (postgraduate) of your total course mark.

Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs)

Assignment questions referred as TMA (Tutor Marked Assignments) for each study units in this course are stated. You will be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your reading, and study units. However, it is desirable for you to demonstrate that you have read and researched more widely than the required minimum. Using other references will give you a broader viewpoint and may provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

When you have completed each assignment, send it together with a TMA (tutor-marked assignment) form to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given in the presentation schedule and assignment file. If, for any reason, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is due to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extensions of time will not be granted after the due date unless in exceptional circumstances. You are encouraged to submit all assignments.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination for this course will be for two hours' duration and it has a value of 60% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions, which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments (tutor-attended- to problems) you have previously encountered in this study material.

Use the time between finishing the last study unit and sitting for the examination to revise the entire course. You might find it useful to review your self-tests, tutor-marked assignments and tutor comments on them before the examination. The final examination covers information from all parts of the course.

Course Marking Structure

The following table lays out how the actual course marking is done.

Table I: Course Marking Structure

Stages of Assessment	Percentage of Scores
Assessments	40% (Postgraduate)
Final Examination	60% (Postgraduate)
Total	100% of Course Marks

Course Overview

The next table brings together the study units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow.

Table II: Course Organiser

Unit	Title of work	Weekly Activity	Assessment (end of Unit)
1	Meaning of learner support services in open and distance learning	1	Assignment 2
2	Theories of learning for learner support services	1	Assignment 3
3	Characteristics of distance learners	1	Assignment 3
4	Reasons for providing support to learners	1	Assignment 3
5	Learning styles and orientations	1	Assignment 2
6	Important elements in learner support services	1	Assignment 2
7	Role of study materials in providing support to learners	1	Assignment 2
8	Counselling/tutoring support services	1	Assignment 3
9	Technology mediated support services	1	Assignment 4
10	Interaction through assignments	1	Assignment 3
11	Personnel in learner support services	1	Assignment 3
12	Capacity building for support service providers	1	Assignment 3
13	Student information systems in ODL	1	Assignment 3
14	Research in learner support services	1	Assignment 2
15	Models of learner support in selected ODL institutions	1	Assignment 3
Total no of weeks		15	

How to Get the Most from This Course

In Open and Distance Learning (ODL), the study units replace the University Lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of ODL. You can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecturer. In the same way that the lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercise, for you to do at the appropriate points. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the study unit and how a particular study unit is integrated with the other study units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you

have completed the study unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the study unit, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives or not. If you make a habit of doing this, you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the study unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from a reading section or some other sources. You will be directed when there is need for it.

Self- Assessment Exercise (SAEs) are stated throughout the study units. Working through these SAEs will help you to achieve the objectives of the study units and prepare you for the assignments and examination.

You should do every SAE as you come to it in the study unit. There will also be numerous examples given in the study units. Work through these when you come to them too.

The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into any trouble, telephone your tutor immediately. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide necessary guidance. You are encouraged to take note of the following tips:

1. Read this course guide thoroughly.
2. Organise a study schedule. Refer to the course overview for more details. You should note that it is expected of you to devote at least 2 hours per week for studying this course. The number of hours to be devoted for intensive study stated above is outside other need-driven academic activities like self help, group discussion and instructional facilitation. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the study units. Important information e.g. details of your tutorials, and the date of the first day of the semester is available. You need to gather together all these information in one place, such as in your diary or a wall calendar. Whatever method you choose to use, you should write in your own dates for working on each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason why students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for him to help you.
4. Turn to unit 1, read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the table of content at the beginning of each unit. It will be helpful for you to always

read both the study unit you are working on and one of the materials for further reading on your desk at the same time.

6. Work through the Unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit, you will be instructed to read sections from other sources. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Keep in mind that you will learn a lot by doing all your assignments carefully. They have been designed to help you meet the objectives of the course and, therefore, will help you pass the examination. Submit all assignments not later than the due date.
8. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor.
9. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
10. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait until you get it back before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also as written on the assignment itself. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
11. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in the course guide).

Tutors and Tutorials

There are 15 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials together with the name and phone number of your tutor as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments. He will also keep a close watch on your progress or any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible. Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if: You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings. You have difficulty with the self-assessment exercises. You have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment. You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is your only chance to have a face-to-face academic contact with your tutor and to ask questions on problems encountered in the course of your study.

To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

Summary

Upon completing this course, you will be required to have acquired basic knowledge on learner support services in open and distance education. You will be able to answer questions like these ones.

1. In a sentence, mention the meaning of the concept learner support services in Open and Distance Education
2. Mention at least five general reasons for providing support to learners who are in the distance education
3. Itemise three reasons why it is important to provide support to learners.
4. Enumerate three theories of learning that are relevant to support services in ODL
5. Itemise five characteristics of learners in ODL.
6. Explain how the flexible nature of duration in ODL constitutes support for the learners.
7. State how course material can be used to break isolation in an ODL programme
8. State how counselling service can be rendered to support learners in distance education
9. Briefly explain why it is necessary to use technology mediated support in transmitting knowledge in ODL.
10. State five reasons why interaction through assignment is crucial in distance learning
11. Enumerate the major personnel in ODL Learner support services
12. Mention the different steps that can be undertaken by an ODL institution to build capacity for its learner support service providers.
13. State five ways by which learner support providers can use the student information system in an ODL institution.
14. State the major reasons why there are needs to conduct research in Learner support services



**PROGRAMME - POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA PROGRAMME IN DISTANCE
EDUCATION.**

**COURSE - ODL 708 LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES (GUIDANCE AND
COUNSELLING) IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

COURSE OUTLINE

MODULE 1

**UNIT 1 - MEANING OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES IN OPEN AND
DISTANCE LEARNING**

UNIT 2 - REASONS FOR PROVIDING SUPPORT TO LEARNERS

UNIT 3 - THEORIES OF LEARNING FOR LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

UNIT4 - CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTANCEE LEARNERS

UNIT5 - LEARNING STYLES AND ORIENTATIONS

MODULE 2

UNIT 1 - IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

**UNIT2 - ROLE OF STUDY MATERIALS IN PROVIDING SUPPORT TO
LEARNERS**

UNIT 3 - COUNSELLING/TUTORING SUPPORT SERVICES

UNIT 4 - TECHNOLOGY MEDIATED SUPPORT SERVICES

UNIT 5 - INTERACTION THROUGH ASSIGNMENTS

MODULE 3

UNIT 1 - PERSONNEL IN LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

UNIT 2 - CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SUPPORT SERVICE PROVIDERS

UNIT 3 – STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN ODL

UNIT4 - RESEARCH IN LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

UNIT 5 -MODELS OF LEARNER SUPPORT IN SELECTED ODL INSTITUTIONS

- **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**
- **OPEN UNIVERSITY OF UNITED KINGDOM**
- **UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**
- **OPEN UNIUNIVERSITY OF SUDAN**
- **OPEN UNIUNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA**
- **UNIVERSITY OF PAPUA GUINEA**
- **UNIVERSITY OF BOSTWANA**
- **THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**
- **ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY**
- **OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA**

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course material on Learner Support Services in Distance Education provides you with interactive approach of finding out and understanding the meaning of learner support services and the reasons why support should be provided to you as a learner in distance education. It will take you through a process of examining the mechanisms/strategies of providing support services, give you handy information on the characteristics of distance learners, reveal to you the different types of available supports services, explain to you the theories that are relevant to support in teaching and learning just as it will examine the various types of learner support like tutoring and teaching; advising and counselling; and the administrative services including the use of on-line and interaction through assignments. Similarly, you will be taken through specific examples of how support service providers can interact with you as a learner using support as a platform to meet your needs. This course material will also explain show how support staff should be trained in order to improve on service delivery to learners. In addition you will learn the steps to take on how to carry out evaluation and applied research that are related to providing support in a distance learning outfit. Similarly, information would be provided on how some selected Open and Distance Education institutions across the world provide support to their learners out of which you can come up with your own version of how support service should be rendered to learners. As you go through the study material, you are advised to take note of important expressions, words, points that will enable you to retain information and be ready to apply such ideas in a typical circumstance.

MODULE 1

UNIT 1 - MEANING OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

1.0 INTRODUCTION

By now you have read through the course guide which is part of your instructional package for this course. If you have not, please ensure that you read the course guide before reading your course material as it provides a comprehensive outline of the materials you will cover on a study unit basis, starting with the topic you are about to study: Meaning of learner support services in Open and Distance Learning. This study unit will guide you through descriptions that will lead to clarification and understanding of this concept. Let us look at what you should learn in this study unit, as specified in the unit objective.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this study unit you should be able to;

10. Define the concept of learner support services
11. Explain using some specific examples, what the concept of learner support services means.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Meaning of Learner Support Services

A careful look at the meaning of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) shows that it is a system in which learning opportunities are taken to the learner, irrespective of age, gender and prior learning, wherever he or she may be, giving him or her the freedom to choose the mode, medium, time, pace, process and purpose of learning while using any one form or combination of forms of available, suitable and appropriate technology. This also indicates that in Open and Distance Learning, learners are at the center of all activities. Following this, support is therefore provided to learners which is clearly reflected in the planning, the material development with, the choice and use of technologies. It is all these practices which are directed towards assisting the learners to succeed in their academic programme so as to be able to complete their study as at when planned that are referred to as learner support services. Learner support can therefore be described as a 'support system' underpinning material and learning task provision. It is the means through which individuals are enabled to make use of institutionalized provisions. Learner supporters are 'intermediaries', able to talk the language of the student/learner and to interpret the materials and procedures of complex bureaucratic organizations. It is like a service industry, in which the needs of customers are paramount. Sewart, (1993) described learner support services as a process in which the learner must

participate actively, as well as the tutor/supporter. Learner support services can as well be described as the non-instructional activities that are provided by an ODL provider to support learner's education, such as catalogues, schedules, admissions, assessment and placement, registration, financial aid, scholarships, billing, degree requirements, grades, transcripts, student clubs, counselling, faculty office hours, tutoring, laboratories, and library resources. In order to further provide clearer understanding of the concept learner support services, Bailey (1987) adopted a guidance approach, preferring to explain learner support service function through a definition of guidance. As defined, guidance means learner support which involves a range of processes that are aimed at helping individuals become more self-reliant and more able to manage their own personal, educational, and vocational development.

Self Assessment

- a. How would you describe the term learner support services? Quickly state this in the space provided below
- b. State three reasons why you think you would need to understand the meaning of the concept Learner Support Services

4.0 CONCLUSION

The need to have a knowledge of the concept Learner Support Services is very important because it serves as the basis for understanding the provisions that are available in an Open and Distance Education environment, the expectations of ODL and how to utilize the opportunities therein to enhance adjustment and ultimately to complete a course of study.

5.0 SUMMARY

- i. What you have learnt in this study unit concerns explaining the concept of learner support services in Open and Distance Education
- ii. An idea was provided on provisions in an Open and Distance Education that constitute support for learners.
- iii. The study unit was used for introducing you to the other units in the study material

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

10. In a sentence, mention the meaning of the concept learner support services in Open and Distance learning
11. Give examples of areas where learners can enjoy support from an Open and Distance Learning Institution

7.0 REFERENCES FOR FURTHER READING

Brindley, J. E. (1995). Learners and learner services: The key to the future in open distance learning. In J. M. Roberts, and E. M. Keough (Eds.), Why the

information highway? Lessons from open and distance learning. Toronto: Trifolium Books Inc.

Brindley, J. E., & Whelan. (1987). A model for the delivery of student services. Paper presented to the International Workshop on Counselling at a Distance, Cambridge, U.K.

Evans, T., & Nation, D. (Eds.). (1989). Critical reflections on distance education. Deakin Studies in Education Series 2. London: The Falmer Press.

Lyons, J. W. (1990). Examining the validity of basic assumptions and beliefs. In M. J. Barr, M. L. Upcraft, & Associates (Eds.), *New futures for student affairs* (pp. 22-40). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Paul, R. H. (1988). If student services are so important, then why are we cutting them back? In D. Sewart, & J. Daniel (Eds.), *Developing distance education* (pp. 50-56). Proceedings of the 14th World Conference at Oslo, Norway. Oslo: International Council for Distance Education.

UNIT 2 - REASONS FOR PROVIDING SUPPORT TO LEARNERS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

After you have read and understood the meaning of the concept, learner support services in Open and Distance Learning, we can now discuss the reasons for providing support to learners who are going through the Open and Distance Education programme. The reasons for providing learners with support provide explanation on why distance education providers necessarily should make various provisions to learners in their academic programmes. It is these support that will complement the learning activities that will eventually result in assisting learners to acquire coping skills that would help them to be able to adjust to study effectively and efficiently.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

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

1. Itemise the reasons why it is important to provide support to learners.
2. Mention at least five general reasons for providing support to learners who are in the distance education
3. List five types of support services that learners can access in the ODL

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 You will remember that while discussing the meaning of Open and Distance Learning, it was mentioned that flexibility provides for a wide range of choices which can be

made by learners. Similarly, it provides access to instruction in order to ensure that there is broad availability of educational opportunities to all. Openness in ODL here disregards age, previous level of academic achievement that can create artificial barriers to education as a life-long pursuit in a democratic environment. This is the reason why ODL is a cost-effective system of instruction that is independent of time, location, pace and space. It can also be stated that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) means the system whereby learning opportunities are taken to the learner, irrespective of age, gender and prior learning, wherever a learner may be, giving him or her the freedom to choose the mode, medium, time, pace, process and purpose of learning while using any one form or combination of forms of available, suitable and appropriate technology. Learners are free to make the choice of seeking and accessing supports in all its entirety or they may decide to study on their own or concentrate to use the resources which they consider would help them to succeed in their studies. Research studies and the philosophical foundations in distance education reveal that, though the distance learner enjoys the freedom of learning by acquiring the learning materials from the institution, which are designed mostly for self study, distance learners still face different types of problems or barriers at different stages during their learning period which need to be taken care of by the ODL institution. The barriers identified are:

- **Study related barriers:** Difficulty in understanding/comprehension the subject matter, lack of awareness about carrying out /writing assignments or how to present answers to the questions etc.
- **Time related barriers:** Lack of time to attend contact classes, to study at home or workplace in view of other responsibilities and priorities.
- **Institutional barriers:** Non-receipt of books in time, lack of information regarding contact classes, assignments, dates of examinations, etc.
- **Personal barriers:** Lack of encouragement and guidance from family members in some cases and financial and psychological problems.

The above mentioned barriers in distance learning show that an ODL institution therefore has the responsibility of providing support for all students in their academic studies in the learning environment. Support here should not be taken as “propping-up” or giving assistance to the weak, the frail, the sagging or the problematic learners. Rather, it

should be seen as rendering assistance or providing help to learners. According to Ipaye (2004), nobody, no matter how upright he or she stands, no matter how strong, and no matter how problem-free, does not need assistance at one time or the other. Learner support in ODL is not concerned, as some perceived it, only with dealing with "learners with problems", neither does it focus only on "solving learners' problems", nor on helping only those with difficulties in their academic work. It does all these but does not stop there. For example, learner support is much involved in pre-admission enquiries, orientation issues, registration matters; it is much embedded in transition issues as well as learning needs issues. While only a few learners may have problems, all learners have particular needs; all learners need information on various aspects of the system and all learners need guidance on matters pertaining to registration while coming fresh into a programme or into an institution. If nothing else, every learner, at one time or the other, has a question tugging in his or her mind which he or she wants to ask someone who cares, who listens, who knows and is willing to answer or who may not know but is willing to direct or help to find out. It has been said that Learner support is a major area of concern for distance education; it is one of the most important subsystems in ODL, and it is an all pervasive component of educational processes which ensures that learning and teaching are approached from a learner centered vision of education.

- **Personal support throughout study:**

Learners require personal support throughout their study. Such support enables them to clarify possible ways forward and make progress, it helps them to deal with the inevitable problems that will arise. Support staff can be provided for learners with special requirements and specific needs. For an example, disabled learners, as well as those with other special needs such as exam anxiety. Similarly, support can also be based on the objective of enabling all learners to lead a full student life and to meet the University's academic requirements. Learners need support because there is no student, especially in the developing nations, having registered for a course, would want to abandon it half-way. Personal support actually goes a long way in helping learners achieve their goal of registering for an academic programme and completing it to obtain a certificate.

- **Welfare support :**It is obvious that, higher education generally can be very stressful particularly for ODL learners. However, Learners need to know that while they experience stress, anxiety and depression there are a number of sources of help that they could turn to for assistance.
- **Communication and interpersonal relationships and networking:** A very crucial reason why learners need support services is to help in sustaining personal and interpersonal relationships that will help them to build a networking of learners with learners and learners with staff and the university. In fact, in most cases, it is the support staff that help learners get net-worked with their studies and study materials. Through the following communication activities which are prominent for support staff though not limited to them, learners are assisted to get connected with the system.

- correspondence with tutors via letter or email
- telephone discussion with tutors
- telephone/online discussions led by tutors
- tutorials: f2f; chatrooms; teleconference; e-mail
- weekend study sessions: f2f; chatrooms; teleconference; e-mail
- field trips
- newsletters and news bulletins
- radio tutorials
- self-help groups
- social events
- web sites (especially bulletin boards).
- **Support for peer tutoring:** Some learners may wish to establish groups on their own to facilitate peer tutoring where they learn from each other. Peer tutoring in some cases may in fact be more beneficial to some learners than tutor led tutorials. Support staff should not only support such ideas and moves but should also get involved in helping learners to organize and source for members etc. Support staff may also be required to tutor the learners in the art and act of peer tutoring. This in fact is most economical to the institution since learners do not get paid for tutoring each other.

• **Examination and Records**

Learners need support from the Directorate of Examination and Records in the University. They require accurate and clear information on the conduct of examinations and assurance that their records of performance are well kept. They also needed to be provided useful information incase there is conflicting records.

• **Library Services**

Learners in the ODL programme need to consult the library staff for information on how to link up with the virtual library or electronic library. In some Universities, learners are assisted to locate printed reading materials.

• **Student Advocacy**

Learners require help from support staff to put them through in understanding their problems, personal difficulties and concerns .They also understand the language of authority and the manners of administration. Communication between learners and the institution will most likely break down if support staff shy away or neglect their advocacy roles. Advocacy could also mean getting parties to know more about each other, and understand each other better. The third party in-between is always the support staff. Often, standing in between the two, s/he gets bruised, but that is part of the hazards of his/ her job.

According to Moore and Kearsley "Most students involved in distance education at the present time are adults." However, a minority of distance students will not be able to cope with the absence of the teacher-as-authority figure in distance learning (Moore and Kearsley, p. 166). The majority of distance students, after overcoming their initial anxiety, "find distance education that is well designed and well taught to be an exciting, even exhilarating experience because they have the structure and interaction provided by a teaching institution yet have freedom to conduct much of the learning themselves" (Moore and Kearsley, p. 171).

Frequent communication between learners tutors/teachers is a great motivating factor for successful learning. Teacher interest is not only essential to overcome learning problems but also enables students to measure their own value systems about their studies as well as their own future. Technological tools assist in this task.

Peer support in learning is highly beneficial: Sharing one's own ideas and responding to the ideas of others improve thinking and increase understanding. Learning can improve by it being a team effort rather than a collection of solo performances. Study cell facilities provide tremendous opportunities for peer supported learning.

Feedback: Knowing what you know and what you do not know can be a focus for future learning. Regular feedback on their performance helps students learn better and deeper.

Learner services exist to serve the mission and objectives of the institution, and this will determine to a great extent where resources are focused (Lyons, 1990). Hence, it is important to assess learner needs within the context of the mission of the institution. For example, if providing access to educational opportunities is the most important objective of the institution, one implication may be that there are large numbers of learners who enter without adequate preparation. In this case, investment of resources will most likely be needed in the early stages of study to ensure that interventions are made when they are needed most to give learners the best opportunity for success.

Some other learner specific and individual reasons why they should seek to enjoy support services are:

- To access face-to-face interaction through the academic counsellors and co-learner at the study centre on specified Sundays;
- To reduce the sense of isolation among the learners by communicating through different media;
- To enjoy guidance on course choice, preparatory diagnosis and study skills. To facilitate students' learning of instructional materials and regular formal and informal learning environments such as access to group learning in seminar and tutorials.
- To have delivery of specified course contents at residential schools and other

prescribed face to face interactions with distance learners.

- To have essential feedback mechanism characteristic of effective Open and Distance Learning.
- To participate in regular orientation programmes for new students and staff of the NOUN.
- To monitor academic progress and liaise with peer groups.
- To enjoy provide on-line learning support particularly for students who have access to and prefer web-based learning environment.

Self Assessment

Quickly state three reasons why learners need support in an Open and Distance Learning.

4.0 CONCLUSION

You have gone ideas on the reasons why learners should seek and access learner support services in the course of their study in distance education. Some of the reasons advanced show that it could be helpful if supports re sought by learners while it may at the same time , it is not compulsory to do so. It is however clear that support services could act as catalyst and enhancer to learners in the course of study and a propelling force to assist learners in pursuing knowledge acquisition and success in a programme of study.

5.0 SUMMARY

- i) You have gone through the major reasons why a learner should seek support in a programme of study in distance education
- ii) Different types of support were itemised and how they could be helpful to learners
- iii) It was also stated that learners have the opportunity to choose which type of support to access in distance learning giving the flexible nature of distance learning.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i) Itemise three reasons why it is important to provide support to learners.
- ii) Mention five general reasons for providing support to learners who are in the distance education
- iii) List five types of support services that learners can access in the ODL

7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 THEORIES OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is important for you to identify theories that are related to learner support services and how they can be applied in the activities of providing support to learners in the Open and Distance Learning environment. Basically, theories of learner support services provide ideas on the different dimensions of providing support, how support can be provided, circumstances in which support could be provided and how support services could be helpful in academic programmes being offered through Open and Distance Learning. It is obvious that the field of open and distance learning (ODL) has changed a great deal over the years. Many factors have contributed to the growth and development of ODL including increased pressure for access to educational opportunities, technological innovations, and vast economic changes on a global scale. Open and Distance Learning is therefore recognized for playing an important role in offering educational opportunities to people who might not be able to gain access to education through the conventional programmes of studies. Following the development of distance learning, practitioners and researchers have become more critical in their analysis of the teaching-learning process so as to be able to improve on the method of service delivery that will also result to more functional intervention that would reduce attrition and increase learners completion rate in their academic pursuit. Beyond the different models of explaining how learning can take place through mass production of learning materials, this unit explores theoretical explanations on how to achieve effective learning through various support systems.

2.0 OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Identify variety of theories that are related to support services in Open and Distance Learning
2. Mention ways by which the theories can be used to provide support and enhance success of learners in Open and Distance Learning

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

There are different theories of how people learn. In this unit, these theories would be explained while ideas would be provided on how to apply them to support learners in typical learning environment through the use of study materials.

According to Burns (1995) learning can be regarded as a relatively permanent change in behaviour. Behaviour in this context includes both observable activity and internal processes such as thinking, attitudes and emotions. Similarly, motivation is included in Burns concept and definition of learning. Burns considers that learning might not manifest itself in observable behaviour until some time after the educational program has taken place.

- Sensory stimulation theory
- Reinforcement theory
- Cognitive-Gestalt approaches
- Holistic learning theory
- Facilitation theory
- Experiential learning
- Action learning
- Adult learning (Andragogy)
- Why consider learning theories?
- References

Sensory Stimulation Theory

The concept of learning can also be understood using Traditional Sensory Stimulation theory which explains that effective learning occurs when the senses are stimulated (Laird, 1985). Laird quotes research that found that the vast majority of knowledge held by adults (75%) is learned through seeing. Hearing is the next most effective (about 13%) and the other senses - touch, smell and taste account for 12% of what we know. According to this theory, by stimulating the senses, especially the visual sense, learning can be enhanced. However, this theory posited that if multi-senses are stimulated, greater learning takes place. In order to achieve this, senses would have to be stimulated through a variety of colours, volume levels, strong statements, facts presented visually, use of a variety of techniques and media.

Reinforcement theory

This theory was developed by the behaviourist school of psychology led by B.F. Skinner. It was stated by Skinner that behaviour is a function of its consequences. According to him, a learner will repeat the desired behaviour if positive reinforcement (a pleasant consequence) follows the behaviour.

It was also stated that, positive reinforcement or rewards can include verbal reinforcement such as 'That's great' or 'You're certainly on the right track' through to more tangible rewards such as a certificate at the end of the course or promotion to a higher level in an organisation.

Negative reinforcement can also be applied depending on the behaviour been exhibited by the learner. Negative reinforcement can take the form of punishment which is applied to weaken a behaviour because a negative condition is introduced or experienced as a consequence of the behaviour and teaches the individual not to repeat the behaviour which was negatively reinforced. Burns (1995) explained that in behaviourism, a set of conditions is created which are designed to eliminate behaviour. However, it was further stated that punishment is widely used in everyday life although it only works for a short time and often only when the punishing agency is present.

