Resources File

The readings for this handbook appear in the following order below:


2. Srivastava, M. 2001 The will to learn ….Counsellors’ perceptions of academic counselling, report produced for the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE), New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Open University

3. Robinson, B. 1999 ‘Open and distance learning in the Gobi Desert: non-formal education for nomadic women’, Distance Education 20, 2: 181-204


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INTRODUCTION

In the literature on learner support in open and distance education, description and prescription outweigh empirical enquiry or research. Publications on learner support are often in the form of ‘how to do it’ guidance or reports of experience. These can have practical value but may be atheoretical, unsubstantiated or lack validity when transferred to other contexts. While many accounts express the conviction that learner support services make a difference to outcomes, demonstrations of the relationships are less easy to find. Learner support has so far received less research attention than other aspects of open and distance learning. Why should this be? There are four possible reasons: learner support may be perceived as a less glamorous activity than some others in open and distance education (support staff often have less power, status and pay); it is often regarded as peripheral to the ‘real business’ of developing materials; it is an element particularly vulnerable to financial cuts; or it may largely be a pragmatic activity rooted in the lessons of experience.

The last of these possibilities is the focus of this chapter which seeks to examine two questions:

• Is there an established body of research findings on learner support?
• Can decision-making about learner support be based on research findings, or is it essentially a pragmatic activity, contingent on each individual system and context?

WHAT CAN THE RESEARCH TELL US?

Research evidence on learner support in open and distance education comes from several sources:

• investigations of individual elements of a support system, for example, tutoring by the media (audio-tape, audio-graphics, computer-conferencing, telephone and audioconferencing), correspondence tutoring, counselling, turn-round times for course work;
• in the wake of research on drop-out or persistence, in terms of the kinds of interventions that institutions and staff can make;
• analyses of roles and characteristics of ‘successful’ support staff;
• description and analysis of institutional or individual practice;
• studies of learner satisfaction with support services (such as Rashid et al., 1994), now growing in number along with attempts to measure and assure quality.

In the literature on learner support there are few reviews of research. Of these, some take a wider focus than learner support alone and not all distinguish between empirical research and other kinds of writing. Cookson (1989) identifies empirical work on learning at a distance (but not specifically learner support). Wright (1991) focuses on learner support, but does not distinguish between research reports and other kinds. Sweet (1993) reviews the literature (not the research) on student support and some more general aspects of learning. Faced with the disparate array of research and theory on learners and learning at a distance (a broader focus than learner support alone), Gibson (1990) attempted ‘to add order where none ... appeared to exist’ by using Lewin’s (1936) field psychology of learning to provide a theoretical framework for exploring it. A critical review of the research carried out so far on learner support is still needed.

So what can we conclude from the research? The following is an attempt to list broad findings:

• learner–institution contact, such as regular contact with support staff, appears to have a positive effect on learner performance and persistence rates;
• factors which correlate positively with course completion rates include the use of course assignments, early submission of the first one, short turn-round times for giving learners feedback, pacing of progress, supplementary audio-tapes or telephone tutorials, favourable working conditions in the learner's context, the quality of learning materials and reminders from tutors to complete work;
• multiple interacting factors (personal, environmental and course variables) are at work in determining learner success; some institutional interventions can assist if appropriately targeted;
• learners value contact with support staff and other learners, though do not always use the services provided; learners most often report a preference for face-to-face tutoring compared to other media, though where face-to-face meetings are not possible, other forms of contact are rated as acceptable or valuable;
• what happens in the early stages of recruitment and enrolment affects later success or failure;
• personal circumstances and lack of time are the most common reasons given for withdrawal from study.
RESEARCH AND PRACTICISM IN LEARNER SUPPORT

However, stating these broad conclusions in this way may give some of them more substance than they warrant. Some are based on studies which have produced marginal or equivocal findings. Replication studies are few and frequently produce conflicting findings or fail to confirm the earlier ones. For example, Taylor et al.’s (1993) study on student persistence and turn-round times in five institutions in four countries failed to produce generalisable results; it drew attention to the very considerable differences between institutions and their practices, and the difficulties these created for achieving generalisations. Often too narrow a range of research methods are used yet different research approaches can elicit different answers: for example, Garland’s (1993) use of an ethnographic approach revealed different reasons for drop-out to those elicited by questionnaires.

SOME ISSUES

There is enormous variation in learner support systems in open and distance learning. Commonalities may lie in similar goals (such as ‘providing interactivity and dialogue’, ‘personalising a mass system’, ‘mediating between the materials, the institution and the learners’, ‘institutional responsiveness to individuals’, ‘differentiation of support services according to different group and individual needs’), but with diverse ways of achieving them.

Concept definition

Definitions of learner support vary. To take just three: one describes it as the elements of an open learning system capable of responding to a particular individual learner (Thorpe, 1988, p. 54); another as the support incorporated within the self-learning materials, the learning system and assignment marking (Hui, 1989, p. 131); and a third as ‘the requisite student services essential to insure the successful delivery of learning experiences at a distance’ (Wright, 1991, p. 59). Some authors include learner support as an integral part of a course, others place it as a supplement. Some include administration and delivery operations in their definitions, others do not. The range of services included in models of learner support also varies; some include pre-entry services, others do not (see Reid, Chapter 25 in this volume). In some cases support services are provided in partnership with other agencies (such as mentor support for teachers in school-based training, or for in-company learners), adding yet another dimension of variation.

Learner support can be viewed as having three components: the elements that make up the system, their configuration, and the interaction between them and the learners, which creates its dynamic. The elements are:
OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING TODAY

- personal contact between learners and support agents (people acting in a variety of support roles and with a range of titles), individual or group, face-to-face or via other means;
- peer contact;
- the activity of giving feedback to individuals on their learning;
- additional materials such as handbooks, advice notes or guides;
- study groups and centres, actual or ’virtual’ (electronic);
- access to libraries, laboratories, equipment, and communication networks.

Configuration of these elements varies, depending on the requirements of course design, infrastructure of a country, distribution of learners, available resources, and the values and philosophy of the open and distance education provider. Interactivity between the provider and learners differs in level, intensity and function.

The choice and use of these components are based on practicalities as much as on research findings (if not more). For example, though feedback on learning has been identified in at least one empirical study as having beneficial effects on learner progress and course quality (Boondao and Rowley, 1991), some institutions cannot afford to provide it, or see it as a low priority in the face of competing demands, or cannot find enough appropriate people to carry out the tasks, or find the logistics of doing it too difficult given the infrastructure of the country. Reports of practice illustrate that learner support is heavily contingent on local circumstances. Comparisons can be misleading, sometimes based on false assumptions. How far, then, do findings from one context apply elsewhere?

**Diversity and generalisation**

Some of the problems in generalising are illustrated by differences in the roles of support staff. In some cases different titles refer to essentially the same kinds of roles; in others the same title encompasses quite different tasks. In some systems, ’tutors’ do no marking or commenting on learners' course-work; in others, ’tutors’ spend 80–85 per cent of their time allocating grades and designing tests for learners, or yet again, use commenting on assignments as the main means of dialogue with learners. The amount of learner support differs as does the proportion of resources allocated to it. The ratio of learners to tutor varies widely: within my own experience it has ranged from 3:1 to 300:1, a difference of scale which has predictable implications for the tutor's role (see Aalto and Jalava, Chapter 24 in this volume). In some cases learner-support staff are selected by qualification, experience and interview, in others they are elected by the group of learners (Warr, 1992). Usually support staff are paid by the open and distance education provider, but sometimes they are paid by the learners, or do the work unpaid. Do these differences matter? I think they do, in two ways: firstly, they make generalisations unsafe for the unwary and, secondly, they
have consequences for the motivations of support staff, the meanings they attribute to their roles and work, and for the match between the role as specified by the organisation and as enacted by staff (aspects little researched but of concern to managers).

A similar caution about generalising arises from the myth of `the learner'. The term has a generic ring about it, but in fact refers to a very wide variety of people with different backgrounds and concerns even within one institution (Evans, 1994). Not all open and distance learners are adults, highly motivated or self-managing. Some are primary school-age children (Forbes and Wood, 1994) or disadvantaged young adults with negative and politicised attitudes to learning (Nonyongo and Nengebule, 1993), or post-graduate doctors or engineers. Contexts of learning vary from yurt-based, non-formal education for women in the Gobi desert to multinational in-company training by computer networks in Europe.

The research on learner support in open and distance education does not reflect this diversity. Its base is relatively narrow: most published research studies are on formal education, institutionally based, and usually higher education in the more developed countries. Yet cultural contexts have considerable implications for the generalisability of the research findings. Models of `good practice' developed in western institutions are not always appropriate for other countries and cultures, for example:

... given the fact that the socio-religious tradition is one of seeing the younger generation as necessarily in a position when they should take orders, listen to elders, their individuality or independent thinking or decision-making is not nurtured. Often these traditions and customs run contrary to the basic expectations required of open learners.

(Priyadarshini, 1994, p. 458)

and

while education means spreading awareness and lifting taboos, it does not mean violation of people's customs and traditions. This must be kept in mind while planning a support system.

(ibid., p. 462)

The diversity described points to the situated nature of learner support in three respects: its place in curriculum and course design, the characteristics and milieu of the learners, and the culture and social structures in which it operates (see Koul, Chapter 3 in this volume). What role, then, can research play if concerns are so specific? What are the implications for constructing research agendas?

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Practical concerns and research agendas

Some of the difficulties in reconciling practical concerns with broader research agendas are illustrated in a report from a group representing several Asian Open Universities (Sweet, 1993). Practical concerns about learner support were specific, described as ‘unique to a particular institution and reflected local conditions, customs and practices’ (ibid., p. 97), yet the common research agenda created by them listed broad topics not specifically focused on learner support, for example:

Explore the feasibility of engaging in various entrepreneurial activities.
Develop models of institutional collaboration.

(Sweet, 1993, p. 99)

This contrasts with the research questions from a single institution, following from an empirical study of science students’ needs at the Open Learning Institute (OLI), Hong Kong, for example:

What should be the quantity of provision of tutorials in distance education? Should the attendance of these activities be made compulsory?

(Chan Shui Kin, 1994, p. 53)

As the researcher says, the answers to some of these questions are not simple, needing not just administrative answers but also some which critically examine academic perspectives and educational values. However, answers do need to be sought in the context of the particular institution. For more theory-focused research, some of the questions would need to be re-framed, for example, to become ‘in what circumstances should tutorials be compulsory?’

The contrast between these two agendas raises some questions: do research agendas on learner support only become focused when embedded in the context of a particular institution or system? Is applied research only relevant to the institution where conducted?

RESEARCH, PRAGMATISM AND DEVELOPMENT

While both research and pragmatism have influenced the development of understanding and practice in supporting learners, research so far seems to have played a weaker role. What does it add up to?

Is there a theory of learner support?

Theory is essentially an account of how ideas are related, a complex system for organising the ideas through which we conceptualise some aspect of experience. However, ‘a few loosely related propositions about causal
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interconnections do not constitute a theory ... though they may contain elements of one' (Dey, 1993, p. 52). Does this describe the current status of research on learner support? Do the research studies on learner support build convincing models or add up to one or more theories? Not so far, for several reasons. Some of the studies are not linked to any theory. There has been relatively little testing out of propositions, theory or findings from one context to another (Taylor et al.'s (1993) study is unusual in this respect). A large number of topics seem to be researched in isolation from previous related work, and do not build on earlier efforts to formulate theoretical explanations. Some studies are single-variable studies resulting in simple explanations for what are clearly complex problems. Sometimes the interpretation of results is over-optimistic. Many studies are descriptive – a necessary part of the research process – but also lack analysis. Some guiding concepts (like 'learner independence' or 'interaction' or 'mediation') are meaningful at one level but not well understood nor well operationalised. ’Learner support' is weakly conceptualised. So, looking at the research on learner support, we cannot claim to have a theory or theories, or even be close to it. But is this too pessimistic a conclusion? What kinds of research are we talking about?

What counts as research?

A distinction is often drawn between 'pure' and applied research. 'Pure' research is primarily concerned with advancing knowledge within a particular field rather than finding solutions to practical problems. It asks broader questions at a higher level of generality than applied research, for example 'how do tutors affect students' approaches to learning?' These kinds of broad questions apply across different contexts and countries. Applied research asks more specific questions, about practical problems focusing on particular programmes and groups ('how did those tutors on that course with that kind of role affect those students' approaches to learning?').

Much of the research in open and distance education generally is applied research (including evaluation) – a problem-solving activity of a practical kind. This reflects the need for managers and course developers to get answers to pressing practical questions. Sometimes it is possible to combine such applied research with more theoretical explorations, but not always. Often institutions or project groups are too small to contain the right kind of expertise within their staff or lack the resources or time. However, research of an applied kind is essential for the effective functioning of open and distance education systems – for getting feedback on the learners, the courses and the systems.

Institutions vary widely in the amount of institutional research they do. Some institutions do little and neglect to compile the necessary baseline data.
about learners, support staff and their activities. The following situation at
the University of Papua New Guinea is, unfortunately, not unique:

... records are so bereft of information that students who have already
matriculated cannot be easily identified, let alone separated, from those
who are still in the process ... the problems caused by this lack of
information make the other problems which impact on student
performance pale in comparison.

(Geissinger and Kaman, 1994, p. 87)

A starting-point for many applied research endeavours on learner support by
an institution must be a set of baseline student statistics (Calder, 1994). This
can also assist in the monitoring and review of the development process over
time and is helpful for testing out organisational myths about what actually
happens. Another source of institutional research is that done by
practitioners.

**Practitioner research**

There is a broad spectrum of what can count as research in learner support. It
includes more than the studies that appear in journals. The results of
systematic enquiry also appear in the form of internal reports, discussion
papers, learner guides and supplementary materials, and feed into training
materials, staff development workshops and the development of institutional
policy and practice. Dissemination of this kind of research tends to remain at
the local or institutional level where it can contribute to the development of a
culture of research-minded practice, often in the form of action research. Not
all those who contribute new knowledge and extend understanding are `experts' or professional researchers. Many support staff who actively
research their own practice would not claim to be so and are often not active
in writing up their findings for publication. This kind of practitioner research
can have limited visibility outside an institution but considerable influence
within it.

Within large institutions, practitioners’ work can be unknown or ignored
by ‘professional’ researchers who may in any case work within a different
research paradigm. The opposite is the case, too. Researchers’ work may not
easily reach practitioners, even within the same institution (the case studies
in Schüemer (1991) illustrate the difficulties that researchers and evaluators
have in disseminating their findings and influencing decision-making); this is
yet another dimension in which separate worlds can exist within one
institution (see Costello, 1993). One result of this lack of connection or
dialectic between practitioners and researchers is missed opportunities: to
build productive partnerships, to democratise evaluation, and to make use of a
broader range of research approaches, particularly qualitative and
participative ones. Some forms of research are more difficult for centrally
RESEARCH AND PRAGMATISM IN LEARNER SUPPORT

Based research staff to do and, because of this, the range of approaches and methodology may become narrowly focused. For example, survey research is more easily managed by centrally based researchers than some qualitative forms of enquiry with distant learners.

Whether ‘pure’ or applied, any piece of educational research is shaped by some underlying assumptions and researchers of all kinds adopt procedures which follow from them. It is vital for practitioners and researchers alike to know what these are in order to carry out investigations or to assess in any meaningful way the products of such research. This understanding is neither the concern solely of professional researchers nor irrelevant to distance education. This belief leads me to disagree with Coldeway’s view that:

The debate over qualitative versus quantitative research in education is best left to those with a keen interest in the philosophy of science. The distinction appears to be far from the needs of distance education research at this time.

(Coldeway, 1988, p. 48)

Research in distance education should not be divorced from the concerns of mainstream educational research, where there is currently lively debate and practical engagement with issues surrounding the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches and their effective combination (Bryman, 1988). To disengage from this kind of debate is to weaken the quality of research in open and distance education.

CONCLUSIONS

Clear conclusions are difficult to draw from the research on learner support. Some of the most basic questions about learner support – for example, the kind of questions Perraton poses (in Chapter 2 of this volume) about face-to-face study: ‘what kind, how much and for what purpose?’ – cannot easily be answered by present research findings, at least without so much qualification as to be unhelpful for practical purposes. Answers to questions such as these most often begin with the words ‘it depends’. Decision-making in response to them has to take account of a number of different kinds of factors, and trade-off one set of benefits or losses against another. While research can (and should) inform practice, providing services for learners is most often a pragmatic, problem-solving activity enacted in a particular context.

But this is not an argument for abandoning attempts to do research on learner support. Useful development can be generated from within an organisation which actively researches its own practice and which ensures that it knows enough about itself in order to do this. The move from this to generalising across settings is a large one. Building theory would need stronger conceptualisation, more repeated testing of concepts and the creation of organising frameworks or theories. And some speculation: what

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might a theory of learner support look like? In the meantime, research-minded practice is the route to improving learner support.

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RESEARCH AND PRAGMATISM IN LEARNER SUPPORT


The Will Learn ... !

Counsellors' Perceptions of Academic Counselling

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New Delhi
July, 2001
CHAPTER - 1 : BACKGROUND AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Teaching through open and distance learning is quite different from teaching in the conventional education system. In conventional education, face to face teaching is practiced in a classroom situation, where student motivation, classroom activities, feedback, teacher guidance, and proximity of the teacher and learner create an ideal environment for learning. The learners are full time and relatively homogenous in nature which facilitates contiguous learning. However, in the open and distance learning (ODL) system, the situation is completely reverse. The students are a heterogeneous group with irregular habits in studies and often with some of their entrance qualifications less than the others. Moreover, distance learners are also part-time learners. The students learn at their own place and pace. The self learning materials (SLMs) which are highly structured and self-contained are expected to carry out the role of a teacher. Hence, a number of learning activities are incorporated in the SLMs and the subject matter is presented in a simple conversational style. Wherever possible an appropriate pattern of media mix, using audio, video, broadcast, computer media along with printed SLMs is used. It is supported by distance tuition through tutor comments on the learners assignments. It is also supported occasionally (depending on the nature and requirements of the course concerned) by face to face tutorial/counselling sessions and if necessary practicals.

Hence, distance education is highly a specialized branch of education requiring a special set of skills and attitude on the part of teachers who take up distance teaching and function at any of the different levels in the system, such as course designing, course development, course production, tutoring, counseling, evaluation, etc.

