AC4ODLMOOC

MOOC

Academic Counselling for ODL Learners

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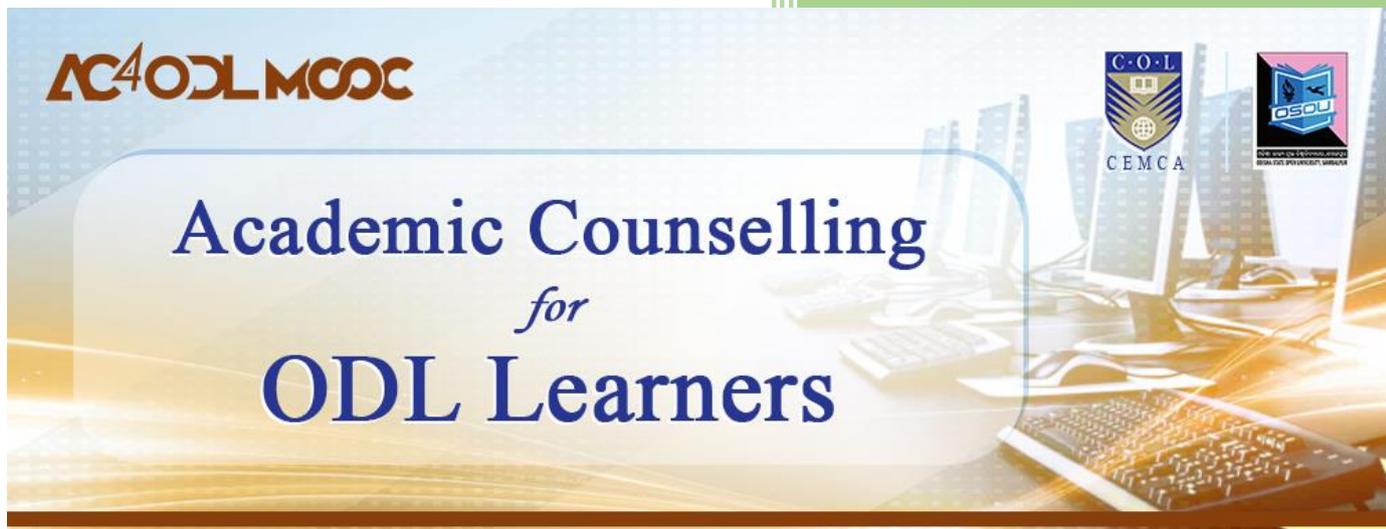
Year: 2020

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
and
Odisha State Open University

MOOC on
Academic Counselling for ODL Learners

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
and
Odisha State Open University

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) is an international organization established by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Vancouver, Canada, to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. CEMCA receives diplomatic privileges and immunities in India under section 3 of the United Nations (privileges and immunities) Act, 1947.

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The first version of the MOOC on Academic Counselling for ODL Learners (AC4ODL) was offered by CEMCA and OSOU from November 02, 2020 to December 03, 2020 at https://www.mooc4dev.org/AC4ODL

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Course Overview

In the open and distance learning system, the academic counselling sessions are very important. The sessions are meant for Informing, Advising and Counselling. The academic counselling can cover both academic and non-academic components at the various stages like at pre-entry, during entry to the programme, during the course of study, at the time of examination and post-study. The academic counsellors are mostly drawn from the formal higher educational system and the exposure towards ODL system, therefore, is minimal. However, the academic counsellors are the pivotal link between the ODL institution and isolated distance learners. Their role in handling face-to-face and online academic counselling sessions at the study centre is very important. The role of an academic counsellor is multifarious and requires both tutoring and counselling. For maintaining quality in academic counselling, the accumulation of multi-dimensional skills, attributes and information is essential on the part of the counsellor in ODL. Among these, possessing information at various levels about ODL system is an enabling factor to effectively support isolated distance learner.

Teachers/Students/Educational Leaders/ODL Practitioners who want to learn more about the Academic Counselling in ODL will find this Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), Academic Counselling for ODL Learners (AC4ODL), informative and engaging. Using up-to-date learning design and simple, accessible technology, the course runs on an easy-to-use learning platform available via the Internet. The course is designed for Teachers and ODL Practitioners who want to build on their knowledge and practice in teaching and learning. It will run over four weeks and requires approximately three to five hours of time each week. Designed to accommodate learners' busy schedules, the course offers flexibility with options for learning the content. You will learn from readings, videos, discussions with other participants and instructors, meaningful exercises, and quizzes. Certification is available for those who wish to complete all required exercises and quizzes.

Course Introduction	Video Link: https://youtu.be/yG4QAJ9aBdI	Scan with QR Code

Course Duration: Four Weeks

Course Details
> Week One:
> Module I: Concepts of ODL, Changing Nature of ODL
> Module II: 21st Century ODL Learners
>
> Week Two:
> Module III: Learning Skills
> Module IV: Characteristics of Self Learning Materials (SLM)
>
> Week Three:
> Module V: Academic Counsellor and Counselling in Distance Education
> Module VI: Support for PWD Learners
>
> Week Four:
> Module: VII: Technology in Distance Education
> Module: VIII: Assessment in Distance Education

Who Should Participate?

Academic Counselling for ODL Learners is designed for Teachers and ODL Practitioners in diverse contexts. You will benefit from this course if you are teaching face-to-face or in a distance/ online environment. Anyone interested in improving teaching and learning would enjoy participating in this MOOC.

Learning Outcomes

Participants will be able to

- define the concept of ODL and discuss the development of Distance Education (DE) at national and international level.
- explain the nature, characteristics, and importance of Self-Learning Materials in Distance Education.
- discuss importance of learner support in distance education and differentiate between counselling and tutoring.
- organize student support using various modes (face-to-face, online, using audio-visual media, computer etc.).
- conduct academic counselling sessions and develop effective learning skills.
- write tutor comments on the assignment responses to enhance learning.
- organize support for differently abled learners.
- use appropriate technology for learner support and create, use OER for academic counselling.

Certification

Two levels of certification are available based on your level of participation and completion of tasks/activities:
- Certificate of Participation: requires participation in at least 3 discussion forums and completion of quizzes with 50%.
- Certificate of Completion: requires 70% in all quizzes, participation in at least 3 discussion forums.

Module I:
Concepts of ODL and The Changing Nature of ODL

Introduction

Commonwealth of Learning basically defines Open and Distance Education (ODL) as a system of education and training that puts onus on the learning resources, rather than classroom sessions, as the central feature of learning experience. This means that the learning material (LM) takes the place of teacher. The definition emphasizes on the innovation in the availability of learning material and its quality; this mode of education moves away from the conventional face-to-face classroom interactions and incorporates more technologically advanced interactions between the teacher and students. These interactions, in the modern day, take place in the digital space. This is an introductory module on ODL, its history, its basic concepts and characteristics.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

The concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is based on providing an open access to education and training to the learners, thus helping them to be free from the place and time-bound constraints. It helps individuals who couldn't get into traditional education with a second chance; but it has evolved over time to become competent with the traditional system and is no more a mere sub-ordinate. ODL, in the recent decades, has gone through some innovative changes which has set an example for the traditional system, for example- the way in which it has been able to harness the best out of the technological developments in the fields of communication and media. This has enabled ODL to be a fast-growing mode of education with an impact on other education systems. The concept of ODL originated from a situation where the learner was geographically distant from the teacher, and this made education far more flexible than it used to be. The concept of Distance Education is not an entirely new concept. The first known major correspondence program was launched at the University of Chicago as early as the first half of 1800s. Open and Distance Education corporates with a wide range of potential partners which include government, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, specialised institutions, industrial corporations, telecommunication companies etc. to meet the urgent requirement of education and training in the modern world. The development of communication systems such as the radio-enabled education to move out of the traditional classroom setting and find new, better delivery systems. In the present day, we have multimedia and teleconferencing interfaces that have improved education in both regular and distant modes.

Introduction and Characteristics of ODL	**Video Link:** https://youtu.be/MG_5y47dTqo	**Scan with QR Code**

Some characteristics of ODL

- The teacher and student are separated in time or place, or both time and place, thus, defining the term 'distant' in Distant Learning.
- The learning done/acquired through the ODL system is accredited by a recognised authority/agency and therefore is different from the learning one may acquire from self-teaching efforts without any official recognition from any authority.

- ODL makes use of mixed-media courseware which includes text in both print and digital types, audio and video content, radio and television broadcasts, computer/teleconference-based learning etc. The courseware's quality is tested and validated before it is made available to the learner.
- The communication in the ODL system is multi-dimensional. It allows interaction between the teacher and student, and also among the students.
- The ODL system has the possibility of face-to-face meetings for guidance, tutorials, for interaction amongst learners, and for purposes like library, laboratory practices etc.
- In large scale ODL systems, the staff is divided into different teams for course-content development, assessment and evaluation.

Different types of Open and Distance Learning

The term ODL is relatively new in the field of education and has gained prominence only in the last two decades. It can be said that Open and Distance Learning is an umbrella term, and there are many definitions of ODL itself. Here we shall look at a few of them.

- *Correspondence education, home study and independent study*

These are over a century-old terms and are types of distance education where the learners do not have to leave their homes to study. These modes have traditionally used print-based educational resources as learning material but are now turning towards multimedia content.

- *External Studies*

In External Studies, the instruction takes place somewhere far from the main campus, such as a remote classroom.

- *Distance Teaching*

This term only explains half of the Open and Distance Learning and specifically focuses on the teachers' role rather than the whole system.

- *Self-instruction*

This term refers to a process in which the learner is taken through a stepwise process by the learning material. Self-assessment is an important feature and it can be paper or computer based.

- *Continuing Education*

It is a vague term that applies to non-credit education. The courses can be delivered on or off the campus.

- *Adult Education*

Adult Education emphasises on the concept and principles of adult learning, which is also known as andragogy, as compared to child-learning known as pedagogy.

- *Technology Based or Mediated Education*

This kind of education refers to a system in which technology plays a major role rather than print. It can function on a stand-alone basis (computer-assisted and computer-managed learning) and conference basis.

- *Learner Centred Education*

In Learner Centred Education, the freedom of the learner is of supreme importance. Hence the teaching and learning processes provide flexible intervals of study, negotiated content, negotiated methods of assessment, negotiated learning methods and a variety of support systems.

- *Open Learning*

The educational philosophy of open learning aims to give a variety of choices to the learners which include choices about place of study (home, study centre or campus), pace of study (time-bound or open), the medium of study (print or multimedia), a variety of support mechanisms and also different entry and exits points.

- *Distributed Learning*

This term focuses on the concept of learning rather than the technology used to deliver education or the separation between a learner and the teacher. It makes learning possible beyond classrooms; when combined with classroom learning, it becomes flexible learning.

- *Flexible Learning*

Flexible Learning focuses on the creation of learning environments with the characteristics of both classroom and distance learning, combining media and classroom strategies. It has a learner centred philosophy. It recognises the diversity in learning styles and the differences in the needs of the learners. It also recognises the importance of equity in curriculum and pedagogy. It fosters life-long learning habits and skills in the learners.

Different Types of Open and Distance Learning	Video Link: https://youtu.be/NyVfjp1SIs8	Scan with QR Code

Functions of Open and Distance Learning Institutions

The institutions that undertake the development and implementation of Open and Distance Learning system must fulfil certain functions. They must obtain and manage money and other resources. They must try to operate in a grant-sustained and cost-recovery mode. The institutions must acquire or develop courses and programmes. They can buy or lease out courses from other open education providers if it facilitates the effective use of resources. The institutions must take ample time for full-scale development of the courses. They can appoint a single author or team of experts for course content creation and analysis.

These institutions must be able to identify the prospective learning population and must be able to recruit and promote them. The learners should be provided all the necessary details and must be assured of the credibility of the courses offered.

ODL systems should engage in a two-way communication while delivering the courses. Evaluation and feedback must be done. Learners must be given library services and record systems must be maintained.

Providing learner support is another important need for the ODL system. The learner must get personal and academic support in the form of advice, counselling, tutoring, grading and

examining. The learners must also be granted credentials based on their examination, and it must involve professional associations and external agencies.

The ODL systems must pay attention revisiting, evaluating and revising the procedures, programmes and courses at regular intervals. The system must orient and train its staff with the emerging technologies and distance learning operations.

ODL Regulations Govt of India	Video Link: https://youtu.be/Jq__YlzczHk	Scan with QR Code

The types of Open and Distance Learning Institutions

- **Single Mode Institution**

These institutions are set up to offer courses and programmes of study at a distance. Some face to face interaction is involved, but it is on an optional basis. The teaching and learning process are mediated in a particular way which may be by print, including correspondence, by audio, radio, and teleconferencing facilities, by video conferencing or by computer-based training. Many of the 'mega-universities' of the world such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), United Kingdom National Open University (UKOU) etc. operate as single mode institutions.

- **Dual Mode Institution**

Dual mode institutions provide education through both traditional classroom-based and distance-based methods. These institutions may provide the course in both modes, with common examination. They distinguish the learners as 'regular' and 'external'. Examples of dual mode institutions are University of Nairobi and the University of Zambia.

- **Mixed Mode Institution**

The mixed mode institutions provide the learners with a variety of modes of study. There are many combinations which include individual or group-based learning, face-to-face or mediated interaction etc. These institutions maximise the flexibility of the place and pace of study. More of the single mode and dual mode institutions are becoming mixed mode institutions. Murdoch University and Deakin University are examples of mixed mode institutions.

Functions of ODL, Advantages of ODL and The Changing	Video Link: https://youtu.be/h0Qtup9VGlU	Scan with QR Code

The advantages of Open and Distance Learning

We shall look at a few advantages of studying in Open and Distance Learning system.

- Open and Distance Learning helps the learners overcome the problem of physical distance. This particularly helps those learners who are unable or unwilling to attend the regular classes. The learners in rural areas can instructed by teachers who are geographically distant.

- ODL also solves time and scheduling problems. It helps in educating groups who may be unwilling to assemble frequently. Learners who work in full-time or part-time jobs can also be a part of the system; they can also keep up with their family and social commitments.
- ODL can harness the best of limited spaces. It does not necessarily require a brick and roof structure. It also does away with the strict entrance criteria for admission.
- ODL is flexible with enrolment. It can accommodate both large and small number of learners as per the enrolments in a particular region.
- ODL makes the best use of the limited number of teachers. They can distribute the teachers equally even if they are geographically concentrated in certain areas. ODL can manage better with the scarcity of teachers as compared to the conventional system.
- ODL can deal with a variety of cultural, religious and political considerations. It provides a better chance for women learners. It can also help in regions prone to war or displacements due to calamities.

The Changing Nature of Open and Distance Learning

Open and Distance Learning has changed since its conception and it is largely due to the changes that occurred in the ways that education is delivered to the learners. Both conventional and distance modes of education have accommodated the development in Information and Communication Technology to suit the demands of the learners. The learning material has evolved from printed text; it has taken new forms such as audio, video and multimedia content. E-books are the new trend. Teleconferencing has taken over the traditional classroom setting.

The availability of Open Educational Resources (OERs) proved to be a boost for the ODL system as it made the educational resources easily available for learners across the world. This made education cheaper and accessible to even the poorest of learners. Nowadays, any learner, with access to the internet, can find free educational resources on almost any topic. The establishment of MOOCs has also helped the cause of ODL. The ODL system is now offering a lot of short-term courses with focus of specific skills, which the conventional education system often fails to. New online platforms that compliment ODL have come up which help the learners interact and collaborate online. There are platforms like SWAYAM that are created by the government to help the open learners. Platforms like MOODLE are also of significant help to learners.

ODL has made it possible for learners across the globe to be a part of more than one course/programme simultaneously.

The assessment, evaluation and certification in the ODL system have also evolved significantly with time. Earlier, the learners in Open Education were not on level ground with the conventional learners because of the difference in their assessment and evaluation. But in present times, the governments across the world are acknowledging ODL systems and are moving towards a unified scheme of assessment and evaluation in both conventional and distance modes of education.

ODL, during its initial years, was considered as an inferior mode of education that aimed at providing chances to those who missed out on formal education; but with the passage of time, ODL has made its own space to co-exist with other education systems. The average age of the

learner in open learning is decreasing and ODL is making suitable changes to meet the needs of the young learners. With the advancement of ICT, ODL will evolve significantly.

Many international organisations such as UNESCO, Commonwealth of Learning (COL), International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) etc. actively promote the ODL mode. These bodies give great importance to regional, inter-regional co-operation and provide the technical assistance to promote ODL. The ODL system will be a key player in education in the coming times as more open universities come up; the conventional universities are also making space for open courses.

National Education Policy 2020 Govt of India	Video Link: https://youtu.be/vbXZENsoZtY	Scan with QR Code

Conclusion

The ODL system of education has been able to influence other systems of education significantly. It can also be said that ODL is the future of education as the ICTs evolve with every passing day. ODL is slowly becoming a part of 'formal' education and the emergence of new mixed universities is ample proof that ODL is the emerging trend in education. Universities worldwide are incorporating the vital ODL characteristics into regular classroom curriculums to make learning flexible. ODL can prove significantly helpful in the education of youth in under-developed and developing countries.

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Module II:
21st Century ODL Learners

Introduction

To understand 21st century ODL learners, one must have an idea about Open and Distance Learning. Education became a fundamental necessity in a constantly changing and developing world. The conventional education system, which was not accessible and affordable to all, had to make space for changes. New innovations came up in the field of ICT and with its help a parallel or co-existing mode of education was taking form. ODL is a concept that boomed at the turn of the 21st century, though it has existed previously for about 150 years. The OER revolution (discussed in another module) is one of the main reasons because of which the ODL system came into full-fledged existence because a lot of learning material became free and was made available to learners worldwide. This module focusses on learners enrolled in the ODL mode of education in the HEIs. These learners are motivated to learn, and they try to apply the learning immediately into their life, mostly as an occupation/means of earning. There are certain characteristics and challenges which are specific only to learners of the ODL system.

Understanding the ODL learner and the Conventional Learner	Video Link: https://youtu.be/yn8KlWMzrcs	Scan with QR Code

21st Century Learners and ODL

The Open Learning System is often criticised for the disadvantages that its learners face against the learners of the conventional system; for example, in most cases, a conventional learner is preferred over the distance learner when it comes to employment. One of the basic questions then is that why a 21st Century learner would choose ODL over the conventional education system which has a strong base and has existed for a long time. The answer lies in the fact that the ODL system is cost-effective and gives leverages that the traditional system does not offer.

With education becoming one of the most significant criteria for employment, the need to procure a basic level/degree of education has become a necessity. Higher education is no more an elitist pursuit; it has become a mass aspiration. The conventional system is strict and does not allow opportunities to everyone who wants to fit in. The requirements to be a part of the regular class and have the prescribed study material are often a barrier to many, especially the poor and backward. But the ODL system has aided the widespread participated in Higher Education, which is a trend that has emerged lately. The Open and Distance Learning system has effectively utilised the digital space and its tools. Teaching and educational resources have been made available online which has made education cheaper and accessible for the marginalised.