Burns notes that while Competency Based Training is based on this theory, it also useful in learning repetitive tasks like multiplication tables and work skills that require a great deal of practice but higher order learning is not involved. It is however important to mention that this theory is criticised for been rigid and mechanical.

Cognitive-Gestalt approaches

This theory of learning is based on the concept that individuals have different needs and concerns at different times. It also emphasis the importance of experience, meaning, problem-solving and the development of insights (Burns 1995). According to Burns, the theory is prone to the use of subjective interpretations in different contexts.

Holistic learning theory

The basic premise of this theory is that the 'individual personality consists of many elements such as the intellect, emotions, the body impulse (or desire), intuition and imagination that all require activation if learning is to be more effective.

Facilitative learning theory (the humanist approach)

The propagandist of facilitative learning theory was Carl Rogers. The basic premise of the theory is that learning will occur by the educator acting as a facilitator, that is by establishing an atmosphere in which learners feel comfortable to consider new ideas and are not threatened by external factors (Laird 1985.)

Other characteristics of this theory include:

- a belief that human beings have a natural eagerness to learn,
- there is some resistance to, and unpleasant consequences of, giving up what is currently held to be true,
- the most significant learning involves changing one's concept of oneself.

Facilitative teachers are:

- less protective of their constructs and beliefs than other teachers,
- more able to listen to learners, especially to their feelings,
- inclined to pay as much attention to their relationship with learners as to the content of the course,
- apt to accept feedback, both positive and negative and to use it as constructive insight into themselves and their behaviour.

Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning,

- provide much of the input for the learning which occurs through their insights and experiences,
- are encouraged to consider that the most valuable evaluation is self-evaluation and that learning needs to focus on factors that contribute to solving significant problems or achieving significant results.

Experiential learning

Kolb proposed a four-stage learning process with a model that is often referred to in describing experiential learning (McGill & Beaty 1995). The process can begin at any of the stages and is continuous, ie there is no limit to the number of cycles you can make in a learning situation. This theory asserts that without reflection we would simply continue to repeat our mistakes. The experiential learning cycle:

Kolb's research found that people learn in four ways with the likelihood of developing one mode of learning more than another. As shown in the 'experiential learning cycle' model above, learning is:

- through concrete experience
- through observation and reflection
- through abstract conceptualisation
- through active experimentation

Action Learning

Action Learning is the approach that links the world of learning with the world of action through a reflective process within small cooperative learning groups known as 'action learning sets' (McGill & Beaty 1995). The 'sets' meet regularly to work on individual members' real-life issues with the aim of learning with and from each other. The 'father' of Action Learning, Reg Revans, has said that there can be no learning without action and no (sober and deliberate) action without learning.

Revans argued that learning can be shown by the following equation, where L is learning; P is programmed knowledge (eg traditional instruction) and Q is questioning insight.

$$L = P + Q$$

Revans, along with many others who have used, researched and taught about this approach, argued that Action Learning is ideal for finding solutions to problems that do not have a 'right' answer because the necessary questioning insight can be facilitated by people learning with and from each other in action learning 'sets'.

Adult Learning theory (Andragogy)

Malcolm Knowles (1978, 1990) is the theorist who brought the concept of adult learning to the fore. He has argued that adulthood has arrived when people behave in adult ways and believe themselves to be adults. Following this, they should be treated as adults. He taught that adult learning was special in a number of ways. For example:

- Adult learners bring a great deal of experience to the learning environment. Educators can use this as a resource.
- Adults expect to have a high degree of influence on what they are to be educated for, and how they are to be educated.
- The active participation of learners should be encouraged in designing and implementing educational programs.
- Adults need to be able to see applications for new learning.
- Adult learners expect to have a high degree of influence on how learning will be evaluated.
- Adults expect their responses to be acted upon when asked for feedback on the progress of the program.

Adulthood as a social construction

Pogson and Tennant (1995) provide a perspective of adulthood as a social construction. They posited that the concept of a life's course varies for different individuals and different cultures; therefore trainers and adult educators should be wary of definitive views of adults and their behaviour.

Burns would probably support this view as he discusses the notion that 'definitions of the adult are not clear' and says 'the same is true of adult education'. He discusses the 'petrol tank' view of school education: 'fill the tank full at the only garage before the freeway, then away we go on life's journey' (Burns, 1995). He goes on to discuss that problems can arise when people have not had their tank filled completely at school and he extends the metaphor to suggest that there should be service stations along 'the length of the highway of life'.

The question could be asked - when is maturity complete? Is there no further development after a certain stage in life?

Some authors think that while children at approximately the same age are at approximately the same stage of development, the same cannot be said of adults. Adults would vary in levels of knowledge and also in their life experiences. There could be said to be tremendous variation in adult experience.

An adult's emotional response can affect learning

Some adults can approach formal educational settings with anxiety and feelings of high or low self-efficacy. Their approach to new learning contexts can be influenced by how they appraise or evaluate the new experience. For example: given two adults where an exercise is about to begin, one individual may interpret the exercise in such a way that leads to a feeling of 'excitement', while the other person interprets the exercise in such a way that leads to the feeling of 'embarrassment'. It is self evident that the way the individual interprets the situation and the subsequent emotion that arises, will affect the kind of action the individual is to take. (Burns, 1995,)

Burns considers that such appraisals, coupled with labels such as 'fear' or 'anxiety' can lead some learners to emotionally disengage from the source of discomfort that is the learning experience. However, when coupled with labels such as 'excitement' or 'challenge' the learner is led to take actions that focus on the task.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It would be helpful to articulate a conceptual model or framework that would constitute

support to learners using any of the theories mentioned above. It is obvious that application of any of the theory could depend on the personality of learner concerned, population of learners, age of learners, context where learning takes place and availability of learning facilities. However, the features of the theory could provide ideas that would constitute an enhancer that would facilitate learning among learners in Open and Distance Education offerings.

Similarly, the features of each model can be used to articulate the role of learner services within the institution and show how interventions facilitate the learning process throughout the "life cycle" of the learner, from first contact to leaving. The development of a framework can include definition of each service, possible delivery modes, identification of priorities, staff roles, and level of staff training required to deliver various interventions.

It is however possible for an ODL institution to develop a learner support or intervention model that would facilitate learning. In order to achieve this, there are a number of key issues to be considered. Some of the issues which are common to many institutions are presented here below.

- 1) congruency between learner services and the institutional mission and culture
- 2) fiscal restraint and resource location
- 3) centralization v. decentralization (control, authority, consistency in service)
- 4) recruitment and marketing v. learner advocacy
- 5) universality of service
- 6) reinvestment: staff development, research and evaluation
- 7) external pressures: access demands, use of technology, competition

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has summarised a range of learning theories that can be applied to learner support services. Support and learning activities can be designed and implemented to take principles of learning into account. Also, it is interesting to think about individual differences among learners and to work towards including activities that have variety and interest for all the learners in educational programs. Most importantly, since the major medium of learning in Open and Distance Education is study materials, it becomes very important for the course writers to be sensitive to the facts of individual differences and the issue of learner separation from learning environment in the design and preparation of all the instructional materials so that they would be able to provide the required support that would help learners to read without much problem, understand and be encouraged to apply the knowledge and skills gathered from their course of study.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i) Enumerate three theories of learning that are relevant to support

services in ODL

- ii) State briefly, how learning can be facilitated through the use of course materials
- iii) Mention and explain a theory of learning that addresses the context of Open and Distance Learning

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UNIT 4 CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance Learners are often described as “new learners”. Most learners in distance education are adult but it is glaring that many young members of the society have taken to distance education. Learners in distance education have a wide variety of reasons for learning at a distance. For an example, many of them had left the formal educational system and want to drop-in back into the system informally; many no longer like the idea of going to school but would like it if the school can come to them; many have the constraints of time, they are no longer able to sit six to eight hours in class listening to teachers teaching; many in fact cannot afford losing their jobs to go back to school and many do not have the opportunity for study leave with pay. Availability of distance learning facilities and the ability to finance their schooling are other reasons why some adults cannot go into conventional universities. Having been out of the formal school system for some time, the opportunity to come in contact with other students from different social, cultural, economic, and experiential backgrounds both face to face and electronically also push some learners to go into ODL. The present day availability of technological facilities that can easily be used to promote and facilitate leaning also motivate people to be interested in

distance learning. In Nigeria, the inability to gain admission into conventional universities because of lack of access, in spite of their having the pre-requisite qualifications, is one major reason why young applicants rush into the distance learning programmes.

Following the achievement which ODL institutions across are making to increase access to education and the interest which members of the society are showing in ODL, it becomes necessary to find out about the characteristics of the distance learners so as to be able to understand them and know ways by which support services can be made available to them to ensure that learning is made easier in the course of their study. This is particularly important since it is well known that the characteristics of distance learners, are quite different from those of traditional, “old learners”. Similarly, even amongst distance learners, their characteristics are as varied as the number of students, because every student is different from the other, yet all of them are distance learners whose main role and interest is to learn (Ipaye, 2004). Schuemer, (1993) reported that in a distance education setting, the process of student learning is more complex for several reasons. He argued that Distance Learners have a variety of reasons for taking courses, and that such reasons are dependent on their characteristics and needs. It was reported by Ipaye, (2004) that, learning at a distance is a very challenging task, yet under the best of circumstances, the challenging task requires motivation, dedication, planning, strategising and the ability to analyse and apply the information on learners constructively for instructional facilitation.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

1. Identify variety characteristics of learners in distance education
2. Mention at least five intervention approaches of addressing concerns of learners in distance education.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

It is expected that after studying and identifying relevant learning theories on support services in distance education, you would be able to have clear understanding of the following discussion on the characteristics of learners in distance education. A knowledge of the characteristics is needed so as to be able to provide useful and relevant support that would make learning easy for such learners who are in the distance learning programme. You would also be able to appreciate the fact that the characteristics of learners in distance education are different from the conventional system. The characteristics are stated below:

Age range of distance learners

In the conventional universities in Nigeria, the age range is between 15 and 24, while the average age of students is below 24; in the Open and Distance Learning system, students are adults, most of who are well over the age of 24, with an age range of between 19 and 70, a rather wide range. On the average, they are older than students in the conventional university. At the National Open University of Nigeria, for example, the first batch of registered students were 9,890. The age distribution is stated below:

Table 4.1: Age Distribution of first set registered students in the National Open University of Nigeria, 2004 (N=9,840)

Age bracket	Frequency	Percentage of total	Remarks
Below 16	148	1.6	The youngest group of learners
16- 20	712	7.5	
21-25	595	6.3	
26-35	3,258	34.3	
36-45	3459	36.5	
46-55	1182	12.5	
56 – 65	119	1.3	
66- 75	12	0.1	The oldest group

The age range as a characteristic is important because according to Ipaye (2004), it provides information on learners' work experience, background, prior learning, educational experiences and exposures which are capable of affecting learners' motivation and interest that could have impact on learners' performance.

Distance Learners work and learn

In conventional universities, virtually all students are, or assumed to be full time students whereas, in open and distance learning, most students learn as they work. Most of them have jobs, and families, and now add another dimension to their life by going into distance learning, (which many in Nigeria call part-time studies), a self-instructional mode, within, hopefully, a virtual environment. As Spodick (1995) and North (1995) noted, "For many workers, taking a year or two off from work to go back to school is an increasingly unacceptable trade-off. It is much tougher to look for another job afterwards, despite new training, since the training may not directly relate to the changes in the job which have come about during those years".

In Nigeria, many civil/public servants feel reluctant taking time off to go for full time studies because on completion of the studies, and if they are lucky to be re-absorbed, they may often than not, go back to the same position and salary grade level on which they were before going for higher studies. Statistics shows that more than 41% of those studying by ODL are employed. Employment history, type of skills and knowledge which ODL students bring to their studies are capable of influencing their opportunities to put any new

learning into practice. Similarly, it affords them the opportunity to immediately apply what they currently learnt to what they currently do at work especially where there is a correlation.

Unemployed

Some ODL students are unemployed with lots of time spent on job hunting physically or on the web, yet they have a hunger for further learning. Some believe that obtaining higher qualifications may open the doors to employment but since they may not have the wherewithal to pursue full time studies, distance learning provides a suitable opportunity.

Long loss of contact with formal learning

A number of distance learners had broken contact with formal school situations for a long time and now have to return to education after a gap of so many years; re-entering studying and learning situation may become rather hard to handle.

Open and Distance Learners are self-directed

Students in distance education are self directed whereas, to a large extent, students in conventional universities, been younger, are other-directed. They are “sent to school” by their parents or guardians. In ODL the learner is self directed because he/she was responsible for making personal effort to apply for admission. Therefore, it was the learner who applied to go to the university because he or she wanted to. The implication is that he or she is accountable to himself or herself. In a situation like this, it is assumed that the student will do his or her work as at when due and as diligently as possible.

ODL Learners are experienced

The ODL learner has a rich reservoir of experience that can serve as a resource for learning. Most ODL learners are well experienced people in diverse walks of life. Their experience of work, life and living serve as a reservoir or pool of knowledge from which they can amply draw as they study at a distance. This, to those of them who do not underestimate such experience and background, serves as a big advantage in helping them understand and apply what they read and study. While many ODL learners may no longer be quite at home with memorizing facts, and theories, they are more likely to grasp and analyse underlying principles, concepts and relationships between facts and events etc. faster and deeper. This, to a large extent helps them to succeed as university students.

Personal effort to seek knowledge

A penchant need to know, to learn, to achieve and to have

The ODL learner wants to know, to learn and to achieve, he or she wants to improve his or her present status or situation. This is most probably why the learner applied for ODL in the first instance. This penchant for learning, and for having a certificate for example, will serve as a push for the learner always to study and study effectively too. It is worth remembering that there are many things that will pull the ODL learner away from studying. He or she should personally struggle to resist them!

Self motivated

The Open and Distance Learner is self motivated, he/she tends to learn from within (internally/intrinsically) as opposed to being obligated, or subject to, external or extrinsic forces. Though the over-all goal of obtaining a certificate is there, the learner is not pushed, rather she pushes herself to learn and to acquire knowledge.

Ability to self regulate

As an adult learner s/he is able to self regulate, to plan his/her time and often more able to stick to a plan with high ability to learn. Sometime, his/her intellectual grasp of facts, ideas and theorems may not be as firm as that of the younger learner, but the ODL learner compensates by means of experiential grasp, high ability to apply imagery and see things with the eyes of the mind and the probability of relating things learnt to what had been done before.

Capacity for handling independent work.

It is assumed that as adults, most distance learners have capacity for doing independent work. They are not likely to require as much supervision as the younger person would require; they have layers of experience and background to fall back upon and appropriate as they learn. The adult learner may not feel so easily isolated as the younger one.

Easier to manage

Groups of adults are more likely to be easier to manage than groups of young ones in a face to face situation, in group session either asynchronously or synchronously; either in physical or in virtual environments. This could, among other things, be because they are more mature and more disciplined. They also have more at stake considering their reputation, status etc.

Discipline or time management skills

Some believe that as adult learners, ODL learners will be more disciplined, have more self control, and self management and thus be able to manage their time better than younger ones.

Instructional needs and styles of the students

Typically, the instructional needs of the adult learner is far different from those of the younger learner. In Africa, the child grew up believing that the adult is always right; that the teacher is always correct and that he as a child, must always be seen and not heard. This carries over to the classroom where the teacher does what he knows best to do – talks, gives orders, etc. Most adult learners who themselves were used to exhibiting behaviours like these often resist such things been done to them. Prolonged talking to, lecturing or didactic discourse therefore does not go well with adult learners. Practical presentations, illustrations, interactive texts, frequent review questions and summaries are approaches that match the characteristics of this type of learners. Adult learners also tend to have a different learning style from that demonstrated by younger ones.

Socioeconomic backgrounds

The socio-economic background of most adult learners is quite different from that of the younger ones. In terms of status in the society, wealth, position, and power, they are more

prominent than the younger learners who, for the time being, merely borrow their parents/guardians status.

Familiarity with distance education methods and delivery systems

One other characteristic is that some ODL students, particularly those at the postgraduate level, would have become familiar with a system of self study, and thus entering into ODL will not be strange to them. They thus face less adjustment problems and have less difficulties settling down to do their private studies. However, Counsellors have more difficult time working with “stale” adults who prefer doses of advice, and a “how-to-protocols” to the professional talk therapy.

Adjustment difficulties

Some ODL students however find it extremely difficult settling down to their work early enough. Some of such students come particularly from the group that have been employed for years, (in our study, 15 to 20 years) but who had never gone on any in-service programme, never attended any workshop, seminar or conference since they left formal “schooling”. Settling down to read passages longer than “file” pages thus becomes really difficult. Some come from employments that have little or nothing to do with reading, e.g. sales men, service men, traders and business people. Getting them to sit down and read, getting them to plan and stick to a study plan, getting them to do their assignments on their own had all been tough if not difficult. Though this is not a general characteristic of this group and though it is a mere initial problem, the fact that others do not show that tendency necessitates our putting it down here.

Self Confidence

Yet another characteristic noted is confidence. A number of ODL students show that unique confidence to succeed, and though we had followed them up for only about a year, it was observed that the level of confidence does not wane, rather on each discussion it seems to wax stronger. This characteristic cuts across groups, gender, age and employment history.

At ease with ODL course delivery equipment

A number of ODL students were quite familiar with the equipments and facilities used in ODL teaching and learning, some of them use the media creatively in their studies and during group work,

Maintains a high level of interactivity

A number of ODL students show a high degree of interactivity. They interact with each other, with the Instructional Facilitators, Counsellors and Centre Staff in a most beneficial manner.

Active listening

Many ODL students are bountifully rich in primary, cognitive strategies, such as active listening, long attention span and logical reasoning.

The ability to work independently in the absence of a f2f teacher

Some demonstrate a lot of secondary, affective strategies, such as ability to work independently of the instructor. (see Sylvia Chap, 1994; Bernt and Bugbee's study (as cited in Schlosser & Anderson, 1994).

Self Assessment Exercise

- i) Quickly state list five characteristics of distance learners.

Strategies and Issues in Building an Intervention Model

Building a model of intervention, choosing the services to be offered, and the technologies to be used in doing so is a complex process. As suggested by the model presented in Figure 1, practice is never based strictly on research data. Rather, the rationale which underpins practice takes into consideration a number of factors many of which are contextual. It is important to be aware of what contributes to the development of a particular range of services and delivery methods, and to continually assess whether these reflect the objectives they are intended to meet. It is easy within the context of institutional demands and constraints to lose sight of service goals.

Learner services exist to serve the mission and objectives of the institution, and this will determine to a great extent where resources are focused (Lyons, 1990). Hence, it is important to assess learner needs within the context of the mission of the institution. For example, if providing access to educational opportunities is the most important objective of the institution, one implication may be that there are large numbers of learners who enter without adequate preparation. In this case, investment of resources will most likely be needed in the early stages of study to ensure that interventions are made when they are needed most to give learners the best opportunity for success.

The first issue is related to the mission of the institution and was alluded to already. It is critical that learner services are an integral part of the institutional culture and core business. A chronic problem in ODL is that learner services are often perceived as "add ons", at best as retention strategies and at worst, luxury items. Seen in this way, services for distance learners can easily be dismantled and or cut completely in the face of fiscal restraint or changing priorities. Learner services should be planned and implemented as an integrated system of interaction which is clearly part of the overall teaching-learning strategy (Brindley, 1995). In this way, the role learner services and their contribution to a particular institution's missions and goals are clear, and have the support of all stakeholders.

Resource allocation is an issue which has become a critical factor in determining services to be offered. Resources include not just operating budgets, but factors such as staff time and skills, availability of technologies, and access to production facilities. With all of these in short supply, it is essential to carefully assess how they can best be used to meet stated goals. Within an institution, new academic programme growth can be pitted against maintenance of services in competition for scarce resources. By contrast, in an

institution which has a clear service model, it is more likely that the costs of services will automatically be factored into development of new programmes. It should be noted that one way in which providers are maintaining and enhancing service options is by finding innovative ways to collaborate with their colleagues within and across organizations.

4.0 CONCLUSION

You have gone ideas on the reasons why learners should access learner support services in the course of their study in distance education. Some of the reasons advanced show that it could be helpful if supports are sought by learners while it may at the same time, it is not compulsory to do so. It is however clear that support services could act as catalyst and enhancer to learners in the course of study and a propelling force to assist learners in pursuing knowledge acquisition and success in a programme of study.

5.0 SUMMARY

- ii) The different characteristics that are associated with learners in distance education were mentioned and discussed in this unit.
- iii) The characteristics that are unique to the ODL learners were compared with those of the conventional institutions in order to show differences in the two groups.
- iv) Challenges that are associated with the unique characteristics learners in ODE were identified so as to be able to know areas where intervention can be provided.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i) Itemise five characteristics of learners in ODL.
- ii) Using good examples, state different areas where learners in ODL institutions are different from those in the conventional institutions.
- iii) List five examples of support services that can be provided to ODL learners to ameliorate challenges arising from their unique characteristics.

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UNIT5 LEARNING STYLES AND ORIENTATIONS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The discussion in the previous unit shows that the characteristics of Learners in ODL have their influences and impact on the way individuals learn and eventually on their success or failure. The different ways by which individuals learn constitute the concept of learning styles. This is the reason why learners as well as the institutions of learning attach importance to learning and the styles or approach being used for learning. While effective style of learning could enhance success in a programme of study, poor learning style could make learning difficult which is capable of spelling doom or failure to learners in a programme of study. Following this fact, this unit shall be devoted to discussing learning styles and how they can be applied to support learners in the distance education programme of study.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

1. Briefly state the meaning of learning style and learning orientation.
2. List three examples of:
 - a) Learning styles
 - b) Learning orientations
3. Explain three ways of helping learners to use their learning style to improve performance in learning.

3.0 CONTENTS

3.1 Learning Styles

Learning styles can be described as the different ways in which people carry out activities that

bring about learning . According to (Litzinger & Osif 1992, 73), each individual, develops a preferred and consistent set of behaviours or approaches to learning, and such approach is the individual's style of learning. Learning styles can therefore be referred to as the different approaches or ways of learning which can be categorised in many different ways on the basis of learners' consistent behaviours and habitual approach to learning tasks.

Brief explanation of the Learning Styles:

It is important to emphasize that, learning styles form aspects of the characteristics of ODL learners, according to Honey and Mumford (1986) the four main learning styles could be described as follows:

- a) **Activists:** In this category, learners involve themselves fully and without bias in new experiences because they enjoy the here and now activities. Learners in this category are more comfortable learning in group because they are naturally gregarious.
- b) **Reflectors:** Learners in this category usually stand back to ponder on their experiences, they collect data and tend to postpone reaching definitive conclusions.
- c) **Theorists:** These are the learners who adapt and integrate observation into complex but logically sound theories, they tend to be perfectionists, and can be detached and analytical in their activities.
- d) **Pragmatists:** Learners who are pragmatists in orientation often try out theories to see if they work in practice, they act quickly and confidently on ideas while they are impatient with ruminating discussions.

e) Visual, Auditory and Tactile/Kinesthetic learning styles:

Also, the visual, auditory and tactile/kinesthetic learning styles, shows how learners in this category learn by: Reading (visual), Listening (auditory) , Seeing (visual) , Speaking (auditory) , Doing (Tactile/Kinesthetic). They emphasised however that the environment plays a role in the effectiveness of each style. The first three on the list, according to them, are passive types of learning, while the last two are active types of learning. How much an individual remembers is a function of the type of learning s/he prefers and his or her level of involvement in the learning. People often learn through a combination of the ways described above.

- **The Active Learning Modes**

Given a good learning environment (be it online or traditional), most people tend to remember best that which they do - practicing the real thing. Next, a combination of doing and speaking about what we learn produces a high retention rate, followed by speaking alone. These levels of involvement are all active learning modes.

- **The Passive Learning Modes**

The passive learning modes - seeing and reading - fall just below the active learning modes on the retention ladder. After speaking, the combination of listening and seeing produces the best retention results, then listening, then seeing, and then reading.

The table below describes how learning styles can be related to the way individuals perform certain learning activities.