In other words ODL revolves around a learner-centered system with teaching activity focused on facilitating learning. The
success of the system does not depend wholly on the highly
structured study materials, which is the hallmark of ODL, but on the
inter relationship of that package with the distance learner as an
individual through the agency of academic counselling

1.2 Academic Counselling

Academic Counselling is one of the most important activities of an
Open University / Distance Education Institution. It is important
because of the particular characteristics of distance learners, of the
institution and of the teaching learning process. An academic
counsellor is the only human link between the learners, the institution
and the resources of learning. It is through the medium of academic
counselling that the real needs of distance learners can be clarified,
their conflicting demands of home and work can be reconciled and
they can come to terms with their isolation and with problems
resulting from their previous experience. Academic counselling is also
important in helping distance learners to develop their own individual
strategy for studying at a distance. Also, whatever be the merits of
the self-learning materials, to the extent they try to build the teacher
in the text, try to simulate a classroom situation, they remain finite in
their character. On the other hand the learners’ needs are infinite in
their variety, as all human beings are. To satisfy these variations, it
becomes necessary to offer some academic counseling and it is
precisely for this reason the role of an academic counsellor becomes
important in distance education.

However the academic counsellor is only one type of resource that
the learner can access and his/her role is that of a facilitator —
linking learners to other resources such as library facilities, various
media and software programmes etc., and providing adequate
support to empower the learner to exercise control over the learning
process. Hence the provision of study center (local resource center)
has been made where help can be provided by the academic counsellor
to distance learners to over come barriers to learning which result
from the loneliness ‘isolation) of the learner working on his/her own
1.3 Role of an Academic Counsellor at IGNOU

Like other open universities, IGNOU appoints experienced teachers from established educational institutions and even competent professionals on a part-time basis for serving as Academic Counsellors at its study centers. The academic counsellor has the combined role of providing general counselling as well as tutoring to the IGNOU learners attached to him/her.

As a general counsellor he/she is supposed to orient learners learn at a distance, familiarise them with the system and try to help them to overcome their non academic problems that are hindering their process of learning. As a tutor he/she assumes a role of a subject specialist where the emphasis is on dealing with problems related to the subject. The academic counsellor has another major responsibility of providing distance teaching/tuition by writing tutor comments on the learners assignment responses.

The major functions of an academic counsellor has been summarized in the box below:

**MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF ACADEMIC COUNSELLORS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counselling</th>
<th>Tutoring</th>
<th>Use of Multi-Media</th>
<th>Assessment &amp; Evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Helping to overcome learning difficulties)</td>
<td>(Helping to achieve satisfactory academic standards)</td>
<td>(making appropriate interventions of non-print media)</td>
<td>(give feedback and establishing interpersonal links)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Tasks of Tutoring and Counselling</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Initiating the student into distance learning</td>
<td>- Guiding the self-learning in the desirable direction</td>
<td>- Identifying and undoing the same</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Confirming the positive learning and reinforcing further learning</td>
<td>- Providing non-print instructional interventions</td>
<td>- Promoting non-print instructional interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Identifying mis-learning and undoing the same</td>
<td>- Promoting and sustaining academic motivation through suitable techniques</td>
<td>- Developing the skills of listening and viewing and following it up with interactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing non-print instructional interventions</td>
<td>- Identifying person specific problems and help to overcome learning handicaps</td>
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</table>
In order to make the counselling sessions more meaningful, the university organizes an Orientation Programme for the newly appointed academic counsellors, where they are given an exposure to the skills of tutoring, counselling and evaluation of assignments.

Counselling sessions are not lecture sessions. Since the printed material are self learning, the distance learners are supposed to have read the course materials before coming to the session. Ideally the learners should utilize the opportunity given to them i.e., to interact with SLMS more effectively through the agency of the academic counsellor during counselling sessions.

1.3 Counselling Distance Learners at IGNOU

At IGNOU most of the courses have fixed credit value. A credit means the study input required by the programme. One credit is equivalent to 30 study hours. These study hours may be distributed among different study activities required of a distance learner, namely:

- Reading the study materials.
- Viewing / listening to video / audio cassettes
- Working on assignments, self check exercises, etc
- Referring to books

Normally a 4 credit course is equal to 4 to 5 blocks and an 8 credit course is equal to 8 to 10 blocks. Generally a blocks is of 1 credit. Each programme is divided into courses Each course consists of a few printed booklets called Blocks, a few audio, a few videos and some assignments. The block appears in the
form of a booklet of around 60 -- 80 printed pages Generally each block represents one unified theme. Each block is further divided into units. Each unit is an individual lesson. All units of a block are thematically linked to each other Normally, the unit comprises of an introduction, explanation of the topics, summary, keywords, self-check exercises to help learners to learn the materials, and further readings and answers to the self check exercises. 10 % of the total study hours allotted to complete a course is set aside for counselling.

Hence, a 4 credit course will have 5 sessions and an 8 credit course 10 sessions of 2 to 2 ½ hours’

Various media are being used to counsel distance learners, viz.

• face to face sessions at Study Centers
• tele-counselling through Gayan Darshan and also teleconferencing at Study Centers / Regional Centers
• phone-in-radio counseling at home / workplace / Study Center
• e-mail at Tele-learning Centers / home / workplace
• chat mode on internet Tele-learning Centers / home / workplace
• practicals at laboratories
• hands on experience at Specialized institutes / industry etc.

All programmes except 2 information technology programmes have the component of face to face counseling sessions which are organized at IGNOU study centers, mostly on weekends and holidays and sometimes even on weekdays but mostly after office hours. Attendance at face-to-face Counselling sessions is not compulsory except for practical courses.

Presently there are more than 20,000 counsellors working at over 600 study centers spread throughout the length and breadth of the country [IGNOU, 2001]. The counselling schedule is prepared by the Study Center in consultation with the
counsellors and in accordance with the guidelines provided by various Schools at the HQs.

The Regional Centers periodically monitor the conduct of counselling sessions at their study centers. The study centers submit monthly counselling reports to the Regional Center.

In addition, to the face-to-face sessions telecounselling is also provided to IGNOU students through teleconferencing at over 160 receiving stations (which are at Regional centers and Study Centers). An exclusive Educational TV Channel, namely Gyan Darshan, is being used by IGNOU and other institutions for 24 hours everyday. IGNOU is the coordinating agency for Gyan Darshan. Gradually the number of hours of telecast would be increased and also more effective utilization of this channel for counselling distance learners. Limited (one hour on every Sunday from 4 to 5 pm) phone-in radio counselling is being provided through nearly 190 radio stations including FM stations all over the country. (IGNOU, 2001)

E-support is being specifically provided to Bachelor in Information Technology and Advanced Diploma in Information Technology students. They have not only received their courses on-line but are being counselled through e-mail (asynchronous) and chat mode on Internet (synchronous). Since all distance learners do not have a computer at their homes / workplaces, IGNOU has setup Tele-learning centers which have the state of art infrastructure to facilitate effective delivery of programmes through e-support.

In the science and technology based programmes such as B.Sc., Computer Programmes, Library and Information Sciences, B.Sc (Nursing) etc., practicals are an essential and compulsory component. In all lab practical based courses 70 % to 80 % attendance is compulsory.

It is the duty of coordinator / programme in charge to arrange for practical counselling and hands on work practice in the course during the academic session. Coordinator / Programme In charge has to prepare a schedule in the prescribed format and send it to the learners and counsellors well in advance.
The duration of each session is 2 to 3 hours depending upon the programme and the course. However, in library sciences, the duration of the practicals is of 4 hours each.

In addition to face-to-face counselling, a number of academic programmes have been provided with project work as a compulsory component of the programme generally as a separate course. Basically, this component is to provide an experience of ground realities in the field of the academic programme which a learner has chosen. Academic counsellors are to assist and supervise learners to pursue their project work. In some professional courses, field visits, workshops, and seminars are prescribed such as PGJMC, B.Ed., MLIS etc.

1.4 Counselling Support for PGDDE Programme

IGNOU’s PGDDE learners are attached to one of the 45 study centers located throughout the length and breadth of the country. IGNOU has appointed 60 counsellors at these study centers for conducting face-to-face counselling sessions. The post graduate Diploma in Distance Education programme has 5 courses of 6 credits each. Normally, 10 sessions of 2 1/2 hours duration are held for each course (50 sessions in all) (STRIDE, 2001).

Those who have successfully completed DDE or PGDDE programme with good performance are appointed as PGDDE academic counsellors. Recently (in 2000) the criteria of selection was altered to attract professionals in the area of media and technology, instructional design, open and distance education, learner support etc. They could be appointed as counsellors, even if they have not completed DDE/PGDDE programmes of IGNOU.

From time to time, the Regional Centers conduct interactive radio counselling sessions for the PGDDE learners. Tele-counselling is provided by the STRIDE faculty members on demand.

The academic counsellors also provide support to the PGDDE learners through letters over telephone and if required even spare their valuable time for them at their places of work / home.
1.6 Statement of the Problem

As we know the support provided by academic counsellors is crucial to learners in the ODL system. Presently 60 teachers from the conventional system who have successfully completed the PGDDE programme are performing the role of PGDDE academic counsellors at 45 IGNOU study centers (STRIDE, 2001). All of them have attended a 2 days orientation programme conducted by IGNOU in order to perform the tasks of counselling, tutoring, and assignment evaluation.

Therefore it is desirable to find out the impact of the two day orientation programme on the PGDDE academic counsellors. Hence the proposed study was planned in order to study whether these academic counsellors have been able to deal with the complexities of academic counselling (counselling & tutoring) and provide distance teaching to the PGDDE learners through comments on their assignment responses.

The rapid expansion of the ODL system in India has provided a vast and ever-growing field to introspect and explore and to find out the contribution of academic counsellors in the teaching — learning process. There is a need for research and empirical evidence to influence the policy makers in order to correct the weaknesses of ODL system with a view to improving the conduct and organization of academic counselling and assignment evaluation and thereby enhance the learning activeness of the learners. Till date no such review has been done of the PGDDE counsellors and their perspective of academic counselling in distance education. Though sporadic information is available but not sufficiently in detail to draw the attention to throw light upon these important questions. An in-depth study was therefore required to be done. Hence, the present study was undertaken.

1.7 Aims of the study

- To know the professional development programmes undergone by the PGDDE academic counsellors
- To critically examine their perspective of academic counselling and assignment evaluation
To seek their opinion on IGNOU’s multimedia instructional system
To seek their opinion on support services offered by IGNOU
To find out the benefits accrued to them as a consequence of being academic counsellors of IGNOU.

1.8 Objectives of the study
This study would enable us to:

- List out the types of professional development programmes undergone by the PGDDE academic counsellors
- Name the methods used by the PGDDE academic counsellors in conducting academic counselling sessions.
- Analyze their experience regarding writing of tutor comments.
- Assess the turn around time taken by the academic counsellors in providing feedback to the PGDDE learners
- Describe their views on IGNOU’s multi-media instructional system
- List out their views on support services offered by IGNOU
- Specify the benefits accrued to them as a consequence of serving as academic counsellors of PGDDE programme.

1.9 Methodology
Descriptive and documentary method of research was used for this study. The design mainly used the survey technique. Schedules were canvassed to collect data. Interviews were conducted to supplement and corroborate the data. Appropriate tools were developed based on the objectives of the study. The tools were tested before actual use. Data collected was then subjected to descriptive analysis using appropriate techniques.
1.9.1 Universe of the study

The e PGDDE academic counsellors appointed and approved by IGNOU formed the universe of the study. These 60 academic counsellors were invited to attend a re-orientation programme conducted by STRIDE in March and August, 2000. Out of 60, 36 attended the re-orientation programmes who were selected for the study. Schedules were canvassed to the 36 academic counsellors to collect data. 30% of them (12 academic counsellors) were interviewed personally to supplement and corroborate the database.

1.9.2 Response Rate

Table 1.1 Response Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number of PGDDE academic counsellors appointed by IGNOU</th>
<th>Number of PGDDE academic counsellors who attended Re-orientation programme</th>
<th>Number of PGDDE academic counsellors who responded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Regions</td>
<td>Regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bhubaneswar 3, Calcutta 2, Guwahati 3, Patna 3, Lucknow 1, Ranchi 1, Delhi – 1, Dehi – 2, Bhopal, Dehradun, Srinagar, Shimla, Karnal, Jammu, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Chennai, Bangalore, Kochi, Pune</td>
<td>Bhubaneswar 3, Calcutta 2, Guwahati 3, Patna 2, Lucknow 1, Ranchi 1, Shimla 2, Karnal 2, Jammu 2, Ahmedabad 2, Jaipur 1, Hyderabad 2, Chennai 2, Bangalore 2, Kochi 1, Pune 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1 Response Rate: Individuals may reproduce a copy of the third-party copyright materials listed below for their own personal use only; any further reproduction or transmission of any such content is prohibited except by permission of the copyright holder of the relevant material.
30 (83%) of the PGDDE academic counsellors who attended the re-orientation programme conducted by STRIDE responded by completing the schedule. They account for 50% of the total PGDDE academic counsellors appointed throughout the country for providing academic counselling support to IGNOU’s PGDDE learners.

1.9.3 Tools of Research

Three steps were followed in developing the tools to be used for the study:

(i) identification of type of tool to be used
(ii) item development (identification of variables) and
(iii) development of the draft of the tool.

The proof of the tool developed was circulated among the STRIDE faculty members to find out the communicability of the language, the adequacy of the response alternatives wherever structured items were used. Based on their comments, the items were modified.

Analysis of Data and Chapterisation

The data collected from the schedules were computerized and subjected to descriptive analysis using simple percentage, graphics, and diagrams. The data has been presented in the chapter two in the following sections:

- Professional development of PGDDE Academic Counsellors
- Conducting Academic counselling
- Two-way communication through Assignments
- Feedback on support services
- Benefits accrued

1.10 Limitations of the study

- Data was collected from the PGDDE academic counsellors who attended the re-orientation programme conducted by STRIDE in 2000.
• The study is limited to the academic counsellors of PGDDE programme.

1.11 Expected Outcomes

It is expected that the outcome of this study would throw light on the performance of academic counsellors in the ODL system. The study is expected to bring out the deficiencies / gaps in the system and suggest appropriate measures to improve the functioning of the system in general and academic counsellors in particular.
CHAPTER — 2 : IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON ACADEMIC COUNSELLORS

2.1 The professional development

The professional development undergone by the PGDDE academic counsellors is generally of 2 types, namely through professional programmes such as DDE, PGDDE, MADE and: by attending a two day orientation programme organized by IGNOU for its newly appointed academic counsellors.

2.1.1 Professional Programmes Completed

It was essential for any teacher desirous of being selected as a PGDDE academic counsellor to have successfully completed the DDE/PGDDE programme of IGNOU. It is only last year (in the year 2000) that the criteria of selection was altered so that professionals with in-depth knowledge of media and technology, learner support, instructional design, open and distance education etc., could be attracted by IGNOU to serve as its academic counsellors. It is not necessary for the experienced professionals to have completed IGNOU’s PGDDE programme. If we look at the data provided by the 30 PGDDE academic counsellors, 17 % (5) of them have done PGDDE and majority of them (83%) have successfully completed the Diploma in Distance Education (DDE) programme of IGNOU. The DDE programme is one of the first programmes introduced by IGNOU, way back in 1987. Majority of the academic counsellors belong to the first batch of DDE (successful) students.

Interestingly 12 of them have also completed the Master’s of Arts in Distance Education (MADE) programme which STRIDE had introduced in 1992 as the next higher module after completing the DDE programme. Even today on completion of PGDDE in the first year, the learner goes on to do MADE. On completion of the second module i.e., the MADE programme, the learner becomes eligible to procure the Master’s of Arts degree in Distance Education. This reveals that 40 % of them have
Only 20 out of 30 respondents have been oriented at a two days orientation programme conducted by IGNOU. 4 of them had been appointed as PGDDE academic counsellors and therefore they have not been oriented before.

6 academic counsellors were appointed a few years ago and 4 had been appointed very recently; had never been provided an orientation in the system or the PGDDE courses. Since STRIDE conducted the last orientation programme nearly 10 years ago, the academic counsellors appointed thereafter had never attended any such programme. The components of the 2 day orientation programme have been described in the box below:

The components of a typical two-day, approximately five hours a day, counsellor-training orientation programme are (Murugan, 1996):

- the concepts of open/distance education: the implication/relevance of these concepts in the higher educational scenario of India; the feature of open/distance education, etc.

- the role of assignments and importance of tutor comments on assignment responses: assignments as a teaching tool (and not merely a tool for evaluation); how to comment on assignment responses, etc.

- the notion of academic counselling: the difference between what is called ‘counselling’ and teaching, the differing role domains of teachers, etc.

- specific content subject areas: how materials has been prepared, the role of self-instructional materials, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Successfully completed</th>
<th>DDE</th>
<th>PGDDE</th>
<th>MADE</th>
<th>Attended Orientation Programme</th>
<th>2 days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 (83 %)</td>
<td>5 (17 %)</td>
<td>12 (40 %)</td>
<td>20 (67 %)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Usually, the first two items are considered on the first day and the last two on the second day. Evidently, the assumption of such a programme is that conventional teachers with some exposure to distance education can assume the role of a counsellor. In other words, the notion underlying the training is that the teachers, if given theoretical orientation, will be able to transfer it to real situations.

Therefore, these academic counsellors who had attended the above programme have outlined some benefits that they derived from it, which are listed below.

