



INTRODUCING DISTANCE EDUCATION



S. TICHAPONDWA MODESTO

AND

DANIEL R. TAU

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Dedication

To the struggling out-of-school youth and adults for placing faith in the transforming potential of open and distance learning



Acknowledgements

By riding on the shoulders of giants, in the field of open and distance learning, we wish to extend thankfulness to the creative vision of the governments of Botswana, Zimbabwe and Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries who saw it fit to introduce open and distance learning in their education systems. It is by riding on this vision that our minds were liberated to wander both at home and abroad to make the happy acquaintance with international providers. Closer home, we were privileged to interact with the University of South Africa (UNISA) and Technikon South Africa (TSA), some of the distance education pioneers in Southern Africa. That was made possible through the co-ordinating role played by the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA), and the Southern African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE). We were, then, able to happily meet other providers in the SADC countries.

At institutional level, we wish to specify our appreciation to all key players in structuring what has become known as the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) and other institutions in the region. Those distance educators have piloted permanent legacies for their respective countries. We also acknowledge the contribution made by functionaries of the institutions in making this Handbook a reality. The dynamism characterising emerging ODL organizations, in new environments, would be immaterial without support from international development partners such as the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Department for International Development (UK), to name but a few. Last, but not least, we extend our thankfulness to distance learners who devote time and scant financial resources to liberate themselves from ignorance and poverty.



Foreword

This book demonstrates the level of awareness shared by the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL), and the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) about the increasing need to share basics of open and distance learning (ODL) with stakeholders. The authors address key issues about ODL by answering questions that seek urgent answers to urgent educational problems. There are many who find themselves obliged to participate in distance education, and need systematic guidance.

The text is a vindication that DE is in Southern Africa to stay, probably as the mainstream alternative. The authors are, therefore, commended for initiating dialogue about DE systems in two countries within the sub-region. This is accomplished by discussing crucial ideas in an informative and accessible manner, thus catering for varied educational and academic expectations.

T.J.Nhundu (PHD)

(Director, Centre for Continuing Education, University of Botswana)

It is my honour and privilege to present this Foreword. This book boldly charts a new direction in terms of systematically reorganising progressive ideas about ODL in new environments. The volume bases its discussion on lived experiences by the authors in their interaction and dialogue with learners, academics, and distance educators. To those coming to terms with ODL for the first time, the volume conveys ideas, knowledge, skills and attitudes which the reader will find compatible with the multicultural environment of Southern Africa. To the experienced distance educator, the volume communicates what often was thought about but never so lucidly expressed.

The generic, the specific, and practical ideas are captured with a clarity of expression that immediately makes ideas accessible, comprehensible and manageable. In that respect, we in Botswana see the volume as a critical starting point wherein ideas are given relevance through a framework that stimulates heightened interest in the acquisition and application of practical wisdom on distance education. I am particularly struck by the commonalties between Botswana and Zimbabwe of the need for national development through DE. I am certain that countries that belong to the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) will find striking similarities with their own emerging systems. Member countries share a common destiny in respect of perceived DE benefits that are expected to accrue in the social, economic, cultural, and human resources development spheres.

P.T. Ramatsui

Former (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Republic of Botswana)



I consider it a rare opportunity to write a foreword to this scholarly text on ODL. This book is timely published at the time when demands for Distance Education and Open Learning are increasing, yet rarely do policy makers or educators find reference for best practice in the region. The book is the first formal attempt to draw lessons from neighboring countries with similar problems that warrant the demand for ODL as a viable alternative to satisfy growing hunger for education in Southern Africa. The similarities that have been drawn from Zimbabwe, Botswana and Malawi can chart the way forward for ODL in the region. The book offers encouragement for good practice and solutions to problems which otherwise would have seemed unattainable if it were not for the shared experience in this book.

The authors are further commended for exposing the expertise in ODL which exists in the region. It is clear that the programmes that have been discussed have been successful and this puts out fears of mediocrity that had for a long time been associated with ODL in the region. The conventional face to face mode of teaching and learning that produced so many of the current educators and policy makers would view the introduction of ODL as the second best alternation rather than a required option. The presentations in this book will go a long way in providing evidence of success in ODL against the background of second best perception.

The inclusion of a chapter on Malawi is another remarkable documentation of a recently introduced programme which is coming up as a success and a model for teacher education at higher education level. While donor funds supported the initiative to introduce it, the government determination to institutionalize the programme provides the example of sustainability so that promising projects should not end with the phasing out of donor funding. The developing countries, like the ones described in this book, cannot afford a one off programme associated with donor-funded projects when it regards ODL because it is an option that must be prioritized against all odds.

Elias Chakwera (PhD)
(Principal, Domasi College of Education, Malawi)



Overview

The authors of the present Handbook invite distance educators (policy makers, managers, course developers, learner supporters, and information communication technology managers) to share basic information about distance education (DE). There continues to be a rapid expansion of DE, and for that reason we need to be properly informed about it. It is now a fact that countries in the SADC region have, without exception, established DE systems in order to respond to the pressing socio-economic needs that conventional school systems cannot address adequately by themselves.

The writers have been influenced by their experiences in setting up DE systems in two countries, namely, Botswana and Zimbabwe. Generally speaking, experiences from those countries serve as a reference point of what obtains in other countries. Distance education is normally introduced after conventional schools have been in operation for decades, and probably generations. That alone is a challenge in the sense that introducing DE is a kind of innovation that unsettles well-established practitioners. Inevitably, they ask the relevant questions:

- What is DE?
- Why DE?
- How is DE practised?

There are no simple answers, and the authors (currently practising as distance educators) used personal experience from both conventional classroom teaching and DE practices to attempt answers. That classroom experience, which you too as a new or established distance educator have, serves as a useful background for answers in response to many questions we all have when we are introduced to DE. As you will agree, we all must start somewhere, usually as teachers trained for conventional schools, then get the necessary information to adjust to DE requirements. The truth of the matter is that converting to open learning practice is not automatic, for it takes training and commitment.

Distance education is both an academic and practical field that draws on ideas from conventional education. To be precise, DE also takes into account the psychology, philosophy, sociology, and didactic principles that typify conventional education. The writers, therefore, took the liberty to draw data from a wide range of sources, both theoretical and practical, while keeping conversation with the reader simple and easy to follow.

The writers draw on their experience from the time they were initiated into DE to the present day. During that period, of ten years and above, the present authors have trained new distance educators; attended national and international conferences; interacted with DE organisations in Southern Africa; managed DE organisations; and continue to contribute in a variety of ways.



Data from that background have been used in coming up with this volume whose aims are to:

- provide information about key issues in DE
- create awareness about an educational system that is fast gaining ground in Southern Africa
- prepare new distance educators to play a more fulfilling role in the field of DE
- empower distance educators by defining and discussing new ideas related to the field
- capacitate educators in managing systems, designing and developing courses, or supporting learners at a distance
- expose educators to sound methods of evaluating the effectiveness of their practice in DE
- equip practitioners with skills of handling challenges faced in DE in a proactive rather than a reactive manner.

To achieve these aims, we attempt a definition of DE and explain its main features. Linked to that are issues about the environment to be considered when setting up systems in new situations. Effective management of a given system, supported with good administration, will be essential for development of new courses and programmes. The course development activity has a number of stages to be followed. Once a course has been developed, there is need for a support structure that facilitates access to the course by learners. For that to happen, communication issues ought to be taken into account so that there is dialogue among stakeholders. The foregoing issues need to be viewed against a broader canvas of the current DE practices in the SADC region. To obtain an even clearer perception, we ought to examine challenges faced by DE systems as they face the future.

These aspects are dealt with in the form of a workshop consisting of nine sessions. Each session is the equivalent of a chapter. The ninth session is a case study on the Malawi experience. This format was adopted because the material arose from a series of workshops with practitioners from different organisations in the region. The material and the approach have been tested with groups of participants who have discussed DE ideas at length with the writers. Space has been left after in-text questions and activities so that as you read, you can write your own impressions. That way, ideas become clearer. Above all, we strongly advise that you engage in discussion with colleagues to make the workshop more practical. In that respect, topics for discussion and activities have also been included to promote more effective dialogue.

We hope that workshop facilitators will also find the book a suitable handmaid to their intentions. The objectives of the text are achievable through the mediating effect of language. I guess, you as an educator, know what language is because you know what language does (Halliday, 1978). Language makes events happen and knowledge more accessible. So, throughout, the authors are



conscious of the need to use language that minimizes barriers to the dialogue you will engage in. In turn, we expect that you too shall use language more actively to share your views and ideas about distance education. As Mercer (1995:21) puts it, “language is used to guide the construction of knowledge”. So, through dialogue, your knowledge about distance education practices is bound to expand. Remember the saying that a candle loses nothing by lighting another candle. Here are new thoughts to kindle your professional orientation.

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Abbreviations

AE Adult Education

BDEC Botswana Distance Education College

BOCODOL Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning

BGCSE Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education

BOTA Botswana Training Authority



CCL Conventional Classroom
CDE Centre for Distance Education
CDSS Community Day Secondary School
CIDA Canadian International Development Agency
COL Commonwealth of Learning
CSC Community Study Centre
CAL Computer Assisted Learning
CCE Centre for Continuing Education
CES Centre for External Studies
DE Distance Education
DNFE Department of Non Formal Education
DFID Department for International Development
DEASA Distance Education Association for Southern Africa
DANFE Department of Adult and Non Formal Education
EPP English for Professional Purposes
EDC Emlalatini Development Centre
HEXCO Higher Education Examination Council
ICT Information Communication Technology
IDE Institute of Distance Education
IEMS Institute of Extra-Mural Studies
L2 Second Language
LTA Learner Tutor Advisor
LTDC Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre
MANEB Malawi National Examination Board
MOU Malawi Open University



MSCE Malawi Secondary Certificate of Education

NADEOSA National Association of Distance Education in South Africa

NCE National Commission of Education

NQF National Qualifications Framework

NUL National University of Lesotho

NAMCOL Namibian College of Open Learning

OUM Open University of Malawi

ODL Open and Distance Learning

PON Polytechnic of Namibia

RRC Rapid Results College

SAIDE South African Institute of Distance Education

SAQA South African Qualifications Authority

SADC Southern African Development Community

SSBM Small Scale Business Management

SSTEP Secondary School Teacher education Project

SWOT Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

TCDE Technical Committee of Distance Education

TSA Technikon South Africa

TMA Tutor Marked Assignments

TVI Tutor Video Instruction

UB University of Botswana

UNAM University of Namibia

UNISA University of South Africa

UZ University of Zimbabwe

UNISWA University of Swaziland



VOU Virtual Online University

VUSSC Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

ZIDECO Zimbabwe Distance Education College

ZIDOLA Zimbabwe Distance and Open Learning Association

ZOU Zimbabwe Open University



Chapter 1 - Defining Distance Education

So long as I live, so long do I learn.

(Ramakrishna)

Introduction

The distance educator should no longer be satisfied with a layman's definition of Distance Education. As a developing field, DE should be viewed in a more professional manner and defined professionally. Though different educators have come up with different definitions, the principles underlying them tend to be the same. That is why we talk of perceiving DE in a certain way.

We assume that by choosing to take part in this workshop you have some interest in DE. For that reason, you need a more professional working definition of the concept and its related terms. For example, the difference between DE and correspondence education; the meaning of open learning; reasons for engaging in DE; and how Adult Education (AE) is linked with DE are issues that require clarification from the outset.

In whatever capacity you find yourself serving, knowledge about these basic concepts will help you carry out your responsibilities with confidence. Unlike the educator operating in the conventional classroom (CCL) situation, which many of us are familiar with, the distance educator will need to put in that extra effort to come to terms with the developing field of DE.

What is distance education?

As we share knowledge about DE, you probably are not meeting the concept for the first time. To begin our journey, pause a while and write your own short definition of distance education in this space.

It is good to note that you came up with a personal understanding of the term. People are likely to define it differently as you might be aware. This is nothing unusual if you recall the story of the six blind men of Indostan who went to view an elephant. One blind man got hold of the tail, and went home convinced that an elephant was like a rope. The other one got hold of the tusk, and exclaimed that the elephant was just like a spear. Upon touching the flank, the third blind man concluded that an elephant was like a wall. The remaining three made their own conclusions, depending on the part they happened to touch. When they all got back home, there arose such a disagreement that each man was left confirmed in his ignorance.



So, what is this elephant called DE? We are fortunate that we are not blind. We are also fortunate that this elephant has been researched into, therefore, there are ideas we can draw upon in the attempt to arrive at a better understanding. The definition you gave will be our starting point, and I take it you will also listen to definitions by your friends. That forms the basis for our joint exploration.

Distance education is the general term that includes the range of teaching and learning strategies used by:

- Correspondence colleges
- Open universities
- Distance education departments of conventional universities
- Distance education training units of private sector organisations

Thus, the term is used to refer to the education of those who, for one reason or another, choose not to attend conventional schools, colleges, or universities but study at home. One of the most comprehensive definitions is by Keegan (1996:44) in which six basic defining elements of DE are suggested. He observes that DE is characterised by:

- the separation of learner and tutor as opposed to face-to-face teaching
- the influence of an educational organisation which distinguishes distance education from private study
- the use of technical media, e.g. print, audio, or website to unite tutor and learner
- the provision of a two-way communication so that the student may engage in dialogue with the tutor
- the possibility of occasional meetings for purposes of interaction
- the self-directed nature of the learner's involvement

Now, add one defining element of your own here.

Note that these characteristics will form the basis for our subsequent discussions, so grasp them firmly. An even more succinct definition is that DE is characterized by its focus on "open access to



education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners” (UNESCO, 2002:7).

Was there any distance education in traditional African societies?

You are probably familiar with published ideas about education in traditional African societies. Educational sociologists (e.g. Castle, 1964) note that traditional education was non-formal, that is there were no structures called classrooms as we have today. Knowledge was acquired in the process of carrying out life processes, and there were no tests and examinations to group learners into pass or fail categories. Elders recognised what an individual was good at, and that person was encouraged to develop the recognised talent (hunting, basket-making, crop farming, etc.). According to Castle (1964) knowledge was acquired in order to solve real life problems. Where did distance education come in?

As distance educators, we ought to link what we practise to some of the practices found in traditional forms of education. Before moving on, write a brief description of how distance education was practised in your community.

Turning back to Keegan’s (1996) characteristics of DE, for example, the provision of a two-way communication, the self-directed nature of learner involvement, the influence of an educational organisation, etc. are some of the characteristics. Are these in any way reflected in your description of distance education in the traditional situation of your community. Now look at this experience closely.



Shaka Zulu

Shoshong is a village in the central part of Botswana. During the 19th century, the fame of Shaka, the Zulu King, spread far and wide. In the village of Shoshong were a number of regular travellers who visited places as far as the Eastern part of modern Zimbabwe, the Southern part of South Africa, as well as parts of modern Namibia and Zambia.

Whenever such travellers came back home, children and adults would huddle around them and listen to stories of horror, adventure, bravery, and courage about people in other lands. One of the most fascinating stories was that of Shaka Zulu. He ruled in Zululand, a stretch of land along the Indian Ocean. The traveller would narrate how Shaka moulded young people into tough soldiers, making up an army that was one of the most formidable on the African continent. These young soldiers would run bare-foot in fields of thorns, and one soldier was taught to tackle five or more soldiers singlehanded. As a test of resilience, the youth were asked to plunge into pools of semi-frozen water at the height of Winter. That was to be done early in the morning, and no one was supposed to shiver. Shaka would also inflict painful death on deserters from the battlefield.

As they listened to the traveller, youth would ask questions, and the traveller answered these as they engaged in a form of conversation. The young Bamangwato warriors who listened to these stories started practising some of the acts of bravery. They even named some of their peers after Shaka, especially those peers who showed the characteristics of Shaka as portrayed in the stories by the traveller. While out in the field, the young Bamangwato warriors would accommodate fighting styles they had heard about, thus improve performance in battle. They also learnt names of places, names of people, and ways of doing things. Thus, through the traveller, they learned new knowledge.

You may well ask, but where is the distance learning here? In our opinion, there is quite a bit about distance learning in this experience.

- The traveller / message carrier represented modern day self-instructional materials.
- Zululand, the equivalent of an organisation, exercised some influence on the listeners in the same way BOCODOL or ZOU would on learners without them going to headquarters.
- There was two-way communication between the traveller and his audience similar to that we find between learner, on the one hand, and study materials and tutors, on the other
- After listening to the traveller, listeners would apply knowledge in practice, just as BOCODOL and ZOU students would. That implies learners became self-directed



- There was real distance between Shoshong and Zululand, mediated through language by the traveller.

The main difference is that the mode of communication in traditional distance education was oral, while open learning, as we know it today, combines both oral and written means of communication. If you think more deeply about it, we still have non-formal distance education today in one form or the other. It influences our knowledge levels, and we change our ways of doing things. Can you think of more examples?

I am sure you were able to point out a number of distinguishing features, including the following.

- Correspondence education is normally organised through the post
- Correspondence education does not have the benefits of audio, video, and computer-based technologies
- There is limited scope for meetings between tutors and students in correspondence education

Add one feature of your own.

It is necessary to have a clear idea about the distinctions between these terms because they are often confused. Put side-by-side, correspondence study is often associated with some of the less successful aspects of distance education, largely because the mediating effect of the human voice is lacking. Mills,,,,, with Marchessou, Nonyongo and Tau (Hope and Guiton, 2006:73) observe that “tutoring and student support should be regarded as being as important as study materials”.

What is open learning?

Open learning is another term normally used in conjunction with DE. It has become common to talk of open and distance learning (ODL). What, then, do you understand by open learning? Note down your understanding.

Distance educators like Evans (1994) and Lockwood (1995) make a distinction between conventional classroom learning and distance learning by defining the openness of the latter. Distance learning is said to be open because:



- there is no age restriction in terms of someone being too old to study
- there is no strict adherence to entry qualifications
- the learner, in most cases, decides on his/her own pace of study
- the learner is in charge of his/her own study timetable
- there are no bottlenecks associated with the conventional education system.

The term open learning is used to distinguish DE from the many educational practices that characterise normal school education as practised worldwide.

There are advantages and disadvantages of ODL, which you should be familiar with. We suggest some of these, and hope you will be able to come up with one advantage and one disadvantage of your own in the space provided.

Advantages

- The materials are especially designed in such a way that the student does not necessarily have to have a tutor in front
- Although learning is directed, it is largely autonomous
- There is flexibility in the scheduling of the learning process
- DE is normally less expensive than conventional education

Disadvantages

- The learner is usually isolated from the tutor and other students
- The distance learner has difficulties having access to learning resources

With the help of the advantages and disadvantages cited above, work on the following activity.

Activity 1A

In the first column, suggest features that characterise conventional classrooms. For each one, write how it is manifested in DE. The first one has been done for you.



CONVENTIONAL CLASSROOM	DISTANCE EDUCATION
A. Teacher determines pace of learning	Learners study at their own pace
B.	
C.	
D.	
E.	

Do you think this helps you realise that there are basic differences between the two ways of learning? How does this realisation help you become a more effective distance educator? Remember that knowledge is power.

Why distance education?

Join any group of distance educators in your country, and indeed any part of the world today. You will hear them talk of the limitless benefits of DE, and how it has opened access to knowledge, for the disadvantaged, with a bang. This 'big bang' or 'big impression' is supported by authoritative references to progress made in big institutions such as the Indira Gandhi Open University (India), the Chinese Mega University, the Australian distance education network, the Open University (UK), to name but a few. That is the way to go!

African countries have drawn inspiration from this trend in response to domestic pressures for wider access to education. The challenge has been taken seriously, and talk about ODL saturates the corridors of conventional colleges and schools, preoccupies politicians and education planners, and pervades our rural areas. Why do you think governments and individuals opt for DE as an alternative means of studying? Naidoo with Nhavoto and Reddi (Hope and Guiton, 2006:&) argue that distance and open learning is increasingly becoming a preferred means of enabling governments to increase access to education, thereby responding to demands of equity of opportunity to participate in learning and meet the ever-changing human resource needs. Now, suggest two reasons of your own saying why it is advantageous to study by distance, then read the six advantages we came up with.

- You do not have to leave your job (losing a salary) in order to do your studies
- What you study could have a direct bearing on your job, and that makes the study more meaningful and holistic
- There is no worry about failing to get a vacancy as happens in conventional schools. Normally there is no question of classes being full in a DE institution



- It is not necessary to stick to specific hours of study
- When studying at home you get the support of family members
- Distance education fees are comparatively lower.

DE has become a viable option because conventional institutions cannot meet the increasing demand for education. As an example, in 1993 the University of Zimbabwe could only accommodate 23% of Advanced Level school leavers who qualified to enter university. What percentage of school leaving certificate holders can institutions of higher learning in your country absorb?

What is the link between adult education (AE) and DE? Let's begin with your personal definition of AE here.

Whenever educators discuss AE, there is no consensus as to what it means. In attempting to define the term, we should begin by recognising that DE, which is characterised by learner separation from the convenience of having a teacher readily available, requires a good deal of self-discipline. This is a kind of maturity often associated with adult behaviour, but can also be found in learners not regarded as adults in terms of age. Because of that, adult education can also include non-adults. To support this, please take note of the following definition by Jarvis (1983:53): "The education of adults was seen to be any educational process in which those who regard themselves, and are regarded as socially mature, participate". For further insight, read ideas on this matter by Per-raton (2000).

Though spelt out long ago, the definition has stood the test of time. Be that as it may, other connotations about the term AE have emerged over time. For example:

- AE learners learn in a whole variety of settings, some of which may be organised by an institution
- Somebody should facilitate AE with the aim of nurturing self-directed adults
- AE involves formal courses run by statutory and non-statutory agencies making up the educational system
- AE is seen as contributing to social change
- AE is accepted as learning that goes on throughout life. Thus, it is a lifelong process for which the following catchwords are used: a cradle-to grave undertaking; recurrent education; continuing education; lifelong education



- AE education involves voluntary participation in a collaborative spirit.

These six connotations, therefore, suggest a close link between DE and AE. Bear them in mind when you prepare material for a group of distance learners, or when conducting tutorials.

Summary

In this chapter, we shared knowledge about foundation issues. The term DE was defined after acknowledging that different educators might define it differently. Though such definitions may vary, the essential principles underlying them tend to converge. After the definition, the discussion went on to:

- highlight organisations that are normally associated with DE
- differentiate DE from correspondence education
- characterise open learning as a feature of DE
- summarise some of the features of DE
- provide arguments in support of DE
- define AE as it relates with DE.

In our deliberations over the subject of distance education, it became clear that learning does not end. It is, therefore, worth noting that there is reward in lifelong learning, and we should bear in mind these words:

Nothing is more dishonourable than an old man, heavy with years, who has no evidence of his having lived long except his age.

(A Shona proverb in Zimbabwe)

Topics for discussion

1. What is the attitude of people in your community towards distance education?
2. What arguments would you advance to young adults to encourage them to study by distance education?
3. Explain what you consider to be the advantages of an open learning approach, as opposed to the conventional approach of education.
4. To what extent can we use the terms distance education and adult education interchangeably?



Chapter 2 - Open and Distance Learning in New Environments

You too can be creative in the field of education. Why doubt your ability? To create is noble, uplifting, inspiring ...

(Gaosetwe Chiepe – former Minister of Education, Botswana)

Introduction

There is a phenomenal increase, the world over, in the demand for education and training. The recognised fact is that conventional schools, colleges, and universities are failing to cope with the demand. DE has been found a viable alternative, but countries burdened with such a demand often start DE systems from scratch. In many cases there is no manpower with relevant training, and it is those people with training in conventional education systems who are prevailed upon to start as best as they can. They make a start alright, and produce results. Somehow they make use of theoretical ideas and their practical experience in teaching. In our experience, however, observation has confirmed that a systematic exposure to knowledge about ODL goes a long way in preparing practitioners and stakeholders for the much-needed creativity in running open learning systems.

New DE learning environments make certain demands on those who hold positions of responsibility. Botswana and Zimbabwe, and Malawi serve as good examples. Some of the issues discussed in this chapter, towards that end, include: features of a new distance education environment; the definition of, the categories of, and the planning of ODL systems; an explanation of distance education structures, that is, what makes a DE structure distinctive; a discussion of stakeholders commonly identified in DE systems; and an examination of some constraints found in new environments. There is a probability that a clear understanding of these matters will enable practitioners to approach their respective tasks with increased confidence.

What is a new open and distance learning environment?

In order to answer this question, let us begin with an examination of the background to DE systems of two neighbouring countries, namely, Zimbabwe and Botswana. The situation in Malawi will be treated as a unique case study in Chapter Nine. After going through these two, pause a while and attempt brief notes on how DE came into being in your country.



Tertiary level distance education at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU)

The 1982 University of Zimbabwe(UZ) Act, as amended in 1990 made provision, among other things, for the establishment of “correspondence courses and extramural courses for young adults” (Section 4 (d)). In 1989, the Williams Commission Report recommended the adoption of a dual mode of delivery, that is, the offering of degree and non-degree programmes on full-time as well as at a distance. This was after realising that the UZ could only enrol a mere 23% of school leavers who qualified to undertake university studies.

In 1991, the university’s Senate accepted, in principle, the introduction of DE. In January 1993, a Director for the Centre of Distance Education (CDE), a department of the university, was appointed. His role was to co-ordinate operations leading to the establishment of programmes of study by the Centre. Earlier, in 1991, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) had been commissioned by the Ministry of Education to undertake a feasibility study on upgrading teachers through DE.