How people with different learning styles respond to various activities

Learning style	Responds well to:	Responds poorly to:
ACTIVIST 'Here, let me do that'	New problems, being thrown in at the deep end, teamwork	Passive learning, solitary work, theory, precise instructions
THEORIST 'Yes, but how do you justify it?'	Interesting concepts, structured situations, opportunities to question and probe	Lack of apparent context or purpose, ambiguity and uncertainty, doubts about validity
PRAGMATIST 'So long as it works'	Relevance to real problems, immediate chance to try things out, experts they can emulate	Abstract theory, lack of practice or clear guidelines, no obvious benefit from learning
REFLECTOR 'I need time to consider that'	Thinking things through, painstaking research, detached observation	Being forced into the limelight, acting without planning, time pressures

(Adapted from Honey and Mumford, 1986)

3.2 Learning Orientations:

Learning orientation can be described as the method of learning that have been imbibed after a period of induction. There are four major segments of learning orientations. According to Martinez, the four segments are different from learning style and can be explained as follows:

a) **Conforming Learners.**

This segment comprise learners who like routine, structure, supportive relationships, and stability. They generally are more compliant and will more passively accept knowledge, store it, and reproduce it to conform, complete assigned tasks (if they can) and often please and help others. They also typically prefer to leave the holistic, critical, or analytical thinking to others. Conforming Learners value step-by-step feedback and guidance to help them monitor and review progress, accomplish goals set by others, and plan next steps. They generally prefer to be less sophisticated learners and have less desire to control or manage their own learning, take risks, or initiate change in their jobs or environment. Their focus is on social interaction and supportive relationships.

b) **Performing Learners**

These learners are generally self-motivated in learning situations that particularly interest them, otherwise they may seek extrinsic rewards for accomplishing objectives that appear to have less value or benefit to them. They most often:

- are skilled, sophisticated learners that systematically follow principles, processes, or procedures,

think hierarchically, and capably achieve average to above-standard learning objectives, tasks, and performance.

- may sometimes clearly acknowledge meeting only the stated objectives, getting the grade, streamlining learning efforts, and avoiding exploratory steps beyond the requirements of the situation and learning task.
- take control and responsibility for their learning but may also rely on others for motivation, coaching, goal setting, scheduling, and direction.
- may self-motivate and exert greater effort in situations that greatly interest or benefit them. These learners may lose motivation or may even get frustrated or angry if too much effort or risk is required and the recognized rewards are not enough to compensate the perceived effort.
- are steadfast, true, and reliable when they recognize and appreciate the importance of implementing tasks, procedure, and structure.

c) **Resistant Learners**

Resistant learners are resistant for many reasons. Ironically, some resistant learners may actually be eager learners on their own outside of formal learning institutions. For example, they may be frustrated transforming learners who aggressively resisted the strictures of too structured, restrictive goals and school environments and chose to learn on their own, quite successfully. Learners in this category, lack a fundamental belief that academic learning and achievement can help them achieve personal goals or initiate positive change. Too often they have suffered repeated, long-term frustration from inappropriate learning situations. A series of unskilled, imperceptive instructors, unfortunate learning experiences, or missed opportunities have deterred resistant learners from enjoying learning. These learners do not believe in or use formal education or academic institutions as positive or enjoyable resources in their life.

d) **Transforming Learners**

These learners are generally highly motivated, passionate, often persistent even in the face of failure, and highly committed learners. They most often:

- place great importance on learning ability, committed effort, independence, vision, and intrinsic resources.
- use personal strengths, ability, persistence, challenging strategies, high-standards, learning efficacy, and positive expectations to self-direct learning successfully.

3.3 Comparisons between Learning Orientations and Learning Styles

Learning Orientation	Learning Style
Considers how individuals learn differently, using a comprehensive set of influences and sources for individual learning differences,	Considers how individuals learn differently, by focusing primarily on cognitive ability, preferences, and differences in how learners

including affective, conative, social, and cognitive factors.	prefer to think or process information.
Considers emotions and intentions as a dominant influence on learning (i.e., key influences that may develop, guide, or manage how we use cognitive ability).	Considers cognitive ability and preferences as the dominant influence on learning.
Considers how learners generally relate and respond to key internal and external influences in their environment.	Considers how learners use cognitive ability to process content, often regardless of the environment.
Provides measures to assess online learning ability.	Estimates cognitive preferences.

Table 1. Describing Key Differences between Learning Orientations and Learning Styles.
(Source: www.trainingplace.com)

3.4 Strategy for effective Learning style/orientation in ODL

Support service providers should regard the development of effective learning style /orientation as a very crucial issue to be discussed during the orientation ceremony either on-line or face to face at the commencement of programme of study to be rendered by the university. Learners should be clearly informed that the adoption of a particular learning style depends on the individual learner while the effective use of each style is important. Similarly, the context under which a learning style is adopted must always be put into consideration much as the course of study. The personality component of the learner must also be a subject of consideration while providing support service on how learners in ODL institutions can adopt and use learning style effectively in their course of study. Similarly, learners the following should be encouraged to use the following tips to encourage them adopt, imbibe and use appropriate learning style/orientation to achieve success in their studies.

- a willingness to interact with your instructor and classmates, in person or by computer and an interest in developing a personal as well as a virtual partnership with staff/faculty members and class members at a distance.
- a willingness to dedicate the same amount of time and effort to a distance education course that you would to a classroom-based course.
- the self-discipline to learn without face to face interaction with your instructor and class members.
- the necessary time management skills that will enable you to balance distance education course work with your professional responsibilities and socio-personal responsibilities.
- the ability to meet deadlines and keep track of your projects when using the postal service or online file transmission.
- an appreciation of and commitment to the convenience and flexibility that ODL but

especially online courses provide.

- a willingness to learn to use the technology necessary to complete course work.
- be self-directed and self-motivated. Distance learning student, need to be self-directed and self-motivated in your approach to learning. He/she should assume a greater share of the responsibility for the learning that takes place in both offline and online environments. He/she should note that the instructional facilitators and/or Professors usually should assume the actual role of ‘facilitator’ and ‘guide’ for exploring a subject and not the dispenser of the information.
- note that unlike the traditional classroom where you receive auditory, visual and non-verbal input, ODL either by print or the virtual classroom is primarily text-based. Communication occurs almost solely in written form. Distance learning provides less opportunity for verbal interaction. If you learn best by listening and interacting with other students and instructors or if you are dependent upon auditory input, you could be at a disadvantage sitting by your study material alone or in an online course.
- be assertive. ODL student must make himself/herself known by introduction and participating in discussions, sending email messages to the professor or facilitator.
- persistent. Learners should note that multiple attempts may be common before tasks are successfully completed. At times, you will be confused and uncertain of what to do, not fully understand something, and have computer and/or network problems. You must persist and refuse to give up when any of these problems occur.
- good problem solvers. When things go wrong, learners should attempt to resolve a problem that occurs, rather than wait for assistance. When there is an obstacle, solutions that allow the fulfillment of course requirements must be sought.
- good writing skills. ODL learners must be able to express him/herself effectively in writing in order to succeed in a course of instruction.
- the ability to organize and prioritize work. An ODL learner is responsible for creating an effective schedule and balancing his/her time around class requirements, including completing projects to be submitted.

Self Assessment Exercise

1.State the meaning of,

a) Learning style

b) Learning orientation

2. Enumerate two examples of learning style and learning orientation each

4.0 Conclusion

Discussion in this unit has provided a clue on how support service staff can assist learners to adopt effective learning style/ orientation in their course of study. It is also crucial for support staff to use different strategies to motivate learners because motivations for learning are important determining factors in learner’s success in ODL.

5.0 Summary

- i) The meaning of learning style and learning orientation were stated
- ii) Different categories of leaning style and learning orientation were itemized
- iii) Learning style and leaning orientation were compared.
- iv)The strategies for providing support service to learners to adopt and imbibe effective learning style and learning orientation in ODL were discussed.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Itemise five ways by which a support service staff can use the knowledge of learning style and learning orientation to assist learners in ODL.

Compare learning style with learning orientation.

List five different categories of learning style in ODL .

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MODULE 2

UNIT 1 - IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Learner support services in Open and Distance Learning is characterised by some key elements that easily distinguish it from the conventional institutions. The elements show how ODL programme of study is directly hinged on support system for it to achieve results and to ensure that learning is made easy for the learners. ODL activities therefore underscore four elements that are significant in learner support services. These are identity, interaction, time/place and duration for completion of study.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this study unit you should be able to

- i) Identify the key elements of ODL support service
- ii) Explain each key elements
- iii) State how each key element constitute support for the learners in ODL

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Identity.

In ODL learner support practices, it is important to state that the principle of individual differences is predominant. Learners are seen to be very unique, because he or she is a differentiated entity with his or her own unique needs, concerns, problems, values, with unique approaches to learning goals and aspirations. Learners' requirements and issues

may be general but needs, concerns and problems are individual in nature, no two individuals may be the same. In the learner support system therefore, there must be a focus on how to respond to and interact with a person or group that is known to the learner support staff. For an example, while the registry is in charge of the learner's files and some vital information on learners, the learner support staff deals with the learner directly by offering among other things, psychological, academic and administrative support to them. Individualisation is therefore a key factor in learner support system and, for many ODL systems, attention and focus on the wellness of individual learners is a key capacity which is also the most exploited features of learner support.

3.2 Interpersonal interaction.

Another key element in ODL support system is the interpersonal interaction which distinguishes it from other method of transmission of knowledge. Interaction with a known individual or a group can be synchronous or asynchronous but they are so important that they distinguish 'learner support' from other elements in the ODL systems. For an example, information about identity, gender and date of registration may appear simple but can make a great deal of impact on the content and style of interactions between learners and support service provider. In interpersonal interaction, the two contexts within which the interactive process of learner support happens are identified as, the institutional context and the course or teaching context. Interactivity is regarded as a process whereby the learner responds in some way to the learning material, becomes active during the learning situation, and gives or obtains feedback. There are two kinds of interactivity:

- a) learning material interactivity which involves the learners' interaction with the medium, the level, and the immediacy of feedback the medium itself provides, and the extent to which the medium will accommodate learners' own input and direction. In line with this, learning material interactivity provides opportunities for :
 - i) Learner-content interaction which is the method by which learners obtain intellectual information from the material.
 - ii) learner-interface interaction by which means the learner manipulates technology to convert a learning situation into an activity- laden one by carrying out instructions, exercises and activities stipulated in the learning material. It is imperative for learners to know how to handle, manipulate and operate the gadget or technology. A learner who wants to succeed in an on-line instruction for example must know how to interact with the appropriate technology, he or she must have an understanding of the use of the interface in all transactions.

- b) Social interactivity which involves the extent to which learners interact with support service providers and each other via a given medium. A learner who continues to read for hours without any activity or interactive process or one who keeps reading from CD-ROM, or listening to audio tapes or watching video tapes without any form of interactivity will soon be bored, tired and likely sleep off. Therefore, social interactivity, provides opportunities for:
- i) Learner-instructor interaction which leads to motivation, feedback, and dialogue between student and teacher. This could be in a face-to-face situation or could be in a synchronous technology mediated situation.
 - ii) Learner-learner interaction which most often results to the exchange of information, ideas, and dialogue between learners. This form of interaction could take in group study settings, tutorials, chat-rooms or in teleconferencing.
 - iii) learner – support staff interaction also provides opportunities for support from instructional facilitators, counsellors, and other support staff. Such support is known to be very helpful in keeping learners on track, in getting them well informed and in monitoring their academic activities.

3.3 The Time and place of study

Time and place form two axis and key elements along which Open and distance learning programmes fall. COL (2004) describes this as the time and place continuum and explains that the place continuum has at one end all learners and their tutor or instructor gathered at the same place, and at the other end all learners and their tutor or instructor in different places. The time continuum has at one end all learners and their tutor or instructor interacting in ‘real time’, that is, at the same time, and at the other end all learners and their tutor or instructor interacting at different times. To illustrate the intersection between the two, the following chart is being used to explain the co-ordinates, which are numbered and match four scenarios for open and distance learning. Most open and distance learning providers use a combination of the four scenarios.

Scenarios for open and distance learning

Location	Same time	Different time
Same place	Classroom teaching, face-to-face tutorials and seminars, workshops and residential schools.	Learning resource centres, which learners visit at their leisure.
Different place	Audio conferences and video conferences; television with one-way video, two-way audio;	Home study, computer conferencing, tutorial support by e-mail and fax communication

	radio with listener-response capability; and telephone tutorials.	
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Sources: COL, 2004:

a) Different time and same place of instruction

In this circumstance, learning usually takes place in a lab or study center where distance learners gather at different times to interact with instructors, tutors and other students. Certain types of instructional objectives can only be successfully met by arranging for learners to conduct an experiment in a lab and observing this experiment for evaluation purposes. To provide this experience, most Open Universities, especially those running single mode, use local study centers to support the distance learner by offering meetings with tutors, discussion with peer groups, and library facilities. This approach also necessitates the use of learner support staff like tutorial facilitators or academic counsellors and student counsellors who work beyond providing academic counselling. Many dual mode institutions also mimic similar experiences for learners which they could not bring to the main campus but often for didactic teaching and coaching but without the required learner support services. Other institutions use such centres for merely providing learners access to media equipment such as videocassette players and microcomputers, and library facilities such as books, tapes and cassettes rather than make arrangements for tutor student interaction.

b) Different time and different place of instruction

The technologies used in this category are further classified as those that transmit one-way information such as print, audio and video cassettes, and those that provide for interaction. Technologies that provide for interaction are divided into two groups: those that permit interaction between the instructor and the learner, and among groups of learners such as computer-mediated communication (CMC); and those that provide learner-machine interaction through Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI)/Computer Based Training (CBT) and interactive video and videotext. The interactive video and videotext are highly individualized learning experiences that can be designed to give learners control over their learning.

3.4 Duration for completion of study

The time duration for completing a programme of study is also a unique element of the Open and Distance Learning. The design of a distance education programme is made flexible and convenient but with high quality instructional delivery and student support service provisions. The duration to complete a degree programme in a typical ODL institution like the National Open University of Nigeria is hinged on the principle of support system for the learners. The duration ranges between 4 years for full-time and 8 years for flexible mode of learning in an undergraduate programme.

The Postgraduate diploma takes between 1-4 years to complete. A student will therefore require at least 120, 90,60,35, and 70 credit units to earn an award for any of the Bachelors degree, Postgraduate Diploma, Diploma certificate and Masters' degree certificates respectively. Similarly, students spending four years on the degree programme will offer about 18-25 credit units per semester. Learners should therefore be encouraged to carry enough credit load he/she can afford with consideration for resources that available for such a learner to achieve an enhanced quality education in the university.

Self Assessment Exercise

i) Mention the key elements of ODL

ii) How would you describe interactive process in ODL

4.0 CONCLUSION

The discussion in this unit shows how unique the key elements mentioned are to ODL particularly in contributing to making distance learners feel relaxed to seek knowledge through quality ODL provisions. It shows that even when learners are removed from the institutions of learning by distance, the facilities of support system still promote good and relevant interactions amongst learners and between them and the institutional support service providers.

5.0 SUMMARY

- a) The key elements of ODL were stated as, Identity, Interpersonal interaction, Time/ place of study and duration for the completion of study
- b) Each of the key elements was discussed with illustrations

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

- a) Explain how the flexible nature of duration in ODL constitute support for the learners.
- b) Give a concise description of,
 - i) Synchronous interaction in ODL. ii) Asynchronous interaction in ODL

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UNIT 2 - ROLE OF STUDY MATERIALS IN PROVIDING SUPPORT TO LEARNERS

Introduction

It is basic that most students feel isolated from their instructors, colleagues or fellow students which therefore makes isolation a major challenge in distance learning. Further, because of the self study philosophy of most distance learning programmes, students limited opportunities to meet in a face to face situation. One of the main purposes of learner support services is therefore to ensure that the learner receives individual attention and that s/he does not feel isolated, neglected, marginalized or forgotten. Learner support services ensures that no individual learner is lost in the crowd. Course material development units and course writers ensure that study materials are written and developed in such a way that the learner reads and works as if the instructor is there talking directly to him or her, thus trying to prevent isolation from the instructor. Also, by various means the Learner support ensures that the learner is not completely isolated from his or her fellow students. One of such ways is by organising support groups for students to facilitate interaction with others. Such groups promote, among other things, more understanding of materials read or studied. Support groups may or may not include an instructor or facilitator. In this unit, we would therefore discuss how course material development can be used to provide support to learners in the Open and Distance Learning institution.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of the discussion in this unit, learners should be able to do the following:

- i) State the meaning of study material in ODL.

- ii) Give simple description of how study materials can be written in such away to break the challenge of isolation in distance education
- iii) Mention how a study material is different from a textbook

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 In ODL, learning materials replace the teacher. In fact, the ODL student's study material is the teacher, the lecturer, the Professor, the Instructor, and the classroom, all rolled into one. Most of the tasks of the teacher in a conventional classroom are performed by the study material. This means among other things that the presentation of the subject matter, the elucidation, the illustration, explanation, clarification of doubts, the correction of misconceptions, intentional and frisky errors are all done by the study material. To some ODL students, especially those in the remote areas who have to receive their study materials by post, the study material is probably the only symbol and representative of the university. This means that the materials have to do much more than the course outline, handouts, class notes or textbooks. The course material has to be in the position of "all in all" vis-à-vis instructions to the ODL student. To meet this responsibility, the course material, among other things, should do the following:

- i) provide the content to be learnt: As much as possible, the course material contains everything that the student needs to learn in the course. It is self contained, comprehensive and robust. It is explanatory, written in a discuss ional manner, talks to you directly as "you" and relates to you as if both of you (you and the course writer) are facie to face.
- ii) structure the content into learning sessions: The course material is written in a modular form, each module containing a number of units, of between 10 to 15 A4 pages; one or two units of which could correspond to a lesson or lecture.
- iii) help students decide which parts they need to use and when: Since it is structured in units and the format is modular , you could decide which part to read, study or work with at any given time and for how long.
- iv) provide activities to help students to learn the content and to apply it: Each unit contains a number of exercises, activities and similar interactive sections which help you learn the concept presented, work out answers to issues raised and refer to sections already read to find out more details about an exercise or activity.
- v) provide feedback to learners, to help them learn from their mistakes: The course material provides answers to questions, exercises etc. raised. Some times, it directs you to where to get the answers. Alternatively, as a means of providing yourself with feedback, you refer to necessary sections, paragraphs or pages of the material to find answers to questions and exercises which you think you do not answer well.

- vi) motivate students: The materials are written in ways in which you are well motivated to read and study and understand the content.
- vii) help students develop those study skills that are essential to individual learners: Your study materials are written in such a way that as you use them, you gradually develop unique study skills which if you retain and sustain, will keep you sufficiently motivated and wish to continue to study and get on with your learning activities.
- viii) provide a means for students to assess their progress: The materials give you copious questions, exercises etc some of which you are expected to assess yourself. Further, you can easily see for yourself the units you had effectively covered, the modules you need to base your continuous assessments on, the units you need to revise or re-read etc. You can easily pencil down or bookmark those points, issues, questions or problems you want to take to your study group, to your tutorials or to the attention of your facilitator. As you read, you are also are to assess your progress.

3.2 THE STRUCTURE OF A TYPICAL ODL MATERIAL

Course Materials in ODL are specially designed and structured. They therefore look different from the normal textbook. Some of the features of ODL study material are therefore stated below.

- i) Size: Often, the ODL study material is larger, longer and bigger than the ordinary text book because many of them come in A4 or sometimes bigger sizes.
- ii) Writing structure: A typical ODL study material should contain the following:
 - Learning objectives: The writers will state the objective of the course. Some will state the general objective separately from the specific objective. Often, the specific objectives constitute the learning outcomes. These are stated in measurable terms because often than not these form the root of evaluation later in the chapter, unit or module.
 - Study advice: some writers will tell you how to use the study material; whether you have to read it in a sequential manner especially if knowledge provided therein is cumulative and unit One is pre-requisite to unit two etc. Others will tell you if the units are independent of each other in which case you can decide to study any of the units on their own independently.
 - Learning activities (with feedback): One of the roles of study materials mentioned above is to provide Learning activities that will help learners master the content and apply it. We need to add that the feature that most distinguishes ODL learning materials from text books used in face-to-face teaching is the large number of learning activities. Experienced writers know that students learn best by doing; they

therefore ensure that the materials stimulate a high level of activity and practice by the learner. Materials are therefore designed in such a way that the learner spend the bulk of the study time doing activities, rather than passively reading, if he is using print materials, or listening or viewing, if he is using media-based material. Studies have shown that successful activities depend not just on content but also on their being carefully structured with sections for a title, a motivational introduction, task/instructions, an answer grid, a time guide and feedback. (Lockwood, 1992, p.131)

- A friendly style of writing, writers adopt a friendly and personal style. As you read, you have a feeling that the writer is discussing personally with you. He addresses you as "you" most of the time thus giving you a feeling that he or she is there with you and for you.
- Examples and illustrations: The material contains lots of examples given to illustrate a point, support an argument, explain an issue etc. The examples may be drawings, tables, figures, pictures or illustrations.
- An open, highly structured layout with lots of headings: As you read, you will come across short and brief sections with separate headings, sub-headings etc. This is because the writer knew that long passages will bore you, and yield an unproductive reading and learning, or may make you doze off or sleep away
- Provision of signposting devices: Many signposts are created, directing you to the main point, to the main goals thus directing your mind and thoughts and making you focus on the main themes.
- Interactivity: Lots of activities are provided ; the material is full of exercises which you will be expected to do; some may require your writing answers to puzzles, questions, posers etc. Some of the time the writers provide answers which serve as feedback, some of the time they refer you to relevant pages where you will find answers to the exercises. All these are expected to provide some interaction between you and the material, the writers and other writers. Sometimes, your study material may require you interacting with peers, other people within the locality etc. hence, interactivity is the device used by study material to provide not only two-way communication but even multi-modal communication. Its main role is to reduce to the barest minimum learner isolation and solitude.
- Less text than in a textbook: The textual quantity of your study material is often less than you will find in a normal text book.
- Structured spaces in which students write their response to the activities

- You will find space provided for you to write short answers, put a list, or do other exercises or carry out some activities.
- Self-marked progress tests.: With the answers provided for exercises and activities or references to relevant pages from where to get answers, you can score your own work and see how well you are doing and thus gauge your own progress.
- Effective communication: Course writers and instructional designers in ODL had been cautioned by Shneiderman (1992) to begin with an understanding of their intended users, and to recognize them as individuals whose outlook is different from the designer's own. Further, Horton (1994) had asked instructional designers and course writers to "communicate unto others as they would communicate unto themselves" (p. 32). In other words, if a writer wants the learner to construct an idea which is similar to the writer's, then he or she should use an image, an illustration, a verbal description etc. for the presentation which will trigger a similar idea in the learner's mind, in the context of the learning environment and the learner's prior experiences. These put together guide writers as they strive to provide effective communication in their development and writing of the course materials.
- Summaries and key points lists: Each chapter or unit or module ends with a summary giving the main points, the main argument etc. of the section.

Self Assessment Exercise

It would be helpful if you can quickly answer the following questions

1. In your own opinion, state the meaning of a course material

2. Mention five components of a course material in an ODL institution

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is obvious from the discussion in this unit that, it is the course material that replaces the teacher or the instructional facilitator. Following this, it is important that course materials are designed, written and produced in such away that they would be learners

friendly. It is expected that apart from the fact that they should be of good and acceptable quality, they should be able to provide necessary support to the learners in their quest for knowledge. As quality course material provide easy access to knowledge they would practically remove the usual distance between the learners and the distance education institutions.

5.0 SUMMARY

1. This unit has discussed the meaning of course material in ODL
2. The role of course material in providing support to learners
3. The structure of a typical ODL course material

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. State how course material can be used to break isolation in an ODL programme
2. Mention five different things that a learner can benefit from an ODL course material

7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING

Shneiderman (1992)

Horton (1994)

UNIT 3 - COUNSELLING/TUTORING SUPPORT SERVICES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Face to face counselling/tutoring is another crucial aspect of the support system in Open and Distance Learning. Counselling in Open and Distance Learning can be described as a process of providing help by a knowledgeable staff to the learners. The help being given can be academic, emotional or social in nature. It is certain that once the help is provided, there would be an improvement or relieve in the life of the help seeker. In Open and Distance Learning institution, learners would need the assistance of counsellors for different and various reasons, some of which can be personal- social, academic or information on health related concerns. It behoves on the counsellor to ensure that he/she is well equipped to provide the needed assistance that is believed could facilitate learners' adjustment and acquisition of relevant copying skill during the course of their study. While a counsellor could render support services in all areas like, orientation, placement, information, assessment, referral, follow-up, record keeping, tutoring services are specifically tied to giving information and guidance to learners on issues that are academic in nature like course registration, how to study, when to submit assignment and how to prepare and pass in examinations.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, learners should be able to,

- i) Give short explanation of the term counselling in Open and Distance Learning
- ii) Mention at least five examples of the services that can be rendered through counselling support
- iii) State at least three qualities of a good counsellor
- iv) State how on-line counselling is different from face to face counselling

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Need for Counselling support

There would be some learners who, during registration, will be confused either by the amount of information they already have, or by the lack of information in relevant and pertinent areas, or as a result of hindrances. Such learners even at this early stage, need counselling. The support staff thus has to provide counselling during registration. Such counselling could be on a one-to-one basis, or in group. It could be by direct face to face or it could be mediated by other means, materials or modes. Counselling could be preventive or for purposes of curing certain existing socio-personal issues and concerns.

3.2 Counselling qualities

Counsellors need to develop and demonstrate qualities that are appropriate to their role. It is not for them to be simply 'advisors', as if they had all the requisite solutions. Rather, they should be able to help the learner reach his or her own conclusions.