Benefits derived from the orientation programme:

- Understood the role of an Academic Counsellor
- Helped in identifying the needs of individual learners
- Understood the difference between teaching and counselling
- Developed the skills of tutoring and counselling
- Helped towards self development as well as professional development
- Learnt more objective and scientific evaluation methods
- Upgraded their knowledge about multimedia instruction
- Improved communication and teaching skills

10 of them who had not attended the orientation programme had therefore no practical knowledge/skills of academic counselling. They had been mainly exposed to the theoretical aspects of ODL which have been covered in the PGDDE courses. Even the 2 day orientation programme mainly covers the theoretical aspects of distance education namely the concept of ODL, the role of assignments and tutor comments and the notion of academic counselling. However, the package does not give any weight age to activities and practical training. The second part of the orientation programme is devoted to the content areas of the PGDDE programme: with which the counsellors are very familiar, having meticulously gone through them as PGDDE learners.
2.2 Conducting Academic Counselling

2.2.1 Counselling Sessions Conducted

63.3% (19) of the respondents have conducted counselling sessions. 13.3% (4) of the respondents have mentioned that they are newly appointed and hence have not yet been given the opportunity to conduct counselling sessions. 23.3% (7) of them have not been invited to take counselling sessions due to less number of students enrolled for the PGDDE programme at those particular study centers. Hence no counselling sessions were organized for PGDDE programme and instead the PGDDE learners were attached to a Distance Learning Facilitator, appointed by the University for low enrolment programmes in the region. All of them have unanimously agreed to the need and necessity for conducting counselling sessions. They have listed many reasons which have been given below:

- Learners come from conventional system and get to know more about the distance education system at counselling sessions.
- Counselling sessions help them in completing the programme on time.
- It lessens the chances of dropouts.
- It provides the learners opportunities to meet and interact with their peer group.
- It provides them opportunities to clarify their doubts and resolve many of the problems coming in the way of their learning through human intervention of the counsellor.
- It also helps the learners in answering their assignments and ultimately appearing in the term-end examinations. They can make use of audio-visual aids during counselling sessions.
- Above all, it is a highly motivating experience for the learners.
Hence 50% of them have suggested that attendance at counselling sessions should be made compulsory. The 50% who are against making it compulsory are of the view that any kind of compulsory attendance is against the philosophy of ODL. However the other 50% of the counsellors felt that at least 25% of the counselling sessions should be made compulsory so that all distance learners would understand the importance and role of academic counselling in the teaching – learning process and take advantage of it.

Some of them have suggested that there should be an extended contact programme of 5 days duration which should be a compulsory component which could be utilized for imparting the practical skills of tutoring, counselling and writing tutor comments on assignment responses.

2.2.2 Attendance at Counselling sessions

Majority (70%) of the academic counsellors have stated that the attendance at counselling sessions is below average. 30% of them found it average. The major reasons given by the respondents for low attendance at counselling sessions are (i) lack of compulsory provision of attendance, (ii) pre-occupations of learners with household and office responsibilities, (iii) indifference/lack of interest of learners, (iv) learners do not feel the necessity of counselling sessions, (v) study center is not centrally located and, (vi) information regarding counselling sessions reaches late (after the sessions have been held).
Except for 3 academic counsellors all of them made efforts to contact the absentee learners. The major medium used was writing of letters (80 %) followed by telephone (75 %), personal comments on assignment responses (72 %) and word of mouth, sending messages through friends (20 %).

Irregular distance learners also made attempts to contact the counsellors by visiting the counsellors at their place of work (70 %) and through letters (30 %).

### 2.2.3 Methods Used in Counselling Sessions

Interestingly 88 % of the counsellors used lecture and discussion method in counselling sessions. Around 60 % used group interaction and moderation method. Barely 34 % made use of audio visual aids during the sessions. The reasons quoted by them regarding the non-utilization of audio and video programmes were: (i) scarcity of equipment to play the tapes; (ii) non-availability of equipment at study centers; (iii) lack of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for not attending counselling sessions</th>
<th>Percentage of opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Lack of compulsory provision of attendance</td>
<td>55 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Pre-occupations of learners with household and office responsibilities</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Learners do not feel the necessity of counselling sessions</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) Indifference / lack of interest of learners</td>
<td>18 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) Study Center not centrally located</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vi) Information regarding counselling sessions reaches late</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cooperation of study center staff; (iv) lack of training and; (v) power failure. Barely 15% of them had pre-viewed the audio-video programmes before utilizing them in the sessions.

Table 2.2.2 Reasons for Non-Utilization of Audio-Visual Aids

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Percentage of Opinion of non-users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Scarcity of equipment</td>
<td>80 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Non-availability of equipment</td>
<td>72 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) lack of cooperation of study center staff</td>
<td>33 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) lack of training</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) power failure</td>
<td>4 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to specify the group learning techniques utilized by them to make the sessions interactive, 12% **have** mentioned that they did not utilize any such method as barely 1 or 2 students would turn up for the sessions. Some of them used role play and brainstorming. The devices used were blackboard charts and atlas.

2.3 Two way communication through Assignments 2.3.

1 Assignment Evaluation through Tutor Comments

26% of the respondents have never evaluated any assignments. A few of them being newly appointed and many of them have not
been given any assignments for evaluation due to low enrolment of learners and low level of assignment response submission. 74 of them who have evaluated assignments have written tutor comments, both marginal and global comments and sometimes even personal comments.

While describing their experiences about writing tutor comments, majority of them mentioned that it was a meaningful exercise (90 %), very time consuming (40 %) and a few of them found it difficult and cumbersome (2 %). Their opinion regarding writing of tutor comments (Table 2.3.1) reveals that (9/10th of counsellors) they need training and re-training.

**Table 2.3.1 Opinion of Counsellors regarding Writing of Tutor Comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion regarding writing of Tutor comments</th>
<th>Percentage of opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requires training and re-training</td>
<td>90 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One needs to cultivate these skills</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases the learners motivation and improves their performance</td>
<td>60 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good method of communicating with distance learners</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of monitoring has reduced the role of tutor comments into an ornamental one</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2.3.2 Adherence to Turn Around Time**

70 % of the respondents adhered to the prescribed (by the University) turn-around time, provided for assignment evaluation
and feedback to the learners. 30 % of them found the time provided insufficient. They mentioned that all assignments were handed over to them just a few days before the examination. Hence, they could not evaluate and return them to students in time.

On an average the academic counsellors required 30 to 45 minutes to evaluate a single assignment response. A few exceptions (5 %) said that they require 1 hour to 1 ½ hours to evaluate one assignment.

2.3.3 Preference for Grading

75 % of the respondents prefer grading system to the marking system. 25 % of them who gave more credence to marking felt that marking was more accurate than grading. However they (25 %) found grading suitable for examinations. The reasons given by 75 % of the respondents for preferring the grading system are

- It is a fairly objective system
- It is more rational as it decreases foul competition
- It is more satisfying to the learner as it lessens the chance of variation
- It has less scope for wrong judgments
- It also prevents discrimination among learners.

2.4 Feedback on Multimedia Instruction

2.4.1 Self Learning Materials (SLMs)

It is interesting to note that majority of the academic counsellors (60 %) found the PGDDE printed course materials good, 37 % found them satisfactory and 3 % unsatisfactory. Their detailed opinion is given in Table 2.4.1.
Table 2.4.1: Opinion about Printed Self Learning Materials (SLMs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The study materials are self instructional and have a teacher built in the text</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are comprehensive and adequately cover the syllabus</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The language used is simple to understand</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each new idea and term has been clearly explained</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult concepts have been clearly explained</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pictures and diagrams have been appropriately used</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The check your progress questions are adequate</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies and examples given are adequate</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References suggested are adequate</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback reveals that 83% found the printed materials really self instructional. 80% of them found them very comprehensive. 60% found the language simple and easy to understand and 40% were just about satisfied. 37% of them
• reduces their anxiety during examinations
• motivates distance learners

70% of them opined that the type of questions asked in the assignments are appropriate and make the distance learners write original answers with some analysis. 30% felt that the questions are framed in such a manner that they make the distance learners apply the knowledge that is given in the text in the form of case studies etc.

2.4.4 Teleconferencing

40% of the respondents have participated in teleconferencing but in hardly one or two sessions. They found teleconferencing very beneficial both from the learners as well as counsellors point of view, because of interaction with resource persons from HQs. However they expressed that teleconferencing cannot completely replace face-to-face counselling sessions as it does not fulfill the criteria of continuity of concern. Moreover teleconferencing facilities are available at very limited places.

The academic counsellors have suggested interactive radio counselling, cable TV networks and direct connectivity between the STRIDE faculty and the PGDDE learners through the internet, as other media that could be utilized for instructional purposes. They particularly stressed on radio because of its outreach and affordability and utility for these learners who do not attend counselling sessions at study centers. Direct contact could be maintained between the learners and STRIDE through e-mail. Frequently asked questions (FAQs) could be posted on the STRIDE website which would be beneficial to both learners and counsellors.

2.5 Feedback on Support Services

2.5.1 IGNOU Study Center

Barely 20% of the academic counsellors are satisfied with the support services provided by the IGNOU study centers. They
have also given the reasons for their dissatisfaction which are:
(i) study center staff are not regularly in contact with the
counsellors; (ii) they do not have list of students attached to
them; (iii) they lack space; (iv) the staff is not active and prompt;
(vi) they do not provide the latest information to counsellors, and
lastly (vii) they lack sensitivity.
70% of the respondents are not satisfied with the arrangements
at the study center for conducting counselling sessions. 60% of
them mentioned that the study center, staff does not cooperate
with them. Regarding their suggestions for improvement, the
respondents felt that the selection of the study center coordinator
is very crucial for the success of the system. The coordinator
must have experience in distance education or should have at
least completed the PGDDE programme.
Study center staff should be oriented and familiarized with open
distance education methodologies time to time and sensitized to
the problems of distance learners and counsellors. Only then
they would understand the importance of timely receipt of course
materials, adherence to turn around time for providing feedback
to the learners on TMAs and the proper organization and
conduct of counselling sessions.

2.5.2 Study Center Library
60% of the respondents have mentioned that they have been
using the library but not very regularly. 38% have been regular
users and only 2% have not used it at all. But unfortunately all the
users of the library have expressed their dissatisfaction with the
library facilities. Their reasons for dissatisfaction are given in
Table 2.5.1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Dissatisfaction</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Reference books are not arranged properly</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Catalogue is not available</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) No proper reading room facility</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) Reference books are not available</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the above Table 2.5.1 it may be inferred that the major reasons for dissatisfaction expressed by nearly 70 % of the respondents are the non—availability of catalogues and lack of proper reading room facility. Around 50 % have expressed that reference books are not properly arranged and there is lack of borrowing facility. Purpose for which library facility has been used by counsellors are given below:

- 60 % of them used for referring to books,
- 50 % for referring to the SLMs, TEE papers and borrowing the audio-video programmes.

In response to review the support services provided to the PGDDE learners and rating of support services them in the order of being beneficial to the learners, the respondents rated SLMs and counselling sessions at one to eight in the order of priority. (Refer to Table 2.5.2)

**Table A Ratings of Support Services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Services</th>
<th>Ratings (Highest)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SLMs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling Sessions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Center</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction Programme</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleconferencing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>8 (lowest)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above Table 2.5.1 it may be inferred that the major reasons for dissatisfaction expressed by nearly 70 % of the respondents are the non—availability of catalogues and lack of proper reading room facility. Around 50 % have expressed that reference books are not properly arranged and there is lack of borrowing facility. Purpose for which library facility has been used by counsellors are given below:

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In response to review the support services provided to the PGDDE learners and rating of support services them in the order of being beneficial to the learners, the respondents rated SLMs and counselling sessions at one to eight in the order of priority. (Refer to Table 2.5.2)
opportunity to apply the knowledge gained from the DDE/PGDDE/MADE programmes. 53% of them mentioned that this assignment gave them more confidence to carry out their permanently jobs (as conventional teachers) better.

50% felt that it has helped them to improve their career prospects and 46% felt that it generated a new interest to keep their mind active. 23% said that it helped them get a job in an open university and thus get promotion and a pay rise. 20% got an opportunity to re-enter the job market and improve their career prospects generally. Some (5%) have also stated that their involvement in activities of IGNOU widened their area of acquaintance.

2.6.2 Overall Assessment

In overall terms nearly 50% stated that they derived some benefit; 40% derived enormous benefit and the remaining lithe or no benefit. All of them have stated that they really benefited from the PGDDE programme to function as academic counsellors. Hence they have suggested that this programme should be made compulsory for all academic counsellors of IGNOU. It should be offered to them either free of cost or at very concessional rates.
CHAPTER - 3 : SUMMARY

The support provided by academic counsellors is crucial to the learners in the ODL system.

3.1 Objective 1 : List out the types of professional development undergone

The 30 PGDDE academic counsellors have themselves completed DDE/PGDDE and some of them (40 %) have even done the MADE programme. 67 % of the respondents have also attended the 2 days orientation programme, which is a counsellor training programme conducted by IGNOU.

3.2 Objective 2 : Name the methods used by the PGDDE academic counsellors in conducting academic counselling sessions

88 % of them have used lecture and discussion method. 60 % used group interaction and moderation method. Only 34 % made use of audio visual aids during counselling sessions.

Among the group learning techniques utilized by them are brainstorming and role play. The devices used were blackboard, charts and atlas. 50 % of them suggested that attendance at counselling sessions should be made compulsory. Some of them even suggested that there should be a compulsory extended contact programme of 5 days duration. 70 % of them found that attendance at sessions below average and 30 % of them found it average. The major reasons for low attendance according to them were lack of compulsory provision of attendance; pre-occupations of learners with household/office responsibilities; lack of interest of learners; learners do not understand the need for counselling; study center is not centrally located and information regarding counselling sessions reaches late.

Except for 1 % all of them made efforts to contact the absentee earners. The major medium used was through letters (80 %), telephone (75 %), through assignment responses (72 %) and Nord of mouth (20 %).
3.3 Objective 3 : Analyze their experience regarding writing tutor comments

74 To of the respondents have done assignment evaluation and have written tutor comments on the students’ assignment respondents. Majority of them 90 To found it very meaningful exercise, 40 % found it very time consuming and 2 % difficult and cumbersome.

90 To of them felt that writing of tutor comments requires training and re-training; 75 To felt that one needs to cultivate these skills; 60 To said that it increased the learners’ motivation and improved their performance; 50 % found it a good method of communication and 20 To felt that absence of monitoring has reduced the role of tutor comments into an ornamental one.

3.4 Objective 4 : Assess the turn around time taken by the academic counsellor

70 To of them adhered to he turn-around time prescribed by the university. 30 To could not do so as the assignments were handed over to them just a few days before the exams.

On an average it took them 30 to 45 minutes to evaluate a single assignment response. 5 % of them however required 1 to 1 % hours to evaluate one assignment.

3.5 Objective 5 : Describe their views on IGNOU’s Multimedia Instruction System

60 % of them found the PGDDE print materials good, 37 found them satisfactory & 3 To unsatisfactory. 83 % found the printed materials really self instructional. 80 % then found it very comprehensive. 60 % found the language simple and easy to understand and 40 To were just about satisfied.

37 % of them are just satisfied with the explanation of difficult concepts, use of pictures and diagrams; and adequacy of case studies and examples. However 7 % were not at all satisfied with the explanation of terms, concepts and picture diagrams and case studies used. 70 To found the check your progress
exercises adequate and good and also the references suggested at the end of the units.

Regarding audio and video programmes, 50 % felt that they should supplement the print materials and 50 % felt that they should complement them. 50 % of the respondents found the video programmes very useful and 33 % found the audio programmes very useful.

23 % found the videos fairly useful and 50 % expressed the same opinion about the audios. 27 % did not find the videos useful at all and 17 % said this about the audios. All of them felt that submission of TMAs should be compulsory. 75 % also felt that the weight age of TMAs in the overall assessment should be increased from 25 % to 40 %.

40 % of the respondents have participated in teleconferencing but in hardly one or two sessions, which they found very beneficial. But they felt that teleconferencing can only partially replace face to face counselling sessions.

The counsellors have suggested that interactive radio counselling cable television networks and internet are the other media that could be used for interacting with the PGDDE learners.

3.6 Objective 6: Describe their views on Support Services offered

Barely 20 % of them are satisfied with the support services provided by the IGNOU study centers. 60 % of them have specifically mentioned that the study center staff does not cooperate with them. 70 % of them were not satisfied with the arrangements made by the study center for conducting counselling sessions.

They suggested that study center staff need orientation and training. The coordinator should have completed PGDDE programme.

All of them were dissatisfied with the study center library. The major reasons for dissatisfaction are: absence of catalogues and reading-rooms, no proper arrangement of books and lack of
borrowing facility. They have rated the support services in the order of being beneficial to the learners. The order of priority is as follows:–

First SLMs, counselling sessions comes second, followed by regional center (third), letters (fourth), telephone (fifth), induction programme (sixth), teleconferencing (seventh) and library (eighth).

3.6.1 Objective 7: Specify the benefits accrued to them as a consequence of being academic counsellors of PGDDE programme.

65 % of them have over 10 years experience as a counsellors of IGNOU and 21.7 % have less than 5 years and 13.3 % have no experience as they were newly appointed.

77 % of the respondents mentioned that they learnt more about the open university system; 60 % stated that this gave them an opportunity to apply the knowledge gained from the PGDDE/DDE/MADE programmes; 53 % gained more confidence to carry out their permanent teaching jobs better, 50 % improved their career prospects; 23 % got them a job in an open university; 20 % got an opportunity to re-enter the job market and 5 % widened their areas of acquaintance.

In overall terms 50 % said that they derived some benefit. 40 % derived enormous benefit and the remaining 10 % little or no benefit.

However, all of them, have stated that they really benefited from the PGDDE programme to function as academic counsellors. Hence they have suggested that this programme should be made compulsory for all academic counsellors of IGNOU. It should be offered to them either free of cost or at very concessional rates.

3.8 Conclusion

Identification of the right academic counsellors will have a long term positive impact on the system. Renewal of counsellors should not be ritual but should be based on actual performance.
of counsellors. The university should effectively monitor their performance.

In order to make counselling sessions more interactive, the academic counsellors should be given practical training in the conduct of counselling sessions and in the writing of tutor comments.

New training strategies need to be developed by STRIDE. Also refresher courses in distance education methods need to be arranged for academic counsellors periodically to update their knowledge and information and sharpen their skills.
Open and Distance Learning in the Gobi Desert: Non-formal Education for Nomadic Women

Bernadette ROBINSON

(Note: the views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of UNESCO)

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Abstract

The use of open and distance learning for non-formal education is much less represented in the literature than for formal education. This paper provides a case study, grounded in practice, of the first open and distance learning project for non-formal education in Mongolia, a developing country undergoing rapid transition in the 1990s from a command to a market economy and from communism to a multi-party democracy. The paper outlines the project and its context, explains the rationale for it, and analyses its achievements, limitations and lessons. It also identifies the additional problems for ODE in a context of rapid economic transition.
Open and distance learning in the Gobi Desert: non-formal education for nomadic women

Bernadette Robinson

INTRODUCTION
Open and distance education (ODE) was introduced into Mongolia for the first time in the 1990s as a response to economic crisis and its social consequences. The 1990s saw sudden and dramatic changes in Mongolian life as the country changed rapidly from a centrally-planned command economy to a market economy, and from a single party communist state to a multi-party democracy. The impact on people's lives, whether in cities or in the countryside, was huge. It generated needs for new kinds of education outside the formal system, relating to everyday life for adults and young people alike and with few resources to finance them. As a consequence, ODE was introduced to Mongolia through donor-funded projects. Before these, ODE was unfamiliar and untried though there had been some small-scale 'self-learning' or correspondence courses in higher education. They seldom provided learning materials or correspondence tuition or learner support in the periods of time in between blocks of face-to-face teaching in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Concepts such as open learning, distance education, feedback, interaction, multimedia, learning objectives, learner support, in-text activities, self-assessment questions, learner-centred education and independent learner were all new and a Mongolian vocabulary for them did not exist. The various roles of teacher, tutor, facilitator, advisor, counsellor, coach mentor, instructor and lecturer were not differentiated in Mongolian education and language and so far lack a Mongolian terminology, all sharing the one word for 'teacher' (bagsh). Mongolia's isolation from the wider world outside of the Communist bloc before 1990 and lack of English language (Russian had been Mongolia's second language) meant that ODE concepts and literature were unfamiliar.