The global workforce is becoming more knowledge-bound with the passage of time and developing countries must be able to meet the demands of educating their workforce but the existing universities in these countries fail to cater to such huge numbers of applicants. Such a

scenario is a threat that needs to be addressed. Building up new brick-and-stone institutions is not a feasible option as they require a lot of resources such as financial capital, land, labour etc., which is a huge economic challenge. In such conditions, the Open and Distance Learning system is a viable option as it does not require large infrastructure and hence the financial investment is relatively negligible. The Open Learning system can also accommodate a larger number of learners as compared to conventional institutions. Digital platforms and tools can be used to reach out and educate the students. The Open Learning system also helps the 21st Century people to learn, work and earn simultaneously.

Hence, the ODL system tends to be a better option both for the learners and educators of this century.

Evolution of the ODL System	Video Link: https://youtu.be/RvKlnxQ0VE8	Scan with QR Code

The Evolution of Learners

For a long time, the open universities had been institutions that were primarily giving chances to people who couldn't make it to the regular system and were aiming for a second chance. The learners commonly used to be in the age group of 25-40 and were mature adults with a job and other social responsibilities. This scenario has been changing in the 21st Century as younger learners are getting enrolled in the open institutions in large numbers; there is a spike in enrolments of the 17-25 age group. This proves that the ODL system has been improving drastically. As the profile of the learners becomes younger, there are certain changes that the ODL system needs to adapt to suit the needs of the young learners. The system needs to help the young learners with new technologies and provide them with state-of-the art facilities to cope up with the advance of the conventional system. It needs to be equally competent, so that its learners can find equal opportunities with the conventional learners. Only in such a scenario the ODL system will be able to co-exist with the conventional system.

Few basic characteristics of 21st Century learners

The following are a few characteristics of the younger learners-

- They spend less time watching TV and have turned towards the internet for their primary source of information and entertainment.
- They are fascinated by new technologies and are eager to apply the same to make their life easier. For example, the development, availability and usage of mobile applications for almost any need have become a trend among the millennials. One can do almost anything from learning skills to self-training from the sources available on the internet.
- They prefer group activities and are more productive in such systems. This helps to harness the best abilities of the individuals in a group and make the overall outcome of the group more productive. The young learners are more social virtually (thanks to their

active involvement on social media like Facebook, WhatsApp etc) as compared to their previous generation. They connect on a real-time basis with others on social media. This helps them to collaborate and create the best of their abilities online.

- They are more goal-oriented and prefer experiential work structures and activities. They have moved out of the rot style of learning. They prefer learning from the experiences that they gain from the activities that they are involved in. Their targets are time-bound and more specific than their predecessors.
- They expect transparency at all levels. They take on the challenges that they face and make their way through them.
- They can multi-task and undertake multiple efforts simultaneously. This means that the learner might be pursuing more than one course or that they might be working and learning at the same time.
- These learners possess a 'Can-Do' attitude and are not dependent on others. They don't require constant overseeing; they only need timely guidance. They demand freedom and prefer learning by themselves. They are innovative and are more practically able when compared to others.

> *The Distance Learners differ from their conventional counterparts in the fact that they can self-educate with guidance from academic counsellors and are capable of self-monitoring.*

Why a 21st Century Learner should choose ODL

- The ODL system helps the learners to multi-task and thus makes it possible for them to pursue more than one course or learn and work simultaneously. This creates a possibility for the learner to be a part of both the conventional and distance learning systems, which gives them a professional advantage.
- With the level of digital literacy that the modern-day learners possess, it becomes easier for them to manoeuvre through the internet to find various sources and educate themselves. This skill is utilised by the Distance Education system in educating its learners.
- The ODL systems of most universities have made their study resources online and free. The learners can find additional material on almost any topic in the form of OER. The OER can be digital text, videos, audio books etc. and these can be used and revised by the learners free of cost. (Explained in Module 7, CC Licencing)
- Since the learning material is made available to the learners online and is free in most cases, they need no buy expensive study material. This makes the ODL system very cost-effective and learner-friendly. This provides a chance of education for the backward, marginalised sections of the society.
- The ODL System is more liberal. It lets the learners to learn at a self-paced mode. The learners can even go through the course multiple before they clear it.
- The ODL system promotes a collaborative structure amongst the learners. This means that the learners can work in groups. The ODL system particularly harnesses the digital

and social skills of the new-generation learners. They can connect online and be a part of virtual groups that discuss and study together.

- The ODL system is also activity-based in many aspects. The learners learn by doing things by themselves. They don't have a regular teaching who oversees them all the time; they instead have mentors who guide on a timely basis. This means that the learners are self-dependent.

- When the learning is activity-based and done by the learners themselves, they tend to adapt the trial-and-error method through which they acquire skills to find information for themselves by themselves. This further enhances their digital skills.

Characteristics of 21st Century Learners	Video Link: https://youtu.be/q_SIGAiJSW8	Scan with QR Code

The Changes in the ODL system

The ODL system is adapting to several changes to suit the needs of the 21st century learners. These changes are effectively essential for both the system and its learners. Further, we shall look at few changes or development in the field of Open and Distance Learning.

> *Effective use of Technology*

The ODL systems worldwide use technology and media for teaching and learning. Technology used by the ODL systems range from print in the earlier days to virtual reality in the modern days. The current model depends on the web, multimedia and virtual reality to develop programmes and courses of the finest quality. The open universities are hiring experts like content writers, instructional designers, media experts etc. for course development in audio, video, web formats etc.

The recent development in OERs, MOOCs, Artificial Intelligence etc. is paving way for development of course contents that are highly engaging and interactive. Using AR/VR makes teaching of practical skill-oriented courses more effective. Over 100 open repositories, relating to almost all disciplines, are available online for the open universities to create their courses.

The use of interactive technology in the learning materials enhances the learner-content interaction. Research suggests that students who interact more in online courses are at an advantage. Collaborative online interaction helps in better understanding of the course content.

Online teacher-student interactions enhance student engagement. The use of learning analytics is very helpful to the learners and teachers for improving the learning outcome. Teachers can monitor the progress of their students and can identify those who are at risk and may drop out. This can be prevented by addressing the issues faced by learners at regular intervals. The effective use of technology helps to enhance learner support systems, reduce the drop-out rates and improve the overall learning experience. The appropriate deployment of technology helps provide personalised attention to the learners.

> ➢ *Learner Support*

The open universities are using technology to develop and deliver educational programmes. Some of the best educational innovations are the delivery of printed text, the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and MOOCs, use of open repositories, e-Portfolios, YouTube, discussion forums, synchronised video conferences, online quizzes, tests etc. Most of the processes of the student cycle, from admission to certification, can and are being converted into automated systems. The learner-teacher and learner-learner modes of interaction are being organised effectively to improve learner support.

> ➢ *Assessing competencies*

Another significant change that has been adapted by the ODL system is the change in evaluation techniques. Assessing competencies is not limited only to assessing learning outcomes. The credibility of the assessment system must be authenticated, and it needs to be assured that the system promotes lifelong learning. The open universities around the world use both continuous evaluation process to analyse student learning. The summative evaluation contains both objective tests as well as essay type assignments. The essay type assignment creates a two-way communication between the teacher and the learner.

In the technology enabled learning environments, a variety of assessment techniques are used, and these include assessment tools integrated within the LMS such as quizzes, assignments etc. and alternative assessments such as term papers, journals and group papers. The digital environment also facilitates peer evaluation and is a recommended practice.

The use of digital badges and micro-credentials allow the learners to share their achievements with employers, thus improving their chances of employment. The use of blockchain technology helps in distributing permanent, tamper-proof digital credentials. The blockchain transcript is designed in such a way that it can give detail of the course content, examinations taken, learner competencies, projects completed, extra-curricular activities involved, internships done etc.

Hence, new student assessments systems help the ODL system to keep with the demands and needs of the 21st Century learner.

> ➢ *Quality Assurance in ODL*

Quality in Higher Education is of supreme importance. Many countries develop quality assurance agencies and regulations to assure the quality of education in ODL systems. The quality of distance education is often regarded as subordinate to that of the conventional education. But interestingly, many distance educators have set benchmarks in the quality assurance of courses. The Open University, UK is an institution that has been a model for many universities around the world in this regard. There are robust systems that assess the quality of ODL, which include COL's Review and Improvement Model that has been implemented in many universities.

Thus, with the presence of quality assurance systems for ODL, it contrives to match the standards of the education in the conventional system. Quality assurance is important to create a level-ground between the learners of both the conventional and distance learning systems.

➢ *Staff Development*

The phenomenal changes in the work environment make it necessary to bring in adequate changes in both teachers and staff of the open universities. The competencies of the teachers and staff affect the quality of learners' experience significantly. The staff and teachers require ample training so that the open universities can harness technologies to the maximum extent. There are many different approaches to staff training and development like in-house workshops, external training, seminars, conferences etc.

Such training given to the staff and teachers will enhance their skills in technology and helps them be in a better position to guide the learners.

Learners of the 21st Century	Video Link: https://youtu.be/YJ4yT16X-qQ	Scan with QR Code

Conclusion

21st Century learners are of a unique nature when compared to their predecessors. They are far more skilled and adapt to changes with ease. They make use of the latest technologies in learning which makes education more interactive and interesting. Such learners require the ODL system to provide them with education which is at par with the conventional system. ODL, over the past two decades, evolved to incorporate the latest technologies to best suit the needs of the 21st Century learners. In doing so, it has been able to cope up with the challenges posed by conventional education.

Further Readings and references

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Module III:
Learning Skills

Introduction

Learners of the 21st Century need to hone their skills to adapt to the technological advancements around them. They require specific skill sets to assist themselves in new learning environment. There are many skill-sets today, but the focus of this module shall rest solely on **Learning Skills.** One must possess a specific Learning Skill Set to be learn in better ways. The word 'Learning Skills' consists of two important terms- 'Learning' and 'Skill(s)'. We shall look at the definitions of both.

What is Learning?

Learning can be defined as a complex and long-term psychological process that consists of individual acquisition or modification of information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, skills, values, competencies or behaviours through practise, experience, study or instruction. (Adapted from: UIS 2012). It must be noted that the definition of learning depends on the philosophical and psychological approaches adopted for defining. Here we shall see how Behaviourism, Cognitive theories and Constructivism define learning. Behaviourism perceives of learning as a measurable change resulting from the joint action of several environmental factors, while Cognitive theories tend to focus on the internal mental organisation of knowledge, its acquisition, mental structuring and how the information is processed. Constructivism defines learning as a process where the learner can actively construct new ideas or concepts based on earlier experience or knowledge.

What are Skills?

Skills can basically be defined as the ability to perform tasks and solve problems that one comes across in everyday life. It is one's ability, dexterity or proficiency to carry out tasks, and comes from education, training, experience etc. It helps one to practically apply the theoretical knowledge to specific situations. On broader terms, Skills would also include behaviour, attitude or personal characteristics that can make an individual more efficient in contexts such as education, training, social engagements and employment.

Introduction to Learning Skills	Video Link: https://youtu.be/f4ZvrLM8ELQ	Scan with QR Code

The Importance of Learning Skills

Learning Skills must be seen as a subset of Life Skills and thus it is primarily important to know about Life Skills. World Health Organization (WHO) defines Life Skills as "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". Essentially, there are two kinds of Life Skills- 'Thinking Skills' and 'Social Skills'. Key Life Skills comprise of interpersonal skills and psychological competencies that help individuals to solve problems, make important decisions, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively and empathise with others, cope up with the demands and being able to manage their life in a productive and healthy manner. Life Skills are important in Education as they provide students with strategies to organise their life and

make wise decisions. Life Skills promote the mental well-being and competencies of the young people.

An individual requires both essential learning tools such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, problem solving abilities etc. and basic learning content such as knowledge, skills, values, attitudes etc. to survive, to work in dignity, to develop their best capabilities, to improve the quality of development, to participate in social development and to continue the process of lifelong learning.

Key Learning Skills- 'The Four Cs'

21st Century Learning Skills can be best defined by the 4 Cs structure. They are-

- **Critical Thinking**
- **Communication**
- **Collaboration**
- **Creativity**

The world has changed drastically in the past 50 years. Today, many countries worldwide are evolving out of manufacturing and agrarian economic structures. Hence, it is no more possible to limit Learning Skills to the 3 'R's in reading, writing and arithmetic. Modern-day situations require an individual to possess an entirely new set of skills that keep up with the technological advancements of the time. Hence, the need for the 4 Cs.

Further, we shall define each one of the 4 Cs, understand their importance, their relation to each other, and their resources in detail.

Critical Thinking

One cannot learn well without being able to think critically and clearly. It is an important aspect in Higher Education and contributes to career success. The habits of the mind such as understanding, analysing, reasoning, problem solving etc are as important as content knowledge. Thus, encouraging students to think critically is vital. Learning to think critically helps in the development of other skills such as deeper concentration, higher analytical abilities and improved thought processing. It is important for the learners of the present day to think critically to evaluate competent claims and make sensible decisions. The 21st Century citizen must go through a vast amount of information relating to health, economy, social issues etc. and then make their decisions. The solutions from the simplest to the most complex problems are to be reached through critical thinking. In everyday life, critical thinking is important to keep up with the changing scenario of the world. Research find that most of the employers regard critical thinking to be a key priority and criterion for employment and succession planning. There are many definitions for critical thinking; here we shall look at the P21 definition of the same.

To think critically, one must be able to reason (inductive or deductive) effectively as per the demand of the situation. One should be able to know how parts of the whole interact with each other to make the system functional. To make good judgements/decisions, one should be able to evaluate claims, evidences, arguments and belief before arriving at a conclusion. The individual should also be able to think from different perspectives and find alternatives. S/he has to analyse the different arguments to create information. One should reflect critically on learning experiences and processes. The individual must solve different and unfamiliar

problems through conventional and innovative ways. Questions must be raised to clarify various points of view and arrive at better solutions.

Critical thinking is vital for creative thinking. When an individual engages in high-quality thinking, his/her thought functions both critically and creatively to assess, generate and judge the products of thought. Critical thinking affects information literacy; it helps the learner to analyse, evaluate and interpret the information. It is not limited to a single mind; nowadays learners can collaborate with others to process large amounts of information and arrive at better outcomes.

One will come across different general and classroom resources of critical thinking. One can find and use these resources to develop and improve thinking abilities. They must be incorporated in the learning environment, so the learners are encouraged to think critically. They must be given different and demanding situations which compel them to think to analyse and interpret them before arriving at solutions. The critical thinking skills of the learners must be analysed through tests on their problem-solving abilities, reasoning, error analysis, decision making etc.

Critical Thinking	Video Link: https://youtu.be/WWdRKyITQ3c	Scan with QR Code

Communication

The learners should be able to analyse and effectively use the increasingly large amount of communication in their daily life. It is important to identify the right resources, analyse their accuracy and the leverage to reuse/restructure them. The influence of communication technologies in all aspects of daily life makes it important to teach communication skills to the modern society. Although education stresses on fluent speech, clear writing and correct reading, it sometimes fails to do so. Though oral and written communication skills are among the top skills sought by employers, most people often lag in such skills. Keeping in mind the 'global teams' that work together in today's world which include people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, one must understand the importance of possessing good communication skills in order to work in collaboration. As the 'global teams' span time, culture and nations, it is imperative to equip tomorrow's learners with the skills to communicate effectively in different languages and spaces.

Communication is not only limited to languages. It spans both the real and the digital space. Communication skills are essential to broaden the customer base in the expanding service economy. The relationship between customers, employees and employers is of supreme importance. Every individual needs to possess culturally effective listening skills, empathy etc. to make communication effective. Complex communication involves negotiation, explanation and higher levels of human interactions, which makes communication skills an extremely vital skill set. Now we shall look at a few factors of communication.

To communicate clearly, one should be able to articulate thoughts and concepts effectively by using oral, written or non-verbal communication in various contexts and forms. One must decipher meaning by keenly listening to the values, concepts, attitudes etc. Communication can

be used for many purposes such as instructing, motivating, persuading, informing etc. The individual should be able to use multimedia and technologies with ease to create an impact; s/he should also be able to communicate in diverse environments which can be multilingual or multicultural.

Communication significantly affects Collaboration. Communication skills such as clear writing and fluent speech are closely linked to effective collaboration and make necessary compromises for achieving a common goal. For teams to effective work and talk, communication and practice must be inseparable. Communication skills are intertwined with information, media and technology as in today's world, the messages pass through different interfaces which are mostly digital. Hence, it is important to teach the learners to communicate clearly as bad communication can often lead to major misunderstanding. Bad Communication skills adversely affect one's employment possibility. The first step to this is to create proficiency is using technological tools. The learner should be able to create, critique and evaluate multimedia and multilingual contexts. Building relations and solving problems collectively are the later stages.

Communication	Video Link: https://youtu.be/XDHn-Qa-Gac	Scan with QR Code

Collaboration

Collaborative websites and groups around the world are proof of the growing digital collaborative structures around the world. The final products are the results of contributions from millions of users worldwide and emphasise the benefits of collaborative efforts. The collaborative culture helps in producing extremely inclusive and valuable resources. Collaborative efforts create space of multiple ideas and concepts from more than one individual to be used for a single project, thus making it better. Collaboration is not only important but is necessary for the learners and employees of the 21st Century to function effectively, due to the rise of technology. The Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) Program is a good example of how students across the globe can collaborate to create impactful solutions to global problems. It promotes and supports students, teachers and scientists to collaborate on environmental issues in partnership with many other organisations. More projects like GLOBE are essential to bring up a global, technology-based workforce for the future.

Scholars emphasise on the importance of collaboration; they explain that how the 'wisdom of crowds' can be used under the appropriate situations and the results might prove to be better than the individual efforts of the smartest people in the group. A group of intelligent individuals capable to making the right decision shall easily outdo a more brilliant decision-maker. With many individuals, the cultural diversity expands and that brings a lot of new ideas and perspectives into the group. It is not only that a collaborative effort produces a better, holistic result but also becomes a process of knowledge sharing amongst a bigger pool of people. Let's look at a few definitions and criteria for collaboration.

For an individual/learner to be collaborative, s/he must be able to demonstrate the ability to work effectively and respectively with diverse teams. S/he must exercise flexibility and should be willing to help and necessary compromises for achieving the common goal. The person must be able to assume individual responsibilities within the group effort and should be able to acknowledge the individual efforts of each member of the group.

It is important to create a model of effective collaborative skills for learners and implement them in learning spaces. The learners must be encouraged to interact and work with people from different backgrounds (linguistic, social etc.) and cultures. It is also important to teach the learners the advantage of collaborative efforts by helping them compare individual and collaborative results. They should also be encouraged to change roles and learn various skills from their colleagues which can help in the holistic development of the individual.