Counselling without imposing one's own views unduly is a highly skilled process. In open and distance learning settings, very often tutors and others are expected to act in counselling roles although they are not trained as counsellors. It is important that all learner support personnel, including administrators and clerical staff who might be in a situation in which they provide guidance or advice to learners, have some awareness of this area. Tutors and others whose role clearly incorporates the counselling function need to be well versed and steeped in its principles.

Even so, many people find counselling effectively extremely difficult. The tendency is either to offer no help at all (just to listen and sympathise) or to tell the client (in this case, the learner) what he or she should do. Simpson (1992) describes the six attributes of an effective counsellor using the acronym 'WHALES':

- Warmth;
- Honesty;
- Acceptance;
- Listening;
- Empathy; and
- Structure.

3.3 Counselling activities

Counselling may be more or less directive. The greater the degree of responsibility the learner takes for his or her own understanding and decisions, the more useful the counselling is likely to be. In some circumstances learners simply need straightforward information; or, if heading in a completely unproductive direction, they may benefit from the advice of their tutor or counsellor. In any single counselling session, the nature of the interaction is likely to shift back and forth among the following activities:

- telling: giving appropriate information;

- advising: suggesting best approaches or courses of action; and
- exploring: helping learners clarify issues and problems for themselves.

3.4 Counselling processes:

Counselling can be seen as a cyclic process of five phases (Simpson, 1992):

- clarifying: ensuring the learner's needs are clear;
- checking: ensuring the counsellor correctly understands the needs;
- conceptualising: restating the need in the counsellor's own words;
- challenging: pointing out contradictions and other ways of seeing an issue; and
- consequent action: agreeing to what the counsellor and learner each might do as a result of their discussion.

3.5 Counselling tasks

Counsellors take on a range of tasks when interacting with learners. These involve the following three primary tasks and associated sub-tasks:

- selecting the appropriate mode for the interaction, including informing the learner; advising the learner on a course of action; and exploring with the learner what the problem seems to be and what courses of action might be possible;
- listening to the learner by reflecting back to the learner what the counsellor has heard and understood; and open-ended as opposed to closed questioning;
- structuring the interaction by clarifying understandings; checking understandings and information; and agreeing on the actions that will be taken consequent to the discussion.

3.6 Advising and counselling through prepared leaflets

Many learners experience common problems that, if dealt with individually, can be time consuming. A number of issues and situations can be foreseen and addressed effectively with a well-prepared leaflet, which can be included in course materials and widely distributed to study centres, tutors, or local co-ordinators. The time saved in dealing with these common problems in face-to-face counselling can instead focus on individual problems that the learner may be experiencing. As well, by finding answers to common questions in the leaflet, the learner has been involved and takes more responsibility for decisions taken.

For example, it is possible to provide advice and counselling to learners through prepared leaflets on the following topics:

- coping with exam stress and suggestions for preparing for exams;
- self-assessment of time available for study; learner fills in own schedule;

- how to catch up (sent out to learners who are dropping behind);
- what to do if learner has missed assignments or an examination;
- reassuring and informing learners what to do if they have failed an exam;
- forming self-help study groups, and activities they could use;
- withdrawing and dropping out from the course, to a learner who is talking of doing so; and
- withdrawing and dropping out to learners who have done so (find out why).

3.7 Online Counselling

This method of giving help to learners through technology mediated outfits like radio, internet, intranet, mobile phone etc is very efficient. While the same procedure for face to face is followed, sometimes, it can be synchronous or asynchronous carried out. Regardless of the procedure being used, it is important to remember that counsellors should be as objective as possible while at the same time they should not be judgemental in helping the learner client

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i) What is counselling in ODL?

- ii) Explain the term on-line counselling

4.0 CONCLUSION

The discussing of counselling as an aspect of support system in Open and Distance Learning shows that most of what is done in distance education is hinged on giving support. Also if support is properly rendered by knowledgeable members of the academic community, it is likely that most learners would be well adjusted to their studies. Similarly, the learners would be able to cope with the stage by stage challenges of pursuing studies in Distance Education.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following were discussed in this unit:

- i) Meaning of counselling in Open and Distance Learning
- ii) Qualities of good counselling
- iii) Counselling process
- iv) On-line counselling

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i) State how counselling service can be rendered to support learners in distance education
- ii) Enumerate five major qualities of counselling in ODL support service system

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Ipaye B., (2004). Study guide and learning strategies in Open and Distance Learning
Chayoobi Publishers, Lagos Nigeria

UNIT 4 TECHNOLOGY MEDIATED SUPPORT FOR THE LEARNERS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

One important and unique characteristic of Open and Distance Education is the technology mediated learner support services. According to COL (2004) Learner Support is intended to assist students in meeting their objectives from the point of first inquiry about admission through course of study, graduation and often for life time. Technology mediated learning is very effective in accomplishing the following:

- Open opportunity for every body (teenagers and adults) that is interested to go to or return to school if and when they are ready to do so with a reasonable chance to succeed
- Provide them with open and flexible learning structures
- Create critical thinkers who will throughout their lives, be the pillars of a learning society, and, therefore develop the skills and attitudes of lifelong learners among all its students
- Open up access to the specialist knowledge and intellectual power through whatever means that are possible, including both modern and traditional technology.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, learners should be able to do the following:

- i) Mention at least three reasons why technology support is needed the education service delivery system of distance learning
- ii) Enumerate five examples of technologies that can be used to support learners in ODL
- iii) State five challenges of using technology to support learners in ODL institutions

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Preamble

Technology mediated support can be regarded as an initiative which corroborates the study of Raghunadh (1994) who asserted that different methods should be used to assist, support and expand efforts to provide education to learners in Open and Distance Education. Access to the relevant technology for learning is crucial particularly if the university operates flexible mode of learning. For an example, learners will need to access the internet to be able to gather whatever information they need about the university. More so, it is suitable because demographic records show that work and family responsibilities

take precedence over the learners academic activities. Considering this, the students would want to have access to technology regularly since they would want to choose their own time, place of study and even when to write examination. The implication of been a learner in an ODL institution with flexible mode of learning however is that such students would only graduate when he/she has accumulated enough number of credits. Similarly, they also enjoy the latitude of completing their programme by twice the expected duration. Given this as an advantage over the conventional institution, some learners concentrate fully on their studies so as to be able to complete their programme in good time while others prefer the part-time option.

There are arrays of technological facilities that are used for mediating the unusual distance between the learners and the institution since some learners reside in remote locations. To this category of learners, face to face contact with the university is infrequent. In order to facilitate easy communication between the learners and the institution, NOUN, for example created local study centres all over the country. Fellow students in the ODL programmes easily communicate with their counterpart learners. Familiarity with the use of computer is particularly helpful to the learners who are employed because it enables them to enjoy their studies combined with other commitments.

3.2 Reasons for Technological Support in ODL

Use of network all over the country helps to reduce the impact of remoteness because most of the study centers in NOUN for an example, are hundreds of kilometres away from some of its learners. Beck (1992), reflected that there is strong individualizing tendencies which requires permanent learning reflexivity among the distance education students. As a result, many adults prefer to take part in organized learning throughout their life span. It was also observed that the world of today is populated by regular knowledge seekers regardless of age. It is this that makes non-formal learning to permeate daily life of some people. This can also make them to register for academic programmes such as short residential courses, fitness centres, sports clubs, heritage centres, self help therapy business management and electronic networks techniques.

3.3 Example of Technological Resources

The technologies which are constantly needed in ODL particularly to access study materials and to ensure that learning is easy are,

- Live teleconferencing
- Computer mediated learning
- Mobile phone contact
- Contact by letters

- Audio cassettes
- Video CD
- Radio broadcast
- Online synchronous mode of interaction
- Online asynchronous mode of interaction.

3.4 Techniques for Managing the Technological Support Systems.

Through the study center network technology mediated support services, the lifelong distance learners can be effectively managed. Keegan (1985) principle can be adopted by using computer technology and computer mediated communication strategies to take the classroom to every student's computer and to their chosen place of study. Ndlovu (1985) lent credence to this by stating that, technology offers just-in-time delivery of complete customized programmes, so that a learner enjoys access to learning opportunities any where and anytime. Since most of the students are adults who are also in employment they will need to have technological facilities at their disposal. These facilities provide services which the face to face kind of study would have rendered. Use of technology becomes more crucial to the female students in the Study Centers which are located for an example in the Northern geo-political zone of Nigeria who live in the purdah since they should not show their bare faces to anybody outside their homes because of their religious belief and culture. The nomadic cattle rearers would also benefit a lot from technology mediated distance education. Technology has therefore made things so easy for this category of learners.

3.5 Challenges of providing technology mediated support to learners

It is obvious that virtually every aspect of the support rendered to the distance education students is dependent on the availability and effective use of technological facilities. It is this reality and quest for an improved service delivery through Open and Distance Learning that has raised the following important challenges.

- High cost of procuring computer laptop and desktop which is particularly not within the reach of indigent students. Such students are compelled to share with those who have or else, they may have to patronise commercial centers who will also charge them exorbitantly.
- Lack of internet connectivity in rural areas and sometimes at some study centres in urban areas where internet service providers can not reach regularly.
- Most learners could have phobia for the use of computer while some are not computer literate.
- Very high cost of procuring and maintaining telephone services particularly for telephone interactive discussion between the learners and the university staff that are concerned with providing information service.

- High cost of printing downloaded course materials.
- Most learners are still sceptical and so are not comfortable with the use of communication technology to provide support in science practical courses.

3.6 Recommendations

In order to bring about some improvement in the quality of technology mediated support for the distance education students, the federal government, university authority and private partners in the education sector should consider and work on the recommendation stated below.

- Provide subsidy for the purchase of computer (laptops and desktops) with mobile phone facilities.
- More course materials should be uploaded to the internet for students to download before they are ready in printed form (hard copy) for distribution.
- Corresponding audio, video tapes and video compact disc on course materials should be made available to the learners from time to time;
- Television and Teleconferencing programmes should be organized regularly to support the learners within a stipulated time.
- The academic and non academic staff at the study centre need to be constantly trained on the availability and use of the modern technology in order for them to improve the quality of support rendered to the learners.
- Live teleconferencing facilities must be available in all the study Centers and must be connected to the university headquarters
- More information and communication technology experts must be employed to work particularly at the study centers.

4.0 CONCLUSION

If learning truly involves all of one's life particularly in this present age when every learning activity is attached to the use of technology, then, technology mediated support for learners needs to be promoted for it to become the mainstay of distance education institution and the hub of the administrative and academic activities. Through technology mediated support services, learners would enjoy support from the education providers just as they will interact amongst themselves without the physical distance posing any barrier. However, the use of any information and telecommunication equipments to achieve a veritable purpose requires action on the part of the user (learner). It also requires access to needed technological facilities and acquisition of relevant skills at both ends particularly the learners.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit discussed the following:

- i) Reasons for Technological Support in ODL

- ii) Example of Technological Resources
- iii) Techniques for Managing the Technological Support Systems.
- iv) Recommendations on how to improve on the use of technology mediated support services in ODL

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSESSMENT

- i) Briefly explain why it is necessary to use technology mediated support in transmitting knowledge in ODL
- ii) Enumerate examples of technologies that can be put into use to make learning easy in ODL
- iii) Mention and explain five challenges in the use of technology mediated support in ODL

7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING

Mealy, L., and Loller, B. (2000,28). E-learning: expanding the training classroom through technology, Austin, TX: Rector Duncan and Associates Press.

Ndlovu S. D.(1985).Development of distance education at university level. University without walls: Some issues for consideration by developing nations. Paper presented at the 4th International conference on new concepts in higher education, by the International Council of the University Without Walls at the Royal National Hotel London.

Ogidan R. J. (2009). The role of the National Open University of Nigeria in providing an enhanced quality education among the work and learn student population in Nigeria. African Council on Distance Education Conference(ACDE) Proceedings. CAFS Center, Upper Hill Mara Road. P.O Box-00-010, Nairobi-Kenya

UNIT 5 INTERACTION THROUGH ASSIGNMENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Assignment in an educational institution refers to task given to be carried out or undertaken by learners. The task can be in form of coursework, project or homework. Specifically in Open and Distance learning, examples of assignments is the tutor marked assignment which can take the form of homework or project. Sometimes giving assignment can ensue while a learner is in the process of interacting with support service providers like the psychological/ academic counsellor or tutorial facilitator. The common purpose of giving out assignment to learners is to foster better understanding of a concept or task. Most of the time assignments are given for the sake of assessment ie tutor marked assignment. Assignments are also given for the following reasons:

- a. To provide quality learner support including guidance.
- b. To develop and manage essential feedback mechanisms which is characteristics of effective open and distance learning;
- c. To review, assess and provide feedback on assignments which are regularly submitted by students as part of the distance learning instructional package .
- d. To monitor distance learners' academic progress as at when necessary or due;
- e. To engage in creative and innovative roles and activities, which will develop and incorporate a range of requirements of particular courses on programmes and learning groups.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, learners should be able to do the following:

- i) Mention at least five reasons for giving assignment to learners in distance education
- ii) List and explain at least five major types of tutor comments
- iii) Enumerate at least five ways by which assignment can be used to encourage learning

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Tutorial support

Tutors and the learning materials are very important in terms of providing intellectual support and facilitating learning activities.

- **tutor contact:** Learners need to be prompted in the learning materials to contact their tutor at frequent intervals, by whatever means is made available. This contact might be to discuss a particular issue, to plan for a major assignment, or to discuss a returned assignment. Instructions that use icons are helpful; for example, a telephone icon for telephone contact or a stamped envelope for correspondence;
- **assignment dispatch and grading:** Learners need clear, complete and accurate information about when and how to submit an assignment, what to submit, where to send it, and how long they can expect to wait before it is returned. Research indicates that ‘turnaround’ times of two weeks or less have an optimal effect on learner motivation to continue, as does the requirement for submitting an assignment early in the course. Most learners who get over this first hurdle will end up completing the course;
- **grading criteria:** In the learning materials, learners need to be told the criteria by which their assignment will be graded, and which aspects of their answer will receive particular emphasis. In turn, the tutors who grade assignments must be explicit in grading according to these guidelines, and provide comments and reasons for their grade that display all the characteristics of effective support: warmth, honesty, empathy, organisation, explication, and the written equivalent of ‘listening’. Acceptance is a little more difficult, since the tutor is in this case required to judge performance, but even so such judgments can be communicated in a constructive and helpful fashion; and

3.2 Tutoring models

While engaged in the process of dealing with the course’s academic content, the tutor may fulfil one of several roles, depending on the design and nature of the course, how the tutor perceives himself or herself in relation to the learners, and the tutor’s views of the teaching and learning process. Four different models of the role of the tutor are as follows.

- **Tutor as expert:** The tutor seeks to explain the course content and to act remedially if the learner has not understood.
- **Tutor as facilitator:** The tutor guides the learner in his or her studies in an enabling way without seeking to teach or explain directly.
- **Tutor as a reflective practitioner:** The tutor explores with the learner, without presuming to possess superior knowledge in relation to the learner.
- **Tutor as assessor:** The tutor’s relationship with the learner is seen primarily as that of an examiner or tester of the learner and what he or she has learned.

Very often, the job of marking assignments and examinations and the role of tutor fall to the same person. In other situations, the role of assessor is seen as primary. However, if the tutor were to perform the broader role of the facilitator or reflective practitioner in helping nurture the learner’s learning experience, learners would benefit more fully.

3.3 Qualities of academic counsellor/ facilitator on interaction through assignment

- i. The academic counsellor/ facilitator should be genuinely interested in the art of distance teaching. He should be able to study and assess the teaching unit of the instructional material. He should be able to see from the point of view of the course writer.
 - ii. He/she should have clear orientation and understanding of the structure of the unit and thematic presentation. All these will ensure that the variance in the facilitation of learning at the various Study Centres is as minimal as possible.
 - iii. The academic counsellor/ facilitator should possess the relevant skills to embark on interaction through assignment. Since wide discrepancies in the study skill of academic counsellor/ facilitator can result in a wide range of interpretation of the unit, the necessary training should be provided to ensure consistency in interpretation as much as possible.
- i. The academic counsellor/ facilitator should be able to discover weaknesses in the assignment response which is as a result of the weaknesses or defects of the assignment and/or the teaching unit. The academic counsellor/ facilitator must be objective in his formation so that the learner benefits from the pedagogic advantage of discovering his/her assignment defects.
 - ii. Also, the academic counsellor/ facilitator should consider the organizational aspect of the assignment response. He should pay attention to the beginning, the middle and the ending. The logic in the sequencing of points, the use of language; its correctness and clarity must be assessed. Again, the academic counsellor/ facilitator must not be distracted by the language and style of a response despite poor or irrelevant content.

iii. Lastly, the academic counsellor/ facilitator should be able to accurately and objectively grade the assignment response. The grading should reflect the academic counsellor/ facilitator 's comments on the response. The comments should:

- a) be motivating to the distance learner;
- b) break the walls of isolation surrounding the distance learner; and
- c) help the distance learner improve his learning through teaching type comments.

3.4 Tutor Comments on Assignments

The different types of tutor comments as enumerated by Adeboyejo (2007) are explained below:

i. Harmful (HL) comment: Such comments are by themselves unpleasant. If anything, they make the learner hate the facilitator and, this may lead to loss of courage on the part of the learner. As a result, the barrier between the learner and the DE institution builds up, the channel of communication begins to narrow down and, the learner may eventually drop out. Examples of such comments are; 'Horrible language...', 'You beat about the bush too much...'

ii. Hollow (HW) comments: There are certain comments that are just mere words. They may appear to have meaning but, the meanings are empty. Making meaning out of such comments is like trying to guess what message the writer wants to pass across. For instance, 'Please go through the unit again...', 'You can do better than this', 'You have lots of irrelevant material in your submission'. One thing that is common to all these examples is that the writer has neither specified what the learner has done wrong nor what is expected of the learner.

- iii. Misleading (MG) comments: This type of comments place the learner on the wrong track. The comment usually instructs the learner to carry out activities which have no purpose. For example a comment may read, 'Please read the lesson once again and re-submit your assignment'. The learner will follow this instruction but without knowing what he can do to improve his assignment response.
- iv. Null (NL) comments: Any comment which neither confirm nor question, illustrate nor explain, refute nor approve may be termed null comment. All types of 'non-sentence' remarks such as question marks, double check marks, underlining, side brackets or lines etc. constitute null comments. The only information passed across by these symbols is that the facilitator has gone through the assignment response. Though symbols with verbal definition may be used especially in situations where comments need to be repeated yet, it is pedagogically better to repeat such comments in sentences and not with symbols.
- v. Negative (NE) comments: These are the type of comments that spell out to the learner what he has done wrong. They usually refute facts, concepts, explanations, illustrations, analyses etc. They may also go against the relevance of the content of a response, or the very approach to a given problem as presented by a learner. These are the most needed of all the different types of comments because without them the learner faces the danger of misguidance. Examples are: 'Not clear, not to the point', 'You did not give a single illustration to buttress your point', 'Your explanation to question ... is not adequate' etc.
- vi. Positive (PE) comments: These types of comments are meant to approve of the point of view of the learner. They indicate that he is on the right track. These comments help to encourage the learner to maintain and possibly improve on his

performance. Example of such comments are; ‘You have brilliantly explained the concept of distance teaching’, ‘Impressive, you speak my mind’ etc.

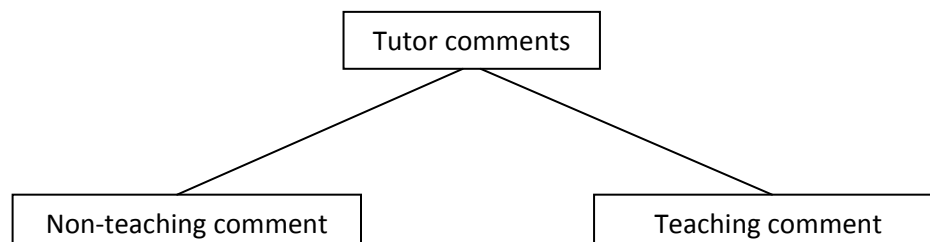
vii. Constructive (CE) comments: When a facilitator wishes to inform the learner of what he could have done to improve his performance, constructive comments are employed. Though such comments neither approve nor disapprove yet, they offer suggestions on how to solve a problem more brilliantly. As an example, a comment may go thus, ‘Always list out the point to be discussed when the question says list

viii. Global (GL) comments: All the comments that have been discussed so far are usually written (in-line) close to the portion of the assignment response for which they are meant. Global comments encompass all the other in-line comments and summarize the overall performance of the learner. They may point out drawbacks such grammar, spelling, legibility etc. Also, they serve to explain the grade awarded to the learner. Global comments are not in-line, they are usually made on a separate sheet of paper.

ix. Personal (PL) comments: These are the means through which the isolation usually experienced by distance learners is broken. A DT who wants to help learners on this basis by making use of personal comments must:

- a) have a very high degree of patience;
- b) be committed;
- c) know when and where a personal comment is needed; and
- d) possess the ability to blend academic comments, instructions and information into a closely knit whole.

Tutor comments are classified as shown in the diagram below:



3.5 Typical process for tutor-marked assignments

Tutor-marked assignments provide a common means of conducting formative assessment of learners in open and distance learning programmes. Typically, the learner completes part of the course, writes an assignment based on this section, and sends the assignment to the tutor. The tutor then marks the tutor-marked assignment, provides some feedback comments, and returns the comments to the learner. The tutor and the institution's administration typically keep a copy of the marks and sometimes of the feedback comments in the learner's file, to provide a record of the learner's progress and achievement.

3.5.1 Ineffective regimes for tutor-marked assignments

'Tutor-marked assignment turnaround', which is the time it takes to return an assignment to the learner, is one of the least well performed features of open and distance learning programmes. One aspect of this problem is often administrative:

- slow or unreliable postal or other delivery systems;
- lack of clerical capacity within the institution to process and record large quantities of tutor-marked assignments promptly; and
- the tendency on occasion for assignments to pile up in academics' offices waiting to be marked.

Another part of the problem may be that neither learners nor their tutors fully appreciate the potential value of engaging in a smoothly running and diligently conducted assignment submission and feedback system.

3.5.2 Effective regimes for tutor-marked assignments

In order for tutor-marked assignments to help learners in their learning it is important that:

- the learner, tutor, and administrators involved all have a shared understanding of the procedure and value of the tutor-marked assignment

process;

- tutor- marked assignments are well designed, relevant to the course, and engage the learner in useful learning activity of some kind, whether it be analysis and essay writing or carrying out a practical task;
- learners have or are able to acquire the information, skills, and other resources needed to complete the tutor-marked assignment;
- the tutor-marked assignments are transmitted securely, whether by post or other means;
- they are marked quickly and reliably;
- they are returned to the learner with feedback with the minimum of delay;
- the tutor writes full and helpful feedback comments, not just a mark;
- the marks and any other significant points are recorded reliably and used as a basis for assessment of the learner; and
- the tutor uses the tutor-marked assignment interactions with the learner as an opportunity to develop a personal (professional) relationship: providing a ‘human face’ to the institution, making the learner feel individually recognised and valued, and raising the learner’s morale.

3.6 How assignments can help learners to learn

According to Adeboyejo (2007) assignments can be a powerful tool in helping distance learners to succeed in their studies, and serve a number of purposes. Some of these are the following:

- measuring learning against objectives;
- checking that material has been understood and covered;
- providing reinforcement of success;
- enabling diagnosis early on of weak point;
- providing learner the opportunity to apply new learning;
- developing a personal tutor–learner link;
- facilitating learner’s learning by making him or her an active learner;
- providing feedback to the learner on his or her performance;
- identifying learners’ strong and weak points;
- providing opportunity for remedial help;
- providing opportunity for individual study;
- providing an incentive mechanism for progressive improvement;
- helping tutor–marker to plan for face-to-face sessions;
- providing opportunity to demonstrate new learning;

- helping learners prepare for exams;
- suggesting where learner should focus further study;
- providing a basis for regular dialogue between learner and tutor;
- providing deadlines and set intermediate learning objectives;
- maintaining and developing learners' commitment;
- guiding learners' study of the course materials;
- alerting the tutor to any problems the learner is having; and
- alerting course writers to units learners found difficult and where extra help is needed.

3.7 The Assignment toolkit'

Various components make up the tutor's 'tutor-marked assignment toolkit' and can be used in combination to good effect. Typical components include the following:

- questions;
- model answers;
- marking criteria;
- feedback comments;
- assessment comments; and
- records of the individual learner's past performance.

3.8. Feedback on tutor-marked assignments

For tutor-marked assignments to help the learner, one of the most important factors is the quality of the feedback comments the tutor provides. The learner will gain very little from merely receiving a grade or a short, automatic, and discouraging comment such as 'You must work harder!'