Mongolia's first experience of open and distance learning was for non-formal education (the Gobi Women's Project for 15,000 nomadic women in the Gobi Desert). Defining non-formal education is problematic, as the literature over a period of time shows (Coombs and Ahmed 1974; Coombs 1985; Carron and Carr-Hill 1991; Rogers 1992). Non-formal education has been described variously as an educational movement, a setting, a process and a system (Fordham 1980; Reed 1987; Khawaja and Brennan 1990). The projects and programmes implemented under the label of...
'non-formal education' are very diverse in scope. Coombs (1985) suggests that it is simply 'a handy generic label covering any organised, systematic, educational activity, carried on outside the framework of the formal system, to provide selected types of learning to particular sub-groups in the population, adults as well as children (Coombs and Ahmed 1974, p. 8).

This is in contrast to the institutionalised, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured nature of the formal education system (Carron and Carr-Hill 1991).

However the boundary between formal and non-formal education can sometimes be blurred, especially when certification enters into a non-formal education programme. A further difficulty of definition is added when non-formal education uses ODE approaches or combined media since programme providers may not think of them as 'open and distance learning'. So there are problems of criteria and classification relating to what counts as non-formal education or ODE.

Can the research literature provide clarification and analysis of the use of ODE for non-formal education? So far, the light it can throw is limited because the research base is small. Though many ODE projects for non-formal education have taken place, the number reported and analysed in the ODE literature is relatively few. As a survey for the Commonwealth of Learning (Dodds 1996) concludes, there is a shortage of information on how ODE is used in non-formal education and the information available tends to be scattered across many different sources, hard to find, poorly documented and sometimes in the form of uncritical reports of hearsay evidence. Since well-informed description is the first step towards analysis, this makes it difficult to draw sound generalisations about the use of ODE for non-formal education and to build theoretical models. There are several reasons for the lack of systematic documentation and analysis: the imperative of schedules and project pressures for implementers, an understandable preoccupation with operational delivery, a shortage of time and staff, insufficient expertise and capacity, failure to allocate resources to it and low levels of awareness about its importance until too late. The result is that the experience and lessons of many ODE projects for non-formal education go unrecorded.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to contribute a little to the literature on ODE for non-formal education though it will also indicate some typical gaps in data. The paper presents a case study of the Gobi Women's Project, providing an outline of the project, explaining the rationale for it, analysing its achievements, limitations and impact, and drawing some lessons. It also identifies the additional problems for projects located in contexts of rapid economic transition. The analysis in the paper is intentionally grounded in practice rather than theory, to concentrate on
giving a rich picture of the project itself, given the restrictions of length on a journal paper. The case study is based on several sources of information built up by the author over a period of time: a study of project documents in English and in Mongolian (translated into English); the evaluation of the project; field work in the Gobi Desert; a review of the learning materials and some observation of their use; interviews and meetings with project personnel at central and local levels and with many other stakeholders; and information gathered in the course of 25 working visits to Mongolia between 1994 and 1999 as consultant to this and other ODE projects (including the follow-on project to the Gobi Women's Project, the Surch Amidarya or Learning for Life project). The approach to the case study is largely qualitative because, like many similar projects, the records and data available did not permit much quantitative analysis to be made.

THE CONTEXT OF MONGOLIA

(H2) The country
Mongolia is a large landlocked country in central Asia, bordering on Russia to the north and the People's Republic of China to the west, east and south. With a population of 2.4 million in a country of 1.6 million square kilometres (half the size of India), Mongolia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. The average population density is 1.5 people per square kilometre, less in the Gobi Desert (for comparison, the population density is about 120 for China, 235 for the United Kingdom and 2.3 for Australia). The population is 52.4 percent urban (half of these live in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar) and 47.5 percent rural, and half is under the age of 20. About a third of the rural population (371,100) live in provincial or district centres; the remaining two-thirds (764,100) live a nomadic or semi-nomadic life based on animal husbandry (NSO, 1997). The climate is dry and extreme, with long cold winters. The terrain varies between desert (the Gobi), the steppes, mountains and forests. The country has a weak infrastructure, with limited telecommunications, variable electricity supply and few surfaced roads (further detail can be found in Robinson 1995 and Aabenhus and Kenworthy 1996). Literacy levels were high up to the start of transition (97 percent overall, 95.7 percent for females), a legacy of socialist policy and high levels of government investment in education, resulting in almost universal basic education.

(H2) Economic and social transition
In 1924 Mongolia was the second country in the world to become communist. Seventy years of communism saw a huge improvement in the country's economic development, health and education, for the rural population as well as the urban.
During this period the agricultural economy was transformed into one with an industrial sector (about 50 percent of the economy), producing semi-processed raw materials (mainly copper and cashmere). A peaceful overthrow of the government in 1990 led to elections and a democratic constitution in 1992. Until 1990, Mongolia had a close affiliation with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Soviet subsidy contributed 30 percent of Mongolia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the collapse of the USSR resulted in two major economic blows: the withdrawal of the Soviet subsidy and the demise of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), Mongolia’s main trading partners. Since 1990, Mongolia has undergone a rapid transition to a market economy. During this period, inflation rose sharply (to a peak of 325 percent in 1992) and annual GDP per capita fell to 394 US dollars, one of the lowest in the world (World Bank, 1998).

The social costs of transition have been high, borne unevenly by different groups within Mongolia’s population (Harper 1994; UNDP 1996). Social inequality has grown. Unemployment has appeared and social indicators such as school enrolment, maternal and infant mortality have declined (Wu 1994; SSO 1995). Poverty, a new phenomenon in Mongolia after 1990, rose rapidly and it is estimated that at least 36 percent of the population now lives below the national poverty line (World Bank 1998). As a result of economic problems and cuts in health and social welfare services, the position of women in Mongolia has deteriorated in a society with previously high levels of gender equity, higher than in many other Asian countries (Robinson and Solongo 1999). Up to 1990, literacy rates for females were only slightly lower than for males, school participation rates were similar, a high level of child-care and social services were provided in order to enable women to work, free health care was available at rural centres, generous maternity leave was available throughout the country, employment for men and women alike was guaranteed by the state, pay levels for males and females were similar and women’s representation in the Mongolian parliament (the Great Hural) and other bodies was ensured by a quota system. From 1990 onwards, social services and benefits were cut, the health service contracted, cost-sharing was introduced for education, employment was no longer guaranteed and women’s ability to participate in the labour market diminished as a result of reductions in social welfare and childcare services. As in other transitional economies women have been more likely to lose their jobs with the privatisation of state enterprises and to earn lower pay for equivalent jobs. Quotas for female participation in political decision-making have been removed.

The year of 1992, when planning began for the Gobi Women’s Project (GWP), was a particularly difficult one with acute economic crises, food rationing and great uncertainty about the future. At the time, the most vulnerable group in Mongolian
society was identified as nomadic and rural women in the Gobi Desert, especially those who were single heads of households—a category which is disproportionately high among those below the poverty line in many countries. For this reason, the Gobi Women’s Project targeted rural and nomadic women, thus anticipating government policy for targeted support for women through the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (1996).

GOBI LIFE

(H2) The context of the learners
The Gobi Desert occupies the southern third of Mongolia. Although barren looking, the Gobi has enough sparse pasture to support herds of animals. Life is hard in the Gobi, particularly in the winter. As Gobi people say, ‘In winter we struggle to survive and the rest of the year we struggle to prepare for winter.’ Many herders live up to 100 kilometres from a district centre (or sum, a settlement of 200-500 families) where, in the past, free services had been provided in education, health, veterinary assistance, administration, and cultural and sports activities. Herders’ families move up to ten or more times a year, a distance of 10-50 kilometres each time, living in gers (circular white felt tents) in encampments of 14 families scattered over very large areas. The average family size is 4.5. Sheep, cashmere goats, yaks, cattle, camels and horses are used for wool, for milking, meat, skins and transport. Animal dung is used for fuel and candles for light though a few families along the Chinese border now have small generators acquired through barter for cashmere wool. Income comes more from barter than from cash which constitutes only 30 percent of rural income (Bruun 1996). Until the 1990s, nearly all herder’s children went to boarding schools in the nearest district centre so basic education was accessible, compulsory and provided by the state. This resulted in an educated nomadic population and in every family there was at least one member with eight years or more of formal education. Since transition began, high drop out rates from schools have appeared (particularly for rural boys whose labour is important to herding families) and illiteracy is growing.

(H2) Changes in nomadic life
For nomadic herders, the change from state management of herds as collectives to private ownership was a major one. Privatisation brought new hardships as well as new opportunities. In the past, the herders’ standard of living was secure under a socialist regime. Herds were organised in collectives of single species, regular wages were paid irrespective of productivity, manufactured goods and services were supplied free, and disasters to livestock were cushioned by the state (Goldstein, and
Beall 1994). By 1995, 95 per cent of all livestock was in private hands and herders’ work took on a different pattern. Families acquired their own mixed herds, needing more complex management and more labour. Households became responsible for producing their own goods, obtaining services, and marketing their products. It resulted in a larger increase in the daily workload of women than for men (Robinson and Solongo 1999).

The decrease in free and local services created immediate needs on a large scale for greater self-reliance, more information, the generation of income, the learning of new skills and the revival of skills lost or discouraged during the socialist period. Much of what was previously bought or supplied by the state had now to be made or bought out of income. As one Gobi woman (Nasandulam) described it:

Shortage of money is a new thing ... in the past the state sent money to all Gobi countryside people and we could buy clothes ready-made in the store and buy fuel ... now we need to make them both’ (interview with author, August 1995).

Information became harder to get in the countryside as newspapers and other reading materials became scarce. A severe paper shortage added to the problems, decreasing the supply of reading materials to a highly literate population. A new concern became the maintenance of literacy levels. In addition, access to information by radio reduced. Though every family had been required by law under the communist regime to possess a working radio, the Russian-manufactured radios were getting old and replacement parts and batteries were unobtainable or unaffordable. Television was only available in large settlements and very few families had one.

This setting presented a number of challenges for open and distance education: a very sparse and mobile population scattered over large areas, a weak communications and transport infrastructure, lack of electricity in people’s homes (gers), diminishing access to radio, limited media options, scarcity of financial resources and all kinds of goods including paper, a state-owned printing house with no competitors, unfamiliarity with the ideas and practice of open and distance education and a strong tradition of teacher-dependency in education. Nonetheless, the scope for using ODE was considerable (Robinson 1995; Aabenhus and Kenworthy 1996).

THE GOBI WOMENS PROJECT
The Gobi Women’s Project (GWP), initiated in 1992 and begun in 1993, was a three-way partnership between DANIDA (Danish International Development Assistance), UNESCO and the Mongolian Government. The project had two main aims: to develop national capacity in non-formal education and ODE and to assist Gobi
women to survive the sudden changes affecting their lives (through providing access to information and knowledge, changing attitudes and developing skills for self-reliance and income-generation).

DANIDA funded the project with a grant of US$ 1.4 million and UNESCO implemented it together with the Government of Mongolia which provided some resources, logistical and institutional support and the personnel. There was also some limited financial contribution from the World Council of Churches. DANIDA funds re-equipped local radio stations, financed materials development and provided radios and batteries for learners, jeeps and petrol, technical assistance, training and 39 tonnes of paper, among other things. The project operated in the six Gobi provinces of Dornogobi, Omnogobi, Bayanhongor, Gobi Altai, Overhangai and Dundgobi.

The project faced four major challenges:

- how to meet rural women’s new needs for information, know-how and skills;
- how to reach large numbers of learners scattered over vast distances with limited transport and a weak communications infrastructure;
- how to create a decentralised framework of adult non-formal education for people accustomed to centralised planning and control and a norm of formal education;
- how to develop a learning system, curriculum and materials appropriate for nomadic women’s lives, customs and culture.

**Needs analysis**

The starting point for project planning was a needs analysis carried out by a social anthropologist in three of the six Gobi provinces in 1992 (Bond, 1992). This involved key stakeholders: provincial and district officials, community leaders, and 142 families. The purpose was to find out what the ‘basic learning needs’ were and to learn more about the lives of the women. From this, the main areas for content were identified: livestock rearing techniques and processing of animal products; family care (family planning, health, nutrition, and hygiene); literacy support; survival skills; income-generation using locally available raw materials; and basic business knowledge for a new market economy. As well as identifying content, this study helped to shape an appropriate model of non-formal education and ODE which fitted the life-style and circumstances of nomadic women, using existing resources where possible. It also raised local interest in the project.

**Preparation phase**

The first two years of the project were spent on three main tasks: establishing an administrative infrastructure and planning the logistics; developing a viable learning system; preparing materials and training people for different roles. New ideas about adult learning were introduced. An organisational structure was set up with
committees at national, provincial and district levels. This rested on existing administrative structures established during communism and used key officials in provinces and districts. The provincial coordinating committees had 711 members with a variety of expertise (local officials, doctors, veterinarians, accountants, school teachers and managers, and members of other organisations, such as the Women’s Federation). The district coordinating committees were similar. There was a regular system of reporting from these to the centre, reflecting practices from former days. The central National Coordinating Commission (NCC) was based in the Ministry of Science, Technology, Education and Culture (MOSTEC) in Ulaanbaatar. Members came from MOSTEC, the National Institute of Educational Studies, Mongol Radio, the Women’s Federation and other organisations. The NCC’s role was to steer and coordinate the overall functioning of the project. It also monitored progress, controlled finance, carried out formative evaluations and liaised with other bodies. A core group within the NCC conducted the daily implementation of the programme and included the two leaders of the print and radio production groups.

Collaboration was established with the state-owned Mongol Radio in Ulaanbaatar, where a new project radio studio was installed. Three provincial radio studios (Gobi Altai, Omnogobi and Dornogobi) were re-equipped and training provided for producers and technicians (these three radio stations reached all six provinces). International consultants and technical assistants from UNESCO, Australia, Denmark, the United Kingdom and the USA worked with Mongolian counterparts in Ulaanbaatar to develop the print and radio ‘lessons’ and to provide training and technical assistance. A teacher-training programme was developed and local tutors (visiting teachers) were trained, using a cascade model together with a printed tutor guide. Local teacher trainers were selected to supervise the visiting teachers.

(H2) The pilot phase
The pilot phase took place from January to May 1995, for 1,500 nomadic women from 10 districts. Its purpose was to test the model and refine it for the main phase of the project. Russian Jeeps (14) were distributed to the six provinces, partly to enable the visiting teachers to reach learners in their gers. Women learners were selected by local committees to participate. Radios (240) and batteries were distributed since 20 per cent of the target group did not have working radios or batteries and could not obtain or afford them. Supplies of anything were very scarce in Mongolia at his time. The pilot programme began with a 3-day ‘crash’ course in district centres, when women received booklets, writing materials (pens and paper), batteries and radios, and met their visiting teachers. Five booklets and 17 radio programmes were produced by the central project team. The pilot was evaluated by the project team and findings used in planning the main phase of the project.
The main phase
The main phase began in January 1996 and ran for one complete cycle, finishing in December 1996. It involved 15,000 women, aged 15-45 years, in 62 districts in the six Gobi provinces. At the end of the project they were given a certificate of participation. They were supported by 620 visiting teachers who worked on a voluntary basis without pay (a legacy of attitudes developed during the socialist period). More materials were produced and distributed, more radio programmes were prepared and transmitted, and the logistics of co-ordinating and managing became more complex and demanding. The pattern of activity was similar to that of the pilot phase. Radios (2,040) and batteries (40,800) were distributed to those needing them. Centrally-produced booklets (21) were distributed from Ulaanbaatar, usually by jeep to district centres (taking 1-7 weeks to reach learners). Weekly radio programmes were broadcast from Ulaanbaatar and from the three provincial studios. A total of 30 Russian jeeps were provided for project activities.

Supplementary materials were produced at the local level and a variety of local initiatives were taken. One was the creation of a travelling box’in Bayanhongor province). This contained resource materials which visiting teachers could take with them on visits or send round their groups, and was a means for learners to exchange letters with their visiting teachers. Visiting teachers, each responsible for about 15 learners, travelled round mainly by horse, camel or occasionally motobike.

Learning materials were created both centrally and locally. Printed booklets were made on topics such as family planning, making camel saddles and Mongoldeels (traditional garments), making milk and meat products, bread and sweet making, fuel production from animal dung, leather processing, feltmaking for boots and gers, vegetable-growing, recycling used clothing, civics and the law, and setting up small businesses. Literacy support booklets were provided on Mongolian fairy tales, mathematics and the environment (used mainly with the children in nomadic families).

At the local level, newsletters and information sheets were produced as well as teachers’ booklets, demonstration materials and visual aids for skills development.

The intended role for radio was to support the booklets, though in practice this was not always achieved (while radio programmes went out on schedule the printed booklets did not). Two programmes were broadcast regularly from Ulaanbaatar: Sunrise’a half-hour general programme, and Shortcut’, in support of literacy (both repeated). Local radio programmes were broadcast once a week, with strong local relevance and topicality. Reception was generally good and the programmes were popular though the amount of local broadcasting was heavily restricted by strict state legislation implemented by Mongol Radio.
The different uses of national and provincial radio within the project was explained by Oyensuren, a junior doctor in a provincial centre. She worked 3-4 hours each week with the project, preparing and presenting radio programmes, writing articles for the local newsletter, attending meetings of the Provincial Coordinating Committee and visiting women in their gers as part of her medical work.