Collaboration	Video Link: https://youtu.be/I-PYBjTTCYI	Scan with QR Code

Creativity

The future always demands creativity and innovations; otherwise the world would find itself in a non-developing, stagnant state. Creators and innovators are the ones who shape and influence the world. The modern learners need to go beyond the conventional thoughts to be able to create new meanings and patterns in their areas. If a learner does not possess the skill to create with innovation, s/he is unprepared the challenges to be a part of the modern workforce. In today's world, competition has global and learners require high-level creative capacity and spirit for both professional and personal success. Scholars perceive creativity to be as important as literacy in education. For individuals to succeed, they should possess the creative skills to have a vision on how they can produce better results. One must have both the practical and the analytical skills to plan and execute their plans and ensure that they for a greater cause.

Creative skills are highly desired in the labour force where creative designs are key to being unique in a world of mass production. To cultivate a 'creating mind', education needs to feature exploration, challenging situations and tolerance to productive mistakes. Rise of creativity is a key force in the economy. Every learner must have a creative mind to stand out in a world is abundant and being more and more automated. Let's look at the definitions and criteria of creativity.

To think creatively means to use a broad range of idea creation techniques such as brainstorming. One should try to make positive changes by implementing incremental concepts. The learner must be able to refine and elaborate existing ideas to maximise their benefits while cutting down on the efforts. The ideas of the learner should be inventive and original, and they must be formulated keeping in mind the real-world limits. The education system must also help the learner understand creativity is a cyclic process which frequents between failures and success. The learner must be ready to act on innovative ventures to bring effective changes in the society around them.

Creative activities should be made a part of learning. It must include different fields and aspects such as language, communication, problem solving abilities etc. The education system should have a provision to identify, encourage and harness the creative abilities of its learners. Innovative ventures must be guided by experts, so that learners do not give up on their projects when they face failures in the initial stages. Today, Creativity is a social component that requires adaptability, teamwork etc; it can help save time, effort and money. A creative learner always has an advantage over his/her counterparts.

Creativity	Video Link: https://youtu.be/BZlMvv00kgg	Scan with QR Code

Conclusion

Our world is fast evolving. The learners must be capable of adapting to the changing scenarios, and the education systems must help them in this. The Skills-set required by the learners have changed over time and education must incorporate these changes to make learners smarter and efficient. Hence, Learning Skills should be given attention and they must be inculcated in the learners by teachers and academic counsellors.

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Module IV:
Characteristics of Self Learning Materials (SLM)

Introduction

In open and distance learning system, learners can learn anything, anytime, anywhere as they are not conditioned by any barriers. They are separated from the distance learning institutions and teachers by a physical distance. They do not get opportunities for regular interaction with their peers and teachers. Hence media and technology play a very significant role in removing this isolation of the learners, bridging the gap between the learners and the tutors and the distance learning institutions. The Self-learning printed materials are the foundation of a sound distance learning system. Unlike the textbooks of the conventional or face to face education system, they have the teacher in-built in them and guide and support the learners at each and every step. In a conventional F2F system, the learners have the scope to learn from their teachers, peers and textbooks but there is no such scope in the open and distance learning system. In this system, the self-learning materials (SLMs) perform the functions of an effective classroom teacher by providing learning experiences similar to the classroom-based teaching-learning process. The invisible teacher built in the learning materials facilitates interaction of the learners with the text materials in the same way as the classroom teacher does within the face-to-face classes. Hence the quality of the self-learning materials determines the access and success of the distance learners. The self-learning materials positively impact the learning style of learners and keep them connected with the contents and the system. They also help the learners know their learning deficiencies and fill in information gaps-what is required of them in the assessment tests/assignments and what they have produced.

Self-learning materials play a significant role in helping the learners grow as self-reliant and independent learners with minimal or no support from external sources. Hence distance teachers and learners in open and distance education system should have a thorough understanding of the features and characteristics of self-learning materials. In this unit, we shall be discussing the features and characteristics of self-learning Materials, self-activeness of self-learning materials, access devices in self-learning materials, the principles of designing self-learning materials, approaches to designing self-learning materials and the stages involved in the design and development of self-learning materials.

Characteristics of Self-Learning Materials

In classroom-based teaching, the teacher occupies a central place. S/He not only teaches the prescribed text but also supplements his teaching with other resources such as textbooks or audio-visual aids and provides other technology-enabled academic support. While teaching the text, s/he provides information, gives examples, explains, questions, gives assignments to the learners, corrects the assignment responses, gives feedback on their learning and helps them deal with individual problems. In open and distance learning system, there is no teacher in the real sense of the term. The tutors and the self-learning materials together replace the teacher. As tutors are not available to the learners in their immediate environment all the time, self-learning materials play a significant role in combining all the roles of the teacher discussed above in stimulating and motivating the learners during their stay in open and distance education system. These materials are complemented by visual, auditory, audio-visual and multi-media content. In open and distance education, the learners being adults are highly

motivated and are responsible for their own lives as they can choose their own course, set their own goals and enjoy full autonomy in achieving their goals.

In Open and Distance Learning system, **Programme** means the curriculum or combination of courses in a particular field of study. **Course** describes the teaching materials and other components of the study. For the convenience of the learners, a course is divided into **Blocks** in the form of booklets of around 60/80 pages. Generally, each block presents one unified theme. Division of the course into blocks helps the learners in two ways: they don't have to carry voluminous books and they may feel a greater sense of achievement each time they complete a block. Each block has 3-4 units of 15-20 pages. Each of the unit deals with one theme or topic and has **sections** and **sub-sections** for the clarity of the presentation of concepts, information, illustrations etc. All the units of a block are logically, and also thematically, linked with each other. They are presented systematically and sequentially. Each of the sections is followed by a Self-Check Exercise or Self-Assessment Test which provides feedback to the learners on their performance. Ideally a learner should be able to complete a unit within a reasonable period of time.

Generally self-learning materials exhibit the following features:

1. Self-motivating: Like a resourceful live teacher, self-learning materials arouse curiosity, raise issues in the minds of the learners and motivate them to relate theoretical knowledge to real life situations. There is reinforcement at every stage of learning so that learners grow into autonomous learners.

2. Self-learning: Self-learning materials, besides information, provide study guide - directions, hints, references etc. to facilitate autonomous learning or self-learning with little or no support from external sources.

3. Self-explanatory: A learner is able to understand the self-learning materials without much external support. The content is self-explanatory and conceptually clear.

4. Self-contained: The self-learning materials are self-sufficient or self-contained so that learners who have no access to additional resources are not at disadvantage.

5. Self-directed: The self-learning materials provide guidance to the learners at every stage by providing necessary guidance, hints and suggestions. The self-directed materials are presented in the form of easy explanations, sequential development, illustrations, learning activities, etc. Like a live teacher such materials guide, instruct, moderate and regulate the learning process during the interaction of the learners with the texts.

6. Self-evaluating: Self-learning materials provide adequate scope to the learners to check their progress from time to time. This is done through in-text questions, self-check exercises, activities, etc. Wherever possible, model answers to self-check exercises are provided at the end of the units to give them feedback about their progress and reinforce learning.

7. Self-Activeness: The self-learning materials have the potential to make the learner active and responsive by engaging them in various types of activities such as jotting down points,

understanding the concepts, collecting materials, applying learning in a new situation, doing self-check exercises, writing assignment responses and similar exercises.

The self-learning materials should be self-active by involving various types of activities inside the text. There can be three types of learning activities.

    a) **Thinking:** Self-assessment questions in the self-learning materials include multiple types of questions and other questions demanding the application of higher order thinking skills. These questions motivate them to think from different perspectives and choose the right responses.

    b) **Writing:** The activities inside the self-learning materials involve some writing activities which may include using information already learnt, writing from memory, and explaining topics or concepts in their own words, rephrasing the given text or summing up the points.

    c) **Doing:** When we aim at developing skills among learners, we include some practical exercises or activities like reading of maps, going on study tours and field visits to collect information and data etc. to make practical application of the theories learnt during the study.

Nature and Characteristics of Self Learning	Video Link: https://youtu.be/C0nbx-UcZr8	Scan with QR Code

Difference between Conventional Textbooks and Self-Learning Materials

Conventional Textbooks	Self-Learning Materials
Assume that learners have interest in studies	Arouse interest in the learners and motivates them to study the text
Teacher-centric as they are mainly written for the teacher who follows it religiously to complete the syllabus.	Learner-centric as they are written especially for the learners, taking the needs of the learners into account.
Little or no scope for self-assessment	Focus is on self-assessment
Hardly contain aims and objectives	Mostly contain aims and objectives
Are divided into chapters, based on topics	Are divided into study units, sections and sub-sections clearly indicating the study time required for completing the unit
Do not provide any study guidance to the learners	Provide study guide guidance to learners on how to study
Have limited or no activities	Self-active as they include numerous activities
No scope for learners to get feedback	Provide feedback to learners on answers
Written in a formal style, mostly in passive voice	Written in a friendly, informal and personal style, in active voice
Filled with text, figures, tables, lists, illustrations and other graphic elements with no space for learners to write answers	Provide space for learners to write their comments on the margins and answers of Self-Check Exercises

Have both the learner and the teacher as the target audience	Have the individual learner as the target audience
Expect the teacher to have the responsibility of explaining the text to the learners	Expect the learners to have the responsibility of studying the texts, understanding the text and responding to the texts

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Activity-1
Group Activity
A. *Discuss in groups the characteristics of the Self-Learning Materials? Then discuss the differences between the text-books of the conventional systems and the Self-Learning Materials.*
B. *How do we know that a set of Self-Learning Materials is self-active? Discuss in groups.*
C. *Pick up any block of Self-Learning material of a course of your choice. Then discuss in what ways it satisfies the characteristics of the self-learning materials as described in the unit. Suggest ways of improving the materials if you find it defective.*

Access Devices

The methods or devices that help learners find their way around a piece of learning material are called **access devices**. They make the structure of the material clear to the learners and help them make appropriate use of the learning materials. In other words, they make the materials accessible, comprehensible and useful to the learners

We can put access devices before we start the unit, during the study of the unit and after the completion of the unit.

Access Devices used before presentation of the contents of the unit

(a) **Cover page:** The cover design should be suitable and attractive. An attractive cover motivates the learners to see what is inside there in the book.

(b) **Titles**: Titles should be clear and meaningful. There should be descriptive titles both for units and for topics within units. Learners should be able to know from the titles what the unit is about.

(c) **Structure of the Unit:** At the beginning of **e**ach unit, structure of the unit in the form of sections and sub-sections should be given so that learners are able to know the order in which the contents are to be presented. It helps the learners get an overview of what they are about to study.

(d) **Concept maps:** Concept maps are often used to display the contents of a unit in a diagrammatic manner.

(e) **Objectives:** Learning objectives tell learners what they can expect to learn after studying the unit. The objectives are defined clearly in behavioral terms and tell the learners what they should be able to do after completing each section of the unit.

(f) **Pre-requisites and Pre-tests**

In some cases, particularly those topics involving complicated theories and calculations, learners are expected to have some pre-requisite knowledge to understand the newly presented topics in a better manner. Hence it is useful to provide either a list of the pre-requisite knowledge or a self-test to help learners comprehend the contents better.

(g) **Advance Organisers**

Advance organisers help learners link what they already know to what they are about to learn. They include a concept map provided in the text, an activity that requires learners to recall previous experience or an activity (or test) demanding the application of previous knowledge.

(h) **Introductions**

Introductions describe what the unit is about, why it is useful and how it is linked to the previous units. In a way, it helps the learners to have a clear idea about what they are going to learn while studying the unit.

Access Devices used during the study or use of the materials

The access devices used during the study of the units are the ones that help learners see the structure of the text, let them know where they are in their study and what they are supposed to do at that particular stage.

(a) **Headings**: In the printed self-learning materials, a typical unit has topic headings and then sub-headings. Generally, the number of headings match the number of learning outcomes. In the sub-headings the main components of the topic are discussed. Headings and subheadings are carefully chosen so that they perform the academic functions for which they have been put in the text.   While numbering the headings and sub-headings we usually follow the following pattern:

1.0 Topic
1.1 Sub-topic
1.2 Sub-topic
  1.2.1 Sub-sub topic

Each new section is indicated distinctly by a distinct number as suggested above. Titles are indicated in **bold capitals** and each sub-section is indicated by relatively **small but bold** typeface and corresponding numbers.

(b) **Verbal signposts:** The 'verbal signposts are mostly used to show the link between the section under study with the previous section. They are the linguistic props to help the learners establish link between what they have already studied/done and what they are doing now or going to do. "As we saw in the previous section…..", " We will discuss more about this in the next section …." are some of the examples in this regard.

(c) **Illustrations:** The content in self-learning materials should be supported with appropriate illustrations, diagrams, charts, graphs, photographs, flow-charts wherever necessary to enhance their accessibility.

(d) **Instructions:** Instructions for tasks/activities/tests should be **p**recise and unambiguous so that learners are able to do the activities easily.

Access devices used after a unit has been studied

These devices help learners recall their learning through the unit. They may include summaries, list of key points, post-tests, suggested reading, model answers to self-check exercises, glossaries and way forward.

(a) **Summaries:** In this section, we summaries the topics, concepts and ideas covered in the unit to help the learners recapitulate what they have learnt in the unit.

(b) **Glossaries:** Glossaries provide a quick way to the learners to check words or concepts which are difficult, unfamiliar or unknown. The concepts/words are explained in simple comprehensible language.

(c) **Model Answers to Self-Check Exercises:** Model answers to Self-Check Exercises help the learners check their progress, get feedback on their progress and change their learning style/strategies to improve their performance.

(d) **Suggested reading:** It provides a list of books, journals and websites which help the learners to expand their understanding of the topic which they have studied in the unit, apply knowledge to newer areas of knowledge and relate their learning to their real-life situations.

Activity-2
Group Activity
A. What are access devices? What are the different types of access devices we use during the study of a unit? Discuss in groups.
B. Pick up any unit of your choice from a set of self-learning materials. Critically examine the access devices used in the unit and recommend the ones which could be used to make the unit more learner friendly.

Designing and Developing Self-Learning Materials

Designing and Developing a Self-Learning Unit	Video Link: https://youtu.be/-bVf_nQrc5Q	Scan with QR Code

Principles of Designing Self-Learning Materials

While designing good self-learning materials, writers should keep the following principles in mind:

- Learners should be given ample opportunities to recall their prior knowledge and experience, reflect on them and compare them with what they are learning.

- Learners should be given opportunities to make choices out of multiple tasks given and direct their own learning.
- Learners should be encouraged to set their own personal goals and check their progress against them.
- Learners should be given maximum opportunity to put new knowledge and skills into practice.
- Learning materials focus on learner activities rather than on exposition and explanation.
- Learning tasks which are meaningful to the learner should match the assumed prior knowledge of the learners.
- Learners should be given regular feedback on their learning; they need to know whether they are on the right track or not.
- Important points should be supported by good examples to facilitate the understanding and retention of the contents by the learners.
- Learners should be given tasks which are authentic and are from the real-world, involve collaborative learning.
- Learners should be given opportunities to learn from observing others.
- There should be enough scope for learners for self-evaluation rather than formal assessment.
- Learning materials should be based on the learning profile of the learners. Course designers should take into account the literacy level of learners, their ICT skills and their prior knowledge of the subject before materials on these subjects are designed and developed.

Approaches to Designing Self Learning Materials	Video Link: https://youtu.be/pNdq6sNSANw	Scan with QR Code

Approaches to Designing Self-Instructional Materials

While developing self-learning materials writers follow different approaches. Some of the dominant approaches are discussed below:

(a) Tutorial-in-print

In this approach, learning objectives are well-defined and the course materials seek to teach a well-defined body of knowledge. The writer presents some form of input (e.g., text, diagram, case study) and then sets an activity to help the learners understand the contents being taught. An ideal unit consists of a carefully controlled sequences of input, activity and feedback sequences. In this way the self-learning materials simulate the presence of a teacher in a conventional classroom, who gives some input and then asks a question or sets a task in the classroom. This approach is mostly used in text based ODL. This approach is based on the following principles:

(a) Every learning outcome should have at least one activity.
(b) Learning outcomes should have several activities.
(c) Learning outcomes should have reasonable number of activities with smaller outcomes.

(b) Reflective Action Guide

This is a constructivist approach to materials design. Materials prepared on the principles of this approach aim to support learners in learning from their own experiences (e.g., at work) and encourage them to learn by doing. In these materials we find broadly defined aims but no precise learning outcomes. Learners are given case studies, projects or tasks which require them to engage with the materials or others which may include their peers, people working in the concerned fields. It encourages the learners to record and reflect on their own experience (e.g., by keeping a learning journal). The activities are open-ended, often being based on the learners' own experiences. It is suitable for designing and developing print materials.

(c) Problem-based learning

In problem-based learning, the focus is on higher level learning skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving skills and deep learning. Problem-solving encourages self-directed learning as it requires students to be responsible for their own learning with the teacher acting as the facilitator of learning.

Activity-3
Group Activity
A. Discuss in groups the principles of designing self-learning materials.
B. Three approaches to designing self-learning materials have been discussed in the previous section. Which of the approaches do you prefer? Why do you prefer it? Discuss in groups.
C. Pick up any unit of your choice from a set of self-learning materials. Critically examine the principles which have been followed while designing the unit and recommend the revisions you think should be made to the unit to make it more learner friendly.

Writing a Self-learning Unit

Self-learning materials, as the name indicates, should motivate the learners for self-learning, learn with minimal or nil support of the teacher. The learning materials must perform the functions of a teacher so that the learners feel that the teacher is built into the materials. Each self-learning unit should have three parts: beginning of the unit, the main body of the unit, and the ending.

Beginning of the Unit

The "beginning" of the unit provides **orientation** to the learners regarding how they should approach the unit and what they can expect from it.

   a) **Structure of the Unit:** In the textbooks, there is one list of 'contents' for the whole book. On the contrary, self-learning materials have a structure or list of contents for every unit. In this structure, we have sections and subsections for sub-topics and sub-sub-topics. This style of organization of contents makes the material more learner-friendly. The sections and sub-sections of a unit are simply numbered in the sequence

using one point, e.g., 1.1, 1.2, 1.3…. and so on, the digit on the left indicating the unit number and the digit on the right indicting the section. While indicating a sub-section dealing with a sub-sub-topic, we use another digit on the right. To show the first sub-section of the first section of the first unit we write: 1.1.1. It is indented one space right to the section in the structure. We do not use numbering beyond two points. We highlight them with bold typeface and no numerical representation.

b) Introduction to the Unit: Introduction of the unit is the gateway to a unit. Through it we welcome, orient and motivate the learners by giving them a brief background to the topic, linking the present topic to the previous topic and telling them what are going to study in the unit.