In 1993, the first distance education Bachelor of Education (Educational Policy, Planning, and Policy Studies) degree was launched by the UZ Vice Chancellor. In 1999, the Zimbabwe Open University was created by an Act of Parliament. It became an autonomous organisation. ZOU was expected to contribute towards economic and social development for self-reliance as envisaged in the national development vision dubbed Vision 2020. Today the college offers a wide range of degree, diploma, and certificate courses. These include the Diploma in Classroom Text and Discourse (an in-service course for teachers); the Bachelor of Arts English and Communication Studies; the Post Graduate Diploma in Education; Master of Business Administration, and degrees in Special Education, Guidance and Counselling, Mathematics and Statistics, Agriculture, Geography and Environmental Science, to name a few.



Pre-tertiary distance education at the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL)

BOCODOL was created by an Act of Parliament in December 1998. The case for establishing a semi-autonomous distance teaching college was made by the National Commission of Education (NCE) in 1993 (Recommendation number 87). The recommendation was approved by the National Assembly in April 1994 as part of the revised national policy on education. The main reason for coming up with ODL as a feature of the Botswana education system was a result of researched evidence that the conventional school system could no longer cope with the demand for education, and secondly, that there were many out-of school youths and adults who wanted to improve their qualifications, but for one reason or another could not re-access formal schools. Some stages were, therefore, followed before final establishment of the parastatal known as BOCODOL.

Initially, DE at secondary level was provided by a division in the Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE). In July 1992, the NCE commissioned a feasibility study on establishing a DE college. In 1994, Government White Paper No. 2 on the Revised Policy on Education accepted the NCE recommendation for establishing a Botswana Distance Education College (BDEC). This was followed by the formation of a Planning Committee in 1996 to work on the legislation and project proposal for BDEC. In 1997, the British government gave a grant to the Botswana government, through the Department for International Development (DFID) to establish BDEC. The grant was going to be administered by the University of Bath, and this partnership began in January 1998. During the same year, the name of the College changed to BOCODOL through Act No. 20. In August 1999 the first Director of the parastatal took office, and in 2000 the first Board of Governors replaced the interim Management Committee.

Currently, the College offers Junior Certificate (JC) courses, and the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE). In addition to these secondary school level programmes, the College has introduced vocational courses. Some of these are English for Professional Purposes (EPP) and Small Scale Business Management (SSBM). EPP is an in-service course for professionals who want to improve their communication skills in English. SSBM aims at improving business management skills of small-scale business people so as to enhance their capacity to generate income and create employment in line with the national development plan dubbed Vision 2016.

What is noteworthy about these two case studies?

Both start something new in the respective countries. The fact that they focus on different educational levels helps you draw comparisons for application in your country or DE system. But then, what is a new environment? Basically, the environments for the two cases cited above a renew because DE was not provided prior to passing of the acts of parliament. Reading through the case studies, one finds that in both:

- a law was passed to create an ODL system
- only conventional education had been in existence before the law was passed



- DE was meant to address social and economic issues which the conventional system could not address by itself focus would be on a specific level of the education system
- there were no formal structures of ODL in existence before the passing of acts of parliament
- courses to be offered were to be determined by the new managers
- the organisations are autonomous

These are some of the features of a new system. Add any two of your own from both personal experience and the two case studies cited above.

It will be clear from the foregoing that where there is no system in place, one has to be developed or created. What does that mean? It is essential to develop a system on the basis of sound planning. Rumble (1997) recognizes the importance of strategic planning as the key to successful ODL ventures in new environments. The first thing is to consider the environmental conditions in which the organisation is going to operate if at all it is to remain sustainable.

To develop a DE system is to start or cause it to exist and make it grow. Developing something involves planning for it, and taking the necessary steps to establish it. On the other hand, planning refers to the preparations made for the DE system (one being developed) so that objectives and expectations are met. In other words, a plan for a system is the decision made in advance, a kind of map concerning how the system is going to be run. What counts as an open learning system? The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines a system as a group of things or parts working together as a whole. The parts are working towards a predetermined goal and vision. From this more general definition, we can come up with one that relates more specifically to DE.

What counts as an open learning system? Note down your understanding in response to the question above.

How does your view compare with the following definition of an open learning system by Freeman (1997:1)?

...a system where learners are substantially responsible for their own learning but are still formally enrolled in a system which includes other learners.



We emphasised some the words for you to reflect on their significance. We invite you to go back to Chapter One and see what we said about features of DE. These are implied in the words emphasised. In what ways are the systems of BOCODOL and ZOU borne out in this definition? The most obvious thing that comes to mind is the issue of structure. How would a DE system be structured? Basically, the term structure refers to the way a system is organised, built and put together. A structure is made up of people who take charge of different but related responsibilities. A parallel can be drawn with the human body as a structure comprising the digestive, respiratory, and neural systems all joined to keep the body functioning. Such responsibilities can be generalised to other DE organisations. That means there are similarities in the way BOCODOL, ZOU and other systems in SADC countries are organised. The variations will be confined to specific requirements that apply to the individual organisation. Given this, what do you consider to be the main responsibilities of a DE system? Note down your suggestions before reading on.

Compare your ideas with these ones.

- Firstly, the state must approve the setting up of a DE system through a legal instrument.
- A board of governors should then be appointed. The board takes charge of logistics for issues such as finance, study programmes, personnel policy, etc. through its committees.
- The top manager (Director or Vice Chancellor) is appointed to manage implementation of the system. Issues such as strategic planning and institutional development are under charge of the director or vice chancellor.
- Course developers are then appointed to work on the core business of producing study materials.
- The Learner support section is created to ensure that enrolment of learners and delivery of courses occur.
- The Information Communication and Technology (ICT) section is then established. It serves a number of functions including desktop publishing and web design. It also acts as a resource centre. This general structure can be represented in the form of a diagram.



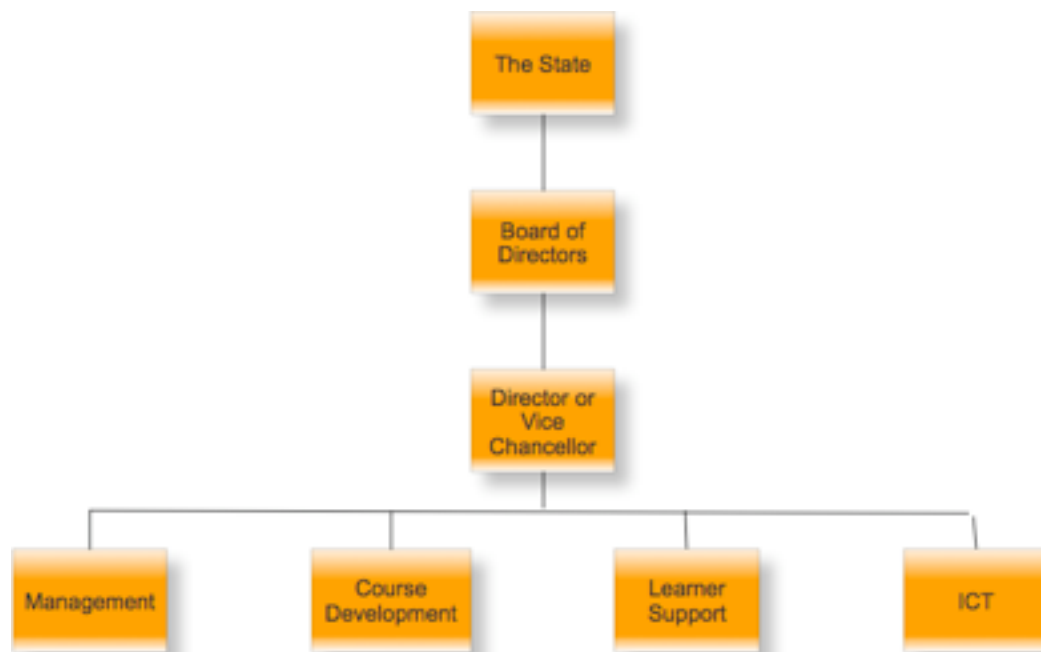


Figure 1: The structure of a DE system

Taking into account an organisation you are familiar with, what differences do you note when compared to this organogram? Note them down and discuss with colleagues.

How are ODL systems categorised?

To categorise is to classify something. In this section the objective is to discuss how DE systems are normally classified. Freeman (1997:2 - 3) proposes six major types of open learning systems. Only three are chosen for discussion presently because they are more relevant to the scope of DE in new environments.

i. The self-paced individual-based system

In this system, learners learn at their own pace. However, the major constraint is that learners would be at different points in their courses. There is limited student-tutor contact, if any. This is the pattern followed by Wolsey Hall College (UK), which mails study materials to learners enrolled as external students of the University of London all over the world. Examination dates are given in advance to facilitate self-pacing.

ii. The paced campus-based system



This system follows study terms or semesters. At times, there are timetabled lecture slots, while the main focus is on individual responsibility for learning. Technikon South Africa (TSA), now merged with UNISA, follows this pattern in some of its programmes.

iii. The paced home-based system

The system gives priority to the organisation's need to have all learners at the same point in their courses, at the same time. This makes it possible for the organisation to send out course materials to everyone at the same time. Deadlines for assignments and assessment dates can be fixed for everyone. The University of South Africa (UNISA), ZOU, and BOCODOL follow this pattern.

Activity 2A

a. Choose one system, from those given above, which you would not opt for, and give reasons why it would not succeed in a new environment.

Name of system

Reasons:

b. Choose one system, from those given above, which you would opt for, and give reasons why you would recommend it in a new environment.

Name of system

Reasons:

Your choice will depend on the environment for which the system is intended. Share your argument with colleagues regarding the two systems you commented on. This is an important activity which leaves you clearer about what you think works well or does not work well in your situation.

Who are the stakeholders in a distance education system?

A stakeholder is an interested party, either as an individual or an organisation. By drawing on personal experience, list some of the stakeholders found in a distance learning system you are familiar with. One such stakeholder, as we have seen above is the state.



We are certain that you were able to list as many as you could. Now turn to Figure 2 and compare your list with stakeholders identified at BOCODOL and ZOU.



Figure 2: Stakeholders in distance education

Each stakeholder is interested in the system for different reasons. For example, what programmes and courses are offered; how programmes link with social and economic needs; the quality of study materials; the nature of support that learners receive; the calibre of personnel in charge of delivering the courses; the fees charged for a particular course; whether courses are recognised both nationally and internationally; etc. It will be interesting to go back to Figure 2.

Look at the list of stakeholders and suggest what each one would be interested in. Alternatively, list all the stakeholders identified in the DE system you are familiar with and suggest why each stakeholder has an interest. New environments tend to have stakeholders who would not be normally found in more established DE systems. A good example are non-governmental organisations that may come up with funding for a particular project. The ZOU had one such project concerned with in-servicing primary and secondary school teachers sponsored by Rotary Club International, Rubery Club (UK). As a stakeholder, the organisation provided funding for developing course materials, and piloting the project before handing over the management of the course to the university. The Malawi case gives interesting insights regarding the role played by the Canadian Development Agency in setting up a DE institution.

What constraints are found in new environments?

Now that we have deliberated over some of the key issues regarding provision of DE, what, in your opinion, are some of the constraints that the manager, the course developer, or the learner



supporter is likely to face? A constraint is something that limits or restricts you from achieving your intended goal. Mention any two constraints that immediately come to mind.

Add these six to yours.

- Physical distance is a real constraint in developing countries. Learners travel long distances to the study centre. That involves money, which is often not available.
- Inconsistent attendance at tutorials is a major constraint directly linked with the issue of distance and money for transport. When learners do not attend tutorials regularly, the effectiveness of a system is compromised.
- There often is a lack of qualified manpower to handle DE. Shortage of manpower limits the capacity of an organisation to deliver quality service.
- Resources are a major problem. These include library books, venues for tutorials, and gadgets such as video and audio equipment.
- In cases where computers can be made available, the manpower often lacks the necessary skills to handle them. You therefore, have a situation where either computers are not available, or when available, no one can use them to good effect.
- There is an over-reliance on print media for delivering the programmes. The print materials have certain limitations which advanced distance learning providers have overcome by using supportive technologies. For one thing, printed materials lack variety, especially in those organisations that cannot afford paying for the services of graphic artists to provide illustrations.

These constraints can be discouraging, but should serve as a reminder that participating in DE requires unconditional commitment. You are joining a system that requires self-starters, people who are creative and able to turn constraints into challenges. In most African countries, governments are grappling with the problem of financial resources. More often than not, there are other national responsibilities such as fighting hunger, poverty, and disease that compete for funding. Distance education may not receive that urgent prioritisation, more especially when conventional education also competes for the same limited resources. However, it is not feasible to think of establishing a DE system without basic financial and other capital requirements.



We take it that the point has been made that there is a host of constraints that could easily frustrate a well-planned DE system. A clearer awareness of the challenges that one can find in a new environment, prepares you for the task lying ahead as we say: forewarned is forearmed.

Summary

So, what did we learn in this part of the workshop? By building on the definition of ODL which we explored in Chapter One, we:

- explained what a new DE environment entails by drawing from two case studies
- defined DE systems, planning, development and the structure of a system
- described a DE structure
- explained three categories of open learning systems
- clarified what a stakeholder is
- explained roles played by stakeholders in ODL
- observed that establishing DE systems in new environments requires creativity so as to overcome constraints

It will be clear by now that careful planning is the basis for pioneering DE in new environments. It is not a question of jumping into setting up some framework overnight and expect immediate results. More careful preparation is required as the following words remind us:

Dig the well before you are thirsty.

(A proverb from the Basarwa of Kgalagadi in Botswana)

Topics for discussion

1. Which section of the ODL structure is concerned with the core business of an organisation?
2. What do you consider to be the major constraints of setting up a distance education system in developing countries?
3. Suggest ways of in-servicing personnel involved in running a DE institution.
4. Discuss changes you would like to be made in the development of the DE system you are familiar with.



Chapter 3 - Managing the Distance Education System

A wise man grips opportunity firmly and turns it to good account for the benefit of the nation.
Good managers ought to be inspired by wisdom.

(Robert Mugabe – President of Zimbabwe)

Introduction

The management function breathes life into ideas, theories, opinions, and expectations about an identified distance education system. A given institution operates within the service industry commonly known as education. For the manager, an understanding of the education market is critical to organizational success. The manager's opportunity to kick-start a DE organisation is a chance that can be converted into good fortune. Freeman's (2004) book is one of the most recent sources of information about the management function. We strongly recommend it for managers.

In this part of the workshop, we discuss questions pertaining to the nature of management as it relates to a DE system. In essence, the management of a given DE organisation is the management of a huge project made up of several projects of national significance. Examples from BOCODOL and ZOU will be referred to in order to illustrate principles that can be generalised to different systems that you may be familiar with. The steps taken consciously by Malawi Centre for Distance and Continuing Education, guided by Hickling International Ltd, a consultancy working under the auspices of CIDA (2000-2007), illustrate the benefits of investing in the management function as detailed in Chapter 9. The link between the strategic plan and management is examined before moving on to the management of investment. After that, the issues of risk reduction and quality control are examined. SWOT analysis is a key consideration in systems management, so it will be discussed in conjunction with market research. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of ways that can be followed to build teamwork in an organisation.

What does management of distance education involve?

A DE system is usually likened to a three-legged pot. Without one leg, the pot cannot stand upright. The three legs are: management, course development, and learner support. The bottom line for the manager is that DE is like any other business enterprise that needs skillful administration and control. The purpose of management is to take the organisation from where it is now to where you want it to be. What questions should managers ask themselves to enable them to move from the present to a future marked with success? Indicate some of these questions here before looking at the ones we have provided.



- The questions are far too many to exhaust, and may include the following.
- What is the core business of a DE organisation?
- What level of the education system does the organisation focus on?
- What are the staffing requirements?
- Who funds the organisation?
- What funds are required?
- How are the funds to be administered?
- What resources are required?
- Who are the stakeholders?
- Who are the competitors in the field?
- What structure would be more suitable for the organisation?
- How can one ensure team spirit among the sections, which make up the structure?

These questions are equally important to stakeholders. It is helpful to know what the administration of an organisation involves in order to appreciate the importance of course development; responsibilities of a tutor; the objectives of managing a district or a region; etc. Having said that, let us define management.

Recently, King with Mallet and Bates (Hope and Guiton, 2006:52) define management by singling out three features. The first involves the capacity of a system to endure over time. The second is cost effectiveness, and the third is the value position i.e. whether what the institution seeks to do through the distance teaching system continues to be worth doing, and is defensible by reasonable argument. Appleby (1982) is of the opinion that management is made up of four functions, namely, planning, organising, motivating and controlling. Planning has already been defined as mapping out in advance what needs to be done to make the system a success. On the other hand, organising means creating an arrangement of positions through which an enterprise can carry out its work. This would be different from motivating which entails calculated rewarding of staff, thereby encouraging them to work with commitment. Finally, controlling refers to defining the extent to which certain responsibilities should be carried out.

As an example, tutoring a group of learners is not management as such. It is the application of management ideas. However, the strategies taken by the administrator to ensure the work environment is conducive to co-operation among the DE sections can be regarded as a management



function since it involves planning, control and organisation. The concept of management, therefore, refers to every other non-routine task which makes it possible for learning and running the organisation to take place. The manager is guided by the Strategic Plan, policies and procedures. The last two are discussed in Chapter 9.

What is a Strategic Plan?

An organisation is expected to have a strategic plan. How would you define it in your own language?

True, it is a map of some kind. It has a number of features, for example, it represents the thinking of stakeholders about how the DE system will be managed. A strategic plan is formulated before the system is implemented, or during the early stages of operation. It should not be left until too late, or else implementation will be haphazard. In a sense, the organisation's strategic plan provides answers to questions raised by the manager, including those already spelt out above.

The primary management objectives of a DE organisation are captured in what are known as the mission statement and the vision. These are part of the strategic plan. To help you understand what these are, I shall quote those of BOCODOL.

Mission Statement

To empower the nation with education and skills through open access to quality, innovative distance learning programmes and services for the promotion of a culture of life-long learning.

Vision

To be a world-class college of open and distance learning.

Remember to link your ideas to personal experience and developments in the organisation you are associated with as you work on the activity that follows.



Activity 3A

a. How is the mission statement linked with the management function?

b. What distinguishes the vision from the mission statement?

c. How does each of these stakeholders benefit from a clearer understanding of the mission statement and the vision?

The course developer

The tutor

There are no right and wrong answers here. The main idea is to give your own view so as to arrive at a better understanding of the two concepts in question. Your responses should show the link between either statement, and a successful organisation. You should also be able to illustrate that stakeholders ought to be inspired by the statements. The two are a driving force behind the creativity we expect in management. As observed earlier, managing a DE institution implies numerous projects to be managed. The executive manager (Vice Chancellor or Director) will have middle managers to assist in running the organisation. For example, the manager for the course development section could have a project of designing a particular course meant for a specific group. Ideas about project management should then be called into play. It is noteworthy that a project mentality is essential in a DE organisation. Managing a new study programme, for example, should be conceived as a way of implementing change.

Hope and Guiton (2006) make an important observation, namely, that the context within which educational institutions operate is constantly changing as political, economic, and social pressures give rise to demands for new accountabilities, relevance and performance. Thus, strategic planning and change management are correlated. Nel et al (2005:502) have the following to say:

Simply defined, change means to make things different. Change, to be successful, requires unfreezing the status quo, a movement to a new state, and refreezing the new change to make it permanent. Too much change, however, leads to chaos; and too little change leads to stagnation.



This is an important observation reminding the DE manager that change means readjustment to the environmental demands, and might involve employees, change of organizational structure, formulation of new strategies, and redefinition of roles. Change can be unsettling, and if not “planfully handled”, can result in conflict. Depending on how it is managed, change can either dramatically shorten the life span of an organization, or lengthen it. How do these ideas relate to the ODL organization you are associated with?

To manage change more effectively, the manager must first identify what the desired outcome of change is. For the project to succeed, it should begin with a clear definition of the outcome. The next step is to plan the route by which we expect to arrive at the desired outcome, the required resources and the expected time it will take to complete it. All these integral parts are taken into account to ensure that change is not haphazard, lengthy, and costly.

Thus, when a project is conceived, the manager will be guided by the simple definition of a project as a scope of work of pre-determined cost, designed to bring about a change of defined quality in a given time.

We conclude this section with what we will call the management tree (Figure 3), which summarises some of the key responsibilities of the DE manager.

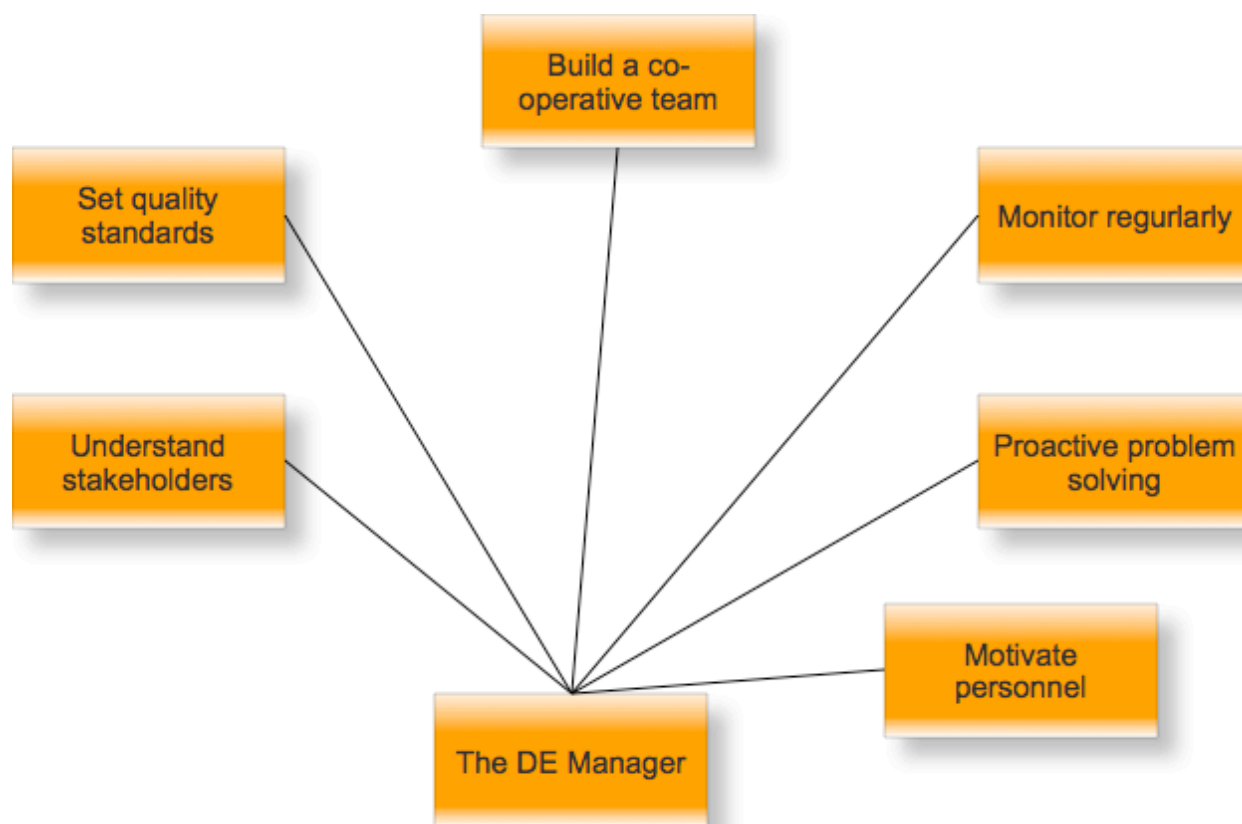


Figure 3: The management tree

What other branches would you suggest for the tree? Share your views with colleagues before moving on to investment management.

How can investment be managed?

To invest in something means spending money with the hope of recovering, or making profit out of that money. In one of the branches of the management tree, it is stated that a good manager is expected to set quality standards. Stakeholders, in particular the learners, are prepared to spend their hard-earned money where quality is assured. In a chapter contributed by Tau and Thutoetsile (Koul and Kanwar, 2006) the issue of quality in the provision of distance learning at BOCODOL is fully highlighted. What does the quality of a product or service mean? Spell-out your understanding here.

The quality of something refers to how good or bad that thing is. Thus, when we talk of the quality assurance of an ODL programme or service, we refer to the methods used by an organization to check that the standards of its programmes and services are high enough. Nel et al. (2005) observe that quality assurance involves the art of inspection that will instill understanding and integration of individual objectives and supportiveness of quality at all levels of the organization. Earlier, Cascio (1995:18) did define quality as the “meeting of customer’s requirements first time and every time, where customers can be internal as well as external to the organization”. For ODL managers, quality is an issue they cannot afford to compromise.

In educational terms quality means competitive education and training services that satisfy expectations of stakeholders, and meet measurable standards or what are known as benchmarks. A quality qualification should, therefore, contribute to the achievement of national, economic, social, or cultural goals. The good manager will ensure that investment is made with the issue of quality in mind.

To set up an organisation, finance is required for various purposes. List as many items as you can for which capital is required.



It will be clear from your list that setting up a DE organisation requires capital for essentials such as premises, salaries, transport, equipment, to name but a few. Finances ought to be managed efficiently irrespective of the size of the organisation.

In Chapter Two, we examined three open learning systems, and pointed out that for organisations like BOCODOL and ZOU, the paced home-based system is the preferred one. What, then, is required for the system to operate successfully? Here are some of the basic requirements.

- Sustained resources
- Effective leadership
- Enthusiastic and committed staff
- Free flow of information
- Relevance of institution to the nation
- An enabling environment
- Responsiveness to change
- Stakeholder involvement
- Networking
- Skilled staff
- Systems and processes for quality assurance in place
- Competitiveness
- Business orientation
- Research orientation

These constitute what we referred to as investment. While these may also apply to conventional organisations, there is a fundamental difference.

In a **conventional institution**, costs are fixed and predictable. The manager plans to have so many learners, to be taught by so many teachers, offering so many subjects, at so much per hour. The costs are fixed in such a way that if there are enough learners, lessons are run. If there are too few learners, lessons are cancelled before incurring costs.