Ulaanbaatar programmes are designed for general information ... I can give specific things which they want to know ... I am very close to our women and I can give them particular advice ... we can respond very quickly to the problems they identify ... they often write to give their reactions to programme and to ask for more on some topics, for example, how to treat sunstroke or accidents from riding horses (interview with author, August 1996).

Oyensuren’s special interest was women’s health and family planning (before 1991, there was no state-provided family planning other than abortion). She thought her best programme was on ‘How to take care of young girls’, a completely new topic in Gobi life:

this topic can help to make the next generation of women more healthy ... under socialism we didn’t touch such problems because it was somehow a prohibited topic and some mothers and girls were too shy to talk to each other (interview with author, August 1996).

Learner support was provided through visiting teachers, local meetings and ‘crash courses’ at in district centres. Small information centres, which also served as meeting places, were set up in provincial and district centres. These contained a set of project booklets and other learning materials, information leaflets, posters, and a radio (sometimes with an audio-cassette player). The room also housed occasional exhibitions of project crafts and products and served as a base for the visiting teachers and teacher-trainers. In some there were maps displayed of the area, showing where learners’ gers were located, and charts of learners’ progress through the materials (a result of individual teacher initiative rather than a planned part of the system). Learning groups provided an opportunity for tutoring and demonstration, skill coaching and exchange of experience and news and social interaction, often with some singing (a constant feature of Mongolian gatherings). Interactivity was provided at the local level rather than across distance. Visiting teachers were an important link in the system, providing feedback to provincial and district coordinating committees, and identifying new learning needs, some of which could be responded to locally.
Gobi women
Gobi women took part in the project in a variety of roles: as learners, teacher-trainers, visiting teachers, radio journalists, writers and members of the coordinating committees. The following illustrations are selected from a large number of interviews conducted by the author in five of the six Gobi project provinces in 1996.

(H2) Javzandulam
Javzandulam was typical of many of the learners who took part in the project. She was 37 years old and lived in a ger in Omnogobi with her husband and three children (a boy and two girls, all under the age of 13). They owned a mixed herd of 120 animals, acquired after the privatisation of livestock in 1994. Their aim was to increase the herd since you can't have too many animals’. Javzandulam had completed seven years of schooling in a state boarding school. She had a long working day (longer since the privatisation of livestock) so time for study was difficult to find. She got up before her husband, at 5 am in the summer, later in the winter. First she lit the dung-stove, then went out to milk the animals before making breakfast for her family. If occasionally this caused her to miss the project’s radio broadcast her husband listened and took notes for her. She spent part of each morning boiling milk and preparing milk products such as cheese and yoghurt, some of which were dried in the sun for later use. Before preparing a midday meal of boiled mutton soup, flour noodles, cheese and steamed bread she collected and stacked animal dung for fuel.

In the afternoons she looked after the younger animals and sometimes set off on her horse to move the herds to new grazing (though mostly her son did that job). The animals needed milking again during the day, at different intervals depending on the species. In any time left over she made harnesses for animals out of camel wool and traditional boots out of felt made from sheep fleeces. She also mended and recycled clothes and sewed household articles, often embroidering them with traditional Mongolian designs. She prepared the evening meal quite late, by candlelight. Until 1991, she could get ready-made foods, fuel supplies and batteries in the store at the district centre and had allowances as a member of a state collective. Then, the district centre met all her needs, providing services free—health, veterinary assistance, maternity care, sports events and concerts. All this changed after transition began. The new skills and knowledge she had acquired and nearly all of her available reading materials were a result of participating in the project.

(H2) Darimaa
Darimaa was a teacher-trainer and visiting teacher in Omnogobi, responsible for 10 visiting teachers in her district. Her travels to learners took her on journeys of 200-
300 kilometres by horse and because of distance and lack of free time, she was not able to visit learners twice a month as recommended. Apart from this work, she had a full-time job. She was the director of a district school (Grades 1-8, with 306 pupils). She had four children, two away at university in Ulaanbaatar, one in secondary school, and one in kindergarten. She was also Chairperson of the District Women's Council. She described the reasons for taking on this extra work as follows:

I know how countryside women have problems now and I wanted to help ... I can see the project is really beneficial ... the women can make clothes and other clothes ... they can't buy clothes in shops now ... and they can sell some of the clothes they make through the Women's Council (interview with author, September 1996).

(H2) Magvan and Batbayar
A visiting teacher, Magvan (a 50 year old teacher of Arts and Crafts in a district secondary school) thought the best thing about the project was its effect on the women:

they're learning by themselves from the booklets ... they're able to cooperate and to share knowledge and skills ... they teach each other and help when the book is hard to understand. In my lessons the women have learned how to make shoes and boots out of felt and second-hand materials, so they don't have to buy them any more (interview with author, August 1996).

Another visiting teacher, Batbayar in Bayanhongor, emphasised the social benefits:

It's given these women a new life ... they didn't have these opportunities before ... they like to be together now and to do things as a group ... they've become really good friends and are not so isolated ... they ride between 4 and 12 kilometres to meet each other ... they really share what they know and that's new (interview with author, July 1996).

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS
At the macro-level, the project introduced new educational ideas to Mongolia about lifelong education, non-formal education, and open and distance learning. It demonstrated that ODE was possible in a country which presented considerable obstacles of distance and infrastructure and it provided a model and experience of a new form of teaching and learning. In the course of this, it implemented a decentralised education programme in a country which was accustomed to highly centralised educational provision and control. It also acted as a catalyst for
government policy development for non-formal education. At the micro-level, in terms of learners, women and their families benefited from the knowledge and skills gained, the goods made for their own use or sale, access to information and social interaction. A range of skills was developed through the use of printed booklets which acted as how to ‘guides’, together with demonstrations and coaching by visiting tutors, peer exchange at informal small group gatherings, and radio programmes which gave advice and reports of learners’ achievements to act as encouraging models.

A strength of the project was the flowering of activity at the local level. There were three reasons for this: a resource of educated, literate and skilled people in rural areas, a legacy of communist policy; the realisation that with the demise of central state services, self-reliance was essential; and the support framework and mobilising of effort by the central team. Local activity took on a dynamic of its own, initiating, supplementing and adapting the programme to fit local circumstances and at times rescuing the failures of the centre. It created strong local ownership of the programme and a demand for more. Many Gobi people gave freely of their time and limited personal resources to make the project successful though this might not have continued in the longer term without financial reward.

Though income-generation was the goal, income-stretching was more often achieved, perhaps because the timescale was too short for income-generation to develop in a society unused to the notions and practices of a market economy. However the women developed better survival skills and use of resources as well as knowledge and confidence. In terms of learning outcomes the range and quality of the crafts and products displayed at the final evaluation event in Ulaanbaatar (November 1996) was impressive and demonstrated a variety of skills learnt, though no systematic or direct assessment was attempted of other kinds of learning achievement. Changes in attitudes were widely reported:

The project helped Gobi women to understand how to survive ... it showed them the importance of learning .. not to wait for someone else to help them but to help themselves (District Governor, Omnogobi, interview with author, September 1996).

There were many anecdotal reports of new levels of confidence in nomadic women. Some began to trade, for example, exchanging a camel saddle they had learnt to make for a camel or two sheep. They also became more articulate in defining their own needs and learning agendas, asking for information about cashmere wool processing, or dyeing animal skins, or spinning wool for knitting, or about the new laws on herdsmen’s rights. Women wrote in to the radio stations (a new thing) with questions and requests for programmes on specific topics, for example, first aid, or how to
make cosmetics from local products or plants, or how to make a family tree (an important document in Mongolian nomadic tradition and selection of marriage partners). This was very different from the situation described in the initial needs analysis study, where there was a universal inability to suggest topics of interest or areas of learning needs. In all probability this was another manifestation of unquestioning teacher-dependent learning strategies (Bond 1992).

(H2) Factors contributing to success
A number of factors contributed to the achievements of the project.

• A careful and thorough needs analysis of the learners and their contexts, informing the design of an appropriate learning system.
• The reach and availability of at least one medium, radio.
• A high level of interaction and collaboration between the central project team and the six provinces, despite distance and communication difficulties.
• Strong ownership and active leadership at the local level.
• An educated human resource and high levels of literacy in remote places.
• Few other competing options on offer, a climate of uncertainty and wide perception of the project as relevant.
• Scope and resources in the project design for the local creation of materials in response to local needs.
• Confidence about project funding in an unpredictable financial environment.
• Appropriate technical assistance.
• Goodwill and voluntary service at the local level, particularly by the visiting teachers.
• A culturally appropriate form of support which facilitated social interaction.
• A tradition and liking for competition between provinces and districts, so that they competed to be the best or to introduce local innovations.
• A strong administrative infrastructure extending to the most local level (a legacy of communist administration which had high levels of control over the population, including nomadic families).
• The high status given by the Mongolian stakeholders to an international (UNESCO) project as Mongolia opened up to the world.
• Support from other organisations, including those with local networks (such as the Women’s Federation).
• Tangible incentives (jeeps, radios and batteries, per diem payments for attendance at meetings, training opportunities, study tours for some project staff.
• A culturally-rooted respect for learning and education.
(H2) **Problems and limitations**

As with any project there were some problems and limitations, both internal and external to the project.

- Inadequate training and technical assistance in curriculum design and materials development were provided for the project team and the demands and skill levels needed for creating self-study texts were under-estimated. As a result, self-study print materials appeared more like short information pamphlets, lacking the typical features of self-instructional materials (though more accessible to readers than the customary textbooks). They varied very widely in quality and there were few quality assurance procedures operating in the process of print development and production. The volume of print produced was relatively small in relation to the time and resources available.

- The production and delivery of printed materials was often late to the extent that booklets for a topic reached learners months after the related radio programmes had been broadcast and in the case of the final booklet, did not reach learners at all. This was due to a combination of factors: inexperience, insufficient training, and weak management of people and schedules within the print group. External factors included the late delivery of paper from overseas suppliers and no tradition of contracts within the country (for example, with the printers or individuals).

- Weak teamwork, inexperience and strong inter-personal rivalry and conflicts resulted in a lack of co-ordination between print and radio groups. This resulted in poor integration of print materials with radio programmes and created major planning problems for the central and regional radio producers who could not get enough advance information about print plans and delivery schedules.

- An imbalance in the needs-analysis knowledge base led to some significant omissions or lost opportunities in the creation of materials. While the project’s initial needs-analysis study was strong in terms of learner-identified needs, the project sometimes took too little account of needs identified by others (such as the Ministry of Health).

- Confusion between the advisory and executive roles of the National Coordinating Commission resulted in a lack of formal accountability, clear line management and some conflict of interests. Clearer separation was needed.

- The management style, practices and skills of a command system, which had been highly authoritarian in nature, left managers unaccustomed to delegating decision-making and responsibility, or to consulting and sharing information and working in collaborative teams. This sometimes resulted in bottlenecks while
decisions were awaited or in lack of co-ordination as decisions by senior managers were made in isolation from each other and not communicated to others concerned.

• Bureaucratic and slow practices in the international agency (UNDP) dealing with the ordering of equipment, supplies and processing of funds to the project slowed down project activities at times and delayed delivery of equipment and supplies. This caused some project deadlines to be missed.

• Out-of-date evaluation approaches reflected the old-style monitoring, control and reporting mechanisms of a socialist state, inspecting rather than evaluating in a formative way. Though some formative evaluation was done, it tended to be patchy and unsystematic, and was only partially successful in feeding back into the project to initiate improvements.

• Effective management, control and accountability were difficult across distance and with poor communications. While local initiative was encouraged, it also meant that there were problems in ensuring that the things planned were implemented. For example, there was inadequate access to the jeeps by those for whom they were intended (a feature of many projects), thus restricting the role of visiting teachers; and the radios and batteries provided did not always reach the most needy for whom they were intended.

• The assessment of learning outcomes received little attention in project plans and this made it difficult to judge learner progress or to substantiate project claims and impact. Baseline studies were not planned or conducted as part of the project's design so it is difficult to produce evidence of what was learnt. Learning from the materials was not systematically evaluated so evidence for claims of effectiveness was partial.

• Unsystematic record-keeping and data-management by the central team handicapped project management and limited the analysis of project activities and project knowledge about its own performance. At the local level some detailed records were kept (again a legacy of communist practice) but not always of an appropriate kind or consistent in form among provinces, and not incorporated in a centralised database. A central database for managing the project and for tracking activities was not set up. This led to gaps in the quantitative data available on the project: for example, demographic data on learners, the number of learners who participated throughout and to what extent, the provision and take-up of different materials and services, and provincial and district variation, and so on.
• The achievement of original objectives varied in extent but was difficult to judge on the basis of evidence available, though there was no doubt about the widespread enthusiasm and esteem for the project. In terms of the literacy component, its role turned out to be less than planned. Information about literacy levels and needs in Mongolia was out-of-date and there was a shortage of in-country expertise in modern approaches to literacy, so the small amount of materials produced were not well-targeted.

• Gender issues within the project did not receive much explicit attention. For example, some materials for rural women were written inappropriately by urban men (demonstrating less knowledge and familiarity with country matters than the women learners — a complaint which was voiced by some rural women). Some male officials were appointed to be visiting tutors but could not then discuss the family planning booklet with female learners (it was culturally inappropriate) or teach learners how to use a crochet hook or knitting needles. The obverse of this was that some of the male visiting teachers had skills that the female visiting teachers lacked, but there was no system for sharing visits as a team. Male visiting teachers who were also local officials tended to treat the visits as ‘inspection visits’ rather than tutoring or counselling visits.

• Though income and expenditure were accounted for and audited in accordance with the requirements of the government and implementing agency, records were not kept in ways which permitted a cost analysis of the project as an ODE one. All inputs were not identified and costed (for example, the contributions of resources by provinces and districts, ‘free’ time by visiting teachers and their subsidising of their own travel costs and teaching materials). So the conclusions that can be drawn about the costs and cost-effectiveness of the programme were limited as a result.

• Collaboration with other agencies brought tensions as well as benefits. For example, the Women’s Federation with its national administrative network was a valuable resource but its previous political affiliation to communism undermined its credibility and it was challenged by other newer women’s groups, putting the project in a difficult position in trying to work with all.

The basis of a model?

Does the above analysis allow any generalisable lessons or model-building for non-formal education projects using open and distance learning in developing countries? A number of lessons from this project are evident in the lists above, so will not be repeated here. These can provide some guidance or pointers to planners. Some key areas for attention by both planners and researchers are:
• the importance of a thorough needs-analysis study, to assist project planning and
design and understanding of learners;
• the need to design and establish a framework of data collection and record-
keeping from the start, for purposes of project management, documenting
activities and formative and summative evaluation.
• the need to address in a systematic way the issue of assessment of learning in non-
formal education projects which do not have examinations or testing as part of
them;
• the need for cost data and cost models which would permit analysis of costs and
cost-effectiveness appropriate for ODE programmes;
• the important influence of contextual factors misunderstanding how non-formal
education through ODE works.

However, to go further than tentative guidelines needs more research, both of a
comparative kind and in relation to theoretical propositions. There are several sets of
complexities which need to be taken into account and it can be misleading to make
easy generalisations. For example, the term developing countries covers a wide
range of economic, social, political and educational differences— some of the
features of the Mongolian context described earlier will not be found in all developing
countries.

INTRODUCING ODE IN TRANSITIONAL ECONOMIES

In addition to the challenges to ODE described earlier, the features of a society in
rapid economic and social transition added some more.

• The rapidly changing economic and legislative environment was difficult to keep
pace with and at times ran faster than the preparation time needed for materials
development. It also destabilised some of the operational structures and
administration on which a project relies. Such pace of change tends to encourage
crisis management and piecemeal, sudden decision making on an everyday basis
and needs good capacity for contingency planning and management.
• The changing circumstances and lifestyles of learners required that the relevance
of plans, materials and support services needed to be re-checked more often and
re-aligned to the changing realities.
• Many of the changes were outside of the project’s control (for example, changing
legislation, high inflation rates changes in government, policies, personnel and
structures). The responsiveness of the project team and flexibility in planning and
strategy were therefore important but faced two problems in particular. One was
that previous political and organisational systems did not prepare people well for this kind of flexible planning, implementation and decision-making. The second was that international projects are often constrained by initial agreements, contracts and reporting requirements by the partners involved — donors too are bound by their own practices, procedures and accountability mechanisms which may be made with a different set of assumptions about the project environment.

- The media most able to respond quickly to changing circumstances were particularly valuable. Radio proved very effective in providing topical programmes and in reaching large numbers of learners rapidly though economic problems limited access. Print production is less speedy, especially when producers are novices, learning new skills and practices, and with little access to computer technology. Different approaches to organising print production, rather than lengthy linear sequences, might have been more appropriate (and might have been possible if more technical assistance had been provided).

- Privatisation and deregulation are a feature of the transition to a market economy. In the case of media such as radio, proposals for privatisation, deregulation and cost-recovery created high levels of uncertainty and a changing environment. This problem has become more acute in the follow-on project (Suraj Amidarya, Learning for Life).

Within the period of the project, a number of transitions in education took place (summarised in Figure 1).
CONCLUSIONS

The Gobi Women’s Project was the first major step towards establishing open and distance education in Mongolia and was effective in addressing the educational needs of a vulnerable sector of the population (rural and nomadic women). While the project had its limitations it also achieved significant shifts in understanding and practice in relation to non-formal education and ODE. It met new educational needs in an innovative way and achieved a great deal in a relatively short time, given the starting point and conditions. Unlike many other non-formal education projects, it has been influential in policy development.
The vehicle for establishing ODE in Mongolia was the donor-funded development project. This approach has both advantages and disadvantages, as experience elsewhere shows. On the one hand it can introduce innovation and bypass the inertia of traditional systems within a relatively short timescale. It can focus on limited goals and identified needs, build new capacity, demonstrate new approaches and bring up-to-date international experience to bear on the development. On the other hand, projects may come and go leaving barely a ripple on the pool of educational change. Distance education projects, especially for non-formal education, may remain marginalised from the mainstream of policy and resource allocation, or may fail to institutionalise or move to scale or influence traditional thinking. The time span of projects may also be too short to establish new structures, systems, practices and attitudes, especially if they only run for one cycle, as many donor-funded projects do. A one-cycle project gives implementers no time to consolidate learning from the experience or to do better next time round, and project personnel are often dispersed at the project’s close. Donor timelines for projects tend to be too short to match the slow process of educational change and projects may be unsustainable in the longer term, with activities coming to a halt with the expiry date of the project.