3.8.1 Helpful and unhelpful feedback

Feedback can be helpful or unhelpful. Helpful feedback encourages the learner to proceed even if he or she has not done very well in the assignment just completed. Unhelpful feedback, on the other hand, may discourage the learner to the extent that he or she wants to drop out of the course. Unhelpful feedback also lowers the learner's sense of self worth, causing the learner to view of himself or herself as someone not capable of learning. This self-concept is extremely damaging and counter-productive, and is not justifiable.

The first task in getting tutors to provide helpful feedback is to persuade them of its value. The second task is to create the possibility for them to provide helpful feedback, by means of training, systems, materials, arranging realistic

schedules and workload, and by continually motivating them to improve their skills.

Following are some characteristics of helpful and unhelpful feedback.

a) Helpful feedback

Helpful feedback does the following:

- establishes rapport between tutor and learner by providing a sense of belonging; and being facilitative and personal;
- links the learner's previous and future learning by fitting the level of the learner;
- encouraging the learner to review the course material; and leading the learner to further consideration of the issues raised;
- encourages a deep approach to learning by promoting dialogue; acknowledging the learner's ideas; commenting on relevance; being open to further discussion; and suggesting ways to improve study techniques;
- provides complete and accurate information by being prompt; being clear; explaining the grade awarded; fitting the grade awarded; and being precise on where errors lie and improvement is needed

b) Unhelpful feedback

Unhelpful feedback does the following:

- suggests the tutor sees the learner as a failure by being aggressive or intimidating; providing a negative start; being automatic rather than personal; and discouraging rather than encouraging;
- offers inadequate information to the student by being late; being careless and inaccurate; not being specific or clear; being too short; providing no suggestions for improving; and not indicating any follow-up.

3.9 Guidelines for feedback from assignments

3.9.1 First assignment

Tutors should do the following when marking the first assignment:

- respond quickly;
- offer praise and recognise effort;

- refrain from being too critical;
- emphasise the next assignment (for example, “Remember to answer the next assignment in full sentences”); and
- establish a personal link.

3.9.2 Every assignment

Tutors should do the following with every assignment:

- start with personal tag;
- first, praise and identify the good;
- then, point out where and how the learner needs to improve;
- finish comments with upbeat, positive, and encouraging words; and
- close with a reference to the next assignment (for example, “Looking forward to your next assignment ...”).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i) For this exercise you will need copies of a completed assignment for which you will pass a comment and then confirm if your comment was helpful or harmful
- ii) Exchange feedback with a partner, and discuss the way the partner approached the task, and what problems was encountered.
- iii) Have a discussion face to face or on-line on the challenges of providing helpful feedback.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Interaction with the learners through assignment is particularly very crucial in distance education because of the advantage it has in breaking isolation among learners and the opportunity to have a stage by stage check on how learners are faring in their study. It is therefore very pertinent for the academic counselor/tutorial facilitator to possess the needed skills to be able to co-ordinate the interactive activity the way it is expected so that it can be used as a major facility to help learners to in away that the objective for the interaction through assignments shall be achieved particularly by offering helpful comments and prevent use of comments that can not help the learners.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has discussed the following:

- i) Meaning of assignment
- ii) Reasons for giving assignments
- iii) Qualities expected of academic counselor/ tutorial facilitator on assignment
- iv) Process of Tutor Marked Assignment
- v) How tutor's comment can help learners
- vi) Types of comments on assignments

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i) State five reasons why interaction through assignment is crucial in distance learning
- ii) What is helpful comments and how is different from harmful comments
- iii) Enumerate five areas where tutor comment can help learners
- iv) Give three examples of helpful comments and three examples of harmful comments on tutor marked assignments

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MODULE 3

UNIT 1 PERSONNEL IN LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Open and Distance Learning , every employee is involved in providing support that would assist learners in one way or another to facilitate learning and to ensure equity and equality of opportunities for the acquisition of flexible and qualitative education for learners anywhere, anytime and via an appropriate and cost effective medium. Consequently in order to accomplish this, some institutions use network of Study centres combined with the activities at the central administration. Like in the National Open University of Nigeria, Study centre is the hub where the university physically administers her students in spite of the fact that many of the activities are mediated by information communication technology. Personnel are regularly assigned to render

support which would ease out difficulties that learners would likely come across in the course of study right from the stage of advertisement for admission to course registration, settling down for study, writing of examinations to graduation. Learning activity in this unit will therefore centre around discussion on the personnel who are in charge of assisting learners in open and distance education.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. Enumerate at least five personnel that are involved in providing support to distance learners
2. Identify specific types of support which they render
3. Mention cases of specialities in personnel support services.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Study Center Managers/Study Center Directors

It is important for all distance learning institutions to have an effective management system which would support and enhance the instructional delivery services. In the National Open University of Nigeria for an example, each study centre has a person who is the head and who is responsible for the day to day administration of the centres and regularly liaises with the Headquarters (seat of administration) of the Distance Learning Programmes.

It is usually considered that for anybody to be appointed to the position of a Study Center Manager/Director, as a matter of necessity he/she must:

1. An experienced academic or administrative staff, not below the level of a Senior Lecturer/Director equivalent.
2. Should have served in management capacities including Department/Head of Division/Academic Affairs Officers with no less than 10 years cognate experience.

Major Responsibilities

Study Center Managers/Directors are responsible in the following areas in order to ensure that study centers are well managed:

- a) To head, manage and coordinate the day-today activities of the Study Centre.
- b) To act as the first contact point for the ODL institution y in the immediate locality of the Study Centre.
- c) To liaise with the headquarters on matters relating to the distribution of instructional materials to distance learners and instructional facilitators.

- d) To review and determine from time to time the adequacy and suitability of the technology facilities at the Study Centre;
- e) To monitor the turn-around time of Tutor Marked Assignments;
- f) To supervise the work of staff involved in the ODL programmes delivered through the Study Centres.
- g) To liaise with the course developers, examiners, assessors and advisory peer groups within the locality of the Study Centre;
- h) To liaise with other sections of the public and stakeholders in the management of the Study Centres and act as caretaker of the facilities in the Study Centre.
- i) To fully engage the study centre and make facilities for learning to students;
- j) To participate in the recruitment, training and supervision of part-time tutors;
- k) To monitor tutorials and coordinate the use of multimedia information and communications technology available at the study centre.

Expectations from the Study Centre Manager/Director

The Study Centre Manager is expected to among other things provide management support and leadership for the day-to-day administration of the Centre and maintain regular liaison with Headquarters of the University.

They monitor the distribution of instructional materials to distance learners at their Centre, as well as the instructional Facilitators.

They also monitor the turn-around-time of Tutor-Marked Assignments(TMAs).

Other expectations as listed by Obidairo (2008) include:

- To review and determine the adequacy and suitability of technology facilities in the Centre
- To supervise the work of staff involved in the academic programmes delivered through the Study Centre
- To liaise with other sections of the public and stakeholders in the management of the Centre and act as the caretaker of the facilities in the Centre
- To coordinate the use by distance learners and members of the local community of the multimedia information and communication technology available at the Centres; and
- To ensure that the contact sessions and face- to-face lecture delivery period in the Centre is problem free and well coordinated.

3.2 Instructional and Tutorial Facilitators

Quality distance learning and teaching is always supported by instructional facilitation and tutoring carried out by knowledgeable personnel. Instructional and tutorial facilitators are in charge of the conduct of tutorial meetings and instructional facilitation at the

various Study Centres. They also assist with organising professional workshops, course material development and design. They are majorly incharge of the tutor marked assignments, and assist with the conduct of examinations.

Any person wishing to be inventorised as an Instructional and Tutorial Facilitator should:

- i. Either be a retired or serving public servant or self employed or employed in the private sector and be interested in teaching and can motivate others with learning at a distance. They should possess a minimum of,
- ii. First degree (with a minimum of Second Class) and a Post-graduate Diploma in Education
- iv First Degree with a minimum of Second Class in Arts, Science and Engineering with at least five years teaching experience.

Characteristics of a good facilitator

A good instructional facilitator should possess the following characteristics:

- i) Provides clear explanations on his/her expectations and marking style
- ii) Welcomes questions
- iii) locates one's fault but corrects them kindly", says a student, "and explains why marks have been lost or awarded"
- iv) Makes thorough but cheerful and constructive comments (in contrast with another student's plaintive remark: "the comments left one feeling criticized, threatened and nervous")
- v) Gives an extra boost to encourage a student in difficulties
- vi) Clarifies points which have not been easily grasped or correctly learned
- vii) Is helpful in achieving the student's objectives
- vii) Offers flexibility when it is needed
- viii) Show a genuine interest in motivating learners (even those who are beginners and so perhaps at a less interesting stage for the Facilitator)
- ix) Writes all corrections legibly and at a meaningful level of detail
- x) Above all returns all assignments promptly.

Major Responsibilities

- a. To provide quality learner support which include guidance about course choice, preparatory diagnosis in study skills etc.
- b. To facilitate students' learning of instructional materials and regular formal and informal learning environments such as access to group learning in seminars and tutorials;
- c. To undertake the delivery of specified course contents at residential schools and other prescribed face-to-face interactions with distance learners;
- d. To develop and manage essential feedback mechanisms characteristics of effective open and distance learning;

- e. To review, assess and provide feedback on assignments regularly submitted by students as part of the distance learning instructional package and transmit same through the Study Centre Managers to the University headquarters;
- f. To participate in regular orientation programmes for new students and staff of the University;
- g. To monitor distance learners' academic progress as at when necessary or due;
- h. To review, adapt and prepare instructional facilitation materials for use by the School;
- i. To liaise with external examiners, assessors and advisory peer groups;
- j. To undertake examination duties including the preparation of examination papers and monitoring of assessment procedures;
- m. To provide online learning support for students who have access to and prefer the web-based learning environment of the University;
- n. To engage in creative and innovative roles and activities, which will develop and incorporate a range of local needs to support learners.

3.3 Students Counsellors

It is the student counsellors who offer regular guidance and counselling to learners at a distance with respect to their studies including enrolment, choice of programmes. Student counsellors also provide accurate information on courses on offer and give guidance on when and how to study, and when to seek for special clinic for academic guidance. Professionally trained guidance counsellors are also expected to provide constant assistance to students at their respective locations. The Counsellor has the responsibility of keeping in constant touch with distance learners, and to provide any early warning signals regarding difficulty with studies in order to ensure that prompt remedial actions are taken by the University distance learner and other related service providers.

Qualities of a Student Counsellor. A trained student counsellor should possess qualities such as the following:

- i) Be professionally trained in the theory and practice of guidance and counselling;
- ii) A Master's degree in Counselling or Psychology
- iii) A Medical degree with specialization in Psychiatry or Community Health

Major Responsibilities

The major responsibilities of Student Counsellor are to;

- To advise distance learners regarding selection of and registration in programmes and courses on offer in the University.
- To provide professional consultation to students and staff who may have difficulty with rejoining the academic world.
- To guide distance learners in the choice and management of peer groups for purposes of tutorials and other instructional facilitation.
- To constantly monitor all counselling needs of students and professionally provide them prompt and effectively.
- To devise, develop and manage student database for purposes of providing counselling and guidance services.
- To liaise with Study Centre Managers/Directors with the University headquarters regarding counselling, assignment and examination related matters.

3.5 Knowledge Management Technologists

The experts in knowledge management technologies are required to support the electronic and computer mediated learning environment in the distance learning University. This group of technologists are responsible for all computing, multimedia learning materials development, web-site development and management, networking and programming activities to aid open and distance teaching and learning. They are also responsible for the national technology instructor frame work and the electronic library aspect of the open and distance learning programmes.

Requirement for a Knowledge Management technologist include the following:

- i. At least a Bachelor's degree with at least a Second Class Division in Computer Science, Information Technology or Computer Engineering Technology. A doctorate degree with experience in open and distance learning environment will be an asset.
- ii. Good knowledge of Web technology in particular, Web-based instruction and on-line learning environment.
- iii. Must have demonstrable expertise in analog and digital electronics circuit design, microprocessor based programming, communications network design and other relevant electronic material devices.
- iv. Excellent computer skills (e.g. Statistical analysts and Hyper Text Markup Language, Extensible Markup Language, database management) and especially networking, database design and management. Knowledge of Call centre is also required.

Major Responsibilities

- a. To develop and support the University's management information systems including project management, systems analysis, design, programming, use liaison, technical support and documentation for Internet and new technology projects.

- b. To construct, manage and constantly update the University's web-site and web based learning environment;
- c. To undertake and facilitate useful training for the University's staff and students
- d. To use Java programming especially with Flash and multimedia in course development;
- e. To model, simulate and visualise communications and simple queuing theories (e.g. coding and decoding, time and frequency domain representations, convolution etc)
- f. To develop computer applications using Internet and Client/Server technologies as well as the provision of technical and user support of computer systems.
- g. To use and instruct others in the use of a range of software including: UNIX/Linux, Windows NT/2000, Apache/HS, Tomcat/OAS, Java Servlet/Application, XML, Perl/PHP/ASP, Flash, Photoshop, Dream weaver, Oracle PL/SQL, Developer 2000 and COBOL.
- h. Responsible for the set-up, testing, maintenance and operation of audio-visual and editing equipment at Educational Technology and Publishing Unit.
- i. Required to work on irregular hours/or shift duties
- j. To implement and maintain different A V and computer systems including hardware installation and configuration and software problem solving
- k. To assist in the production of multimedia and on-line components such as computer animations and streaming Videos, and test various hardware and software.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Support personnel in distance learning occupy very important facet of distance learning to the extent that all learner activities are connected in one way or another to the services being offered by personnel in learner support services. The personnel already mentioned above are therefore important right from the stage of application for admission, registration for courses, studying, carrying out different assignments, submitting tutor marked assignments providing information about examination, graduation and even follow-up after graduation.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit discussed personnel in ODL learner support services with particular reference to the following:

- i) Explanation on the activities of Center Managers/ Directors, Student Counsellors, Instructional Facilitators and Knowledge Management Technologists.
- ii) Qualities of each personnel in learner support services.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSESSMENT

- i) What is personnel in ODL learner support?

- ii) Enumerate the major personnel in ODL Learner support services
- iii) List and explain five ways each by which knowledge management technologists and student counsellors render services to learners in ODL.

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UNIT 2 CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SUPPORT SERVICE PROVIDERS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The previous discussions in this course material surrounds the fact that ODL is learner- centred and this accounts for the reason why the activities of support staff can not be over emphasised. Personnel in ODL are therefore important for ensuring that learning is made easier and that learners are well adjusted during their programme of study. In order to be able to achieve the good intention of supporting the learners in ODL, it becomes essential to put in place the mechanisms that would ensure that such staff that would provide help are well equipped with the right knowledge and skills that would help them to provide acceptable services to the learners. According to Siaciwena R. (1996), since training the support staff in ODL is one of the basic support requirements for support staff in ODL then lack of such training might mean that the need for learner support is not appreciated. Following this, there is therefore a need to have a discussion that is centered on how to build capacity for the support service providers in ODL. Part of this would involve how to provide constant training to the for the Student Counsellors, Knowledge Management Technologists and provide short term training to Course writers and instructional facilitators so as to reflect the concept of learner centeredness and cater for the peculiar needs of distance learners in

the course design, development and writing. As reported by Lewis & Hawkrige (1998), exposure to relevant training will help the support staff to better understand and use approaches and techniques involving:

- participating in a learner-centred environment,
- running a learner-centred environment,
- assessing learner participation, deliverables and overall performance,
- initiating and maintaining a publicly accessible learner portfolio on the web
- evaluating a learner-centred environment,
- designing a simulation script. (Lewis & Hawkrige, 1998)

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. Enumerate at least three areas that requires capacity building for support service providers in ODL
2. Identify different steps that can be undertaken by an ODL institution to build capacity for its learner support service providers
3. State how sharing of experiences can be utilised as a tool for building capacity among support service providers in an ODL institution

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Capacity for Emotional support and prevention of burn-out

Support staff need to be capacitated on how to provide emotional support and prevent burn-out. Handling it is a common practice in ODL institutions to over-load support staff with work considering the high staff to student ratio. Overloading staff with work load may not be inevitable most of the time particularly in developing economies where staff/student ratio is generally high. It is important to state that, this may sooner than expected lead to stress for many support staff. Inadvertently, it will have serious negative effect on a staff's ability to function maximally well. For support staff whose main focus is on providing personal and relational support, increased workload may hinder their ability to provide the levels of human support that ODL learners need. It is also possible that adjusting to new techniques of doing things, new styles of working particularly working with new technologies may indeed be stressful for support staff in developing economies especially since most of the equipment and gadgets will be new to most of such staff. For Counsellors in particular who had been trained to work with adolescents, working with adults in ODL may be stressful, for tutors who had been used to teaching face to face in a conventional manner, adjusting to tutoring in ODL where the tutor is expected to lead, guide and facilitate rather than get engaged in direct teach and tell, may be stressful. In fact, many tutors would find out that providing academic support for learners put a greater demand on their time. The instructional facilitators would also discover that, every

minute spent in one-to-one dialogue with an online learner or in monitoring patterns of student engagement, or in working with small group is one less minute available to do other things he/she normally had been used to as a conventional teacher. Coping with work pressures like this can be rather difficult to withstand. According to Baldwin and McInnis (2002), “Difficulties of the job in an institution at times can induce feelings of debilitation. When staff are in that mood, how do they then cheer up distance learners who are feeling discouraged?” Baldwin and McInnis observed further that no matter the extent of the learner’s need for support, facilitators and other support staff “can only give so much to students from the spring waters of their own wellbeing. Unless all players in a human activity system possess sufficient energy to sustain their inputs into the activity, their input will be scaled down, weakened or terminated”. They concluded that “the twin risks are dropout by students and burnout by staff”, both of which can lead to “system breakdown”. (Morgan and Mckenzie 2003). Considering all these, it becomes very necessary for the University authority to organise regular capacity training workshop for all support staff so as to ensure that they are well equipped with the emotional components of support service delivery to a level where they readiness to assist would always radiate on their faces while burn out is constantly prevented amongst them.

3.2 Peer Support

Staff of learner support services need to have the capacity to support each other at least for purposes of professional development. But more than that, peer support could be an important component in assisting staff in developing supportive behaviours and attitude, and in seeing things with the third eye and hearing them with the third ear. For example, peers can be powerful opinion leaders who sway their colleagues to see the benefits of supportive dispositions, of learning to use new approaches in group work, in facilitating courses or even in individual relationships. Peer support can help in overcoming technophobic tendencies, and in adopting classroom innovation by listening, guiding, using questioning techniques, etc. rather than tell and teach. Peers can also serve as mentors to each other, and thus becoming instrumental in providing support to colleagues who were beginning to sag and lose hope, interest or motivation. In fact, older colleagues could be ‘mentored’ by younger ones who are more familiar and more at home with technology as they work in the on-line environment. Older colleagues can mentor younger ones as the latter get confused, frightened, or alarmed by the enormity of students’ concerns and difficulties. In order to accomplish this it is necessary to organize forum where support staff members of the ODL community would acquire the skill of working together, to see themselves as players who need to cooperate constantly in order to achieve the goal of learning easy and removing tension that may arise among learners in ODL.

3.3 Contextual Support for service providers

Considering the interconnected nature of the various departments in ODL institution, it is obvious that the practice of offering support to learners is dynamic because most of the services are dictated by the individuality of the learner and the creativity of the support staff. Capacity building for staff must therefore be emphasized. In carrying out this, it

would be helpful if it carried out through in-house training and workshops where activities would be centered around use of theory, experience and practical realities of situations on the ground. The cultural setting, availability of resources and administration's disposition to support services matter a lot to the success of the work of the support staff. In learner support services many things are learnt outside the text book. Senior and experienced members of the community therefore are veritable assets which have to be maximally utilised. They in particular will serve as mentors to the younger ones, and they should thus see the younger ones as peers in the process of developing the new profession of supporting learners. Most importantly, the mentors should treat each workshop or in-house training session to create a sense that this was an evolving experience where everyone needs to develop a style of doing things collectively to promote a style which is unique to ODL institution. The process also involves the more experienced coaching the less experienced in certain aspects or identified areas in terms of how to do certain things thereby allowing the support service for the institution as a process to unfold. Similarly, staff members's capacity shall be enhanced with the mentors continued support and relentlessness in coaching their colleagues through use of case studies, use of contextual materials or some of the frequently asked questions as cases for teaching and coaching the less experienced.

3.4 Sharing Experiences at Orientation and workshops

It is good practice for capacity building when the ODL institution provides regular orientation, workshop and in-house training for support staff. This will give staff the opportunity to share experiences, concerns and fears as well as hopes and prospects for the future. At such workshops, staff will interact and ask each other questions. They will also use it to avail themselves the opportunity to brainstorm on ways of handling some common concerns, problems and areas of difficulties just as they can discuss some frequently asked questions (FQA) and map out acceptable answers and responses.

4.0 CONCLUSION

There are lots of benefits for the ODL institution and the staff when capacity building for the service providers is made a priority and becomes part of the culture of the institution. This will help to constantly improve the way things are done in assisting learner to be adjusted to studies and exploit the opportunities that are in distance learning. Support service providers would also be able to discharge their services with little or no stress, make learning easy; and by so doing prevent attrition among the learners.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit discussed capacity building for the support service providers in ODL with particular reference to the following:

- i) Capacity for emotional support and prevention of burn out
- ii) Peer support
- iii) Contextual support for service providers
- iv) Sharing experiences at orientation and workshop

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSESSMENT

- i) State in clear terms the components of emotional support as a form of capacity building for staff in ODL.
- ii) Enumerate different steps that can be undertaken by an ODL institution to build capacity for its learner support service providers
- iii) Explain how sharing of experiences can be utilised as a tool for building capacity among support service providers in an ODL institution.

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UNIT 3 STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEM IN ODL

1.0 INTRODUCTION

An important facility that can be used to manage student record is a soft are called Student information system (SIS) This application can also be referred to as student information management system (SIMS), student records system (SRS), student management system (SMS), campus management system (CMS) or school management system (SMS). Support service providers will realise that they need to avail themselves with the information on students before they can commence rendering assistance .This is because records in the student information service system are adjudged to be valid and reliable. The facility is therefore considered to be comprehensive and essentially repertoire of all necessary information which the support service providers can readily lay hands on in the university database very readily, anytime and anywhere. It is expected that all relevant data on every learner are kept and made available in such away that anytime any information is required, it can be retrieved and utilised for the purpose of helping the students. It is also such a veritable provision in ODL to the extent that if it is well managed, it can be used to enhance success of the individual learner and for institutional accountability. It is because of this that most institutions rely heavily on the effectiveness of this record system to provide support to its learners than it

is done in a conventional or face-to-face university.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

4. Mention five functions of student information system in Open and Distance Learning institution.
5. Identify at least five types of records that can be kept in the student information system
6. Mention five ways by which the records in the student information system can be utilised to offer support to learners in distance education.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

Student information system relate directly to learners in an open and distance learning programme and so it is basically an aspect of activities in the distance learning programme delivery services. In this unit, there would be discussion on functions of the student information system, what records to keep, and how to keep the records and evaluate the process for keeping and utilising student records.

3.1 Conditions for a good student information system

Considering how important student information system is in ODL, record systems should therefore ensure that learner's grades and performance data are securely logged while learners welfare are documented in an informative way.

Moreover, because there is large number of students with diverse academic computer based systems are very much preferable to manual systems, as they can generate a great deal of useful information and reduce labour and errors considerably. However, many open and distance learning organisations still function with paper-based systems. It is in view of these that it is crucial for the system to have the following qualities:

- logical;
- simple;
- understood by its users;
- secure; and
- sustainable.

3.2 Functions of Student Information System?

One of the characteristics of ODL is regular demand for access to information by students, and support service providers and others who would be interested in such records. Similarly, the student information system is being used for large multi-campus organizations. Following this, it is important for the student information system to be able to support the maintenance of personal and study information relating to:

- Handling inquiries from prospective students
- Handling the admissions process
- Enrolling new students and storing student course materials
- Automatically creating class & teacher schedules
- Handling records of examinations, assessments, marks, grades and academic progression
- Maintaining records of absences, attendance and those who have withdrawn from programme of study.
- Recording communications with students
- Maintaining discipline records like cheating in examinations, plagiarism, and late submission of tutor marked assignments.
- Providing statistical reports
- Maintaining Learning Groups and study Groups.
- Communicating student details to whom it may concern
- Providing special support services
- Student health records
- Check progress of learners;
- Provide continuity regardless of changes of personnel;
- Assist a tutor in his or her organisation and tutoring;
- Institutional reporting purposes e.g. management;
- Tracking individual learner progress;
- **M**ake comparisons between courses, tutors, learners, sexes, and years;
- Make analysis of learners as a cohort possible and to identify emerging trends
- Historical proof of things done;
- Data for research;
- Verify regularity of attendance;
- Give feedback to learners, tutors, and others
- Evaluate the system.