Components of an introduction: There are three major components of an introduction.

a) Structural Component: The introduction tries to   establish a link between what a learner has already learned and what he/she is going to study in the unit.

b) Thematic Component: The introduction gives an overview of the main theme of the unit and its components.

c) Guidance Component: The introduction guides the learners regarding what they are supposed to do before they start reading the unit in terms of time, special activities, equipment, books, etc. which makes the reading more fruitful to the learners.

c) Defining Objectives: This is a very important component of writing a self-learning unit as it clearly lays down the terminal learning outcomes after the study of a unit in terms of observable performance of learners, presented in 'behavioral terms'.

Components of Objectives:

i) Condition: The objectives should clearly define the condition/situation in which the learners are expected to behave in a desired manner [g. After going through the unit, the learners will be able to do……']

ii) Behaviour, i.e., action: The objectives should indicate what behavior a learner should be able to display after studying the unit.

iii) Standard, i.e., level: Objectives should help the learners know 'to what level they would be able to perform' after completing the unit. At the UG level, for example, the learning objectives should be application-oriented and should involve the application of knowledge and understanding. At PG and higher levels, the objectives should involve higher level activities involving synthesis and evaluation.

Terminology to be used in Objectives: While defining the objectives, we should use appropriate verbs indicating the observable and measurable behavior of the learners.

(a) **Knowledge:** define, label, list, measure, name, recall, recognize, reproduce, select, state, underline, write,

(b) **Understanding/ Comprehension:**   classify, contrast, explain, formulate, **identify**, indicate, illustrate, judge, justify, name, represent, select

(c) **Application:** assess, choose, compute, construct, explain, demonstrate, find, perform, predict, show, use, select

(d) **Analysis:**   analyze, break down, compare, contrast, conclude, criticize, differentiate, identify, justify, resolve, select, separate

(e) **Synthesis:**   combine, conclude, derive, discuss, generalize, organize, relate, restate, select, summaries

(f) **Evaluate:** choose, criticize, defend, determine, judge, identify, evaluate, recognize, select, support

Middle of the unit or Main Body of the Unit

In the middle or main body of the unit we have the content presented in the form of sections and sub-sections, each of which presents at least one new point or idea, and corresponding self-assessment questions, exercises and activities. This is main part of the unit where the learner intensely interacts with the text, engages himself in the tasks and activities and makes his/her learning fruitful.

We need to take the following things into account while working on the main body of the unit:

a) Small steps: The content in the unit should be divided into small manageable learning steps/activities. Each topic or sub-topic should be put under a section or sub-section. Each of the sections should be logically linked so that the learners can move from one point to another point, from one step to the other seamlessly in a systematic manner.

b) Logical arrangement: The content being presented in the unit should be logically arranged so that the learners can proceed from one learning point to another. Each learning point should be linked with the previous one and the following one in a logical manner. Logical presentation of the contents maintains continuity, improves understanding of the learners and aids retention.

c) Ordering the content: We follow the following principles while ordering the content in the self-learning materials.

(i) From known to unknown: In each unit a writer should try to link the new concept/idea/knowledge with pre-knowledge or experience of learners to make it meaningful to them.

(ii) From concrete to abstract: Concrete ideas should be introduced before the abstractions to facilitate proper comprehension of the contents.

(iii) From particular to general: Particular or specific concepts, cases and ideas should be discussed first before they are generalized.

(iv) From actual to representative: It is useful to present actual objects/events before the representative samples are chosen. Learning becomes joyful and interesting if it is based on actual events/experiences. Representative samples such as charts, graphs, diagrams may be chosen in the absence of actual things/events to make the contents easy, comprehensible and interesting.

(iv) From simple to complex: The writer of self-learning materials should start with easy ideas/ concepts and then gradually move to the complex ones in order to facilitate better learning.

(d) Personalized style: In self-learning materials, we use the pronoun 'you' to address the learners to make the writing personal, interactive and make them feel that they are being paid individual attention. The conversational style makes the interaction between the self-learning materials and the learners more effective. Learners feel the presence of the teachers before them.

(e) Language: Language in the self-learning materials should be clear, direct, simple and persuasive. The language used in the text should inspire and tempt the learner to use the materials, interact with them, think critically and respond appropriately. The language of the materials should match with the intellectual level of the target group. A writer should also take into account the learner's educational background and intellectual maturity while deciding the type of language to be used. Use of high-sounding bombastic words may sound good but should be avoided at all costs. Sentences should communicate the ideas and concepts clearly and directly. They should be short and simple so that the learners are able to grasp them at one go. Long sentences should be broken into smaller and simpler ones. Likewise, passages or paragraphs should be short and should contain one single idea.

The following things should be considered while writing the materials.

i) *Use of personal pronouns:* As the teacher is not physically present, the self-learning materials should be written in a personal, conversational and friendly style by using the personal pronouns 'you' and 'we'.

ii) *Humour:* In order to break the monotony of the learning materials and make them interesting and attention-sustaining, humour should be used intermittently. The English and Foreign Languages University presents subjects like Linguistics and Grammar in a humorous manner.

iii) *Familiar words in place of less familiar or unfamiliar words:* A text is always easier for readers to understand if they are familiar with the words being used. It is both useless and improper to use high-sounding and unfamiliar words when familiar alternatives are available. For example, the word 'help' is more useful than 'facilitate' when we want to say that the learning materials help the learners learn on their own. However, we use some unfamiliar or less familiar words to convey the exact meaning with precision in technical texts.

iv) *Use of short words in place of long ones:* Short words are easier to understand and remember than longer ones. The word 'basic", for example, is better understood than the word 'fundamental'.

v) *Use of short sentences in place of long ones:* Long sentences are more difficult to understand than short ones. Hence short sentences should be used as far as possible but overuse of short sentences without proper linkers can destroy cohesion.

vi) *Remove unnecessary words and phrases:* It is necessary to remove words and phrases which are either unnecessary or not directly related to the topic in context. Repetition of points should be avoided to the maximum extent.

vii) ***Prefer positive to the negative:*** While presenting the contents, we should prefer to positive concepts and statements to the negative ones as they are easier to understand. Moreover, we should avoid double negatives which are interpreted differently in different cultures**.**

viii) ***Maximise cohesion:*** We should try to cohesion among the words in a paragraph by using linking words like pronouns, conjunctions like 'thus', 'however', repetition of key words, and use of transition words and phrases. Transitional words and phrases like also, in addition, moreover, firstly, for example, first of all, at the same time, however, on the other hand, to summarise and in conclusion.

ix) ***Use active rather than passive voice:*** As the writing of self-instructional materials require the writers to address directly to the learners, active voice should be used in such materials as much as possible.

x) ***Avoid idioms and words that have a double meaning.***

f) Illustrations: Good writers should make proper use of illustrations in varied formats in the self-learning materials as they create interest, stimulate imagination, aid comprehension, and help learners retain information on long term bases.

g) Activities: As discussed above, self-learning materials are self-active as they are full of activities which require the learners to interact with the texts, interpret the contents and respond to the them as per the instructions in the activities. It is through the activities that the learners get an opportunity to make practical application of theoretical knowledge gained. Activities should not demand much time and energy from the learners. Activities can be question-based and reflective-action based. Question-based activities include In-text questions with immediate feedback, Self-Assessment Questions with model answer at the end and Exercises with no answers but hints. Reflective action-based questions include activities like things to do (Collection of data) and experiential activities (Writing a note after watching a movie or tv programme of writing a book review).

Different tasks can be given under the Self-Assessment Questions. They might include short answer type questions, true-false questions, multiple-choice questions, match the columns, fill-in-the-blank type questions, put in right order and complete the graph/diagram/table tasks.

Self-Check Questions/Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs): Self-check exercises or self-assessment questions help the learners consolidate their learning, assess their own grasp of the contents and get feedback on their performance. While framing such questions, one should ensure that the activities are relevant, stimulating, encouraging and helpful to learners in checking their progress. The SAQs should be not more than three in number after a given section and should demand less time. All SAQs should be provided with model answers/possible answers at the end of the units so as to prevent learners from getting tempted to look at them while attempting the questions. They are very useful means of providing feedback to the learners and motivate them.

Good Self-Assessment Tests should take minimum amount of time to help the learners get feedback on their progress, test as much of the content of the section as possible and use questions that which help the learners identify their strengths and weaknesses. Self-assessment tests should test all the new learning in a section like all new vocabulary, concepts, rules, facts,

theories, methods, problem-solving methods, methods of creating things (e.g., reports, spreadsheets) and skills of analysis. Activities under Self-Assessment tests may include activities like reporting own observations, giving own examples, restating facts, concepts and principles, applying new concepts and principles.

Good self-learning materials should provide answer spaces in the self-check or self-assessment exercises. This practice is learner-friendly and encourages learners to complete the activities. It has been found through research that learners tend to attempt those exercises with space for answers more than the exercises without space for answers. People who complete the activities in the self-learning materials show better performance.

Ending of the Unit
While ending the unit, we should take care to include the following components:
i) Summary: The summary helps the learners recall all the important points/ideas/concepts covered in the unit. It provides a quick overview of the topics, sub-topics or sub-topics covered in the unit.

a) Recapitulation: Learners consolidate their learning by recapitulating the important learning points/ideas/concepts covered in the unit.

b) Reinforcement: The summary reinforces the learning of the learners by helping them quickly recall whatever they have read and motivating them for further learning.

(ii) Exercises: There should be unit-end exercises on all the aspects covered in the unit to help the learners reinforce their learning through practice.

(iii) Glossary: Under this section, **t**he key words, difficult words and unfamiliar are explained in simple and comprehensible language.

(iv) Suggested reading: This list includes the names of books, periodicals and other references which are useful to the learners in having a better understanding of the contents in the unit studied.

Activity-4
Group Activity
A. What precautions should we take while designing the learning objectives of a self-learning unit? Discuss in groups.
B. What points should we keep in mind while preparing a good Self-Assessment Exercise? Discuss in groups and then design a self-assessment exercise keeping the points in mind. Please prepare the Model Answers for the questions in the exercise.
C. Prepare the outlay for a Self-Learning Unit for a topic of your choice on the basis of the format recommended in the previous section. Try to include maximum varieties of activities to make the self-learning materials interesting and engaging for the learners.

Module V:

Academic Counsellor and Counselling in Distance Education: *Counselling in Distance Education*

Introduction

Distance learning is where learning takes place when the teacher and learner are physically separated from each other geographically. To guide, support and link the learners with the institutions, the counsellors or tutors are recruited at the study centers. These counsellors impart face to face counseling on various issues like academics, general, emotional, examination etc.

Counselling in educational context is a learner centric activity and deals with the individual and personal needs of the learners. It helps learners identify their problems along with the causes behind the problem and ways and means to overcome such problems to enhance learning.

Counselling has been defined as "the advice, help and support given to learners to enable them to make satisfactory progress in the system" in the educational context.

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, or BACP, define counselling as:

"Counselling and psychotherapy are umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies. They are delivered by trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to help them bring about effective change or enhance their wellbeing."

Counsellor in education is one who uses his/her interpersonal skills and understanding to help learners resolve their individual problems. Counselling in distance education is very important and critical for overall delivery of the programme because of the specific characteristics of the learners, the distance education institution and of distance learning itself.

Academic Counselling in Distance Education

Academic Counselling in distance education system acts as a bridge to fill the gap between the learner and the teaching institution.

In the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system the teachers who deal with the learners are scattered all over the country and the teacher who are the course writers are on the central location of the university and they do not know the learners. The prior groups of the teachers who deal with the students are the academic counsellors. The major role of academic counsellors is that of tutoring and counselling. However, these two terms are different, where general counseling is based on the needs of a specific person and tutoring must be done by a subject specialist. The difference is explained in the table Tutoring and Counselling.

Tutoring and Counselling

Tutoring	Counselling
1. Subject specific	1. Person specific
2. Tutor need to be well versed with subject knowledge	2. Counsellor needs positive human attributes
3. Course Centered interaction	3. Student Centered interaction
4. Communication is from teacher to student	4. Communication is from student to the counselor

5. Explaining to the learner	5. Informing about the details of the various programs and fees structures etc.
6. Clarifying concepts	
7. Enhancement of Knowledge and reinforcing learning	6. Advising about making appropriate choices for courses/ programs
8. Guidance for practical's, assignment's, and term end examination	7. Motivating learners for learning, enhancing confidence and managing stress
	8. Supporting learners to manage administrative and personal problems faced in ODL

This combination of tutoring and general counseling is known as academic counselling and the person performing this task is called academic counsellor. Thus, the term Academic Counselling is used in broader sense for providing academic and non-academic advice to the learners. It is different from classroom teaching as that is purely subject centered and academic counselling is need based and student centered. Academic Counselling covers all courses related topics (cognitive level), it also covers non-academic areas (Affective level) and it may also involve transferring skills through practical's (psychomotor level).

Academic Counselling and its Activity	Video Link: https://youtu.be/AQFOgBIzShM	Scan with QR Code

Activities of Academic Counselling

Academic counseling is not lecture-oriented, rather it is aimed at problem solving, and small group teaching to conduct the sessions with the aid of available audio and video materials. Academic Counselling involves three major activities.

- **Informing**

Informing involves giving appropriate, correct and up to date information which is independent of the learner. For example, if a learner wants to know about the courses offered by the university, pre-qualification for the courses, rules and regulation of the university, examination system etc. For informing the learner the counsellor needs to have appropriate and accurate information and it should be communicated clearly. Also, the same question put forward by 10 different students will have the same answer.

- **Advising**

Sometimes a learner raises a query which has many possible answers. Advising the learner will mean to give him/her information about the possible responses and suggesting an appropriate way or guide him/her to choose out of several available options. Advising is many times learner dependent and sometimes it is also just about 'giving information' which is knowledge based.

Apart from giving information, here the academic counsellor will give a response based on learner's previous experiences and interests like choosing a programme and course based on the previous qualification and also based on the interests of the learner.

- **Counselling**

Counselling helps the learners to understand their needs, feelings or motivations. This helps them in taking decisions for themselves. Counselling is a learner dependent activity as it deals with individual learner's feelings, needs and requirements. For example a learner is facing difficulty in understanding a course and wants to withdraw from the course, in this case the counsellor will try to understand problems he is facing and then keeping in mind his interests and experiences the counselor will help him in taking decision.

Stages of Academic Counselling

As you all are now aware that an academic counsellor has majorly three activities to perform informing, advising and counselling. It is important for an academic counsellor to familiarise himself/herself with the various stages which the learners may come across and how the counsellor might have to help them to overcome those.

These are the stages from which a learner might move through:
- Pre-entry Stage
- Entry to the course
- During the course
- Examination
- Post course stage

These stages help the academic counsellor to focus on learners upcoming needs and plan accordingly. These stages are not at all isolated, rather work as an indicator for academic counsellors.

- **Pre-entry Stage**

A learner at the pre-entry stage is willing to change his/her situation in terms of education and job prospects. At this stage the learner wants to know about the programmes available in distance education, entry requirements, the university/ Regional center/ study center, application procedure, fees details, examination pattern etc. and the learner may not be clear about what he/she wants to do. Learners at this stage need a mix of information, advice and counselling. We can understand it in the given table.

Activities	Support
Information	Programmes, Courses, entry requirement, duration of the programme, examination system, fees structure etc.
Advice	Guiding about the programmes and connecting it with prior knowledge of the learners for selecting an appropriate programme
Counselling	About selection of course as per the choice and interest of the candidate and to identify a line of action

Academic counsellors should have detailed information about not just their programmes rather about all the programmes running in the university/ institution. They can keep an updated prospectus, brochure of programmes and courses for guiding the learners on various aspects.

- **Entry to the Course**

During the pre-entry stage learner decided to take some course. In the next step learner would require information related to course like no. of credit courses in the programme, assignment submission details, advice on studying the course etc. However, the learners are given a programme guide at the beginning of the course, which contains a lot of relevant information and aims at counselling. Sometimes learners are apprehensive about the workload, and their success. Here, a counsellor can help them find ways of handling the workload, time management for effective studies. Also, the academic counsellor inducts the learners into the instructional system of the university/ institution at this stage.

- **During the Course**

Beginning Stage: Once the learner is admitted to course, he/she needs guidance about the paperwork, learning material, academic difficulties, assignment preparation and system. Learners in the ODL system may be adult returning to the studies after a long gap, here the academic counsellors need to motivate the learners, build their confidence and give constructive help to move further.

- **Mid-Course Stage**

This is a stage where academic difficulties, personal and non-academic problems can crop up which indirectly affect the studies of the learners. The problems can be at home, office or health related. The academic counsellors must listen to all the problems explained by the learner and help them overcome those.

- **Examination**

Examination brings anxiety in learners irrespective of age and experience and it needs to be handled by academic counsellors. The learners need the information regarding the time date and venue for the conduct of examinations. They also need advice on preparing for the examination and revision techniques. Academic counsellor needs to give counselling to overcome examination-anxiety and conduct dummy exams for practice. Academic Counsellors need to plan and discuss types of questions, strategies to answer them with the learners prior to exams.

- **Post-Course Stage**

The responsibilities of the academic counsellors do not end with end of examinations. At this stage also the learners need support of the academic counsellors to advise them about career opportunities and their suitability and career advancement. They also need information of results/ grades/ awards, convocation etc.

The academic counsellors need to be empathetic towards the learners, where some learners overcome the barriers easily and some need support at every stage.

Stages of Academic Counselling	Video Link: https://youtu.be/QSKsF3EjO9Q	Scan with QR Code

Media of Counselling

Distance learners are encouraged to be self-reliant and independent, still they need some support and motivation to move ahead and complete their learning. Learners in the distance learning interact individually with their self-learning materials and interact socially with their peers and academic counsellors during the counselling session. Apart from counselling session the communication between the learners and academic counsellors takes place through variety of media.

Institutions offering distance education keep exploring new technological platforms for supporting the interactions between academic counsellors and learner or group of learners. Distance learning institutions make use of technology to achieve their goals.

The media are:
- **Face to Face Counselling**: These sessions aims at reinforcing the self-learning material and offering remedial help wherever required. It also allows for peer interaction and establish a human link. The role of academic counsellor is different from a teacher in traditional classroom. The teacher controls the learning in a classroom whereas in a counselling session, it is a learner who controls the learning.

- **Counselling through Assignments**: In Distance Education an academic counsellor is required to mark the assignments in most of the courses. An academic counsellor marks the assignments with comments, grades or marks for the continuous assessment and improvements of the learners. This is the only support which reaches to each learner. Assignments are the means of academic communication between the learner and counsellor.

- **Counselling through Phones**: Telephone or mobile phone allows to reach the learner or counsellor within no time and allows for one to one interaction. Now a day's mobile phone allows for group calling, teleconferencing, Messaging, Use of SNS and video conferencing for better and speedy interaction.

- **Counselling through Letters**: Effective counselling can be given through writing letters. Here reading takes the place of listening and writing is done in place of speaking. Structuring of the letter is important in this type of counselling as the letter should be structured in such a way that it is clear and useful to the learners.

- **Counselling through Handbooks**: Counselling handbooks are aimed at encouraging learners to clarify their issues on their own and motivate them to raise appropriate and relevant questions. Such handbooks are written in an interactive style with the aim to make the learners reflective learners.