In an **ODL institution**, where materials are often made from scratch, there is an initial high fixed cost. The writing of materials takes long, and costs have to be paid before enrolment takes place.



The costs are for salaries, fees for writers and content editors, and stationery. In addition, there are costs for typesetting, publishing, and printing.

So, what conclusions do we arrive at concerning investment in open learning?

- there is a large fixed cost
- large numbers of learners are required before costs can be recovered once the organisation is able to recover costs, further enrolments yield a high profit
- it is possible to make huge losses with poor management, and vice versa
- courses should be introduced after carrying out market research

The financial risks in a DE system that develops its own materials are considerable. There is ample evidence in new environments showing that some institutions close down sooner before offering any service worth talking about. In other cases, there are government-sponsored organisations, which become a national liability for failure to generate their own revenue and sustaining open learning activities. Let us suppose you are a tutor, a course developer, a study centre supervisor, or a regional manager within an open learning organisation. What two recommendations would you make to the manager of your organization to improve chances of cost recovery and profit making, thereby reducing risk?

One of the risks associated with poorly managed finances is the viability problem, which usually results in an organisation retrenching some of its workers. A project that is not viable is one that makes losses. That means the manager should develop an awareness of the implications of running a system without basic knowledge about project management and the required expertise. The expertise needed to set up and run a system that is efficient implies two notions:

- market research
- constant appraisal of investment

These are usually exercised under guidance from SWOT analysis, probably a familiar acronym to you. It means:

S - strengths (the strengths of your organisation over competitors)

W - weaknesses (the weaknesses compared to those of your competitors)



O - opportunities (the opportunities you have to make you succeed)

T - threats (the threats that could interfere with attainment of goals)

The two features (market research and appraisal of investment) are considered relative to a given organisation. The point is that the manager should figure out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats surrounding the system then decide what programmes to offer.

How can market research be used to reduce risk?

The DE manager should be in no doubt about the importance of market research, and what its benefits are. Let us begin with your own definition of market research in the field of education. What is market research?

I guess you included, in your definition, the idea that market research is a conscious step taken to find information about the market in which your DE institution is going to operate. Successful market research will yield useful information about your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relative to other competitors. It will:

- inform you about your percentage of the market share
- help you ascertain feasibility of the project
- show trends in DE over time, and help you make reliable forecasts
- help you identify stakeholders
- reveal the motivation of stakeholders to study with your organization
- give information about competitors
- indicate how competitive your programmes will be

As Freeman (1997:139) points out, "there is nothing that can be done within a financial management system to make something sell that people do not wish to buy". That is to say, people ought to be asked what they are interested in before you can sell it to them. Here are two success stories about market research from BOCODOL and ZOU.

The BOCODOL story

The management of BOCODOL had a hunch that there was need to raise the standard of English language and communication among members of the Botswana Police Service. A consultant was commissioned to do market research. The officers who were interviewed confirmed the need for such a programme. The findings also showed that there was no similar course run anywhere in the country.



However, BOCODOL was advised of the importance of originating material that would reflect communication issues commonly found in the police service. BOCODOL went on to appoint a co-ordinator to take charge of the proposed programme. In turn the officer carried out an in-depth analysis of the way police officers used language in statement-writing, report-writing, court procedures, interviewing, interrogating informants, etc. Instructional materials were to be developed before enrolment took place, and costing was also done. The duration of the certificate course was fixed before piloting it with a smaller group of learners to ensure the issue of quality was addressed. A task force, named the Project Committee Team was assigned the responsibility of driving the project.

The ZOU story

The Zimbabwe Ministry of Education realised that a high percentage of teachers (both primary and secondary) were under-trained as far as processing classroom discourse was concerned. The main concern were the observed shortcomings by teachers in handling the discourse of classroom texts, and that of oral interaction competently enough to teach the different subjects of the school curriculum.

In collaboration with the Open University (UK), ZOU piloted a module:

Observing Classroom Language with a selected group of teachers. There was no course offered in the country similar to that. This encouraged Rotary International, Rubery Club, England, to finance the writing of instructional material. ZOU appointed a Programme Co-ordinator with the relevant pedagogic and communication expertise to take the lead. Enrolment of students was carried out nation-wide when the materials were in place. The course lasted 12 months, and was subsidised by the government.

These stories are meant to explain the issue of market research and project management. So, what do we learn from them, considering what we said about SWOT analysis? Spend some time on this activity, which is based on the two stories.



Activity3B

Refer to the stories detailed above to respond to these questions.

- a. How does market research help reduce risk?

- b. How does market research help identify competitors for the two organisations?

- c. What are the strengths of each organisation as reflected in the market research?

- d. What chances of success do the two organisations have? Support your view.

Your response should be guided by ideas contained in the SWOT analysis. Useful feedback will also come from colleagues as you discuss the issues together.

Managers will be reminded that while market research is essential where cost is involved, it is sometimes too easy to put too much faith in what research can tell us. This is for a number of reasons, including the following:

- While research findings may show the need for a programme of study, that need may be at cross purposes with politicians who might have a totally different agenda that is not educational. This is often experienced in new environments.
- The findings may recommend a fantastic course, which might, unfortunately, be outside the mandate of the college.
- Stakeholders do not necessarily know what they want. They might not be able to describe it in precise terms. The course they want might not be relevant to the job market.



- Interviewees have the tendency to say what they think the interviewer wants to hear, and that can lead to recommendations that are not beneficial to national development.

In view of the foregoing, the DE manager is advised to combine market research with wisdom from experts and any other personnel within or outside the organisation.

How does the manager reduce risk through investment appraisal?

Investment appraisal involves looking at the proposed investment, and working out the financial returns it is expected to yield. In other words, a course that a college will be providing is a kind of commodity for sale and the returns must be forecast. The term commodification of knowledge has gained entry into DE discussion. In its positive sense it means selling knowledge (as a commodity) for profit. This should be the goal for every provider, since recovery of costs is the main way of sustaining a given organisation. Governments, in most developing

countries, often experience cash flow problems, and are increasingly talking of cost-sharing with statutory organisations offering distance learning. In turn, a given organisation should have in place cost recovery policies. A good manager will, therefore, strive for returns from programmes offered. Good returns are out of the question in the absence of a good policy to monitor investment.

There is, however, the negative side of commodification. Hawkridge (Lockwood, 1995:9) puts it thus:

Some critics seriously decry the commodification of knowledge represented by distance education, which turns out knowledge products for sale to mass markets of students. This would clearly add to the dangers of domination of distance education institutions by multinational interests, driven by the market and the profit motive.

The insight to be drawn from this is that managers in developing countries may have sound approaches for appraising investment, but are victims of too many conflicting voices. The multinational voices often claim expertise in the use of new information technologies said to improve open learning for better returns. When courses are put to the test, results can be disastrous. Managers end up falling prey to some people who are otherwise less professional than members within their own organisations. We can categorise these multinationals as follows:

- Consultants who compile their reports on the basis of information furnished by those people they are meant to enlighten, but present such knowledge as though it was their original ideas.
- Peddlers of computer-ware that is originally meant for developed countries, but not appropriate for new environments.



- Self-invited consultants with an imperialist mission, or who are motivated by profiteering when dealing with unsuspecting managers.

It would be unfair to say consultancy is a bad thing. However, it would be even most unfair if managers are not reminded that some consultants might not be as helpful as they claim to be. Perhaps it is time to realise that in the midst of members of an organisation are experts who could be organised to provide consultancy on some of the issues bothering the organisation. Alternatively, there could be competent consultants from fellow neighbouring countries than from the so-called developed countries. The syndrome that only experts from overseas are the best, may have a disabling or retrogressive effect to the organisation in the long run. For one thing, quantities of money will have been pumped out with no tangible results in return.

DE management is a broad area that defies exhaustive discussion, so it is not possible to give a detailed coverage of the topic within the scope of an introductory text. We shall conclude this chapter with a management function on one of the branches of the management tree. This is the issue of building a co-operative team.

How does the manager build a co-operative team?

Firstly, what is meant by teamwork within an institution? Secondly, how are teams built? Teamwork is, without question, essential in every organization whether conventional or distance. The concept of teamwork arises because of the need to achieve organisational goals and an understanding of the way systems are structured. There are sections, or departments (in a DE organisation), each carrying out a different responsibility though for the realisation of the same vision. But why is it, sometimes, difficult to achieve teamwork in an organisation? Write two suggestions of your own here.

In a survey carried out at ZOU in 1999 (unpublished), the following were established as some of the factors that interfere with the building of a co-operative team.

- lack of information about the aims of an organization
- lack of knowledge about qualifications, competencies, and experience of members both within the same department and those in other departments
- officers underestimating other members' abilities
- concern with building little empires



- lack of communication opportunities among members
- lack of ideas about team building

Now, suggest any two factors that, in your experience, interfere with team spirit.

One can also add that as far as DE is concerned, officers may not be working in the same place. The pattern is that some are based at the headquarters of the organisation, while others are stationed in the regions. Geographical distance, thus makes building a coherent team considerably difficult. Thus, the manager has a major task to ensure that team spirit is fostered. Some of the recommendations made to managers are that they:

- should familiarise themselves with the competencies and expertise of individual members in the system, and recognise them accordingly
- should deploy members inter-departmentally for specified responsibilities. This is likely to promote better understanding among members
- ought to distribute privileges equitably to ensure members feel their contribution to the organisation is valued
- encourage members from different departments to serve in the same committee
- organise inter-departmental workshops
- organise excursions and get-together occasions.

Write two additional recommendations of your own here.

Many ideas could be raised, but the point is that the successful manager should see himself/herself as the chief human resources officer, the chief communicator, and the pilot of an aeroplane that has already taken off and should be prevented from making an emergency landing. Managers should thus effectively and consciously promote synchronised energy (Synergy), that is, pulling together in one direction.

The administrative wisdom put across here is clearly articulated in one of the great books, The Bible, as follows:

For just as in one body we have many members, but not all members have the same function, so the many of us form one body, while each is related to all others as a member. But having gifts that differ according to the grace bestowed on us ... (Romans 12 v 4 - 6)



Summary

In this chapter we dealt with principles of management as they apply to DE. On the basis of a series of questions, an attempt has been made to answer them, while appealing to your personal experience. That way we engaged in a kind of dialogue around these issues:

- what distance education involves
- the importance of organisational mission statement and vision 5. the quality of service offered by an organization
- financing DE and risk management
- SWOT analysis and market research
- investment appraisal
- strategies of building teamwork.

Successful management requires good leadership, and a good objective of leadership is to help those who are doing poorly to do well, and to help those who are doing well to do even better. A good manager is, therefore, an agent of change. He / She is open-minded and accommodating as these words remind us.

The good manager should not fear departing from convention. Good leaders are the few who do, and are the envy of the many who only watch.

(Mwalimu Nyerere, former president of Tanzania)

Topics for discussion

1. Discuss the joys and sorrows of the distance education manager in a given organisation.
2. How can the manager ensure that a particular course offered in the organization is of a high standard?
3. What prospects are there in making your organisation financially independent through commodification of courses?
4. What opportunities and threats require dealing with in your organisation?
5. Team building is a key management function. How successfully has the manager of your organisation gone about it?



Chapter 4 - Open and Distance Learning Study Materials

Atomisation of the totality of knowledge should lead to its synchronisation
(A Kenyan proverb)

Introduction

Education systems around the world are developing a dual mode of education. This means distance education is provided alongside the conventional school system of a given country. Many institutions are developing ODL courses mainly for home-based students. The major difficulty faced by such organisations is ensuring that study materials, of the right quality, are developed and produced on time. Professionals who are identified to write course materials, and those who are expected to facilitate their development usually start with limited knowledge about the process of writing such materials.

We discuss the process of structuring and writing study materials with the primary objective to create a high level of awareness. Here the focus is on a number of questions that a person joining an open learning system for the first time would ask. The ideas raised will be helpful to those who intend to try a hand at writing open learning materials.

The questions are about the qualification of people who create study materials; what the process of developing materials involves; what the characteristic features of ODL materials are; and ways in which such materials differ from those used in the conventional classroom. After acquiring such knowledge, the aspiring course developer is better positioned to put together ideas for more effective practice. Let's now turn to some of the key questions.

Who comes up with study materials?

In Chapter Two, we noted that one of the challenges in new distance learning environments is the lack of and shortage of qualified personnel. We then noted in Chapter Three that the manager of a DE organisation has to ensure that suitable materials, those which meet the needs of learners, should be in place before the learning and the support of such learning can occur. Who do you expect should come up with the materials? Write your suggestion here.

Yes, it must be someone from the course development section of the organisation. The scenario at ZOU, when the system was set up in 1993, was one in which a number of degree programmes were to be introduced. However, there were no study materials in place.



As an example, for the BA (English and Communication Studies) the only professionals one could turn to, were university lecturers with qualifications at master's degree level and above in the fields of linguistics, literature, and communication. They were specialists in their own disciplines, yet the only experience the majority of them had was pedagogic practice in the conventional university lecture room. Regarding DE practices, that meant these professionals with experience closest to the task in hand, had to be recruited, and given the necessary induction.

Imagine you were one of the professionals called upon to assist with the development of course materials. In which areas do you think you would need training? Think of the situation in your own country, that of ZOU, or that of BOCODOL. In the latter, academic subjects such as Geography, Commerce, Science, History, English, etc. had to be developed in order to prepare learners for the Botswana Junior Certificate, and the BGCSE. In which two aspects of DE would you require training if you were called upon to join a team of course developers for the two courses offered by BOCODOL or any other similar institution?

In addition, we think the following are some of the areas for which the course writer needs information and training:

- what ODL means
- trends in ODL provision
- the way the DE system you serve in is structured
- a comparison of open learning and CCL practices
- the distinction between ODL and CCL learning materials
- clarity about the level of education the organisation focuses on
- an understanding of the mission statement and vision of the organization
- the characteristics of learners for whom materials are to be written
- the way course materials will be used
- the learner support model

These, and many other areas could be taken into consideration. Professionals with a background of education in their respective areas of specialisation can be trained in order that they come up with course materials. It is, thus, necessary that the would-be course writer examines the areas, enu-



- Adapting study material used by another DE organization

A distinction is often made between adopting and adapting study material. To adopt is to take the course as it is and use it without making any changes. To adapt, on the other hand, is to customize or make changes that are in agreement with the DE environment in question. Local examples will be fused into the material. For example, BOCODOL adapted INTEC study material to suit the Botswana educational environment.

Looking at the five options discussed above, the first option is a relatively cheap and easy way for an organisation to get started. The Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong has used materials from the Open University (UK) by adapting them to its environment. Producing its own material can be costly for a new organisation in terms of money, time and interpersonal stress. It is, therefore, wise to check what else is already available before producing materials from scratch. As we say, there is no point in reinventing the wheel.

The fourth option, from the list above, is becoming more popular. A DE organisation, after establishing the need for a particular course, can use its learner support system to deliver a course on behalf of another organisation. As an example, the Zimbabwe Open University has offered the post-graduate diploma in Accountancy originated by UNISA to local students. Examination and certification remain the responsibility of the originating organisation. This works well where the qualification resulting from the course is recognised in the host country.

As you will appreciate, organisations choose an alternative for reasons most suitable to their situations. Suggest two reasons why the organisation to which you are attached chose the alternative of developing course materials that it is following.

An organisation can, for example, choose a particular alternative because of the linkages it has with similar external organisations. Strategic alliances are becoming increasingly popular. In typical circumstances, institutions collaborate to offer courses that lead to degree or certificate qualifications. As Johnson et al. (Hope and Guiton, 2006:112) observe, “institutions can form alliances with other institutions that have faculty members with different expertise”. This can actually extend resources, reputation, and capabilities.

What is involved in organising for course development?

Let us take for discussion the third option where an institution plans and develops a package. This is the most commonly chosen option by distance education providers in Southern Africa. BOCODOL and ZOU are two clear examples of institutions that follow that option. The essential point to



note is that to come up with a written module can be a long process. It includes decisions at management level on the rationale of the course, to begin with. Course developers then accommodate such decisions when designing materials. It is the course developer's responsibility, too, to plan how materials will be used by tutors, and present the information accordingly. Course development normally progresses in the sequence shown in this figure.



Figure 4: Course development sequence

This means the course must respond to national needs in accordance with the national qualifications framework of that country, in the first place. Effective management should then follow and pave way for course development. Once materials have been developed, delivery can take place. That is why it was pointed out that course development is a fairly long process. The details about decisions to be taken in the process are captured in the following checklist. Study it carefully and decide which items you agree or disagree with.

Course title: What is the name of the course?

Course status: Is it new or a replacement?

Course level : Which national level does it fall under?

Course award: Degree, diploma, or certificate?

Course length: How long will it take?

Course life: How many intakes are projected?

Course justification: Why introduce the course?

Target group: Who are the learners?

Entry requirements: What are the minimum entry qualifications?

Student numbers: How many students per intake?

Course aims: What are the course aims?

Course objectives: What are the course objectives?

Course outline: What is the structure of the learning and teaching material?



Module outline: What are the elements of each module?

Course assessment: How is it going to be assessed?

Course validation: Who awards the qualification?

Course media: What media will compose the package?

Course team: Who takes part in developing materials?

Development testing: How is the course monitored?

Course delivery: Who takes part in delivering the course?

Look at the checklist once again. Which items do you not understand clearly? Note them down then cross check with colleagues. The list draws our attention to key responsibilities in the process. It will be clear that there are no short cuts to producing quality study materials. Careful thought and planning must be invested in the process.

How is the course development process activated?

The manager of a given organisation begins by appointing somebody to coordinate the overall development of the course. This is in terms of both content and delivery effectiveness. The co-ordinator will be responsible for getting the course produced within a given budget and time frame. The incumbent will also be in control of course writers. This convenor / chair is known as the Programme Co-ordinator at ZOU, and Programme Development Coordinator at BOCODOL. It is advisable for the convenor to also write some of the material. This helps him/her to have first hand experience, which is useful when guiding authors.

Firstly, the convenor studies the rationale of the course, and if a market research had been carried out before, he / she will study the findings closely. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the prevailing situation and needs among stakeholders. Once that has been done, the way forward will be determined. This can be illustrated by a case at BOCODOL where a new course called English for Professional Purposes (EPP) was pioneered . It targeted police officers in the Botswana Police Service, and was concerned with their competence in English language and communication skills at the workplace. The in-depth analysis carried out by the PDC entailed an evaluation of the current use of language by officers as they conducted their routine duties such as statement-writing, interviewing clients, report-writing, presenting evidence in court, translation, etc.

Typical language in use was analysed, and this led to the establishment of areas around which the new materials were to be developed.



The co-ordinator went on to draw up a list of topics covering areas of language and communication as a proposal. The proposal was circulated among stakeholders in order to obtain comments and suggestions. The Zimbabwe Open University follows a similar approach, except that after receiving input from stakeholders, the organisation has introduced the idea of a steering committee. This is made up of the convenor and three or four specialists in a given area of study. The latter are also prospective course writers who volunteer their time to review the course content before inviting the full complement of authors. The committee will come up with another draft of content lists to be presented and discussed in detail at a full writers' workshop. What do you consider to be the advantages of having a steering committee? Write any two here.

Basically, the committee lays ground for the formation of a strong course team comprising writers, editors, and ICT experts. The committee also shares the administrative burden with the programme co-ordinator.

A writers' workshop is an important occasion, but can be difficult to organise. For one thing, invitees come from all over the country, and that requires proper arrangements for transport and accommodation at some central venue. Prospective writers may have other commitments that tie them down, and would attend only part of the workshop, thus missing out on important course development issues. For these and other reasons related to costs, BOCODOL prefers shorter training sessions for its writers, and this has ranged from one afternoon to two days. Writers are exposed to theoretical ideas about course development in distance education, then go away to start writing. In the process of writing, they will be interacting with the PDC.

The Zimbabwe Open University handles its workshops somewhat differently. The initial workshop is run in not less than a full week. The transition from conventional ways of teaching to crafting distance learning material is not an easy one, and requires investment of both money and time. That is why ZOU prefers to give writers more time for training. Resource persons are invited, and they facilitate induction with officers from the organisation's key departments by making presentations on different aspects of DE. The initial workshop covers the following:

- information about the organization
- roles played by different sections of the organization
- theoretical ideas about ODL materials
- the link between course development and learner support



- drawing up contents lists for different modules
- the role of the editor in materials development
- plenary session to brainstorm module content proposed by individual writers
- actual writing in constant consultation with the Editor, Programme coordinator, and fellow writers
- closing plenary session to raise new insights, set up teams, and deadlines

By the end of the workshop, each writer will have made significant progress. For example, issues about module content, writing a full lesson, covering objectives, and activities will have been finalised. The writer will also have clarified important matters with the editor, and can go away to write on his/her own with confidence.

In the interim, individual writers or teams of writers will be liaising with the Editor, through the PDC, before a second retreat workshop to last three days. This will be held after one or two months to monitor progress and clear any difficulties.

If you belong to a different organisation, how do you run your workshops? Express your views briefly, and note the advantages and disadvantages in your system. Keep in mind the approach at BOCODOL and ZOU.

What is a course team?

“When colleagues join together in a more democratic, equal status group to produce a course, they form what is generally known as a course team” (Rowntree,1990:20). Course teams were pioneered by the Open University (UK). Who makes up the course team? Note down your suggestions.

Did you mention the convenor and the steering committee? Who else? Check to see if you listed the following:

i. Course writers

These are subject specialists responsible for planning the course content and writing the materials.

ii. Content editors

These are subject specialists whose role is to go through material originated by the writer, and attend to issues of relevance, suitability and accessibility of content. The writer of a given topic could also serve as content editor for another writer.

iii. Media producer



A professional with special skills in the production of video material, audio tapes, computer software, etc. who works in liaison with the writer.

iv. Language editor

A specialist in language who liaises with writers about the communicativeness of what they write.

v. Editor

A professional who helps authors in polishing up their texts, ensures writers comply with the organisation's house style, takes charge of copyright clearance, and prepares final drafts for printing.

v. Graphic designer

A professional who advises writers on layout, and graphics, and suggests where text can be replaced with graphics.

vii. Course secretary

An administrator, under the convenor, who handles day-to-day routine. He / she is responsible for arranging meetings, keeping course team members informed between meetings, and follows up writers who miss deadlines, or require other forms of assistance.

viii. External assessor

A professional from a similar organisation. He / she is an expert in the subject on which course material is written, and is engaged from early stages to monitor the way material takes shape. He / she will also moderate the examinations. A major advantage of using the course team approach is that the final product is jointly owned by participants. Discussion and mutual criticism can improve the quality of study material quite considerably. What other advantage do you find in using the course team approach?

Course teams can, however, be riddled with challenges. For that reason, some writers prefer to work alone as individuals. As an example, some team members may dislike having criticisms and suggestions from colleagues. Experience has shown that valuable time is wasted in personal dispute as writers insist that the module outline be just as they think it should be. This is true especially when all course writers, facilitators, and editors brainstorm the module outline presented by an author. All sorts of problems can arise for the convenor, and some of them can be retrogressive. Suggest any one disadvantage you think can be associated with the course team approach.



Probably, the most obvious one is the difficulty in managing many people scattered all over the country. For more detail on course development procedures please turn to works by Rowntree (1990), Lockwood (1994), etc.

What distinguishes ODL learning material from the classroom textbook?

This very important section of the Handbook is a meeting point for the course developer and the learner supporter. The former should be aware of features that distinguish ODL materials from the CCL textbooks, as that will help the writer incorporate the important features in the study material. The learner supporter, on the other hand, ought to appreciate what went into the creation of learning materials. On the basis of such awareness, he / she will be best positioned to facilitate dialogue between the learner and the study module. As observed earlier, most distance education writers are practitioners from the conventional education systems. They would be used to handling conventional textbooks. What, in your opinion, are the differences between the textbook you have used to teach a given subject in formal schools, and an open learning module?

Suggest any two differences.

You will remember that in Chapter One, Keegan (1996) suggests six elements that define DE. The two, which are of interest at this point, are the geographical separation between learner and tutor, and the issue of a two-way communication as reflected in open learning material.

ODL study materials take into account the question of physical distance, while CCL texts are written on the assumption that the teacher is present during a given lesson. Whenever there are problems, the teacher can easily mediate. With ODL materials, however, the writer includes the teacher's voice as a way of making the text more interactive. That is why ODL modules are said to be self-instructional. The same cannot be said of CCL texts for they are less interactive. The teacher has to activate them, and materials are often characterised by exercises requiring the learner to simply recall knowledge. A typical ODL module, on the other hand, engages the learner in dialogue through what are known as activities. A detailed discussion about activities is given in paragraph 4.8. There are notable differences between activities and exercises as illustrated later. Examine any ODL material side-by-side with a conventional textbook on any subject to establish differences. The points raised here are summarised in this figure.





Figure 5: Self instructional versus conventional texts

While both texts aim at communicating content, ODL study materials are more interactive, dialogical, and self-instructional. CCL texts tend to transmit messages, and do not accommodate dialogue in the way they are presented. Dialogue is an important feature of open and distance learning.

What is dialogue?

If we agree that dialogue is a major distinguishing feature in DE study materials, then it is necessary to have a working definition of the term. How would you define it?



In so far as learning materials are concerned, I hope in your definition you managed to capture the idea of conversation, and to be more precise, written conversation. The materials are written in style that is conversational. Essentially, dialogue is a purposeful conversation or discussion between tutor and learner during which ideas are exchanged. Is it not strange though that we talk of exchanging ideas in a written text? Not at all. Here are two extracts from a business studies lesson. The first one is from a conventional textbook, and the second one from ODL material. The lesson topic is: Why people get into business.

Extract A

In Botswana, many people want to start businesses of their own. The reasons for starting a business are to:

- make money
- create jobs for the unemployed
- be free and independent
- serve the community
- improve the standard of living

Exercise

List four reasons for starting a business.