3.3 Constituents of the Student Information System

The following can be found in the student information system:

- assignments submitted;
- marks allocated to assignments;

- test marks;
- problems learners face;
- problems in implementation of the programme;
- correspondence;
- feedback;
- attendance register;
- learner personal files personal data; progress report; assessment record;
- log or journal: incidents, visits, equipment and material
- issue of modules;
- financial records; and
- notes regarding meetings and counselling and tutorial sessions with reference to necessary follow-up action.

3.4 Method for evaluating records systems.

Records can be evaluated basically through the use of checklist procedure. To confirm the usefulness of the record system questions in the checklist below are used:

- i) Does your learner record system contain the following information:
 - personal details, including name, address, age, family circumstances, and employment?
 - academic and professional qualifications?
 - special requirements such as specially adapted materials for disabled learners?
 - tutorial record, including dates when assignments were received, grades, and copies of tutor comments?
 - list of materials sent, including date of dispatch?
- ii) Are your records detailed, accurate and up-to-date? Do you ensure that
 - records systems are regularly monitored to ensure that they are functioning efficiently?

- information is disseminated to the right people at the right time?
 - records are kept in a secure fashion so that only authorised personnel have access to them?
 - legal requirements governing the handling and storage of information are met?
- iii) Are your support staff, whether instructional, counselling, or administrative, trained and updated on an ongoing basis on the records system and how it is to be used?

There is certainty that if honest responses are provided to the questions stated above, it will be possible to gather Data that can be used to judge the effectiveness of the student information system in an ODL institution.

Self Assessment Exercise

Make notes on the following questions.

- i) What specific forms or procedures in the records system are particularly important to make the open and distance learning programme run effectively?
- ii) How could the effectiveness of these forms or procedures be improved?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Considering the fact that the student management system is a repertoire of many data which are relevant to the students and which the learner service providers will always need to be able to carry out the crucial service of assisting learners in their academic, psychological, social and domestic needs that can impinge on their performances as learners, then it is important for the authorities in the ODL institution to make it as a point of duty to ensure that in house training is regularly organised for the service providers to be able to acquire needed knowledge and skill that would assist them in the management of the student information service.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit discussed student information service in ODL with particular reference to the following:

- i) Meaning of student information service
- ii) Conditions for a good student information service
- iii) Functions of student information service
- iv) Constituents of student information service

v) Methods for evaluating student information service

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- With relevant example, state the meaning of student information system
- Mention and explain the qualities of a good student information system in ODL
- Enumerate five ways by which learner support providers can use the student information system in an ODL institution

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UNIT 4 RESEARCH ON LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Research is an important activity in the life of any higher educational institution. With research activity put in place, data obtained would help the institution to work more effectively and efficiently. Research helps in improving practice. It helps in building theory to test new methods as the basis for interventions when things are not working well in a system. Research can therefore be described as an activity that is conducted to increase knowledge by systematically collecting, analysing, and interpreting data to answer carefully formulated questions about publicly observed phenomena. Similarly, research in learner support services can be described as activities that are carried out through a systematic procedure to collect information on issues and concerns that would help to assist learners to maximise their benefit in the learning process of an institution. Invariably research can help to reduce attrition, increase retention and enhance completion rate/throughput of learners.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

4. Mention activities that are involved in ODL research.
5. Identify areas needing research in ODL learner support

service

6. Define research in relation to learner support.
7. Provide a rationale for doing research in learner support
8. Identify methods that are commonly employed to investigate issues in learner support.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Principles of research in learner support service

Basically, there are principles to bear in mind while conducting a research. The principles are stated as follow;

- 1 The purpose of the research. Purpose of the research must be identified. Most of the time the purpose is to increase knowledge by gathering data to answer questions.
- 2 Researchers investigate publicly observable verifiable phenomena with procedures that can be repeated in similar conditions.
- 3 Research questions are formulated carefully so that it is clear.
- 4 Research data are collected, analysed, and interpreted systematically to maximise confidence in the answers being provide.
- 5 Most of the time, questions asked are drawn systematically from a body of theory, and the answers obtained support, expand, or refine that body of theory

Using the principles mentioned above, research can be carried out on a particular concern in the institution like attitudes toward school in which case a research method such as attitude surveys is employed.

Self Assessment Exercise

Look through the proceedings from a conference such as those from the African Council for Distance Education Conference and General Assembly or International Council on Distance Education. You can also pick up a Journal such as West African Journal on Open and Flexible Learning (WAJOFEL) Or any other Journal on Distance Learning.

- i) Find a short article describing a research study; skim it and find out if it incorporates the principles discussed above.
- ii) Note ways that the study can be improved upon

3.2 Identifying areas needing research in learner support service

In this activity, you will identify your areas of greatest interest as

follows:

- 1 List your areas of personal interest for research. These may be exploratory in nature such as trying to understand learner behaviour better without a specific theory in mind, a test of a theory or an assumption, an evaluation of current practice, or an experiment with new methods. What would you like to know more about that would help with your practice?

- 2 List areas of research that you think are most pressing for your institution. What would do you think will make the most difference in terms of progress toward goals? (e.g. a breakthrough in improving completion rates, a more cost-effective tutoring system, an increase in the number of satisfied students who recommend the institution to others; availability of data on employment of graduates).

- 3 Score your list of areas on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 high and 10 low, on each of the following criteria:
 - your own interests
 - possibility for improving practice
 - making a positive difference to the institution
 - and contribution to practice in the larger context of distance education.

If you want to be more precise, you can weight each of the criteria according to which you think is most important.

3.3 Need for research in Learner support

Hadley and Mitchell (1995) listed a number of reasons for why you should be engaged in research including the ones below. Although they are speaking specifically about counselling practice, their points are equally applicable to tutoring and other areas of learner support practice:

1. research offers the best available means for counsellors to know which kinds of interventions are most effective and which do not merit continued use with certain kinds of clients. Research reduces the likelihood that ineffective interventions will be continued based on the belief that they might work.
2. the experience of serving clients yields ideas for research that are more relevant to counselling than they would be if developed without this experience.
3. conducting research requires counsellors to keep abreast of related literature more than practice alone does; this knowledge benefits both research and practice.
4. a counsellor who conducts research can put the findings immediately into practice; research reports written by others often reach readers after a long delay.
5. conducting research encourages counsellors to think rigorously. In turn, such thinking encourages counsellors to conduct service activities so that

their results are clearly demonstrable.

6. being skilled at conducting research helps counsellors make good decisions about whether existing knowledge is sufficient for the tasks at hand or whether new research needs to be carried out.
7. conducting research and publishing in the professional literature expands opportunities for two-way communication with other scientist-practitioners, thus enriching the professional knowledge base of all participants in the counsellor's network.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISES

- 1 Think about the reasons why you might engage in research. For example, what information would you like to have about your practice that you do not currently have, and what would it enable you to do?
- 2 Write down your most important reasons for doing research.
- 3 Now think about and write down some of the barriers to you doing research. You can come back to this list later as you work through this course, and see if these factors are still valid, and if so, what you can do to reduce their effect.

3.4 Research methods

There are many different ways of doing research but your purpose is an important factor to determine the method to be used.

It is helpful to start by thinking about the purpose of your investigation by asking the following questions:

Do you want to better understand a particular process such as motivation?

Do you want to know whether to invest in face-to-face tutorials as an adjunct to written communication between learner and tutor?

Would you like to know more about who your learners are and how they experience interaction with your institution or organisation?

Are you anxious to find out what students think about the new orientation programme that you are planning for this new term?

Would you like to be better able to articulate the impact of tutoring on learning outcomes?

Following this information about the purpose for the research, you might begin by thinking about research with following purposes:

- 1 description, and
- 2 exploration of the relationship between or among variables. training in open and distance learning

A variable is a characteristic (e.g. of people, environments, physical objects, behaviour, tasks) that can be categorised or measured. Examples include gender, age, teaching method, geographical location, or amount of time spent studying.

Some variables are theoretical constructs such as intelligence or social support. We cannot necessarily directly observe these but have developed ways to measure them.

Description

Sometimes we want to be able to better describe a group, a process, an institution or other educational phenomena by using one or more variables to categorising it. For example, we might want to find out how many open universities have special needs programmes for disabled students and what services are offered by these. Or we might want to be able to categorise our learners by age, gender, income, geographical location, and previous educational level achieved.

Relationship between variables

In investigating relationships, we are usually concerned with seeing what effect manipulating a particular variable (such as an aspect of teaching) might have on another variable (such as course completions). For example, we might want to know the effect on course completions of adding an interactive radio programme to a course. In this case, we choose a group (sample) and then see if their response to a variable (course completion) is correlated with their response to another variable (interactive radio).

Sometimes an exploratory study to improve description is a good first step before investigating the relationship among variables. For example, you may want to know more about your learners' characteristics (e.g. Is there any pattern that tells you about which ones are more likely to complete courses? What are students' expectations when they start to study? What factors do they perceive as contributing to or detracting from their satisfaction and success? What are their opinions of their current experience with your institution?). On the other hand, you may already have this kind of information, and are anxious to either experiment with some new practices or evaluate current ones. Whether the purpose of the investigation is description or exploration of relationships, there are choices to be made about methods of inquiry.

3.5 Categories of research-: Quantitative and qualitative research

Research methodology is usually categorised into two broad areas of inquiry: qualitative and quantitative. It is important to discuss these in relation to the purpose of the investigation and the type of data required. Qualitative research tends to be concerned with exploring phenomena through getting accurate descriptions, defining variables more clearly, trying to understand experience, and looking for meaning. Quantitative research is concerned with categorization and accurate measurement of pre-specified and clearly defined variables.

Qualitative research

The qualitative study will tend to yield a rich set of data (the scripts of the interviews), and being a verbatim account, it will accurately (albeit subjectively) reflect the experience of the particular tutors interviewed. As such, the qualitative approach is often said to have greater validity than a quantitative method, that is, it addresses what the study purports to address: the experience of these particular tutors. The qualitative approach generally relies less on strict design and structure than the quantitative approach, and is less concerned with reliability and generalizability and more concerned with gaining depth of understanding of the phenomena being studied. For example, a qualitative approach to better understanding a tutor's experience of working with learners might involve in-depth interviews with a few tutors, recording exactly what they say, and then looking for patterns of similarity which emerge from what they tell you. A quantitative approach might consist of a short survey of many tutors that asks them to endorse specific statements that match their experience. Their responses can then be quantified in terms of frequency of endorsed statements. Both types of study have the potential to yield useful information.

Quantitative research

The quantitative approach (in this example, the survey of a large number of tutors), with its structured design and large sample can yield a great deal of useful information and is relatively easy to carry out. The collected data are not difficult to analyse (usually a matter of counting and calculating), and unlike qualitative research, this type of study relies less on the researcher's ability to interpret the results (has greater objectivity). Further, the quantitative study, with its strict protocols is more easily replicated. In other words, given like circumstances, the same survey is more likely to yield similar results at another time and place (have greater reliability) than the in-depth interviews. However, the gain in objectivity and reliability comes with a loss of nuance and personal meaning. The information gained from the quantitative method is more of a broad brush approach as opposed to the detailed painting of the qualitative approach. For example, from the survey, we might find out what percentage of tutors believe they need further training, but not what it is like to tutor if you feel unsure of your skills.

Qualitative versus quantitative

There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches to research. Hence, both qualitative and quantitative data are often collected as part of the same study. For example, in student satisfaction surveys, ratings are usually collected on specified variables such as course materials, contact with tutor, etc. The addition of some open-ended questions can help explain and add meaning to the numerical ratings. Similarly, follow-up interviews with subjects who have participated in a programme evaluation or an experimental study can be used to collect descriptive information that gives depth and aids understanding of the quantitative data.

The purpose of your study will be the main determinate of the methods you use. As noted above, it is sometimes important to do a preliminary investigation that yields descriptive information. Sometimes there is not enough information about a particular phenomenon to proceed to a quantitative study. An exploratory study using qualitative methods can be an important step toward identification of variables and possibly relationships among variables to be investigated in a subsequent study. In the example above, the in-depth interviews with tutors might turn up a pattern of concern about lack of training, a reluctance to

take on a personal counselling role, or dissatisfaction with not being able to adapt course materials to local contexts.

Within the broad categories of qualitative and quantitative research, there are many specific methods that can be employed to examine learner support issues. These include, experiments, various types of observation, surveys or interviews, and comparison studies.

Comparison between Qualitative and quantitative research

Hadley and Mitchell (1995) stated that the core idea of qualitative research is that projects do not need to collect data in numerical form or use quantities or numbers to analyse the data. As a descriptor for research, qualitative represents a matter of emphasis rather than a separate and distinct category. Ideas and methods have been drawn from anthropology (ethnographic field methods), sociology (participant observation), and phenomenology (studying people's verbal reports of internal experience). Many case studies are qualitative in nature. Similarly, qualitative research missions are:

- descriptive
- exploratory
- people's internal experiences which include general rather than specific research questions, and are vague at first but evolve as data are collected and analysed.

Quantification means to measure on some numerical basis, if only frequency. Whenever we count or categorise, we quantify. Separating people according to astrological sign is quantification. So is giving a grade to an essay.

A qualitative approach, by contrast, emphasises meaning, experiences (often verbally described), descriptions and so on. Raw data will exactly what people have said (in interview or recorded conversation) or a description of what has been observed. Qualitative data can be later quantified to some extent but a 'qualitative approach' tends to value the data as qualitative. It is rather like the difference between counting the shapes and colours of a pile of sweets as against feeling them, playing with them, eating them. Or counting sunsets rather than appreciating them. The difference between each one may be somehow quantifiable.

4.0 Conclusion

There is much to be improved in learner support research including 'stronger conceptualisation, more repeated testing of concepts and the creation of organising frameworks or theories more so when learner support is now seen as not only a legitimate, but a very necessary part of distance education practice regardless of the mode of interaction with students. As such, it requires sustained research and evaluation activity in order to continually test assumptions and theories, and to measure the effectiveness of practice.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit discussed research in ODL learner support with particular reference to the following:

- i) Principles of research in ODL learner support
- ii) Identifying areas of research
- iii). Need for research in ODL learner support service
- iv) Type of research in ODL learner support

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSESSMENT

7.0 What is research in ODL learner support?

- iii) State the major reasons why there are needs to conduct research in Learner support services
- ii) Compare qualitative with quantitative research

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UNIT 5 CASE STUDY IN ODL LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There are different approaches to rendering support to learners by the support service providers in the different ODL institutions across the world. In this unit you will find out that the method of providing support to learners could be determined by several factors bothering on population of learners and whether the institution is single or dual mode. In some institutions, learner support is comprehensive while in others it is partial but there is definitely a form of support that is provided to assist the learners. As you go through this unit, you will come across institutions with similar practices in learner support and institutions with unique method of handling issues of providing support to learners. It would also be discovered that there are lessons to learn from practices in each of the distance education institutions. You will also come across some specific challenges while the way forwarded in addressing such challenges are mentioned.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. State an acceptable definition of learner support services
2. Mention specific challenges in learner support services in some of the ODL institutions mentioned in this unit.
3. Enumerate at least five suggestions that can be used to improve the method of providing support to learners in ODL institutions
4. Explain five lessons that can be learnt from support service delivery in the ODL institutions that were mentioned in this unit.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

University of South Africa is regarded as the oldest and the biggest distance education institution in Africa, It has a responsive student support services for its over 300 000

students. UNISA has a network of community learning centres that provide tutorial support, counselling services and peer-group support. These centres provide a place where people can meet, attend classes and discussion groups, study, pick up books and other materials for learning. Where it is not possible to offer face-to-face tutoring, tele-tutoring (telephone, video, computer-conferencing) with lecturers is also used as well to support a two-way communication between the teacher and the learner. Tele-tutoring is utilised to reduce student's sense of isolation because it can overcome geographical barriers and provides immediate discussion and feedback. Several technologies, such as UNISA's Learning Management System, MyUnisa, have also been used to provide interaction and resources that supports all areas of teaching and learning. The multimedia approach that UNISA uses is much more effective than using one method of delivery.

Despite well-meaning efforts of distance education providers, students especially those from disadvantaged environments still find it extremely difficult to adjust to and succeed in distance education. The present landscape of education in South Africa could not escape the prevailing political, economic and social factors of its creation. There are distinctive social conditions that precede and accompany the student as he or she enters higher education. These are student characteristics, enabling inputs and outcomes, the social, political and economic environment. All these elements have impact on the life of student who is in an ODL programme of study and must be understood before an institution can enhance learning through provision of appropriate support services.

Characteristics of UNISA students:

For many years, distance learners have always been presented as adults who are fully employed, who are often at a geographic distance from the campus and who pursue their study part time. Recently, there have been changes in the demographics of the distance learners. UNISA has seen a growing number of younger distance learners who are studying full time and most of them have never worked. In most Western countries, distance learning has become attractive to younger students because it offers flexibility. However, in South Africa, younger students enrol in distance education institutions because the tuition fees are much lower than on contact-based institutions.

In the past, most students who enrolled at UNISA were those who were geographically separated from the institution; now most younger students leave their homes in rural areas to find rented accommodation in the vicinity of the main campus, Unisa Mueleneuck Campus in Pretoria. These students who call themselves "full-time" students move closer to UNISA in the hope that proximity to the university would enable more help with their studies. This has become a dilemma for the institution because now students require a study area for daily use and also expect lecturers to attend to them on demand and on a daily basis. For these students learning is contextualised in terms of daily access to facilities like study areas, the library, lecturers and other students in the vicinity. The support services have to take into cognizance the changing landscape of ODL institutions while not neglecting majority of mature students.

Way forward

The UNISA's 2007 ODL report suggests new ways of addressing limitations of the present student support systems. In the new system, each student should have a personal tutor who supports and understands a student as or she grows through the course. The tutor also has to provide feedback and mark students' assignments. This role of a new tutor system is seen as "at the heart of learner support" (Tait 2003). An efficient and effective support system should be grounded on the strength of the student context. It is in this regard that other tutorial systems that have been used effectively in other developing countries should be explored.

3.2 Open University of United Kingdom

The Open University of UK, established in 1969, was probably the first Open University to use the radio and television on a massive dimension thus proving skeptics wrong. Distance education, known as correspondence education prior to the mid-sixties, relied mostly on print materials sent by post. A few really bold institutions ventured into the use of audio but not much more; radio lessons for primary school level education were all right but at the post-secondary level they were anathema. Nineteen sixty nine witnessed the founding of the UK Open University and that institution's association with the BBC. The synergy between these two remarkable institutions resulted in university level courses using radio, broadcast television, print, correspondence and interpersonal tuition. Since then, many open universities as well as conventional ones have been using a multitude of media to deliver curriculum to widely dispersed student populations. At inception, the UKOU massively used the radio and television in the delivery of instruction, cooperating closely with the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC. The use of radio and television was not an accident because from the planning stage, the government was thinking of a University of the Air, but the Minister in charge of establishing the university Jennie Lee, "hated the term 'University of the Air' because of all the nonsense in the Press about sitting in front of the telly to get a degree" (Jennie Lee, 1969). Even the first Vice Chancellor of the university said, "I had heard about the University of the Air, but I regarded it as a political gimmick unlikely ever to be put into practice" (Walter Perry, first VC of OU,UK 1969). The Minister was clear in her mind the type of involvement she wanted for the radio and television. This view is supported by her when she said, "Harold Wilson asked me to go to Chicago and Moscow. Neither was anything like what I wanted to do. The Chicago lads were lovely but they were only short-circuiting the first year or two of the degree. In Moscow all they were doing was routine long-term broadcasting and some correspondence courses".

The Open University was set up in Britain in partnership with the British Broadcasting Corporation, to pioneer the system of open and distance learning for adults. It teaches degree-level courses in many subjects via BBC radio and television broadcasts and summer schools. This means that Television programs are an integral part of the sophisticated learning system by which students study at home. These programmes are made by the BBC, which provides production, operational, engineering and support facilities at the OU's Production Centre, in cooperation with the university's academic staff. As of 1996, almost 30 years later, about 200,000 students are registered at any one time for undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing education courses. But in addition to the OU's 'official' students, the BBC estimates that six to eight million people watch the OU's broadcasts every week. (**The Roland Collection & Pira International, 1996**)

With the combined use of the print material, radio, television, computer and other multi-media, including the internet, the “blithering nonsense” (Ian Macleod) of 1969 has today crept to the apex of excellence. This has largely fulfilled the prediction of the university’s founding Chancellor who said, among other things in 1969, “... We are open as to methods. ... already the development of technology is marching on, and I predict that before long actual broadcasting will form only a small part of the University’s output. ... Every new form of human communication will be examined to see how it can be used to raise and broaden the level of human understanding ...”

The nineteen sixty nine experiment showed clearly that people can literarily “sit in front of a television to get a degree” and that “academic excellence need not be compromised by openness”.

3.3 University of Nairobi

Brief description of the programme

The External Degree Programme of the University of Nairobi is conducted in the Faculty of External Studies, College of Education and External Studies.

The establishment of the External Degree Programme of the University of Nairobi in 1986 followed two feasibility studies in 1976 and 1983, which established the need and relevance of such a programme in Kenya. The External Degree Programme was set up to upgrade both professional and academic qualifications of secondary school teachers who had trained to teach the first two classes of secondary school but who, due to a shortage of staff, found themselves teaching O level and A level classes in the secondary school curriculum. Through distance education these teachers would receive in-service training without leaving their families and as they continued to perform their duties. Of the 600 candidates who were selected and admitted to the programme from more than 3,000 applicants, 504 registered for different subjects in the External Bachelor of Education (Arts) programme.

Problems encountered

Planning and managing distance education

The university with its six colleges is a dual mode institution. The fact that the External Degree Programme operates within a dual mode system has its own inherent problems. The programme has a core of academic staff who serve full-time as subject co-ordinators and are in charge of a group of subjects. This core staff, comprised of subject experts, editor, radio and audio lecturer, and a graphic artist, identify, train, and supervise part-time staff, who are engaged to write, review, and edit instructional materials. The radio and audio lecturer, editor, graphic artist, and printer are in charge of the production and distribution of instructional materials under the supervision of the chair of the Department of External Degrees and the dean of the Faculty of External Studies. Both the chair and the dean answer to the principal of the college, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, and the Vice-Chancellor, in that hierarchy.

The department and its core staff perform duties similar to those of a publishing house.

The subject co-ordinators provide academic guidance and counselling to students during residential sessions and also by correspondence. Each subject co-ordinator handles part-time staff in a whole subject area (for example, history), which constitutes a department of its own in the conventional internal programmes of the university. In this arrangement, part-time staff are paid for their services on a piece work basis. The costs of running the programme are met from government subsidy, student fees (the programmes run on a cost recovery basis), and from the sale of materials to other institutions such as the Open University of Tanzania; Makerere University, Uganda; and the University of Zimbabwe.

The learning system of the External Degree Programme has been mainly the print materials supported by audio and video cassettes, face-to-face tutorials, and supervised teaching practice, with students studying specially developed print materials in each subject. During the four residential sessions held at the University of Nairobi each year in August, November, January, and April, during school holidays and at the six regional study centres which are spread in six major towns, writers and subject specialists introduce course materials to students, revise course content, and mark assignments and give timed tests that form part of student assessment as provided for in the regulations.

The regional study centres are managed by resident lecturers who are core staff within the External Degree Programme.

Management challenges

The management of the External Degree Programme within a dual mode institution has presented a major challenge.

To start with, the students are external. Where choices must be made, the needs of internal students come first and those of external students come second. This problem is particularly common in the sharing of resources. If the timetable of internal programmes is slightly interrupted, for example, then the residential sessions for external students, which are held at the university where accommodation facilities and tutors are based, must be rescheduled. These interruptions sometimes mean re-scheduling supervised tests and examination schedules, causing frustration to students and part-time staff.

The distance education mode of delivery is not quite understood by senior management. The programme managers on the ground have often found it difficult to explain and justify, for example, expending tuition revenues on the production and reproduction (or reprinting and dubbing) of study materials because the term 'tuition' has a different meaning in the conventional mode.

When the programme started in 1986, students attended regional field tutorials once a month, twelve months a year, in addition to three residential sessions at the University of Nairobi. Although very popular with students, the field tutorials

were discontinued in 1990 due to the high costs of paying the field tutors and the accompanying supervision constraints due to limited core staff. However, the hours from the field tutorials were recouped into the residential sessions so that students still have the same number of tutor contact hours per subject. While senior management are convinced about the value of frequent student–tutor physical contact, it is difficult to raise funds to pay for the monthly accommodation and transport bills field tutors incur.