- **Counselling through Audio and Video Cassettes:** Use of Audio and Video cassettes is like counselling handbook and these interactive tapes can be used in the similar ways. There could be variety of tapes for different types of counselling like anxiety counselling, exam counselling tape etc. These tapes are useful as they can be used while pursuing other physical tasks.

- **Counselling through Broadcasting (Radio and Television):** Broadcasting provides a unique feature of mass counselling to enrich and motivate learners. Broadcasting has less opportunity for interaction but now it is possible through various ways. One such is phone in radio or phone in tv option to raise the question and get the answer from the experts. CIET, NCERT organized broadcast during board examination for school students with an opportunity for phone in and ask the questions. It was a well appreciated programme.

- **Counselling through Internet:** Internet now a days has opened a new window for interaction. Till date it was not well tapped medium but now as the internet is becoming cheaper with mobile set in every hand has made it possible.

The various options are there to explore like email, online discussion, video conferencing, audio conferencing use of world wide web and many more. These options can be explored and implemented by the academic counsellors to guide and motivate the learners.

Media of Counselling	Video Link: https://youtu.be/pvYxM2iX-MQ	Scan with QR Code

Conclusion

Academic Counselling is a collaborative process. It helps individuals in defining goals, making decisions, and solving problems related to different areas like educational, career concerns, personal, and social. Academic Counselling in distance education is important because of the specific characteristics of the learners, the distance education institution and of distance learning itself. Academic Counselling involves tutoring and counselling both. Academic Counselling has three major activities: informing, advising and counselling.

Counselling in Distance Education is required at five stages: Pre-entry Stage, Entry to the course, During the course, Examination and Post course stage. Academic Counselling can be done using variety of media or mix of media like: Face to Face Counselling, Counselling through Assignments, Counselling through Phones, Counselling through Letters, Counselling through Handbooks, Counselling through Audio and Video Cassettes, Counselling through Broadcasting (Radio and Television) and Counselling through Internet. Many more media can be explored for counselling with the advent of technology.

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Module V:

Academic Counsellor and Counselling in Distance Education: *Roles and Responsibilities of the Academic Counsellor in ODL*

Introduction

Open and Distance Learning Institutions have developed a system of Academic Counselling to interact, guide and advice the distance learners on both academic and non-academic issues. Distance learners experience both course related and academic difficulties during their studies. The course related difficulties are related to choosing the papers, understanding the fee payment processes etc. and academic difficulties are content related. Academic counselling deals with both, basically it is learner centric and not like teaching. So, the Academic Counsellor acts as a facilitator for distance learners and performs an important role of guiding the learners in overcoming the various hurdles and difficulties during their academic programme. The academic counsellors assist the learners and bridge the gap between the distance learner and the ODL institution. They guide the learners, set the contexts for the interactions, and create opportunities for exploration to make the learners active and interactive.

Role and Responsibility of ACs by VC-OSOU	Video Link: https://youtu.be/DSM7-7CPvDc	Scan with QR Code

Roles and Responsibilities of an Academic Counsellor

Academic Counsellor is a qualified and experienced teacher in his/her area of study and works in higher education institution, wherein the study centres are established. Apart from the qualifications the functions of an Academic counsellors are well defined in ODL system. Academic Counsellors need to work in close coordination and harmony with the coordinator of the Study Centre who is the overall in charge in the context of the ODL institutions activities. To fulfill the roles and responsibilities of an academic counsellor there are certain pre-requisites:

- To understand the difference between the academic counselling in ODL institution and teaching in conventional classroom system

- Pedagogy of instruction in conventional educational system is different than that of the ODL system. It is required for an academic counsellor to be well versed with the ODL instruction system in general and university system in particular.

- Academic Counsellor must be aware of the Self Learning Material prepared by the ODL Institution either in print form or non-print (audio and video resources)

- Orientation towards the evaluation methodology adopted like continuous assessment through Self check questions in SLM, assignments related to the course, end term or semester end examinations.

- Awareness about the credit system of the university and other rules/norms for governing students' progress.

To fulfill these pre-requisites the ODL institute can organize a short training for orienting the newly selected academic counsellors.

There are certain major responsibilities which an academic counsellor has to fulfill further which will be elaborated individually. These responsibilities can vary from one institution to the other. The major **functions/responsibilities** envisioned are:

- Conducting the counselling sessions

- Training the distance learners in distance study methods and imparting study skills relevant.

- Maintaining record of learners allotted, like contact details (mobile phone number, email id and address), attendance records for the assigned sessions and record of completing SLM, self-check questions, course material preparedness, interactivity in the group and individually, and assignment submission.

- Tracking the overall academic progress of the learners assigned in the respective course(s) of a programme.

- Evaluation of the assignments/ practicum/ project (if any)/ internship (if any) and other field work as prescribed in the respective course

- Supervising the learners during project, practicum and field work

- Guiding the learners during internship and its successful completion.

- Giving feedback to the learners during the counselling session and on the assignments through the written comments

- Coordinating with the coordinator and giving feedback on counselling sessions and assignment evaluation.

Preparations for Academic Counselling Sessions
The preparedness of academic counsellors and learners need to be ensured prior to the transaction of academic counselling.

Preparations Required by Academic Counsellors
- Developing good knowledge of the course.

- Acquainting with the programme/ course guide and with course material including self-learning material printed or non-printed like audio video or any other required component of the course

- Getting assignments: an important component of the evaluation process.

- Preparedness regarding discussing the assignments during the counselling sessions.

- Well informed about the university and its rules and other relevant points to facilitate students during their academic programme/ course.

- Dealing with learners sincerely and creating sustained interest in them not only as learners but also as individuals.

Preparing Learners for Counselling
- Ensuring access of learners to study material, programme guide and assignments.
- Learners have detailed knowledge of programme structure.
- Ensure that the learners are aware that a different learning philosophy is to be followed during the counselling sessions.
- Ensuring learners awareness of the learning philosophy during the counselling sessions. It may be challenging in the beginning as many distance learners will be new to the system, and at that time the learners would need more of general counselling than subject specific counselling.
- Ensure that learners have a detailed schedule of counselling sessions and units to be covered in each session
- Ensure that learners are aware of aims & objectives of each counselling sessions.
- Learners shall be aware of the tasks expected of them during the counselling session.

- Learners shall be informed about University rules in general and about regular attendance in the counselling sessions in particular;

- Learners shall be informed about the multi-media inputs offered by the University such as Interactive Radio Counselling, Teleconferencing, web conferencing, Open educational Resources repository and library facilities and also like Gyan Darshan & Gyan Vani in case of IGNOU.

- Learners must have knowledge of calendar of the University activities including submission of assignment responses, fees, term end examination forms, re-registration forms etc.

- Learner shall also be aware of the University's website and Learning Management System (LMS) if any.

Pre-Requisites of ACs	Video Link: https://youtu.be/9Ys1jze3mmE	Scan with QR Code

Organizing Counselling Sessions

Learners after joining the course are willing to know about the support services available during the course of study for their progress along with their peers, counsellors and other supporting

study centre members. Induction meeting at the commencement of the session helps the learners to familiarize themselves with the instructional methodology.

Theory Counselling Sessions

Theory Counselling sessions are important aspect of any course in ODL system. But these sessions are not mandatory for successful completion of the course. The learners shall be made aware about the rules regarding their respective course during the induction programme itself. However, the counsellor shall conduct the courses in such a way that the learners are motivated to attend these sessions. Counsellor need to plan the activities of 1st session well to encourage the learners to be regular to these sessions.

Session 1: The first session can start as an introductory session, wherein the learners and the academic counsellor get to know about each other. This interaction with the group will enable the learners and counsellor to know about the purpose of joining the particular institution/ programme or course. After the introductory session the counsellor can give an overview of the course, self-learning material, self-help questions and importance of counselling session. The interaction and activities during the introductory session can motivate the students to be regular to the sessions.

Remaining Sessions: The next session can start with a recap of the previous sessions while initiating discussions on the course, its concepts or any difficulties pertaining to the course. Through this, learners will get to know the nature of academic Counselling and how it is different from a lecture. In later sessions learners can come prepared with the units or topics allocated for discussion. Different group learning techniques can be used by the academic counsellor to facilitate the learning.

Practical Counselling Sessions

The ODL institutions are offering many programmes which are skill oriented for example courses in science education, computers, engineering and other such disciplines. These courses are practical intensive and require laboratories, and specialized equipment. It is mandatory to attend these practical sessions to upgrade skills set required for completion of the course. It is also advised to learners to attend the theory counselling sessions of such courses for better understanding and acquiring better practical knowledge. The Institution provide the academic counsellors with all resource books or lab manuals to support the counsellors while conducting the practical sessions.

The academic counsellors must be present while the practical session is going on to facilitate the learning as per the objectives. The learners shall maintain the practical files and other documents as prescribed by the institution. Also, the record of practical work shall be properly maintained by the counsellor and the coordinator of the study centre.

Absenteeism in Counselling sessions

It is observed that the study centre coordinators experience the problems of learner absenteeism and often irregular attendance by academic counsellors too. The academic counsellors shall be timely informed about the schedule of the counselling sessions to avoid the absenteeism of the

counsellors. Also, the academic counsellors shall be motivated to make the counselling sessions interactive to encourage the learners for becoming regular to the sessions. Any social media group can also be created to facilitate the learning and keeping the learners motivated for attending the counselling sessions.

This aspect shall closely be monitored by the coordinators of the study centres by having a meticulous record keeping mechanism in place. In case of continuous absenteeism in counselling sessions counsellor shall inform the coordinator about it and should send list of such students to the centre for reminding the learners through SMS/ calls. In extreme cases of absenteeism or less registration in course the coordinator should organize intensive counselling. The record keeping shall be done in the institution's specific formats for records.

Organising Counselling Sessions I	Video Link: https://youtu.be/peQ-5XCft_w	Scan with QR Code

Continuous Evaluation through Assignments

Assignments are critical to ODL system and they have important pedagogic function. Assignments provide an opportunity for interaction between the counsellor and the learner. Academic counsellors have a significant role of writing quality feedback on assignment responses submitted by the learners. The feedback and tutor comments on assignment has great impact on the learning process of the learners. The feedback or comments shall be personalized, timely and regularly. However, assigning just marks or grades is not good feedback. Good feedback must have verbal comments, and well written comments motivates learners. Tutor or counsellor's comments are needed to:

- Sustain the motivation of learners
- Create two-way communication through feedback and remedial guidance
- Clarify ambiguities and guidance in difficult areas
- Provide personal guidance and tips related to study skills/ study habits etc.

Academic Counsellors shall maintain the regularity and timeliness in assignment evaluation as sometimes it is a major challenge faced by academic Counsellors.

Supervision and Evaluation of Projects, Practicum and Internship

Academic counsellors are also supposed to be a part of projects, practicum and internship in programmes which has these components. They shall be equipped with the course project manuals or handbooks to guide the learners. For projects the learners have to select a problem in their area of study, submit a synopsis on the same with the help of academic counsellor to the institution in the required format. Counsellors shall guide the learners to opt for a genuine area of study. Only after the approval of the synopsis, the project shall be taken up by the learners and completed project report shall be submitted to the department mentioned by the institution. Project evaluation and viva voce (if required) shall be done timely.

The AC shall guide the learners about the internship programmes their tenure and report submissions at the end as per the guidelines of the university.

Feedback on Academic Counselling Sessions

Feedback is always an important component in any kind of activity. It helps the authorities in improving the particular activity or system as a whole. In case of academic counselling in ODL system, the feedback of the Academic Counsellors on the organization and conduct of counselling sessions is significant. It may help to improve existing practices and methods for ensuring effective learner support.

Feedback on counselling sessions can be obtained from:
- Learners attending the counselling sessions
- Academic Counsellors taking/ facilitating counselling sessions

The feedback form generated online or printed can be circulated amongst the learners by the academic counsellors during the counselling session. The filled in feedback can be either collected prior to the semester/ course examination or any suitable date can be decided by the academic counsellor for online form submission. The formats for feedback can be taken from the institution or an exhaustive and well researched form can be developed by the centre coordinators. The coordinators can collect the feedback forms from the counsellors and learners and share it with the institution for analysis and interpretation.

Organising Counselling Sessions II	Video Link: https://youtu.be/BcZ_HC68UxA	Scan with QR Code

Conclusion

Academic Counsellor acts as a facilitator in Counselling sessions. He/she is responsible for bridging the gap between the ODL Institution and the learners. The major roles and responsibilities of Academic Counsellor are: conducting the counselling sessions both theory and practical; training the distance learners in distance study methods; maintaining record of learners allotted; tracking the overall academic progress of the learners assigned in the respective course of a programme; evaluation of the assignments/ practicum/ project / internship etc. as prescribed in the respective course; supervising the learners during project, practicum and field work; guiding the learners during internship and its successful completion; giving feedback to the learners during the counselling session and on the assignments through the written comments and coordinating with the coordinator and giving feedback on counselling sessions and assignment evaluation.

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Module VI:
Support to People with Disabilities in ODL

Introduction

Education is an empowering force. People from all sections of society use it as a tool for empowering themselves. Conventional or face to face education is the first choice for many but only Open and distance learning system of education is an empowering tool in the real sense of the term. There is no scope for any discrimination on the basis of caste, class, sex, religion and abilities. It is the urge for empowerment and development in the learner that pushes them forward in this mode of education as they occupy the central position in this system. This is a great blessing for people with disabilities as they don't have to take the physical strain of moving out of their locations and attending the academic sessions on a day-to-day basis. Moreover, they don't have to face any sort of discrimination in the society because of their disabilities. Now with the introduction of online education, they are even spared of the responsibility to attend the contact sessions or academic counselling sessions at weekends. But the tutors or the academic counsellors need to be aware of the various support services available for people with disabilities so that they can discharge their academic responsibilities in a more effective manner. In this unit we shall be focusing on the factors which contribute to the disadvantageous position of people with disabilities, needs of people with disabilities, role of ODL in empowering people with disabilities, the academic, administrative, moral and psychological support that can be extended to people with disabilities, the various technology-enabled support services for people with disabilities and the role of tutors in providing support to the learners in ODL.

Support to Learners with Disabilities in Open and Distance Learning	Video Link: https://youtu.be/ENSEuyBzr4k	Scan with QR Code

Factors contributing to the Disadvantageous Position of PWDs

Two of the ten targets in Sustainable Development Goals of UNO focus on the need to i) eliminate disparities for people with disabilities and ii) to provide infrastructure and materials for improved access to education. Governments need to adopt alternative and innovative approaches to achieve these ambitious targets. Goal 4 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals aspires to provide inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030(Kanwar, 2017). Access to education is based on four values which are central to inclusive education namely: presence, participation, acceptance and achievement. (Mosia, 2017). Unless we ensure the presence, participation of the learners with disabilities in the ODL and accept them as they are, we cannot expect to attain success or achieve any academic goals.

Fifteen percent of the world population has been reported to be suffering from one form or other form of disability. The percentage of differently abled people going for education, particularly higher education, is very much negligible. When 30% of the world population has access to tertiary education and more than 75% participation rate is in European and North

American countries (Marginson 2016:245), in the US and Canada, access to tertiary education for people with disabilities is at nearly 11 %, it is over 5% in Australia. But this percentage is still negligible, the percentage drops to 1% in South Africa and .56 % in India (Kanwar, 2017). People with disabilities continue with multiple disadvantages for various reasons, the main reason being the attitude of the people dealing with people with disabilities. The social structure, the physical infrastructure available in educational institutions and government policies towards people with disabilities   are not very encouraging and greatly contribute to the disadvantageous position of these people. The statement of Finkelstein (2001:2) is highly relevant in this context, "Our society is constructed by people with capabilities for people with capabilities and it is this that makes people with impairments incapable of functioning*" (Mosia, 2017). The disadvantageous position of people of disabilities increases when the society unnecessarily isolates and excludes them from full participation in society (UPIAS 1976:3-4).

Some people are born with disabilities, but some get disabled due to factors beyond their control, like disease, accident, fire. Some are temporarily disabled but some are disabled for their life. People with both categories of disabilities are discriminated against in each and every walk of life. Apathy of common people towards people with disabilities, inadequate accessibility of higher education institutions, lack of support, adverse social attitudes and social isolation as well as low financial capacity put people with disabilities at disadvantageous positions.

Needs of people with disabilities are identified late and the people in support services have no proper training to respond to their unique needs. Moreover, learners with disabilities hesitate to inform the support staff about their disabilities for fear of being victimized (Mosia, 2017). When people coming across the PWD are not responsive to their needs, they feel more disadvantaged than they really are. Inappropriate physical access, inappropriate application and admission procedures, inappropriate teaching methods, inadequate support services and resources and non-supportive political will worsen the condition of people with disabilities (Chataika, 2007). Lack of requisite skills usually leads to negative attitudes developing among the service providers.

In such a disabling environment, only access to quality education can bring about significant changes in the lives of people.

- *Physical Infrastructure:* Inaccessible physical infrastructure is the greatest challenge for people with disabilities, particularly the ones with mobility challenges. People with disabilities feel more disadvantaged when there are no sidewalks for wheelchair users, storied buildings have no ramps or elevators, doorknobs are too high, doors are too narrow and so on (Engelbrecht & De Beer 2014:10-14). When physical environments are inaccessible, they make students with mobility challenges feel 'excluded and insignificant' as they reduce their level of independence (Hadjikakou et al. 2010:404-405)**. I**naccessible structures or buildings incompatible to the needs of the PWDs are detrimental to their growth as autonomous human beings. In most of the places, the public transport system and buildings are not compatible with the needs of learners. Because of the inaccessibility of the transport system, the disabled persons remain

confined to their homes and hence cannot participate in routine, social or academic activities.

- *Unfriendly Environment and Negative Attitudes:* Attitudes can have both positive and negative impact on the learning of people with disabilities. Attitudes of both the people with disabilities and without disabilities towards disability determines the status of people with disabilities. Negative attitudes of the academic and administrative staff, peers force learners to resign to their disadvantageous positions and hide their invisible disabilities and do not request for any assistance to accommodate their interests [(Jung, 2003) and (Johnson, 2006)]. People concerned with support services to the differently abled people should ensure that the policies for the PWDs are implemented in word and spirit. Choruwa (2006) states that challenges to access to education for most PWDs start right from the family level. They are faced with negative attitudes from the family members as they consider sending children with disabilities to school as a waste of time. Moreover, the breadwinner in a family is required to dedicate himself/herself to the service of the differently abled person which adversely affects the family income (Choruwa, 2006, p.12). But when the people with disabilities consider their disability to be a handicap and make no efforts to get out of the disabling environment, their condition tends to deteriorate as people around them start victimizing them for their disability.

  Negative attitudes towards people with disabilities develop when people are neither sensitive towards their problems nor know their rights. As a result of this, they make no adjustments to accommodate the interests of such people and ignore the challenges faced by them. The staff dealing with support services to the learners should have proper understanding of the needs of the people with disabilities in order to facilitate their access, retention and success in any form of education.