Was the Gobi Women’s Project sustainable? Some of the activities continued in some provinces after the project ended, to a limited extent — a result of local commitment and individual initiatives. However, in the main, it was not sustainable after project funding finished, because of the very limited availability of resources for education within the country and competing demands on them. The way forward has been another externally-funded project (again funded mainly by DANIDA and implemented by UNESCO), extending the scope of non-formal education and the span of ODE's reach. The experience of the Gobi Women’s Project and lessons learned from its evaluation (Robinson 1996) were used to shape the follow-on project (Surch Amidarya, ‘Learning for Life’) for 31,000 rural families and 6,000 marginalised youth in urban centres (1997–2000). At the same time, government support for non-formal education has developed in parallel. Partly as a result of the Gobi Women’s Project and its successor project, new national policy and law for non-formal education developed. The first national seminar on non-formal education was held in Ulaanbaatar in 1996 and in the same year, the Government approved a National Programme for Non-Formal Education 1996–2000, with the goal of developing a national non-formal education system. In 1997, a Non-Formal Education Centre was formally established within MOSTEC though with minimal funding. A senior ministry official was given responsibility for non-formal education and local officers were appointed in each province. Some funding allocation was earmarked within education budgets at provincial level in
1997; though this was only a small amount (about one percent of provincial education budgets at best) it should be considered against the acute shortage of funds for schools. Its significance is that it backed policy with some resources, however minimal.

Other projects using ODE have followed. In November 1998, the first National Round Table on Distance Education was held in Ulaanbaatar and a draft national policy for ODE in Mongolia was prepared at the beginning of 1999. The two main obstacles facing the further expansion of open and distance education in Mongolia are lack of finance in a country with acute economic problems and limitations of infrastructure. Despite these obstacles, open and distance education is becoming part of the educational landscape of Mongolia in a relatively short time, a change led so far by non-formal education.
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4 Tuition

Main Themes: What is tuition? The diversity of tasks which may be carried out by staff designated as 'tutors'. The tutorial role of the tutor. Learner perceptions about tuition. Monitoring the performance of tutors and the quality of correspondence tuition. Unreliability in script grading. The importance of tutor comments on assignments and their role in learning. Criteria in assessing quality in tutor commenting and the correspondence role more generally. Face to face tuition and the different forms it can take. Measuring attendance at sessions and the student user rate.

'Tuition' is used here to refer to course-related teaching/support provided by an individual for a particular learner or group of learners who are also using prepared materials as a resource. The tuition may take a variety of forms but is usually focused on facilitating the learning of a known group of learners not on replacing the materials. It usually involves a local tutor with whom learners are in direct (if infrequent) contact, whose role may be defined variously, for example, as interpreting course materials, enriching course content, diagnosing learning problems, helping with study skills and practical activities. The overlap with counselling may be more or less encouraged, depending on the kind of system set up, but counselling issues are treated separately here, in chapter 5.

What tutors actually do again varies widely, and they may have different titles in different systems - trainer, tutor-counsellor, learning advisor, teacher, and so on. However there are a number of major topics in tuition evaluation which provide a general introduction to the area -- the tutor role, correspondence tuition and face to face tuition at workshops, resource centres and so on.

The role of the tutor

In systems like the Open University which commit very large amounts of resource to the design and presentation of multi-media
packages, the question 'what is the role of the tutor?' has been from the beginning a focus of interest, research and development, particularly among regional staff and tutors themselves. The University has of course designated the role of the tutor in its staff development materials, and orientated it towards the facilitation of learning, especially for new learners, with perhaps more emphasis on a remedial role after the first year, when it is hoped that learners will be increasingly independent in their approach. However there has also been evaluation of the role that tutors actually do play at the OU and in a variety of open learning systems. During 1983-84, researchers from the Industrial Training Research Unit, (sponsored by the then Manpower Services Commission) reported on the role of the tutor in the OU and in 27 vocationally oriented open learning courses: 14 in colleges, nine in companies and four

Figure 4.1: The main tasks of a tutor for the Kingston Open Learning Action Project for Industrial Supervisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks of Tutor</th>
<th>Tasks of Tutor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- monitor and evaluate effect of training on work environment</td>
<td>- identify and present learning blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- negotiate and engage learners</td>
<td>- support and develop learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- provide feedback</td>
<td>- plan, author and deliver course materials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2: The main tasks of an Open University tutor
The title open learning 'tutor' therefore can cover a very wide range of tasks, some of which have little to do with tuition, though they may influence how the tutorial role is carried out. This is summarised in figure 3.

However, whatever the job specification of tutors on different schemes, the facilitation of learning is often specified as at the core of tuition specifically. The components of this role are also varied, and not all schemes involve all of those shown in figure 4 below. One of the key optional areas for example is the counselling/guidance area, which may be provided independently of the tutor in some schemes, or not at all.

Table 4.1: Tutor responses on a selection of issues concerning their role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you involved in the preparation of learning materials for this scheme?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you involved with students before they undertake the course?</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you arrange tutorials?</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are you expected to be available?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at all times</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at all times at work</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by appointment</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the telephone</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have to set assignments?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you responsible for marking assignments?</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you keep records?</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you responsible for evaluating/monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) the students</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) the course</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Industrial Training Research Unit survey of tutors on vocationally oriented open learning courses.

Figure 4.3: A range of tasks which may be carried out by open learning tutors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Skills/Knowledge required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation with business organisations</td>
<td>Understanding of business organisation and practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection and adaption of existing materials</td>
<td>Understanding of OL databases and course materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of OL materials</td>
<td>Content of qualifying syllabus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-course counselling (determining Knowledge of open learning material learning needs and assessment of available.</td>
<td>Skill in assessment, counselling ability and potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Course counselling</td>
<td>Knowledge of career paths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Includes material from a table in Clarke, Costello and Wright, (1985 p.43).

Figure 4.4: Component tasks of tuition in Open Learning

![Diagram showing component tasks of tuition in Open Learning](image-url)
Learner perceptions of tuition

The role of tuition and the tutor within distance open learning has been explored in an OU project which surveyed over 5,000 students studying a variety of post-foundation courses, i.e. these students had already studied at least one foundation course at minimum, and many had studied and passed several other courses as well. They were asked to comment on their tuition on the course just completed, and on their experience of tuition in general. Kelly and Swift (1983)

The questionnaire used a five point rating scale to explore reactions to the provision of different media on the course students had just completed.

Table 4.2: Student reactions to media provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components:</th>
<th>Much too much</th>
<th>Too much</th>
<th>About right amount</th>
<th>Too little</th>
<th>Much too little</th>
<th>No answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence materials (including units, supps., readers, set books)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcasting (including TV/video, audio cassette)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition (including TMA grades and comments, tutorials, etc., informal tutor contact)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kelly and Swift, 1983

Of the three main components listed in table 2, tuition is the one eliciting most of the ‘not enough provided’ responses. Four in ten respondents noted too little provision of tuition and, when specifically asked, 45% favoured reduction in TV broadcasts if that allowed more tutor contact instead. 29% of students were also against this idea, however.

Having established something of the value of tuition relative to other media, the questionnaire then attempted to explore the quality of the role of the tutor in general. Students were asked to respond to a very wide range of statements, both about the course they had just completed (table 3) and about their experience of post-foundation tutors generally (table 4).

Table 4.3: Student perceptions of the help they need from tutors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of help needed from tutor:</th>
<th>% needing A lot of help</th>
<th>% needing Some help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of the errors and deficiencies in my TMA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of what a good answer to a TMA would have been</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear identification of the good points in my TMA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The clearing up of problems, obscurities in the teaching materials</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a fuller, more rounded understanding of the subject area than that provided by correspondence and other materials</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis/feedback on how I was progressing in my understanding of the subject</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human support and encouragement from tutor</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on strategies for coping with materials and set tasks</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of the requirements of TMA/CMAs</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the main themes and issues of the course</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with preparation for the final exam</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of my skills so that I can do better in the future</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on essay writing/structuring TMA answers/ study skills</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with identifying my strengths and weaknesses as a student</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion, practice in developing skills in argument</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support, reassurance when depressed, worried about my studies</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with pacing my studies, identifying priorities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Kelly and Swift 1983

NOTE: TMA - Tutor Marked Assignment CMA - Computer Marked Assignment
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Table 4.4: Student evaluation of the role of the tutor and tuition generally

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Statements</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>In between</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>No views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apart from having my TMA's graded and commented on, I don't want or need other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- contact with a tutor ..................</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without a course tutor there would be no one in the OU system to whom I could turn</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- for help with study problems ..............</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good tutor can make a course, a poor tutor can spoil one ..................................</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some aspects of most courses can only be taught effectively on a face-to-face basis</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If the amount of tutor support were reduced, it would adversely affect my ability</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to cope with OU studies ..............</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without the help of a tutor I would probably have dropped out from at least one course</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- that I stuck with ..........................</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there were no provision for contact with the course tutor, the OU would lack</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- credibility as an academic institution ......</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students were asked whether they had needed help from their tutor on the course they</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- had studied in 1982 and the responses are shown in table 3. On all except one of the 17</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentages are rounded up or down, as appropriate</td>
<td>Swift and Kelly (1983)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students were asked whether they had needed help from their tutor on the course they had studied in 1982 and the responses are shown in Table 3. On all except one of the 17 types of help listed, at least 30% of students reported needing some or a lot of help. Predictably most (two-thirds) needed help on continuous assessment (tutor marked assignments or TMA's) over half also needed 'human support and encouragement', feedback on how I was progressing in the subject, and help in 'developing a fuller, more rounded understanding of the subject area than that provided by correspondence and other materials'.

Overall, it was clear from this survey that students value tuition as a whole very highly. 68% felt that without a course tutor there would be no one to help with study problems and 25% definitely felt that without the help of a tutor they would probably have dropped out from at least one course. Over two-thirds felt that 'A good tutor can make a course, a poor tutor can spoil one'. (See Table 4).

It was only possible to devise these lists of attitudinal statements because individual tutors had already described their own role in accounts published in 'Teaching at a Distance' and much discussion with tutors had occurred either in interviews or through the regular staff development role of regional staff. Much qualitative 'research' had already occurred, albeit informally; this provided a firm basis for the design of the questionnaire, especially the attitudinal statements shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Correspondence tuition

Many open learning providers will want to monitor and evaluate the performance of tutors in this area which remains otherwise a private transaction between tutor and learner where the learner is especially vulnerable to the effects of poor quality tuition.

Turnround

There is first the turnaround issue — how quickly does the learner get back an assignment after posting or handing in, and how much of this time is taken by the tutor in marking? Many of the European correspondence schools can monitor tutor turnaround very easily because learners mail their assignments direct to the institution which then mails on a batch to the tutor, who also returns marked scripts to the school. The system 'knows' therefore when the tutor should have received what, and can chase late returners, if there are any.

In a system like the OU, where students send assignments direct to their tutor, such checking is not possible. Tutors return marked assignments to the University where a record is made onto computer files for both the tutor and the student. Where no assignments have been received by 21 days after the cut-off date (the date by which tutors should receive scripts from their students for that assignment) a 'marker' against the tutor name is made automatically by the computer and the appropriate staff to
Open Learning and Evaluation

Why are markers 'unreliable' in the first place, you may ask?

Evaluation of tutor marked assignments at the Open University in the later seventies confirmed earlier findings from other contexts, that a group of tutors marking the same set of scripts was likely to grade them differently. A selection of assignments covering all faculties was chosen for each assignment, three tutors marked the scripts of the same 12 students. Some indication of the differences between the assignments is shown in figure 5.

The results of the study of grades awarded showed that:

- the same script was given different grades by different tutors; there was often a difference of two to three grades on scripts from group one. Variation in the grades awarded was much larger for scripts in Group 1 than it was for those in Groups 2 and 3.
- Group 3 was slightly better than Group 2.
- tutors also differed in their ranking of scripts, especially tutors in Group 1.
- the average (mean) of all grades awarded by each tutor showed that means often differed, indicating that tutors vary in leniency/severity
- some tutors used a wider range of grades than others.
- tutors interpreted the grading scale differently; for example they might agree that a script was one of the best but grade it anything from C+ to A-
- tutors of students in Groups 2 and 3 did tend to be more lenient in marking scripts from 'their own' students but the effects were small by comparison with the variation in grades given the same script.

It may be surprising to discover that, even in a subject like mathematics, experienced tutors do not agree absolutely on grades. This means that we would expect to find different grades for the same script even among experienced tutors, and figure 6 suggests the range based on the findings discussed here.

Figure 4.6: Approximate frequency with which two tutors would be expected to award grades differing by at least one point on a large set of scripts (expressed on a 0-10 scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>At least 4 points</th>
<th>At least 2 points</th>
<th>At least 1 point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 in 25</td>
<td>1 in 3</td>
<td>2 in 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Very rare</td>
<td>1 in 25</td>
<td>1 in 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Very rare</td>
<td>1 in 70</td>
<td>1 in 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Byrne (1979)

Tuition

The value of this kind of evaluation is not primarily the discovery of unreliability per se since, on the basis of previous research in conventional education 'unreliability' can be expected. Its value in this case was, first, that it demonstrated that tutor unreliability on continuous assessment was no worse than that reported in studies elsewhere on examination marking. Second, it stimulated consideration of the possible causes of unreliability, and provided a very helpful form of staff development for those taking part.

Those tutors involved discussed their grades and discovered why others had judged a script differently in an atmosphere which was supportive rather than threatening. As suggested earlier, similar exercises, especially at the beginning of a course, can improve both grading and commenting on scripts thereafter.

Although the exercise demonstrated that it would be unrealistic to hope to eradicate unreliability completely, some of the reasons for unreliability became clearer, and a number were associated with the quality of assignment design, where improvements can be made. Some assignments generated more unreliability than others, because of unclear wording, poor student or tutor notes. The single essay question generally came out worst, of all question types, and can be improved by being broken down into a number of components, if that is possible. Students then need guidance on the relative importance of these parts, and problems can be created if this is not given, or if unrealistic word lengths are provided.

Evaluation of tutor reliability can therefore be as much an evaluation of the quality of assignments on a course as of the quality of tutor performances. During discussion of differences of opinion, it was possible to pinpoint aspects in the advice to students, or in the notes to tutors, which were the cause of disagreement, or to pinpoint other inadequacies. These are valuable findings for the redrafting of assignments.

Tutor comments and correspondence teaching

Although the grade awarded a script is very important to the learner, the purpose of the assignment interchange includes far more than assessment of the standard that it reaches. It may often be the case that the learner's work is not graded at all. Whether there is a grade or not, however, the learner is looking for feedback on general progress with the course and specific help with areas of difficulty. The quality of the tutor's comments on a script therefore also matter as well as the grade, and are not unconnected. A low grade for example can make it very difficult for some students to read comments carefully and learn from them, disappointment and a sense of failure making them want to push the script away.
and forget about it. Clearly this is a very individual matter, but survey findings suggest that there is little basis for the view that Students are only interested in the grade (see table 5).

Table 4.5: The importance attached by students to provision of four types of content in their tutor's comments on assignments for the course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance attached to attributes:</th>
<th>VERY IMPORTANT</th>
<th>FAIRLY IMPORTANT</th>
<th>NOT VERY IMPORTANT</th>
<th>NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attributes of TMA comments:</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis and clear explanation of where things went wrong and why.</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive criticism – helpful and encouraging comments.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of reasons for grade awarded to TMA.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of general progress at several stages throughout the year.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMA – tutor marked assignment</td>
<td>Kelly and Swift (1983)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 1983 OU Survey of students mentioned earlier provides conclusive evidence for the importance of correspondence tuition. Table 5 indicates that almost all respondents (over 90%) felt assignment comments were important for explaining errors and making helpful criticism. Students were also asked what they usually did with marked assignments and table 6 indicates that fewer than 10% are only interested in the grade. 72% read comments carefully and tried to use them in subsequent assignments. There seems good evidence that the quality of correspondence teaching is a vital part in the effectiveness of the system as a whole, from two points of view: the learning process and the performance of students on continuous assessment.

Table 4.6: Types of use of correspondence teaching by students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of use</th>
<th>Usually did this</th>
<th>Sometimes did this</th>
<th>Never did this</th>
<th>Did not answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read comments carefully and where appropriate, tried to incorporate advice into later assignments.</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made use of comments for examination revision.</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read comments carefully and followed up references made to units, books, articles, etc.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took up points made on TMA's in tutorials.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did additional work on TMA in the light of comments.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only ever took a quick look at grades and comments.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted tutor outside tutorial to take up points.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used comments in self help groups.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looked at grades but ignored comments.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMA – tutor marked assignment</td>
<td>Kelly and Swift (1983)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the importance of correspondence teaching, it is an important area for monitoring and evaluation. This can be done by asking students directly, as in the case of the survey findings reported above. However, it may also be particularly important to check that professional norms are being achieved by individual tutors, and this requires the judgement of professional peers. In a system like the OU, monitoring of tutor comments requires that scripts are read by a subject expert with experience of correspondence teaching. A proportion of scripts is selected from one or more assignments marked by the tutor being monitored. A tutor can expect that the scripts they mark will be monitored at least twice a year on a full credit course (4-40 hours and around 8 assignments), and at least once a year on a half credit course (220 hours and around 4 assignments). New tutors, and any tutor whose work causes concern, are monitored more often. The criteria which can be used to judge the effectiveness of an example of correspondence teaching naturally depend on the type of learning outcomes of a course, and its difficulty. Figure 7 lists a range of possible criteria.
As important as checking standards is the communication back to a tutor of the results of monitoring. During the course of an evaluation of the OU’s briefing of its part-time staff, it was discovered that tutors value monitor comments and use them as an indication of whether they are meeting the University’s requirements for correspondence tuition. (Thorpe, 1985) Some faculties now send the monitor’s comments direct to the tutor, who has the right of reply, if necessary. The monitor’s comments therefore need to be phrased with the kind of constructiveness and consideration that is expected of tutors in their comments to students.

Figure 4.7: Criteria which can be used in monitoring a tutor’s scriptmarking

A tutor marked assignment can be assessed for:

**Efficiency:**
- Returns marked script within the period required by the system
- Writes legibly
- Completes associated record/forms in full and accurately

**Grading:**
- Accurate/lenient/severe
- Correct use of marking scheme (if there is one)

**Relationship with learner:**
- Tone friendly and sympathetic
- Comments likely to encourage continued learning
- Further contact suggested, where desirable

**Overall appraisal of learner’s work:**
- Praise on achievement
- Suggestions for what would have been necessary to get a higher grade
- Assessment of progress in course as a whole

**Detailed comments:**
- Corrects any errors
- Suggests improvements in approach/structure as necessary
- Suggests course pages or components learner needs to revise
- Tells learner what she is doing well/adequately
- Comments on any irrelevance by referring to wording of the assignment
- Points to the relevance of materials/sidelines outside the course for development of ideas the learner has expressed.