Instructional design and production for distance education

Materials development has been another problem area. When the programme was launched in August 1986, only two units (booklets) in Education were written and ready to go to students in a 10-subject External Degree Programme. Consequently, the other materials were developed as students waited, causing frustration to many. By the time students were ready for their first-year examinations in 1988 only 388 out of the registered 504 students sat for their exams. By 1990 the programme had only 260 regular students who went on to graduate in 1994. This high drop-out rate was partly due to a lack of study materials to maintain and sustain student motivation and progress through the programme because students lacked credibility about the sustainability of the programme. Also, materials development was delayed due to low motivation on the part of writers, reviewers, and editors, which resulted from delayed payment for work completed because of the long part-time claims scrutinisation process by the finance department. After the claims were approved for payment the amount due was subjected to super scale taxation as required by law, leaving the part-time staff dissatisfied with the very small sum of money earned from writing course materials. As a result, the External Degree Programme lost many good and trained part-time staff, thus prolonging the already protracted materials development process.

Possible solutions

Problem	Suggested Solution
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<p>External Degree Programme in a dual mode institution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is need for some degree of autonomy for the progress of the programme. • Management is often too conservative, leaning more towards the conventional mode. They should be sensitised about the needs of external students. • Measures of full-time students equivalent contact hours should be based on the distance mode
<p>Materials development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no need for lead time to develop or acquire ready to use course materials. • A programme that starts with limited study material should wait for the materials to roll off the press
<p>Processing of part-time claims</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To avoid delays, the External Degree Programme requires its own budget to process part-time claims and to procure printing and other materials required for the production of study materials. Of course, this budget would be subject to both internal and external audit as is

Problem	Suggested Solution
	the rest of the university.
Learner support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Support services are a vital link between students and the institution providing the programme. •Field tutorials should not be substituted with anything else as they provide the maintenance function for learners who are isolated from the providing institution, their tutors, and from fellow learners. •Logistics for implementation costs, who will bear them, and the availability of physical facilities and field tutors should be planned well in advance in order to limit drawbacks after the programme is launched. •However, the programme has now come of age and the regional

Conclusion

The External Degree Programme has been a real eye opener. Following successful completion and graduation of the first cohort of 260 students in December 1994, a second cohort of 1,500 students enrolled in August 1995 and the drop-out rate is negligible because most of the study materials required in the Bachelor of Education (Arts) course are now readily available. Study materials from this programme have helped expand education frontiers through distance education to other countries and other institutions in Kenya. In time there has been a cost benefit accrued from the study materials as different cohorts of students use the materials, thus reducing the unit costs substantially.

3.4 Open University of Sudan

Introduction:

The emergence of the university and its foundation: -

The Open University of Sudan established on, April 28, 2004 to meet the extension of the revolution of higher education, an increase in the content to suit social and economic conditions, scientific seekers of higher education, a desire to liberate higher education

from all restrictions temporal and spatial, it was necessary to provide this type of Education through open and distance education.

Objectives of the university:

1. Expansion of higher education opportunities and to respond to the growing social demand and the diversification of academic programs and providing access to them.
2. Compensation opportunity for those who missed the access to higher education for social or cultural conditions or economic or geographic.
3. Provide opportunities for training and continuing education in-service involved in the labor market, according to the professional development needs, and to develop skills and raise the level of performance and production among them.
4. Providing education to students in their accommodation.
5. Develop different participation faith society for local development.
6. Creating the appropriate environment for graduate studies and research associated with the different needs of society.
7. Resettlement of modern technology and good use in the effective delivery of academic programs.
8. Strengthen cooperation between the higher education systems of traditional and open to facilitate the movement of students between different educational institutions.
9. Documentation relating to the public and educational institutions to meet their own in planning programs and curricula and provide scientific and technical advice.
10. Rooting Science, and the emphasis on the status of Arabic and English and interest in other languages and translation.
11. Closer attention Sudan in terms of inherited cultural (physical and verbal) and its environment, its population, its economy, living and so on.

University Center's Management:

1. Management of the educational process at centr's districts and the linkage between them, and between different departments of the university in the academic affairs, administrative, and financial.
2. Providing appropriate educational services.
3. Provide human and material resources assigned to the educational process.
4. Create good relations, and distinguished between the educational areas of the Open University of Sudan, and universities, and state ministries.
5. Supervision of academic centers, and development.
6. Link the student community through cultural events.

7. Create social bonds between learners.
8. To optimize the distribution of educational media to reach the educational centers in time, and place.
9. Storage media are fit.
10. Delivery of textbooks according to the actual needs of the educational zones according to accurate census.
11. Prepare periodic reports on the general attitude of the curriculum in terms of exchange and monitoring of the books, and non-academic educational activities.
12. Proposals to increase the number of copies of any textbook on statistical analysis of data from the Scientific Affairs Dept.
13. Training courses for centers employees.
14. Increase the number of educational centers States, as well as increased university admission.
15. Establishment of computer centers in educational areas

Educational goals attribution:

The main goals for this section is the Management of the educational process, the study centers and the linkage between them and between different departments of the university related to academic affairs, to work on evaluating the performance of students' academic, and the development of the educational process at the university.

Tasks and functions:

1. Educational guidance and counselling for university students in coordination with mentors
2. Supervision of the educational process in coordination with supervisors
3. Make sure the distribution of books and academic appointments, and collected from students in a timely manner, and follow-up corrected, and monitoring grades
4. Quarterly follow-up examinations, and the end, and continue the process of debugging, and monitoring
5. Academic programs meetings, and guidelines for supervisors, mentors with students, and make sure its in a timely manner, and in locations across the educational centers
6. Help students to make the most of the University's programs through radio broadcasting, television and in coordination with units Responsible for it, choose the times that suit students
7. Work to supplement the university feedback from mentors, supervisors, and students
8. Follow the registration process in all Center's districts, and supervision of staff

9. Oversee the introduction of center's districts after the results corrected, and monitoring grades
10. Holding seminars and workshop for educational appropriated attribution in coordination with the Human Resources Development Center to develop their performance, and development in the field of educational reference submitted to the Open Learning students, and distance education
11. Research and studies related to the development of academic work, and academic supervision

Distribution Section: Tasks and functions:

1. Continue setting up educational media with the competent authorities at centers
2. Overseeing the inventory of existing educational media stores university, stores and school districts
3. Identifying the needs of center's districts and reality applications sent
4. Follow up the ratification of the requests for center's districts
5. Submit monthly reports on the position of the distribution of books, multimedia and other aids to the different educational areas

Beside these we aim to improve the use of Electronic Education through covering all center's district by providing new computer laps, internet facilities and training. We are facing the challenges to restore areas at the conflict areas. We have a number of students at South Sudan; we need to help them to complete their education. Now they are facing the new regulations after referendum.

3.5 University of Papua New Guinea, Institute of Distance and Continuing Education

Brief description

Distance education began at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1974, with the establishment of the Department of Extension Studies. In 1994, the Institute of Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE) replaced Extension Studies, adopting a broader mission and new funding and reporting processes. Enrolment in the distance education programme has increased continuously in recent years, with growth in all programme areas and at each of the 15 distance education centres in the provinces and on the main campus in the National Capital District. The central activities are the Matriculation Programme (upper high school), the Diploma in Commerce Programme (two-year university diploma in accounting), the Bachelor of Education In-service Programme (for upgrading elementary teachers), and the Non-credit Programme (maths and English review). In 1996 there were approximately 16,000 course enrolments throughout Papua New Guinea (up from 4,000 in 1991), and, in 1997, enrolment is expected to show continued increases.

Problems encountered

Planning and managing distance education

- A lack of planning for growth in distance education is a serious problem. The nation is growing at an annual rate that exceeds most other nations, yet the high school system has increased its intake only slightly by building new schools and the university system has not increased its intake in several years. Increasing enrolments result from the increasing demand for distance education, and increasing enrolments also result from the opening of new centres and new courses, but due to national financial limitations the institution has had repeated cuts in staff and funding.

Using and integrating media

- Courses are based entirely on the printed page and tutoring, and no media have been introduced. The tropical environment and the lack of air conditioning results in prompt growth of mold on the few audio and video cassettes that have been obtained, soon making them unusable. There are no facilities for creating audio or video cassettes, no staffing or funds to do so, and equipment for playing cassettes exists only at a few centres (and then it is typically one machine in the director's office). Most centres have a computer for administrative use, but only in one centre are computers used for education.

The most important issue: The planning environment at the university

Guidelines for IDCE planning are derived primarily from three documents: The national higher education plan, the University of Papua New Guinea's five-year plan, and the plan for the institute. Though these documents assign our mission and provide the best and most comprehensive structure for our activities, problems with each limit their usefulness.

Both the national higher education plan and the University of Papua New Guinea's five-year plan have gone unrevised for several years, well beyond the period they were intended to cover, and thus they reflect the priorities and values of several years ago. An example of an outdated value is the advocacy of goals for IDCE enrolment growth that are so conservative that they were fully achieved six years ago. Current issues and the concerns of the nation and the university have not been woven into the structure of these documents. Examples here are the failure to address the massive change in teacher education and new educational standards, and the failure to reflect major changes in educational emphasis growing out of the restructuring of our national and provincial governments.

Lacking any other guidance, the guidelines provided by the higher education plan and the University of Papua New Guinea's five-year plan have been closely reflected in the plan for the institute. Indeed, the rationale for operation as an institute is presented in the national higher education plan. The national plan also provides the framework within which growth and development of the institute is expected to occur. IDCE has continued to take the derived plan for the institute very seriously, particularly since it has been endorsed by the University Planning Committee, the Academic Board, and the University Council. This document was the basis for recurrent requests for increased staffing and financial resources in the past three

years, without any results. In fact, the IDCE central office's annual budget of 140,000 kina in 1994 has been reduced to 23,000 kina in 1997, which is the equivalent of about one United States dollar per course enrolment. Over the past six years we have repeatedly proposed that a standard be adopted for staffing (most recently suggesting a ratio of 1,000 students to each academic, which if accepted would double our staff) but no action has ever been taken. It must be said that there has been no detectable support for the planning process as a basis for resource allocation in the university.

The plan for the institute contains our view of the IDCE's future, and as such it is our guideline for mission accomplishment. For example, in the years ahead our priorities for growth in certain areas and reduction in others will be as outlined in the plan. Similarly, later this year when IDCE occupies the new building constructed for it by the European Union, and when IDCE eventually expands its staff and incorporates new media, the utilisation of these resources will be as described in the plan. If and when the national higher education plan or the university five-year plan is revised in the future, the plan for the institute will then be revised to assure the compatibility and support that is required in an effective planning environment. We have elected to be true to our assigned mission of bringing increasing educational opportunity to a nation that desperately needs it. By franchising our courses to private institutions and by raising and retaining registration fees we have assured operating funds for essential IDCE activities at the main campus. Provinces usually provide budgets for university centres, but some provinces have virtually no money and most centres are in poverty.

We have begun a planned reduction in non-credit (remedial maths and English) courses, reducing non-credit enrolments to offset some of the growth in matriculation and degree programmes. Using collected fees we have recently hired two new staff members, though we may not be able to retain them as the university does not provide benefits such as housing because they are not a part of the regular establishment.

In 1997 an estimated 62 percent of all students in the university will be in the distance education programme, but IDCE has only six academics and two administrators on the main campus and a maximum of two persons at each centre. Funding, already sub-marginal, is expected to decrease by five percent each year for the next three years, disregarding inflation. Staffing has been cut, people who leave are not replaced, and it is difficult to remain confident of our future ability to grade papers much less revise courses. We are at a crossroads, with rapidly increasing demand and massive expectations, and no agreed-upon plan for achieving our assign

3.6 Centre for Continuing Education, University of Botswana

Brief description

The University of Botswana, which hitherto existed as a constituent college of the University of Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland (UBLS), became a separate national university in 1982. The university is a dual mode institution that offers on-campus degree programmes through various academic faculties, conducts research through various institutes, and provides off-campus academic and other outreach programmes through the Centre for Continuing Education where the Distance Education Unit is based. The mandate of the Centre for Continuing Education is to provide educational opportunities to adults through distance education, evening and weekend classes, public education conferences, workshops, seminars, and radio programmes on a variety of subjects that are in high demand by the public.

The university's involvement with distance education dates back to the 1970s when radio campaigns, complemented by face-to-face contact, were used to educate the public on issues of national interest such as civic education. Geographically, Botswana is a vast country and radio broadcasts could reach many people simultaneously. Today, the main responsibility of the Distance Education Unit, which conducts its distance education programmes mainly through the print medium, is to increase the university's capacity for distance education and, in collaboration with relevant departments, to identify and develop certificate and non-certificate programmes for delivery at a distance. The Distance Education Unit plans to provide programmes at non-credit, certificate, diploma, degree, and post-graduate levels. Currently, the unit offers a certificate in adult education for people involved in literacy, adult, continuing, and community education programmes. A diploma in primary education commenced in 1998 to upgrade primary teacher's certificate holders in a bid to raise the standards and quality of education at the grassroots level. Plans to launch further programmes are also underway.

The certificate in adult education course development experience

The Distance Education Unit has, in the past, offered a certificate in adult education programme in a semi-distance education mode, with materials developed by consultants and heavy reliance being placed on residential study schools in Gaborone, where most of the teaching has taken place. This programme was reviewed in 1989 and is being revised so that it can be offered completely by distance education.

This exercise has proved to be a useful pilot project, as it has brought to light a number of problems in the area of materials development that the unit will have to address in the future. These problems relate largely to four specific areas of course development: the development of the syllabus, the recruitment of course writers, the submission of a first draft, and the actual development of the materials.

Developing the syllabus

The syllabus outline for each of the five courses was developed as a collaborative effort between the Distance Education Unit and lecturers in the Department of Adult Education who have been teaching the courses. As each course will be taught over a

two-semester academic year, courses were divided into two modules, each consisting of 10 to 15 units, but no firm guidelines were set regarding the exact number of units that would comprise each module. The content of each unit was then detailed under several major topic areas. Course writers were thus armed with mutually agreed upon unit outlines to use as the basis for their writing but these were insufficiently detailed.

Recruiting course writers

In the unit's material development process, course writers are recruited mostly from the co-operating departments and colleges that run the on-campus equivalent of the programmes. In the Certificate in Adult Education programme, some of the course writers have been drawn from the Distance Education Unit because of their professional training in adult education. A decision was made that all writers, apart from unit staff, would be paid for their services and that all materials developed would be recognised as academic publications for staff appraisal purposes. Contracts were not signed as they required the approval of university authorities. Thus, course writers have proceeded with their task on the assumption that they will be paid for their efforts in due course. In each course, at least two course writers were appointed and decisions relating to a division of the writing workload was left up to the individuals concerned.

As distance education has not been a significant feature of the University of Botswana in the past, it is understandable that most writers have not had any experience of writing materials for distance learners. As a result, course writing workshops were

held to train writers for this specific function. During these workshops, the writers were made aware of the nature of distance education programmes, the features that would be expected in materials, and the reasons for incorporating them. They were advised that a typical unit should be 10 to 15 typed pages in length and consist of an overview, unit objectives, several sections of content divided into subsections, interactive questions, a summary, self-assessment questions on the whole unit, and a list of additional reading materials. They then set off to start writing.

Submitting the first draft

In most cases, materials were not forthcoming as writers were preoccupied with teaching activities and could not find the time to devote to additional tasks. Many manuscripts, when submitted, did not conform to expectations, and in some cases, ignored the guidelines altogether. Consequently, the decision was made to hold a series of writing retreats during which writers were isolated in comfortable surroundings conducive to the activity of writing. Secretaries accompanied the group to word process materials as they were submitted and there were high expectations that all units for both modules would materialise. In reality, although these retreats have produced units, less than half of the expected output has been achieved.

Once written, units were passed on to the word processors and editor for word processing, formatting, and editing. On the whole, the submission of hand-written manuscripts resulted in unnecessary confusion and delay as word processors struggled to decipher handwriting and instructions. The content was often not divided

into subsections with identifiable headings and manuscripts were incomplete as they did not contain all the expected features. Many units did not follow the agreed upon syllabus outline for content and, in some cases, later units were collapsed into previous units and dealt with fleetingly as the agreed range of twelve to fifteen units per module was not met, leading to unequal workloads for students over the semester.

Actually developing the materials

A combination of inexperienced distance education writers and word processors has meant that part-time copy editors had to be employed to work on the initial word processed drafts before they were passed on to the editor. In addition, the volume of work arriving at one time meant that it has not been possible to return a first draft to course writers within a short period of time. The underlying assumption at the time was that hand-written materials would only need word processing and superficial editing and formatting by an editor. The reality has been that this is not the case and that there must be far more concentration on developmental processes if quality standards are to be met. Materials could be improved considerably by the input of instructional design, graphic art, and media staff.

Possible solutions

Identified Problem	Possible Solution
Development of syllabus outline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide modules into a set number of units. • Develop behavioural objectives for each unit. • Identify and list major topics to be covered in each unit. • Identify and list sub-topics to be covered under major topics in each unit.
Recruitment of course writers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit from a wider pool of potential course writers by advertisement.

Identified Problem	Possible Solution
	<p>progressive payments and requiring the submission of a model unit for assessment of writer suitability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be prepared to enforce
Training of course writers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide rigid guidelines stipulating the essential features that will be expected in each unit. • Assess a model unit to determine the course writer's suitability and compliance with requirements. • Extend the training period to permit submission of at least the first two units. • Stress the significance of the team
Submission of a first draft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stipulate and enforce minimum standards for presentation of hand-written drafts.
Course development process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the importance of developmental staff and increase their numbers accordingly. • Spread realistic submission dates for units over the whole writing period to avoid developmental congestion. • Provide professional development training for word processors.

3.7 The University College of Education of Winneba

Brief description

Until 1992, diploma teachers who wanted to further their education by upgrading themselves to the degree level had to pursue the same four-year courses planned for sixth-formers at the University of Cape Coast. The University College of Education of Winneba (UCEW) was established in 1993 through the amalgamation of seven diploma-awarding teacher training institutions to serve such diploma teachers. The college was therefore established with the overriding purposes of both preparing teachers and other professionals for service to the nation and improving upon the basic education needs of Ghana by concentrating on the training of teachers at both the Diploma and Bachelor of Education degree levels. UCEW therefore carries out its mission by designing and implementing pre-service education programmes for the preparation of teachers and other personnel. Even though the college was set up to recruit more teachers to pursue higher courses, the limited accommodation facilities available militated against the achievement of this noble objective.

To complement the efforts of the university college in meeting the ever-increasing demand for access to its programmes, the Institute for Educational Development and Extension (IEDE) was established as one of seven academic divisions of UCEW to co-ordinate the offering of some of the courses at a distance. The distance education unit, which is by far the largest of the five units of IEDE, is therefore charged to run the Bachelor of Education (In-Service) degree programme for teachers and teacher trainers holding diploma certificates who expect to study part-time without undue disruption of their work schedules. The programme will run alongside the internal two-year post-diploma Bachelor of Education programme and will offer a degree of equivalent status. Like most distance education programmes in developing countries that have been heavily influenced by donor countries, the IEDE received some funding at least in the beginning from the Department for International Development (DFID), formerly known as the Overseas Development Administration (ODA). DFID invested in the initial survey of the learner profile of prospective students to enrol in the Bachelor of Education programme and also helped to address the training of writers of participating departments through consultancies involving workshops that were run jointly by external experts, the DFID subject advisers, and local counterparts (co-ordinators) of the IEDE. Even though IEDE co-ordinates the course material writing of the departments, the participating departments are responsible for the content of the distance education programme. UCEW is therefore a dual mode distance education institution using departmental course teams and editors. Co-ordinators at IEDE serve in varying roles from simple proof-reading and assisting with artists' briefs and layout to offering advice for the restructuring of study material.

Problems encountered

Planning and managing distance learning

- Academic staff of the participating departments are not provided release time for the writing and review of their course material. This has caused delays in the submission of course material since lecturers have many functions such as lecturing, organising tutorials, and marking their examinations as well as supervising their on-campus students on teaching practice.

Implementing quality assurance

- Lecturers in the participating departments were initially sceptical about the credibility of the programme, taking into consideration the user-friendly language proposed for the writing of distance education course material. However, this scepticism can be explained in light of some lecturers' inexperience with the delivery systems involved in distance education programmes. It should, however, be emphasised here that external assessors have been engaged to read and comment on the course materials and provide supportive feedback to the course writers. Each course has its own editorial team of two or three members who review the materials initially and provide feedback to the authors.

Using and integrating media in distance education

- The use and integration of media in the distance education programme of UCEW leave much to be desired, since the departments engaged in course writing do not have the basic skills or the necessary equipment to enable them to use any medium other than print.

Instructional design and production for distance education

- Instructional design is the sole responsibility of the departments although co-ordinators at IEDE monitor their work and give advice. The production of course materials is facilitated at IEDE with the help of support staff using the equipment purchased by the DFID.

Learner support systems

- Even though the programme has not yet taken off, the institutional response to student enquiries needs improvement. The preparation of course material by the academic staff needs speeding up to avoid the situation in which students enrolled in the programme have to wait long periods for study materials to be delivered and are consequently frustrated and demotivated. Four regional study centres have been established to provide student support through tutorials and library facilities, with the help of tutors and other supporting staff.

The most important issue: Instructional design and production for distance education

The literature on the Open University of the United Kingdom and many other institutions on distance education indicate that for a course to be implemented, an institution requires about 18 months (some even a lot longer, say three years) from the initiation of the writing process to the implementation of the programme. Although

the writing of the distance education material at UCEW began in April 1995, only four courses out of a total of twenty-four first-year courses are on the shelves at present. The heavy teaching workloads of the course writers impedes their ability to deliver the study material as planned.

Staff who have found it difficult to prepare their teaching in the distance mode are given close support from the IEDE co-ordinators, who have been trained in distance education. To this end, therefore, the IEDE co-ordinators have always tried to treat writers with respect and courtesy by sharing with them their concerns and encouraging them to pick up from where they left off. In this way, the co-ordinators provide not only guidance in content, style, and format but also give moral support while urging them to make time to write — despite their heavy teaching workloads. The IEDE co-ordinators also ensure that writers are provided with regular feedback on the progress of writing to the respective course teams. Course writers are encouraged to meet regularly with the co-ordinators to discuss their units.

Realising that a good team can exert pressure to achieve deadlines and equally ensure quality output, the IEDE co-ordinating team instituted departmental academic editorial boards of committed and dedicated writers trained in the editing of distance education material to help more specifically with the content editing of materials. During the editorial training, emphasis was laid on the basic principles of distance education material writing procedures.

This step has to some extent speeded up the writing process even though much is still left to be done. At one time it became clear that one reason writers could not deliver the materials on time was that they managed their time poorly. A workshop on time management was organised to enable writers to make the optimum use of their time.

Future plans

To facilitate the production of the course materials on time, it is important that the UCEW establish realistic workloads and, if possible, set up staff support networks to maintain the writers' morale. There is also the need to consider involving a wider development team by contracting external writers and staff from other institutions. Plans are afoot for a series of short one- to three-day writers' workshops to encourage faster planning, drafting, and reviewing of course materials. A 'writers' surgery' session will likely evolve to give writers the opportunity to bring and share their difficulties with their more experienced and

successful colleagues.

3.8 Open University of Sri Lanka

Brief description

The OUSL started the two-year Post-Graduate Diploma in Education Programme (PGDE) in 1980 in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka. The main objective of the programme is to provide professional training for graduate teachers employed in government schools, pirtvenas (community schools) private schools, and teachers' colleges. A few years ago selection to the programme was based on teachers' seniority and the marks obtained in the qualifying test. Now it is open to all graduates of recognised universities.

The curriculum of the programme consists of nine components: eight theory subjects and one practical component. Students complete four theory subjects in each academic year as shown in the following table. Teaching practice, which is the only practical component of the programme, is arranged under the supervision of master teachers and carried out for eight to 10 weeks at the end of the second academic year.

The main medium of imparting instruction is print material. They are supported by occasional day schools, tutorials and a few audio and video programmes. In 1995–96, 3,200 students were enrolled in both Parts I and II of the programme. Several studies have been carried out by OUSL academics with the view of improving the quality of material and instruction, minimising drop-out rates, and increasing the effectiveness of the programme.

PGDE Programme — Part I Courses	PGDE Programme — Part II Courses
ESP 1305 — 'Principles of Education'	ESP 2305 — 'Teaching Practice'
ESP 1306 — 'Educational Psychology'	ESP 2306 — 'Techniques of Teaching'
ESP 1307 — 'Evaluation of Educational Outcomes'	ESP 2207 — 'Curriculum, School and Society'
ESP 1308 — 'Student Adjustment and Counselling'	ESP 2208 — 'Comparative Education and Educational Problems'
	ESP 2209 — 'Educational Administration and Management'

Problems encountered

Planning and managing distance education

- Monitoring and co-ordination of master teachers activities is difficult because of the large numbers involved (250 master teachers) and their placement in dispersed locations.
- Meeting schedules is difficult: even though the PGDE is a two-year programme, academic activities last for six months in each year. Therefore marking assignments and giving eligibility have always been delayed.

Implementing quality assurance

- Because of the involvement of large numbers and pressure put on meeting eligibility schedules, it is difficult to maintain quality in marking assignments. Discrepancies among marking examiners are noted.
- Updating material is not economical.