Now, contrast this with the way Extract B is presented.

Extract B

Have you ever tried to find out why people in Botswana want to get into business? A good starting point is yourself. Why would you want to open a business of your own? Work on the activity below, then read on.

Activity

- a. Suggest any two reasons for starting a business.

- b. Compare your reasons with those from colleagues.



After reading the extracts, express your opinion about them.

What distinguishes the exercise from the activity?

Which of the two extracts is more conversational?

How are ideas exchanged in the more conversational extract?

I guess you found Extract B more conversational than Extract A. In that case, Extract B is a good example of a dialogue. In it, the teacher's voice is heard in the open-ended why question. This is followed by an appeal to the learner's personal experience. In turn, the learner takes part in the dialogue by noting down his / her own views, then cross checks these with what colleagues suggest. The teacher responds by giving feedback in the form of answers on page 28. In

Extract B, the writer has included the teacher's voice, and in that sense reduces distance. That completes what we call the dialogical cycle, illustrated in the next figure.

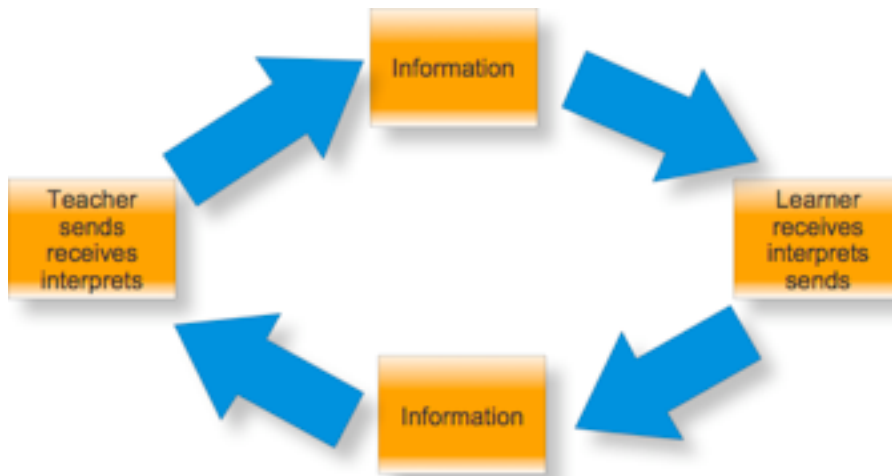


Figure 6: The dialogical cycle

Extract A merely transmits information, followed by an exercise. The answer requires the learner to simply regurgitate the same content in the same language used in the text. Among other issues,



Perraton (2000) points out that instructional material should be dialogical, and that one of the key issues to consider is how interactive the study material and the tutoring style are.

Now that we have made the distinction clearer, let's focus on ODL materials.

What are the main characteristics of self instructional materials?

In the foregoing section, we noted that open learning materials ought to be dialogical. Beyond that the course developer is expected to develop an awareness of what else makes open learning materials distinguishable. On the other hand, the learner supporter should also take note of such features in order to promote effective learning during tutorials. Now, jot down what you consider the main characteristics of open learning texts.

Nhundu (1997) and Rowntree (1990) join other distance educators in recommending ways of making materials more accessible to users. The following words by Rowntree (1990:207) sum up the point of view adopted in this Handbook.

As I hope you will agree, the tone of your lesson should not be that of a textbook nor a lecture. Rather, it should be that of an enthusiastic teacher enjoying a discussion of the subject with a responsive learner. Ideally you should try to create in print the kind of tone you might use in a one-to-one tutorial.

If you cast your mind back to Extract B, for example, you will notice that the tone is conversational. The learner is expected to respond before receiving feedback. Compare this with the characteristics you listed. In brief, a module is expected to be a tutorial in print. Now, consider the following characteristics for that module you may be preparing to write. See whether they agree with those you have listed.

Aims

The ODL text must have a clearly spelt out general statement of what the learner is expected to achieve after going through the lessons contained in the module. A module is normally made up of lessons, parts, or topics, depending on the house style followed by a given organisation. Aims also make clear what learners are going to learn in the long term. For example when you say, "After studying for six months, learners should be able to gain insight into the meaning of distance education". This would be an aim. There are certain words used to express aims, for example, "to Understand", "to gain insight into". Aims are more general and long term goals. Suggest two more here.



Note that an aim is a goal that can be achieved in more than just one lesson. An objective, on the other hand, is achievable in one lesson. Objectives are achievable by the end of a lesson, while aims are achieved at the end of two or more lessons.

Objectives

Before each lesson, one expects specific statements about what the learner should be able to do, or do better as a result of interacting with the text. These statements are referred to as objectives. Basically, objectives are concerned with learner behaviour, that is, whether it changes as a result of going through the lesson. We identify four types of objectives.

Memory objectives - These are concerned with remembering information.

Words like 'list', 'name', 'identify', etc. are often used to specify them. Spell out one example of your own.

Attitudes - These are objectives concerned with a shift in the learner's beliefs about an issue. They can be stated using words like 'to appreciate', 'to give an opinion on', etc. State one example of your own.

Understanding - These are objectives concerned with the learner showing a deeper insight into the information under discussion. Words like 'to explain', 'to interpret', 'to predict', or 'to draw conclusions', etc can be used. Spell out one example of your own.

Doing - These are objectives concerned with the learner's capability to carry out certain activities. To spell out such objectives these words can be used: 'to demonstrate', 'to illustrate', etc. State one objective of your own.

To help you recall these four types of objectives stick in your mind, remember the acronym MAUD which stands for: memory, attitudes, understanding, and doing. When objectives are spelt out clearly, learners and tutors are able to focus on issues of importance.



Using conversational language

The best way to get your message across to learners is to make the writing user-friendly, but formal enough to carry the academic content. This can be done by taking into account these ideas.

- i. Use personal pronouns. Speak to the learner directly by using the pronoun 'you' and not 'the learner', or 'the reader'. As author of the module, speak of yourself as 'I' or 'we' when two or more of you write jointly.
- ii. Use contractions. These are another means of creating dialogue. It is not always necessary to write 'you are', 'do not', 'you would', etc. Instead you can write: 'you're', 'don't', 'you'd', etc.
- iii. Use rhetorical questions. This is a question type which you pose without expecting an answer from the learner. You may ask such a question at the beginning of a section and go on to answer it, as in: "What is distance education? We are certain you have an idea what distance education means. In my opinion, distance education means ..." Rhetorical questions captivate the learners' interest, and promote active participation.
- iv. Appeal to personal experience. In a conversation, people share experiences. Participants come forward, more willingly, with their views when they feel that they are directly involved.

Do you still remember these words from Extract B? "A good starting point is yourself. Why do you want to set up a business?" This is likely to stimulate a personal response because the learner is made aware that no other person's view is expected other than his/hers.

Sequencing and emphasising the content

The effective course writer presents ideas in a logical sequence, consciously showing how one idea leads to another. Take the simple steps of starting a retail shop business as an example. Before selling items, these steps must be followed:

- come up with a business idea
- carry out market research
- seek funding for the business
- secure suitable premises
- apply for a trading licence
- sell the product

This is a sequence of what has to be done. If you were writing ODL



material, those ideas would probably serve as headings. When you write under each heading, you would also think of sub-headings. Then, there might be need to repeat certain words or expressions, underline some sections, or italicise them to promote emphasis. You are most likely going to use figures and diagrams to illustrate what you will be communicating, a practice that reinforces the sequencing and emphasis of content.

Using appropriate language

We will assume that when you are called upon to write a module in a particular subject, you are the expert. As such, you will be familiar with specialist words and the academic style through which content is conveyed. Now that you are into DE, it is time to graduate from the high flown style of the lecture room to the more down-to-earth style suited to someone studying at a distance. Look at these two extracts which talk about the same thing.

Extract C

Entrepreneurship constitutes plausible ground for venturing into an enterprise where the merx can be traded.

Extract D

Business mindedness is regarded as proof that one can get into business to sell goods.

Which of the two extracts do you find more communicative? I think Extract D is. Why? I find it less ambiguous than the first. Extract C is not clear because it uses long and unfamiliar words. It is too wordy, and uses abstract words, which do not make it concrete enough. Language that is abstract interferes with communication.

We have, up to this point, attempted a description of some of the major characteristics of self instructional materials. To reflect on the foregoing, let us work on this activity



- are encouraged to go out and seek information that may not be provided in the module
- are provided with the opportunity to link what they learn with their experience at work
- are able to identify their weaknesses and strengths
- can link theoretical ideas with personal experience
- reflect on ideas they will be reading about

The list is endless. Activities are significantly important in new environments where open learning is largely dependent on the written word. Activities will, therefore, have to be more carefully designed if learning at a distance is to be more effective.

Summary

Questions about ODL materials are inexhaustible, especially where DE systems are introduced for the first time. Many organisations start from scratch. We wish to remind such organisations that those who start from scratch must keep on scratching until optimal results are achieved. In the foregoing sections, some of the questions were singled out for discussion, and that led us to engage in dialogue on these areas:

- professionals who help in developing ODL materials
- steps taken in writing study materials
- ways followed by management to initiate and sustain the process
- what a course team is and how it functions
- differences between traditional school textbooks and self instructional materials
- dialogue as a feature of open learning texts
- major characteristics of ODL texts
- importance of learning activities

How useful did you find these thoughts about course development as a process? Having gone through this chapter, I expect that you will be in a better position to carry out your responsibilities with increased confidence and an open mind. Remember these words:

Merely having an open mind is nothing; the object of opening the mind, as opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.

(G.K.Chesterton)



Topics for discussion

1. What, in your opinion, is the link between an understanding of the definition of distance education and the course development process?
2. As a course developer, how would you address some of the challenges faced by an organisation that has to develop a custom-made package from scratch?
3. Identify any five items from the checklist about the course development process.
4. Why is a knowledge of these important to you as a course developer, manager, or learner supporter?
5. Which of the two approaches do you prefer – writing the module as an individual, or writing as a team where each member contributes a section of the module? Support your point of view.
6. You have been teaching in the conventional school system for a number of years. You are requested to either write ODL material, or teach material developed by somebody. What challenges are you likely to face? Suggest ways of overcoming them.
7. Some people have suggested that to be a course developer you must have a teaching qualification, as well as some teaching experience. To what extent do you agree with this view?



Chapter 5 - Supporting the Distance Education Learner

Journey that begins with certainties, ends in doubts, but a revolution that begins with doubts, ends in certainties

(Samora Machel – former President of Mozambique)

Introduction

Like all human beings, the distance education learner begins with uncertainties on the new journey. DE learners need support because they have uncertainties about getting to their destination, and this support is rendered through dialogue with others. The learner support section of a DE organisation takes care of that. Learner support is inseparable from the management and course development functions already discussed. The learner supporter should have clarity about ways in which management and course development influence his / her role. To improve provision of DE, tutoring is introduced as an element of support that is complementary to the study materials. Tutoring facilitates learning, but is not meant to be a replacement of the study module.

Apart from tutoring, learners also need help and advice on matters that might have nothing to do with the course they will be studying, but would have some effect on it. These are issues like personal problems, pressure of work, lack of self confidence, and others. In this respect, the services of the learner supporter are also called into play.

The initiate to ODL will have, at the back of the mind, several questions about learner support. While there can be no claim, on our part, to exhaust all areas about the subject, we attempt to share experience on key issues with you, and these include: an examination of three forms of learner support; clarifying the connection between the learner supporter's role and that of the course developer; explaining the broader role of the learner supporter; describing learner characteristics; and exploring those areas where support is required. Our personal experience will be called into play during the discussion.

What is meant by supporting the learner?

The experience you already have in education should enable you to express a personal point of view in response to this question. We'll listen to that view first as you answer the question posed above.

To support somebody is to prop up and encourage that person in whatever he/she will be doing. As far as open learning is concerned, support involves giving the learner backing in terms of ideas, materials, advice, and assurance required to carry out studies successfully. This position is supported by Rowntree (1992:71) in these words:



Open learners usually work with packages of materials. But a package is rarely enough. Most open learners will need support from human beings- people who can help them with their learning and respond to them as individuals.

In ODL, the support can be subdivided into three categories.

i. Administrative support

In general terms, this is the support rendered by managers, course coordinators, tutors and non subject specialists, and includes:

- enrolling learners with minimum delays
- supplying information about fees, course structure, tutorial services, assignments, examinations, and resources
- providing relevant learning materials in good time
- keeping accurate and up-to-date records

ii. Tutorial support

This is support given in order to add the human voice to the printed materials. It is divided in two parts.

- Face-to-face support, which is characterised by the holding of formal meetings. These are time-tabled sessions facilitated by a tutor; one-to-one sessions between learner and tutor; and peer group tutorials organised by learners among themselves.
- Tele-tuition, which is a way of supporting learners at a distance, and includes tutoring by telephone; tutor marked assignments (TMAs); radio lessons; electronic mail; and computer-based tutoring.

iii. Guidance and counselling support

As a mode of support, guidance refers to the provision of experiences which help students understand themselves better, and includes assistance given in these areas:

- choice of subjects or course
- career prospects in a given programme
- management of time
- study skills e.g. listening to lectures, note-taking, participating in oral discussion, reading to learn, writing and examination skills.



Counselling, on the other hand, is concerned with emotional support in areas to do with:

- personal problems
- social circumstances interfering with studies
- management of stress
- motivation

More detailed information about the three categories of learner support can be sourced from some of the books cited in the reference list. Let's now reflect on the foregoing by participating in this activity.

Activity 5A

a. From what you have read so far, which two aspects of learner support are you not well-informed about? Mention them.

b. List the nature of information somebody needs in order to attain a better understanding of those two aspects.

The ability to specify what you are not clear about, prepares you to find more information that leads to better understanding. You are going to get feedback to some of your concerns in the subsequent sections.

What is the link between the learner supporter and the course developer?

To begin with, it is essential to specify who the learner supporter is. In Figure 1, learner support stands on its own as an organ of a DE organisation, just like the course development section discussed in the previous chapter. Taking our clue from the three categories explained in the previous section, we expect to see no less than three people playing the role of learner supporter. Firstly, there is the administrator known as Regional Manager at BOCODOL, and Regional Coordinator at ZOU. This administrator manages the region on behalf of the

Director or Vice Chancellor. For purposes of effective administration there are records clerks, administration assistants, and despatch clerks.

The tutor is a key learner supporter. At both BOCODOL and ZOU, the majority of tutors work on a part-time basis, being employed full-time elsewhere. They are in charge of course delivery, and are academics who implement course materials developed by programme development officers based



at headquarters. The academic in-charge of part-time tutors at regional level is known as Learner Tutor

Co-ordinator (LTC), at BOCODOL, and Regional Tutor at ZOU. At the latter institution, there is a close link between the regional tutor and the programme co-ordinator.

- Firstly, the programme co-ordinator sits on the interview panel to select the best academic from short-listed applicants
- Secondly, the programme co-ordinator is responsible for the induction training of regional tutors
- Thirdly, the programme co-ordinator assigns academic responsibilities on learner support and course delivery such as preparing marking guides, setting assignments, developing a bank of exam questions, and leading part-time tutors at regional level.

After regional tutors or learner tutor co-ordinators, we have the officer in charge of guidance and counselling. This professional could be stationed at headquarters as the case is at BOCODOL, or each region could be assigned its own officer, as obtains at ZOU. The number of regions varies from one country to another. BOCODOL has a total of five regions, while ZOU has ten.

In both organisations, the learner support section is the most decentralised, it being the implementation point or the cutting edge of the organisation. That is where things happen, as we would say. The following are some of the responsibilities of the regional centres:

- course materials that are silent are given voice
- learners are enrolled
- learners are supported
- learners pass or fail on account of the support given
- the image of the organisation is built
- open learning ultimately reaches the grassroots

BOCODOL has, for example, developed a learner support model in which community study centres (CSCs) are used as access points for the learners. Usually these are local schools within a given community at which tutorials are conducted.



Each CSC is under a supervisor who sees to it that tutors and tutor markers discharge their responsibilities in line with the vision of the organisation. The CSC Supervisor is a part-time officer. The other learner support personnel at the region include:

Community Study Centre Support Officers (CSCSOs) who are full-time employees of the College. One of their supportive roles is to ensure that CSC supervisors get the necessary help to carry out their duties with minimum problems.

The Remote Learner Advisor, a professional whose responsibility is to travel to remote areas giving assistance to learners, thereby advertising courses and publicising the College. Figure 7 summarises the BOCODOL model starting from the regional level.

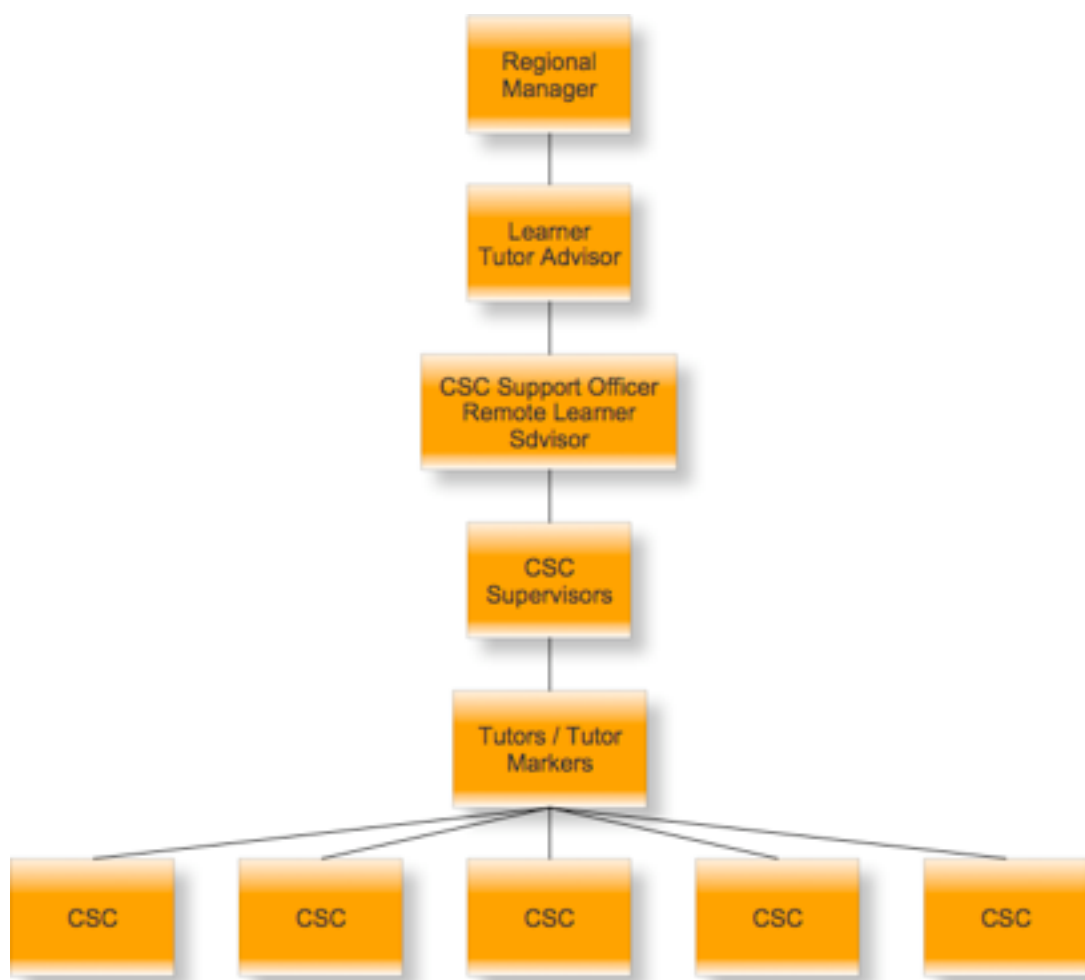


Figure 7: BOCODOL Learner Support Model

Learner support models are not the same, although there could be common features identifiable in different organisations.

If you belong to an organisation, other than one of those referred to in the foregoing discussion, what model do you follow? Describe it briefly.



Whatever the difference, I think the idea of decentralisation still applies. That makes us come back to our original question for this section, namely, what is the link between the learner supporter and the course developer? Better still, how should these two be linked?

You will have noticed that the course developer seems far removed from tutors, CSC supervisors, CSC support officers, LTCs, and Regional managers when writing courses, yet the said officers have to use those materials to support learners. In your opinion, how are the functions of course development and learner support related? Suggest any two ways.

Course materials, as explained earlier, contain interactive devices embedded in them. These include rhetorical questions, activities, illustrations, and clarifications of concepts. The tutor, as facilitator, needs to understand the thinking behind these from dialogue with the course developer. In the words of Mary Thorpe (Lockwood,1995:50), “although materials producers are likely to be dominated by the production process, they can also contribute to effective learner support in a number of ways”. That means, they can help make explicit decisions about the role of tutors and other supporters. They can do this by:

- mounting induction workshops for regional managers and their teams to introduce the course materials
- taking part in training tutors
- advising tutors on the frequency and length of contacts with learners
- explaining the nature of assignments and examinations
- giving procedures for course evaluation
- giving an overview of course components and how these fit together

It is true that the Regional Manager and tutors often have a teaching

background. However, that does not necessarily and automatically make them conversant with every new study material developed at headquarters. The need for them to appreciate what goes on in a given course cannot be overemphasised. It is, therefore, desirable to begin delivery of a course with a formal meeting between the course developer and learner supporters. As Mary Thorpe (Lockwood,1995:152) puts it, “people who have met, if only briefly, seem much better able to sustain communication at a distance than if they have never met”. There is sense in perceiving course development and learner support sections of an organisation as two sides of the same coin.



Experience at BOCODOL has shown that mutual working relations are strengthened when professionals from learner support get involved in the various stages of course development up to the time the course is delivered.

In the case of both BOCODOL and ZOU, as enrolments increase, it is the responsibility of regional managers, regional tutors, and learner tutor advisors to train the part-time tutors. If they themselves never met course originators in the first instance, there is a strong likelihood that they will advise tutors on grounds of the only methodologies they are familiar with, and those are none other than conventional classroom teaching approaches. Experience also shows that where course development and learner support professionals develop policies on interdepartmental consultation, programme development and implementation are expedited. Misunderstandings and misconceptions of what officers will be doing easily arise where the two sections rarely discuss issues of mutual interest. The crucial issue in DE is to systematically work on improving the mindset of professionals who have a background in conventional classroom teaching. Course developers will also want to keep in contact with learner supporters in a number of ways, and these may include:

- requesting feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of materials
- getting information about errors of language and content that need to be corrected
- observing how facilitation takes place during tutorials
- taking part in facilitation
- revising the course materials on grounds of feedback from learner support

Good relations, established at the launch of a course can be maintained during its delivery.

It is, therefore, desirable to arrange contact between course developers and facilitators at a point where early experience can be monitored and adjusted accordingly. Management should then ensure there is progressive interaction between the two sections.

What is the role of the tutor?

The term 'tutor' is normally used to describe the person who supports the distance education learner. One who supports learners in conventional classrooms is often referred to as 'a teacher'. What is the distinction between these two, if any? Give your opinion.

The commonest distinction is probably that a teacher imparts knowledge or skills by giving lessons. In DE circles, a tutor guides studies. To be more precise, a tutor facilitates learning. To facili-



tate is to promote learning. Thus, the impression to be developed of a tutor is that of somebody who:

- sensitises learners about important areas of a given topic
- directs the learners in alternative ways of understanding knowledge
- encourages learners to ask relevant questions
- helps them find answers from among themselves and from other sources
- imparts knowledge when it is necessary
- encourages learners to make demands for rather than wait to receive knowledge.

Thus, the DE tutor can be likened to a midwife who ensures that somebody delivers, but does not herself deliver. Tutor intervention is, therefore, a recognised pedagogic practice.

Its scholastic benefits are backed by research findings (e.g. Lockwood, 1995; Freeman, 1997). Here is an illustration that summarises the perceived tutor's role in the learning process.

To begin with, the learner enrolls for a particular course after feeling the need to do so. This is because he / she feels a deficiency in knowledge. The learning process begins with collaborative diagnosis of what the learner requires in order to clear the deficiency, and the search for solutions with the tutor. The learner goes on to apply knowledge, then evaluates progress. The tutor acts as catalyst, process helper, solution giver, and resource linker. The catalyst motivates goal achievement, while the process helper makes the learner aware that successful learning is not a one-day-wonder. The solution giver occasionally comes to the learner's rescue with solutions to problems, while the resource linker directs learners to other sources of information on the topic at hand. This is shown in Figure 8.