**Face to face tuition**

Face to face tuition takes different forms depending on the context for open learning. Figure 8 indicates some of the variety in this context.

**Tuition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Learning context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-line supervision</td>
<td>Mostly under 1 hour, available continuously, on demand from learner</td>
<td>Other 1 to 1 tutor engaged in correspondence tuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College-based ‘class’ or workshop</td>
<td>Approximately 1 hour</td>
<td>By appointment or drop in. Learners may consult a tutor for 1 to 1 help. Group work also organised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Centre</td>
<td>By arrangement</td>
<td>Learner uses packages (text, video or audio-based, or CRT) either on site or elsewhere. Help often available on site, on demand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In most forms of open learning, face to face tuition has a voluntary aspect; it is provided with the assumption that learners will want to use it. But do they in fact use it, and for how long and how often? There are also important managerial considerations for monitoring attendance, because buildings, rooms and salaries are costly resources to offer a group of learners. Does take-up justify provision? Could we increase take up if we re-organised provision, to better match learner convenience? These are important questions, particularly for providers like the OU which has not made such attendance compulsory; although the value of face to face interaction and group tutorials is emphasised, it must still be possible to pass an OU course without having attended tutorials.
Open Learning and Evaluation

This is one of the features of ‘openness’, most obviously for those who are physically disabled, geographically isolated, or otherwise prevented from attending.

Reliable figures for learner attendance can only be gathered by a meticulous and systematic monitoring process. This is likely to require the co-operation of learners, clerical staff and tutors, depending on the system. In the case of a college-based workshop, the learner initiates a record of attendance which is collated and reviewed by clerical or tutorial staff. At the Bradford and Ilkley Community College (BICC) Workshops for Mathematics and Communications, learners are asked on enrollment which sessions during the week they elect to attend. This information is entered onto the microcomputer database set up for the Workshops. A new printout is produced for each day of the week, listing the names and sessions of all those who ought to attend on that day. As each learner comes in, they sign for the appropriate session against their name and at the end of the week, all the registers are entered onto the learner database.

Figure 4.9: Session Register: Mathematics Workshop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Registration Number</th>
<th>Name (Alphabetical order)</th>
<th>Monday Afternoon Week No</th>
<th>A*</th>
<th>A/V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ND 7099487</td>
<td>ALNASSER</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11</td>
<td>/ / / / / / / / / / /</td>
<td>/ / / / / / / / / / /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM 7115180</td>
<td>BASHIR</td>
<td>/ / / / / / / / / / /</td>
<td>/ / / / / / / / / / /</td>
<td>4/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND 7071191</td>
<td>CHAN</td>
<td>/ / / / / / / / / / /</td>
<td>/ / / / / / / / / / /</td>
<td>X 2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PB 7126522</td>
<td>CLARKE</td>
<td>/ / / / / / / / / / /</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PB 7094377</td>
<td>CLOUCH</td>
<td>/ / / / / / / / / / /</td>
<td>/ / / / / / / / / / /</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Attendance: Actual/Possible
X - indicates withdrawn

Source: N. Dow, Mathematics Workshop, BICC

Data can be taken off the database in various ways, for different purposes. Figure 9 shows a version of the printout of a cumulative register for the Monday afternoon session, showing all learners due for attendance at that session together with the number of attendances achieved out of the total possible (remembering that learners can register at any point during the year, after week one). This register would enable a counsellor scheduled to cover Monday afternoon sessions, to check the attendances of all learners who have been allocated to them and are due to attend every Monday afternoon. It is also possible to generate a printout for every learner, showing all sessions attended, and total hours (figure 10). This enables the counsellor, or a clerical assistant to pick up all who have missed for more than, say, two weeks, (or a specified number of attendances), so that a follow-up letter can be sent, offering support and asking the learner to get in touch.

Figure 4.10: GCSE Mathematics: Learner Register

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: MISTRY</th>
<th>Course: A3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D of Birth: 30/10/31</td>
<td>Subject: Pure Maths, Applied Maths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reg. Number: 7145313</td>
<td>Start Week No: 07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance data on 27-11-87</th>
<th>Week No</th>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tue Eve 5:30:8.00</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11</td>
<td>ac/tst wct/tst</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu Eve 5:30:8.00</td>
<td>/ / / / / / / / / / /</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>7.5/7.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where learners are using flexi-study or distance learning options, it is more likely to be the tutor who records contact. South Manchester Community College uses a proforma similar to that shown in figure 2 chapter 5, which is provided in duplicate form to flexi-study tutors who complete and return the duplicate copy to the college on a monthly basis. The open learning staff then enter the information into a cumulative form for each tutor, and also onto a computerised learner database. These records are regularly checked by the Workshop Co-ordinator; if a tutor has no contact with a learner for two consecutive months, the co-ordinator sends the learner concerned a follow-up letter.

Each of these systems could be used to produce a cumulative total of actual versus possible attendances for all learners (in the case of workshops), and number and type of contact between learner and tutor, in the case of flexi-study. The Open University has undertaken a large number of studies of this kind for two main purposes: the first to ascertain the nature and distribution across the year of tutorial and counselling tasks; the second, to provide indicators of the efficiency with which face to face tuition has been provided and its effectiveness as a medium for teaching and learner support. I shall return to the value of attendance rates as indicators, but first we need to look more closely at the methods which can be used.

Monitoring attendance can take a variety of forms but is the basis of calculating usage and therefore must be done systematically.
and reliably. Collecting attendance data is only the beginning though, and a review of the findings of OU evaluation in this area will serve to indicate some of the pitfalls.

Some of these arise from differences in what has been measured. For example, two measures have been used most often, and they produce quite different rates. The first measure is the student usage rate, that is the proportion of students who have used tutorials at least once on a course. Three major studies since 1976 have consistently produced a figure of around 60% of students who say they have used tutorials during the course studied. In 1979, a survey of 16000 students studying 91 courses produced findings shown in table 7 below.

Table 4.7: Student use of tuition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of students making</th>
<th>Extensive Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence tutoring</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Centre Tutorials</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Tutorials</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Grundin (1980)

Similarly 63% of the post foundation students surveyed in 1983 said that they used tutorials, whether evening or Saturday morning sessions. However this survey also asked students to discriminate between different forms of tuition, and to say whether they were aware that a particular form of tuition was available to them. As table 8 shows, if we take this awareness into account in calculating percentage usage, rather higher figures result. Thus 75% of those saying they knew about the programme of tutorials on their course attended one or more sessions.

The second common measure of attendance is the rate of attendance at each tutorial during a particular course presentation period, often presented as an average for the period as a whole. Rates of tutorial attendance measure different things from the student usage rate — estimates of the proportion of students who use tutorials - and there are important implications for the way these two indicators are used. If, for example, the 60% of students who stated they had attended one or more tutorials, only ever attended one, and that the first scheduled tutorial for the course, this would be vital information for those organising the tutorial programme — and for the tutor. The only way of checking this out is to measure attendance at each tutorial, using attendance records.

A number of such studies has been done by OU regional staff, who organise tutorial programmes annually and therefore need to monitor the extent to which a cohort of students is being ‘reached’ by their allocation of tutorial resources. These rates of tutorial attendance vary widely by course/faculty, by tutor and even by different years. The attendance rate also varies during the year and the first tutorial may often produce 90-100% attendance, with another peak before the examination being a common pattern. Again, the drop in attendance does vary by course, being noticeably less for example on some third level maths courses known to be very difficult. Overall averages of attendance for the whole year have been found of around 30% going up to 60% — the higher figure taking into account dropout during course study. (Thorpe, 1983)

Apart from the need for care in specifying what has been measured, and in clarifying terminology, there is the question of the accuracy of the base on which percentages are measured. If a learner has dropped out, or is not actively pursuing a particular course, it would seem reasonable to exclude them from the total number of those doing a course and therefore considered eligible for tutorials. Tutorial attendance rates appear higher where the base has been adjusted in this way to account for drop-out. However it is not always easy to find out who is ‘actively studying’ and thus rates of attendance are best seen as approximations of more or less accuracy depending on how carefully they have been generated.

Apart from the difficulty of calculating accurate attendance rates, is the issue of how they are used as performance indicators. While they may offer an indicator of the efficiency of resource allocation, can they tell us anything at all about the educational effectiveness of tutorials or workshops? Unfortunately the existence of data on attendance can encourage an over-simple interpretation of their
Open Learning and Evaluation

meaning: 'high rates of attendance justify the provision of tuition, low rates justify cutting tuition'. Tutors themselves are likely to be very wary of these kinds of response, knowing as they do how many factors affect attendance on a specific occasion — only one of which, albeit important, is the quality of tuition they provide. And, if only five out of (say) 16 students attend a tutorial, but value what they get out of it, does that adequately justify provision? And what about the 11 non-attenders? Are they happy with the situation, or would they prefer some other kind of tutorial support?

There are no hard and fast rulings here; decisions can only be taken effectively in the light of local resources and learner needs. Nor is it argued that attendance data, though difficult to interpret, are not worth having. It is now possible to see in the OU that the same tutor, on the same course, operating the same tutorial programme, can get very different attendance rates from one year to the next (Thorpe, 1983). This is one reason why surveys of the preferences of students for particular locations and times of the week for tutorials can offer misleading data for designing future programmes so as to maximise attendance rates.

However, collecting evidence of attendance over several years or several course presentations can be useful because it establishes at least the upper and lower parameters of what can be expected. A fall in attendance rates then is likely to indicate the need for further investigation. It may be that the distribution of tutorials throughout the course clashes with other demands, like the cut-off date for submission of an assignment, so that some students who would otherwise attend choose not to do so. By re-scheduling the times or locations of tutorials, it may be possible to increase attendance and thus use staff resources more efficiently.

The performance that attendance rates do not measure directly of course, is that of the tutor. This requires qualitative evidence from students or colleagues or both. On first appointment, new OU part-time tutors are usually observed during a tutorial by a member of full-time regional staff, and all those tutoring at summer school are observed, whether new or experienced. At the Social Science Foundation Course Summer School, students are asked to complete a questionnaire (anonymously) on the performance of tutors with whom they have worked during periods of 9-12 hours each tutor. Tutor competences are listed (clarity of presentation, responsiveness to questions, handling discussion, and so on) and tutors are rated on a five point scale from 'excellent' to 'very weak'. Tutors are provided with the feedback on their own performance

Tuition evaluation is seen as important and worth taking into account. It may also help some students with strong negative reactions to express their feelings and to learn from the experience. This is also a useful mechanism for identifying weaknesses in the design of the summer school, and thus improving it for future students. (Bradshaw, 1987)

Tutor performance is one of the most difficult areas to evaluate and to develop subsequently, because the needs of learners are so varied and because the way one behaves as a tutor is closely tied to personality factors. Any significant changes in behaviour require the tutor's voluntary commitment and a personal conviction that change is necessary. A positive step in that direction is the use by tutors themselves of some form of feedback from learners on the quality of tutorials they give, and if relevant, the helpfulness of their other functions, like assignment comments and telephone contact. Feedback forms can be handed out at the end of several sessions or when several assignments have been marked, and returned by learners anonymously. One format is to list a number of desirable characteristics of the tutoring concerned, and to ask the learner to rate the tutor against each one on a five point scale, as in figure 11. This example also includes a rating for the general importance of each item, so that the tutor can see how important a good or poor rating of one characteristic is likely to be to the learner.

It is also useful to ask learners to complete ratings of this kind before tuition starts, as an indication of their expectations. In this case, additional items exploring their perceptions of themselves in the group context might also be helpful: for example —

'I find it very difficult to speak out in a group'
'I prefer groups of 3 or 4 to bigger groups'
'I can speak more easily when the tutor isn't there'
'I tend to keep quiet not to show my ignorance'

— and so on.

Even if feedback forms are not used, it can still generate thought provoking comments from learners to ask them how helpful they are finding the tuition provided. Three questions which can be used in discussion to pick up most of the responses in this area are:
OU students have also been asked why they attend tutorials in general and, of the reasons shown in table 9, "to meet my tutor and discuss course study matters" was chosen by 63% of all respondents. Of the reasons given for non-attendance, the 1983 survey notes the following:

The most common reasons respondents gave for not going to all the tutorial events for their course all related to personal factors: family, personal and work commitments. However, the second most frequent was distance/time spent getting there. Further, significant minorities did not attend because the potential value was too little relative to the time/money/effort involved or they preferred to spend their time on the units/assignments. Student decisions were also influenced by disappointing early tutorials on their course and by past experience of unhelpful tutorials.

As a way to assess their degree of satisfaction with the face-to-face tuition available to them on their course, 24% of respondents reported being fully satisfied, 32% satisfied but with reservations, 11% fairly dissatisfied, and 5% very dissatisfied. A further 23% had not attended any tutorials and 5% did not respond to the question.

Insufficient tutorials to cover the course adequately stood out as the most common cause for dissatisfaction with tutorials, 24% giving this as a reason.

(Kelly and Swift, 1983)

Table 4.9: Reasons for attending tutorials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>% for whom reason applied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To meet my tutor and discuss course/study matters</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with difficult aspects of the course</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet other students and discuss course/study related problems with them</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To extend my understanding of the subject beyond the limits/scope of the units</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion and help with TMAs</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To sustain my interest and motivation</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision and preparation for exams</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General support for studies</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of practical/field/lab./sessions/computing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just because tutorials were provided</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These are features of only a small proportion of sessions.

Kelly and Swift (1983)
Conclusion

This chapter has not provided a comprehensive account of all the media through which tuition can be provided; telephone tuition is especially important, audio tape can also be used, and computer conferencing offers an exciting technology which opens up the possibility of a very much greater communication between learner and tutor (Ryan, 1987, and Kaye, 1987). However, all three can be evaluated by drawing on existing knowledge of learner perceptions and use of the core tutor functions of face to face and correspondence teaching. And some of the clearest messages in the evaluation of tuition derive from learner perceptions of the general role and value of the tutor, irrespective of the medium through which particular functions are carried out.

The effective evaluation of tuition requires, at minimum, regular monitoring of the quality of tuition offered all learners, and tutor evaluation of the quality of their own interaction with a particular group of learners. Direct tutor involvement in evaluation need not always require the tutor to invite written feedback from learners; it may take the form of meetings with learners to review their progress, or discussion with other tutors at staff development meetings. The essence of tuition should be its responsiveness to the learner, and that requires tutor self-evaluation, as well as system evaluation.

Further reading


Summarises models of face to face teaching and presents analysis of tutor-student interaction in tutorials at the Open University.

Teaching at a Distance: formerly published by the Open University and since 1986, replaced by Open Learning, published jointly with Longman. Both journals have many articles relevant to the tutor role and its evaluation. Contact Regional Academic Services, the Open University, Milton Keynes.

Estell, G.R. (1986) Staff Development for Open Learning Tutors. Harrogate College of Arts and Technology co-ordinates a particularly open form of open learning. 'OWTLET' accepts all enquirers irrespective of their learning goal and the period they have available for study, providing a tutor can be found, who selects any materials used and negotiates a learning programme with the individual concerned. The report takes the form of a brief summary of evaluation of the staff development needs of open learning tutors, together with the staff development units produced out of the project: unit one — the concept of open learning, unit two — the initial meeting, and unit three — a continuing dialogue.


A very useful typology of different systems for the provision of tuition and counselling, with detailed descriptions of the tutor role in particular. Twenty-seven open learning courses were surveyed, and five very different courses studied in depth.


Includes some useful formats for recording workshop loading, tutor/student contact sheet, student attendance record, counselling contacts and so on.
Chapter 1

The nature of evaluation

Think about the last time that you considered the need to make some sort of change. Before choosing a particular course of action, you would have reviewed the available options, or at least the options that you knew about. You would have assessed how well each option might meet your needs, and at what cost. You would then have weighed up the advantages and disadvantages associated with each of the options before making your decision.

The change you selected might have been about some personal matter such as your family finances, or something to do with your children’s future. Or it may just as easily have been related to your professional life. You may have been thinking about introducing a new course, or modifying the student registration system, or increasing student retention. Whatever your area of concern, in order to carry out any change, you will have had to work through the process which we call evaluation.

The process of evaluation which we employ to reach a decision as to the way forward is the same regardless of the area of concern or its source or even of its importance. The care we take, the methods we use and the amount of attention we give to the process in those different situations is another matter. In this chapter we will be looking at formal evaluation, considering the purpose of formal evaluation activities in open and distance teaching organizations and examining the different types of approaches to evaluation which are available to us.
Formal evaluation

Evaluation then is an activity with which everyone is familiar. The question is, how you can best use evaluation with open and distance learning provision. At the informal level, individual members of any institution will be actively engaged in making their own personal evaluations of activities which come within their own areas of responsibility. The problem will be that, as with all other spheres of life, individuals’ perceptions will be coloured and distorted by the particular lenses through which they see the world. We can only make an evaluation on the basis of the information to which we have access. The conclusions that we reach will be limited by the quality of that information – its comprehensiveness, relevance, up-to-dateness, accuracy.

A more structured approach

One way of looking at the process of evaluation is to view it as a series of different stages. The stages which comprise this cycle are shown in Figure 1.1. It should be emphasized that reality is usually much more untidy and idiosyncratic. Some stages may be omitted, and the sequencing may not always operate as shown. The old joke about deciding what the conclusions will be before carrying out the evaluation does, as is often the case, carry a grain of truth. For example political pressures may result in stage 7 actions being agreed on political grounds before the evaluation findings in stage 6 are available (a frequent habit with government departments).

![Evaluation stages](image)

**Figure 1.1 The basic stages of evaluation**
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Identify an area of concern
This stage can be triggered in a number of different ways. Formal monitoring procedures such as reviews of pass rates, or course registration figures often identify situations which should be giving cause for concern. Informal means such as letters of complaint, or anxieties expressed by staff can lead to the recognition of the existence of possible problem areas. Cost concerns may result in pressure within the organization for the evaluation of a specific project or innovation, such as the use of interactive video for example. Or again there may be an institutional commitment to provide certain data or certain types of evaluation for external auditing, review or grant awarding purposes. If you think of your own institution, you can probably think of just as many if not more instances where the evaluation process has been triggered by external requests for data or because of political pressure than through the process of objective review. The trigger for the evaluation cycle may therefore operate in a variety of ways.