Using and integrating media in distance education

- Audio-visual programmes are not popular among teacher trainees. They prefer face-to-face instructors to audio-visual programmes.
- Academic staff is heavily burdened with other activities (planning, management, writing, marking, and conducting day schools), so it is very difficult to find time to produce good quality audio-visual material.

Instructional design and production for distance education

- It is difficult to simplify material while maintaining the quality of teacher training.
- Academics who have worked in the conventional university system have little faith in distance methods.

Learner support systems

- Participation in day schools and tutorials has been limited due to personal difficulties and geographical barriers.
- Decentralisation of academic and other support is difficult due to lack of facilities.

The most important issue: Monitoring and co-ordinating teaching practice

The OUSL recruits nearly 250 master teachers from all over the country to conduct teaching practice during the second year of the programme. They are full-time employees of other institutions like government schools, teachers' colleges, training colleges, or technical colleges. Therefore they tend to maintain

their own schedule of involvement in the distance education programme so that it will not affect their day- to-day activities. Due to the enrolment of large numbers and geographical barriers, proper monitoring and co-ordination procedures cannot be maintained. This situation has led to the following problems:

- variability in guidance;
- difficulty in meeting deadlines;
- poor quality of supervision and guidance;
- practical difficulties faced by the students; and
- negligence of the supervisory role (they tend to act as evaluators but not as supervisors).

Solutions

On the basis of recent research findings and the experience of academic staff of the Department of Education, the following procedures were launched as solutions to the above problems:

- conduct workshops and seminars for master teachers;
- conduct demonstration lessons for student teachers in small groups; and
- the significance accorded master teachers' evaluation was reduced from 50 percent to 30 percent and a decision was made to consider it a continuous assessment of teaching practice.

Suggestions were also made to allocate 10 to 15 master teachers to each academic member of the Department of Education to monitor their activities. However, many problems remain unsettled.

3.9 Makerere University

Brief description

Makerere University is a dual mode university running two external degree programmes (Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Commerce). These courses are run by the Department of Distance Education, which is part of the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education. These programmes are run in collaboration with the Faculty of Commerce (for the Bachelor of Commerce) and the School of Education (for the Bachelor of Education). The two faculties are responsible for the academic component, while the institute is responsible for the administrative component.

The External Degree Programme (EDP) is governed by the general regulations of the university. No special regulations were drawn to govern the External Degree

Programme, an arrangement that has ensured the External Degree students receive the same quality of course content as internal students. However, without regulations that fully consider the needs of the external student, the programme has been affected by bureaucracy. As a result, the pace of various activities required for the smooth running of the programme has sometimes been slow.

The External Degree Programme study package consists of:

- print materials;
- face-to-face sessions;
- assignments and tests and quizzes;
- student study groups; and
- audio cassettes.

The External Degree Programme admits students every academic year and at present has 2,200 students.

For administrative purposes, the Department of Distance Education is divided into three units: Materials Development Unit, Tutoring Unit, and Support Services Unit. Each of these units is headed by a lecturer. The Department's major concern is the provision of External Degree Programmes but it is also in the process of developing short courses which include 'Skills for Research Assistant', 'Writing and Publishing', 'Marketing', and 'Income Generating Activities'. Written materials for these courses are being developed now.

Problems encountered

Planning and managing distance education

The planning and management of distance education programmes in Makerere University is greatly affected by a lack of clear policies on the running of distance education programmes. Neither are there clear policies on staff recruitment and development, student registration, or library and support services for students. Instead, all are governed by the general university regulations, disregarding the special needs of distanced education programmes and students.

Implementing quality assurance

Makerere University is a dual mode university. The university therefore feels that to ensure quality, students in the External Degree Programme must sit the same examination as internal students at the same time. This has particularly been the case for the Bachelor of Commerce programme.

Course delivery and course assessment structure for the external students is not yet satisfactory. There is a general lack of reading materials, insufficient contact with tutors, and lack of a personal tutor scheme.

The tutors participating in the External Degree Programme are lecturers in the internal programmes. They already have full loads and see the activities of the External Degree Programme as an extra load. Consequently, the assignments and tests given tend to be easy to mark and do not encourage in-depth study and research. These assignments and tests end up examining mainly surface learning.

Using and integrating media in distance education

Integration of media in the Makerere External Degree Programme has been a problem, caused by the delay in the production of print materials. A situation has therefore arisen in which the cassettes accompanying print materials are ready but, due to delays in publishing the print materials, they cannot be used. To a large extent students still depend on print materials. Radio and computer-based learning are difficult to integrate because of a scarcity of resources.

Instructional design and production for distance education

The process of instructional design and production has been very slow. The causes of this slackness are:

- inadequate staffing;
- lecturers who are supposed to develop and review materials are busy;
- lack of sub-editors to assist the principal editor;
- delays at the publishing stage due particularly to the long process of procuring funds; and
- delays by the publishing firms.

Learner support systems

There is no clear learner support system in the External Degree Programme. The programme began with no clear system and, due to a lack of resources, is evolving very slowly. Student study centres are being started in the different regions as a response to student demands rather than as part of a clear scheme.

The two most important issues: Developing a learner support system and developing study materials

Developing a learner support system

Learner support systems in Makerere Distance Education Programmes have not yet been fully developed. At the planning stage of the programme the role of the extramural centres, for example, which were supposed to play a vital role in the support system, was not fully defined. As a result, administrators, tutors, and

students of the programme have failed to utilise fully the potential offered by these centres. Support is therefore very much centralised despite the scattered nature of students, who come from all over Uganda.

The scarcity of funds has made the personal tutor arrangement difficult to implement. The radio and television services have not yet been effectively used because many of the students, especially those who live in remote areas, cannot afford the accessories. It has also been difficult to use a multimedia approach to provide student support, largely due to inadequate staff and funds. For example, counselling on the telephone is almost non-existent since it is expensive and telephone services are not available in most remote areas. Students are therefore left to study mostly on their own with little support.

Support available to students

Learner support in Makerere University is provided in a variety of ways.

- On admission, students receive information about the programme through the prospectus and the study guide. They receive two weeks of orientation, which enables them to receive more information concerning the programme, guidance on subject combinations and study skills, and to interact with each other. It is also mostly during that orientation week that they form their study groups.
- The university main library and all off-campus library branches offer library services. The department also operates a small collection of rare books.
- Study groups have also been started, are located in existing education institutions, and meet mostly on weekends.
- Other groups meet in the evenings on campus to solicit the services of tutors.
- Hand-outs and other references are provided to students.
- Occasional visits are made by members of the Department of Distance Education to some of the study centres to meet with the students and to obtain feedback on their progress. The visits assist the department in the planning of materials distribution and preparation for face-to-face sessions.

Student study groups

Mainly because of a lack of study materials and the problems associated with remoteness from the centre, students have organised themselves into strong study groups. The study groups meet mostly on weekends to review previous work and discuss difficult assignments. Ongoing research has shown that groups are mainly found in areas where there is a concentration of students, not necessarily at the extramural centres. The radius of these clusters is as great as

50 kilometres so the department is encouraging students to form groups based on these clusters. This will assist the department to provide services to the students by establishing convenient centres where materials can be kept and students can go to read. These may later be developed into resource centres.

Personal tutors

Students have expressed their need for personal tutors. The department has also realised the urgency of establishing a strong network of personal tutors who will assist students in academic and socially related problems. Centralised support services are insufficient to cater to the large number of students. The total population of students on the External Degree Programme is more than 2,000.

The personal tutor scheme, it should be noted, has not been implemented in Makerere because of a lack of funds. A cheaper scheme can possibly be designed, for example, one in which the principals of teacher training colleges and qualified staff in other institutions and banks can be involved on a part-time basis in assisting students. They would, however, need training in handling distance learners.

Developing study materials for the External Degree Programme

The External Degree Programme was launched in 1991 and at that time no study materials had been developed. Instead, through financial assistance of The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Makerere was able to purchase written materials from Nairobi University and from the Open College UK. This acquisition of study materials was a ‘stop gap measure’ that enabled the programme to take off.

Purchasing materials from other institutions is good as a ‘stop gap measure’ but in the long run it has proven too expensive. The department has not been able to continue doing this. Also, courses can be deceptively similar on the surface, giving the impression that they are identical when there could actually be deep set differences. Where materials are purchased, there may be need for the institution buying these materials to develop supplementary materials that would ensure the students needs are fully met.

In the External Degree Programme, written materials were viewed as the core of the learning package, so to ensure that Makerere University produces its own materials COL funded the initial writers’ workshops. Since then, the Department of Distance Education has run a number of other writers’ workshops. As a result a total of 40 units are at different stages of development with only five published so far. Clearly, this is far below the needs of the External Degree Programme and so the shortage of study materials is still acute.

To deal with this, the department has chosen a number of options, as follows.

Handouts

In nearly all the subjects, but more especially in subjects for which no written materials have been developed, students are given handouts. These may be handouts developed by the lecturers but which are not written in the distance education mode or they may be extracts from texts. Handouts are important but should be seen as either another 'stop gap measure' or supplementary reading material. To meet the needs of the distance learner it is still imperative that materials written for the distance learner be developed.

Face-to-face sessions

Face-to-face sessions should be part of the study package but, because of inadequate study materials, a lot of time is allotted to them, which is expensive to both the students and the department. Also, there is the danger of the External Degree Programme students beginning to rely entirely on these sessions even in subjects in which study materials are available.

Student study groups

Student study groups are also part of the study package but, like the face-to-face sessions, they have taken on a different meaning, particularly in the Bachelor of Commerce programme, where the shortage of materials is worse. The students now rely so much on the student study groups that sometimes meetings are held daily as though they were a conventional evening programme.

Conclusion

In any distance education programme, there is no replacement for study materials. Ideally, they should be developed even before the programme is launched and, where this is not possible, production should be guaranteed. If materials must be purchased, then care is needed in the selection and, where necessary, supplementary materials should be developed.

3.10 The University of Zambia

Brief description

The University of Zambia is a conventional university that has been operating a comparatively small scale distance education programme since it was established in 1966. Distance student enrolments vary from year to year. In the 1995–96 academic year, for example, 381 distance students (326 male and 55 female) were enrolled, constituting 9.8 percent of the total university enrolment of 3,980 (that is, full-time, part-time, and distance studies).

There are 68 first- and second-year level semester courses offered to distance students by the schools (faculties) of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences. These lead to the award of the Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Arts with Education, and the Diploma in Adult Education. However, students who enrol for the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Arts with Education degree programmes

must transfer to full-time study for their final two years. The Diploma in Adult Education can be completed entirely by distance education.

Problems encountered

Planning and managing distance education

- In the past the distance education programme has suffered from the lack of a clear and comprehensive policy, inadequate funding, and long bureaucratic procedures through which matters relating to distance education are referred to the university's policy- and decision-making bodies. An additional problem is that the Directorate of Distance Education does not always find it easy to establish its authority over the overworked teaching staff, who are inclined to regard requests and instructions from the directorate as carrying less weight than those given by their teaching departments relating to internal teaching.

Implementing quality assurance

- There is neither a policy nor mechanisms or strategies for implementing or assessing quality in distance education, a phenomenon that has made distance education more variable in quality than should be the case. In the past, this has been compounded by the lack of trained staff (in distance education) and the difficulty in retraining teaching staff so that they become more proficient in distance teaching.

Using and integrating media in distance education

- Print materials are the predominant medium of instruction complemented by a four-week intensive face-to-face teaching programme. The comparatively under-developed telecommunications technologies make it difficult to use and integrate other media in distance education, resulting in a weak two-way communication system.

Instructional design and production for distance education

- There is no uniform policy or practice on instructional design or course presentation and there is very little input into course design from experts and professionals in the Directorate of Distance Education. The course production capacity of the Directorate of Distance Education is very limited and, therefore, it is not capable of supporting and facilitating efficient production and speedy delivery of study materials to the learners.

Learner support systems

- Some of the support services offered by different departments and units are not fully integrated into the distance education system as a whole and the Directorate of Distance Education can exercise no sanction for any failure on the part of various providers to offer efficient support services to distance learners. Most of the support services are centralised and the comparatively under-developed telecommunications infrastructure limits the range of learner-support services and the media through which they are provided.

The most important issue: Planning and managing distance education

Some policy and organisational changes instituted in the 1990s have helped to minimise a number of problems that, over the years, have affected the planning and management of the distance education programme.

- Unlike the report on the establishment of a university in Zambia which provided broad aims, the University of Zambia's Strategic Plan: 1994–98 offers more specific and more comprehensive policy provisions for the development of distance education.
- Distance education, once part of the Centre for Continuing Education, was transformed into an autonomous Directorate of Distance Education in 1994. Its director, like deans of schools and faculties, is accountable to the Vice-Chancellor, and is a member of the Senate and its various committees. A Senate Committee on Distance Education, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, was established as part of the new structure of distance education. Its main functions are to consider and formulate policy on distance education and recommend to the Senate, rules and regulations governing the distance education programme.

Solutions

These changes have not only improved the decision-making process but have also enhanced the status and visibility of distance education in the university.

- Distance teaching staff are now paid allowances for: all work on study materials prepared; every hour of lectures and tutorials during the residential school; and for each assignment and examination script marked. Although the current levels of allowances are not commensurate with the distance teaching responsibilities of the affected staff, they have had, in general, a positive effect on the running of the distance education programme.
- It has been realised that it is important and necessary for the Director of Distance Education and staff to meet regularly with distance education staff. Unlike Boards of Studies meetings (which also discuss matters relating to distance teaching) meetings with the distance teaching staff are more focused. Decisions or recommendations from these meetings can be referred direct to the Senate or to the Senate Committee on Distance Education. Perhaps one important lesson to be learned from the experience of the University of Zambia is that, in a dual mode university, the administrative and financial autonomy as well as various incentives for teaching staff are crucially important. A lot more has yet to be done in these areas at the University of Zambia.

3.11 ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Zimbabwe Open University started as the Centre for Distance Education of the University of Zimbabwe in 1993. Three years later in 1996 it became the University College of Distance Education of the University of Zimbabwe. Finally in 1999, the Zimbabwe open

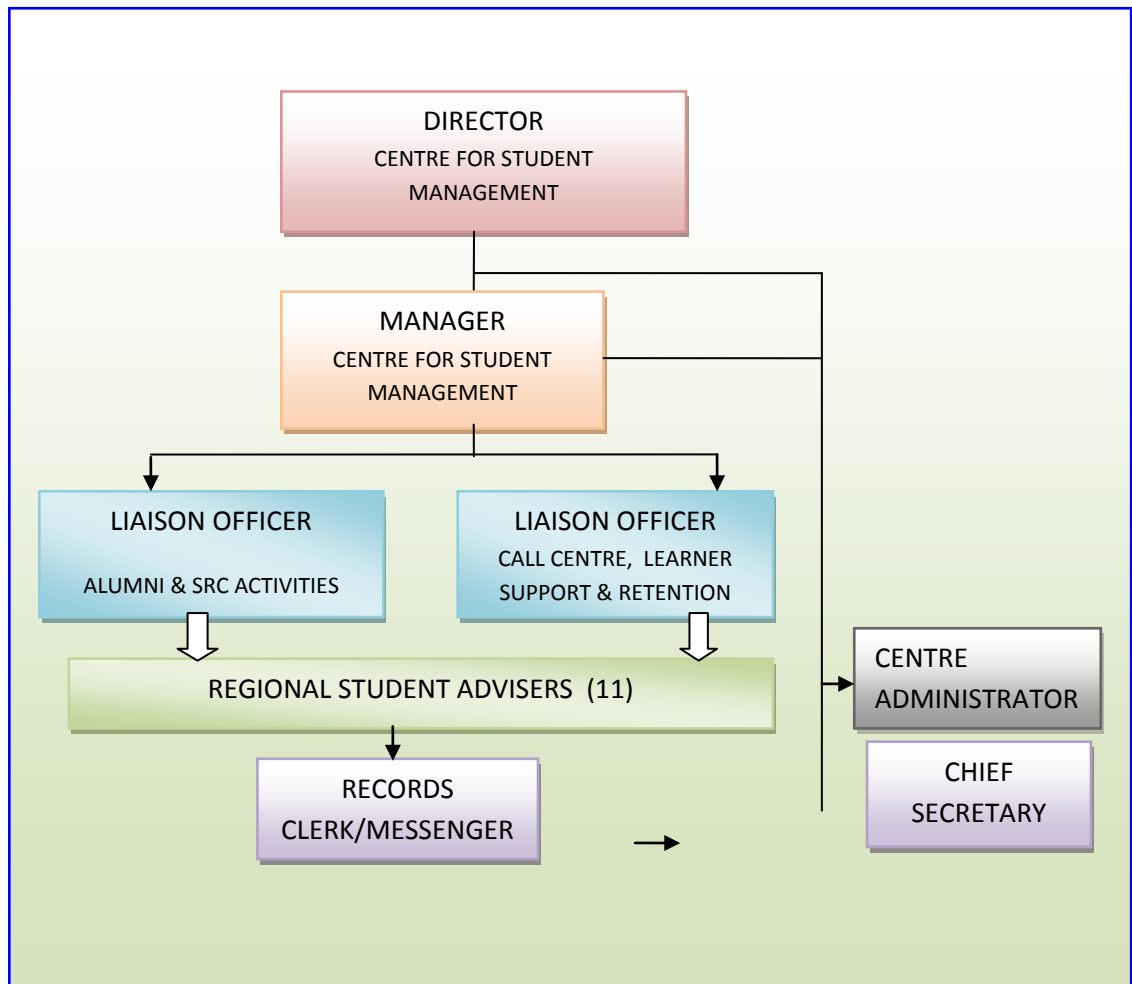
university was established by an Act of Parliament 25/20. As early as the onset of the first classes of ZOU it was realized that the Open and Distance Learning student required other assistance to strengthen his/her studentship. Learners Support started with the establishment of Study Circles where student met for advisement by a tutor on how to answer and structure assignment according to university's expectations. From this perspective Materials development became the focus of learner support by ensuring that materials interacted with the learner cognitively. Other services fell into place until a more refined learner support system was established.

Personnel in-charge of learner support service in your University

Learner Support at the Zimbabwe Open University is the responsibility of the Centre for Student Management whose vision is:

To become the centre of world class academic and psychological Learner support services and support, to all Zimbabwe Open University students in order to achieve high student retention levels which culminate in a viable and sustainable world class University. Learner Support in the Zimbabwe Open University is managed through an organisational structure which runs from the National Centre through to all Regional Centres as shown in the diagram below:

Centre for Student Management Organisational Structure



Method used in providing support to learners

The frame work for Learners Support is in three aspects which are integral to instructional delivery mode. These are the face-to-face tutorials, on-line interactions and self managed learning. In the Zimbabwe Open University, Learner Support is indeed integrated in both the pedagogical strategies and the administrative structure. At the Pedagogical level, Learner support is firstly, integrated into the development of learning materials where we insist that the modules should actually be interactive, that is, they should be talking to the student in a manner that the teacher talks to a student in the class. Secondly, part-time tutors are given periodic induction and training so that they respond appropriately to the needs of the learner in their face-to-face tutorials and in assignment marking. Thirdly, we have student counselling and advisement services which are offered by professionals in the Centre for Student Management. Student advisement concern itself in assisting student to answer assignments and to prepare for examinations.

On the administrative side, Learner Support is handled by the student advisors who are employed at every Regional Centre of the University. The Student Advisor receive student complaints, queries, concerns and issues which they document and escalate to respective departments for action. The student advisors then communicate the responses to the respective students. The roles of the student advisor are;

- advisement and counselling
- Facilitating Student Representative Council (SRC) activities
- Operation of a student drop in centre service point

The Centre for Student Management oversees the activities of the Student Representative Council whose responsibility is to ensure that the Student Body receives adequate, fair and commensurate service. The SRC is an important vehicle of University management as it conveys issues of concern to students to administration while information from management is relayed to the student body. This arrangement ensures that student learn in a manner that is hassle free.

In addition ZOU has a Call Centre whose role is;

- Responding to prospective students enquiries about ZOU programmes and prospects
- Communicating with students regarding any changes in structure, operations and study time schedules.
- Linking and referring students to relevant service points such as Academic Registry, Finance Departments, Library etc.

Gains of providing support to learners

Adequate and efficient Learner Support has a number of advantages to both the student and the institution. Learner support ensures the following;

- That the student adjust to open and distance learning smoothly
- That the student has a stress free learning experience
- That the student manages his/her learning efficiently
- That the student goes through his programme with no of few disruption
- That the institution has a higher student retention rate

- That the institution has a higher throughput rate.

Challenges

Challenges in learner support mainly relates to individuation of services to students in remote part of the country where ICT connections are not yet developed. However with the advent of the 3G technology, it is possible that this particular challenges will disappear soon.

Plan for improvement.

Plans for sustainable Learner Support include deliberate increase in use of digital technology in order to mitigate the distance between the Learner and the tutor. Use of mobile text messages as well as website chat boards help to increase students' access to learning.

3.12 THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA

Introduction

The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) is an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution established by the Government's Act No. 17 of 1992 which has now been replaced by the Open University of Tanzania Charter and Rules of 2007. It is a single mode distance learning institution in which students are geographically and physically separated from instructors.

In the academic programmes of OUT, which comprise academic degrees, diploma and certificate programmes there are over 60,000 students spread in 28 Regional Centres found within Tanzania and outside (in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Namibia). In OUT, students are admitted through the flexible mode in addition to the use of programmes delivery which is not limited by time, pace and place. Effective student support is critical for successful student learning at OUT.

OUT concept of students support

Student support includes provision of course outlines, study materials and communications about student learning in general among others. Synthesis of the conceptions is adopted which involve (i) provision of learning resources (e.g. course outlines, study materials, handbooks and guides), (ii) regular communication and interaction between lecturer and students through face-to-face or modern technologies and (iii) provision of immediate feedback to students. As a result, students encounter several challenges when learning in ODL.

Study materials are also provided to students in Centres in the form of print materials to support students in their learning. Correspondence through courier services and face-to-face sessions were the most dominant means of communication and interaction between lectures and students.

ICT-enhanced student support

According to Mbwette (2009), ICT infrastructure and access has substantially improved compared to the first decade or so since the establishment of OUT.

It should be noted that OUTs efforts to integrate ICTs in its operation to enhance student support (among others), can be traced back in 2004 when the university formulated comprehensive structures such as ICT Policy, ICT Master Plan and E-Learning Implementation Strategy (OUT, 2009 abc). Amongst others, the OUT Policy stipulates clearly that the university aims to (i) enhance the use of ICT as a main interaction platform between students and lecturers and (ii) transform all study materials developed henceforth into an interactive format consistent with Moodle Learning Management System (ICT Policy, 2009). Additionally, efforts are ongoing to install computer laboratory for students in all Regional Centres (Mbwette, 2012). Besides, as a way to improve students' access to ICT, OUTSO leadership has negotiated with a Tanzanian Company called Royalmark Supplies Co. Ltd to supply laptops from China at USD 270 with specifications provided by IT staff from OUT.

The use of CDs has improved the delivery of study materials and course outlines.

The top management is very committed to support integration of ICTs in teaching and learning. This is evidenced by installation of a Heavy CD burner at OUT which has facilitated production of over 566 CDs which are made available to students through respective Centres. Examples of the courses which are available in CDs include BSc. (ICT), BA (General), BA (Ed.), DPTE and Foundation Courses.

Where necessary, students are given orientation on how to access electronic resources (such as course outlines, study materials and other related resources) that are useful in their learning. According to Nihuka (2011), students get sufficient and up-to-date learning resources when ICTs such computer and internet on time.

There is also provision for interaction through e-mail among students and between students and lecturers. Students use e-mail to forward their inquiries in relation to their examination grades to the Director of Examination Syndicate (DES) via Deputy Vice chancellor Academic and Dean or Director of respective Faculty or Institute. According to Nihuka (2011), students in Dar es Salaam use e-mails for about 3 – 6 times per week to communicate and interact with their course lecturers compared to their counterparts in Regional Centres.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i) I want you to enumerate the challenges to learner support services in some of the institutions you have studied above.
- ii) What are the suggestions for surmounting the challenges which you have identified.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is about time, according to Lentell and O'Rourke (2004) that developing countries should start researching other models and methods of providing student support in situations of large student numbers WHICH IS CHARACTERISED BY Open and Distance Learning institutions.

5.0 SUMMARY

Case study on how support services are carried out was discussed in this unit with aim of having an idea of practices beyond the shoulders so as to be able to improve on the way learners are provided support from other ODL institutions across the world.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- i) Having studied the way support services are rendered in some selected distance learning institutions across the world, state in brief, the meaning of student support services from the experience you have gathered.

- ii) Mention the specific lesson you learnt from the way support services are rendered by the Zimbabwe Open University.

- ii) Explain briefly how support services are rendered in three of the universities stated below:
 - Open University of Sudan
 - University of South Africa
 - Open University of Tanzania
 - Open University of United kingdom
 - Open University of Sri lanka
 - Makerere University, Uganda

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