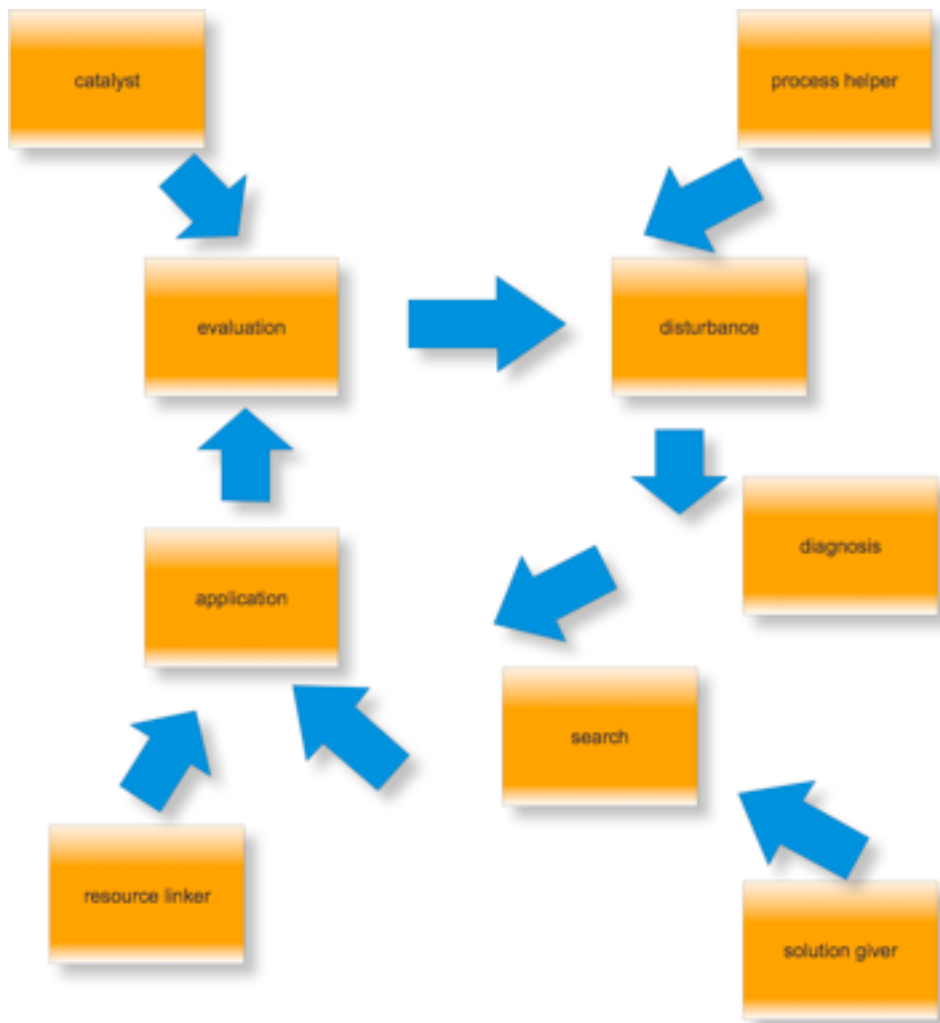


Figure 8: The tutor as an agent of change

How does this agree with the ideas of what an adult learner is as discussed in Chapter One? Do you find this description of the tutor's role adequate? Suggest any other role you think should be included.



Two distinct perceptions about facilitators have emerged at ZOU and BOCODOL. These are: the tutor as a specialist, and the tutor as a general practitioner. What do you think is implied by these concepts? Share your views with us.

In his comment about the tutor as a specialist, Rowntree (1992:76) says, " tutoring is certainly a role for someone expert in the subject that learners are learning about". One can also add that the best placed person to facilitate learning is the course developer, bearing in mind that he/she will have written the material. Unfortunately, it is not possible for the course developer to do all the tutoring countrywide. That task is, understandably, left in the hands of specialists in the given course. These will be trained by the course developer in collaboration with the learner support team.

The engagement of specialists as part-time tutors is commonly practised at ZOU. In each of the ten regions, a full-time specialist regional tutor is appointed in charge of a specific degree programme. For example, in the BA English and Communication Studies degree, the regional tutors are language specialists. Under these academics are part-time tutors, who are also language specialists. What do you think is the advantage of this approach?

In our opinion, the advantage is that learners are entrusted to specialists, so there is no danger of them being misguided. However, there is one major disadvantage with this. As the number of programmes increases, the new organisation finds it difficult to employ full-time staff for every new programme owing to limited funding.

BOCODOL combines the two approaches quite successfully. The regional academic, known as the LTC, who may be a specialist in Science, for example, is in charge of tutors who are specialists in the whole range of BGCSE courses. The primary role of the co-ordinator is to create a relationship with specialists as an intermediary who perceives the interests of learners and course material requirements. The Science specialist will, therefore, train tutors of history,

English, commerce, mathematics, geography, etc. on how to use materials originated by the course development section of the organisation. What advantage do you see in this approach?



Is there any disadvantage, which you think this approach has?

One advantage is that employing one full-time professional for more than one course is more cost effective than employing full-time tutors for every course. A disadvantage is that a specialist in one field will not be in a position to offer expert advice in all subjects. However, if opportunities for course developers to participate in the induction of tutors are availed, the LTC's task is made easier. It is important to note that this distinction between the specialist and generalist roles for the LTC is not always easy to separate in practice. A combination of both is often preferred.

Who is the learner to be supported?

Before the supporter can offer support in any form, it is essential to know the course aims and objectives, as well as the type of learner for whom the course is intended. According to Evans (1994:22):

Adult learners come to their studies with social and educational backgrounds, which provide important clues as to why they are studying, and what they will learn from and do with their courses.

So, the need to know the backgrounds of learners is crucial. As an example, a tutor may be convinced that tutorials can benefit the individual learner. In that case the tutor will expect the learner to attend regularly and enthusiastically. But, does it not surprise us that some learners are not keen to take advantage of this opportunity? The reason might be that such students choose to study by distance precisely because they want to distance themselves from other learners. They prefer to read the material on their own, come exam time, they do well, if not better than those who were attending face-to-face tutorials regularly. All that has to do with the individual learner's background. However, that should not put the tutor off. The view expressed by Thorpe (Lockwood, 1995:148) are a reassurance to tutors:

... even where materials of proven high quality are created, many learners still require the flexible and individual attention that only a person can provide in order to achieve their intended goals.

The tutor facilitator, therefore, still has those many who seek the tutorial support as well as the few who prefer to study in isolation. There are many uncertain learners who need assistance in order to achieve a degree of certainty about their studies.



Since tutorials find justification in DE, the learner supporter needs to know something about the beneficiaries of tutorials. What three things do you think you should know about learners you are going to support?

In ODL, features of the learner that you have listed are known as the learner profile, and in addition to yours are these ones:

- Previous formal learning experiences. These form the basis of how the learner will cope with the course.
- Experience as teacher. Adult learners will have taught something to other people in one form or the other. Though that may not have been formal teaching, the experience shapes expectations of how they want to be tutored.
- Learning resources. The issue of fees, access to learning technologies, libraries, and tutors will have a bearing on the way learners are going to benefit from the tutorials.
- Family background. The size of the learner's family, the ages of the children, type of social environment, social commitment, and financial needs influence the learner's participation in the study programme.
- The environment. Participation in DE by learners depends upon where they are located, that is, whether urban/rural, availability of study rooms, etc.
- Level of motivation. Some learners are more motivated than others. It is, therefore, necessary for the tutor to know what the hopes and aspirations of a given student are in doing the course.
- Professional background. Adult learners may hold a professional qualification when they enrol. It is important for the tutor to know what that profession is and how it influences current learning.

Personal factors. The age, sex, race, and physical handicaps or attitudes of learners ought to be known by the facilitator so that tutoring support could be offered accordingly.

The course developer will have taken these into account at the time of designing materials. You'll notice that under each sub-heading I've listed several features. These need to be expanded upon during your discussion with colleagues. Before moving on to the next activity, here is a brief summary of what we can identify in the learner profile. Each profile characteristic bears influence on the learner as shown in the figure below.



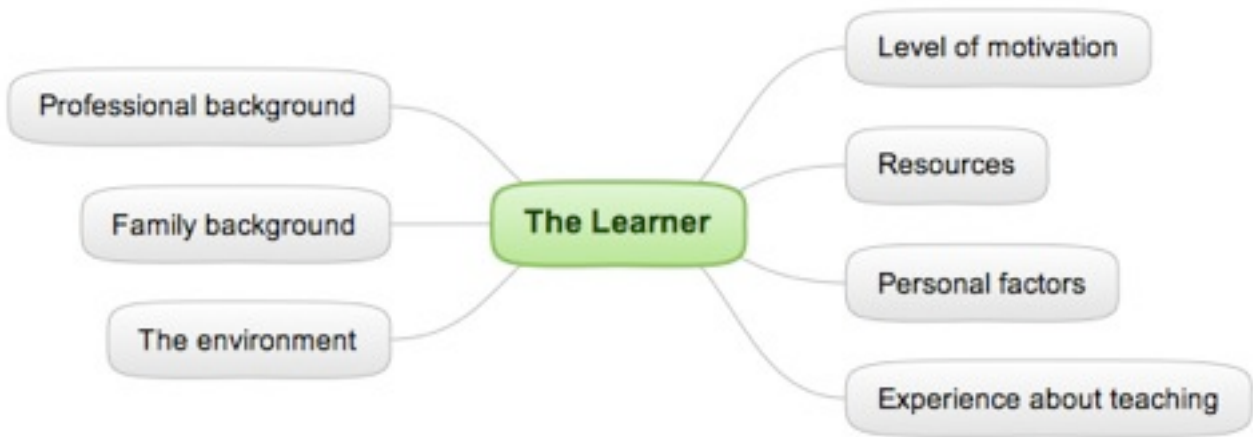


Figure 9: Learner Characteristics

Activity 5B

As tutor or course writer, give one reason why it is important to know each of these learner characteristics.

- a. Educational background

- b. Learning style expectations

- c. Ability to pay fees

- d. The learner's social environment

- e. The learner's nationality

The reasons you give are important. Add them to those from colleagues, and bear them in mind when you either prepare for tutorials, or when you have to write a module. The course writer and the tutor who do not have information about their learner's profile will be writing or talking merely to entertain themselves.



What nature of support does the learner require?

Tutors in DE often think that they know what learners want. Sometimes this is a mistaken view since learners might have different perceptions of tuition. What three forms of support do you think learners want?

Mary Thorpe (1988) summarises findings of a study project carried out at the Open University (UK) about learner perceptions of tuition. In the project, 500 learners studying a variety of courses were surveyed. A questionnaire was used, and learners were asked to react to the provision of different media on the course they had completed. A total of 68% felt that without a course tutor there would be no one to help with study problems, and 25% felt without the help of a tutor they would probably have dropped from their studies, while only 7% didn't

bother about getting support from the tutor. On a different item, 66% expected the tutor to analyse errors and deficiencies in their assignments. They, therefore, expected constructive comments from their tutors.

It is worth noting from these findings that for many learners tutor presence alone can be an important form of support, then, of course, also the need to mark assignments and give constructive comments. Sometimes we never anticipate learners' expectations. Let us, therefore, develop a more systematic list of areas where learners need support.

i. Face-to-face tuition

According to Thorpe (1988:77) face-to-face tuition has a voluntary aspect, and is provided with the assumption that learners will want to use it. Tutors tend to be anxious about low turnout at tutorials, but the truth is they can do no more than encourage regular attendance. In fact, it is possible to study a DE course without attending tutorials. This is one of the features of openness. There are, however, a number of reasons for giving this type of support. For example:

- Learners get immediate feedback from their tutor and colleagues
- It helps learners know how other learners think
- Learners share common problems, both academic and social
- Tutorials provide opportunities for a two-way communication



- Learners develop positive attitudes about learning at a distance
- Attending tutorials boosts confidence and morale to learn
- Tutorials are an occasion to make learning more personal and to know one another
- During a tutorial, the facilitator can explain difficult concepts for the benefit of all.

ii. Individual tutorials

These are one-to-one sessions meant to discuss issues that apply to an individual learner. An example is the issue of research projects. After a group tutorial, where research methods are discussed, the individual learner will require individual tuition. This is done in order to negotiate the topic, structure it, determine relevant literature, and agree on the plan of action. Individual tutorials are an important feature of learning at a distance because the:

- individual learner feels valued
- learner can express personal problems without feeling embarrassed as might happen in a group
- learner gets more time to articulate his / her understanding than would happen in a group tutorial where more students compete for talking time
- introvert gets the opportunity for self expression while using the specialist language of the subject at the same time
- learner takes control of learning

iii. Support with assignments

Tutor marked assignments (TMAs) are an important form of support. The tutor uses them to monitor learner progress, and through comments helps learners realise their weaknesses and strengths.

In some courses, assignments carry a certain percentage of marks which counts towards the final grade. This is the case with degree courses offered at ZOU and the vocational courses at BOCODOL. In most situations, assignments help learners prepare for public exams. The BGCSE programme at BOCODOL is a good example. Marks obtained in assignments are a useful indicator, to the student, of areas that need more attention when preparing for exams. The tutor should, therefore, bear the following in mind:

- mark promptly and give feedback. The amount of time taken to submit, mark and return the assignment to the learner is known as the turnaround time



- the grade awarded must be reliable. To ensure this happens, course developers who set assignments, should prepare a marking guide
- constructive comments ought to be given on the script. Areas of difficulty, and places in the study material to be referred to, should be highlighted
- comments should be positive and encouraging even when the learner is awarded a failing mark

iv. Guiding and counselling learners

Learners need support for a number of reasons. For example, the choice of subjects; coming up with a study time-table, especially when learners study while they are employed; maximising tutorials; coping with family pressure; handling social problems interfering with studies; etc. It is the tutor's responsibility to lend support in the best way possible.

One of the most disturbing experiences is stress, and we shall examine it here as it relates to learners, both in general and in particular. What does 'stress' mean to you?

You are stressed when you experience some anxiety that interferes with studies. Having said that, in what ways is stress good or bad? In many cases we think of stress as something always bad. Let's examine learner experiences related to stress in the next activity.

Activity 5C

- a. What difficulties do you think the learner experiences during face-to-face tutorial support in your organisation?
- b. In what situations are individual tutorials a necessary form of support in lessening stress?
- c. What constraints are you likely to face when trying to offer guidance and counselling support to your

The answers you came up with should be a useful guide to you. It is always important to be proactive so that when problems arise you are better prepared for them. This is especially true, bearing in mind that the tutor has the responsibility to lessen learner anxiety. Let's now share a few ideas about stress.



Stewart (1996:24) defines stress as “our body's response to any demand made on it, obviously there must be good stress as well as bad”. Enrolling for a distance education course makes a big demand on the learner. It demands regular travelling to the centre, and that in turn demands money. The learner will also probably be required to follow certain patterns of thinking and interacting quite different from the more relaxed and uncontrolled social ways prior to enrolment. Further, there will be new people who perceive the learner differently. Getting to understand these people can be difficult and, therefore, stressful. Scoring low grades can be a cause for anxiety especially when members of the family are not supportive enough. These and many other demands are instances of stress and clearly suggest the need for support by the tutor.

The learner supporter should, however, note that stress has a positive side. Some degree of anxiety is necessary. When a learner reacts to a problem with a plan and a positive attitude, that can lead to higher achievement. Thus, we cannot avoid stress altogether. When well-handled, stress can be a creative force with a transforming effect on the student. However, when stress is handled in a haphazard manner and gets out of control, it can destroy one's confidence, competence and health. Support in this area cannot be overemphasised.

It is beyond the scope of a mere workshop handbook to go into detail about guidance and counselling techniques at the disposal of tutors. We believe the awareness given presently affords learner supporters some idea about this form of support. A knowledge of learner characteristics, discussed earlier, combines with this awareness to make the guidance and counselling support an important feature of open learning.

Summary

In this chapter, we concentrated on the need for the distance educator to support the learner. Enrolling for a course is bound to bring uncertainties to even the most enthusiastic student. The mediating influence of the learner supporter has been researched upon. Its results are considered to be beneficial in the majority of instances. To explore the issue of support, these areas received coverage:

- the meaning and import of learner support
- the categories of support, namely, administrative, tutorial, and guidance and counseling
- the interrelationship between learner support and course development functions
- explanation of learner support systems at BOCODOL and ZOU
- the way course developers should relate with learner tutors
- the tutor as an agent of change in the learning process



- the specialist and the generalist role of the tutor
- accounting for learner characteristics
- forms of learner support that an organisation can offer

It is clear from our discussion that tutoring and counselling are responsibilities which give hope and confidence to those who put effort. Remember to impress on learners that when, at times things go wrong, as they are bound to:

Failure is delayed success that gives you the opportunity to begin again only more intelligently (Steve Biko of South Africa)

Topics for discussion

1. Some students believe that attending tutorials is a waste of time. They are comfortable using study materials only. What is your view about this argument?
2. What importance do you attach to pre-enrolment counselling, and counselling the learner after completing the course?
3. Why should distance educators in the course development section, and those in the learner support section of the same organisation, be aware of the complementary nature of their functions?
4. Suggest ways to improve the learner support system of your organisation. Refer to learner support systems in other institutions to support your views.
5. To what extent do course materials and tutors in your organisation take into account the learner profile?
6. As a tutor, how do you ensure that a face-to-face tutorial achieves its objectives?



Chapter 6 - The Communication Issue in Distance Education

Communication is a process where reality is produced, monitored, repaired and transformed.

Introduction

The discussion of communication as a distance education area of concern is, in essence, a discussion of the broader culture obtaining in new environments. Language constitutes the basis for all other forms of communication in the creation of cultural specifics. As Erasmus-Kritzinger, Bowler, and Goliath (2001:1) put it:

“no organization can function properly without a good system of communication... communication is used to solve problems, give instructions, resolve conflicts, motivate employees, and persuade clients...”

One feature that makes open and distance learning distinctive is the ‘two-way communication’. This now-popular key phrase, however, tends to be misinterpreted. Generally, its mention is associated with signal carriers such as the radio, video, audio tapes, and computers. Surprisingly, not much is said about language as a tool for communication. If language has for long been identified as a major barrier to learning in conventional education systems, where teachers and learners are not separated by geographical distance from each other, it is probable that such a bother is even more pressing where such distance is an issue. This is because English, through which concepts are learnt, is a second language (L2) for the majority of our distance learners. So, one of the issues for which the distance educator ought to take cognisance is the language used to communicate intentions.

In this session we raise the view that language is the basis for all manner of communication. For example, audio tutoring or computer-based interaction are what they are on account of language. We shall, therefore, examine language in DE, then shed light on the communication technologies that have gained currency. As we explore the matter of communication, it is important to bear in mind that all the ideas discussed in foregoing sessions and subsequent ones are dependent on language for their efficacy. This position led us to define communication as language and related means that convey ideas, knowledge, dispositions, attitudes, and skills that are subject to evaluation and re-evaluation in a given context. Our Figure 6, the dialogical cycle, is representative of this position.



How does communication feature in open learning?

There are two primary components that a distance educator should bear in mind in order to come to terms with the essence of communication. These are:

- the study materials, which we referred to as tutorials-in-print
- the tutor, whom we described as a facilitator of learning

The first feature presupposes that distance learning materials themselves are expected to meet certain expectations about use of language. The second one suggests that although self-instruction materials are expected to be self-contained, the tutor still has a role to play. From your experience about the language of communication in DE, what role should the tutor play during facilitation? Write two suggestions here.

Learners do not necessarily make sense of information contained in study materials when they read. As a direct result, their dialogue with such materials could be constrained. It is, therefore, one of the tutor's roles to guide the learner so that he / she profits from the dialogue initiated by study modules. Earlier, we referred to this as intervention, a process in which the tutor acts as a catalyst. In previous workshops with DE learners, agreement was reached that communication through language is manifested in the following ways:

- learners' capability to use language to grasp the concepts being learnt
- proficient use of language during tutorials
- learners originating their own questions instead of waiting for the tutor to initiate dialogue
- learners interrogating the study material in order to achieve goals of learning
- drawing on personal experiences to interpret new knowledge
- being able to distinguish that some words have a special meaning, within the context of a given subject, that is different from everyday usage

On the tutor's part, language awareness can facilitate communication if these features are observed:



- the extent to which the tutor is proactive about difficulties likely to be faced when new concepts are encountered
- whether all learners interpret words in the same way
- the differing interpretations of certain sections of the study material
- whether there are certain words or expressions learners find difficult to relate to their own world
- whether most interactions are initiated by learners
- whether the tutor consciously allows learners to express their own attitudes and feelings
- whether tutors ask more open-ended than closed questions

When tutors are aware of their role, they are more likely to create the same awareness in learners than if they were not aware. Tichapondwa (1997:24) advises that the tutor's role could be:

Following the learner's lead; accommodating the learners' attempt to communicate; responding in some way to the learners' attempt; providing corrective feedback in a positive way; limiting your instructions and directives. This awareness and sensitivity, by the tutor, accounts for more effective tutorials in which language is used interactively and communicatively.

Now, share your experience by responding to questions below.

Activity 6A

Write a brief explanation to show how each of these features is related to language as a tool for communication.

a. learners asking their own questions

b. tutors asking open-ended questions

c. learners drawing on personal experiences when they interact with study material

In previous workshops, many participants had difficulties, for example, explaining how tutor's open-ended questions stimulate open-ended answers in which learners draw on their store of language. Responding to such questions helps learners select appropriate words, manipulate them to suit the purpose, and come up with original ideas. That, in fact, is language in action. We believe



you have applied similar reasoning to the other points in the activity above. When learners are encouraged to respond that way, we say they are using language to construct knowledge.

How does language help in the construction of knowledge?

The purpose of engaging in dialogue with DE materials is to acquire new knowledge, or understand better what was understood only partially. According to Mercer (1995:6), “this is why an analysis of the process of teaching and learning, of constructing knowledge, must be an analysis of language in use”. That is why, one may also add, Barnes et al. (1971) argue that language should figure prominently in the curriculum. Similarly, we in distance education, going by learner experiences, often observe that students who cannot respond to activities more accurately, and who cannot branch out to draw on their own language to pursue a topic (orally or in writing), have problems coping with their studies. In a book-long argument, Tichapondwa (2000) argues for a linguistic education in which the main thrust is that the development of oral and writing competencies in any given language, more especially English L2, is not automatic. There ought to be a systematic way of learning and using the language through which a topic is presented. We shall illustrate these ideas with an example from material based on a business studies lesson. The extract is from a lesson about borrowing money from the bank in order to start a business.

Extract from a business studies lesson

In the previous unit we discussed the need to borrow in order to set up a venture. In this lesson, we examine conditions of borrowing. By conditions we mean requirements you are expected to fulfil by the bank before they can lend you the money. Pause for a while and suggest any two conditions you should fulfil. Write them here.

By the way, we said that the money you borrow from the bank is called a loan. Now check if you included the following as some of the conditions:

- time consideration
- the interest rate
- capacity to repay the loan
- proof that you already have a trade licence

There could be many more, but these will be enough to keep our discussion going. However, I do not think it is enough just to list the conditions. You should also be able to explain why. To do that, work on this activity.



Activity

i. In your own words, write down why it is important to know about each of these conditions.

ii. the interest rate

the capacity to repay the loan

ii. What is the difference between:

being interested in something, and an interest rate?

a loan and a lawn

borrowing and lending

iii. Discuss the ideas you wrote with friends to see whether your answers agree with theirs. After that, turn to page 18 for suggested answers.

What features of language and communication does this study material reflect? Can you see the tutorial-in-print, in which the voice of the writer as tutor encourages students to learn new content as well as language for that topic? Now, check whether you agree with the following features that can be identified.

- The extract begins with language that links what was covered in the previous unit with the present lesson, and that promotes continuity.
- The concept of conditions is explained in context as a feature of language that helps the learner focus on objectives of the present lesson.
- The listing of two conditions implies that after receiving the message from the material, learners understood it to the extent of being able to send back an interpretation of the language via two conditions of their own.
- Before moving on, the material reminds them of the word 'loan'.



- Thereafter, the material gives feedback to the response by the learner in language carefully chosen to construct learner knowledge by listing four conditions. The material then challenges learners to go beyond merely listing conditions, and explain why those conditions are important. That open-ended
- question encourages use of original language to be reflected in the response to activity questions. The activity instruction is explicit about language expectations.
- In question ii., the first question focuses learner attention on distinguishing the everyday use of the word 'interest' towards its educational meaning. The second and third questions encourage learners to reflect on words often confused.
- When learners have responded, they are encouraged to engage in dialogue with colleagues. That way, they gain further practice in personalising language in the construction of knowledge.
- To seal off the dialogue, the material offers some feedback, and that serves as a reference point before moving on.

So, if the study material carries the tutor's voice, as explained above, how crucial is the tutor's role during face-to-face tutorials?

In Chapter Five, we shared a number of ideas about the nature of support offered by the tutor. Among them are face-to-face tuition, and individual tutoring. As already mentioned, the tutor is a catalyst of learning. That means his/her function is to complement the self-instructional material. He / she should:

- read the materials and understand their communicative purposes
- identify parts that might cause language, communication, and
- conceptualisation problems for learners.
- intervene only when learners fail to make progress. That is when he / she acts as solution giver.

The simple conclusion to be drawn from the discussion so far is that in the absence of a sound command of language, the learner won't be in a position to construct knowledge. Availability of a tutor goes a long way in promoting learning. Effectiveness of language is also enhanced by other technologies as discussed in the next section.

How is language linked with Information Communications Technology?



If language is the basis for communication, do we, as distance educators, have a case for technologies such as audio-cassettes or computer-based programmes? Write two reasons why such technologies are necessary in DE.

True, such technologies are necessary and complement the printed word.

In conventional systems, the content of a course, especially that part not contained in recommended textbooks, is communicated by the teacher mainly by word of mouth. This is similar to the role we saw being played by the traveller in the Shaka Zulu experience, cited in Chapter One. ICTs may be an integral or supplementary part of the course delivery system. They support the communication of information and interaction between learners and teachers. ICTs are also important to the establishment of sound management and administration systems that underpin effective distance education operations (cf. Hope and Guiton, 2006). Interpersonal communication, in the context of DE, can be improved through mechanical and electronic means such as print, telephone, audio, video, radio broadcasting or the computer. Delling (Keegan, 1996:45) refers to each of these, when used in a distance system, as the 'signal-carrier'. We now examine some of the signal carriers separately.

Radio broadcasting

Rowntree (1990:5) observes that when Open University courses began in 1971, each had a half-hour radio programme broadcast twice weekly. Radio broadcasting is also used at BOCODOL and ZOU for its beneficial use. What do you think is the importance of using radio broadcasts in DE? Give two reasons.

The following reasons may or may not agree with yours. That doesn't really matter. What counts is for you to develop an awareness that radio serves the distance educator in a number of ways, for example:

In developing countries, the radio is the most readily available electronic medium to learners. It is also more affordable than computers.