Decide whether to proceed
Not all problems or potential problems which are identified will be seen as having a sufficiently high priority to warrant further investigation. A decision will therefore need to be taken about whether or not to investigate further, or whether to commit resources for a thorough evaluation.

Investigate identified issues
The ways in which issues are investigated should, wherever possible, be determined by the requirements of the problem. For example, the evaluation of an issue such as the quality of guidance to tutors may be usefully approached using a mixture of in-depth discussion to establish the criteria used by the tutors themselves, plus some quantitative feedback to establish the scale of any particular problem areas.

Analyse findings
Whatever the type of study devised and carried out for the evaluation, the data collected need to go through some form of analysis stage. The extent and depth of the analysis will depend in part on the technical competence and in part on the specific interests and institutional requirements of those carrying it out. I have known examples where the analysis of course feedback data was limited simply to a one-page summary of students’ written comments presented as a report from the teaching team to ’higher authorities’. I have also seen examples where weeks of sophisticated computer analysis were carried out on complex quantitative data in order to help the course team pinpoint the precise sources of students’ problems with a course.
Interpret findings
The more sophisticated and complex the study, the more important is the interpretation phase. The same set of analyses may well be interpreted in very different ways depending on the particular perspective of the interpreter. A high difficulty rating for a course module may be interpreted as evidence that the teaching approach needs further investigation and possibly some revision, or it may be taken as evidence that the students are insufficiently prepared for the course.

Disseminate findings and recommendations
The dissemination phase can be key in determining whether or not the evaluation findings are used. The timing of the dissemination, the target group for the findings, and the perceived relevance of the findings to people’s concerns will all need to be taken into account. For example, the importance of variations in student retention rates may be different for those responsible for ensuring the viability of future courses than for administrators responsible for ensuring adequate provision of exam rooms. The same set of information can carry very different messages to different groups. Increased student retention rates may be good news to some staff in an organization, and a mixed blessing to others.

Review findings, agree and implement corrective actions
These final two stages do need to be seen as part of the evaluation process. Evaluation is not an abstract research exercise but an essential tool of good management. In general the methodologies for the design and implementation of evaluation studies are well developed, but the methodologies for enhancing the likelihood of organizational use of evaluation findings is still developing. Hence the importance of recognizing that these two stages must be included in the cycle.

The purpose of evaluation

The aim of evaluation in the case of any organization must be to support that organization in achieving its goals. In other words, to enable it to become a more effective organization within whatever constraints it has to operate. In educational organizations, the need for formal evaluation activities is usually clearly recognized. In their 1977 review of major evaluation studies, Guttentag and Saar drew attention to the fact that ‘education is one of the most highly researched evaluation fields’ (Guttentag and Saar 1977).
Evaluation is used, or should be used, to enable institutions to operate as learning organizations. The importance of the role of the detection and correction of error is the basis for the ideas on organizational learning put forward by Argyris and Schön (1978). An important feature of their argument is the view of the organization as a unit or a whole in respect of the reviews of performance and the implementation of subsequent modifications.

For example, individuals or small groups such as course teams may have learnt that the submission rates on assignments for a particular course drop sharply at a certain point. There are a number of possible explanations for this phenomenon which would have to be investigated. It may be to do with the difficulty of the assignment or the course workload at that point. If that is the case, then the person responsible for the course will probably attempt to deal with the problem by changing the assignment or by cutting out some of the student study tasks. However, there may be institutional-level implications for this state of affairs. For example, the number of assignments which students are expected to complete, the monitoring of standards, the course approval strategy and the course testing strategies are all aspects where the institutional procedures may have to be modified if the problem is found to be sufficiently widespread or severe.

Programme evaluation

Programme evaluation in the field of open and distance teaching is relatively underdeveloped. By programme evaluation I mean evaluation which focuses on programmes of study. It is at this level that the pedagogic, management and often the financial responsibilities lie in education and training. It is usually here that responsibility for the detailed issues of quality and accountability have to exercised.

I have chosen the term 'programme of study' to describe sets or groupings of courses. Usually, these would be sets of courses which share some sort of common aim. That aim may be the award of a qualification for students who successfully complete a requisite number or series of courses in an area of expertise; or it may be that a particular audience is targeted, or a particular teaching medium is used.

Within any institution it would be a simple if onerous task to list large numbers of possible issues to which evaluation could make some contribution. However 'busyness' is no substitute for purposeful intervention at key points. The question then is how to determine what the key
points are — how are we to identify the purposes of evaluation in such a way as to achieve the best match with the goals of the institution?

Diverse institutional goals

The overarching aims of a provider of education will be related to the provision of learning opportunities and to such associated activities as the accreditation of learning. But such global aims can also contain a diverse range of subsidiary goals. In an earlier work I discussed the different types of goals that learning providers can hold (Calder 1993). Four distinct groupings can be identified:

- society/economy centred
- institution centred
- subject centred
- learner centred.

The society/economy centred goals refers to the skill centred education and training which both public and commercial providers are increasingly encouraged to offer. Institutional goals can include institutional survival; high status among clients, other providers or funders; or public recognition. Providers may also hold 'subject centred' goals, by which I mean claims to scholarship and the desire to provide courses of a high academic quality. The learner centred goals emphasize the personal development aspect of learning and the need for learners to achieve not only subject knowledge and skills but also more sophisticated learning strategies and such intangible outcomes as self confidence, recognition of self worth, and a commitment to the community.

You may have noted the absence of student performance from the list. In the UK, the assessment of student performance is referred to by the term 'assessment'. The term 'evaluation' refers primarily to the evaluation of the teaching and organization activities which support student learning and includes the assessment of student performance as just one aspect or function. However in his book on the assessment of students, Rowntree highlights the fact that assessment and evaluation are often treated as 'virtual synonyms'. As he points out, there are many countries, including the USA, where the term 'evaluation' is used to describe both the assessment of individual student performance in terms of what they have learnt or accomplished and the evaluation of the teaching and other organizational activities which support student learning (Rowntree 1977). In fact some institutions use the term 'evaluation' solely to describe the assessment of student performance.

Needless to say, such differences in the the way the term is used can on
The nature of evaluation

occasion lead to considerable confusion. Discussions about ‘evaluation’ between professionals from countries separated by different traditions of usage of the same term can be enlivened by the misunderstandings caused by failure to check on the definitions of apparently common terminology. In this book, I will stay with the UK meaning of evaluation.

Diverse interest groups

The particular interest group which sponsors the evaluation is of particular importance in determining the purpose of any particular evaluation activity. Kogan (1989) described well the complexity of the way in which the nature of the evaluation is determined when he commented that

The nature of the evaluation will vary according to whether an intervention is primarily directed to, for example, improvements in quality, reduction in cost, equalisation of access, or improvements in working conditions; and it will also vary according to its sponsors whether they be managers, political leaders, client groups, or the workers who are subject to the evaluation.

What Kogan was drawing attention to was that evaluation is not a clear-cut straightforward activity. Rather the primary purpose of the evaluation and the particular interests of the sponsoring group initiating or sanctioning the evaluation will combine to define what kind of approach, what kind of focus the evaluation will have.

Even where the evaluation is commissioned internally and carried out internally, there may still be great differences in its nature. Consider for example, a situation where the quality of the teaching received by students is being evaluated. If the aim of the evaluation is to assist with staff development, then its nature will be rather different than if its aim was to collect data to use for staff appraisals. This particular example is an important one because many staff have relatively little experience with open and distance teaching, and are frequently unaware of the rather different needs of home-based or 'distance' students from those of conventional students or trainees. Certainly the system of student feedback on teaching used by many providers for assessing face-to-teaching can conflict with the need to use evaluation for staff development purposes.

Approaches to evaluation

We have discussed the fact that evaluation is a process which can be utilized across the whole range of activities in an educational institution. The
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Purpose</th>
<th>Materials Development Phase</th>
<th>Materials Presentation Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formative</td>
<td>Developmental testing</td>
<td>Rolling remake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summative</td>
<td>Market testing</td>
<td>Validation review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.2 Examples of activities with different evaluation purposes at dot materials production phases**

It would be a mistake, however, to think of the distinction between the two forms of evaluation as formative if carried out during the development phase and summative if carried out during the presentation phase. Figure 1.2 shows examples of both formative and summative approaches being used during materials development and materials presentation stages.

In a similar way, material which is gathered for formative purposes may be used for summative decisions, just as data which is gathered for summative purposes can be and often is used in formative ways. Tessmer, in his book on formative evaluation, points out how "As long as the purpose of the evaluation is to "revise" the instruction by reorganizing or supplanting it, the evaluation can be a type of formative evaluation" (Tessmer 1993). He gives the example of instructors who may wish to evaluate a 'bought in' course. If they intend to modify or supplement those parts which they consider inadequate for their learners, then they would be carrying out a formative evaluation. There is also the point, however, that if it fell below the expected standard, whether technically, pedagogically or academically, then it might be expected that the instructor would decide not to use it at all. In other words, the evaluation would be transformed into a summative evaluation.

**Context, input, process and product**

**Pretest — posttest approach**

The next step to consider is what methods of enquiry you can actually use in carrying out evaluations. There is a long tradition of trying to set up experimental designs, or the nearest thing to them that was actually feasible,
in education and media research. However this approach does have limitations because of the problems of trying to control all the variables except for the experimental one. It is also open to criticism about the appropriateness of the 'lab-based' approach for investigating the effectiveness of instructional materials used by different kinds of people in different ways and in different settings. However, variations of it are still used for the formative development of instructional materials. Barbara Flagg (1990) describes a typical pretest-posttest investigation which was designed to look objectively and in detail at what pupils had learnt as a result of the use of videotapes and print materials:

An example of the one-group pretest-posttest design is the formative evaluation of Systems Impact's prototype videodisc lessons on fractions. . . . Teachers presented a series of daily lessons on fractions using videotapes and print materials to mimic the instructional design of the Level 1 videodisc.

Criterion-referenced tests\(^1\) integrated into every fifth lesson and comprehensive pre- and posttests established the degree of mastery of the fraction concepts. These tests gave evidence as to what programme content was or was not being successfully communicated.

Figure 1.3 illustrates this approach. As you can see, the learning experience, together with any other events or processes which might take place between the pretest and the posttest are not taken account of. In effect, the interaction of the students with the programme is treated as if it were a

\[ \text{Pretest} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{Programme} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{Posttest} \]

Figure 1.3 The pretest-posttest approach

This approach does have a number of methodological drawbacks. Flagg describes problems such as the drop-out from the test group, possible effects of external events, such as TV maths programmes at home, or extra help from parents, and the effect on the group of constant testing. As Flagg points out 'The pretest-posttest objectives-based study has limitations, . . . in its utility for formative evaluation because it provides little insight as to why the programme might be working or might not be working.'

\(^1\) Criterion-referenced measures assess a student's achievement of subject matter or a student's behaviours in relation to a criterion standard of performance, not in relation to the performance of other students on the same test.
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Illuminative evaluation
Concerns about methodological problems and the recognition of the importanc e of understanding more about the process which the learner was actually going through led to the development of a very different methodological approach, namely illuminative evaluation. Parlett and Hamilton (1972) who developed and introduced this approach saw the pretest-posttest approach as 'a paradigm for plants, not people'. They wrote:

such evaluations are inadequate for elucidating the complex problem. areas they confront and as a result provide little effective input to the decision-making process.

Illuminative evaluation is introduced as belonging to a contrasting 'anthropological' research paradigm. Attempted measurement of 'educational products' is abandoned for intensive study of the programme as a whole: its rationale and evolution, its operations, achievements, and difficulties. The innovation is not examined in isolation but in the school context or 'learning milieu'.

They explain:

Observation, interviews with participants (students, instructors, administrators and others), questionnaires, and analysis of documents and background information are all combined to help 'illuminate' problems, issues, and significant program features.

What Parlett and Hamilton were identifying was the importance of the process as well as the input and the outcome. There is also a recognition of the importance of the context in which the learning occurs. Figure 1.4 illustrates the illuminative approach.

Clearly there are limits within programme evaluation as to how much of the programme as a whole can or should be evaluated over extended periods. The illuminative approach was developed very much as a response to the 'agricultural–botanical' approach which had previously predominated. The concern with description and interpretation rather than measurement and prediction, however, reflected a substantial shift in evaluators' understanding of the potential of formal evaluation as an aid to decision-making through greater understanding of what happened within educational programmes.

The CIPP approach
For the evaluation of some projects, an evaluation of the context in which it is operating is essential. A major evaluation of the use of the Canadian Hermes satellite for educational purposes in the late seventies drew
particular attention to this aspect. As the evaluators explained:

The importance of context in educational satellite projects is such that all evaluations must be partly illuminative, even if they rely heavily on survey methods. The study of context involves looking at the costs of the project and the manner in which it was managed. Although such issues are fraught with controversy, knowledge of them is essential to a fair assessment of an experiment. (Richmond and Daniel 1979)

The evaluation framework which was chosen for this massive project was the CIPP approach put together by Stufflebeam and his colleagues (Stufflebeam et al 1971). Richmond and Daniel explain how this acronym describes the four evaluation stages which can encompass the main aspects of the presentation of a course, programme of studies or major project.

Context evaluation: Descriptive data about the programme objectives, intended outcomes, criterion measures.

Input evaluation: The selected programme strategy.

Process evaluation: The implementation of the programme procedures and strategies.

Product evaluation: The success of the programme.
(The same as summative evaluation.)
The advantage of the CIPP approach is its comprehensiveness. The example given is of a major national multi-programme project, but the approach is one which can be usefully drawn on even for small studies such as a course or even a module evaluation.

Other approaches
We have looked at the main key evaluation approaches, but in practice there are a whole range of different approaches whose usefulness will depend on the particular concerns you have and on which you want the evaluation to shed light. New approaches to evaluation continue to be developed. With open and distance teaching, the role of evaluation as communication between organization, students and tutors becomes more important. Similarly, developments in research methodology also open up new ways of looking at evaluation. For example, the developments in participative research give respondents more power and a greater say in the research process. In the evaluation context this approach can be seen as a development of the illuminative process. We will be looking at some examples of this approach in Chapter 7.

Utilization of evaluation

The final and often neglected phase of evaluation is its utilization. Within institutional evaluation especially, the view of evaluation as an activity which is completed when the final presentation is made, or the report is presented, is too limiting. The circle must be squared by looking at utilization as part of the evaluation process. This final phase is essential if the institution wishes to identify itself as a ‘learning organization’.

The need to take seriously the issue of when and how evaluation findings are used by the organization is highlighted by the experience of those
innumerable organizations who have participated in evaluations of various kinds. A report from the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) in the Netherlands made the distinction between three types of results arising out of the evaluation activities associated with their quality assessment system: no utilization, passive utilization and active utilization (Westerheijden, Weusthof and Fredericks 1992).

No utilization

'No utilization' describes the situation where the organization takes no account whatever of the evaluation findings. This situation is, unfortunately, not unusual. Many readers will, I am sure, have shared my experience of having seen decisions taken just before the completion of a major, carefully designed and carried out evaluation study! In such situations, the evaluation report may not even be formally considered within the organization, but merely be put on a shelf; or lodged in a library.

Passive utilization

'Passive utilization' describes the situation where the evaluation findings are formally received and discussed within the institution, without any actions being taken to change anything directly as a result of the evaluation study. The report may be formally disseminated, may be discussed in committee, and may even be the basis for recommendations for a variety of future changes.

Active utilization

Only activity which takes place as a direct result of evaluation findings can be classified as 'active utilization'. Thus if a course evaluation suggests that a particular part of the course is presenting students with difficulties, and as a result, that course is modified, then this would be seen as 'active utilization'.

As Westerheijden et al suggest, this classification refers to the short-term use of evaluation. Very often the relevance and the implications of evaluation findings are not taken up institutionally for some time, but nevertheless, the information and insights from the evaluation may affect thinking within the organization to a considerable degree. You may be able to think of some instances where you have had this experience yourself.

While the worst instances of the lack of utilization of evaluation findings are often found in studies which are carried out by individuals or groups external to the institution this need not always be the case. Utilization can fail to take place regardless of whether the sponsoring group for an evaluation activity is internal or external to the organization; the evaluation activities are carried out by individuals or groups who are internal or external to the organization.
The need for agreed procedures for dealing with the conclusions and recommendations from evaluation studies which are linked with the decision-making structure of the organization is clear. Otherwise, whoever the sponsors are and whoever the evaluators are, it can be too easy for the findings of the evaluation to be set aside.

Conclusion

These developments are part of the growing recognition that no stage of the collection, analysis or utilization of data is a value-free activity. The decision to collect information about, say, the age of students, means that the institution considers this data relevant and important. Equally, the decision not to collect data — about dependent relatives, for example — means that this information is not seen to be of importance to the evaluators (although it may be of considerable importance to students who have to make arrangements to get to study centres or to attend residential schools). Such data may be used either formatively, in that the institution may use them in planning or designing provision which is more appropriate to students needs, or summatively, as in monitoring whether certain agreed admission targets have been met.

We must therefore come to the conclusion that not only does 'evaluation' mean different things to different people, but that its definition depends on one's philosophy of education and on how one intends to use the acquired evaluation information. The information which is available about evaluation approaches reflects very much, as might be expected, the predominant concerns and cultural values of the time. So in education, for example, it could be argued that concerns about the quality of the learning experience for students have, to a considerable extent, been superseded by concerns about the efficiency of the providers.

Much of the early evaluation work in the field of education and training was concerned with judging the outcomes from innovative experimental projects. Kogan (1989) refers to the 'massive American literature concerned with the evaluation of large-scale experiments which are undertaken under controlled conditions in order to note the effects of systematically controlled change.' However, the institutionalization of much evaluation has led to the development of a greater range of evaluation approaches in response both to the identification of a range of evaluation needs at different levels in organizations, and to pressures from inside and outside organizations for more substantial information to assist decision-making at all levels.
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In educational research, the implications of the context in which learning takes place for the way we look at the way students learn have long been recognized. With organizations, the model still holds. No provider operates in a vacuum. Just as we need to look at learners’ personalities and the wider environment in which they live and work in order to understand their study behaviour, so we need to be aware of the ethos of individual organizations, and the external environment within which they must operate in order to appreciate their organizational behaviour. In the next chapter, we shall be looking at the wider environment in which providers of open and distance learning have to operate and at some of the implications of current trends for programme evaluation.