- **Gender:** In case of women, disability becomes a double handicap. On the one hand they are disabled because of their gender which society considers to be inferior to men. On the other hand, they are differently abled and hence a double burden to their families and society. As per the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) (2013:1) report literacy rates for women with disabilities are estimated at 1 per cent, and "Girls with disabilities are also less likely to get an education, receive vocational training or find employment than boys with disabilities or girls without disabilities" (**Mosia, 2017).**

- **Lack of Information in Accessible Formats:** Lack of accessible information is one of the environmental barriers which prevent the differently abled people make use of information or facilities available for the public. Persons with visual impairment or disability, for example, would find the information accessible if it is available in Braille, large print or sign language (films or interpreter). Meetings, leaflets, television, cinema and newspapers prepared with the normal people in mind are far from being accessible to PWDs. All information and media   should be available in in various formats and languages so that they are accessible to all. The course-team preparing the materials for learners in any educational system, particularly the learners in the ODL system, should keep the learners with disabilities in mind so that the materials are relevant to such learners. Additional or supplementary materials and both online and offline

support need to be provided to such learners to facilitate their active participation and effective performance during the teaching-learning process.

- **Public Policies:** Public Policies regarding people with disabilities have a great role in shaping the life of such people. Unless the public policies are clear about the facilities to be given to the people with disabilities, society cannot be expected to have a positive attitude towards them. The statement of Walker (2003:172) is pertinent in this regard. "…preferences and choices are shaped and informed or deformed by society and public policies". Admission policies of the universities can have enabling or disabling effects depending upon the concessions they allow to the learners with disabilities.
- **Lack of Appropriate Technology:** Learners with disabilities can be assisted in multiple ways by integrating appropriate technology with the instructional strategies. Learners with mild visual impairment can be provided with presentations with large fonts and learners with major visual impairments can be provided with software like JAWS, NVDA, Supernova and Window-Eyes. Likewise, learners with hearing impairment can be provided with videos on relevant topics being presented in sign language.

Factors Contributing to PWDs	Video Link: https://youtu.be/klmljh4PNLQ	Scan with QR Code

Needs of People with Disabilities

While designing and developing learning materials and curriculum, people with disabilities need to be consulted and their needs taken into consideration to make them accessible. Problems arise when decisions are taken without consulting the students concerned. People with different disabilities differ in their needs. Even students with the same disability differ in their needs. Institutions of higher education should therefore periodically assess the needs of students with disabilities so as to enhance access to education for all (Mosia, 2017). The university staff who know the needs of the PWDs respond to them appropriately. A teacher aware of the presence of deaf students in the class may make arrangements to have an interpreter who can convey the important points to the students through sign language. Teachers in all modes of education, particularly Open and Distance Education, should familiarise themselves with basic communication methods of the students such as sign language and braille. (Mosia, 2017). University staff dealing with people with disabilities need training in basic media of communication, braille and sign language to meet the needs of students with disabilities and enable them to communicate properly with the members of faculty.

Students with disabilities should not be exposed to challenges which they have not faced till date. As these students have limited choice of courses or programmes due to poor administration of concessions, lack of educational resources, inflexible teaching methods and

curricula, all support services need to be integrated in the ODL system so as to ensure their access, retention and success. Disability data need to be taken into consideration while planning support services and social and extracurricular activities for the learners in this system (Mosia, 2017).

Activity-1
A. What factors contribute to the disadvantageous position of learners with disabilities? Discuss in groups and share your independent views with the other groups.
B. Why is it necessary to identify the needs of learners with disabilities before making plans and policies for them? Discuss in groups and share your ideas with others groups.
C. What accommodations we need to introduce in our system to make it compatible with the needs of learners with disabilities? Discuss in groups and share your ideas with other groups.

Empowering People with Disabilities through ODL

The characteristics of open and distance learning match the needs of the PWDs and hence look like an attractive alternative to them as they can study at their desired place without campus confinement and irrespective of their age, sex, class, caste or creed. Majority of the learners with disabilities consider ODL to be appropriate for them as it does not require them to leave the environment in which they are located and also cost-effective. This gives them the autonomy to study in familiar and favorite environments at their own convenience. Research shows that more and more people with disabilities are joining ODL institutions. First, ODL is convenient for them as they can study at their own pace, place and time. They don't need to travel to campus or seek accommodation near the institution. Second, ODL is more flexible and offers content in various formats so learners can read, listen or watch lectures. Third, ODL is more affordable as it costs significantly less than campus-based instruction. Finally, ODL also provides a degree of anonymity—where students with disabilities can interact with professors and peers without feeling discriminated.

However, in order to be effective and useful to the learners with disabilities, all ODL institutions should:
- include learners with disabilities in all their agendas and dreams
- make sure that they have skilled human manpower for the diversified learners
- keep records of their successful graduates and use the records as self-marketers of learners with disabilities (Mutswanga, 2014)

Open and Distance learning can only become viable and flexible alternative to people with disabilities if the support system in the ODL is sensitive to their needs and the infrastructure is in place. Singh and Agrawal endorse this when they say that open and distance learning systems provide flexible time, location and are self-paced, thus fitting into irregular schedules which is suitable for children and young people with disabilities (Singh and Agrawal, 2013).

According to Hendriks (2009), one of the primary concepts of ODL is to offer students learning anytime, anywhere. Therefore, all ODL resources must be designed to afford students with

disabilities maximum opportunity to access distance education resources anytime, anywhere without the need for outside assistance (e.g. sign language interpreters, aides, etc.).

Prof Asha Kanwar, CEO, COL points out four reasons why learners with disabilities prefer ODL.

Convenient	Study at your own pace, place and time
	Don't require to travel to campus or accommodation
Flexible	Option to listen, watch or read lecture in different formats
Affordable	Costs less than F2F
Anonymous	Engage with professors and peers without being discriminated

The course team for every programme should have at least one specialist in disability issues to ensure that the needs of the PWDs are taken care of in the instructional design. The study materials designed for the learners should also meet the needs of the PWDs. The PWDs should feel free to participate in all the academic and extracurricular activities being organized by the institution. The institution may collect feedback from the PWDs to check the relevance or usefulness of the programme to the learners, especially learners with disabilities. Disability specific support services can enhance success (Moisey, 2004). Adding computers, assistive technology and other adapted learning equipment, in addition to scholarships to students is assumed to have resulted in an increasing number of students with disabilities entering higher education (Inbar, 2003).

Empowering PWDs through Open and Distance Learning	Video Link: https://youtu.be/t6WgU-onXNA	Scan with QR Code

Support to People with Disabilities through ODL

When we talk about support to people with disabilities, we mean the facilities provided to them at different stages to facilitate their access, enhance their retention and ensure their success in the open and distance learning system. Creating facilities means removing physical, attitudinal and curricula barriers and providing academic, administrative, moral, psychological and technical support in order to promote equity and success of all learners.

Open universities across the world have supportive policies which are in sync with the needs of the learners with disabilities and promote their access. The Open University UK has a policy on Securing Greater Accessibility which ensures that all students regardless of access achieve comparable learning objectives. The university closely monitors its performance against a 4-stage model of professionalism in accessibility. It attracts the largest number of students with disabilities in the UK. In 2014, 19000 students with disabilities, that is 12 % of the institution's student population, enrolled in the undergraduate programme (Kanwar, 2017). Athabasca, Canada's open university, has a special provision for providing access to students with

disabilities. In addition to advocacy, they provide courses in alternative formats, access to assistive technologies, exam accommodations and referral services. AIOU, Pakistan offers free education to all disabled students up to PhD level. They have initiated this process from this year with an initial enrolment of 400 students. There are universities like UNISA which produce study material in alternative formats, including Braille, large print, audio and electronic and provide sign language interpretation services in certain of its contact groups. 2,469 students (0.8% of total) enrolled in 2011 has a disability. The enrolment of students with disabilities has grown by 59.3% since 2007.

All these ODL institutions are committed to inclusion as it fits with the social mission of the university which is to open up access to as many people as possible, but particularly the unreached segments of society. Different institutions are at different levels of advancement in this field—some of them are at the policy stage while others have much success to share. But in all cases, we note a growing convergence between ODL methodologies and ICTs and Assistive Technologies. Access, retention and success of learners with disabilities can be enhanced by providing courses in alternative formats; providing extra time for exams; external support such as sign language interpreters and access to AT.

Academic Support
Academic support to the learners with disabilities need highest attention of the authorities as a conducive academic environment in a university determines the retention of the learners in ODL. Academic support could include various areas like recasting the curriculum in view of the needs of the learners, providing learning resources like notes and presentations in larger fonts and alternative formats, accommodating the needs of the learners with sensory impairments and integrating technologies with the teaching strategies to optimally utilize the opportunities available in ODL. ICT combined with content and pedagogy can do wonders for people with disabilities.

- *Reorienting the curriculum in consonance with the needs of the PWDs***:** Most of the curriculum in the ODL are designed with the learners without disabilities in mind and the teachers are not oriented to deal with learners with disabilities. The curriculum should have access points for learners with disabilities so that they don't feel excluded in the system. ODL courses, resources and materials must be designed and delivered in such a way that the level of communication and course-taking experience is the same for students with or without disabilities. Valverde et al, (2011) explain that modifications to the curriculum, materials or resources used in the course can also improve accessibility of ODL to PWDs. This process transforms curriculum, materials and or resources to a form which allow their easy use by PWDs.

- *Ensuring access to the learning resources available:* The learning resources in ODL are mostly printed or digital materials with some resources in the audio-visual format. The resources have to be redesigned and presented in alternative formats in accordance with the needs of the learners with disabilities. Printed or digital materials are of no use to the visually challenged learners unless they are presented in alternative useful formats.

- *Changing the instructional and assessment strategies to accommodate the interests of the learners:* The instructional and assessment strategies need to be redesigned to

accommodate the interests of learners of different kinds of disabilities. Learners with visual impairment, for example, need the letters on the whiteboard written in large fronts so that they are able to see them clearly. Likewise, learners with hearing impairment need the voice of the teacher in a high tone.

- *Integrating technology with teaching strategies:* Most of the technologies used in ODL are compatible with the assistive technologies used by the learners with disabilities. Hence teachers dealing with learners with disabilities should know how to identify the different kinds technologies useful for academic purposes and make appropriate use of such technologies in the right places for the benefit of the learners with disabilities.

Administrative Support

Administrative support to the learners with disabilities can be provided in multiple ways, right from the day they take admission in the university until they exit. The administrative support extended may include the proper use of the disability date, having a string inclusive policy, providing adequate human and material resources, removal of barriers, creating opportunities for participation in social and extracurricular activities and training of the staff and students in successful handling of disability issues.

- *Handling Disability Data:* Once admissions are over; the administration should find out the details of the learners with disabilities admitted in different programmes and plan support services accordingly.

- *Inclusive Policy:* An inclusive policy should clearly outline the rights of students with disabilities and mention the kind of concession or privileges available at their disposal. The policy should also be reviewed periodically to assess its relevance. Besides insisting on physical accessibility of the facilities, it should also condemn discrimination. The policy should clearly outline how the students' needs would be assessed, lessons reoriented, accommodative assessment measures for learners with disabilities and ensure their holistic development (Mosia, 2017). It should spell out what the students with disabilities are entitled to and how the enabling departments or divisions dealing with support services should facilitate support of their rights. Moreover, the policy should have provision for providing financial assistance to learners with disabilities to remove financial barriers obstructing their academic progress.

- *Providing Adequate Resources:* The university or distance learning institute should have secure requisite human and physical resources for support and train staff on how to support students with different kinds of disabilities. Staff and students of the conventional modes of education should be inducted on how to work with and behave towards students with disabilities (Mosia, 2017).

- *Prioritizing the needs of the PWDs:* While designing support services, the needs of the PWDs should be prioritized. Disability specific support services tend to enhance success (Moisey, 2004). Students with disabilities have equal rights for equitable access to the university resources.

- *Removal of barriers and obstacles:* All the physical barriers coming in the way of learners with disabilities should be removed to allow their free movement in the premises of the university. All the roads in the university premises should be free from potholes and humps

so that learners with disabilities have free mobility with little or no effort. As far as possible tactile pavements, ramps, railings, elevators and accessible toilets should be available in all premises to make the stay of the disabled people comfortable in the campus. There should be braille signages everywhere to guide the blind students to lecture halls, toilets, libraries and other support services. Visually challenged students should also be given mobility training to facilitate their hassle-free movement in the university premises. The university should create an enabling environment to accommodate students' diverse needs (Lone & Kumar 2013), particularly those students who have sensory or physical impairments (Anastasiou & Kauffman 2013: 442).

- *Creating opportunities for the participation of the learners with disabilities in social and extra-curricular activities:* Learners with disabilities are human beings who, in spite of their disabilities, want to live the life of normal human beings. Hence all opportunities should be created to enhance the participation of such learners in social and extracurricular activities.

- *Training of the support staff and awareness programmes for learners without disabilities:* The administration division of the university should design the training packages on disability issues for the support staff and awareness programmes for learners without disabilities in such a manner that the students' needs and allied services are taken into account.

  The support staff in ODL should be trained from time to time in the new technologies to help them provide right support at the right time.

Moral and Psychological Support

In most of the open and distance learning systems, all students are considered equal and no special accommodations are made available for learners with disabilities. The fact remains that learners with disabilities and learners without disabilities face completely different sets of challenges and hence the support system needs to reorient to meet the academic, social and psychological needs of learners with disabilities. In such cases, it is the moral responsibility of the support staff to identify the learners with special needs and provide them moral and psychological support as and when necessary. When differently abled students **are** victims of discrimination and bullying, they feel judged as strange and devalued. Funny comments are passed in their presence, other students often laugh at them, gossip about them and even call them names. Some question and devalue their participation in sports, games and other curricular activities. Discrimination creates otherness perception about such students; they are belittled and unwelcomed by peers. A differently abled student's potential to explore their learning environment is limited by an unsafe social environment where it is not safe to interact with other students for fear of discrimination and bullying (Mosia, 2017). All students who are victimized because of their disabilities need psychosocial support since their emotional and psychological health has a bearing on their academic performance. There should be adequate number of counsellors and social welfare officers to provide individual, one-to-one moral, social and emotional support to the learners.

Technology-enabled Support Services for People with Disabilities

Learners with disabilities need ICT-enabled support services to make their presence, participation and performance significant in the ODL system. The impersonal quality of technology-mediated distance learning has the potential to increase learning opportunities for learners with disabilities. Technology-enabled learning helps the learners with disabilities overcome physical difficulties that some students may have in navigating around campus (Singh &Agarwal, 2013). Technology enables these groups of learners *to* access materials from home, the safest, least expensive as well as least restrictive environment and saves them the pain of physically attending the counselling sessions. In ODL, the resources are generally designed to provide "built-in" accommodation and/or interface design/content layout, which is accessible to "industry standard" assistive computer technology in common use by persons with disabilities. Whenever possible, printed information should be provided in the alternative format preferred by the student (that is, Braille, audio tape, large print, electronic text, MP3, DAISY).

The 21st century university community would benefit from improved information and communication technology services. These services would help the students to download and access information in preferred media. The students' experience of tertiary education would be enhanced by promoting independence of visually impaired and mobility-challenged students in accessing the university's physical resources (Mosia, 2017). Nowadays we find mobile devices with assistive technologies built in. Such devices can help a learner convert text to speech using a smartphone; or convert speech to text by giving dictation into the device. The zoom and magnification facilities on these devices help people with vision impairment. Smartphones also provide Braille support for web browsing. Several mobile apps have been developed to assist people with various disabilities related to vision, hearing, autism, learning disabilities and mobility.

Life of people with disabilities has become comfortable with the invention and intervention of AI and Robotics in their personal and professional life. Artificial Intelligence can provide vision-free communications for the visually impaired while Robotics can extend the arm of someone who has lost a limb or provide caregivers. Now in the smart cities we see all technologies in a combined form (integrated use of AI, Robotics, Internet of Things) to open up a world of possibilities to the people with disabilities. Virtual and Augmented Reality can support PWD to experience new situations without leaving the comfort of their homes. Social

skills and empathy are important for success in the 21st century. Virtual Reality can help us to teach the 21ˢᵗ century skills like social skills and empathy and Augmented Reality can support the development of life skills among PWD. Inclusive Design Institute, Canada has developed open source software to make websites accessible for PWD. Anyone can adopt and adapt this free service for their purposes (Kanwar, 2017).

The technologies used in Open and Distance learning and assistive technologies can be integrated successfully to help learners with disabilities take maximum benefit out of Open and distance learning. The Print, audio, video, interactive multimedia, online courses, email, forum, chatrooms, asynchronous tools, and social media of ODL and Assistive Technologies used by learners with disabilities like voice recognition, screen magnification, refreshable braille displays, planning and organization software and various mobile apps can be put to maximum use for the benefit of learners with special needs in ODL. Technological support can be provided to the learners in accessing and understanding content through digital learning resources, assistive technologies and educational aps. Likewise, they can be supported in content creation and classroom participation through the use of alternate means of content creation such as voice recognition, communication tools to interact with teachers and online participation from home. Finally technology can also play an important role in organisation and memory through calendars, memory aids, and organization apps (Kanwar, 2017).

Role of Tutors in Supporting Learners with Disabilities	Video Link: https://youtu.be/bhLwdOX9ods	Scan with QR Code

Role of Tutors in providing support to the learners in ODL

Teachers/Tutors in the Open and Distance Learning System should:

- Speak at fairly high tone of voice so that learners with minor hearing problems may not suffer. Likewise, they should write legibly on the chalkboard in normal font so that learners with minor visual impairment can see them from a distance and make notes.
- Be empathetic, exhibit patience and tolerance while dealing with learners with disabilities and refrain from showing any resistance to the requests of such learners. When teachers have negative attitude towards them, learners with disabilities feel hurt, dispirited and doubly-disabled.
- Pace their lessons appropriately to accommodate the interests of the learners with disabilities as they find it difficult to catch up with teacher's/tutor's pace. No learner should miss the information presented in the class.
- Guide the learners with disabilities in the use of the right resources and technologies so that they don't consider their disability to be their handicap.
- Allow learners with disabilities handle their own situations independently and assist them only when they desire it. They should refrain from being protective or over-possessive which such learners consider infringement of their rights.