- Broadcasts can reach rural areas quite easily.
- Radio lessons, useful for learning new knowledge, can be broadcast followed with group discussions.



- For purposes of learning correct pronunciation of words used across the subjects, model voices can be used.
- An organisation can broadcast discussions between tutors and learners, or 'phone-ins' with learners quizzing a panel of experts.

However, there are some disadvantages associated with this medium. Let us suggest them here, beginning with one from you.

- It is not possible to repeat the same broadcast unless the learner tapes it
- Learners cannot pause to think or discuss
- Broadcasting time is fixed, so it may not be convenient to all learners.

In spite of these, we can overcome some of the problems by using audiocassettes as an alternative.

Audio-cassettes

Many distance learning institutions use audio-cassettes as an alternative to radio broadcasts, because the latter are found to be inflexible. How can you avoid the inflexibilities of radio by using audio-cassettes? Suggest your own point then read ours.

- It is possible to tape a radio lesson for replay later.
- The learner can stop and start the sound at will.
- The listener can skip over any material of little relevance.
- One can listen to the sound as many times as one wishes.
- Audio-materials can complement study materials quite effectively.

The main disadvantage, however, is affordability. In addition, these can also be added.

- Organisations might have limited funds to pay a professional to develop recordings.
- Cassette recorders can be expensive for learners in developing countries.



Experience has, however, shown that audio-cassettes used in conjunction with print media, make open learning more qualitative. BOCODOL serves as a good example where the combination makes delivery of open learning distinctively more effective. As a rallying point, an audio programme could raise new concepts and clarify existing ones leading to a discussion.

The telephone

In Chapter Five, we discussed individual tutorials as a form of providing support to the learner. They are a one-to-one session between tutor and learner. Where face-to-face sessions are not possible, the telephone has been used to fill in that gap. This form of support is known as telephone conferencing. The learner discusses an issue related to studies over the phone. The advantages are that:

- talking directly to the tutor reduces the distance normally associated with DE
- the learner initiates the dialogue, that means he / she is directing the learning process by asking questions and using language to communicate knowledge
- there is immediate feedback during the two-way communication
- actual voices, reflecting tone, pauses, pitch, and stress, facilitate emphasis of important issues
- tele-conferencing also allows two or more learners, in geographically different areas, to communicate at the same time as they would do in a normal tutorial

What other advantage can you think of?

The main problem with telephone conferencing is that it is expensive. In new organisations like BOCODOL and ZOU, the telephone is mainly used for administrative purposes. Managers of the organisation use this medium to give directives, pass on information, place orders, explain issues, etc. Use is, therefore, mainly confined to issues that relate to the running of organisational affairs.

Tutor video instruction

Citing their experiences, Morgan and O'Riley (1999:14) observe that "tutored video instruction (TVI) offers a cheap form of video-led open learning, using simply produced videos and notes". In that form of instruction, ready-made videos are given to learners to replay and link with study materials.

In the alternative form of TVI, the presenter lectures on a given topic, at a particular time, to as many learners as enrolled across the whole country, or across a number of countries. Students



watch these, either as individuals or in groups. Those in groups will have a tutor who gives them support. The advantages of TVI are:

- learners can ask questions from the tutor when they do not follow what the presenter says
- learners can see the person who will be presenting the topic
- the situation encourages learner participation and free communication in the group tutor's presence
- there is dialogue and immediate feedback
- learners can readily link the new knowledge to self-instructional materials

Notwithstanding these advantages, there are constraints in using this technology, especially in new environments. Chief among the disadvantages is the question of cost. Television sets and the accompanying accessories can be expensive. Now, add two disadvantages of your own bearing in mind the organisation you belong to.

Computer conferencing

Computer assisted learning (CAL) has become popular among institutions in developing countries. It is used for teaching at a distance to both a national and international cohort of students. Firstly, as Morgan and O'Riley (1999:205) point out, "students and tutors are all networked, and it is a requirement that study support should be provided through computer conferencing". Learner and tutor interact as they would by phone, but this time learners can hear the voice as well as see and talk to the presenter. Secondly, in addition to the more traditional printed course materials, learners are given access to a personal library of academic articles on CD ROM, and there is also guidance to sites on the Internet. Recent developments in the ICT sector, such as the World-wide Web also allow learners access to electronic libraries set up by their institutions. They can also access resources from other DE organisations. Thus, CAL has these advantages:

- geographical distance is reduced when learner and tutor interact live
- there is immediate feedback during the learning process
- learners develop communication skills and, and play a more active role in the guided construction of knowledge
- students learn information-handling skills



- learners will also be linked to peers, and that helps them share their perceptions with equals
- learners use language in context, therefore apply language for practical intentions

CAL is, however, relatively expensive to implement, more especially in those environments where DE is introduced for the first time. Basically, it requires electricity, which is not readily available in some urban areas, to say nothing of most rural areas. Costs of staff, software, and hardware can be substantial. Also, once systems are set up, running costs can be prohibitive.

Recently, (2004-2005) NAMCOL, assisted by UNESCO and SAIDE implemented an e-learning pilot project. NAMCOL's motivation was to add value to the existing learning materials. While paper-based resources were critical to its model of distance education, it was felt that in a few key areas, web-based multi-media might illustrate content and concepts much more effectively. This was against a background where computer skills and resources are limited. However, despite that, success was realized, a development, which serves as an example of how ICTs can be used to enhance ODL practices.

Another current and ongoing development is the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), and initiative co-ordinated by the Commonwealth of Learning. This aims at using ICT to

Develop a virtual university to particularly serve the small states of the Commonwealth, using existing structures and capacity. Altogether there are 32 small states with an estimated total of less than 4.5 million. Of these, 25 are on board the project.

Among some of the characteristics that make VUSSC unique are that it should:

- enable small states to be contributors as well as consumers
- add value to existing institutions
- enable delivery in different formats, adaptable to different technological environments

The whole idea is for stakeholders to work collaboratively, each contributing to the eventual success of the project. COL facilitates the creation of networks. On the other hand, Ministries of Education :

- develop appropriate policies
- allocate resources to sustain the project
- support implementation



- monitor implementation

Individual institutions, on the other hand:

- assume responsibility for programme development and delivery
- supplement and adapt course materials to local contexts to meet the specific needs of learners
- commit themselves to the granting of awards earned by learners

In the workshop held in Singapore (April 2006) a technical steering committee was set up, and a strategic plan was to be developed with appropriate proposals for funding. At that forum, a number of multimedia courses to be developed was identified. Among them were Tourism and Hospitality, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Business Management. As a follow-up, COL has co-ordinated the structuring and writing of two courses (Entrepreneurship and Tourism and Hospitality).

Course outlines and the first Unit for each course were written in Mauritius in August 2006. Thereafter, countries will continue with the writing for an estimated period of two years.

The ICT discussed thus far can be used to improve the quality of distance learning. It should be remembered, however, that for learners to conclude that the audio-cassette, the telephone, or any other form of technology is of some value, much depends on language. Technologies are signal or message carriers to the extent that the appropriate language is chosen to communicate content. This view is summarised in the following diagram.



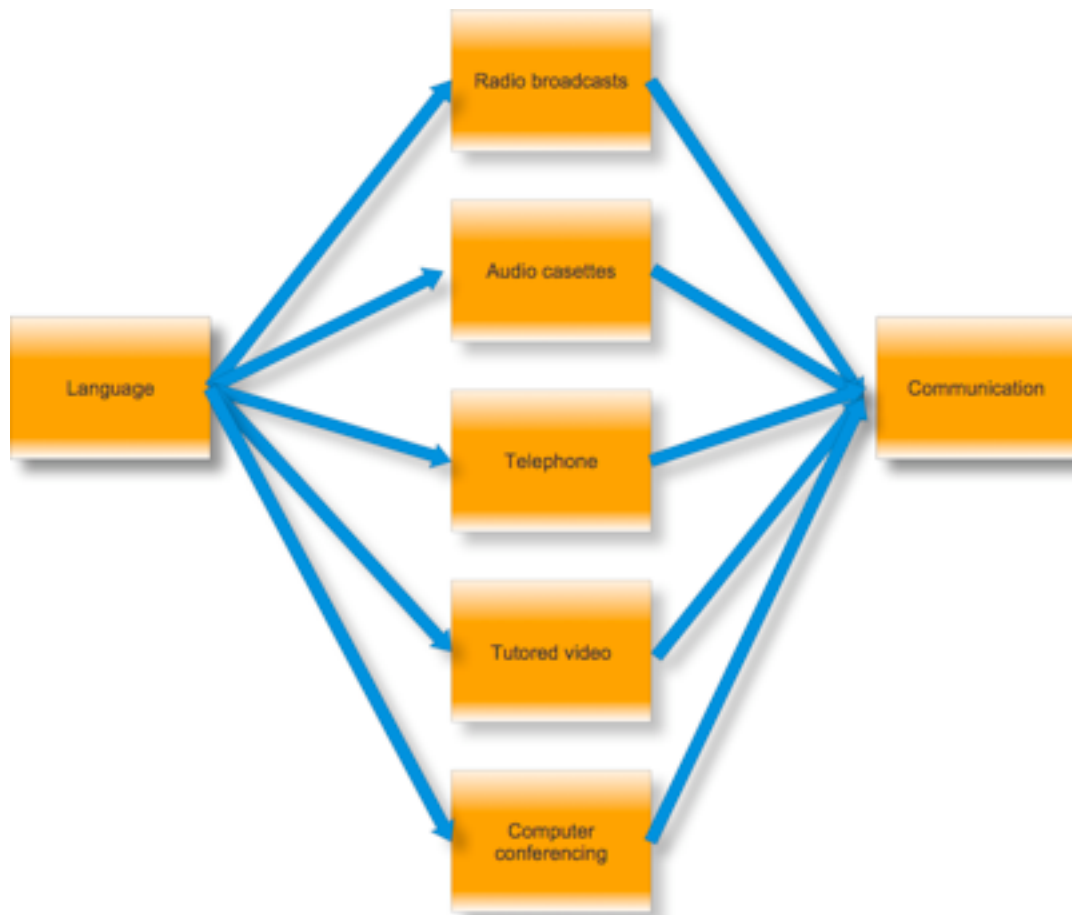


Figure 10: The mediating influence of ICT

Thus, these technologies are fast becoming a part of the culture of DE systems in our institutions in new environments.



Activity 6B

- a. Suggest any three ways in which audio-cassettes support the study materials used in your organisation.

- b. Although there are a number of disadvantages in using the radio, it is the most accessible technology in developing countries. What two ways would you recommend to turn the disadvantages into advantages?

- c. Which expensive, but useful technology do you wish to see being used in your organisation? How can your organisation make it available?

One of the ways in which audio-cassettes support the BOCODOL study units is that they cover difficult sections which are then discussed with experts while learners listen. One disadvantage of radio broadcasts is that you cannot repeat them. To overcome that disadvantage, you should record on the cassette for replay later. The computer is expensive. However, an organisation could develop a resource centre at each regional office, and encourage learners to use the Internet to access resources. Note that we gave only one suggestion for each question in the activity. You can fill in the others and find out what your colleagues think.

Summary

In this part of the workshop, we discussed the communication issue in distance learning. Communication is such a key issue that DE is inconceivable without it. We argued that the basis for the two-way communication is language. It is through language that distance learning messages are communicated to learners. To address the matter, the following were discussed:

- the function of study materials as a medium of communication
- the role of the tutor in the communication process
- how learners draw on personal language to come to an understanding of the content of a subject
- how concept formation and construction of knowledge relate to the command of sound language
- an illustration of language in action during the process of constructing knowledge



- the link between information communication technologies, on the one hand, and language and communication, on the other
- an explanation of five technologies of communication.

More effective communication should, therefore, be consciously cultivated and treasured as a cultural possession. As the first President of Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama often said, “A nation without a culture is a lost nation”, distance education practitioners ought to play a more active role in the furtherance of language and communication.

In light of the foregoing, we arrive at the conclusion that the learner supporter should pay special attention to language matters, just as much as the module writer does. We often take an understanding of what we communicate to learners for granted when their language world could well be totally different from ours. Here is a case in point to show that English as a second language can pose serious difficulties for the learner.

The first day I taught my class, I asked one child where the books were. He responded “My name is Tonderai. I come from Chikore village”.

(Kuhudzai, 1995)

Topics for discussion

1. What do you consider to be the difference between communication practices in traditional African distance education and today’s distance education as practiced in your organisation?
2. If open learning materials are self-instructional, what communication role is there for the tutor as a learner supporter?
3. To what extent can information communication technologies, on their own, further open learning independently without language?
4. How does a two-way communication, as opposed to a one-way communication, encourage original use of the language of learning by the student?
5. What is your understanding of the guided construction of knowledge as an element of effective distance education practice?
6. Discuss some of the cultural issues, associated with communication, that the distance education practitioner in your environment ought to take into account.



Chapter 7 - Distance Education Systems in Southern Africa

Undue expenditure of energy by an organization, digging a well beside an equipped borehole, leaves that organization sapped, and with barely enough energy to draw muddy water from the shallow well.

(Anonymous)

Introduction

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) comprises 14 countries. These are Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho, Republic of South Africa, Botswana, Mauritius, and Seychelles. They strive to share a common vision about the sub-region socially, economically, educationally, and culturally. One such vision, commonly shared, is the development of open and distance learning systems towards the elevation of living standards among citizens.

If their shared vision is to be realised, there is need for each member country to be aware how its neighbours are going about the task of setting up DE systems. The point for doing that is to avoid re-inventing the wheel, and also to use the experiences of other countries to make a country's system better. Countries should, therefore, expend their development energies wisely.

At the level of individual organisations, distance educators need information about what other organisations are doing, how they handle challenges, etc. This session examines those issues, and gives information about major developments in the sub-region. Availability of information to distance educators is a form of empowerment, because when equipped with knowledge, they can improve themselves as practitioners. Above all, they can make a positive impact on their respective organisations leading to the delivery of quality educational service.

What sort of information does the distance educator need?

This second-last session looks both back to issues already discussed, and forward to the challenges and the future of distance education in our region. In previous sessions, we defined ODL, talked about its management, course development, and learner support practices. In the previous chapter, we discussed issues of communication. In the present session, we look into the future to determine what sort of practices we want to see in our organisations. Note what you expect to learn from this session.



When we put together the expectation you have cited above with those of your colleagues, we may come up with a list of expectations in the form of questions.

- What role should governments play in DE?
- Is there a general pattern in the way DE systems are organised?
- What different types of institutions are available?
- Is there any form of co-operation among DE providers in the sub-region?
- What challenges do the organisations face?
- What progress is being made in providing quality DE?
- How do organisations in a given country link with other international DE organisations?

Although an attempt is made to answer these questions, we admit from the outset that it is not easy to come up with answers to some of the questions. This is so because the SADC region is vast, and it may not be easy to keep track of all that is happening at any given time. Some general and specific responses to the questions will be given, hoping that at the end of the session you will have developed the awareness that your organisation is not alone in the struggle to provide quality distance education. There are organisations, more or less similar to yours which face challenges, and strive to overcome them in the true spirit of progress.

How is distance education facilitated in the region?

As we say, somebody has to call the tune for the rest to dance. In every country, it is the government that:

- identifies the need for distance education
- passes legislation to govern the establishment of systems: state- supported, parastatals, or private ones
- funds organisations which are backed by the state
- prescribes the framework to govern operations by providers regarding national qualifications, quality of programmes, and minimum standards National bodies are normally created by act of parliament to accredit, register, and monitor both public and private training institutions to ensure adherence to the required standard and quality of training. The bodies also ensure that variability between institutions is minimised. As an example, the government of Botswana created the Botswana Training Authority (BOTA) to monitor vocational programmes offered both by distance and conventional modes.



In Zimbabwe, the statutory board known as the Higher Education Examination Council (HEXCO) does the monitoring. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) are the two main bodies in South Africa. They are primarily concerned with aspects of curricula, and the learning enterprise to ensure delivery of quality services to stakeholders.

The next activity requires you to make reference to your country.

Activity 7A

a. With reference to your country, name the government body or bodies responsible for quality standards in Education

b. Briefly describe one or two specific roles the bodies play in your organisation

From what you noted above, we can conclude that the government of a given country is a key player. Once DE takes root, the different providers within the country organise themselves into associations that specifically address issues of DE nation-wide. We have the National Association of Distance Education in South Africa (NADEOSA), and in Zimbabwe we have the Zimbabwe Distance and Open Learning Association (ZIDOLA). Not all SADC member countries do have such associations. However, where no association exists, plans are under way to form one. National associations play an important role, and we want you to give your opinion about their relevance in the following activity.

Activity 7B

a. Suggest two reasons to justify the formation of a distance education association in your country.

b. Suggest two steps you would follow in order to form an association, or to improve an existing one in your country.

One reason for forming a distance education association is that it brings together like minds. People with an interest in DE share a common vision for the benefit of the nation. One step towards forming the association is calling a meeting for representatives from different organisations to plan the way forward, then work out a constitution that will serve as a national framework. National



associations are widely acknowledged for their role in facilitating progress in ODL. There are also regional bodies that play a major role in promoting open learning, and these are discussed below.

The Distance Education Association for Southern Africa (DEASA)

DEASA is a non-profit making educational body inaugurated in 1972. To understand its role, the following words from the DEASA Newsletter (2001:2) paint a clear picture.

The co-ordinating and relationship building work done by DEASA among distance education providers in Southern Africa is to be commended. If, as Africans, we are to succeed, we have to work as a collective. The Europeans realised this ages ago, and proceeded to establish the European Union, and are now having a single currency whose buying power is increasing with the consolidation of unity and passage of time.

The quotation says it all. In brief, DEASA is concerned with co-ordinating, building up linkages, uniting providers, and advising so that with passage of time, unity of purpose, in the field of DE, is consolidated.

The operations of DEASA are governed by a constitution. The association aspires to be a regional DE powerhouse, a point articulated in one of its constitutional amendments (2001:15) thus:

For the last 30 years DEASA has been an institution for distance educators in Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa , Swaziland and Namibia. It has now found it fit to network with other SADC countries...

This futuristic decision was made at the annual general meeting held at UNISA in March 2001.

The DEASA Secretariat which has been rolling from country to country after every two years, now has a base in one of the member countries, South Africa at UNISA. This decision was passed at the conference held in Maseru, Lesotho in March 2002. Some of the unifying and co-ordinating functions of DEASA include:

- organising general meetings twice every year
- publishing a newsletter with contributions from member countries
- circulating information, through its secretariat, on developments in the region
- providing a forum for interaction towards a better understanding of how distance education can lead to true social and economic liberation
- recommending guidelines on capacity building
- helping in designing and developing courses and programmes geared to regional needs
- co-ordinating the writing of articles and their presentation at international conferences



Having listened to the facilitating role of DEASA, what would you suggest your country should contribute to make DEASA a regional powerhouse?

Yes, unless individual countries make a conscious effort to improve the capacity of DEASA, the idea of a powerhouse will remain a pipe dream. More conscious collaboration can be the basis for unity among SADC countries as attempted by yet another organisation in the SADC region.

The SADC Technical Committee on Distance Education (TCDE)

The TCDE is a body that is responsible for projects that form part of its five-year Strategic Plan. Its main objective is to unify the effort of member countries towards the attainment of quality educational services. The projects include:

i. Omnibus study

This aims to gather base-line information on various aspects of ODL in the region.

ii. Policy development

The aim of this project is to gather information on DE policies of the SADC countries, to analyse them and prepare a report on the status of policy development.

iii. Capacity building

This covers training of distance education practitioners and policy makers. One of the first courses introduced is an on-line course, funded by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). It is offered through the South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE).

iv. Information communication technology

The project is a study of the technology currently being used in the region. It makes recommendations on how to strengthen and expand co-operation in the use of ICT.

v. Database development

This aims to establish a database for ODL activities, learning materials, expertise, etc. to facilitate co-operation among the countries . This diagram summarises the projects under TCDE.





Figure 11: TCDE Projects

TCDE holds regular meetings which involve member countries. Its 4th meeting was held in Maputo, Mozambique in October 2001. Some of the issues dwelt on during that meeting were the restructuring of DE and resource mobilisation. Eight SADC countries attended, this time including Zimbabwe, Zambia and Mauritius. Having examined the foregoing, what difficulties do you think the TCDE is likely to face in its effort to promote collaboration among countries of the region? Suggest any three.



One such problem is the lack of financial resources by member countries. Think how the problems you raised can be addressed in order to improve the capacity of TCDE.

South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE)

This facilitative organisation is based in Johannesburg, South Africa, and is guided by its objectives, namely:

- to assist in increasing equitable and meaningful access to knowledge, skills, and learning through the adoption of open learning principles and DE strategies
- to develop and promote the concept of open learning and functional distance education
- to assist departments of education, institutions and programmes to give practical expression to the principles embodied in these concepts.

(DEASA Newsletter,2001)

SAIDE does this by carrying out a variety of projects. These are few examples of the many it has accomplished:

- training of BOCODOL staff on the designing and development of study materials
- the Kellogg Rural Development Project aimed towards the eradication of poverty in rural South Africa
- the development of a framework of quality criteria and conditions necessary for successful DE in rural areas of South Africa
- the training of regional staff at the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL)
- collaboration with TSA in which SAIDE assists in developing a cost effective quality assurance and review process which would, over time, be extended internally to include all courses and programmes

This role played by SAIDE, together with that played by DEASA and TCDE, indicates the level of seriousness about DE in Southern Africa.

Organisations also collaborate with the COL, an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. All these efforts point to a promising future, an issue examined in detail in the next chapter. In what way does your organisation benefit from its association with SAIDE, or if it is not already benefiting, how would it benefit?



Your response should be based on a mini research you carry out to find the situation in your country regarding links with SAIDE.

Which are some of the distance education organisations in the region?

Basically, there are three types of DE organisations in our sub-region

i. Dual-mode organisations

These are institutions that offer both conventional and distance education. There are many of these, especially universities which have departments catering for distance learners separately from conventional ones. The Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) is an example at the University of Botswana.

ii. Single-mode organisations

Such organisations offer distance education only. UNISA, ZOU, and BOCODOL are typical examples. In the majority of cases, dual and single mode organizations are state sponsored.

iii. Private organisations

In most countries are found private providers of DE. They complement efforts by the state, and set up their own institutions in accordance with the national qualifications framework of their country's education system. The Zimbabwe Distance Education College (ZIDECO), and Rapid Results College (RRC) are some of the examples of private colleges in Zimbabwe. There are many such providers in South Africa , and among them are Damelin, and INTEC College. Your country will probably have private colleges, but you may not know them until you find out.

Activity 7C

In light of the explanation above, cite examples of organisations in your country under each of the three categories.

a. Dual-mode

b. Single-mode

c. Private



It will be clear from what has been said so far that DE is a field that continues to expand in new environments. You will, perhaps, be interested to have more information about some of the organisations in SADC countries. As you will be aware by now, there are 14 countries in the region. It has not been possible to gather information exhaustively about all countries for a number of reasons. Data from some countries, especially those that are more active in DEASA has been easier to access, but not so for countries which are not active. If institutions of the country you belong to are not included, fill in the information in the space provided at the end of this section.

Botswana

BOCODOL

BOCODOL is a semi-autonomous parastatal institution that evolved from the Department of Non-formal Education (DNFE) in 1998. It provides DE at pretertiary level. Thus, it deals with secondary education primarily. However, it also offers vocational courses. It has collaborated with the University of Bath (UK) in various projects during its formative years.

The University of Botswana (UB)

UB provides continuing education by open learning methods through its CCE. Currently, it offers the Diploma in Primary Education, Certificate and Diploma in Accounting and Business Studies. New programmes such as the Master's degree in Educational Management and Administration, Certificate in Law, to name a few will be introduced in the near future. One of UB's collaborative projects is the youth programme which it runs collaboratively with ZOU.

Kingdom of Swaziland

Institute of Distance Education University of Swaziland (IDE, UNISWA)

This is a university department that offers adult education programmes by distance mode, for example, the B.Ed. Adult Education degree is run collaboratively with national institutions in the country.

Emlalatini Development Centre (EDC)

EDC is a distance education organisation that develops and delivers DE programmes responsive to social needs. There is an increase in the enrolment figures for both EDC and IDE. The Distance Teaching Forum has enabled the Department of Adult Education (UNISWA), EDC, and IDE to discuss future linkages and the formation of the national council for DE.



Namibia

Department of Adult and Non-formal Education, University of Namibia (DANFE, UNAM)

This is a department in the Faculty of Education. It offers academic and professional adult education programmes to middle level community development workers, and adult education practitioners. These include district literacy organisers, literacy promoters, agricultural extension workers, and health educators. In addition, the department undertakes research, evaluation and consultancy in the field of adult education.

The Centre for External Studies (CES)

The centre runs DE programmes including the Diploma in Adult and Community Development. It also develops study materials for that programme.

Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL)

NAMCOL focuses on the Alternative Secondary Education Programme. The College has also entered into an agreement with Cambridge University (UK) as agent for the sale of study materials, developed by Cambridge Open Learning Project, in Namibia. NAMCOL has developed a quality assurance policy. Enrolment figures continue to increase.

Polytechnic of Namibia (PON)

The Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning at PON introduced a degree programme – the Bachelor of Technology in Agricultural Management. This is in collaboration with Technikon South Africa (TSA). The year 2000 witnessed progress in the forging of collaborative arrangements between the publicly funded ODL institutions in Namibia.

Kingdom of Lesotho

Institute of Extra-Mural Studies, National University of Lesotho (IEMS,NUL)

The Institute runs the Commonwealth Youth Programme, as well as the new Business Management Programme. New programmes in business leadership, on a distance mode, at both the degree and sub-degree levels are being planned for. IEMS collaborates with the Christian Council of Lesotho in strengthening the capacity of communities through distance education.

Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC)

The LDTC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Gender, Youth and Environment work together with the aim of integrating population and family life education into the DE system of Lesotho. LDTC trains tutors for its Project Literacy with the assistance of a Non-



Governmental Organisation in South Africa. The number of literacy learners has increased since 1999.

Republic of South Africa

There can be no doubt that South Africa is in the lead as far as the number of DE institutions in the region is concerned. Many SADC countries have, in one way or the other, been influenced by the South African systems. By virtue of its history and economic strength, the country has many dual-mode, single-mode, and private providers of open learning. Thus, no summary of institutions can do justice to the situation in that country. We shall look at only two of the most well-known ones.

UNISA

For many, UNISA has become a household name. This distance education university has a long history of success, and offers programmes in almost every field. Its international reputation is well-acknowledged. Emerging organisations in our region draw inspiration from it, and have developed collaborative linkages. These include: study visits by new distance educators; enrolling practitioners for

DE courses; consultancy work; etc.

Technikon South Africa (TSA)

In practice, TSA has merged with UNISA, and what is described is applicable to UNISA. TSA is a dedicated institution offering career-focused education via flexible, foundation and bridging modes across a wide spectrum of vocational and research-based programmes. The institution gives effect to the national policy goals of access and equity, and is committed to fostering lifelong learning for adult learners in the workplace, especially in remote parts of the country. A collaborative venture with SAIDE has been entered into to help TSA develop the necessary critical mass, and the initial evaluation instruments to quality assurance courseware. National plans are at an advanced stage to unify TSA and other DE institutions such as UNISA and Vista University.

Zambia

Recently, the Zambia Open University (ZAOU) was established, with its headquarters in Lusaka.

Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe Open University

ZOU is an autonomous distance education institution which offers tertiary programmes. Currently, the university offers a wide range of degrees in response to identified social and economic needs. Some of the areas covered include: Educational administration, English, Media Studies, Ge-



ography and Environmental Studies, Nursing Science, Education, Mathematics and Statistics, Guidance and Counselling, etc. In addition, ZOU offers certificate and diploma courses. In its early stages, as a department of the University of Zimbabwe, the then Centre for Distance Education collaborated with other organisations such as the Open University (UK).

Activity 7D

If organisations in your country were not covered, mention them and give a brief description of what each offers in the space provided below.

What conclusions can be drawn from the new awareness we developed about the institutions described above? In our opinion, the information proves that:

- there is effort and enthusiasm in developing ODL as an alternative that can help address some of the political, social, cultural, and economic problems of Southern Africa through DE as an alternative educational option.
- systematic steps are being taken to synchronise effort made by the different organisations.
- there is shared sensitivity to obstacles, constraints, and possible sources of stagnation. Ideas to overcome such hindrances are often discussed.
- there is sustained effort to disseminate information to member countries to ensure that provision of ODL upholds quality standards.
- there is an awareness that courses to be offered should help people to live here and now.
- nations are aware of the need to collaborate both within national borders and across.
- in nearly all institutions, enrolment is increasing.

What does this tell us about the future of distance education in the region? The answer to that question is attempted in the next session, Chapter Eight.

Summary

A well-informed distance educator has the capacity to create a group of well-informed distance educators. Such educators can develop a well-informed organisation. In turn, a well-informed organisation is an agent for national development. To what extent did this session inform you adequately about what goes on in your region? Do you think you are now in a better position to influence your organisation more positively? Here are some areas we covered in our discussion:



- the role played by governments in setting up distance education systems
- a description of what government bodies do to ensure adherence to quality standards
- provision of names and functions of some non-profit making organizations which are active players in DE
- discussion of the function played by national associations in promoting DE
- explanation of the three types of DE systems, namely, dual-mode, single mode, and private
- brief summaries of individual institutions in different countries
- illustration of the importance of collaboration among providers

The level of commitment that SADC countries have shown towards DE is reflected in their joint effort. The vital issue of collaboration reminds us of these words:

Even a sheet of paper is lighter when two people lift it.

(A Korean proverb)

Topics for discussion

1. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each of these DE modes:
 - dual-mode
 - single-mode
2. Do you think DEASA is doing enough to unify distance education providers in Southern Africa?
3. Distance education is meant to address economic and social problems. Do you think it is achieving this objective in the SADC region? To what extent can politics interfere with qualitative and quantitative issues of DE?
4. Propose linkages for your organisation with institutions in two different countries whose systems have impressed you.



Chapter 8 - Challenges and the Future of Distance Education

To affirm the worth of an end is to create an ideal. The ideal is created today for a fulfilling tomorrow.

(Kenneth Kaunda – former President of Zambia)

Introduction

Challenges have to be overcome if we are to secure a condition of progress and stability in DE. We are convinced that it is hope, rather than despair, that leads to a prosperous distance education future. Such hope is dependent on practical steps the distance educator takes to achieve the desired goals. The future of DE in developing countries can be assured if the right questions are asked, and the appropriate planning, to answer such questions, is done.

In light of this mind-set, managers, course developers, and learner supporters should work collaboratively to address the major issues which include: conditions associated with successful ODL practices; the potential of research findings in providing information to plan for a successful future; how comparing and contrasting practices in different systems can inform the management about future organisations; linking sound managerial policies to a potentially successful future; evaluating the impact of technological advances on DE practices in the industrialised world; and analysing local contexts to determine how best ideas from developed organisations can be implemented.

What conditions are likely to make DE more effective?

Now that we have explored several areas together, we should conclude the workshop with some kind of evaluation and reflection. As a distance educator, an awareness of challenges and how best to convert them into success, is a primary requirement. Workshop participants we have interacted with, in SADC countries, have asked numerous questions pertaining to challenges and the potential of DE.

You, too, could have questions in your mind, so pose any two in this space.

Your questions will, no doubt, be influenced by what you read in previous chapters, and current practice in your institution. That there is great interest about the academic, social and economic possibilities in this field cannot be in doubt. You noticed in Chapter Seven the phenomenal in-



crease in the number of organisations taking up the DE challenge in our region. Be that as it may, is there any guarantee that this enthusiasm necessarily translates into a prosperous future for ODL? Wills (1993:111) gives us this appropriate reminder, "it is important to remember that potential is one thing and substance is another "...potential without substance is short-lived". So, how can we ensure there is substance in our new systems? In the attempt to address this matter, here are some of the questions that have been asked by educators like you:

- We are now aware of the ideas about DE, what guarantee is there that the culture, economy, and the society will benefit from that alternative educational practice?
- Will a newly established DE system achieve the same quality of education as a conventional system? Educators are often more comfortable with the established standards they are familiar with.
- Do developing countries have the manpower and financial capacity to develop efficient DE systems? This relevant question is tied to the many and new technologies that have revolutionised open learning in industrialised countries.
- What respect will communities give to learners who achieve their qualifications by distance learning? This is a general concern regarding the quality of DE programmes.
- How competent are course writers and developers in writing materials against a background where subject textbooks have been written extensively? This is a genuine concern because the future depends on professionally written materials.
- How can governments ensure there are managers competent enough to run such complex systems? When this question was asked, new distance educators had in mind, among other things, the human relationships required in the performance of management responsibilities. We quote the exact sentiments expressed by one participant.

Concerning this last point, one educator put it explicitly by saying that in the new organisation, people who know little or nothing about DE are often hurriedly put together to share their ignorance. Each person works by intuition, and nobody listens to anybody. The lone voices of the few who may have some relevant background are drowned.

Eventually, the organization becomes another high school or conventional college fictitiously trading as an open learning institution. Essentially, it remains closed in both ideas, attitudes, practice,



and etiquette, except for the occasional outbursts of rhetoric gleaned from some book to create an impression of competence.

This, obviously, sounds negative. However, from negative thoughts, the reflective educator has something to learn. Does this negative opinion remind us of the six blind men of Indostan who went to view an elephant? We made reference to these in Chapter One. The foregoing questions contain some of the major challenges faced in new environments such as those found in SADC countries. Hilary Perraton and Charlotte Creed (1999) of the International Research

Foundation for Open Learning, came up with the following challenges in developing-country institutions:

- ensuring that teaching materials of the right quality are developed and produced on time
- offering the appropriate training
- putting in place the right management structures capable of coming up with the right policies
- conflicting interests in setting up dual-mode institutions
- inadequate financial resources
- dual teaching responsibilities leading to shortage of time for meetings, training, and writing by part-time employees
- potential clash between face-to-face and distance teaching
- resistance of distance education by some stakeholders
- an attitude problem that ODL is inferior to conventional education
- using DE for political expediency
- too much theorising about open learning without demonstrable practical action
- problems of accessing new technologies

Examine each challenge separately then work on the next activity.



approaches to training writers, comments on tutor marked assignments, and several others have a positive effect on the quality of DE. The distance educator, who is aware of findings will practise from a more informed position. This, in our opinion, serves as an assurance for a successful future.

ii. Lessons from the past

In the distinction made about distance and correspondence education, we noted that DE developed from the latter. DE has, over the years, been striving to overcome weaknesses of correspondence learning. Progress made in that regard is sufficient proof that DE is here to stay. Lessons from the past will be beneficial if we:

- emphasise those approaches which have made DE more effective than correspondence education
- take note of the merits of the home-based approach actively supported by an organisation, as opposed to study by correspondence
- can combine the advantages of exclusively print-based courses with modern technology
- can ascertain from the past that people who study through distance education can perform as well as those from conventional systems when it comes to social and economic development of a given country.

iii. Examples from other organisations

Southern African countries, starting their own systems, are lucky in that there are pioneers in DE to learn from. Leadership has often come from Europe, Australia, and Canada. The year 1969 is a well-known landmark to many educators. In that year, the Open University was established in the UK, and in 1972, Athabasca University in Canada came into existence. The pioneers:

- provide information about the benefits of ODL
- publish journals on a regular basis
- review international trends beneficial to beginners
- shed light on similarities and differences existing among students from culturally diverse countries
- share experiences on course development models, and evaluation procedures, which have gained international acceptance
- show what distance education management structures are in place in other countries
- indicate levels and types of statutory involvement in DE



From such lessons, new organisations become aware that they are not alone. Above all, new institutions learn from mistakes made by pioneers, thereby making the future more assured.

iv. Integrating ICT systematically

Technological innovation tends to be rapid. Distance educators, setting up their own systems, no longer have to experiment with technologies whose performance has been evaluated and confirmed to be either viable or ineffective elsewhere. Managers need only analyse their environments before picking and choosing what would work best for them. In other words, educators:

- do not have to select blindly hoping to get the best technologies in the process
- are able to merge the less sophisticated but effective technologies with the more sophisticated ones
- will be in a better position to link learner characteristics with the chosen technology
- will make more informed decisions about cost and benefit factors of the chosen technologies

A future in which effective media of communication, and the most relevant technologies are chosen, can only make distance education in Southern Africa more assured.

v. Developing responsive management policies

From the four sources explained above, the enterprising manager will extract ideas that can help guarantee that open learning will prosper. However, it is from sound management policies that challenges can best be addressed. Managers who are proactive rather than reactive make the potential for open learning a reality. Such policies would include:

- how procedural issues can be implemented or resolved
- the role advisory committees play in identifying and resolving policy issues
- effective ways of deploying technical resources and educational infrastructure
- sharing DE delivery costs more equitably
- decision-making about programmes that have a positive impact on the image of the institution
- attention to promotion and tenure procedures for staff as a way of preventing staff turnover
- developing linkages with other institutions.

The capacity to develop a robust DE system requires relevant information from a variety of sources. Such sources are informative about the past and the present, thus preparing for the future.



Having intuitive sense of the potential of DE is not enough on its own. Basic questions should be asked to make that intuition more concrete, and data from research are bound to be helpful. Such views make sense only when we think more seriously about them as we do in this activity.

Activity 8B

a. What information does your organisation possess that makes you certain that DE has a future in your environment?

b. List three features from the community, where you serve as a distance educator, which point to a promising future.

c. What three policy issues can your organisation learn from one open learning institution you are familiar

You, most probably, need to do a bit of research in order to give a good response. The answers will be determined by the environment in which your organisation is situated. Use those responses to improve the quality of your organisation. It is from such practical answers that ODL ideas, we covered earlier in the workshop, are made more realistic.

What relevance does the 'Big Bang Vision' have for DE in Southern Africa?

In the previous chapter, a summary of some ODL providers in our region was given. The list, obviously, shows that there is an increase, instead of a decrease, in the number of emerging organisations. That indication alone gives reassurance that DE is here to stay. But, to what extent is that scenario close to what has come to be known as the 'Big Bang Vision'?

Hawkrigde (Lockwood, 1995:3) has introduced the term which refers to the enthusiastic thinking that distance education can expand exponentially. Expansion is said to be exponential when it is characterised by remarkable and rapid development, especially in its "capacity to sustain two-way communication that aids learning". The vision applies to industrialised communities where open learning can claim a comparatively longer history of establishment. In such environments, "at last, students everywhere will be able to explore massive". This sounds a very secure present indeed, hence promises a secure future. Can we, in new learning environments, draw a leaf from that vision?

How has the Big Bang Vision manifested itself in developed countries?

Institutions with established ODL output are likely to have a developed pool of expertise in the various sections of their organisations responsible for successful throughput. Drawing on



industrialised-country experience improves chances of finding good answers to universal challenges, an activity which prepares for a secure future in open learning. Lockwood (1995:5) observes that “the UK is at the forefront in creating a distance education superhighway”, and the following are some of the features of the Big Bang.

- According to Yeomans (Lockwood,1995) the British universities will be offering remote library access, instant document delivery, electronic journals, and interactive browsing.
- It is envisaged that institutions will switch from a paper-based system to one that is electronic.
- According to Dunning (Lockwood,1995), fundamental changes are approaching in which DE will be through telecommunications, rather than educators. Even educators will receive training through video tele-conferencing.
- Mapp (Lockwood,1995) mentions plans to create a virtual campus with most learning materials and transactions available through an electronic network. Some of these are already in existence, for example the Africa Virtual University, based in Nairobi, Kenya, which offers degrees through electronic learning. The goal of the Virtual Online University (VOU) is to provide low -cost, and high-quality education and training.
- Two -way communication between teacher and students has replaced the old one-way systems of print, radio, and television.

What does this scenario suggest to distance educators in developing countries? Does it sound promising? How feasible do you think it is for your situation? Whichever way it appeals to you, the vision confirms that DE has a definite future. However, for those of us in new environments, located in underdeveloped economies, there is need to temper enthusiasm with pragmatism. We must determine what works practically for our situations. Generally, the situation in developing countries is characterised by the following:

- limited access to technologies
- prohibitive costs for such technologies
- many geographical locations in rural areas, and even some in urban centres, that are not electrified. Gadgets that account for the Big Bang are out of the question where there is no electricity
- technologies such as the tape-recorder and video, which are regarded as common in the industrialised world, are still a novelty in developing countries



- the usefulness of technology is dependent on the personnel who operate it. In many situations, there is no trained manpower even when technology is made available

From these observations, it would appear only privileged communities in Southern African open learning institutions can access the technologies that have led to the Big Bang Vision. In that case, the print media, in the form of modules and study units, is likely to continue into the future. It is the one type of technology that is easier to manage, given the many well-educated academics who can be trained to write course materials. It is interesting to note that even established institutions like the Open University (UK) are said to be sticking to their reading and writing. The OU's computer-mediated communication in half a dozen courses is well-documented.

These courses usually have a small, vociferous and enthusiastic group of users, and a majority of non-users, among staff as well as students (Charlotte and Creed, 1999), showing that some of the latest technologies have not surpassed print media.

Essentially, therefore, distance education has a future in which both the old and the new technologies will co-exist. It is a question of old media being used for good new teaching methods, while new media are used for bad old ones. Reflect on this matter in the next activity.

Activity 8C

Which items from the features of the Big Bang, do you not understand clearly? List them here.

Find out their meanings from colleagues, then write your research findings accurately below.

If the printed word will continue to be with us in the future, what improvements do you want to see in the way study materials are developed in your organisation?

What advantages, for distance education learners, does any one technology, not commonly accessible in new environments have?



Remember to do some simple research before finalising your answers. There are no right or wrong answers because what works successfully in your situation, may not be as successful in a different one. So, much, then, about the challenges and potential for ODL. You have so far made a tremendous contribution throughout the workshop. With all the ideas you helped create, and the new ones acquired from colleagues and workshop facilitators, you can face your responsibility with confidence. Whatever your role in the organisation - course developer, manager, or learner supporter - you now possess that level of awareness required to make new organisations a success. Finally, for more complex theories about DE, you should turn to books published in that field. By going through this workshop, we believe that you have laid the foundation for a practical approach to distance education in your country. Your own ideas on how best to improve the future should now be heard more and more regularly. You are no longer a spectator, but an active participant, an agent of change.

Summary

One of the major challenges facing distance educators is that open and distance learning is often perceived as second class form of education. If DE is here to stay, educators in that field have to redouble their efforts to ensure their organisation is a successful provider. That effort should go beyond the present to a future based on sound research practices in the present. We have attempted to capture that thinking by covering these issues:

- the type of information distance educators require to shape an organization
- competent performance of one's responsibilities in the furtherance of open and distance learning
- sources of information available in explaining the future of DE such as research findings, lessons from the past, examples from other organisations, and systematic integration of ICT
- lessons from the Big Bang Vision
- the situation found in new environments relative to DE technologies

These areas of observation speak clearly of the need by educators to be more purposeful, visionary, and resolute in shaping systems with an assured future. A great deal depends on the quality of management. Thus, managers, at the helm of DE systems do well to heed these words.

A secure future, a future marked with attainment of goals, rests squarely on decisions cautiously and consciously crafted at the conceptualisation stage of the project.

(Dr. D.R.Tau – BOCODOL Director)



Topics for discussion

1. How does the view that today is the mother of tomorrow apply to planning for the future in distance education?
2. Information Communication Technology has become a major issue in open learning. What potential does ICT have for your country's distance education system?
3. Which features about the challenges and the future of open learning, in your organisation, deserve more attention at induction workshops for distance educators like you?
4. To what extent do you agree with the view that policies for the management of an open learning system are dynamic?
5. Discuss ideas about quality assurance in your organisation which you think ought to be taken into account to ensure success in the future.



Chapter 9 - Facing the Challenges: the Malawi Experience

A visitor brings in a sharper knife
(A Chichewa proverb)

Introduction

The present chapter results from the consultancy carried out to establish new structures, policies and procedures for the new Centre for Distance and Continuing Education (CDCE) in Malawi. Looking at itself, without any sort of help whatsoever, Domasi College of Education (DCE) would probably not be able to see its need clearly, hence the need for a visitor. An outsider (the Consultant) is likely to bring in a perspective that enhances the performance of an institution such as CDCE.

In Chapter 8 we examined challenges and the future of distance education. We hypothesised about conditions that are likely to make DE in new environments take root. In this final chapter, we share our experiences by examining how Malawi has practically gone about addressing some of its challenges, thus going beyond mere hypothesising. Among other issues for discussion, we will dwell on how the Centre has gone about tackling the management function. As already pointed out in Chapter 3, systematic lay out of management systems is a pre-condition for the successful running of the huge project of open and distance learning. Why would the Malawi experience be important to you as a distance educator?

Firstly, although earlier we shared our insights about BOCODOL and ZOU, not much was said about how systems can be developed to address threats and weaknesses identified using the SWOT Analysis. Do you still recall what SWOT Analysis means? Secondly, it is beneficial for you to gain insight into how one organisation has 'done it', so that your comparison with systems of other DE providers will help you practise more efficiently. In particular, we highlight how the issues of consultancy, benchmarking, organisational structure, policies and procedures have been handled in Malawi.

What is the background?

Malawi is a member of the SADC, and shares educational challenges that are comparable to those of member countries. Like its counterparts, the country has, in the past, tried several approaches at implementing continuing education with limited success. Its current efforts have, however, been so inspiring that the success story could serve as an example to aspiring DE providers from both the public and the private sectors.

The story is written around Domasi College of Education. The College has been in operation since 1993 as a government-funded institution. It trains secondary school teachers at diploma level



through the conventional residential mode. Since 2000, the College became a dual –mode provider of both conventional and distance modes. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) financed what has come to be known as the Secondary School Teacher Education Project (SSTEP). Its primary objective was to create and institutionalise a three-year Diploma in Education that would provide upgrading by distance to already-qualified primary school teachers. These teachers currently serve in Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs) across Malawi. The diploma is sanctioned and monitored by the University of Malawi.

The drive by CIDA was in response to the dire shortage of secondary school teachers in the country. Implementation of CIDA Project number 594/20401 was entrusted to Hickling International, a Canadian consultancy company. The project was under a Project Manager, assisted by the Education Monitoring and Assessment Manager, who systematically evaluated progress at both the formative and summative stages. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data from which conclusions were drawn and recommendations made about project effectiveness.

Salaries for all staff (Centre Co-ordinator and deputy, study material writers, Field Supervisors, part-time lecturers, Teacher helpers, and support staff) working on the project were paid by CIDA. By December 2005, CIDA had completed building the new Centre on the DCE campus. The Centre houses administrative and technical staff, lecturers and the materials production unit. It was the intention of CIDA to hand over the Project to the Malawi Government once satisfied that all systems were in place.

In addition to the recommendations by the Monitoring and Assessment Manager, Hickling subcontracted a consultant from BOCODOL to contribute to logistical and strategic features of management resonating SADC experiences. The Consultant recommended an organisational structure, that would be lean at the outset, progressively leading to the ultimate and more inclusive one in step with expansion. Secondly, the Consultant recommended formulation of policies and procedures. In a follow-up consultancy, the DCE task force and the Consultant worked together and came up with a document comprising 27 policies identified as the most urgent to guide the Centre's activities. As part of the institutionalisation process, a Centre Director was appointed in March 2006. The incumbent assumed planning, organisation, and control responsibilities.

By 2006 the SSTEP had upgraded 1140 Teacher-Learners (TLs) from 4 cohorts to diploma status. Results from monitoring revealed a growing community of distance education graduates whose impact on CDSSs across the nation is now widely acknowledged. In both towns and villages, hope is increasing for thousands of families who, previously, had no access to quality secondary education. The government of Malawi will now take over and expand the systematic provision of ODL to a receptive population that has confidence in the transforming influence of continuing education. Before we turn to specific aspects of the Malawi experience, please work on this activity.



Activity 9A

Suggest any two features that you think make the Malawi experience unique.

What do you understand by institutionalisation as used in the present context?

What, in your opinion, are the challenges likely to be faced by governments in similar positions as Malawi when taking over from a donor agency?

Several features are identifiable, notably that the Centre is located within a conventional college. It is also unique in that the donor agency paid staff salaries, because usually it is the responsibility of the government. To institutionalise is to cause an institution to be in existence, and recognised as such where none existed before. One of the challenges likely to be faced by any government is shortage of funds to sustain the model systems set up by the donor.

What did CIDA achieve during its period of management?

Now that we have examined the background to the project, it will be informative to give some of the highlights and success indicators. These are articulated in the Annual Report (April 2005 – March 2006) as research-driven evaluation that gives results about key operations. Measurement instruments, discussed below, were used to collect data from the grassroots level. Stakeholders were asked what they valued as a measure of success.

Head Teachers' data on SSTEP's impact on pupils' results in the CDSSs

One of the instruments used was a comparison of pupils' test results before and after 2003. Results from 60 CDSSs showed that in those schools where CDCE's TLs taught, there was an improvement of 10% between 2002 and 2004. In schools where the TLs taught, 95% reported an increase in the number of learners passing over the last 3 or 4 years. Statistics showed that 37% of all CDSSs doubled their number of passes and another 41% tripled their output. This showed the impact of teachers who had benefited from the DE teacher education programme.

Malawi National Examination Board (MANEB) results

MANEB provided a computer print-out of all Malawi Secondary certificate Education (MSCE) examination results of 2004. These were analysed by SSTEP office, and comparisons drawn with the first three years of DCE Teacher-Learners at community day secondary schools. In 2004, a total of



328 schools, where SSTEP TLs operated, reported MSCE results, while 132 CDSSs without any SSTEP TLs also reported results (control group). Only 66% of the control schools improved over the last four years, compared to 90% of the CDSSs with DCE teachers.

Domasi College of Education statistics

DCE compared conventional and distance education teaching practice (TP) marks (using the same TP assessment instrument). In both 2003 and 2004, the TP marks for distance learners were higher than those for conventional teachers. The interpretation was that the former had the advantage of many years of teaching (as primary school teachers), so they applied the new skills they learned at DCE immediately. The percentages are illustrated in the next table.

Group	2004		2005	
	No. of trs	TP mark av. %	No. of trs.	TP mark av. %
Conventional	123	72	181	64.71
DE	267	74	284	66.12

Figure 12 : Teaching practice results for DE and conventional learners in third year

DCE also compared the final average marks of the conventional and distance education teachers in academic subjects. The first two cohorts had lower overall average marks in their academic work than the conventional students in residence at DCE. One reason may be that conventional students have the distinct advantage of spending ten months a year at college, with library facilities and lecturers at their disposal, and not simultaneously working full-time as distance education TLs do. The statistics are shown in the table below.

Group	2004		2003	
	No. of trs.	Ave. mark %	No. of trs.	Ave. mark%
Conventional	123	61.55	155	57.25
DE	260	56.38	284	56.71

Figure 13: Comparison of distance and conventional overall final average marks

Now, share your insights about the statistics discussed above.

Activity 9B

To what extent does the statistical data influence your appreciation of the distance education mode compared to the conventional mode?



Statistics are objective and give concrete information about the phenomenon of training using two modes. Somehow, it confirms in scientific terms, insights that practitioners who experience certain advantages perform differently in different areas of assessment.

Checklists of comments about project impact on Teacher Learners and Community Day Secondary Schools

A total of 60 head teachers answered checklists and questionnaires to discover their opinions and reactions to the impact of TLs. A tour of CDSSs by SSTEP in January and February 2005 revealed great enthusiasm for distance learning, but questionnaires revealed moderate realism and increasingly high demand and expectations in programme delivery. The achievement here was the consciousness raising in a practical manner.

Responses to questionnaires and interviews further revealed increasing awareness about HIV / Aids and gender sensitivity in the Malawi communities where the girl child plays second fiddle to the boy child. Results from the questionnaire showed that new sports like girls' football have now been introduced in 61% of the schools where TLs operate, and 79% are reported to have witnessed an improved understanding of gender roles, thus creating more respect and opportunities for girls. The most common example to illustrate this was that now the boy, as well as the girls, have to do the mopping and sweeping around the school. Previously, it was a chore for girls only.

Finally, 81% of head teachers are proud to say that TLs have introduced HIV / AIDS awareness clubs, which do poems, songs, and plays for the whole community. This was considered an improvement over 2003. The Report, however, noted the view by school heads that these types of social changes and discussions of gender equality are not always welcomed by those concerned, and that makes the task arduous, and changing of behaviour a rather slow process.

In 2005, 91% of TLs recognised that DCE lecturers are overworked and the College understaffed. Some lecturers (67%) just told the TLs to simply read modules without lecturer intervention. Again, 97% said they need more feedback and assignments and more thorough explanation of marks awarded. Another important challenge in DE is to give field assignments with very clear instructions, in writing, and early enough (during the eight-week residential session) to allow TLs to do research in the college library before departing for their distant homes. This notion is still not appreciated by lecturers, in spite of efforts by SSTEP to convince them.

Another finding was that 91% of TLs wanted lecturers to come to the field more often to assist with difficulties in the study modules. However, this was seen to be expensive. To address this challenge, the Project introduced the idea of Teacher helpers. These were teachers holding degree qualifications and taught in nearby secondary schools, and would be readily accessible to TLs. They would be paid hourly rates by SSTEP. Thus, effort to support the distance learner manifested



itself in four distinct forms, namely, residential teaching at the inception of the programme; visits by DCE lecturers for teaching practice; peer group tutorial circles and visits co-ordinated by the Field Supervisors; and access to Teacher Helpers.

Obviously, the model implied considerable cost, which was borne by CIDA. However, it is noteworthy that a great deal was achieved. Firstly, SSTEP management proved there is a lot that can be realised when systematic planning is done. Secondly, it became clear that donor funding can go a long way in meeting educational challenges of a nation that cares for its citizens. There can be no doubt that the benefits of SSTEP permeate the economic and social spheres of Malawi communities for the general good. Thirdly, the Project raised the professional profiles of graduates as they self-actualised. Promotion prospects, access to further studies, and upward mobility were enhanced.

It will be noted here that only a few selected project evaluation findings have been highlighted in order to illustrate some of the challenges faced in the Malawi experience. The Donor Agency, a development partner, has played a major role and sponsored 4 cohorts of TLs. Each cohort comprised 300 learners, and at the conclusion of SSTEP's sixth year of operation, the Project had been institutionalised at Domasi College of Education. The Malawi Government showed its commitment to ODL by providing funding that resulted in the recruitment of the fifth cohort.

However, before winding up its operations at the end of 2006, the Project Manager made a prudent decision on behalf of CIDA. Following investigative visits to regional distance education institutions, SSTEP decided to request assistance from a consultant in BOCODOL to assist with the development of new policies and procedures for the new Centre. A contract between BOCODOL and Hickling was, therefore, entered into in February 2006 for the services of the Consultant.

The three-week consultancy resulted in two reports. The first one was a document with recommendations on organisational structure, policies and procedures. The second one resulted in a composite document of policies and procedures. Thus, the new Centre now has a home-grown 'code of ethics' relevant to context. The importance of consultancy to the new Centre, towards meeting its challenges, is the subject of the next section. For now, see if you can work on this activity and share your views.



Activity 9C

What impact have the teacher-learners had on the girl child in the CDSSs where they taught?

Which two issues were not readily welcomed for discussion in the Malawi CDSSs?

What lessons can your organisation learn about staffing challenges as discussed in this section?

What evidence is there to show that the Malawi Government takes distance education seriously?

Firstly, to determine the impact of TLs, refer to sports and HIV/AIDS awareness. Secondly, issues of gender and HIV/AIDS tend to be sensitive in Malawi and, therefore, some might resist discussing them. Relating to lessons that your organisation can learn, it is up to you to decide. Finally, an example of collaboration is funding of the fifth cohort by the Government of Malawi.

What significance did the consultancy have on the new ODL Centre?

As already noted in the foregoing section, the consultancy aimed, among other things, at assisting in the development of new operational policies and procedures, as well as recommending an organisational structure. We shall start by looking at the organisational structure.

Organisational structure for the Centre

The uniqueness of CDCE is that it started as a department of the conventional college (DCE), and the people who wrote study modules, taught DE learners, marked assignments, and supervised TP were lecturers in the conventional college. They did that over and above their normal responsibilities. Quite a few challenges came to surface, including role conflict, more especially because DE makes certain demands that are different from conventional ones. The other more obvious one is that lecturers were overworked, resulting in the lack of thoroughness. Regarding advantages, lecturers benefited financially since their services were paid for, and that was over and above their normal salaries. A further advantage relates to the mindset. Finding themselves playing a dual role helped lecturers appreciate the benefits of DE. This gave them an edge over counterparts in other institutions, and since ODL seems to be in Malawi to stay, the professional prospects of the lecturers are comparatively brighter.



In terms of structure, the Project recommended that the distance education department be given some autonomy. Towards that end SSTEP built a centre in the premises of DCE. This was overt recognition of the importance of DE, henceforth the Centre would not be treated merely as one of 'those departments', and would enjoy some form of autonomy. It would continue to be under the chief executive of DCE (the Principal). On that basis the Consultant recommended an interim structure in which the co-ordinator was to be elevated to Director. The incumbent would report to the Principal through the Deputy Principal.

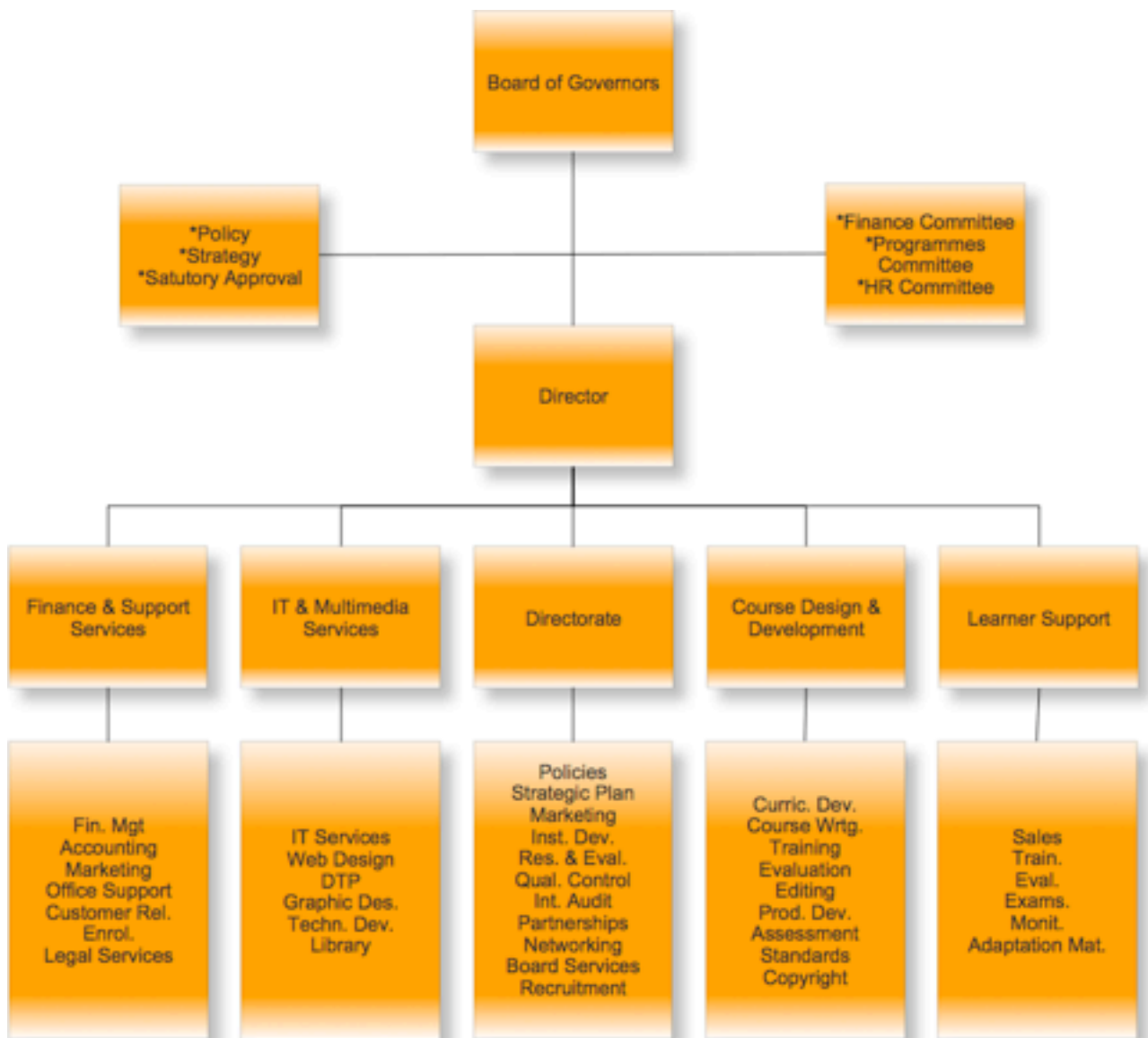
Below the Director, a major recommendation was the creation of two departments, namely, the Department of Teacher Education and the Department of Open Learning. The former department is core to the Centre's activities because teacher education is the Centre's current pre-occupation. Besides, all indications are that Malawi will continue to need teachers, so the Department has an assured future. Further, there is a probability to offer degree programmes by distance as a logical sequel to the Diploma. The following interim structure was, therefore, recommended.





By looking at the progress made in ODL at DCE against a situation where not much has been done in that field in Malawi, the Consultant entertained ideas, which received confirmation from DCE operatives. The notion was that given the inroads already made by DCE in the new field; given the training and empowerment about DE matters that lecturers, the Deputy Principal and the Principal had acquired; and given the solid foundation laid by CIDA, in collaboration with the Government of Malawi, all indications were that it would be logical to transform DCE into the Malawi Open University (MOU) or the Open University of Malawi (OUM). Parallels can be drawn in the Region with ZOU, which evolved from a university department status to a university, and BOCO-DOL, which evolved from a provider of school equivalence courses to a provider of tertiary programmes as a semi-autonomous entity. Towards that end, the Consultant recommended the following structure, which presumes increased autonomy as the ultimate goal for the Centre.





What are policies and procedures?

Policies and procedures are normally influenced by the organisational structure of a given ODL institution. When talking about policies and procedures, two questions immediately come to mind. Firstly, what are policies and procedures? Secondly, why is it necessary for an organisation to have them in place? Try to answer these questions before reading on.

A policy can be defined as a set of guidelines or ideas, showing what is to be done in a given situation that commonly occurs in the distance education organisation. A procedure, on the other hand, is a set of actions accepted by the organisation as the most effective way of handling commonly occurring situations.



What are the categories of policies and procedures?

The consultant recommended that policies and procedures be sub-divided into three categories, namely, management, programmes and services, and learner support.

In a week-long workshop, the Domasi College task force, assisted by the Consultant, came up with 27 policies as follows. Altogether there were 13 policies for management (e.g. quality assurance, staff development, etc.). Policies on programmes numbered 6 (e.g. identification of new programmes, assessment and examinations, etc.). In the area of learner support, we came up with 8 (e.g. induction policy, enrolment policy, etc.). Policies and procedures could be any number. However, the team prioritised those it considered essential for the smooth running of the new Centre.

What is the structure of a policy?

The main feature of its policy is that it should be succinct. This deliberate stylistic aspect is aimed at brevity. Stakeholders do not have all the time at their disposal to plough through voluminous documents. It was with that guidance that policies were formulated so that they would be terse but informative. Each policy was benchmarked and comprised the following elements: policy rationale, objectives, definition of terms, policy context, and key areas covered. All the 27 policies were bound together as a composite document for ease of access and reference. In other organisations, each policy is bound separately. This practice has its own advantages and disadvantages. What, in your opinion, are some of these? How are policies and procedures presented in your organisation?

Now let's turn to the input given by the Consultant on the issue of programmes.

How do programmes feature in the system?

One of the areas the Consultant stressed on was programmes development. An ODL provider is as good as the programmes and services it offers, and the Centre, under DCE, has been providing an in-service diploma for teachers. Given that there is a great demand for qualified teachers, teacher education is likely to continue being offered, so it was recommended that, in the new structure, the Centre sets up two departments, both under managers. These are the Department of Teacher Education and the Department of Open Learning. The latter will accommodate any new courses (long and short as well as training workshops).

The purpose of such a department is to ensure that the Centre becomes a competitive provider in the political, economic, educational and social context of Malawi. Any new needs-driven programmes and services will be identified and offered, and customers are expected to pay market rates. That way the Centre will be able to recover costs, and possibly realise some profit as it gradually moves towards self-reliance. Potential short courses for the Malawi market are too numerous to mention. Given the vibrant business environment, the following readily come to mind:



business marketing, retailing, sourcing and supply management, customer care, security management, marketing, writing a business plan, to name a few. Other possibilities are: HIV and AIDS care and counselling, pre-school care, tourism and hospitality, project management, team building, etc. Do you think these programmes for the Centre's Open Learning Department would also appeal to your efforts in the organisation you are associated with?

How does learner support feature in the system?

At the time of writing this handbook, the CIDA sponsored SSTEP was winding up its activities, and hand over to the Malawi Government. Recommendations by the Consultant were made with this scenario in mind. Under the SSTEP management, learner support was premised on the services of Field Supervisors (full-time), Teacher-Helpers (part-time), and DCE lecturers for the writing of modules, TP supervision and marking assignments. The model has served its purposes, but these logistical challenges were highlighted during interviews with stakeholders:

- Slow processing of assignments, resulting in a long turnaround time
- Role conflict arising from lecturers serving on both the conventional and the DE diploma
- Difficulties in monitoring the activities of field Supervisors more effectively

In light of these observations, the Consultant urged DCE to re-examine its learner-support model and come up with one that would be fit for purpose when CIDA pulls out. The two recommended organisational structures clarify the situation (see Figures 12 and 13). The following recommendations were, therefore, made namely that:

- Regional centres be set up
- Each regional centre be run by a Regional Co-ordinator under whom there will be Field Supervisors or Tutors. In order to cut down on costs, the majority will be part-time
- The Regional centre will handle issues and report to the national Centre
- Key functions of tutoring, marking, TP supervision, materials distribution, data capture, and general administration be expedited at the Regional Centres
- Some of the envisaged new courses and services be delivered at the National Centre with assistance of DCE lecturing staff
- Policies and procedures be followed in order to harmonise learner support functions with those of management and programmes



How does Teaching Practice feature in the system?

Teaching practice is probably the best example where evidence about benefits gained by TLs from the in-service course are manifested. A lesson is an event where teacher-learners' knowledge about a subject, their ability to apply theories of education, ability to organise the teaching-learning process, and command of language for purposes of negotiation of learning are evident.

- The TP model used by the Centre was found to be thorough, and is characterised by these features:
- A common assessment form was used by both Field Supervisors and lecturers
- Tutorial circles were held during weekends. At these sessions, TLs engaged in micro-teaching. They also worked in groups on assignments from the subjects they will be specialising in. This was done under the Field Supervisor
- Field Supervisors submitted regular reports to the Centre so that appropriate action could be taken to improve practice.

The Consultant supervised a number of lessons and assessed TLS. Evidence of good teaching was noted. However, three issues that are cause for concern were identified, and recommendations were made in a bid to address them.

Firstly, the majority of teacher-learners do not seem to have a clear conceptualisation of what group work, as a teaching method, can achieve. It was noted that group tasks are not clarified; objectives for engaging in group activities are not spelt out to learners; teachers' instructions are either in-explicit or not given at all; and the number of learners per group was found to be very high, making interaction rather chaotic.

Secondly, use of the mother tongue by both teachers and pupils was rampant. In the majority of cases, it was for off-task purposes, and not to explain concepts. Once in groups, the learners reverted to the mother tongue, a practice which interferes with the attainment of cognitive goals that would be spelt out in the lesson plan.

Thirdly, it came out clearly in lessons that teachers are insensitive to learning difficulties that the special vocabulary of subjects poses. Simply because they themselves are familiar with the words, makes them take everything for granted. Related to that were instances when teachers themselves had problems using some of the words incorrectly. The negative result was that learners ended up not understanding concepts as objectified in lessons.



The recommendation made by the Consultant was that the new Centre should, as a matter of urgency, create a TP committee that will spearhead efforts to identify key issues about classroom interaction and the negotiation of learning. Workshops and follow-up seminars with teacher-learners should also be mounted. Let's now work on this activity to recapitulate.

Activity 9D

Why is some degree of autonomy necessary for distance education centres operating in dual mode situations?

What do you think is the future of the Centre since it is located within the premises of a conventional college of education?

What is the distinction between policies and procedures?

Why is teaching practice crucial as a component of the different functions?

The Activity requires you to be critical and evaluative of the Malawi experience, and relate your views to other ODL situations you are familiar with. Otherwise the whole idea is that you should see yourself as a practitioner, right in the centre of an alternative system of education known as distance education. Any new ideas you come across should, therefore, be consciously evaluated and selectively used to improve practice.

What lessons do we learn from the Malawi experience?

By now it will be clear that starting a distance education organisation in a new environment can be riddled with challenges of all sorts. The Malawi experience will have taught you a few lessons. Before reading some of those we isolated, suggest any two that are important to you.

In addition, also consider the following.

- The contribution made by a donor agency, as a development partner, can go a long way towards establishing the DE system of a country



- The funding by CIDA of SSTEP demonstrates how collaboration, with the government of a given country, can be progressed without political interference.
- The SSTEP Project manager demonstrated in practical terms that it is possible to plan, implement, and monitor activities systematically for best results.
- The Assessment and Evaluation manager amply demonstrated that scientific tools of evaluation can be used to evaluate ODL processes and procedures.
- Local professionals can be trained and run new systems efficiently.
- Consultants can have a positive transformational influence on organisational structure, programmes, services, policies and procedures.
- Malawi has DE challenges similar (and sometimes identical with) to those found in member countries in the sub region. The way Malawi has gone about addressing such challenges serves as a prototype of what progressive nations, with the interest of their people at heart, should emulate.
- DE institutions in the SADC region can light each other's candle and achieve intended goals.

An observation of critical importance is that the onus is on the Malawi government to maintain standards set by CIDA, or handle the project even better. It is pointless to regress after effort, finances, intellect, human hours, weeks, months, and years have been invested in the most combative and efficient manner.

Summary

In this Chapter we detailed how the CDCE at Domasi College of Education has introduced distance education in a new environment. You can, if you like, treat this as a case study in which a number of areas were examined, for example:

- the background to the establishment of the Centre
- the partnership between CIDA and the Malawi government
- the achievements and impact of SSTEP
- how research-based approaches can be used to evaluate a project and use the results to make informed decisions
- the significance of consultancy in setting up DE systems
- the importance of policies and procedures, relative to management, programmes and learner support



In order to overcome challenges, an organisation simply has to take action, look in different directions and not remain seated in the same place. Research, planning, and action result in tangible achievements. One is reminded of the following Chichewa proverb:

If you sit in the same place, you won't see the cobwebs.

(Anonymous)

Topics for discussion

1. What do you consider to be the similarities and differences between the Malawi CDCE, and the organisation you are associated with?
2. What contributions did CIDA make, which the Malawi Government would not have been able to afford on its own?
3. How objective do you find the instruments used to evaluate SSTEP? Support your view.
4. In some quarters, it is believed that organisations are able to sort out their own problems without consultants. How far do you agree with that view?
5. It is one thing to put policies and procedures in place, and another to apply them. How should the new Centre ensure that its policies are applied?
6. The programmes offered by an ODL institution account for its relevance in the competitive world of education. What should a new ODL organisation do to achieve relevance through programmes?



Glossary

Autonomous An autonomous organisation has control over its own affairs, and acts independently. As an example, universities which have their own charter are said to be autonomous, while parastatal organisations are semi-autonomous.

Activities Activities are specially designed exercises found in distance learning materials. They invite learners to engage in dialogue with study materials.

Bottleneck When used with reference to conventional education systems, a bottleneck is a point at which only a few learners can proceed to the next educational stage. Exams are used as a screening mechanism.

Capacitate When you capacitate tutors in DE, for example, you train and equip them with skills required in carrying out their responsibility more efficiently. To capacitate people is also to empower them.

Communication A two-way process of sharing knowledge mediated through language. Information communication technologies are used in distance learning to enhance communication.

Connotation The connotation of a concept is the idea or implication it suggests. For example, DE and correspondence education carry different connotations.

Collaboration The practice of working together with somebody or with an organisation to create something. For example, a DE organisation can collaborate with schools in the community to deliver a service.

Commodification This term was recently coined to refer to the offering of DE courses by an organisation as a commodity to be sold for profit.

Constraints In a given situation, constraints are the limiting factors that prevent smooth progress or achievement of stated objectives.

Consultant This is a person who gives expert advice on setting up a DE institution, for example. The service offered is known as a consultancy.

Convenor This term is used in DE to refer to the professional whose task is to co-ordinate activities of a given aspect. As an example, we talk of the person who chairs course development activities as a convenor.

Correspondence Refers to a mode of study when the individual exchanges study materials with the organisation through the post.

Course team The people who contribute their expertise in developing a DE course (author, editor, content assessor, illustrator, etc.).

Dialogue It is the spoken or written conversation during which discourse is used to share knowledge.

Directorate This refers to the position of Director of an organisation, including immediate officers who assist the director in managing the system.

Disadvantaged People are disadvantaged when they are deprived of a human right or privilege for some reason. For example, some people fail to access education because of poverty.



Discourse The specialist language used to discuss issues of DE is known as discourse. This could be either in written or spoken form.

Dual-mode An institution that offers a dual-mode system of education, teaches both conventional and open learning courses.

Empower To empower a professional, e.g. a tutor, is to capacitate that person by teaching him / her relevant skills. When skilled, such a person is able to act in a certain way expected in the profession.

External assessor The expert appointed from a similar organisation, to assist with the development of a particular course, is known as an external assessor or examiner.

Facilitate In the case of tutors, to facilitate is to make learning easier in a professional way. For that reason, tutors are referred to as facilitators.

Feasibility study This is an investigation carried out to establish how practical something can be, e.g. how practical a DE course is going to be.

Feedback This refers to response given back to the originator of a message. It is aimed at giving an alternative way of looking at something. Feedback is an element of educational dialogue.

Graphic artist This is a member of the course team in materials development whose function is to illustrate study materials, in consultation with authors.

Informal learning Informal learning is learning that is not formal. Nobody exercises the directive role of teaching somebody, nevertheless

learning takes place as in learning team spirit by working in a team.

Imperialist A person who extends his/her country's power and influence. In the field of education, this may be done through means such as literature and ideas inclined towards a certain ideology.

In-service course An in-service course is a programme offered to a cohort of people who already hold a qualification. The course is structured in response to identified job-related needs. In-service is also known as continuous professional development.

Interaction The process and activity of exchanging knowledge through language. For example, we talk of interaction between learner and study material, or between learner and tutor.

Investment To invest in DE is to spend money and time for some serious purpose or useful result. Such an investment is aimed at improving the quality of products as an aspect of nation-building.

Liability An organisation that mismanages finances, and fails to fulfil its mandate, is said to be a liability to those who sponsor it.

Linkages Professional connections cultivated between organisations with the view to offering the best practice in a chosen area.

Mandate The authority given to a DE organisation to offer specified services by those who support it.



Mission Statement A specified aim or duty that an organisation wants to fulfil more than anything else. This is often put in writing.

Non-governmental Organisation A charitable institution that collaborates with service providers in order to assist the government achieve its goals in a particular field, e.g. DE.

Objectives When used with reference to study materials, objectives are short-term outcomes in a given lesson. Learners are expected to perform specific skills. Objectives are different from aims, which are long term.

Partnership An organisation goes into partnership with another when there is an agreement to collaborate in a certain area.

Peers A peer is a person who is equal to another in status. Thus, learners enrolled for the same DE course are peers.

Policy A statement of ideals proposed by an organisation used to guide decision and action in an area of operation. For example, a DE institution talks of an enrolment policy as well as other policies.

Principles The guiding rules or basic ideas serving as the foundation of an organisation.

Recurriculation The process of reviewing, modifying, or changing the curriculum of a given course in response to learner needs.

Resource person An expert who gives help and support in a specific DE area during workshops.

Retreat workshop In DE retreat workshops are those meetings held by the course team at a

place away from the usual workplace where authors will not be disturbed.

Risk This term refers to the possibility of suffering a loss. In DE this might refer to possibilities of failing to achieve intended goals.

Sequencing The conscious organisation of study material in a logical order.

Single-mode A single-mode educational organisation offers DE or conventional courses, not both.

Stakeholders Individuals, groups, or organisations with an interest in what an institution offers.

Steering committee The committee that decides the order of certain activities and guides their general course.

Stress Pressure or tension arising from problems in one's life. Stress can easily interfere with one's work or studies.

System A DE system refers to the various organs or sections working together as a whole in order to achieve stated goals.

Tertiary level The post-secondary education level which usually includes college and university studies.

Venture A project or an undertaking that involves risk and failure. DE is also referred to as an educational venture.

Vision A map for the future carefully planned with imagination and wisdom.



Vocational course An area of study relating to the qualifications and preparation needed for a particular job.



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