- Provide notes or learning resources in alterative formats or recorded versions to enhance/ensure the access of the learners with visual or hearing impairments. Open Educational Resources have been made available in braille by Open Schooling wing of COL. Teachers and academic counselors should make use of them to facilitate learning for the visually impaired (Kanwar, 2017).
- Ensure that learners with disabled mobility don't face academic disability due to the wrong strategies adopted by them in the classrooms.
- Provide access solutions like assigning assistants (i.e., sign language interpreters, readers) to assist an individual student with disability when there is no other scope for providing access to the course material.
- Change the teaching strategies or instructional styles to accommodate the interests of the learners with disabilities.
- Put in sincere efforts to sensitise students and lecturers without disabilities about the needs of learners with disabilities so as to inspire them to respond to the needs of such learners appropriately.
- Allow special concessions to the learners with disabilities during instruction, in assessment of assignment responses and final examinations. Learners with various impairments can be given extra time depending upon the kind of disability they suffer from.
- Make themselves available for consultation by the students with disabilities to support and enhance their level of participation and performance.
- Press upon the authorities to organize intervarsity games with games for persons with disabilities so as to boost up their confidence and mental health. Sound physical and mental health, in turn, shall have positive impact upon their academic performance.
- Accommodate individual needs of the students with disabilities in the teaching, learning and assessment methods by making necessary changes in the strategies. They could do so by giving handouts ahead of lessons and encourage such learners to actively participate the classroom discussions.
- Assist the learners wherever possible and ensure that they are comfortable in the system.

Group Activity
A. How can technology play an enabling role in ODL? Discuss in groups how the technology available in ODL can be integrated with assistive technology to enhance the presence, participation and performance of the learners with disabilities?
B. Critically analyse the facilities available for learners with disabilities in your university. Suggest the ways it can be improved.
C. What is the role of a tutor in retaining the learners with disabilities in the open and distance learning system? Discuss in groups and share your views with other groups.

Let Us Sum Up
In this unit we studied the factors contributing to the disadvantageous positions of people with disabilities and needs of people with disabilities. Then we discussed how open and distance learning can be used to empower the learners with disabilities. In the next section we highlighted the different kinds of support that need to be extended to the learners in order to

enhance their access, retention and success in the Open and Distance Learning system. In this regard we discussed the various possible means of academic, administrative, moral and psychological support that can be provided to the learners. In the nest section we discussed different technology-enabled support services that can be extended to people with disabilities in all the stages to make their stay in ODL comfortable. Finally we discussed the role of tutors in providing support to the learners with disabilities and how they can bring about transformation in the lives of the learners with their positive interventions.

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Module VII:

Technology in Distance Education: Open Educational Resources (OER), Creative Commons Licensing, MOOC, Moodle LMS and SWAYAM

Part A- Open Educational Resources and CC Licensing

Open Educational Resources (OER)

Introduction and definition of OER

The 2012 OER Paris Declaration states that "*OER are teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authorship of the work*". OER can be perceived as a subset of the much broader term, i.e. Open and Distance Education. The OER revolution took shape after MIT launched its entire course catalogue online in 2002, thus promoting a culture of open knowledge and learning. The digital content and the availability of Internet have helped OER challenge the conventional styles of education. OER also made the concept of Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) possible, which shall be discussed later in this module.

Benefits of using OER

OER significantly benefits both open and conventional forms of education. Its availability as digital content makes it easily accessible and affordable for students. It allows the learners to learn at their own pace. There is a huge amount of data and information which is available in different OER repositories on the Internet. Most of the OER materials are adaptable; this means that it can be reused as per the learners' own convenience. OER promotes lifelong learning.

Challenges of using OER

Apart from the advantages, there are also a few challenges while using OER. One of the main challenges is that the learner must possess basic ICT skills to find, use and, if needed, repurpose the OER material. There is no single-stop for all the material; therefore, one must gather the material from different sites and make sure the content is of fine quality. In order to find, use or repurpose the OER content properly, the learner must have a good understanding of the open licensing system; otherwise, the learner might land in trouble because of copyright prohibitions.

Types of OER

In terms of content, OER can be separated into 4 groups- text led, video led, animation led and multiple media, and are available as full courses, open textbooks, modules, open licensed videos, tests etc. One can also organise OER into platforms, repositories and directories. The directories provide the learners with lists and links to different OER materials. The repositories are collections of OER content that are made available to the learners, especially by universities or institutions. The platforms help a user with tools to repurpose the OER content and thus create new learning material.

Using OER

The Creative Commons License prescribes the ways in which a particular OER can used, and there are three basic ways to use OERs- '**Reuse**', '**Revise**' and '**Remix**'.

Reuse- This means that the content can be deployed into a learning equipment/environment as it is. The only condition is to acknowledge the source.

Revise- This is when the OER is revised to adjust with needs of a particular group or learning environment. It can include changes in vocabulary, case studies, and even translation. But one needs to assure that the CC license does approve '*revising*'. For example, the ND clause does not allow revising the content.

Remix- Remixing is the process of compiling information from different OER materials to create a completely new OER resource. This helps in bringing out better OER materials by combining the best parts from different resources, but one needs to be extremely judicious while remixing because not all combinations of the Creative Commons Licence allow it.

Searching OER

There are a number of search engines that are designed specifically to assist the search of OER content. A few of those are enlisted below-

1. CC Search- This is a customisable search engine by the Creative Commons which helps in finding text, audio, video, music etc.

2. OER Commons- This search tool can be used to find ready-to-use teaching and learning material from around the world.

3. Google's Advanced Search- Google helps in finding CC licensed content and its advanced search allows the users to adjust the usage rights to find out specific OER material by using the keywords. The advanced search can found by the following link at www.google.com/advanced_search

Also, provided here are links where OER can be found

http://oasis.col.org/

http://nsouoer.krc.net.in/

http://egyanagar.osou.ac.in/slm-list.php

http://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/

http://www.ebookbou.edu.bd/

http://nroer.gov.in/welcome

OER, Accessing OER and Quality Assurance of OER	Video Link: https://youtu.be/20xt55almM8	Scan with QR Code

Quality Assurance of OER

It is very important to make sure that the materials developed as OER meet the quality standards before that are made open for the public to use. There is a set criterion to evaluate the quality of the OER which depend on factors like content, pedagogy, access to the learning environment etc. The TIPS framework for the quality assurance of OER shall be discussed in brief here.

TIPS Framework: OER quality assurance criterion

TIPS framework is a useful tool in ascertaining the quality of the OER content. It uses the basic factors such as content, pedagogy etc. to assess the quality and also uses specific criteria to assess the use of OER. The Version 2 of TIPS framework has 39 criteria divided into four sections, which are-

- Teaching and learning processes (16 criteria)
- Information and material content (7 criteria)
- Presentation, product and format (8 criteria)
- System, technical and technology (7 criteria)

TIPS allows one to assess the OER in their own context, which makes it a flexible tool for quality assurance of OER.

Open Licensing

There are a variety of licensing systems that one might encounter while browsing, for example- GNU General Public License (software), Free Art License (art, images, graphics), Creative Commons etc. This section of the module shall specifically deal with the CC licensing system as it is one of the most commonly used licensing systems academically.

Creative Common Licensing System

The Creative Commons is a collection of licenses that ensures suitable licensing to share content under different conditions. It is an easily understandable and commonly used licensing system that helps the user to know the prescribed conditions while sharing the content. All the CC licenses are created by a combination of four specific conditions or rights, i.e. Attribution, Non Commercial, No Derivative and Share Alike, that the creator can reserve.

Six major CC licenses

There are six commonly used combinations to create six major CC licences which are as follows-

1. Attribution (CC BY) – This is the most liberal of all the CC licences which allows the reuse, revision and remix of the content, both commercially and non-commercially, as long as it acknowledges the creator. It is recommended for the maximum dissemination of the licensed material.

2. Attribution- Share Alike (CC BY- SA) - This license allows the user to revise, tweak and build upon the content as long as the user licences the new creation under 'identical terms' and acknowledges the creator. It allows both commercial as well as non-commercial use of the content.

3. Attribution- No Derivatives (CC BY- ND) - This kind of license approves both commercial and non-commercial use of the content as long as the work is passed on without any changes and acknowledges the creator/source.

4. Attribution- Non-Commercial (CC BY-NC) – This licence allows the user to reuse, tweaking and remix of the content as far as the material acknowledges the creator and is not used commercially. The derivatives from this work need not be licensed under the same terms.

5. Attribution- Non-Commercial- Share Alike (CC BY- NC- SA) – This licence allows the user to reuse, revise and remix the content as long as it is utilised non-commercially and the newly developed content is shared under identical terms. Acknowledging the creator/source is must.

6. Attribution- Non-Commercial- No Derivatives (CC BY-NC-ND) – This is the most restrictive of all the six licences, allowing you to share the content only if you acknowledge the creator/source, use it non-commercially and without any change to its original form.

Creative Commons Licensing	Video Link: https://youtu.be/DQE2NaVOVJU	Scan with QR Code

The symbols of the concepts and the licences are provided here.
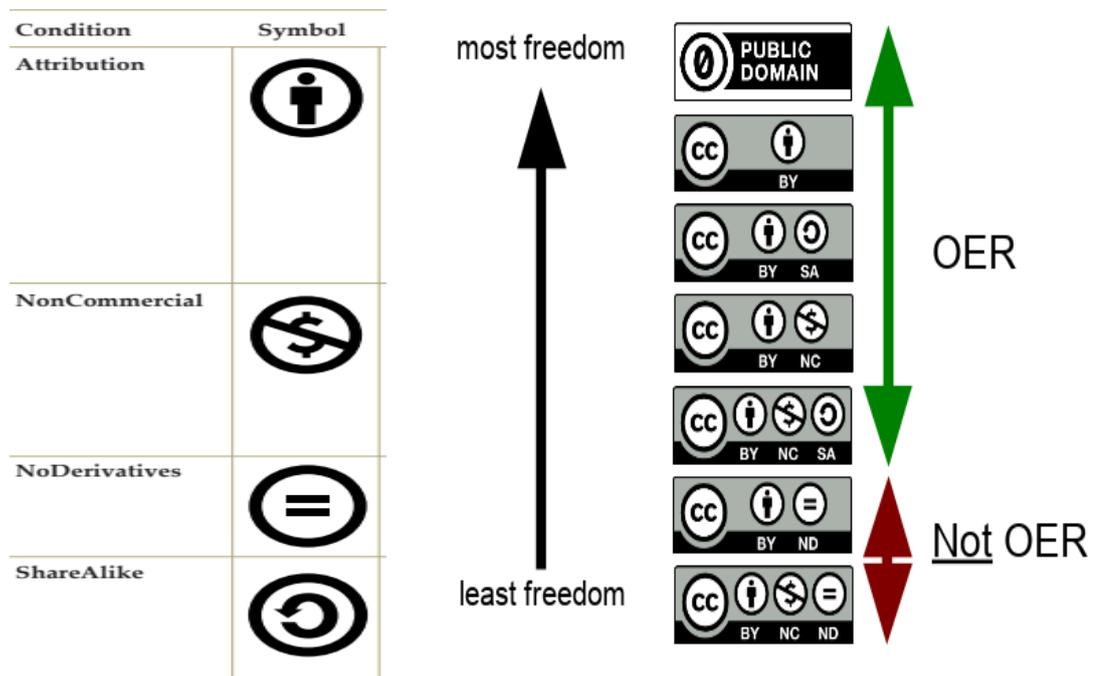
Conclusion

The potential benefit of promoting the use of OER is that learners and teachers around the world can access quality learning material, thus improving global education. Some institutions like UNESCO and COL have consistently promoted the use of OER to make knowledge more globally accessible. There are many OER projects like the OER Impact Map, OpenLearn, the UNESCO-COL chair etc. The CC license has helped the educators and learners to break free from the limits of Copyright; CC licensing helps the creators to reserve certain basic rights while making the content open for others. Although OER allows the user to utilise the content to a great extent, one must be extremely conscious of the licence terms so that any rights of the creator are not infringed.

The learners are requested to take an online free course on OER and Open Licensing offered by the Commonwealth Of Learning. The link to same is https://learnoer.col.org/

Part B: Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), Moodle LMS and SWAYAM

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are widely regarded as one of the best tools to promote Higher Education (HE). MOOCs are popular as compared to any other educational innovations in the recent times for a number of reasons. They are designed to accommodate an unlimited number of participants. They are open, which means that the course is most often free and there are no entry qualifications. The courses are online which means that they can be

accessed anywhere, anytime with an Internet connection and OER (digital) can be used, making the cost of study material negligible. MOOC is a much debated concept amongst educators and policy makers but it continues to be one of the most legitimate tools to expand Higher Education. It can be seen as a form of Open Education provided through online platforms. MOOC is intended to promote education amongst the relatively uneducated, but often it is found that it is used by the well-educated learners to attain more knowledge and credentials while those with limited study experience tend to struggle in completing the course. Online and Blended Learning is considered as the most appropriate by the governments of developing countries because it significantly cuts the cost of learning. MOOC, with its ability to educate masses through online means, becomes the first choice of policy makers in these developing countries as they believe that such innovations in digital technologies can prove vital in solving many difficulties in Higher Education.

The benefits and limitations of MOOCs

- **Benefits**
  (a) Promotes wide participation in Higher Education
  (b) They help in creating opportunities for those who cannot afford formal education, hence creating the possibility of a level ground.
  (c) MOOCs can play a vital role in the Return of Investment (ROI) of education in the society. Quality education contributes significantly in the development of a society politically, economically and culturally.
  (d) One of the most potential benefits of MOOCs is that they can help in cutting the cost of education significantly.

- **Limitations**
  (a) The absence of comprehensive government policies to incorporate MOOC into the traditional educational system is a challenge, which puts its authenticity in question. It is essential to link the MOOCs to HE.
  (b) It cannot still be claimed that the society has benefited much from MOOCs (or ODL in the larger perspective). This opinion cannot be improved unless there are significant investments in MOOCs and other modes of teaching.
  (c) MOOCs might not be able to remove some pre-existing barriers such as economic differences, availability of network connectivity etc. Thus, MOOCs might actually contradict the fact that it provides an advantage to the marginalised.

Quality Assurance of MOOCs

Like for any other form of education, it is very important to assure the quality of the MOOC being offered. The credibility of MOOCs is criticised because of several reasons such as problems in pedagogy, low completion rate, limited outreach to the marginalised etc. Efforts are being made to counter such criticism by using a certification and accreditation process to make MOOCs more authentic. One of the simple ways to assure the quality of MOOCs is to check the standard of the MOOC's platform and the institution providing the course. Apart

from this, there are further criteria to assure the MOOC's quality. One needs to check if the MOOC offers a clear outcome and if it actively involves students to assure maximum participation. This module shall also discuss about two Quality Assurance Frameworks for MOOCs- The E-xcellence Framework and the OpenupEd Quality label.

The E-xcellence Framework

The E-xcellence Framework is an instrument to ascertain the quality of education provided through different modes (open, online and flexible) at different levels. This framework deals with specific areas such as Strategy Management, Curriculum Design, Course Design, Course Delivery and Staff Support. This framework is an umbrella concept into which specific MOOC characteristics can be incorporated in order to make it fit for quality assessment of MOOCs.

The OpenupEd Quality label

The OpenupEd Quality label is derived from the E-xcellence framework and can be useful for benchmarking and certification. The benchmark statements in this label are divided into two levels- one at the institutional level and the other at the course level- which are further divided into different criteria.

The following table will help in a detailed understanding of the criteria.

Institutional Level	
Area	Example of a benchmark
Strategic management	The institution has a MOOC strategy that relates to its overarching strategies for eLearning, open education and open licensing.
Curriculum design	The institution makes explicit the relationship between its MOOC portfolio and its mainstream curriculum.
Course design	The institution provides templates or guidelines for the layout and presentation of MOOCs to support consistency across the portfolio. These templates have the flexibility to accommodate a range of teaching and learning methods.
Course delivery	The MOOC platform provides a range of online tools that are appropriate for the educational models adopted.
Staff support	The institution provides adequate support and resources to MOOC staff and manages workloads appropriately.
Student support	MOOC students are provided with clear and up-to-date information about courses, including aims/objectives, learning and assessment methods, workload and prerequisite knowledge.

Further in this module, we shall take a look at two of the major Learning Management System- **Moodle LMS** and **SWAYAM.**

MOOCs, Moodle LMS and SWAYAM	Video Link: https://youtu.be/K5tGj3aIobk	Scan with QR Code

Moodle LMS

Moodle is one of most used Learning Management Systems in the world as it is a flexible, open source and free download learning platform. It is user-friendly and is capable to attend the learning and training needs of almost all kinds of organisations, in almost 225 countries around the world. It is safe, flexible and is constantly updated as per the user's requirements. Moodle helps one to create compelling visualizations including charts, tables etc.

Moodle helps in creating an effective learning environment by acquainting students with the basic skills required to manoeuvre the Internet. It keeps students engaged and interested by incorporating games and activities in the courses. Moodle makes use of diversified teaching methods including text, audio, video and slideshows. Moodle also simplifies the grading process with a built-in Gradebook plugin. Open and accessible communication is very important in the Higher Education; hence Moodle helps students with chat, comments, blogposts etc. which promotes easy collaboration and team work. The platform also has a 24/7 submission provision. The platform is compatible on phones, tablets as well as computers which makes learning on-the-go easy.

Moodle can be used in many non-profit ways. It can be used by the non-profit organisations to create their online classes and host community learning. Since Moodle is an open source, global digital distribution becomes extremely easily for the non-profit organisations. The platform can be very effectively to improve the state of Higher Education around the world.

SWAYAM

Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) is a programme initiated by the MHRD, Government of India, which allows professors and faculties from the centrally funded institutions in India to provide online courses to the Indian citizens. AICTE and MHRD developed SWAYAM with the assistance of Microsoft; it offers many courses in which the credits are transferable. This programme has made India one of the few countries in the world that have their online interactive learning platform with study material, video lectures, assignments/quizzes etc. that can used to secure credits in the assessment system.

SWAYAM covers curriculum based course contents across different disciplines such as arts, science, commerce, performing arts, humanities etc. in the higher education domain. All of these courses are certification ready. There are also school education modules for teacher training and learning aids for leaners so that they can get a better understanding of the subject. It also helps the learners in the preparation of different competitive exams for admission to professional degrees. SWAYAM also provides skill based courses for post- higher secondary school skills like polytechnics as well as industry skills which are certified by the Sector Skill Council (SSC). SWAYAM also promotes a unified scheme of learning and certification in the higher education domain that can be reworked to suit the regulations of the Choice Based Credit System which is currently being used at the under-graduate level in India.

Every step of the course (the creation, the approval and the implementation) is closely attended by experts; hence the quality of courses offered is assured. Once a course is created and approved, the SWAYAM Secretariat takes step to communicate with all universities under its jurisdiction to notify the course to their departments and affiliated institutions for availing and transfer of credits by the students enrolled with them. SWAYAM ensures that all the courses and learning material across different streams should follow a unified scheme. This actually improves the credibility of the MOOCs offered on the platform and the learners can benefit academically as well as find employment opportunities. SWAYAM thus is able to dispel one of the most common criticisms of MOOCs- the lack of any unified certification.

One can reach the SWAYAM portal at https://swayam.gov.in

Conclusion

MOOCs can prove very effective in Open and Distance Education. But there are a lot of challenges that MOOCs face, especially in aspects such as completion, certification etc. But if the governments and educational bodies strive together, MOOCs can improve education to a great extent, particularly in the developing nations. It is a cost effective as well as innovation way forward in the field of education. The governments need to promote MOOCs and also help it co-exist with the conventional schemes of education. If channelled in the right directions, MOOCs have the potential to reach to a large number of the marginalised sections of the society.

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Module VIII:
Assessment in Distance Education

Introduction

An education system survives on the basis of a sound assessment and evaluation system. Unless the assessment system is foolproof and quality-driven, quality education cannot be ensured, be it conventional mode of F2F education or distance mode of education. Assignments, in addition to the self-assessment questions, are a compulsory component of formative/continuous assessment in every distance learning system. They help the learners have a grasp of the contents of the course concerned, gauge their level of understanding of the contents and assess their ability to apply the understanding of the contents. They positively impact the learning style of learners and keep them connected with the contents and the system. They also help the learners know their learning deficiencies and fill in information gaps- what is required of them in the assignments and what they have produced. On the whole, assignments are wonderful tools for teaching and learning.

Assignments play a significant role in grooming the learners as self-reliant and independent learners. It is essential that both the teachers and the students in open and distance education system are well conversant or academically socialized with the system before they get into the system. In this unit, we shall be focusing on the academic and administrative aspects of the design, development and assessment of assignments.

Assignments: Types and Academic Significance

Assignments are of two types: Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) and Computer Marked Assignments (CMAs).

Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA)	Computer Marked Assignments (CMA)
• Assessed and evaluated by academic counsellors or distance tutors. • Comprise long answer type, short answer type and objective type questions. • Used as a two-way communication tool between the learner and the distance teaching institution or the tutor/teacher.	• Evaluated by the Computer named Optical Mark Reader (OMR). • Comprise objective/ multiple-choice type questions.

Academic Significance of Assignments

Assignments demand a good grasp of the contents on the part of both the teachers and the learners. They serve as the main link or channel of interaction between the academic counsellors and learners and facilitate the formative or continuous evaluation of learners by helping the learners judge their progress during the course and prepare properly for the term-end examinations. Simultaneously, they also provide authentic feedback on the course contents, the distance tutors and their teaching strategies and the system as a whole. There is regular interaction between the learners and the teachers at various stages: before the preparation of the assignments, during the preparation of assignments and after the preparation of assignments. Assessment of assignments is a wonderful way of recognizing and rewarding

the good performance of learners, identifying the weaknesses of weak students and guiding them in the choice and application of right strategies and study skills to improve their performance in future.

Academic Significance of Assignments	Video Link: https://youtu.be/3z2bHiQWwW4	Scan with QR Code

Preparing the Learners for writing the assignments responses

Learners look for academic support from the academic counsellors in the preparation of assignments. Academic counsellors should give appropriate advice to the learners in the preparation of assignments:

- Keeping margins on the left for tutor's comments
- Providing correct and relevant information
- Arranging points in logical sequence and in a coherent manner
- Maintaining precision, clarity of expression and comprehensiveness
- Using correct and simple language
- Keeping the assignment neat and legible
- Sticking to word limit
- Avoiding plagiarism or copying from others or other sources

Criteria for Preparation, Assessment and Evaluation of Assignments

Academic counsellors/ course writers should take utmost care while preparing and assessing the assignments. They should ensure that:

- Questions for assignments are vetted through a committee of experts before they are put to use.
- Questions are of various types, cover the entire syllabus and match with the question pattern that the learners find in the Term End Examinations
- Questions have different sections, each section containing a separate type of questions with proper allotment of marks
- Questions clearly cover/reflect the instructional objectives or learning outcomes
- Questions encourage the learners to use multiple sources for better answers and provoke them to use creative and critical thinking
- Objective questions are unambiguous and subjective questions have scope for multiple responses
- Questions match the maturity level of the target group and are a mixture of questions of various levels of difficulty in order to accommodate all kinds of learners
- Instructions for writing the assignment responses are clear and cover aspects like the word limit, the portions of the study materials which are relevant for answering a particular question

- Model or Ideal Assignment Responses and marking scheme are provided to the distance tutors engaged for evaluating assignment responses to help them evaluate the assignment responses in a uniform manner.
- There should be a full-fledged system for providing timely feedback to the learners

Sometimes it is observed that learners do not submit the assignments in time. This could be mainly happening due to the following reasons:
- Lack of motivation
- Lack of good writing skills
- Inappropriate marking by the tutors
- Weak channels of contact between the learners and the counsellors
- Irresponsible attitude of learners due to multiple commitments

Learners often think that assignment preparation and submission is not important for them. Probably, institutions are responsible for the promotion of this wrong perception among learners. If, institutions efficiently monitor submission of assignments by learners and take appropriate action against those who do not submit assignments timely, students might change their point of view.

Evaluation of Assignments: Some Ethical Considerations
While evaluating the assignments teachers need to focus on the following:
- Return the assignments in time to the learners
- Avoid rude and harmful personal comments
- Be unbiased and impartial in the assessment and evaluation of assignments
- Give appropriate and supportive/constructive feedback to the learners
- Provide feedback on all aspects of evaluation.
- Motivate learners to apply knowledge in new perspectives.

Some basic ethical principles of assessment:

- Assessment should be impartial and objective.
- Only those who are competent and well acquainted with the distance education system should be allowed to assess an assignment.
- Evaluated responses should be returned within the stipulated period.
- Evaluators should be careful and responsible.
- Allotment of grace marks should be there when the questions in the Assignment do not match the contents in the Syllabus.
- Evaluators should maintain a balance between being too strict and too lenient.
- Learners should not be penalized for faults of the designers of assignments.
- Marks/Grades on the performance of students should be shared with the learners and their parents/guardians, unless otherwise demanded.
- Focus of a good educational system should be on the real assessment of learners.

- Grades should be assigned to the learners for their actual performance in the assignments, not on the basis of other factors such as effort, ability, neatness, and attitudes.

Activity-1
Group Activity
A. What is the academic significance of assignments in a distance education system? What are the challenges involved in the evaluation of assignments in the open and distance learning system? Discuss in groups.

B. Discuss in groups the responsibilities of a distance tutor and possible reasons responsible for the distance tutors handling the assignment responses without proper attention and devotion. Then discuss whether it is ethical on the part of the distance tutors to handle assignments in this manner.

C. Discuss in groups the ethical considerations that the distance tutors need to take into account while evaluating assignments.

Role of Assessors in Assessment/Evaluation of Assignments

A distance teacher should study the self-learning materials thoroughly before taking up the responsibility of evaluation of assignment responses. The distance teacher is expected to:

i)   compensate for the weaknesses of the units/lessons and the assignment with appropriate grades/marks;

ii) break the 'isolation' of the distance learner;

iii) sustain the distance learner's motivation;

iv) evaluate and grade the assignment-response appropriately;

v)   help the distance learner in improving and advancing his/her learning through purposeful comments.

Role of Assessors in Assessment of Assignment	Video Link: https://youtu.be/1V0aA5-GXuk	Scan with QR Code

Discrimination factors help the distance teacher in discriminating between a weak response and a good one, and between a good one and a better one when they are favourable; and they affect the teachers' judgement adversely when they are not favourable. Let us discuss the discrimination factors one after another.

Assessor's Perception of the Unit

The assessor should have a thorough understanding of the relevant unit/units and try to discover what course-writers intend to convey through the units. S/he should keep personal reactions/ responses at bay while assessing an assignment-response. S/he should instead see what the learner is expected to achieve and judge the learner's performance accordingly.

Assessor's Perception of the Assignment

The assessor may understand the questions in an assignment in a different way than it is expected. A faulty perception of the question may cause errors in assessment. This problem can be avoided if there are clear-cut guidelines from the course-writers and the assessors are properly oriented before they are given the responsibility of evaluating assignments. A better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the assignment helps in proper assessment of assignment responses.

Tendencies towards being lenient or strict

Assessors or evaluators are said to be lenient or strict when they deviate from the norm or the standard score that is expected of the learners. People who are lenient while evaluating the assignment responses of one course may turn out to be strict while evaluating the assignment responses of another course. Hence, we can conclude that no one is absolutely lenient or strict.

Assessor's Ideal Response

While preparing the assignments the course writer or the course writing team should also prepare an ideal response for the assignment which should serve as the norm or standard for the assessors or evaluators. This will not only help the uninitiated distance teachers to assess the assignment responses appropriately but will also help the experienced teachers add their inputs to make the assessment more authentic and judicious. Teachers can be trained to prepare ideal responses for the assignments of their courses before they start evaluating the assignment responses.

Assessor's Attention Span

Efficient assessors or evaluators stand apart from the inefficient assessors or evaluators because of their attention span. Attention span refers to the ability of the assessor to objectively evaluate a response over a specific time period. Some evaluators may evaluate 2-3 assignment responses at one go and some others may evaluate 4-5 assignment responses at one go. Research shows that the assessors' 'attention span' reduces as they evaluate more student responses. So, an evaluator with three as attention span may evaluate the 4th script onwards differently than expected. This adversely affects the evaluation of assignments and grading of the responses. Evaluators should be cautioned against hurried and casual evaluation of scripts and erratic evaluation to meet the deadlines.

Record Keeping: Academic counsellors assessing assignments should maintain a register for the assignments evaluated by them so that they can use them for providing personalized comments related to progress and performance of the learners later, avoiding unnecessary duplication of work and for maintaining account of the payments received for the evaluation.

Turn-around Time: There should be a fixed time frame for the turn-around time, the time taken by a Study Centre to receive, process, evaluate the assignments and send/give them back to the students. Ideally the turn-around time should be 6-8 weeks. The evaluated assignment responses should be returned to the learners much before the Term End Examinations so that

they are able to go through the comments by the evaluators, understand the areas where they need to improve and prepare accordingly.

Activity-2
Group Activity
A. Design a tutor-marked assignment on any of the courses you teach in your group. While designing the assignment, the following things should be taken into account.
a) Subject Area
b) Topic
c) Coverage of the contents
d) Appropriate distribution of marks
e) Criteria for marking
f) Ideal Assignment Response
After working on the assignment, exchange your assignment with the assignment of your neighboring group and critically discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the assignment in terms of language, clarity of questions, the marking scheme and Assignment Ideal Response.

Teaching through Assignments

An experienced and efficient distance teacher uses assignments as the main tool to reach out to the learners. A sincere teacher should:

i. **Understand what the assignment demands of the learner** and build what may be called the **'assessor's ideal response' (AIR,** for short) to the questions in the assignment. The AIR serves as a norm or standard for the assessment of the assignments.

ii. **Discover the weaknesses in the responses** which have accrued due to the weaknesses/defects of the assignment and/or the teaching unit**.**

iii. **Consider the organizational aspects of the responses.** S/He must take into account the beginning, middle and end of the assignment responses. Other factors like the logical development of ideas in the response, the clarity and correctness of language used, presentation of arguments should also be considered while evaluating assignment responses.

iv. **Grade the responses appropriately** and this grade should very clearly be reflected in the comments he/she writes on the response.

Tutors Comments

In distance learning system, since the learners stay at distant places, opportunities for interaction between the teacher/tutor and the taught, are either minimal or missing. Hence, distance teaching has to be carried out mainly by means of SLMs and 'comments' on learners' assignment responses by the distance tutors. Comments of tutors on assignment responses play a major role in providing the link between the teacher and the taught and giving feedback, support and motivation to the learners.

Significance of Tutor Comments

While communicating with the learners the tutors can engage in three levels of communication- Academic Communication, Personal Communication and Supplemental Communication.

Academic Communication

At this level, a distance tutor:

    i.   Reads the assignment-responses thoroughly between the lines.

    ii. Writes comments on assignment-responses by identifying the particular issues/points which need attention.

    iii. Evaluates the assignment-responses by grading/marking them honestly.

A tutor should comment on the responses by correlating and comparing his/her own understanding of a particular course-unit with the responses of the learners in terms of both content and presentation.

To teach effectively through distance mode, a tutor must understand each learner personally and address every learner individually by writing comments on their assignment-responses. A tutor supports the learners by:

    i.   Providing suggestions on the assignment response and guide the learner where s/he may have gone wrong;

    ii. Elaborating on points which have been missed out;

    iii. Appreciating the acceptable aspects of his/her responses;

    iv. d) Assessing the level of his/her achievement and explain the basis of that assessment to ensure better learner performance in the future.

Personal Communication

Since distance learners are heterogeneous, the assignment-responses reflect their characteristics. In this context, assignment-response is also treated as a product of a learner's 'attitude' towards 'understanding' of the course content. In this situation, they need a personal communication from the tutor which may warm them up to understand their situations and try to overcome their lacunas. Personal comments enhance the rapport between the teacher and the taught in such a manner that the learners feel the teacher's presence before them. They seek support from the tutor in handling both academic and personal issues during the course of their study.

Personal communication motivates and encourages the learners to do their study tasks in time, reduces the feeling of isolation among them and sustains their interest in studies. It guides the learners to achieve their learning objectives and gives them emotional strength.

Supplemental Communication

Supplemental communication guides the learners in correct learning, clarifies doubts, encourages them to work on their shortcomings, and assists them in acquiring different skills. This sort of communication may be initiated either by a learner or by a tutor. Some learners wish to know why they have secured low grades in their assignment-responses, react strongly to the comments written by the tutor on their assignment-responses and wish to know the

justification for such comments. Learners also seek help from tutors when they require previous question papers and their model answers for preparing for Term-End Examinations. Learners may also consult their teachers when they find difficulty in solving/answering the previous question papers. Likewise, the distance teacher can provide a model answer to the learners when he/she thinks that a particular question is difficult.

Significance of Tutors comments in ODL system	Video Link: https://youtu.be/mXnzzb_iluo	Scan with QR Code

Types of Tutor Comments

In distance education system, there are no direct interactions between teachers and learners and hence there is less or no guidance to the learners' learning processes. In order to overcome this lacuna, tutors are trained to give well thought-out, precise and purposeful comments to build a channel of communication between them and the learners, help the distance learners know their shortcomings and work upon them and achieve their predetermined goals.

Tutor comments can be both teaching type and non-teaching type. Under teaching type comments, we have the following types of comments:
(a) Positive Comments (b) Constructive Comments (c) Global Comments and (d) Personal Comments

Positive comments: Positive comments appreciate learners' understanding of the contents and writing of the assignment responses, encourage the learners to maintain the performance and guide them in improving their studies and retain learners' interest in their studies, enhance their confidence in writing skills and study habits and motivate them to do well in their academic activities. The comment "*You have made a good attempt to write this assignment. Please maintain the spirit*" is a positive comment.

Constructive comments: These comments are constructive suggestions written on the margin of the assignment responses. "*It would have been better if you had discussed these issues point wise, such as: a, b, c…*" is a constructive comment. An evaluator gives constructive comments to encourage the learners to improve their writings and presentation styles even if s/he does not approve of the answers as the final answers. These types of comments establish effective, purposeful didactic communication between learners and tutor.

Global Comments: Academic counsellors can use a sheet to provide overall/global comments on them, apart from the teaching and non-teaching type comments. All the marginal comments written by the tutor in a precise form with all inputs are regarded as global comments. In a global comment a tutor is supposed to cover all the comments of assignment responses in reference to various aspects of the answer. Such comments appear on the front page of the evaluation script running parallel to the grade given to the learners. Such comments explain the grade and guide learners for improvement in their learning activities.

Personal Comments: Personal comments are not academic in nature, but they are powerful means of providing personal touch and motivation to the learners. They can also reduce the feelings of isolation in the learners and retain them in their study activities. A tutor must have high degree of patience and a certain degree of linguistic command to successfully blend academic comments, instructions, and information into an intimate whole. The comment "*Your answer is quite good. In fact I could not have thought of a better answer myself….*" is a personal comment.

Under Non-Teaching Type comments we have the following types of comments**:**

Hallow comments: Hallow comments sound good but they don't specify any specific meaning and convey any useful message. For example, the sentence "*You need to go through the materials again and redo the assignment*" does not convey anything to the learner as he does not know why he should go through the materials again.

Harmful comments: Harmful comments are rude, unsupportive and harmful to the learners and demotivate them. These comments fail to build any purposeful rapport between learners and teachers and block all possible future communication. Some examples of such comments are: "*Rubbish! There is not a single relevant point in your answer/ You don't seem to know anything about the topic/"* Such comments annoy and hurt the learners who are emotional and sensitive.

Misleading comments: Through these comments the tutor asks learners to do something but the learners do not understand the instruction and they do not serve any purpose. Remarks on learners' style of learning, the environment in which it takes place are also considered as misleading comments. In the comment "*Read the units and redo the assignment*", for example, the tutor instructs the learner to read the units and redo the assignments. Learners don't know what to do with the assignment response.

Null comments: These comments serve no linguistic or academic functions. They include non-verbal remarks like question marks, double check marks, underlining, circling, brackets, etc. In fact, a learner does not get any meaning out of these comments. They don't guide learners to identify what they need to concentrate for future assignment-responses and why such answers are not acceptable to the tutor. Such comments become valuable only if the symbols are supported by verbal comments.

Negative comments

Negative comments provide negative views on the facts, explanations, illustrations, etc. given by the learner. For example comments like "*Explanations are not clear*", "*Examples are not relevant*", etc' may serve as correctives for the learner as the learner can improve his/her performance based on the feedback. These comments should be taken positively by the learners. They should work on their shortcomings to improve further in their teaching-learning

activities. The tutor has to explain why a particular answer is not correct and might have to supply brief answers, examples to support his/her stand.

Activity-3
Group Activity
A. Look at the assignment responses, critically study the comments and grades given by the tutors. Then do the following:
(a) Critically evaluate if the grades are supported by appropriate comments
(b) Critically examine if the Ideal Assignment Response has been followed during the evaluation or not
(c) Prepare a table for both teaching type and non-teaching type comments.
(d) Change the comments/grades which are not properly given
(e) Critically analyse the suitability of the evaluator to be a distant tutor

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Let us Sum Up

In this unit, we studied the definition, types and academic significance of assignments. Then we discussed the criteria for assessment and evaluation of assignment responses, the ethical considerations that we need to take into account while evaluating the assignments. In the next section, we highlighted the role of the assessors/evaluators in a distance learning system with special reference to the assessment of the assignment responses. While discussing the role of the evaluators in evaluating the responses, we touched upon points like the Assessor's Perception of the Unit, the Assessor's Perception of the Assignment, Tendencies of the Assessor towards being lenient or strict, Assessor's Ideal Response and Assessor's Attention Span. Then, we discussed how teaching is carried out in the form of assignment evaluation by establishing two-way communication between the teachers and the learners. In the next section, we discussed the different types of tutor comments and how they impact the two-communication between the teachers and learners in a distance education system. At last, we discussed the need for regular monitoring of the evaluation of assignments to sustain the rapport between the teachers and the learners and uphold the quality and sanctity of the distance education system.

Assessment and Evaluation in ODL System	Video Link: https://youtu.be/gdlIVWugt6A	Scan with QR Code

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